

Content submitted for Portfolio

Manifest Paper Exhibitions

Curating as a Radical Re-materialisation of Forms

Mathieu COPELAND

Submitted 30 July 2020

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the university for PhD by Publication

Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, Kingston University

Student number: 1941569

§

Voids p3

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- General Introduction by John Armleder, Mathieu Copeland Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot p5
- Yves Klein at the Salon Comparaisons, 1962, Interview with Jacques Villeglé by Mathieu Copeland p8
- Ideas Come Out of Objects, Interview with Robert Barry by Mathieu Copeland p13
- An Internal Depth, Interview with Bethan Huws by Mathieu Copeland p23
- Making the Invisible Visible, Interview with Roman Ondák by Mathieu Copeland p33
- Qualifying the Void by Mathieu Copeland p39
- “Less is more, but I prefer nothing,” Interview with Ben Vautier by Mathieu Copeland p44
- To Teach People to Create the Void in their Memories, Interview with Claude Parent by Mathieu Copeland p49

§

Choreographing Exhibitions p57

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone, by Mathieu Copeland p59
- Jérôme Bel in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p65
- Kenneth Anger in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p71
- Malcolm McLaren in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p74
- Boris Charmatz in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p81
- Jennifer Lacey in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p90
- Pierre Huyghe in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p96
- Claude Rutault in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p105
- Gustav Metzger in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p112
- Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p116
- Phill Niblock in conversation with Mathieu Copeland p123

§

the exhibition of a film p126

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- The Exhibition of a Film by Mathieu Copeland p128

- Morgan Fisher in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p130
- Ben Vautier in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p135
- Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p140
- Joanna Hogg in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p146
- Philippe Grandrieux in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p151
- Peter Downsbrough in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p157
- Fia Backström in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p163
- Benoît Maire in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p170
- Liam Gillick in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p178
- Lawrence Weiner in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p184
- Susan Stenger and Tim Etchells in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p186
- Leah Singer and Lee Ranaldo in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p193
- John Giorno in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p200
- Meredith Monk in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p205

§

The Anti-Museum	p213
------------------------	------

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016) by Mathieu Copeland	p215
- Graciela Carnevale in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p227
- Daniel Buren in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p234
- Robert Barry in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p239
- Lefevre Jean Claude in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p242
- Plamen Dejanov in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p246
- Svetlana Heger in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p249
- Henry Flynt in conversation with Mathieu Copeland (part 1, 9 October 2012)	p251
- Henry Flynt in conversation with Mathieu Copeland (part 2, 10 February 2016)	p255
- Jacques Villeglé in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p263
- Claude Rutault in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p266
- Ben Vautier in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p271
- Mierle Laderman Ukeles in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p275
- Lydia Lunch in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p279
- Genesis Breyer P-Orridge in conversation with Mathieu Copeland	p282
- John Armleder in conversation with Mathieu Copeland (part 1, 1 March 2009)	p286
- John Armleder in conversation with Mathieu Copeland (part 2, 20 May 2016)	p290

§

Gustav Metzger, Writings 1953 – 2016	p294
---	------

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- Introduction by Mathieu Copeland	p299
------------------------------------	------

Voids



Voids. Edited by Mathieu Copeland, with John Armleder, Laurent Le Bon, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot and Philippe Pirotte. Published by JRP|Ringier, in collaboration with Ecart Publications, Geneva in co-edition with Éditions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, and Centre Pompidou-Metz, in 2009. 21,5 x 28 cm (hard & softcover versions). 448 pages (96 colour & 267 b/w ill.) ISBN: 978-3-03764-036-4

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- General Introduction by John Armleder, Mathieu Copeland Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot
- Yves Klein at the Salon Comparaisons, 1962, Interview with Jacques Villeglé by Mathieu Copeland
- Ideas Come Out of Objects, Interview with Robert Barry by Mathieu Copeland
- An Internal Depth, Interview with Bethan Huws by Mathieu Copeland
- Making the Invisible Visible, Interview with Roman Ondák by Mathieu Copeland
- Qualifying the Void by Mathieu Copeland
- “Less is more, but I prefer nothing,” Interview with Ben Vautier by Mathieu Copeland
- To Teach People to Create the Void in their Memories, Interview with Claude Parent by Mathieu Copeland

Book Content:

Commissioned texts to John Armleder, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot, Denys Riout, Bob Nickas, Julian Heynen, Françoise Bonardel, Branislav Jakovljevic, Sarah Wilson, Henry Martin, Dean Rickles, Lucy Lippard, Laurent Le Bon, Graham Stevens, Bernard Marcadé, Sébastien Pluot, Guy De Bièvre, Jean-François Chevrier, Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, Henry Flynt, Adrian Glew, Shumon Basar, Sadie Plant, Arnaud Michniak, Tom Marioni, Vít Havránek, Didier Semin, Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, David Toop, Joseph Grigely, Devorah Baum, Ming Tiampo, Reiko Tomii, Pavel Büchler, Olivier Surel, Simon Ford, Jon Savage

Reprints by Yves Klein, Art & Language, Robert Irwin, Michael Asher & Benjamin Buchloh, Allan Kaprow & Robert Smithson, Brian O’Doherty, Robert Rauschenberg, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, D. T. Suzuki, Ralph Rugoff, Henry Michaux

Interviews by Mathieu Copeland (unless specified) with Robert Barry, Jacques Villeglé, Bethan Huws, Maria Eichhorn (with Mai-Thu Perret), Roman Ondák, Parker Williams (With John Armleder), Ben Vautier, Claude Parent, Morgan Fisher (with Stuart Comer), Mieko Shiomi (with John Armleder & Mai-Thu Perret)

Artists’ Pages commissioned to Fia Backström, Francis Baudevin, Becky Beasley, Kim Boninsegni, Steve Van den Bosch, Stefan Brüggemann, Philip Corner, Philippe Decrauzat, Peter Downsbrough, Bill Drummond, Jimmie Durham, Nicolas Garait, Vidya Gastaldon, Piero Golia, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Amy Granat, Susie Green, Joseph Grigely, Benita-Immanuel Grosser, Wade Guyton, Hans Haacke, Jon Hendricks, Karl Holmqvist, Alfredo Jaar, Gareth James, Tom Johnson, Ben Kinmont, Alison Knowles, Pablo Leon de La Barra, Dominik Lang, Sherrie Levine, Paul McCarthy, Corey McCorkle, Malcolm McLaren, John Miller, Larry Miller, Olivier Mosset, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch, Yoko Ono, Charlemagne Palestine, Bradley Pitts, Seth Price, Emilio Prini, Pamela Rosenkranz, Claude Rutault, Claude Rychner, Mike Scott, Mieko Shiomi, Sturtevant, Jean Toche, John Tremblay, Phoebe Unwin, Jacques Villeglé, Franz Erhard Walther, Lawrence Weiner, Neal White, Jordan Wolfson

Voids

A Retrospective

John Armleder, Mathieu Copeland, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot

Yves Klein's emblematic 1958 exhibition at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris—an essentially empty space presented as such to the public—figures among the defining episodes of modernity, together with such events as the Impressionist exhibition at Nadar's studio in 1874; The Armory Show in New York in 1913; *O, 10* (the Futurist exhibition with Malevich's Suprematist canvases); Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916; the re-appearance of (Duchamp's) R.Mutt's readymade *Fountain* at Gallery 291 after its rejection from the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York; or the Surrealist exhibition of 1924 at the Galerie Pierre in Paris, for example.

Like every radically innovative gesture, the echo of Klein's void opened up a previously inconceivable space, naturally attracting a series of seemingly analogous events. The empty space as an object of exhibition thus became a kind of classic of the radical mode, and was to be replayed in other contexts, other places, and other times by other artists with similar, or to the contrary different, even opposite, intentions. Our shared fascination for the repetition of the extremist decision, leading formally to what appears to be the same exhibition by different authors, gave birth to the desire for this retrospective. What was at the beginning nothing more than an idea thrown about in jest, turned out to be an astonishingly timely field of enquiry, and later became the subject of an exhibition and a publication.

The Exhibition

The strategy for this exhibition, based on the constitution of a first inventory of exhibitions taking the void as their theme, was to select only the events where a totally empty space,

museum, or gallery was shown. This excludes all the exhibitions where accessories, instruments, or temporary architectural devices assist the presentation of emptiness, such as the modification of lighting systems, the closure of the access to the public, the construction of obliterating walls, the manifest removal of objects, or a special sound environment, for example. With this perspective, a number of works, of *empty exhibitions*, were selected with the idea of devoting a room to each of them. These surfaces are used almost allegorically to represent the exhibitions in question. Only a label marks the work allocated to each room. These have not been modified and partake of the permanent architecture of the museum where the retrospective takes place. There is therefore clearly no intention to reconstitute the original sites of the works exhibited, no documentary endeavor, nor material authenticity in the presentation. In the same spirit, no period documents, invitation cards, or exhibition announcements, catalogues, or photographs are added to the display. The idea is truly to face *empty exhibitions*. This is obviously a slightly polemical and subjective, even questionable, position, especially since it is not sustained by a credo or a theory, but by a critical and practical intention.

Such systematic criteria led to a relatively small list of works, especially since the inclusion of new works—i.e. specially commissioned pieces—was deliberately ruled out from the start. All the perfectly empty exhibitions that attracted our attention were considered, and even automatically incorporated. Our selection was guided by no hierarchical principle, beyond, in the case of artists who produced more than one such empty piece, the choice of

their first such works. The intention, of course, is to get close to an exhaustive view of the subject. It is already obvious to us at the time of writing, however, that many exhibitions will have escaped us. The history of empty exhibitions remains to be studied more thoroughly, and this conclusion already appeared obvious to us at the outset of our project. While the publication accompanying the exhibition might suggest some of its premises, it is of course our hope that a more objective summation be one day undertaken.

To our knowledge, no empty exhibition was made public before that of Yves Klein (1958). A wave of events in this spirit is linked to the emergence of Minimal and Conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s. Later, such projects occurred regularly, and we might certainly have overlooked some of the most recent works here. We have considered the works of Yves Klein, Art & Language, Robert Barry, Michael Asher, Stanley Brouwn, Robert Irwin, Laurie Parsons, Bethan Huws, Maria Eichhorn, Roman Ondák, as well as Maria Nordmann and Emilio Prini, the latter two not being included in the exhibition after our discussions with the artists. Michael Asher's work is included in the catalogue, where it is described, but it is not physically included in the exhibition space, at his request. Conversely, the work of Stanley Brouwn is presented in the museum, but not listed in the catalogue, according to the artist's desire (it is mentioned in some of the more general studies compiled in the publication).

This exhibition is obviously a kind of speculation on the unlikely convocation of a group of artists and artworks which attempted, at one time or another, the extreme gesture where the artist exhibits without presenting any objects, without any intervention beyond an announcement. In this sense, Laurie Parsons's 1990 exhibition at the Lorence-Monk Gallery in New York, announced by card bearing only the name and address of the space, without mention of the dates or the artist's name, represents one of the artwork's last frontiers. Whether as search for novel sensibilities or perceptions, as self-reflexive foregrounding of the exhibition process, as political or ideological position, or even as a springboard for semantic experimentation, these apparently similar exhibitions actually piece together a radical constellation

of criticality and refusal. In each case, there is always a challenge. Although to retrospectively bring these works together might lessen the force of their contextual legitimacy, this unprecedented roundup nevertheless opens up the debate again. This wager is central to our project.

The Publication

The related book is of course a fundamental part of our undertaking. While the exhibition dryly renounces documentary fetishism, this publication attempts to cover broader ground. To begin with, there is the catalogue of the exhibition, or of the works exhibited, which historically documents each piece, with the available iconography and commissioned essays.

This is followed by three main sections. First, an anthology of texts either republished or specially written on topics that seem to us connected, or which bring light to the platform we are dealing with. These texts touch on the visual arts, in particular the movements with which some of the artists of the exhibition have been involved, and artists who have treated the Void in an emblematic fashion without, however, having directly realized an empty exhibition; but it also encompasses music and some pervasive figures such as John Cage, as well as philosophy, science, literature, cinema, the history of religion, and even physics.

These chapters are accompanied with an iconographic selection of works which we also believe allude to our subject. It is a rather random ensemble, which we would also like to function as an anti-dogma, to the extent that no artist ever seems to convert to an exclusive praxis of empty space. To our knowledge, there are no authors who solely produce, even at a given point of their career, only empty presentations. Moreover, many artists have dwelt on the subject, without producing an empty exhibition.

The last section is a collection of interventions by artists who were invited to contribute to our project on one page each, completely freely. The only constraints were the format and the black and white printing. The idea is partly inspired by the conversations we have had with numerous friends who expressed their interest since the inception of this project. This made

us curious about the reactions of other artists, thus enabling us to put together an ensemble of new creations, and maybe to reach beyond the academic scope of our research.

Acknowledgements

The book also includes the usual appendixes and customary mentions. To these we would like to add a few words of gratitude.

The exhibition was put together by a group of friends—three artists, a curator and a writer—during fortuitous meetings and discussions. Never could we have imagined that this idea would garner the kind of adhesion which makes a museum retrospective and an anthological publication possible.

The early enthusiasm expressed by Laurent Le Bon at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Philippe Pirotte at the Kunsthalle in Bern, and Lionel Bovier at JRP|Ringier in Zurich confirmed our initial impulse. The legitimacy they represent enabled us to approach the artists and the authors who responded with true openness of mind and passion. We would like to extend our deepest thanks to the institutions and the individuals who have supported and helped us on this project, to Rotraut Klein-Moquay, to Daniel Moquay, to Philippe Siauve and the Yves Klein Archives, to all the authors and artists who have contributed to the book, and most particularly to all the artists who are part of the exhibition.

It is of course the artists who fundamentally justify this entire project. It is they who, through their work, have asked the initial questions. These groundbreaking interrogations share an urgency which means they can always be asked anew. They do not call for a single answer, and bringing them together today seemed a natural response to both an ambiguous present and a real desire.

It is in this sense that the artwork is, always, a provocation.

Yves Klein at the Salon Comparaisons, 1962 Interview with Jacques Villeglé Mathieu Copeland

MATHIEU COPELAND

I'd like to discuss the piece by Yves Klein called *Zone de sensibilité picturale immatérielle, Zone No. 1, Série No. 5*, which was realized for the Salon Comparaisons, held at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris from March 12 to April 2, 1962. To produce this work, you, Klein, and other friends took down the paintings in one room of the 16th Salon Violet, hosted by the museum from January 12 to February 2, 1962. Photographs of the empty room were then printed in the catalogue of the Salon Comparaisons.

JACQUES VILLEGLE

I knew Yves Klein very well. His first "Void" show, which he did at the Galerie Colette Allendy, was very private. He didn't talk it up. Only a few people were invited. I was amazed to see that Guy Debord went, as evidenced by the famous photo where he can be seen in the empty room of "Void." But to return to your question, I was in charge of one of the rooms of the Salon Comparaisons. Yves phoned me to say that he wanted to do the "Void"; and to make his action concrete, he wanted the catalogue to publish a photo of the room with the works by the Nouveaux Réalistes on show, then another photo of the same room empty, along with a statement by Pierre Restany.

MATHIEU COPELAND

What was the statement?

JACQUES VILLEGLE

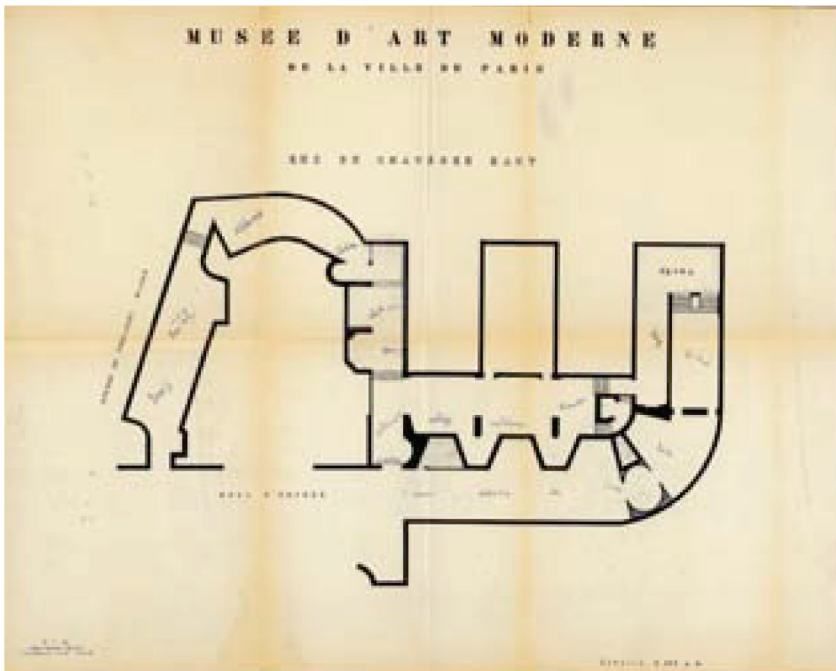
"Yves Klein's *Zone of Pictorial Sensitivity*—immaterial and extra-dimensional—exists in itself. Its 'wonder' is the very essence of Nouveau Réalisme: neither the walls nor the dimensions of the room in which it is exhibited represent its true reality. Its integrity is to be found elsewhere, everywhere. Nothing

more needs to be said." It was signed P.R. I'd said to Restany, "Just sign it P.R., it's a short statement." He agreed. "Fine," he said, "I'm pretty well known as it happens!"

But it all had to be organized, and there you have the true Klein spirit. He was such an organizer! It was amazing. He'd got to know all kinds of people through the Rosicrucians—police commissioners and so on. When we told the Salon organizers that we were going to take down the works that were hanging



Iris Clert, Guy Debord and Asger Jorn, in the room which was devoted to "Surfaces and Blocks of Pictorial sensibility. Pictorial Intentions," *Yves Klein: propositions monochromes* exhibition, Paris, Galerie Colette Allendy, 14th–23rd of May 1957



in the Salon Violet and then take photos, we were met with howls. We were told it would be impossible. But thanks to a police commissioner linked to the Rosicrucians, Yves got the name of the president of the Salon Violet

and obtained permission to take the works down at 8 a.m., before the museum opened. My role, as organizer, was to make phone calls to round everyone up. But from the very first call I realized that Klein had already phoned everyone. So I stopped, telling myself it wasn't worth the trouble. The next morning, when Yves complained that I hadn't done anything, I said, "So what? Everyone's here!" That was Klein through and through—the organizer, the one who controlled everything. The only person I called was Gérard Deschamps, because I knew he wouldn't come; he was too lazy to get out of bed at eight in the morning. In the end there was Niki de Saint-Phalle, François Dufrêne, Klein, the photographer Harry Shunk, and me. The photos show the works coming down and then the entirely empty room.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Did Klein do something ritualistic that day?

JACQUES VILLEGÉ

No, it was very simple, just among friends. It was a technical operation, to show that he had "voided" the room. We drove over to Galerie J in Niki de Saint-Phalle's car, a 2CV, to pick up some [Nouveau Réaliste] artworks—which we took back the same evening. The Salon Comparaisons agreed to include a double-page spread of photos in the catalogue, which was unusual in that highly conventional context. It was a comparative exhibition that included both figurative and abstract or Surrealist works—all trends in painting, in twenty-two highly distinctive rooms.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And what about the room itself?

JACQUES VILLEGÉ

Every work in the show had been inventoried and every artist had received a card with the number of his artwork, a document that the exhibitor was given when he dropped off, and had to show to pick up the work. Before the exhibition Yves phoned me to tell me to keep the card. And since I kept it, since we never handed it in to the museum, you could say that the "void" is still there, that it was never "taken down." But the museum has now been completely revamped, so you'd have to compare the plans of the old spaces with the new ones to be able to say, "There! That's where the

Exhibition plan for the Salon Comparaisons 1962 at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1962
Private collection

Taking down of the paintings exhibited at the Salon Violet, Paris, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 26th of January 1962
Left to right: Jacques Villegé, François Dufrêne and Yves Klein

void is!" Just like the Krefeld museum, except that in Paris the museum is unaware of it.

MATHIEU COPELAND

In fact it's fascinating to realize that the Krefeld museum doesn't include "Void" in its inventory. They've kept "Void" without it ever becoming an item in the museum's collection, which is pretty paradoxical and really great.

JACQUES VILLEGLE

And at the Musée d'Art moderne the "Void" truly has its own space.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Exactly. And furthermore, it's interesting that the walls of the Musée d'Art moderne were neither altered nor painted, unlike the Krefeld "Void," or the one realized at the Galerie Iris Clert in 1958 where the walls were painted, covered with a lot of highly mannered materials. It was Klein's last "Void," and also his most radical in my opinion.

JACQUES VILLEGLE

If we look at a plan of the Musée d'Art moderne at the time, I could locate the "Void" precisely. Here we have the hanging label with Klein's signature and the statement that Restany made.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Could you tell me about the photos for the catalogue.

JACQUES VILLEGLE

The pictures were taken one day about a month before the show. We hung the works, took them down, and then took a photo of the "Void."

MATHIEU COPELAND

So you were the curator of the show?

JACQUES VILLEGLE

That's right.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And a month later, when you re-hung it for the Salon, did you hang it exactly as it was in the pictures in the catalogue?

JACQUES VILLEGLE

No, no, they were different paintings!

MATHIEU COPELAND

To continue with the idea of the "void," I'd like to talk with you about your own work, and the concept of the void in relation to the moment where destruction creates a void. I'm thinking of the concept of *décollage*, or tearing down, as a removal, as the creation of a void in the city, and the way that tearing strips off posters creates a void in their midst.

JACQUES VILLEGLE

One day a Surrealist critic told me that he'd like to film me making a work. I said to him, "OK, you can show me tearing down a poster

NOTICE N° 2 **COMPARAISONS** 1^{er} Lettre du Nom

Notice à conserver par l'exposant et à présenter lors du dépôt et du retrait de l'œuvre.

Organisateur de groupe :
M. Villeglé
60 rue de Turbigo 3^e

Droit d'accrochage 3500 frs (35 NF) à joindre à la notice n° 1, sous forme de virement postal à M^r FEUGEREUX, 35, Rue de Seine, Paris-VI^e, C.C.P. Paris 2365.24.

*
Toutes demandes de renseignements ou de modifications au Catalogue devront être adressées à Madame SATET, secrétaire, 65, Rue Duboussé, Paris-XVIII^e - MON. 32-49.

NOM KLEIN LE MONOCHROME
Prénoms YVES
Adresse 114 Rue Campagne Perrière Paris
Téléphone 146.0277

A détacher suivant le pointillé.

NATURE (dessin, sculpture)	TITRE DE L'ŒUVRE	FORMAT	PRIX
<u>Zone</u>	<u>Zone de sensibilité picturale immatérielle - Série n° 7</u>	<u>100 x 100 cm</u>	<u>2.000.000</u>

Date : 17 Mars 1962 La et approuvé le règlement de l'exposition
Signature : J. Villeglé

DEPOT LUNDI 5 MARS 1962 RETRAIT MARDI 3 AVRIL 1962

Voir au dos le règlement de l'exposition. —>

Salon Comparaisons, 1962, "Notice to be kept by the exhibitor" delivered to Yves Klein for his *Zone of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility, Zone n° 1, Series n° 7*
Private collection



and carrying it off, but what you have to film is what's left on the wall, because that's a lot more beautiful than what I will take away." I've never had the impression I was creating a void. When Klein phoned me about the *Vide*, I knew he was worried I wouldn't understand. I told him that of course I understood what he meant by doing that. Nowadays you see lots of artists who manage to produce things fairly close to this spirit of the "void," of the immateriality of a venue. That wasn't the case in Klein's day. It was something really new.



Yves Klein presenting a "Pictorial Intention" in the room reserved to "Surfaces and Blocks of Pictorial sensibility, Pictorial Intentions," during his exhibition at the Galerie Colette Allendy, 14th–23rd of May 1957 (filmstill from the movie realized during the exhibition)

Extract from the catalogue *Salon Comparaisons* 1962, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, with the photograph showing Yves Klein's action

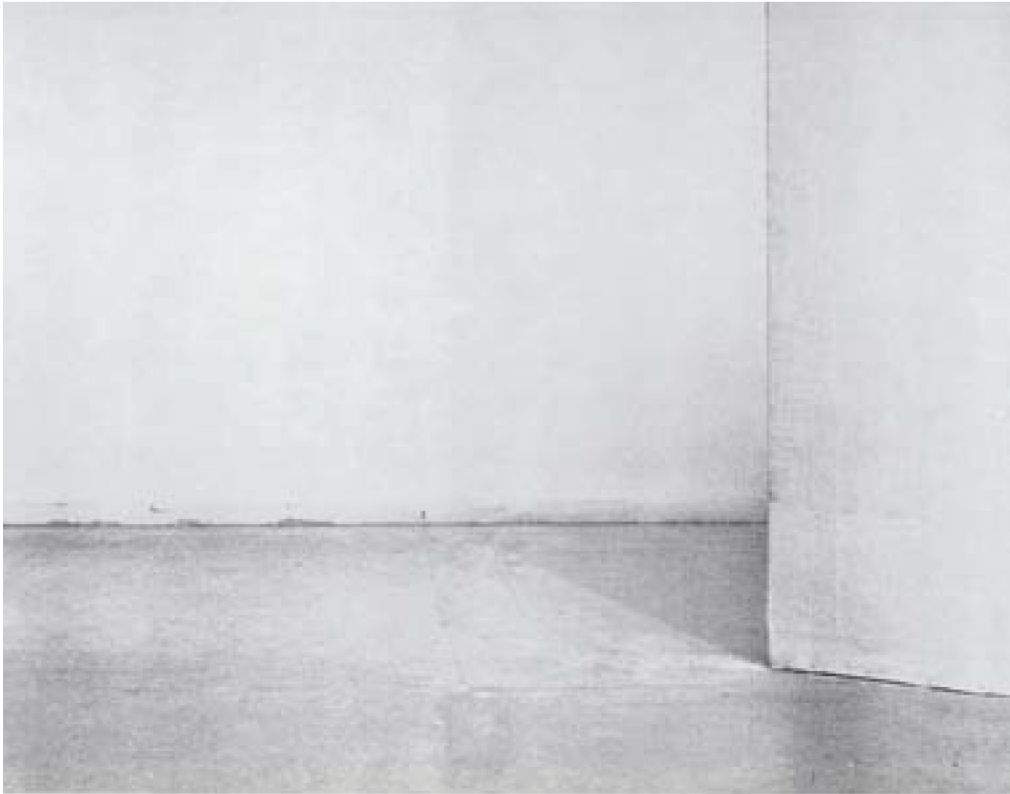
MATHIEU COPELAND

There's something really great about looking at those pictures of you removing the paintings from the room. If you compare them to photos of yourself removing posters from the street, it seems pretty similar.

JACQUES VILLEGÉ

But the posters are still something, they're life. Buchloh said I was the opposite of Klein, but I told him that in fact we helped each other out, because we were complementary. They say that the irrational is just the flip side of the rational; I see culture as being composed

of complementary sides. But I don't feel I'm approaching a void. What I produce are socio-political signs; they fill a space. In the film you can see that when I tear posters down I never leave a bare wall.

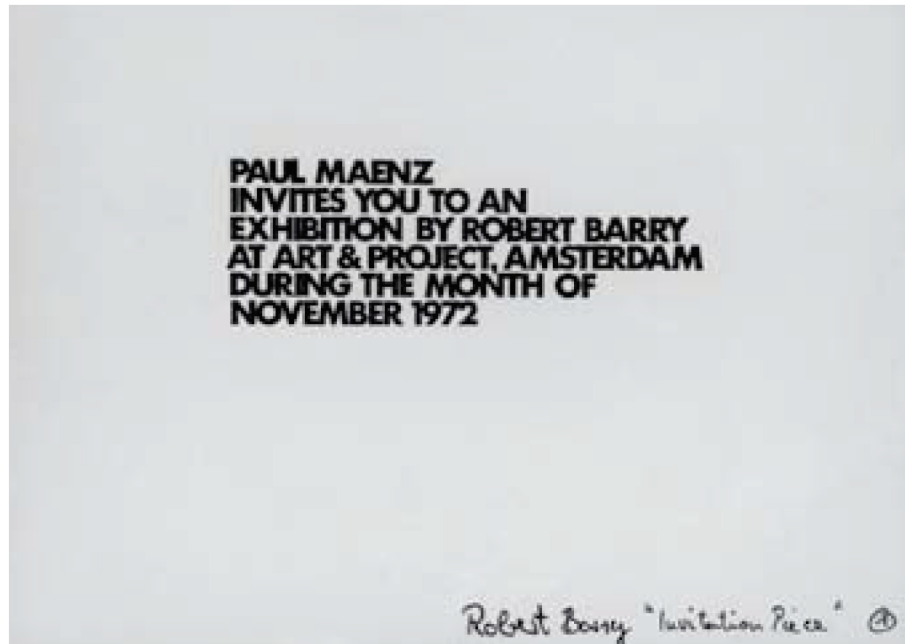


YVES KLEIN - Le Maximum - une zone de stabilité parfaite immatérielle.
Sans a° 1, Sans a° 2.

La zone de stabilité parfaite d'Yves Klein, immatérielle, extra dimensionnelle, créée en soi. Son - merveilleux - caractère l'exécute même de puissance infinie : ni les murs, ni les dimensions de la salle où elle se trouve agissent sur correspondance à sa seule réalité. Son intégrité est ailleurs, partout ; inutile d'en dire plus. P. B.

Ideas Come Out of Objects, Interview with Robert Barry

Mathieu Copeland



MATHIEU COPELAND

In the *Inert Gas Series* in 1969 you released inert and noble gases into the atmosphere in various different places. In a previous discussion you mentioned that far from being about nothing, these works are about the release of a million molecules.

ROBERT BARRY

The sculpture is all the molecules together, invisibly and endlessly expanding in the atmosphere. But the thing about inert gases is that they don't change chemically, they always stay the same. You can think about them as a unified whole. These were also noble gases, as I remembered them from high school. There's something about them that's stayed with me over the years and it

seemed quite natural for me to use them when I was ready! Like the radio waves and all the rest.

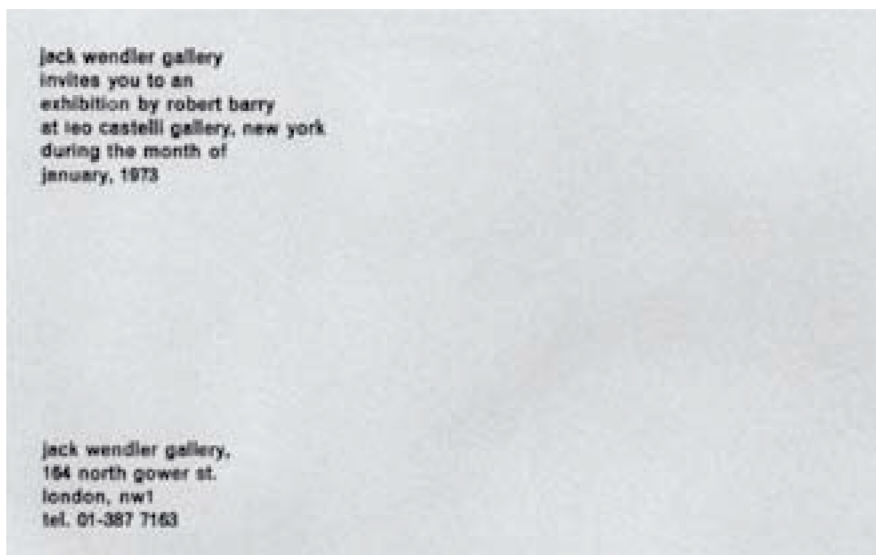
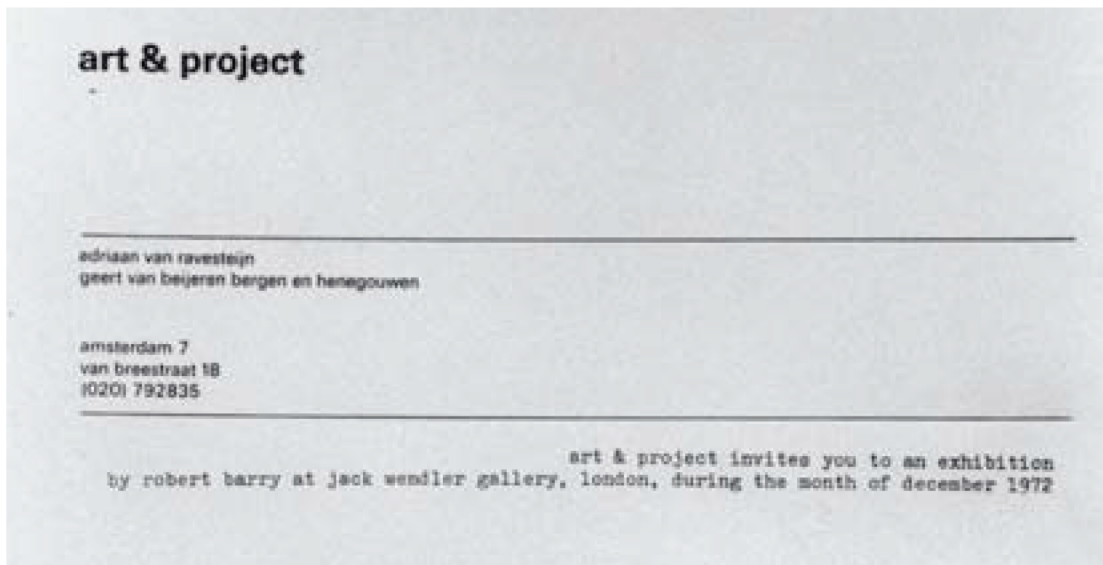
MATHIEU COPELAND

A unified whole is such a powerful image.

ROBERT BARRY

It was an important volume. You start with something that's completely measured, a cubic foot of inert gas that's released into the expansive infinity. But it's also a cycle, since these gases originally come from the atmosphere. It's something we breathe in, it's always with us. And yet it's a totally conceptual piece because you can't visualize it, you can only imagine this endless expansion and the fact that it's recycled.

Invitation Piece, 1972–1973
Paul Maenz—Art & Project, November 1972
Invitation card



MATHIEU COPELAND

It's only remembered by the photos of the gas being released from the bottles.

ROBERT BARRY

We had to drive to the Mojave Desert to do the first one. Seth Siegelau was photographing a piece for Douglas Huebler. I decided that we

would do a couple of the *Inert Gas Pieces* while we were out there, driving around the desert. Both Seth and I documented the pieces, and when I did it I really wasn't sure how the photos would be used, or if they would be used at all. For me the initial concept was the statement on the poster, and that was it! How it would be sold and all that was something we just didn't think about at the time. In fact the documentation comes from Seth's salesmanship as an art dealer and the fact that he was heavily into documentation. For the project in California there was no real gallery space, just an answering machine. On the poster there was the name of a service with an operator, and an address.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Which exhibition was this exactly?

ROBERT BARRY

Inert Gas in Los Angeles (1969). Seth asked me for a show and I said I wanted to go to LA rather than do it in NY. He also had a patron out there who was willing to pay for the whole thing—in fact we used his company credit card to buy the inert gas! We looked up a scientific warehouse that usually sold to science labs and science departments. It came in various forms such as glass or metal bottles.

Invitation Piece, 1972–1973

Art & Project—Jack Wendler, December 1972
Invitation card

Invitation Piece, 1972–1973

Jack Wendler—Leo Castelli, January 1973
Invitation card

MATHIEU COPELAND

The beauty of this piece is that it's constantly expanding.

ROBERT BARRY

Infinity is something that's always been in my mind. The *Carrier Wave* (1968) and *Inert Gas Series* (1969) are pieces that both constantly expand into the universe; things that are outside of our ability to handle or that we can't really deal with physically. For instance, in the *One Billion Colored Dots* books (1969) the dots are physically present but you can't count them. It's about trust.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And belief.

ROBERT BARRY

Exactly. The idea and the meaning of art is constantly changing. This is the real value of so-called Conceptual art, to go back to art's real nature and what it's really all about.

MATHIEU COPELAND

I was thinking about Lucy Lippard's phrase, "the dematerialization of the art object," but in your case it's not so much a matter of *de*-materialization but rather of *re*-materialization.

ROBERT BARRY

I've always worked on some kind of material. It may not have been perceptible in those days, but the idea of material reminds me of the phrase "ideas come out of objects." Our connection to the real world is always important to me.

MATHIEU COPELAND

The space within also echoes the space in-between. This reminds me of your painting practice from the early 1960s, paintings that define a space like, for instance, your *Four Squares* (1967) series, four paintings displayed in each of the four corners of a wall.

ROBERT BARRY

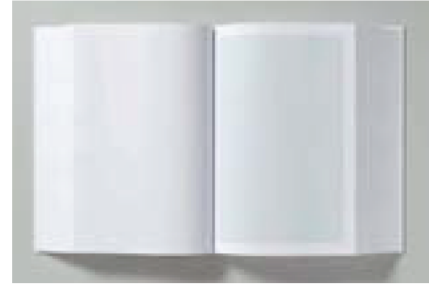
But the space also expands far beyond.

MATHIEU COPELAND

This brings to mind your decision to release the gas not in a gallery, but in the open desert.

ROBERT BARRY

Yes, in that case I didn't want to use a space. I liked the idea of going to all those different locations: to the beach, to the Beverly Hills Hotel, or to Stanley Grinstein's pool—he was the patron who paid for all that! I tried to make each of the locations meaningful to me. For



LEO CASTELLI INVITES YOU TO AN EXHIBITION BY
ROBERT BARRY AT **YVON LAMBERT/PARIS**
 DURING THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY 1973.

Invitation Piece, 1972–1973
 Leo Castelli–Yvon Lambert, February 1973
 Invitation card

One Billion Colored Dots, 2008
 25 Volumes, each 27.6 cm × 18.6 cm and
 contains 2,008 pages
 Published by mfc-michèle didier, Brussels

instance, there's a relationship to a movie that I'd seen a few dozen times, *The Maltese Falcon* with Humphrey Bogart. What always struck me about this movie is that all these people are looking for an object that they never really find! An endless search for something that may not even exist! And when they do have the object in their hands they realize that it's all a fraud! At the end the cops ask them what the thing was and they reply "The stuff that dreams are made of." It always struck me that this is what art is. It's so elusive that it means something different to everybody. We thus decided to release one of the *Inert Gas* pieces on the road to Tehachapi prison depicted in the film. Ultimately, Seth wanted to rent a space. I said I absolutely did not want to have a place to go to see the show. I just wanted the poster to be mailed out. We used Seth's and Leo Castell's mailing list.

MATHIEU COPELAND

This brings us to the importance of the art context in your work and to the way you use the gallery structure to subvert the system. I have in mind the *Closed Gallery Piece* (1969), or the *Invitation Piece* (1972–73), where you use the context of the galleries rather than their space.

ROBERT BARRY

Yes, I try to use the situation to create something within the idea of a show. I really try to use the space and the context in some unique way, not to present works or build a showroom.

MATHIEU COPELAND

I also want to discuss the notion of process in your work, from the paintings which define the space to the *Inert Gas Series* or the radio wave-pieces. Can you say a few words about what seems to be a logical process of reduction?

ROBERT BARRY

It looks logical now, but it wasn't. It's all very intuitive. I just look at what I've done and look at where I can go from there. It all seems to fall into place, but it's not that simple. It's just about never being satisfied, in order to avoid falling into a style and just repeating variations. To come back to the use of the gallery, it has a lot to do with what particular situation someone offers you, and you must consider where you want to go with the given context. I'm currently preparing two exhibitions with

Yvon Lambert for 2009. I've worked with the gallery since 1969, for forty years! So time, the idea of a forty-year relationship, is going to be very present in this show.

MATHIEU COPELAND

As you've said before, time is the essence of your work.¹

ROBERT BARRY

Yes, absolutely.

MATHIEU COPELAND

I'd like to come back to the process of reduction. Although the paintings are not actually more material than the gas, it's just a different kind of materiality. There's a reduction in terms of what one gets to see, of what one gets to consider as material. After the gas pieces and the closed galleries, did you ever ask yourself where to go next? Did you ever contemplate the possibility of stopping altogether?

ROBERT BARRY

No, never. Remember that in those days, everybody was talking about Ad Reinhardt's black paintings as the end of painting. I never saw it that way. I thought it was the beginning of something else, some place where we could go! And the idea that this was death never occurred to me, nor did I identify with being called a Conceptual artist, or with the view that somehow Conceptual art was some kind of religion that you had to stick to. I can't tell you the grief I had from other artists when I started doing paintings again. Maybe there's something perverse in my personality. For so many, painting was dead. You were not supposed to think about it at all, although it's a process that's been going on for over 40,000 years and counting. To think that it's now over is absurd. It's something you use to make art, and if you need something else to make your art, that's fine too!

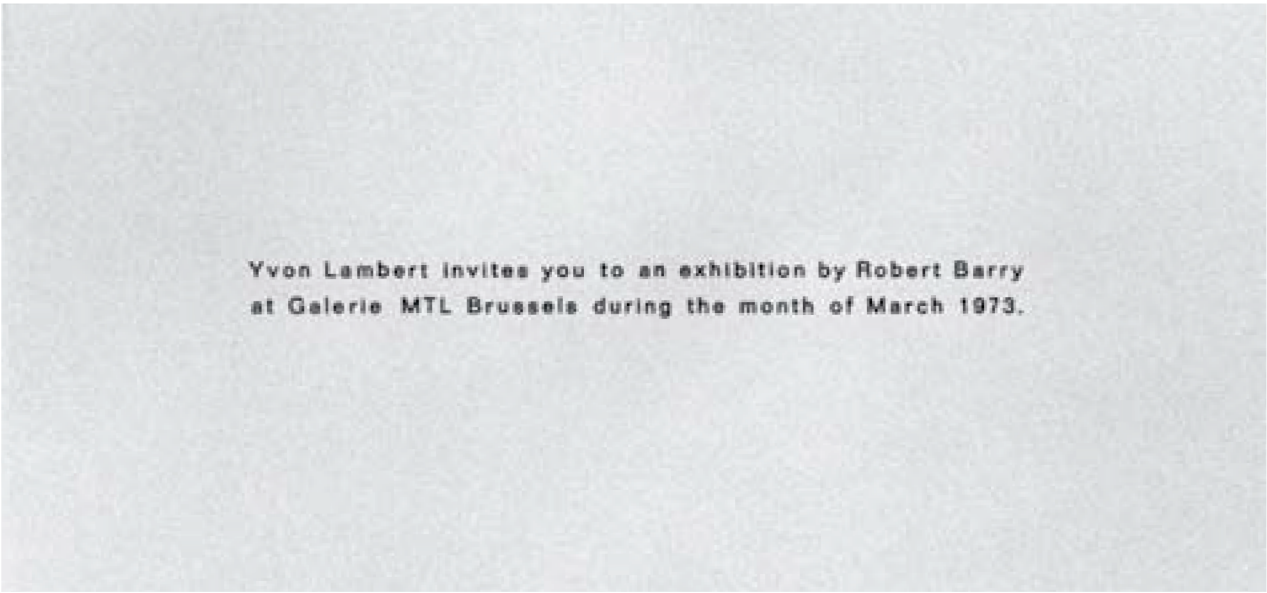
MATHIEU COPELAND

The way some of the first paintings were made, using the mouth to blow paint on the walls of a cave, is not so different from the process of releasing gas into the atmosphere.

ROBERT BARRY

Yes. Basic image-making that coincided with the discovery of the power of images.

Untitled (Something which I know exists, but I cannot know if anyone else knows it exists),
1969
Typewriter on paper, 27.5 × 22.3 cm



Yvon Lambert invites you to an exhibition by Robert Barry
at Galerie MTL Brussels during the month of March 1973.

MATHIEU COPELAND

The notion of belief seems rather important in your work. One has to believe that there is a radio transmitter, or that there is radiation.

ROBERT BARRY

It's a question of trust.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Have you ever thought about deceiving the viewer?

ROBERT BARRY

Saying there's a transmitter and not having one? Never. If someone wants to buy it they'll want to see it!

MATHIEU COPELAND

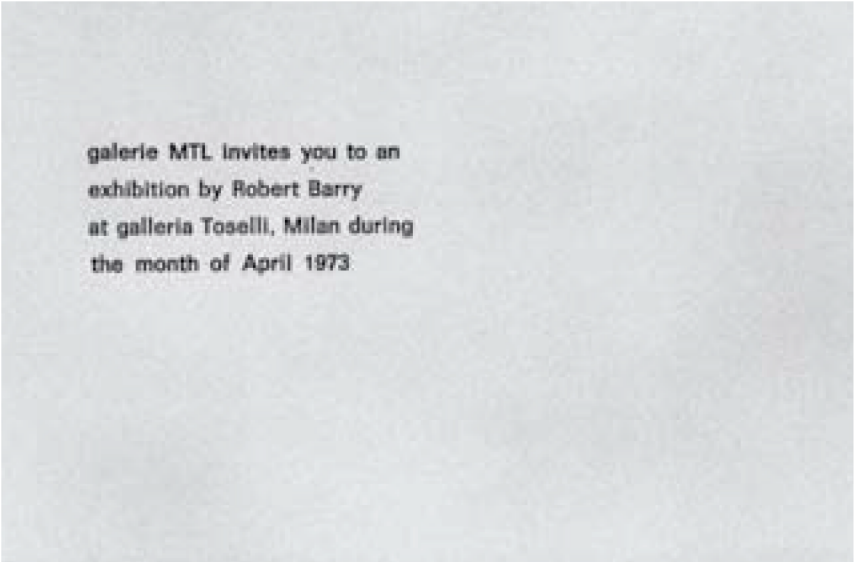
And you built the actual transmitters with your father?

ROBERT BARRY

Yes, my father was an electrical engineer without a degree. He barely finished high school. I think he had to go back to get a high school diploma after he'd been working for AT&T! He built our very first television set in the late 1940s. He was a supervisor. His job was to install telephone equipment. For instance, he installed the Rockefeller building telephone system, and when the CBS building was under construction I actually went there with him.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Do you think this had an impact on your work?



galerie MTL invites you to an
exhibition by Robert Barry
at galleria Toselli, Milan during
the month of April 1973.

Invitation Piece, 1972–1973
Yvon Lambert—MTL, March 1973
Invitation card

Invitation Piece, 1972–1973
MTL—Toselli, April 1973
Invitation card

ROBERT BARRY

It's really hard to say. David Smith used to say that you're influenced by everything you've ever seen. It's there and is part of the idea.

MATHIEU COPELAND

The radio transmitter emits a radio wave. What can we hear when we turn to the right frequency?

ROBERT BARRY

For the first radio transmitter you could hear a whistle. It was a little module that sent out a silent signal, what's called a carrier wave. This one also had a little standard signal, at 1,600 megahertz. And I liked that because if you came to the gallery with a portable radio you could hear the signal.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Would you say that listening to the signal is part of the work?

ROBERT BARRY

Yes, the sound was part of that work. But the next group of works was just the carrier wave without the signal.

MATHIEU COPELAND

This is a process where neither the appearance of the empty gallery nor the reality of a sound wave is stronger than the other. You don't need to listen to the wave to experience the work.

ROBERT BARRY

There are different kinds of waves. AM waves bounce off the atmosphere and travel all around the world, FM shoots into outer space, as do television waves. It all has to do with infinitely moving out, keeping the idea alive.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And did you consider the physical qualities of the empty spaces where these pieces were realized?

ROBERT BARRY

No. For instance the first space was just the space that Siegelraub rented.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And you also showed the works in your empty studio.

ROBERT BARRY

It was a painting studio first. Later I changed it to fit the situation.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And moving on to another kind of wave, can you tell me about the *Radiation Installations* from 1969?

ROBERT BARRY

You could buy the radioactive material very easily then, it just came in the mail. I actually carried some of those pieces on airplanes too.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Could you tell me about the *0.5 Microcurie Radiation Installation* carried out in Central Park on January 5, 1969?

ROBERT BARRY

I buried four Barium-133 Capsules in two different locations in Central Park and took a photograph of the locations. As far as I know they're still there. And I also realized another of those pieces, *Uranyl Nitrate (UO₂(NO₃)₂)*, up on the roof of the Kunsthalle in Bern, for the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* the same year.



0.5 Microcurie Radiation Installation,
5 January 1969
4 Barium-133 Capsules buried in Central
Park, New York, in two different locations
Duration 10 Years

MATHIEU COPELAND

Which is wonderful, as the *VOIDS* retrospective will travel to the Kunsthalle! That piece is apparently still emitting, so it's possible to say that there will be two pieces by you in the exhibition.

ROBERT BARRY

As far as I know, it's still there! Time is the essence of this piece. Zero time is when the element is created, and it has a half-life. For instance it can have a half-life of a second, which means that every second it loses half its strength, or its half-life could be a million years. So we're dealing with ideas of time that are really outside of our ability to grasp. We can talk about it, but we can hardly conceive this kind of time.

MATHIEU COPELAND

From radio waves to mental waves there's another level of abstraction, which brings us to the *Marcuse Piece* (1970), which reads: "Some places to which we can come, and for a while 'be free to think about what we are going to do.' (Marcuse)."

ROBERT BARRY

"Be free to think about what you are going to do" is borrowed from Herbert Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation*. It's the last sentence on the last page of the book, and in fact it's a quote from a little black girl. So it's a quote inside a quote. Originally it was not called the *Marcuse Piece*, it picked up the name later. I hadn't thought about naming it.

MATHIEU COPELAND

What were your original intentions?

ROBERT BARRY

Just the sentence. This piece is about designating something, a particular place, and seeing how this affects the situation. It leaves a lot open to the mental space of the viewers, and I think this is what art is about. It grew out of the idea that you walk into an empty gallery and as you read the title of the piece, you realize that it's filled with radio waves. How does that change the way you deal with that space?

MATHIEU COPELAND

The *Telepathic Pieces* also dealt with expanding location.

ROBERT BARRY

On 57th Street there was a building where there were many galleries before SoHo. And there was the telepathic center. Of course I didn't believe in it, but I thought it was fun, and I did some performances where I would sit there and communicate some kind of feelings telepathically, and people would respond that they were indeed getting something.

MATHIEU COPELAND

I'd also like to refer to your series of pieces *All the things I know...*, such as *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking—1:36pm, June 15, 1969*.

ROBERT BARRY

There are quite a few of those. They originally started as typewriter pieces.

MATHIEU COPELAND

What is the materiality of these pieces? The typewritten paper, or the experience you have whilst reading the lines?

ROBERT BARRY

Well the pieces are really both of the above. The typewriter pieces convey information in a certain way to a certain place. I use lots of different media, and when you have these ideas you have to convey them somehow. You have to get it out to the public, you have to get a way for somebody to interact with you on this. The means to do it are numerous: you write it on a piece of paper and give it to somebody, you write it with a pencil on a wall, you print it in a book by Lucy Lippard, or in a magazine. And when you do this, other problems arise. This creates limitation but it also creates possibilities. How it's going to look, how it's going to be reacted to. I've always said that a characteristic of a successful artist is that other people want to know what he or she is doing. A successful artist is someone who is given the opportunity to do something.

MATHIEU COPELAND

It is about enabling.

ROBERT BARRY

Exactly, as long as there's someone else in the world who is willing to enable you to do what you want to do.

Untitled (Something that is taking shape in my mind and will sometime come to consciousness), 1969
Typewriter on paper, 27.5 × 22.3 cm



MATHIEU COPELAND

How did the *Closed Gallery Piece* come about?

ROBERT BARRY

All the different galleries asked me for a show.²

MATHIEU COPELAND

At the same time?

ROBERT BARRY

Pretty much at the same time. Not everybody agreed. Originally there was a gallery in Amsterdam who asked me for a show, and although the owner didn't think she could do it, she had a very good friend running Art & Project who was interested in doing the work. Konrad Fisher said no, he didn't want to do what everyone else was doing, he wanted to do something else. Later he apologized and said that it was the biggest mistake of his life.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And for the ones that did agree, did you go to any of the galleries?

ROBERT BARRY

I knew all of the spaces, but during the shows I didn't go.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Did you have any specification in regard to what had to happen inside the gallery?

ROBERT BARRY

The doors were closed, so you couldn't get in! I only wanted the cards on the door. The gallery was closed and nothing else.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And what was your motivation then? It can be read in so many different ways!

ROBERT BARRY

I guess part of it was anti-gallery! I really was not enamored of galleries. The people were so nice, but partially I would say that it was a kind of independent anti-establishment streak. It was also the idea of using the gallery itself as something. Also, each statement was different. If you look at them, they're all different mailers as each gallery had a different style. I told all of them that I wanted to use whatever style their mailer was.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And could you tell me a bit about the *Invitation Piece* (1972–73), a mailer from Paul Maenz inviting people to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Art & Project, a mailer from Art & Project inviting people to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Jack Wendler Gallery, which in turn invited people to an exhibition at ...

ROBERT BARRY

The mailers were sent out from the galleries during someone else's show.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And at the end, you got back to the beginning, with Gian Enzo Sperone inviting people to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Paul Maenz.

ROBERT BARRY

It's a circle. There was no work of mine in the gallery, just the statements, the stacks of cards inviting you to the next exhibition.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Very much like the *Marcuse Piece*, you came to envisage what was going to come next.

0.5 Microcurie Radiation Installation,
5 January 1969
4 Barium-133 Capsules buried in Central
Park, New York, in two different locations
Duration 10 Years

ROBERT BARRY

The mailer piece lasted for one art season. The galleries would each advertise a month. And in those days all the galleries were closed during summer, from June to the middle of August.

MATHIEU COPELAND

What's striking is that most of the works that we've discussed are word pieces.

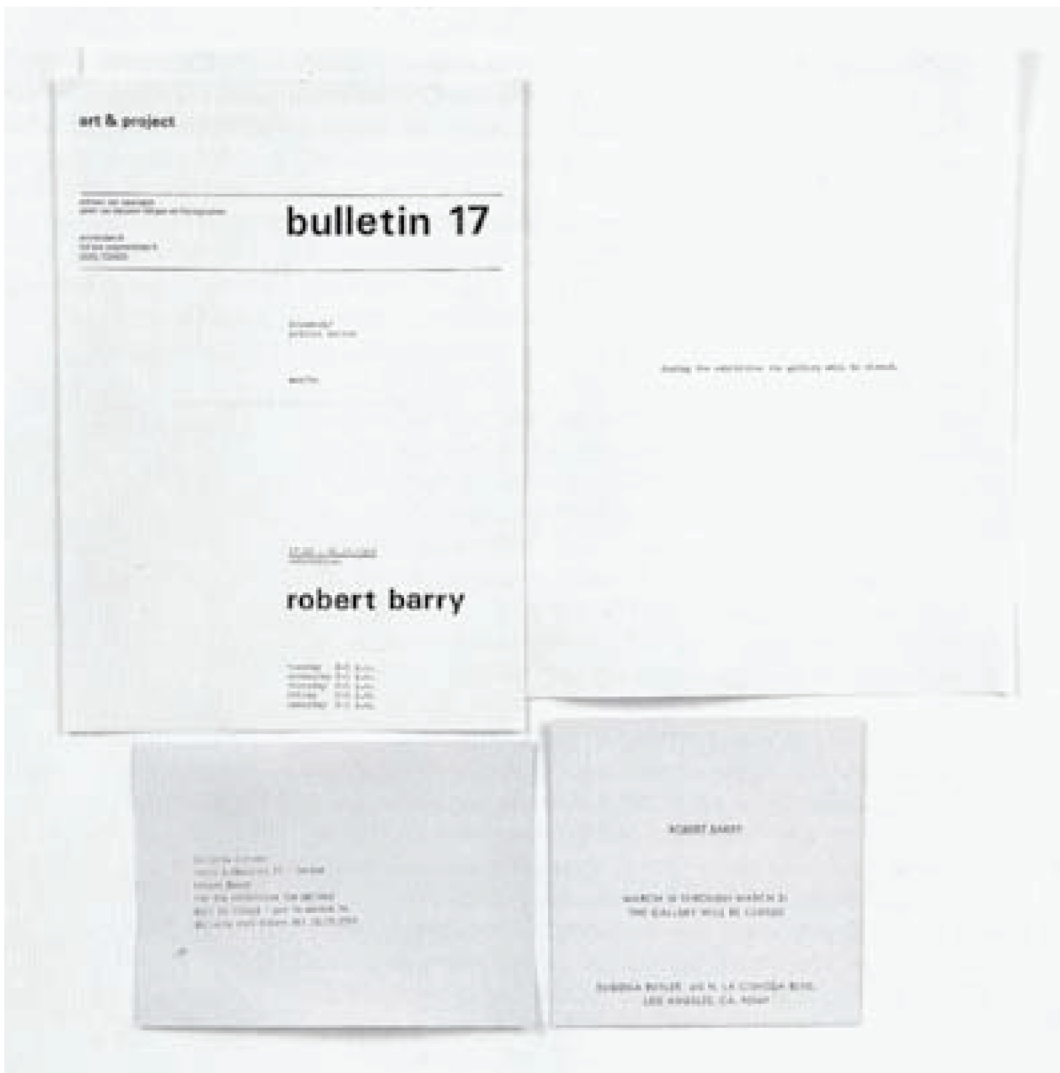
ROBERT BARRY

I use words. With pieces such as the description

of *Nothing*, or the *It is ...* series (1969–72), the words are an attempt at defining something that cannot be defined, words circling around something that may be in your mind. Then I fell for the power of individual words and the space between them. The meaning between unrelated words and also the physical space in between. And their look, their placement, and all of that.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Words abstracted from their original context.



Closed Gallery Piece, 1969
Three invitations cards

ROBERT BARRY

Yes, yet there's always a connection to something else.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Can you tell me about *Robert Barry presents three shows and a review by Lucy R. Lippard*, at the Yvon Lambert gallery in Paris in April 1971.

ROBERT BARRY

These were the index cards shows. I showed her catalogues and then she wrote a text, a review of her own shows.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Showing the shows by a curator, and you were part of two of these, as your artwork pursues your ongoing interest in going full circle! What was your position then?

ROBERT BARRY

Reversing roles! Artists as curators!

MATHIEU COPELAND

And finally, I'd like to refer to *A work submitted to Projects Class, Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, Fall 1969*, where a group of students was instructed to decide on a single common idea known only to the members of the group. The protocol you wrote implied that if they shared the idea with anyone outside the group the piece would cease to exist. So what was the secret?

ROBERT BARRY

I don't know! I got different stories from different people about that! I really don't know. I think everybody forgot it. Actually, somebody told me that as soon as they left the class somebody blew it out. Some say it's not true. I don't know what the secret was and I don't want to know!

- 1 "Time may be the most important thing in my work," in Robert Nickas, Interview with Robert Barry, *Journal of Contemporary Art*, Vol. 5., No. 1, Spring 1992, p. 10.
- 2 The *Closed Gallery Piece* took place in three locations: Art & Project in Amsterdam (1969), Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone in Turin (1969), and Eugenia Butler Gallery in Los Angeles (1970).

An Internal Depth, Interview with Bethan Huws Mathieu Copeland

MATHIEU COPELAND

During a previous discussion you told me you had trouble situating your *Haus Esters Piece*.¹

BETHAN HUWS

Yes, understanding how to structure a work is complicated, and it was even more so then. That piece I believed would relate to Conceptual art from the 1960s and 70s, as we knew it. But for me it worked on a much more complex level because of my art education in Britain, where we were not taught about Conceptual practice and its origins at all. So it was really making do with all the tools I had. That's why it was very difficult for me to understand what I did at Haus Esters, and still is today. I would need to go back to all the different levels.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Was Michael Asher, for instance, one of your references?

BETHAN HUWS

I knew Michael Asher's work. Not in great depth, but I was aware of it. There's definitely an inspiration there, like a base, but we don't share the same background. I was trying to use my Northern tools. Where we overlap with Asher is in working with the given, with three dimensional space. This is why I was feeling very close to him, to his very rigorous, analytical posture, the belief in the readymade and doing things with it.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Somehow this relates to your early floor pieces and to the notion of the readymade, or rather the *raised readymade*.

BETHAN HUWS

It is a duplication of what's there.

MATHIEU COPELAND

I'm interested in the feeling of emptiness in your early raised floor pieces, for instance in your exhibition at the Riverside Studios in 1989.² Was that something you were looking for?



Exhibition poster, Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, May 16–July 11, 1993



BETHAN HUWS

Absolutely not, for me it was very formed. There was no thought of emptiness, but rather a character type in the work, something before Minimalism. Being so precise, trying to concentrate on the few parts, trying to see what's important and essential. Part of the logic at the Riverside was also to make the space coherent by unifying it; making sense of it and so simplifying the whole thing. Even though there was lots of restructuring, the reading became only a few lines, with very little to take in. For me it was akin to making an

abstract painting in real space. I was always making this analogy to making an abstraction, an empty field, but literally a field of grass. There is a human need to breathe and have free space.

MATHIEU COPELAND

An invisible depth.

BETHAN HUWS

The incorporeal depth of humanity which is not external, an internal depth.

Riverside Piece, Riverside Studios, Crisp Road,
London, August 9–September 3, 1989
Installation view, floor



MATHIEU COPELAND

That reminds me of your one-person exhibition *The Lake Writing* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1991. There you had these handwritten pages laid directly onto the wall in a room that appeared to have been left mainly empty. The words dealt with the abstraction of language; an apparent emptiness that was in striking contrast to the density of the depiction of the lake.

BETHAN HUWS

Yes, and yet it's difficult for me to go back

to the origins of that work. I was looking at the piece recently and I was struck by how archaic the writing was. At first I wanted to record my feelings of the place by sitting down with a notebook, but that didn't work because I started thinking, reflecting, and saying things I didn't want to say, saying things that were not in front of my eyes. Instead I was writing things that were inside my head. So my second strategy was to get a recording device and walk along to look at the lake, recording all the impressions that went into my brain. That stopped me from

The Lake Writing, 1991,
Institute of Contemporary Arts, London,
October 24–December 1, 1991
Photocopies of manuscripts, 24 pages,
29.7 × 21 cm, View Text III, 4 pages
Tate Collection, London

thinking, but inevitably when we're not thinking, we are thinking.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Which brings us to translation. When we entered the gallery we created mental images of the location through your words.

BETHAN HUWS

Yes, it creates a narrative of it. As we're walking around the lake we're saying things that we don't know, as we're not thinking and reflecting back onto ourselves. So I just opened this to everybody and condensed the situation.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Which comes back to the doubling you were discussing earlier with the *Riverside* piece, which was a doubling of the floor; and there you were realizing a doubling of the location.

BETHAN HUWS

Yes, I think there's a desire there to double what's there rather than create something that comes entirely out of me. It's always in-between. The environment outside and you inevitably come round to yourself. I think there was a logic in the first floor. The *Riverside* piece revolved around this idea that I didn't want to bring anything inside the Riverside. That's what I wanted, just to work with this maze, to model the floor, a floor that I didn't invent or create; this was a given form, a readymade form.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And somehow that's very similar to what you wrote about the *Haus Esters Piece*, how you were so responsive to the given environment that you saw that the house could sustain itself and there was no need to bring anything in there.

BETHAN HUWS

Yes, but that was more about Haus Esters, about how I perceived that incredible architecture. I would never have done that at the ICA because the architecture is not that fantastic, it's not very meaningful as architecture. Coming to Haus Esters was to realize that it's much more than a house, it's a work of art.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And somehow there's also the doubling of the houses, Haus Esters and Haus Lange, both

built by Mies van der Rohe. Different and somehow very similar. Did you have an interest in architecture in general?

BETHAN HUWS

Well, it was the first time I'd seen proper modernist architecture. We were so deprived of such buildings in Britain. It's changed since then; we've rediscovered modernism, but before that it seemed to be all flowered carpets! It was Haus Esters that taught me modernist architecture at its highest level.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And by one of the greatest architects.

BETHAN HUWS

Very different from the concrete buildings to be found in England, completely lacking in sensitivity. Another reference to mention is the work of Laurie Parsons, and especially the empty gallery of 1990.³

MATHIEU COPELAND

And how did you react to it compared with the work you were developing for Haus Esters?

BETHAN HUWS

I was always questioning Parsons' empty exhibition at the Lorence-Monk Gallery, asking if it was enough, and where one could go after such a gesture. To show an empty gallery, what are we saying by doing that? I appreciated it, but there was a question there. When I came to Haus Esters I felt I really couldn't show Haus Esters on its own, that I had to bring my own contribution. The text was the response.

MATHIEU COPELAND

It's interesting that you should ask where to go from there, since Laurie Parsons retired from the art world shortly after her empty show.

BETHAN HUWS

Yes, I did that too, with my own practice. You reach a point and realize that there's nothing left any more. There's a process of rebuilding that needs to begin, and that's a very long process.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Before we go there, could you tell me about the text that you wrote for the exhibition.

BETHAN HUWS

In the end the process was the same as with the *Lake* piece. The *Lake* piece was my first piece of writing. I was in the habit of taking notes, but never before had I put forward my own writing as a piece of art. I came up with this strategy at the ICA. The ICA was in 1991, Haus Esters in 1993, so I thought I'd feel comfortable with writing. But in the end I failed to write what I wanted. I tried, but my ambition at the time was to follow the model of abstraction. I considered Haus Esters to be abstract architecture and I wanted to make the equivalent of an abstract painting in writing. The way I was going to do that was to use all the prepositions of the English language, which are purely transitional words with hardly any meaning. But I couldn't get any sense out of it. So at the last moment I asked my partner Thierry Hauch if he would speak to me about his own work. I then took his words out of context and just kept the prepositions. My logic was that if we use the same words to talk about a cup of tea as those we use to talk about artworks, then there must be an equivalence.

MATHIEU COPELAND

The prepositions are empty of meaning, as the empty building calls for meaning.

BETHAN HUWS

Also the text is written mostly in the past tense, and this is how I felt about my own work at the time. I was working, but very instinctively, intuitively. It was not in the sense of the Conceptual artist who thinks beforehand and then carries it out. I wanted to be able to answer all the questions that arose, but couldn't. So this past tense needed to change for me, to become the present tense, and this is what I then did: be in the present so I could be ahead of my own work, not following behind. It was a change, like the difference in English between "here" and "there." In the text you have the line "being there" and this was very characteristic of my state at the time. Now I am "being here." This is where I wanted to go, "being here," but at the time I was "there."

MATHIEU COPELAND

Going back to Haus Esters, the adjacent building is the museum Haus Lange which houses the only permanent *Void*, realized by Yves Klein in 1961.

BETHAN HUWS

Yes, I knew it was there. Julian Heynen, the director of the Krefeld Museum at the time, often used to talk to me about Klein's work. But I must say I didn't feel very close to his philosophy, or to the mystique that surrounded him.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Yet both voids happened within meters of each other.

BETHAN HUWS

It must have been important that it was there, but my thinking comes from different sources, from all the parallels that cross over.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Still, it's fascinating that they all collide in Krefeld, and within this modernist architecture.

BETHAN HUWS

Maybe because it's an inspirational space. Julian showed me all the works realized there, and how each one worked upon the phenomenon of the place. The space inspired the artists.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And you also discussed the architecture by Mies van der Rohe as a work of art. Yves Klein's void came at the height of modernist



Not Using Artificial Light, exhibition view of *Gemischtes Doppel/Mixed Double*, Wiener Secession, Vienna, August–September 1992

WHICH HAD BEING THERE WAS WHICH WAS AND IT WAS AND WHAT WAS
 THAT WAS AND WHAT WAS THAT WAS WAS THERE WAS WAS THIS WAS NOT
 WHICH WAS WHICH IS THAT WAS THERE WHICH IS WHICH WAS THERE WAS
 WHICH WAS THERE WAS A WITH THERE IS WHICH WAS WHICH OF
 OF A WHICH IS WAS THAT THAT WAS WAS NOT THEN THERE I WAS
 IT WAS THERE WAS I WAS IT WAS WAS AND THE WHAT WAS
 THAT WAS WOULD HAVE WAS TO TO WHERE I WAS THAT I
 WHAT WAS THERE IT WAS WHAT I IN THAT THAT TO TO THE
 AND THAT THERE WAS TO THAT ARE THERE WAS THERE WAS WAS
 WAS IT WAS WAS WAS NOT WAS WHEN WHERE IT WITH A
 YOU WERE WHEN YOU WAS WAS NOT WAS WHAT WAS THERE WAS
 THERE IS THERE IT WAS THERE IT WAS

art, and this building was built by one of the greatest of modernist architects. So how do you bridge the two?

BETHAN HUWS

It was indeed the height. Haus Esters is always pushing us, it's infinite in its logic; when we're inside it draws us outside, and when we're outside it's drawing us back inside. It doesn't matter where you are, at one end of Haus Esters it's pulling you to the other end. If you're here, it's pulling you over there. And I felt that this was a highly modernist characteristic. An opening toward the outside. He calculated that from every point of view you would be looking outside. But I thought that for me it was time to go back inside. It was a strong feeling, and the photographs that I had taken of the *Haus Esters Piece* tried hard to find a space where you wouldn't encounter those sensations. A view without a window is one of the rarest places! For me that was the only way to represent my desire to interiorize it all.

MATHIEU COPELAND

You're digesting the building, making it your own, and by working on the in-between spaces you're showing its own internalization. Now, moving on, you told me that you stopped working for three years after the *Haus Esters Piece*. Would you mind describing what happened?

BETHAN HUWS

Well more than three years, five years actually—from 1993 to 1997. But it wasn't only Haus Esters that made me stop—and not completely, as I kept on drawing. It was generally having too many questions in my own mind and not being able to answer them all. Too many questions, and therefore a lot of doubt, doubt about what I was doing. And not knowing what I was doing took over my activity, it became my activity.

MATHIEU COPELAND

It's quite striking that when you show Haus Esters empty there's a significant reduction of the process, and then comes the second and most radical reduction, not working.

BETHAN HUWS

It's an important moment in my history. I had an intense period of work from 1988 until

WAS_HATTE DORT SEIEND WAR WAS_WAR UND ES WAR UND WAS_WAR
 DAS WAR UND WAS_WAR DAS WAR WAR DORT WAR WAR DIES WAR NICHT
 WAS_WAR WAS_IST DAS WAR DORT WAS_IST WAS_WAR DORT WAR
 WAS_WAR DORT WAR EIN MIT DORT IST WAS_WAR WAS VON
 VON EINEM WAS_IST WAR DAS DAS WAR WAR NICHT DANN DORT ICH WAR
 ES WAR DORT WAR ICH WAR ES WAR WAR UND DER WAS_WAR
 DAS WAR HATTE WAR ZU ZU WO ICH WAR DASS ICH
 WAS_WAR DORT ES WAR WAS ICH IN DEM DAS ZU ZUM
 UND DAS DORT WAR ZU DEM SIND DORT WAR DORT WAR WAR
 WAR ES WAR WAR WAR NICHT WAR WENN WO ES MIT EINEM
 DU WARST WENN DU WAR WAR NICHT WAR WAS_WAR DORT WAR
 DORT IST DORT ES WAR DORT ES WAR

Haus Esters Piece exhibition text, Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, May 16–July 11, 1993
 Printed text on Arches paper 120 gsm,
 500 copies, folded once, 24.5 × 30.5 cm

Haus Esters and by 1993 I had realized things I really wanted to realize. And as I realized them, I also realized that my house was kind of collapsing, it was empty ...

MATHIEU COPELAND

And did you ever consider that you might stop producing art altogether?

BETHAN HUWS

No, not at all! Sometimes you don't know why you do things, and this was not a decision. It's something you get into. It was never "Well today I'm going to stop because I have too many questions!" I couldn't carry on working because of too many questions and too many doubts, and I wanted to know how. And asking myself how became my practice.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And then?

BETHAN HUWS

Then I was invited to carry out a piece of work for Skulptur Projekte Münster in 1997. And I stopped making notes on the *Haus Esters Piece* because I began to make notes for the Münster project. Up to 1997 I called the notes "Origin & Source."

MATHIEU COPELAND

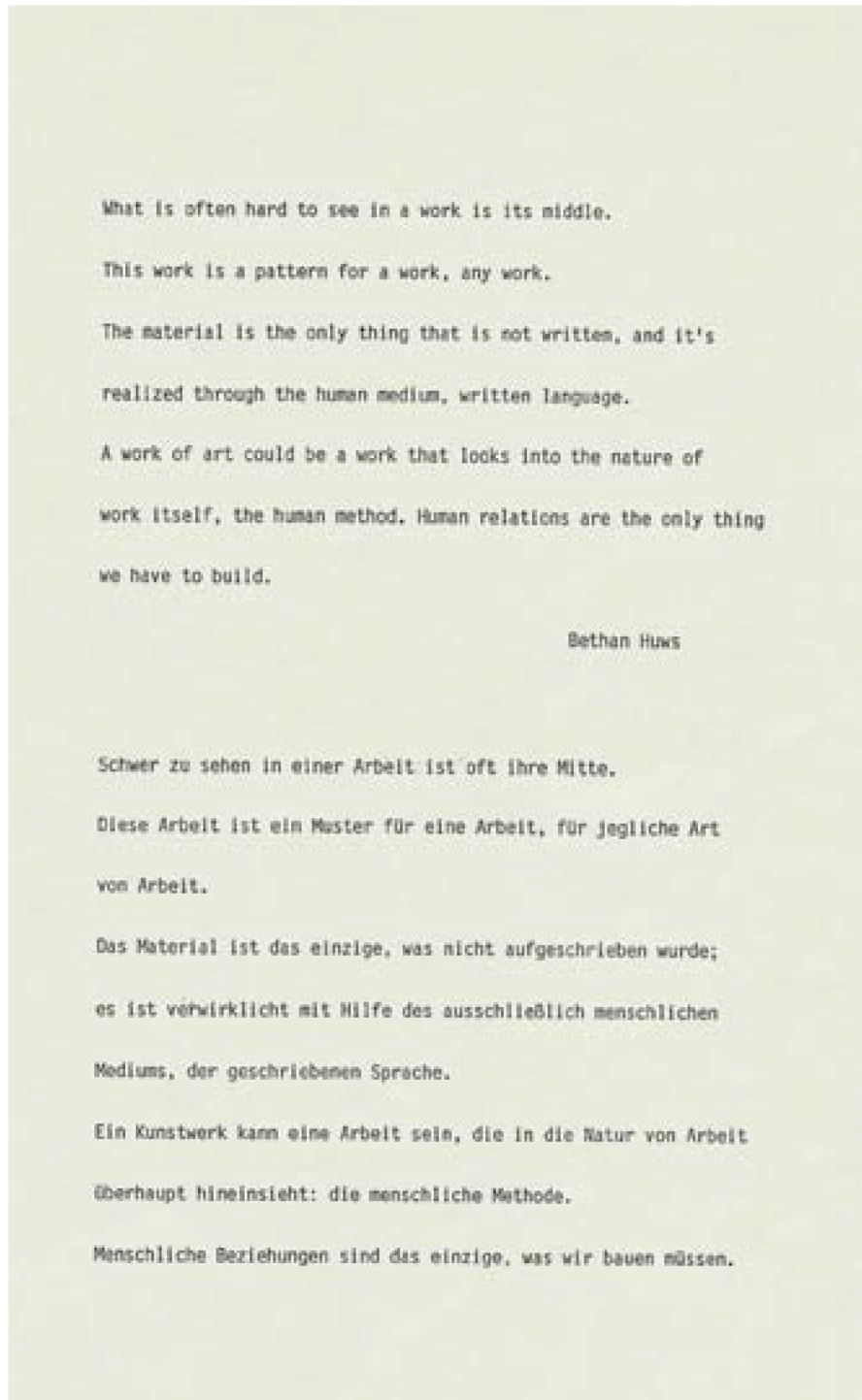
Also, as you told me, envisaging the retrospective of empty exhibitions would enable you to revisit the work. More questions than answers again?

BETHAN HUWS

Well with a work like this your sources come from so many different directions. You have to have a certain understanding and maturity of thought, so in that respect I never got to the bottom of *Haus Esters*, but I know it's possible. Somebody would have to work on it! And that's my main interest. I believe this is the only value a work of art has; everything seems to be just a shell, and art is to know how every artwork is structured. That's the only important thing, to understand the mechanism of human beings.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Somehow doing an empty show is the most honest thing one can do. There's no alteration or modification, there's no desire to shape your surroundings.



Exhibition notice, Museum Haus Esters,
Krefeld, May 16–July 11, 1993

A single text is written for the museum staff purposes, a single A4 paper copy which is at the desk in the event of any discussion with the public.

BETHAN HUWS

When I consider the retrospectives of empty exhibitions, I think of them in terms of a dread of the white page, clearing the tables and starting again from the beginning. Artists in different periods have always dealt with that feeling, and we should get back to that. As we're always going round in circles there's a period where we say "Let's start again."

MATHIEU COPELAND

In the void there is indeed the notion of a *tabula rasa*.

I believed that this was a turning point for me, one where I would stop responding to architecture and start responding to people.

MATHIEU COPELAND

You also told me that there was a strong response from the public in Haus Esters, and that before the opening of the exhibition you wrote a text that the attendants kept with them at all times in case the public responded violently to the work, a text that reads: "What is often hard to see in a work is its middle. This work is a pattern for a work, any work. The



BETHAN HUWS

I think it's that, the moment of "let's start again," and I think that's what I did then.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Yet what strikes me is that you made such a radical gesture so early on.

BETHAN HUWS

But that's more an accident of character! That's how I respond to the outside world. I'm as sensitive to people as I am to architecture.

material is the only thing that is not written, and it's realized through the human medium, written language. A work of art could be a work that looks into the nature of work itself, the human method. Human relations are the only thing that we have to build."

BETHAN HUWS

Yes, looking back, this is me trying to formulate the piece, defining the middle! I would know the beginning and the end, but never the middle! There are no nouns, as there is nothing

Haus Esters Piece, Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, May 16–July 11, 1993
Installation view

concrete. There are no references, as we have no references ...

MATHIEU COPELAND

The first sentence encapsulates the whole show, as through your decision—in other words the beginning—you could envisage

BETHAN HUWS

Human relations are the unexpected. This was what I also concluded. This had become equally—or actually more—interesting at the time. I was really holding on to this more than to the architecture.



the end. You knew what Haus Esters would look like empty. The only undefined aspect was the way that the public would respond, and therefore make the work, art being the moment of indecision that cannot be read right away.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Did you try to stay in Krefeld while the show was on, to talk with people?

BETHAN HUWS

Unfortunately not. I heard bits from Julian and from the people at the desk, as I was quite

Haus Esters Piece, Museum Haus Esters,
Krefeld, May 16–July 11, 1993
Installation view

close to the two people who were looking after the house.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And could you tell me something about the poster, why a brick?

BETHAN HUWS

It came from a discussion I had with Julian. He told me about a phrase by Mies van der Rohe that says architecture starts when you bring two bricks together. My initial reaction was to ask him how you can build with one brick! That was, and still is, my state of mind!

MATHIEU COPELAND

And indeed with the *Haus Esters Piece* you created an architecture with no bricks, with everything else but the bricks!

BETHAN HUWS

Later, as we discussed that sentence—how to build with one brick—we both thought we would throw it!

MATHIEU COPELAND

And thus create a void!

BETHAN HUWS

Indeed, the void in that sense has negative connotations; it's a lack rather than an emptiness.

MATHIEU COPELAND

The void has many aspects, and for me the quality of the void is that it's neither positive nor negative, it just is. Whereas when I consider your piece, I think it has more to do with a negative as understood in photography. The inverted space, as one talks of the negative in photography to make a positive. Your piece is the inverted space of that which is present; the piece is the negative space of the positive Mies van der Rohe building. It's not the building itself, it's this other.

BETHAN HUWS

I know what you mean, and it's very abstract.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Very similar to the abstract painting you envisaged!

BETHAN HUWS

It was necessary to do the piece, but the point is to reflect on it!

- 1 *Haus Esters Piece*, Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, Germany, May 16–July 11 1993.
- 2 *Riverside Piece*, Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, London, 1989
- 3 Cf. section on Laurie Parsons.

Making the Invisible Visible, Interview with Roman Ondák Mathieu Copeland

MATHIEU COPELAND

I would like to discuss with you your relationship to the idea of the void, and how you first began to consider exploring the notion of void as an artistic practice.

ROMAN ONDÁK

It was in the mid-1990s, when the climate of the art scene in Slovakia was at freezing point, mainly because of the political situation at the time; there was a real loss of enthusiasm in the air. The other thing was that there was almost no audience at all, so the main question for my generation living in Bratislava became “why” instead of “what.” This atmosphere was most probably what led me, in some of my works, to fill the exhibition rooms with “nothing,” or more precisely with forms which refer to emptiness. I wanted to escape from the exhibition as such, yet I felt that if I had to stay there, I would rather develop the works from “nothing,” or only from a given, pre-existing situation. At that time I created a lot of works compiled from the elements or situations I came across in the galleries where I was about to show; I took such moments as a point of departure.

MATHIEU COPELAND

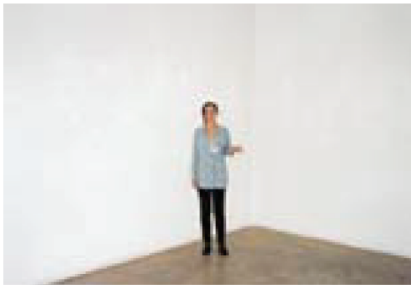
Many of your works seem to concern the emptied spaces of galleries. I'm very interested in *Guided Tour* for instance, where you organized guided tours of an emptied gallery that ended in the outdoor square. I'm also thinking about the virtual museum of contemporary art that you initiated in 2003. Considering the art environment, could you clarify your approach to the architectural concerns of space, and the prevalence of the white cube when considering the outdoor space.

ROMAN ONDÁK

For me there's no difference between creating such situations in galleries and conceiving them for public spaces. In *Guided Tour* I



Letter asking for the Slovak Minister of Culture's support for the establishment of a Virtual Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003
Laser print, ballpoint pen, and stamp on paper, 29.7 × 21 cm
Collection Erste Bank, Vienna



was, in fact, interested in exactly that moment: what it is that makes the difference between real-life experience and a staged experience represented inside the gallery. I did the piece in 2002 in a small gallery called Josip Račić situated next to a very lively square in the center of Zagreb. The gallery was left empty of art objects, but everything that belonged there remained unchanged: the walls, the desk with catalogues on it and the attendant-cum-ticket seller. I then hired a professional tourist guide and instructed her to give a talk, both inside the gallery and in the square facing the gallery. She simply talked at first about the empty gallery and then, without giving the visitors a break, she took them straight outside the gallery and continued to comment on life in the square. By giving the whole event an uninterrupted character, I believed that the two different experiences would merge in the visitor's mind. So what people had missed at the gallery was replaced by what they had seen and heard on the square. Her commentary was significant: visitors were listening to the situations they could actually see in front of their eyes, but with comments. So it changed the whole piece into something like an instruction for seeing. In *Virtual Museum of Contemporary Art I* established a seemingly functional art institution, which was in fact simulated by only few marginal traces

recalling its pseudo-existence. There were no exhibitions, but there was, for example, a letter I wrote to the minister asking him to support VMCA. There was once a plaque made bearing its name, which was installed on a pier in Venice, together with a few benches ...

MATHIEU COPELAND

You've often considered the empty gallery with the artist wandering through the space. An empty gallery is pretty much always the prerequisite of any exhibition to come and very often for the artist, encountering that space would be the first moment leading to an exhibition. The lonely figure of the artist, a very romantic theme, is central to your work and is often portrayed as yourself in the empty gallery (somehow, bringing us back to the relationship of an artist with his space for creation, at a time when so many artists are deciding not to have a studio). In this regard I'm reminded of the series of drawings you did, like *Somewhere Else*. Could you expand on these thoughts?

ROMAN ONDÁK

There are some pieces in which I'm "acting" in the work, not as an artist but rather as a visitor, playing the role of those who come to galleries, walk in the rooms and look around. So I'm not there doing or representing anything that could relate to me as an artist, I'm just wandering in the empty galleries or traveling—sitting in the train or in an airplane. Somehow a notion of being confronted directly with the space was what I intended, in the same way that any visitor is confronted with the space he or she enters. So I don't feel like being there as an artist with the desire to create, but as a visitor, full of expectations. In *Somewhere Else* such a moment of visiting the gallery is evoked and then specifically documented in drawings made by my parents according to my descriptions. I then drew myself into these drawings, walking in these real drawn spaces. The drawings about empty galleries, as well as those about traveling to the exhibitions have, in my opinion, a common potential to deconstruct this notion of the artist as a romantic figure.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Considering the series of drawings you did like *Untitled (Empty Gallery)* or *I Am Just Acting in*



Guided Tour, 2002
Performance at Josip Račić Gallery, Zagreb

Virtual Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003
Plaque, benches, variable dimensions
Installation view, Venice Biennale, Venice, 2003

More Silent Than Ever, 2006

Room with a hidden eavesdropping device

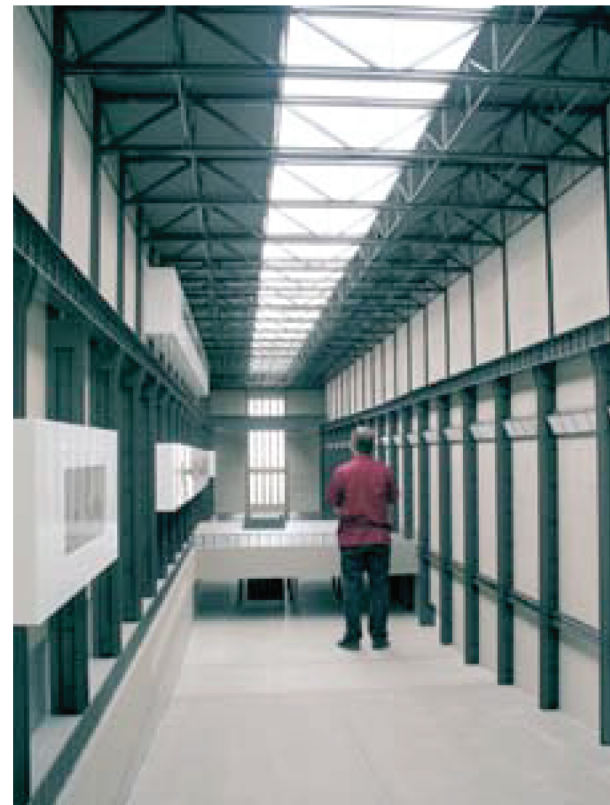
it, I would like to ask you about your desire to have the drawings done by someone else than you. Considering the translation of nothing from your words to someone else's is indeed a deep and beautiful challenge.

ROMAN ONDÁK

Yes, the drawings were done with the help of my relatives or friends; sometimes with children or people I'd never met. They were often based on descriptions, images, or even rumors about places those people—or I—had not actually seen. Reconstructing emptiness or non-seen places in a collaborative manner is a challenge. We collect various views of something that perhaps doesn't even exist, but we tend to believe it does.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Taking shape around the unspoken code of practice for art, most of your pieces could be approached through the prism of institutional critique; pieces concerned with the mechanism of the gallery, the relation of the artist to the gallery and to the system of production—the ultimate paradox being the commodification of the gallery itself as you realized with *It Will All Turn Out Right in the End*, where the concern becomes not only the reproduction of a gallery as an object



More Silent Than Ever, 2006
Room with a hidden eavesdropping device
Detail of wall label, gb agency, Paris, 2006

It Will All Turnout Right in the End, 2005–2006
Installation, mixed media
Overall dimensions 3.6 × 2.5 × 15.8 m
Installation Tate Modern, London, 2006



(here the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern and showing it within the gallery), but also the creation of the scaled down empty gallery and its immediate relation to the onlooker. Here the gallery produces a smaller version of itself, and remains empty. Would you care to discuss your feelings and relation to the notion of institutional critique?

ROMAN ONDÁK

I've never thought about my works in relation to "institutional critique." I understand my role as an artist within an art system in the same



way as I understand my role as a man within society. Art and the art system could be viewed as a mini-society, a system existing within a society, both having institutional parameters. By involving people from outside the art system, like people from my community or from the audience, I like provoking situations in which these two systems can merge.

MATHIEU COPELAND

We haven't talked about your influences. One thinks of artists such as Michael Asher, and also Jiří Kovanda for the minutiae and precision of your pieces (I'm thinking of Kovanda's exhibition *Installation 5 [Panes of Glass in an Empty Gallery]* from the summer of 1979), and Franz Erhard Walther for the process embedded in your practices. Would you care to tell me who you were, and still are, looking at?

ROMAN ONDÁK

There are certainly intuitive references to several artists I appreciate in my works, but Július Koller from Bratislava and Jiří Kovanda from Prague have influenced me the most. I've always believed that looking closely at some great art by a few local artists would bring me more in terms of understanding my own situation than looking for influences from internationally established art. In the meantime Koller and Kovanda have become internationally renowned and their influence has gained a wider importance.

MATHIEU COPELAND

I'd like to discuss the possible impact of the political context in which you grew up, and how this may have informed your work. In particular I'm interested in the desire and need for voids and emptiness. Would the void be a means to an end for you, representing the ultimate engagement of defiance?

ROMAN ONDÁK

I've never thought about doing "political art," but because of my interest in situations within society, the impact of the political context on some of my works is noticeable. I've never wanted to illustrate politics as such, but many of my works are concerned with infiltrating my personal experiences into a society which is being transformed. It's actually very exciting to live in a society whose shape is constantly

Untitled (Empty Gallery), 2000
Series of 24 drawings, colour pencil on paper,
variable dimensions
Collection Fonds national d'art contemporain,
Paris

evolving. I grew up during communism, so I can compare both political and cultural systems, but what I see as an advantage is that I began to make my art after the fall of communism, at the beginning of the 1990s. I've never had a desire to comment directly in my works on that "dark" period. Later the notion of void was a tool for me to start, to move from a certain point. Just as someone needs a house to be filled with furniture for his family to inhabit it, the void for me was a matter to create for myself and possibly to fill it with something later.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And pursuing the subject of the void, I'd like to understand how you describe it. To me the void is neither positive nor negative, it just is, as a statement of fact. How would you qualify the void?

ROMAN ONDÁK

As I said, it's like some abstract matter kept somewhere in Room 13, which you can visit when there's no space left around you. It's like something one should have a chance to escape to.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Most of your work also calls for a reversal of situations, turning things on their heads without adding anything. I could give the example of going out of the gallery, looking into the gallery from outside and doubling the points of view. I'm interested in the use of the gallery as a readymade (and in that respect it's very similar to the view of Bethan Huws for instance). Would you care to consider this?

ROMAN ONDÁK

The gallery is like a large sculpture, but yet it's not interesting enough for me to call it a sculpture. If I do something with a gallery itself, there's always something else going on beyond it. So for me the gallery is like a pretext to make something invisible visible.

MATHIEU COPELAND

I'd like to also discuss the piece *More Silent Than Ever*. This piece affirms one thing, and yet leaves the gallery entirely empty. The notion of deceiving the viewer is at the very core of the work. For this piece, a choice has to be made: we either believe the artist or not. The

implication that there is something there means that the viewer becomes central to the work.

ROMAN ONDÁK

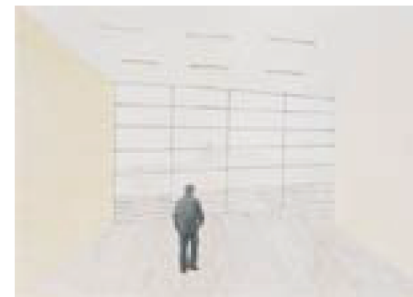
When I state on the wall label in the gallery "room with a hidden eavesdropping device," is it true or not? Is there a chance to prove it or not? Is it important or not? Furthermore, what if said there: "This is the wall." Is that true or not? Well, I can see paint, but there should be a wall behind it. It's like Magritte's "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." Of course this work is based on how much we can believe in the words that we read on the wall label. We all know that an eavesdropping device is usually doing a good job when it's well hidden, so the statement remains no more than a



rumor left to the viewer wandering in the empty room. If the visitor is curious about the fact he stays longer and observes the walls, hoping to find a detail revealing the hiding place of the device. So in the end it's he who plays the most important role in the work.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And to conclude, allow me to put to you again a question that you avoided during our last discussion! Maybe this will strike a chord



Somewhere Else, 2002

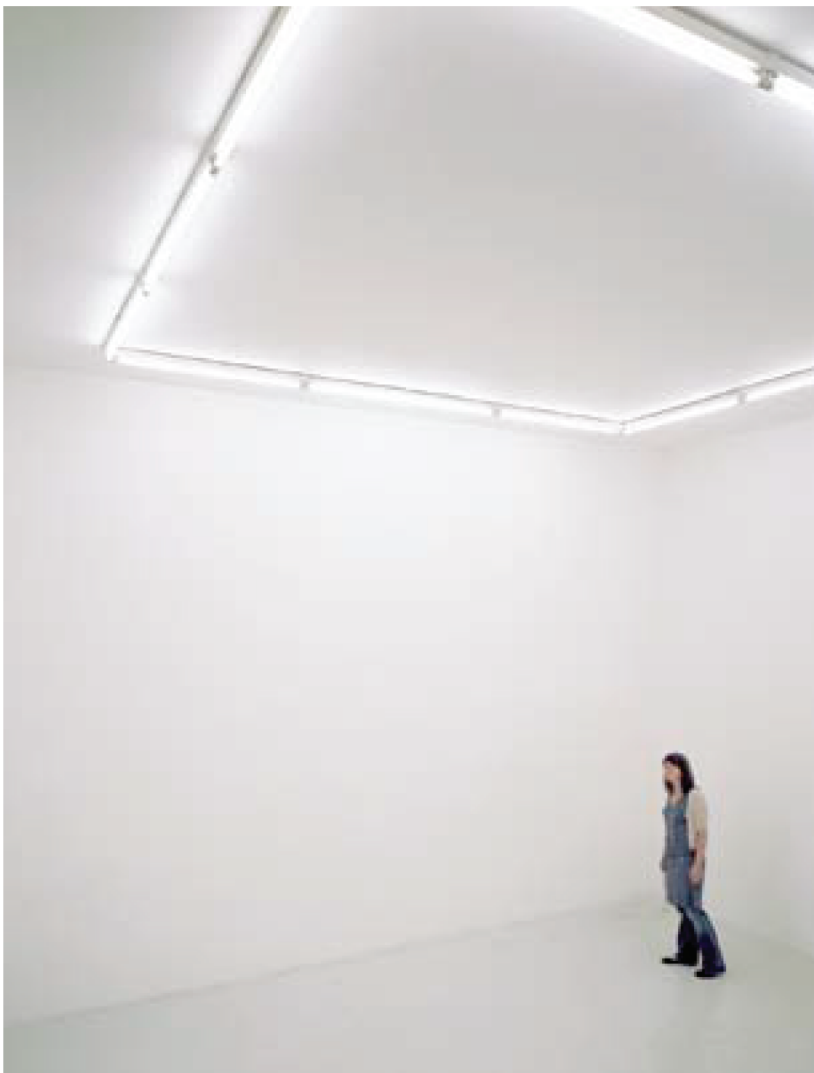
Series of 10 drawings, colour pencil on paper
Each between 20 × 29 cm and 42 × 53.5 cm
Collection Frac Pays-de-la-Loire, France



now, or maybe it will generate another void! Everything begins with nothing and somehow, by deciding to leave the gallery empty, you highlight a deep concern for the fact that by showing nothing, everything is indeed already there. The gallery is no longer the place for art to be but—because of the environment that (rightly) validates any object as art—it begins to validate itself as art.

ROMAN ONDÁK

Time to fill my void?



Untitled, 2005

Plastic sign, string, Installation view,
Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna

More Silent Than Ever, 2006

Room with a hidden eavesdropping device
Installation view, gb agency, Paris, 2006

Qualifying the Void Mathieu Copeland

The void cannot be considered from just one point of view. Of both spiritual state and physical nature, it infiltrates all fields of the possible and in fact allows the advent of the (se) possible(s). We can get closer to it through its fundamental architectural or musical qualities, or approach it as symptomatic of the intellectual gaping characteristic of many aspects of contemporary times. The word itself is imprecise in qualifying its semantic multiplicity. When considering the void we are immediately confronted with nothing, absence, vacuity, emptiness, the invisible and the ineffable, with destruction and rejection, and finally with negation—the void as the opposite to life, as the absence of everything.

This book, with its anthology of essays from all viewpoints and all disciplines, offers possible readings of the void—or rather the voids—through the historical prism of a retrospective on empty exhibitions. How do we define these exhibitions? They are exhibitions left strictly empty, with no element added or subtracted, without the space being altered, leaving it free of any content other than itself. This collection of contributions proposes contemplating the nature of the void, how it changes in content and form according to our comprehension of it, and how each void defines itself by its own quality, so showing its inherent relationship to reality.

In art, the void is mediated through the artist's first intention. The unity of these past exhibitions can be found in their obvious similarities, within which they contrast in their undeniable realities, namely in their particular kinds of voids.

The experience of the void is not emptiness: it is not about nothing, nor is it about absence. To the contrary, it is about a whole, yet a whole

which has no noticeable reality. The void does not have a positive or negative connotation. It just is.

Considering the void in art brings us to an impossible definition. The desire to work with "nothing" can manifest itself in many complementary ways and generates numerous approaches: pure voids, spaces left empty, "assisted voids" (to borrow John Armleder's apt expression), voids emerging from the desire to empty everything, voids resulting from the desire to add nothing, voids as signature, unfulfilled voids and conceptual voids, voids as refusal etc.

Exhibiting the void turns out to have been a recurring motif in art history since the 1950s, to the point where the approach—whether it be direct or "quotationist"—has practically become a cliché of contemporary artistic practice.

A Retrospective of Empty Exhibitions

Yves Klein is the point of reference in this retrospective. With *The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State of Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility* at the Galerie Iris Clert in 1958, he announced the advent of a new radicality in art. Proposing a new understanding of the gallery, this exhibition definitively engaged him to pursue the void.

On March 17, 1959, during a group show entitled *Vision in Motion—Motion in Vision* in Antwerp, the artist pronounced these words, borrowed from Gaston Bachelard: "First there is nothing, then there is a deep nothing, and then there is a deep blue." Later on he would refer to his participation in this exhibition: "In fact I tried to limit my pictorial action for this exhibition to the farthest extreme [...] those few words I pronounced were already too many. I should not have come at all, and my

name should not have even appeared in the catalogue." (As we will see later on, this program of disappearance was taken up again in 1990 by Laurie Parsons.) This is how Yves Klein pointed out the existence of pure sensibility and worked to go beyond it, qualifying the void in its spiritual sense. Exceeding the frame of the gallery, his immaterial work does not create the void, but, strictly speaking, *is* the void. His practice is embodied in the least tangible, yet the most real form there is.

The void can also constitute the zenith of Conceptual and Minimal art by questioning the materiality of the artwork itself. Robert Barry adopts a radical process of reduction in his work that brings him to question the place of the work within the "art" object. His work *Some places to which we can come, and for a while "be free to think about what we are going to do"* (Marcuse), pursues this process of re(dis)-placement, bringing to the forefront the split between the presence of an empty space and the thought of an essentially void and indeterminate future yet to be written. During a discussion with Carl Andre and Lawrence Weiner on February 8, 1968, Barry stated: "Why the void and not the created space? There is something about void and emptiness which I am personally very concerned with. I guess I can't get it out of my system. Just emptiness. *Nothing* seems to me the most potent thing in the world."

For the British group Art & Language, qualifying the void involves weighing it in structural terms. Their work *The Air-Conditioning Show* (1966–1967)—originally presented as a written text in *Arts Magazine* at a time when museums were not yet equipped with air-conditioning systems—falls within the framework of their immaterial artistic practice, which had begun with their air columns and the *mise-en-scène* of the fundamental relationship between art and language. Furthermore, *The Air-Conditioning Show* came from the desire to show institutions' internal mechanisms, here the thermal regulating system for an exhibition space, left empty.

As for Stanley Brouwn, he qualifies space by making use of the void. For his exhibition *Walking Through Cosmic Rays* at the Städtisches Museum at Mönchengladbach

in 1973, he emptied the institution of its artworks and invited the visitors to walk through the cosmic rays in the cleared space. For his exhibition at the SMAK in Ghent in 2001, he measured the exhibition rooms with his own unit of measurement that he established in the 1960s according to his body size. He left the rooms empty and kept these measurements to himself. The visitor found himself confronted with both a naked space and two measurements: that of his personal experience and the measurements signaled in the captions, inherent to the artist's work. In this way, the artist gave the place back its initial reality, that of a space with indisputable physical qualities. His participation in the retrospective follows this same idea in *An empty space in the Centre George Pompidou* and *An empty space at the Kunsthalle Bern*.

When qualifying the void, it is necessary to distinguish between quantity and quality. A void defines itself by its quantity, while its quality becomes sign (which attests of its reality as void) and symbol (which transcends its reality as void). Highlighting the epistemological rift between sentient being and conceptual self, Robert Irwin employs phenomenological reduction to bring us to the heart of the comprehension of the void. For Irwin, contemplating the void requires an ongoing commitment to the concerned spaces. His work and thinking help us grasp the unaltered qualities of a given space. He touched on this in *Notes Toward a Model* (catalogue from his exhibition at the Whitney Museum in 1977): "How is it that space could ever come to be considered empty when it is filled with real and tactile events?"

The void qualifies as much as it needs to be qualified. In this manner, Laurie Parsons' work—which embraces a radical commitment—brought her to abandon her artistic practice following an exhibition left entirely empty at the Lorence-Monk in New York in 1990. This exhibition gave her the context for repositioning the artistic question. More than a work about institutional criticism, her void defines the gallery for what it is, physically and conceptually, encompassing the physical space and questioning its commercial reality.

Bethan Huws: "I don't want to add anything, absolutely not...I think it's all there; I have no

choice but to work with what's there." "That a space stopped me from having to invent or even create anything." "Space is the most concrete thing for all of us and yet none of us can see it." In these quotations, these fragments of discussions between Bethan Huws and Julian Heynen, Director of the Krefeld Museums when Huws' exhibition at the Museum Haus Esters took place in 1993, the artist insists on the importance of sensitivity in her work. For her, the void does not work by adding or subtracting something, but results from the architecture, i.e. all of the inner space. In the presence of a house created by Mies van der Rohe, Bethan Huws asserted that no artwork should be exhibited, as the art was already present. She uses the exhibition space as a readymade, conceptually doubling it with a work that makes its impossibility the material of the void itself.

More than a qualifying or self-qualifying object, the void can be seen as a state of occurrence, an obvious absence. Artist Maria Eichhorn creates a work founded not on the void so much as on the works that find their place outside the usual exhibition places. She works with the noticeable split between the presenting space and the work presentation. Focusing more on an institution's structure than on its spaces, she paradoxically makes the void while driving her work to its fullest capacity. In this manner, for her exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern in 2001, Maria Eichhorn left the institution empty and invested the exhibition budget in repairs needed for the building.

Lastly, the void asks the fundamental question about the viewer's relationship with the work. If the gallery is empty at first glance, it is necessary to go beyond this obvious reality. With the work entitled *More Silent than Ever* (2006), Roman Ondák shows the viewer that what there is to see transcends what is visible, and in doing so he questions the void in visible and invisible terms. Making use of the presence of invisible elements, he plays with the spectator's usual confidence in viewing an artist's exhibition and gambles with the possible deceptions. For Ondák, the work is not situated in the void but results from the void. The void is mediated by words and offers a different reading of the space, not as a physical space but as a perceptible texture of the work.

The examples above concern spaces and voids that are *physically* present in this retrospective, but the list is hardly exhaustive.

In this light, it is also fundamental to consider the qualities of the void in the reductionist, uncompromising practice of Emilio Prini. For his exhibition entitled *Il Vuoto* at the Sound Art Museum in Rome in 2007, the artist left the gallery entirely empty. An emblematic representative of Arte Povera, with this work the artist pursues his commitment to the minus and the absence and shows the naked reality of the gallery. Invited to this retrospective, the artist answered with these precise words: "Yves; Il Vuoto" [Yves; The Void].

The void enjoys a complex character. Considered in all its critical dimensions, it is tied into the physical aspects that characterize it as much as the precise context of a given place. Invited to participate in this retrospective, Michael Asher turned down our invitation, specifying that: "Each of my installations which have no objects, and present just the exhibition space, addresses specific questions or concerns about that space which are particular to its context. These exhibitions are not transportable, and to actualize any of the works would imply that the original exhibition would lose its meaning entirely and become a different artwork, which would, very likely, address other issues."

Since the end of the 1960s, Maria Nordman has worked with and embraced the qualities of places, viewing empty space through all of its sculptural possibilities. For her, the existence of the void is an impossible thing—no one can be witness to the void, since this state is clearly nullified by the presence of witnesses. In *Unnamed*, a work begun in 1967 in Los Angeles, the artist envisaged the empty spaces between the buildings as an ongoing artwork. In 1979, she made a proposal to the Berkeley Art Museum, University of California, which involved emptying the museum of all works and opening it to the public and to the path of the light of the sun for seven rotations of the earth. Even though it was not carried out, a similar work was proposed to the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne in 1993. The museum's exhibition of Maria Nordman's drawings was emptied for twenty-four hours and the

rooms were made “open to the sun and the full moon and any person arriving.” We should also remember her exhibition held at the Museum Haus Esters in Krefeld in 1984—again Krefeld, as with Yves Klein and Bethan Huws!—in which Nordman celebrated the qualities of natural light by filling the empty spaces uniquely with sunlight throughout the duration of the exhibition.

Firmly asserting that it is impossible to “renew” an artwork, working with and celebrating the qualities of natural light and refusing the idea of participating in a retrospective (rather one which would be prospective), the artist ultimately preferred not to be present in the retrospective, stating that, “People visiting will not find a white room with my name on it, as I have been working solely with solar illumination for some decades. It is a concrete thing to acknowledge a difference.”

“Void If Opened”

The void is as much the result of artistic reasoning as it is a deep engagement in what guides our contemporary lives. The void as a state of occurrence asserts the importance of not creating, to paraphrase Douglas Huebler, not adding another object to this already saturated world. To think of the void as a refusal to create is a supreme political action.

An option would be to consider the void as an ecological affirmation and to reason with a world in agony. Effectively, in reaction to the overproduction of recent decades, to make nothing and leave space empty would allow for creating without contributing to this physical overproduction.

In fact, we can envisage hurting the art market this way, at least temporarily. Pursuing Gustav Metzger’s 1977 undertaking formulated in *Years Without Art*, where he called for the halt of all artistic production for a period of three years, producing the void offers a frontal attack to a market founded on exchange.

For many artists, it is fundamental to consider the void as an act of commitment and defiance. To quote Gustav Metzger again, it is important to question “how artists endeavored to come as close as possible to the extremity of the world which they are forced to inhabit,

and forced to reject, and how they responded by not showing, by emphasizing nothing and by bringing in destruction.”

The void plays constantly with its present and its presence, and it questions its state of content. Defined in relationship to a full point, it spreads and invariably makes its contents, in other words its definition, fluctuate. A content containing content, which is of a changing material and in the vacant sense.

To return to a more pragmatic stance, a retrospective of empty exhibitions leaves us in front of an empty space, and an exhibition of the void can have certain similarities to an exhibition of the place. Using full exhibitions as reference, a retrospective of empty exhibitions shows the museum through the works and what they represent. To make light of an undesired yet perhaps very present role within a void exhibition, it is also very possible to see the most beautiful exhibition on architecture there ever was! Just the unaltered space!

To follow up on this thought, we are right to ask ourselves if an exhibition on the void called *Voids* does not reassert what is supposed to be questioned in the first place. In any case, the exhibition is neither about the void nor an assertion of the void. Having made the void, exposing the void brings about a number of new and radical problems, and the first is to know what happened to the original void. In a number of ways, this retrospective pursues the initial questionings of each of the works shown and proposes a possible continuity of the void.

To evoke Arnaud Michniak’s expression *dans le vide rien ne résonne* [*in the void, nothing resonates*] within the framework of a retrospective, the void views the museum as a resonating chamber, and the context of the void amplifies the impact of the work. With its nature stripped down and exposed, the exhibition of the void reveals itself for what it is as much as for what it allows, and the accumulation of voids, which appear to be homogenous yet are radically different in reality, resonates beyond its walls.

This exhibition goes beyond the understanding of possible definitions and apprehends the sufficient relevance of conceivable questions.

Proceeding from historical experiences, the void is hinged between a possible return to zero and its opposite, to draw a *tabula rasa*—two antithetical possibilities for a result that is identical in appearance.

This retrospective proposes neither to replay past exhibitions—which is impossible—nor realize new empty exhibitions. It promises to be a retrospective led by intellectual research speculations, a space where we are invited to remember these past exhibitions and compare them. To pick up on the words of Mai-Thu Perret, these empty rooms become an additional and heuristic support, evoking the historical exhibitions. A retrospective of empty exhibitions presents itself as an exhibition of memories, empty places commemorating their own empty place pasts. A retrospective of exhibitions, a genre of its own to be explored, is similar in many possible ways to a progressive accumulation of memories; the void of these spaces shows nothing, just the memory we project into it; voids distant in terms of space and time; and the most beautiful thing is how it is impossible to define the void, which continually escapes all definitions. The closer we come to grasping a possible understanding, the more it fragments, revealing thousands of other aspects that also need to be defined. The void changes in texture and qualities according to the chosen perspective. And finally, as in its origins, through the void we experience its fundamental quality, namely the presence of its absence.

"Less is more, but I prefer nothing" Interview with Ben Vautier

MATHIEU COPELAND

Have you ever had the opportunity to discuss the void, or your void, with Yves Klein?

BEN VAUTIER

Yes and no. There's a well-known anecdote that's true. I am an envious person, I want to exist, to survive, to have an ego. Klein had already signed everything. He'd signed the Blue, the void... so if all that's true, everything must be signed. If God is everywhere, then He's also in this ping-pong ball. I signed it, so I signed God.

Actually, we didn't have the same idea of nothingness. I feel closer to Daniel Spoerri's vision. One day I said to Spoerri that Klein was the greatest because he'd signed everything. He replied, "If you ask twelve pupils to bring along just anything, they will all bring a different Just Anything. If you tell them to bring everything, they will all bring a different Everything. Everyone's Everything is different, and everyone's Nothing is different." That was when I said to myself that my own Nothing is not Manzoni's or Klein's Nothing; it's a different Nothing. A Nothing of fear, a Nothing of "I don't know what to do," a Nothing of "I want to die," a Nothing of suicide, a Nothing of a lot of things. Klein's Nothing might be a Nothing of God, or a Nothing of Sainte Rita, and it might transmit different visions of Nothing. Klein was a megalomaniac; it was "I, Klein, sign Nothing," "I, Klein, sign the Void." His ego was there more than Nothing! When you think about Isou's supertemporal art for instance, he takes a frame and signs everything through the frame. But for Isou himself, the ego came before everything else, and that's why I'm very interested in the ego, because I reduce art to the ego. There is no art, only ego. There is no art without me, only ego. Then you add something to the ego to make the ego live.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Before we come back to the ego, could we talk about Nothing? You signed an empty canvas, then you took it off the stretcher and signed the stretcher without the canvas. The next logical step would have been to do nothing, and sign the non-action. Is that how you intended to go on?

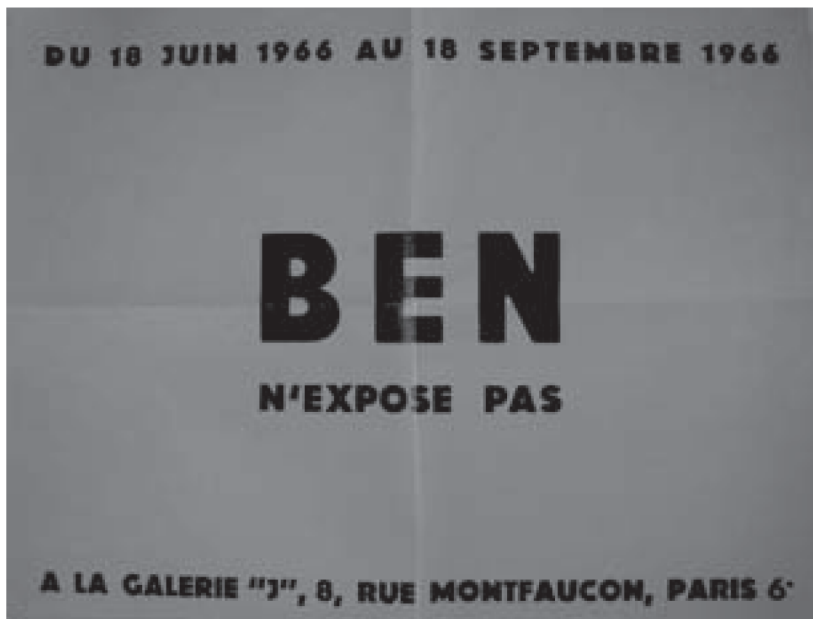
BEN VAUTIER

No. Because it's impossible. I've worked a lot on Nothing, but Nothing is a failure. When the ego says, "Look, I've done Nothing!" the I is more important than the Nothing. Nothing cannot exist in art without the I. And the I takes up too much room. In the end, Cézanne could say, "I've done these apples," Malevich could say, "I've done these blacks and whites," and so on. So if you want to change art, you have to start by tackling the I. And it's impossible for us to separate ourselves from the I; except through suicide, and there I agree with Henry Flynt. Flynt is a misanthrope who is anti-art. Flynt is political, and I'm not as political as Flynt. That reminds me of the story about a neurotic Jew who lived in Brooklyn. He was having problems with his wife who left him for another man, then his daughter fell ill, then he



Exhibition view of Ben's retrospective at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1975. In the background, the painting *Tout doit disparaître* [Everything must go] shown on its own in an empty room

Je signe rien faire, Ben, 1961, extract from *Ben, Dieu, sa revue*



exist, and he found himself alone in the universe. And then he said to himself that nothing existed, and he heard a voice saying to him, "Oh, I've been waiting for you for so long!" and everything disappeared. He found himself with no bed and no chair, and he got bored. So on the first day, he created this, and the second day he created that, and the third day he created something else, and that's how mankind began! That's the idea that if the mind could make everything disappear, we'd rebuild it all ourselves. And I must admit that I think a little bit like that when I think that I try to trace everything back to the ego. The ego is everywhere. We all say, "I have to do this, I have to do that," and even when you don't sign anything, the I is still more important than the Nothing. You can't leave the Nothing behind. The ego is the only thing you can't get rid of.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And of course, George Maciunas believed that you had to get rid of it, that your problem was your ego, and he asked you to stop signing.

BEN VAUTIER

Yes, but stopping signing is no more than an attempt doomed to failure. For me, non-ego attempts are always doomed to failure. Because the ego is there when it says I don't want to be there! It begins with the word "I."

MATHIEU COPELAND

Could you tell me about the festival of Nothing?

BEN VAUTIER

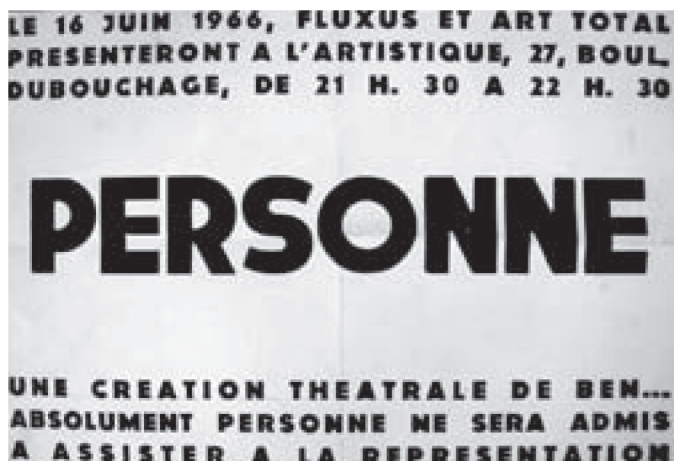
I started the festival of Nothing because I was annoyed with people who think that works of art are important.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Do you think that Nothing and the void are similar?

BEN VAUTIER

The void is physical. One of my friends is a scientist who spends his time trying to make a vacuum, emptying containers of their oxygen and everything. He thinks he's managed it. He made a box with nothing in, guaranteed free of air and oxygen—a complete vacuum, but there's still light in it.



broke his leg and ended up in hospital, and then the taxman came after him and took all his money and he couldn't pay the hospital. So he said, what if all these problems didn't exist, and what if the hospital didn't exist, and suddenly he found himself in his bed out on the sidewalk! So he said to himself, well, it works! So he said to himself, the world doesn't exist, and he found himself floating in space in his bed! And he said to himself, the stars don't

Poster for *Ben n'expose pas* [Ben does not show] at the Galerie J, June 18–September 18, 1966

Poster for *Personne*, a theater play by Ben created the 16th of June 1966 at the Artistique, Nice

MATHIEU COPELAND

And there's the box itself.

BEN VAUTIER

But the box is the container. I asked myself, is that Nothing? No, it's not nothing. It's a scientific experiment, but it's not Nothing. But it's a difficult question. Klein's room wasn't empty, it had air in it, but the principle and idea were to display the void.

MATHIEU COPELAND

We're back to defining the void again. Klein's void isn't anyone else's void.

BEN VAUTIER

And it's not my void. My void always contains ego. But I'm trying to eliminate it. Because it also consists of envy. For instance, I am not on display somewhere like the Galerie J, so I decide that not being on display at the Galerie J is a work of art. So for me, Galerie J is "Ben is not exhibiting," and since everything is art, not being on display at the Galerie J is art. And what's more, I go along and check that I'm not on display there!

MATHIEU COPELAND

That was *Ben is not on display from June 18 to September 18, 1966 at the Galerie J, 8, rue de Montfaucon, Paris 6^e*. While the gallery was presenting its usual program with works on display, you didn't actually do anything at the gallery, did you?

BEN VAUTIER

I didn't do anything, just a poster.

MATHIEU COPELAND

And did the gallery agree?

BEN VAUTIER

They half agreed, half not. Restany wasn't happy with it, but Jeannine¹ was. And still on the theme of Nothing, I also put on the play *Personne* [Nobody] on June 16, 1966, where no one was allowed in to watch the performance.

MATHIEU COPELAND

But the presence of actors means that it was far from Nothing—far from a complete absence or an empty gallery. Did you play with the idea of doing Nothing, of holding an empty exhibition?

BEN VAUTIER

I didn't want to go through with it, but we all had that idea. Of course I held exhibitions and wrote a number of plays on the theme of Nothing. For example, I wanted to spend eight days in a gallery fasting, complete with an official affidavit to prove it, just for the glory of it. Or in 1969 I had an idea, inspired by George Brecht and Drip Music, for an exhibition where a drop of water would drip regularly from the ceiling of an empty gallery. Or there was the idea for a private viewing in empty premises, where I would carefully paint a table white ... Or again my text "Ben is giving up art" ... My relationship with death is very close to my relationship with Nothing, because death enables us to be Nothing.

Let me tell you something about Nothing. You take art history, and you say to yourself that we start with the idea that art history is the idea of the New sweeping away the Known. Let's say we start with Ingres. It was natural that Manet should come along and sweep him away. And it's natural that we then come across Kandinsky, who told us that abstraction isn't representation, thereby creating the New. When we get to Kandinsky, it was natural that Duchamp should come along and tell us that a bottle rack is better than a drawing of a bottle rack. And so on. They all hand the New on to the next artist. And at that point I say, in line



Tout doit disparaître, painting by Ben at the Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris

with Manzoni, Klein, Marinetti, and others, it's perfectly natural that someone should say that since we've reached the limits of art, and as part of the New, the New should be Nothing! So if Nothing is just a proposition of the New—another New—it's like when you throw down your extra cards in poker. It's a vision of Nothing in relation to a society that seeks the New. The New brings us to Nothing.

MATHIEU COPELAND

What was Manzoni's Nothing?

BEN VAUTIER

There is the version which copies Nothing. Because when I talked to Arman and Klein about Manzoni's Nothing, they said be careful, he copies. So I asked them, how can you copy Nothing? Nothing is at the limit, so how can you copy someone who copies Nothing?

[...]



Let me tell you about my empty room. I had a major exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1975—a retrospective of Ben. We got there, and there was Ad Pedersen who was organizing the exhibition. We filled the first room, we filled the second room, we filled the third room, and so on. Then Pedersen comes over to me and says, "You know, we've got another room," and opens a door, and there was an empty room. It was magnificent. My whole exhibition was in eight rooms and there was a magnificent extra room. I asked him if there was really nothing planned for the room, and he said, "Yes, really, nothing." So I brought along a canvas with the words "Tout doit disparaître [Everything must go]," set it up at the back of the room, and left the rest of it empty. People always say that Ben fills the space. I had people enter through that room, so they began with the impression there was nothing on display, then they found everything when they went into the following rooms! It reminds me of the catalogue I did for the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, where I put forward twelve propositions for leaving art behind. They included falling in love, becoming a postman, and there was also Nothing, which was impossible. *Nothing is impossible!*

MATHIEU COPELAND

Was "Everything must go" also a suggestion for a work in its own right?

BEN VAUTIER

I did the painting and put it on offer, but unfortunately "Everything must go" had two implications. When I did it, I was thinking in terms of Nothing. Unfortunately it was bought by the owner of a clothes shop who wanted to get rid of all his stock in a sale. I let him do it because I needed the money. So there are two versions: "Everything must go"—the whole world, and "Everything must go"—everything is on sale!

MATHIEU COPELAND

Would you mind if we came back to Nothing?

BEN VAUTIER

Nothing is one of the limits of art, as is the void. The void could be presented in formal terms as a box containing nothing, but for me, Nothing is theoretical. What I find interesting are the limits of art, and at some point, the

Rien n'existe pas [Nothing does not exist],
1991

limits touch on Nothing. Thinking about art, if you start with the idea that the New sweeps away the Known, you end up at Nothing, and if you start with the idea of the Minimal, *less is more*, you end up at Nothing. *Less is more, but I prefer nothing.*

MATHIEU COPELAND

And that carries on from your 1961 proposition which stated, "Doing Nothing: Searching for a new expression in relation to all art which involves the creation of visible or tangible works, I thought of creating inactivity: building NOTHING, destroying NOTHING. In other words, simply getting an official affidavit attesting to my creative inactivity at the end of each month. It's not the same thing as Klein's immaterial, but rather creative inaction."

BEN VAUTIER

Yes, of course, but I didn't manage to stick to it! Yet I remember thinking I had to go through with it and spend a year doing nothing. It was impossible for me, and even for everyone else! Thinking about Nothing, people are increasingly grappling with the question of what the situation in art is, and how you can try and get out of it. So people try and do Nothing, but the Nothings are immediately appropriated. I would say that even Duchamp's bottle rack, readymade art, Dada, Situationism, and Fluxus were all movements that always wanted to leave behind the bath in which the artist's ego swam, but never managed it. So I would say that Nothing is just an attempt to leave art behind, and a failed one at that. I would have liked to stop time. To have a time of Nothing. Imagine a space of Nothing. But you can't. You can imagine these: I, Ben, can take a piece of paper and sign that time stopped from 6.33 p.m. to 6.43 p.m. I can stop time, I can write and publish it, but you can't actually make it come true. In truth, it's like my mother used to say, "*There is no such thing as nothing!*"

- 1 The Galerie J (1961–1967), managed by Pierre Restany's wife Jeannine Goldschmidt, played a major role in promoting the New Realism movement.



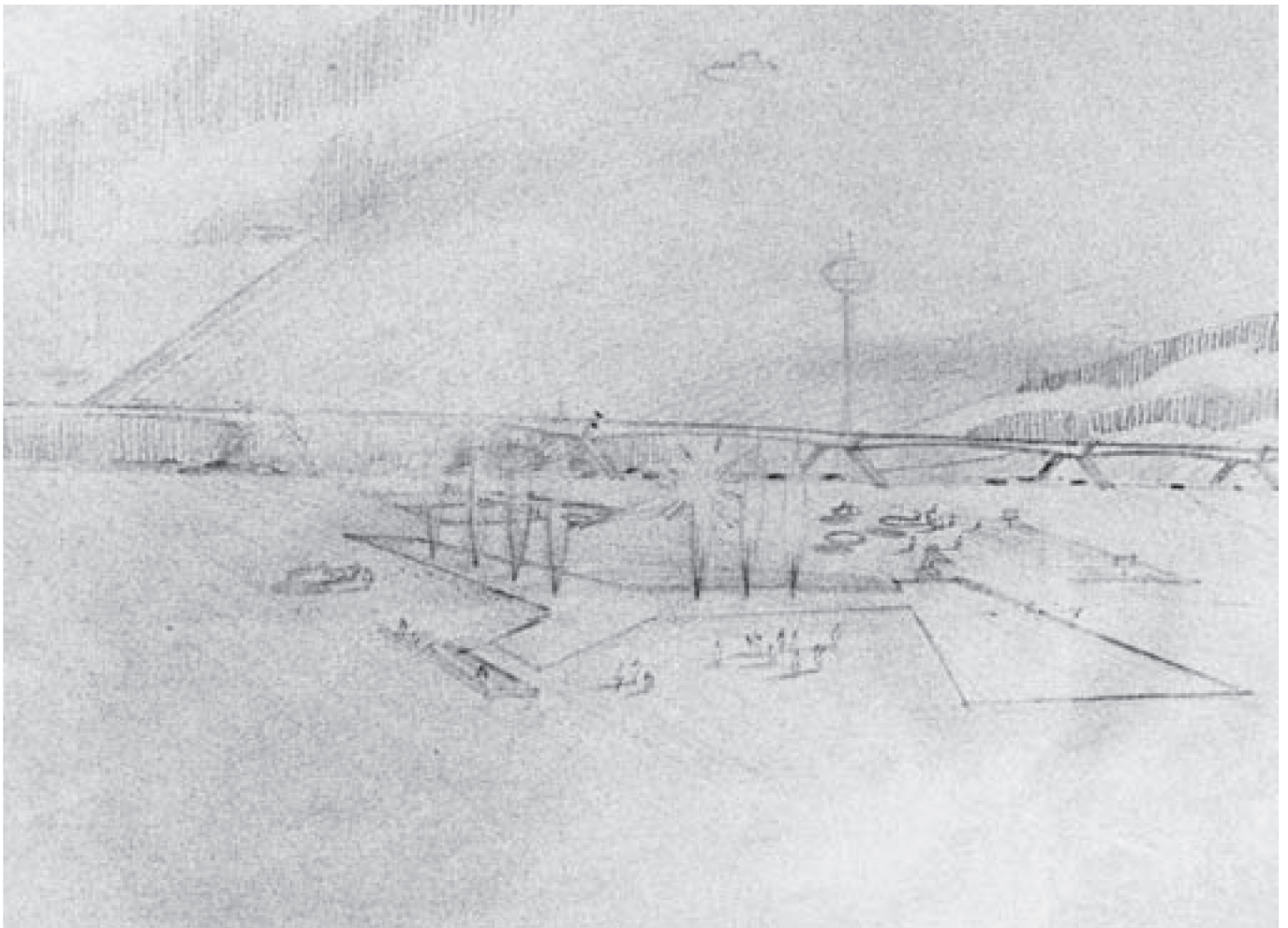
Personne, a theater play by Ben created the 16th of June 1966 at the Artistique, Nice

To Teach People to Create the Void in their Memories, Interview with Claude Parent Mathieu Copeland

MATHIEU COPELAND

In your practice, you have maintained a constant relationship to the void, to emptiness,

whether it be in your collaboration with Yves Klein for the immaterial architectures (which François Perrin has described as the visionary



Yves Klein, collaboration with Claude Parent and Sargologo
Cité climatisée—Accès à l'éden technique,
1961
Ink and pencil on tracing paper, 21 × 30 cm
Private collection

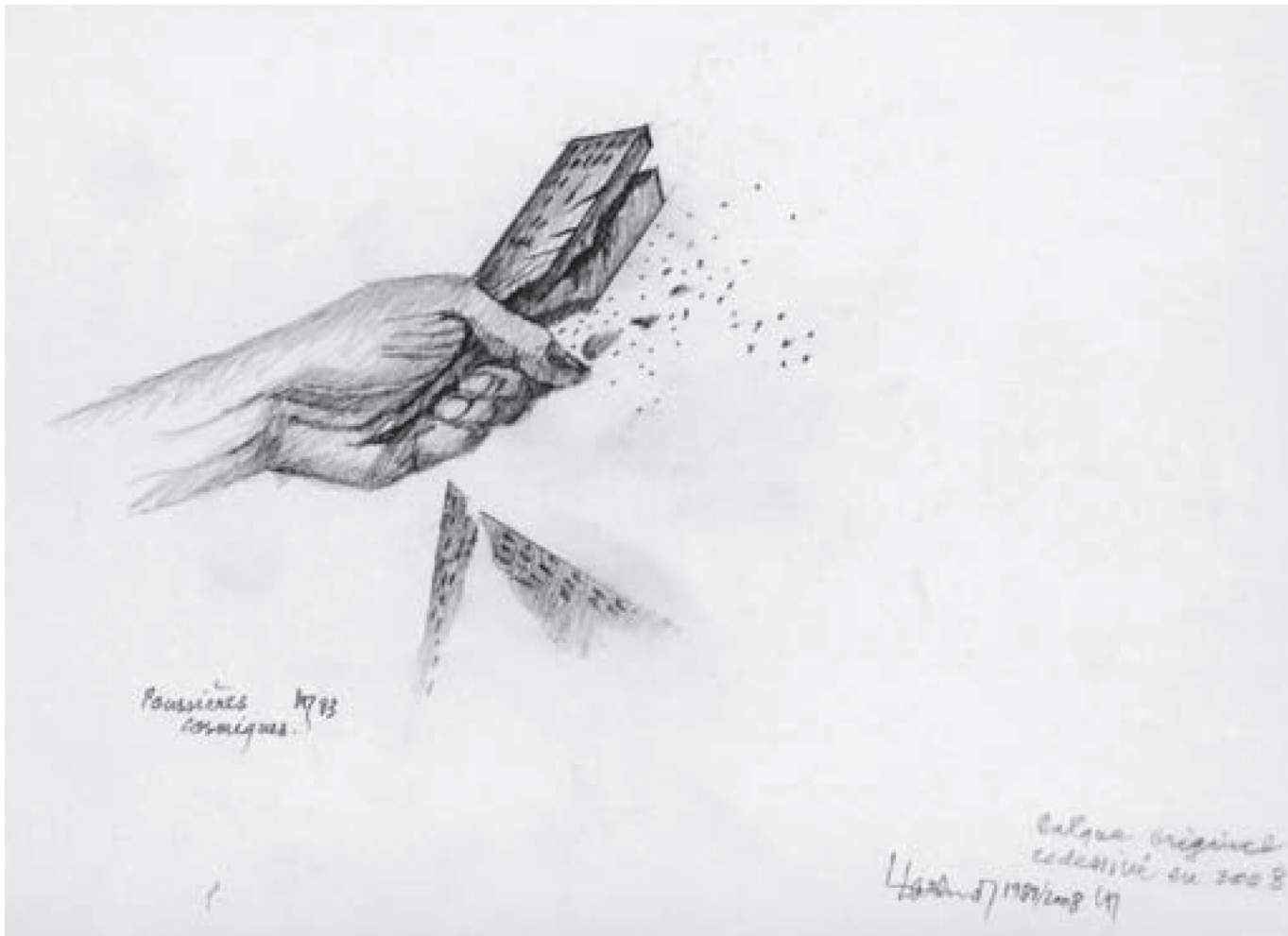
project of a living environment reconnecting people to the earth and the elements), your work on destruction, or your writings, such as *Colères ou la nécessité de détruire*, 1982. To begin, could you speak about your interest in the void and your work with Yves Klein?

CLAUDE PARENT

I followed two years of studies at the École Polytechnique. I wanted to be an engineer, but I was told that I would not succeed in math. As I could draw well, I found myself thrown into architecture. Architect, what an interesting profession! Before World War II in France, architects were not building anymore. Architecture

had suffered from the crisis of 1929, which had brought a number of constructions to a halt. This is why, until 1945, so little was built in France. In the postwar years, the profession retained the entire mental structure of the pre-war years. It was there that I found emptiness for the first time: within this perfectly coherent, academic, mental structure, where a high school diploma was not even required in order to become an architect. I belong to the first generation that had to have the first part of a high school diploma at admissions to get into the architecture course!

My first awareness of emptiness was in my education. At art school, they tried to instill me



Claude Parent
Poussières cosmiques (Cosmic Dust), original
 from 1983, redrawn in 2008
 Ink and pencil on tracing paper, 27 × 35.5 cm
 Private collection



with an education that never was any use to me except to rise within the hierarchy of idiots. One day, my friend Ionel Schein took me to hear a talk by Georges-Henri Pingusson, whom I still consider to be one of the best French architects. I'll always remember the sentence he pronounced during this theoretical speech: "Architecture will become something extraordinary with the new materials. You will have to

think differently. And you will have to work with materials that will be too thin to be depicted in your drawings. You will have to draw them, but you will not draw them with their real dimension; they will be dilated in relation to reality." So I thought that it was interesting that everything was over, even drawing, and that from now on, everything would happen in one's head. So here, before the void, I was free. The void was going to make it possible for me to move about within it. So obviously, it was necessary to accept something that made my relationships with my fellow students difficult. One has to accept being orphaned, being alone, and have the courage to continue.

MATHIEU COPELAND

What year did the Pingusson conference take place?

CLAUDE PARENT

It was in 1953, not long after I met my first partner, Ionel Schein, who was just as empty and even more rebellious than I. It was he who taught me rebellion. I became Nietzschean with him without ever reading Nietzsche. We became partners even though we had nothing, no diploma, no one to listen to us. It changed my life.

When I did one of my first houses, an old Belgian architect said to me, "But your house: in Belgium, we would call this articulated emptiness." I found the expression so beautiful—to envisage that I work by articulating emptiness. Later on, thanks to André Bloc, I was able to meet a number of artists from the Espace group. Everyone knows that my basis for thinking about space comes from neoplasticism. The artists created my reputation. I was someone who loved art, who was constantly involved in it, who was in all the artistic groups, and who adored artists' ideas. One of my greatest fortunes is to have been in contact with some of the key figures during this moment of synthesis of the arts. It was a generous and magnificent time. They wanted to be called *plasticiens*, and not artists anymore. And it was said that, if you had a good idea and you did not know what to do with it, there was this architect who would try to understand and help bring it to life, to produce something that could be expressed to others. Yves Klein did not know how to draw. He had people who drew for him who did things that were even more horrible. When you

Yves Klein, collaboration with Claude Parent and Roger Tallon
La Climatisation de l'atmosphère à la surface de notre globe et architecture de l'air
 Two sided panel presented at the Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris, group exhibition *Antagonismes 2, l'objet*, March 1962
 Private collection

want to work with emptiness, that takes the cake! He came to see me. I do not know if it was Jean Tinguely or some other architect who recommended that he come to see Parent! He had just gotten annoyed with the German architect Werner Ruhnau, and so we got along really well. In the beginning, he was essentially preoccupied with water and fire conjunctions. This is what motivated him.

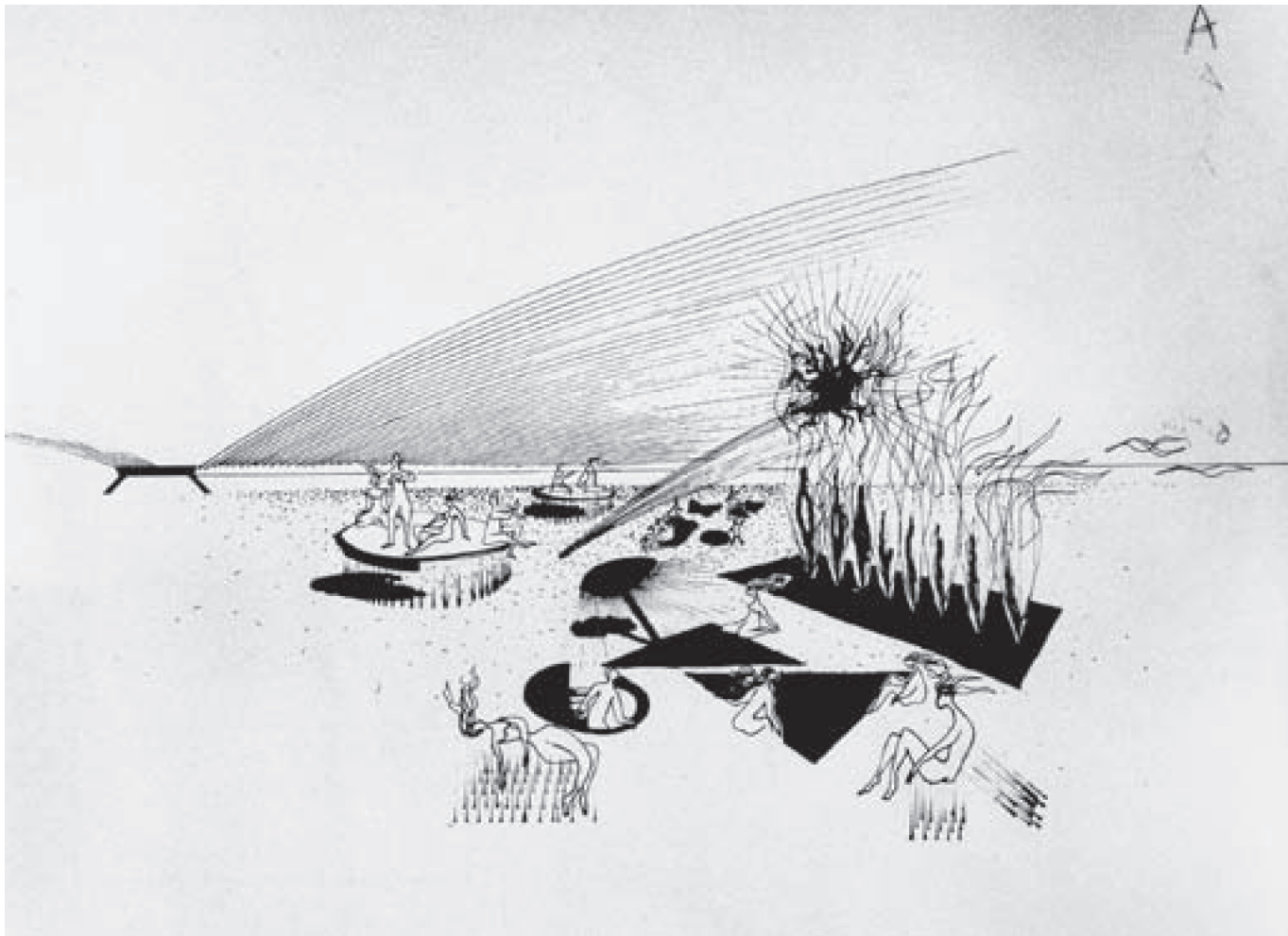
MATHIEU COPELAND

In 1958, Yves Klein wrote that “the making of truly ‘immaterial’ housing—affectively, technically, and functionally” defines “the true goal of immaterial architecture: climate controlling vast

geographical residential spaces.” Did you know of the texts that Yves Klein wrote with architect Werner Ruhnau about air architecture?

CLAUDE PARENT

No. Everything that I knew of him began when I started to spend time with him. I saw the exhibition *Le Vide* at Iris Clert. But there were so many people the night of the opening! He was the guy that everyone adored. I have never met anyone of this caliber who could convince you of everything and nothing. I really believed in his Japanese experience. He had a very simple life, but as soon as he began to talk about and paint his world, he did not try to make



Yves Klein, collaboration with Claude Parent
Cité climatisée (toit d'air, lits d'air et murs de feu), 1961
 Ink and pencil on tracing paper, 50 × 68 cm
 Private collection

you understand. He wanted you to enter into it. I was very receptive to this kind of thing. In journals and elsewhere, I've written that the ideas that interest me the most are those that come from others.

Klein came to see me for a few months. He didn't leave my side. This did not last more than two or three years. Unfortunately, he died so quickly. The same thing happened when I spent six months at Le Corbusier's place. In the last two weeks, as Le Corbusier came through the office, he saw a small drawing that I was doing. He stopped and said that he did not know me and asked me how long I'd been there. I answered him, and he apologized. After that, he did not leave my side for two weeks. The little drawing interested him even though it was not complete.

With Yves Klein, when we made our first works with fire and water, we were obviously getting closer to metaphysics, to the seekers from the Middle Ages who worked away on these problems. For as soon as you contemplate the immaterial, you need to find another way of living, another way of being. We no longer had a base. Man must make a mutation, and this is carried out in relation to emptiness. Everything that tied man to something concrete was no longer of interest. This is why we had discussions, which I see as being a bit ambiguous, about energy production factories. Yves Klein was not yet theorizing about energies to invent. He wanted to represent them. His idea was to bury everything, hence the fire drawings. These drawings are a bit naïve, they can be understood by everyone. I told him that they looked a bit Jules Verne-ish. But no, that's how it was. He was difficult to understand because, despite his big theories, he looked for very realistic images to show that everything that was a part of the factory, the noise, the technology, etc., was to be beneath the ground, up to seven meters deep if needed, a thousand meters deep if he wanted!

MATHIEU COPELAND

Did he see the paradox in creating an immaterial architecture based on such a tangible reality as factories?

CLAUDE PARENT

What needs to be said here is that emptiness begins at the surface of the world. In fact, he would never have accepted that there be

constructions at all. When he had me make drawings of naked people conversing on air cushions, he did accept that it was necessary to shelter the world and the people with the famous air roofs, seeing that we were making their environment natural, providing breezes. However for him, energy was not developed in the mental enough so that man could go without an energetic backing capable of supplying the territory with everything that was needed. There were those famous ribs, resembling both highways and railroad tracks for a possible express train, for a means of transportation ribbing the territory. In fact, he was attached all the same to some very concrete elements: burying, and the need for a structure capable of ribbing the entire territory anywhere, anytime. If about 50 people decided to go to a specific place, all they would have to do to have the energy they needed is just hook up. With underground communications, they would be brought all the supplies they needed, etc. This is when he spoke of the golden age. This desire to live outside freely, to be sheltered from the elements, yet within an architecture of natural elements like the wind. This is Klein's version of the architecture of emptiness because we cannot understand the golden age without the emptiness.

I made these drawings so as to think of another way of doing things, because we cannot continue to cram ourselves onto the earth. Klein's response was to reconquer the surface. When I told my colleagues about this, I was in for a long ride, with bumps and bruises all along the way! Why did this turn to my disfavor? Because in order to return the earth to men, we must put the men in caves. By this I mean: we must build the city of Petra, with constructions even in the cliffs. Beginning from this question of human settlement, two images take shape. The first, the most beautiful dream, is that of a river basin with its inflows and confluences. The second is to raze everything to the ground and keep nothing. Those who persist in making high-rises are completely wrong. Take the example of the Romans, the one-floor villa was common, except in Rome where they managed to have nine floors. As if by chance, this came with the decline of the empire.

This was Klein's second premise: to take back the ground just for mankind, the condition for the advent of a new Eden. To what does this correspond? To an intermediary

step between Klein and the real world. Klein is the summit, the absolute, complete emptiness from which it is necessary to make a gradation. The world doesn't want this, yet the land would be saved because it would recover its agrarian dimension and what is needed to feed people.

MATHIEU COPELAND

This brings us closer to the idea of following the land, from the moment of destruction that recreated the emptiness and announced the reconquest of the land. Making the soil fertile again so as to create, live, and develop architecture there.

CLAUDE PARENT

That's right. If we're not going to make something fundamental, then it is not worth digging. I never was a "hard-core ecologist," but to build a city buried on three sides provides an extraordinary opportunity for geothermal energy. There will be some positive points when it comes to energy savings; however, what is fundamental is the distribution we can propose once we have reconquered the land. For the moment, I propose a system where we would raze everything and rebuild according to a mesh principle, at a suitable height of ten meters or so. We knit the surface of the entire planet with a mesh made of steel, concrete, etc., and we place only evolutionary structures within it. Then, we cover this mesh with four meters of soil, on which we reconstitute a nature, a new and clean vegetation. It is only afterward that we need to envisage roads and communication axes. Why? Because it seems to me that cities are prisoners of those who invented roads, boulevards, avenues, etc. As long as we build roads, avenues, and boulevards, we'll be in shit! My proposition constructs a continuous layer, an urban carpet in which the architect digs with gigantic machines, breaking the structure wherever it suits him. This means that he regains the freedom of the journey according to the place's topography. He is no longer bound to the rules and regulations from those gentlemen coming from the Ponts et Chaussées engineering school! This proposition interests me because, as a function of the cut made, the constructed network, regardless how geometric it may be, will no longer make architects the masters of facades.

MATHIEU COPELAND

At the same time, we return to your love of concrete and cement, of the qualities these materials possess.

CLAUDE PARENT

At this point, we need simply to hold on and work while leaving traces, by digging into it, if you will. It would be more radical to make the cloth and to cut the cloth as one likes. The necessity of the function of the oblique becomes obvious: we cannot do without it without making roads again. It is also important to consider the importance of notions of the void and its notions of the infinite. Everything I've done in my life owes so much to a few great companions like Klein and three or four other figures that I met, all necessary to my ongoing learning.

MATHIEU COPELAND

I would like to relate what you just said about facades—section architecture that makes it possible to cut into the created mesh—with the architecture of emptiness. In effect, in both cases it is impossible to see the facades.

CLAUDE PARENT

That's right, we do not see them. What recently interested me in young architecture were the attempts to erase the facades. But they didn't succeed. On the contrary, our great heroes these days, like Herzog & de Meuron, place so much importance on working with the external material. The main work of these architects is skin deep. This really kills me! This is why I tell my wife that I am unable to join a movement. I'll only join a movement when they refuse confinement. This also brings me straight to Klein. I made a series of drawings called "Open Limit" where the theme is how to interrupt a continuity without closing, dividing up, or blocking.

MATHIEU COPELAND

I would like to contemplate with you the idea of emptiness by destruction in order to recreate.

CLAUDE PARENT

It is about destroying or the need to destroy in order to construct. I cannot envisage that we can build without destroying first. If we do not destroy our world, we'll die. For me, this

premise is fundamental. We can only hope to survive if we have the courage to destroy, and this on the most philosophical level possible. We need to especially destroy all that hinders new development. So when I see that they are building the same idiocies on terrains that were undeveloped, it makes me furious.

MATHIEU COPELAND

We are not far from the architecture of Cedric Price, that temporal architecture made to last for a given time and which, once destroyed, offers a new emptiness.

CLAUDE PARENT

Yes! Though it needs to be made in a precise way, so that there are fixed points. This is why, in the thinking of Yves Klein and the drawings made for him, the connections, like the raised highways, are visible. I think that this is necessary.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Could you talk a bit about the idea of connection points?

CLAUDE PARENT

I need structure. I need to fasten myself at a given moment or to be certain that I will fasten myself or that I can fasten myself. Personally, it is not in the wilderness where I would be happy. What I believe to be most beautiful in nature are man's tracks when they do not damage it. When I see the footprint on the moon, it is so impressive. Man's mission is to create. In this way I need fixed points that are not fastened. Not so much points as fluid structures, determined yet fixed. This is what I like about oblique architecture and the notion of continuity.

MATHIEU COPELAND

Architecture creates emptiness. Many architects begin their careers making emptiness, until the moment of their first realization.

CLAUDE PARENT

In my first presentation, I dreamed of working on magma—which is to say, the city—and of making clearings in this magma. The forest is important for understanding this idea. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the forest was a crossing point, with its big hunting paths, its great communications and upkeep networks.

This type of network is planetary. All men and women from all cultures and across time made these, just as they made the walls separating the fields. Humanity is capable of making things on a planetary scale, but we have lost the idea of this dimension. So, we divide it up into small parcels, and this makes me crazy. My first work was to tell these fine gentlemen: you need to cut to shape! You take a map of Paris and a big pencil, and you try to see how you can rib one point to another, and you knock it all down!

MATHIEU COPELAND

How did you approach this need for emptiness by way of emptiness, and the need to destroy in order to recreate?

CLAUDE PARENT

It was pretty obvious to me. During a conference, I said that we should not think about the city as a city, but as a magma. And the only way to allow this suffocating magma to breathe is to carve into it. Again, the notion of emptiness is more important than the notion of fullness. We only know how to fill. This is elementary. So if we are not capable of creating cities before, then we'll have to make them after, and this means we must dig. These are the fundamentals and we know it; emptiness is more important than fullness. They take this as provocation. But it's not provocation. These are profound, essential thoughts, not metaphysical, but thoughts of a philosophy of life. It is easy to understand; the basis is here. Even if architecture is responsible for transmitting thought—and this is still one of its big roles—I do not see why architecture ought to have this role anymore. Many architects no longer want this role. Then, if we say that architecture is no longer the trace of the transmissions of civilization and we truly cease to believe that, the only thing left to do is to destroy and to think about construction as a function of destruction, and visa versa.

If I approached destruction to begin with, it wasn't really for emptiness, but rather to create the void in my memory. Because my memory was bothering me, even though my memories of childhood were happy and my parents were fabulous. I grew up in family bliss. My single problem as a living man is to pass along this family bliss as it is in my memory. However, what was memory as it was presented to me?

Memory was what hindered everything, prevented everything; it was opposed to modernity, opposed to new policy and to new architecture, and even more, it was opposed to an architecture that questioned the past. We need to teach people to create the void in their memories.



Yves Klein
 ANT 102, "Architecture de l'air," 1961
 Dry blue pigment in synthetic resin and
 charcoal on paper on fabric, 263 × 214 cm
 Collection Tokyo Metropolitan Museum, Tokyo

Julie
Pellegrin

Tim
Etchells

Myriam
Van Imschoot

Raimundas
Malašauskas

Franck
Leibovici

Jérôme
Bel

Choreographing

Barbara
Formis

Julien
Bismuth

Loreto Martínez
Troncoso

Irena
Tomažin

Maite Garbayo
Maeztu

Kenneth
Anger

Malcolm
McLaren

André
Lepecki

Boris
Charmatz

Catherine
Wood

Exhibitions

Jennifer
Lacey

Kenneth
Goldsmith

Pablo León
de la Barra

Abbie
Hoffman

Pierre
Huyghe

Alan
Licht

Claude
Rutault

Giovanni
Carmine

Gustav
Metzger

Hans Ulrich
Obrist

Lilo
Nein

Mickaël
Phelippeau

LeClubdes5

Michael
Parsons

Phill
Niblock

Amy
Greenfield

Karl
Holmqvist

A book by Mathieu Copeland

Fia
Backström

Michael
Portnoy

Choreographing Exhibitions. A book by Mathieu Copeland. Published in 2013 by la Ferme du Buisson, Kunsthalle St.Gallen, Les Presses du Réel. 16,8 x 23,8 cm (softcover). 424 pages (with 14 b/w ill.) All texts in English and French. ISBN: 978-2-84066-682-0

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone, by Mathieu Copeland
- Jérôme Bel in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Kenneth Anger in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Malcolm McLaren in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Boris Charmatz in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Jennifer Lacey in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Pierre Huyghe in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Claude Rutault in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Gustav Metzger in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Phill Niblock in conversation with Mathieu Copeland

Book Content:

Commissioned texts to Giovanni Carmine, Tim Etchells, Barbara Formis, Maite Garbayo Maeztu, Kenneth Goldsmith, Myriam Van Imschoot, LeClubdes5, Franck Leibovici, Pablo León de la Barra, André Lepecki, Alan Licht, Raimundas Malašauskas, Lilo Nein, Michael Parsons, Julie Pellegrin, Mickaël Phelippeau, Michael Portnoy, Irena Tomažin, Catherine Wood

Reprints by Amy Greenfield, Abbie Hoffman

Interviews by Mathieu Copeland (unless specified) with Kenneth Anger, Jérôme Bel, Julien Bismuth & Loreto Martínez Troncoso (Julie Pellegrin), Boris Charmatz, Pierre Huyghe, Jennifer Lacey, Malcolm McLaren, Gustav Metzger, Phill Niblock, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Claude Rutault

Artists' Pages commissioned to Karl Holmqvist, Fia Backström, Roman Ondák

Mathieu Copeland

Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening
Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone

Choreographing Exhibitions envisages exhibition-making through the prism of choreography, by means of the terms that compose an exhibition: *score, body, space, time* and *memory*. To curate an exhibition encompasses the score that enables its realisation, the bodies that make it be, the location it inhabits, the time taken for its experience, and the memory that remains once its course has run.

The plural-reality of an exhibition is akin to a “choreographed polyphony”—the orchestration of a score reveals, over time, the physicality of any given space and the memory one creates of what *is*. A proposition for a definition: Exhibition. /,ek.si'biʃ.ən/, noun—a material, textual, textural, visceral, visual... choreographed polyphony.

Choreographing Exhibitions affirms a criticism of the “objects,” and of the “object” created as the result of an accumulation of objects. Too often, an exhibition is none other than a temporal gathering of disparate objects in a given space. To reconsider the materiality of the work of art, and thus that of the exhibition, brings forward an understanding of, among many others, the ephemeral and the (un)physical, or the (im)material again—may these be through the absence and the void, the voice and the words, the gesture and the movement, and their inherent choreography.

An exhibition that inhabits the realm of re-materialised forms—as opposed to dematerialised; a conceptual object remains an object, as what constitutes an “object” must be constantly reassessed—addresses the possibilities of art, memory, and exhibition-making. *Choreographing Exhibitions*

brings into context the memory of the ephemeral, and insists on its inherent political resistance. To consider the word “exhibition,” and its French translation “exposition,” is to assert the possibility of both an exhibition stripped bare of all content—as *in* exposed—and the idea of an “ex-position”—a position that was, but is no more, that moves on; a position that is yet to happen.

To choreograph an exhibition is to envisage both an exhibition *in* a moment of time and the exhibition *of* a moment of time. Self-contained and generative. The curatorial model of an exponential exhibition—and in its permanent growth, of time with no date, of place with no space—announces an exhibition happening everywhere, at all times, with and for everyone.

Through the prism of the exhibition, an understanding of the institution is affirmed. The institution is a medium in itself. To consider the time of the exhibition is akin to envisage an abstract space that is, due to its very nature, as much its own reality as that of its inscription in reality. If the format of an exhibition can be envisaged in terms of time and space, its form is that of a material to construct and fragment.

To understand an exhibition as a “fragmentary unity” enables us to consider it as an abstract structure—a conceptual, contextual, and perhaps formal backbone that acts as an active link between, and an enabler of, artworks. It constantly re-contextualises (without perverting) their nature. An exhibition, in this sense, is the ignition of a process that becomes autonomous and self-generating. Pier Paolo Pasolini talked of the cinematic image as a “free indirect speech,” an expression which reflects that cinema is neither a “direct speech,” nor an “indirect speech.” Gilles Deleuze uses this system to characterise what he sees as a perception *within* a perception, as “it is no longer the metaphor that is the fundamental act of language, as it homogenises the system, but the free indirect speech, as it tells of a constant heterogeneous system, never reaching equilibrium.” In a very literal approach, curating an exhibition can also be understood as being a free indirect speech. It follows the postulate that art encompasses all different possibilities and potentials of a given environment, whilst refusing to level any of its constituents.

In typography, the whole volume of space occupied by each letter, as well as the implications for the space it shares with the next letter and the whole combination of letters on a page, is known as the counterform. This relational dynamic also addresses, in depth, curating. The exhibition is to be envisaged as the abstract environment between, and emanating from, the artworks, the counterform to its constituent parts.

Tony Conrad talks of exhibitions as moments of micro-utopia modelling, and proposes that the artist becomes a dramatist who sets up the conditions in which the audience can model a quasi-utopian world. This conception of an exhibition as a social space—not prescribed by the forms that its participants create or that artists construct, but as a structure inscribed in a shared reality—enables us to consider the exhibition as a fluctuating and floating element, where the counterform becomes apparent as a non-neutral, multiple-usage environment.

If the writing of an exhibition is to be understood as a contextualising process, fundamental to the development of choreographing exhibitions is the notion of a fragmented unity encompassing all possibilities and potentialities. In modulating the counterform, the exhibition is not what is being defined, but in a semantic twist, what defines.

As an echo to Jérôme Bel's definitive statement that he knows he has his "hands on a piece when (he) finds the title," to name is to propose that, through the title, the entire program of an exhibition is being laid out and presented.

Choreographing Exhibitions considers the writing of the inner choreography for the pieces to reveal themselves, as much as the writing of their choreography and organisations in time. Time is fundamental in an exhibition made of, and in, movement. In this orchestrated time, these gestures only last as long as it takes for them to be realised and experienced.

To choreograph an exhibition is to confront the ephemeral nature of movements. The materiality of a gesture raises the question of the memory of an artwork, and of its exhibition. A spoken word exhibition is constituted of artworks to be said, verbal gesture exchanged from one person to another. It presents us with an exhibition of the same nature, and material, as that of the artworks that constitute it, which are words spoken. The same can be said of a choreographed exhibition. It is of the same nature and material as that of the artworks that constitute it, and that is movement.

In a space where nothing is present but movement, in a gallery left empty and devoid of any "props," only the opening hours and the duration of the exhibition determine the rhythm. Movements produce a critical experience of the ephemeral, affirming a critical counter-attitude to a world saturated with objects. A choreographed exhibition will only exist for the time needed for its overall realisation. However, the visitors' partial and fragmentary memories will persist long after the very last succession of movements has come to a standstill.

An exhibition that reveals itself through time cannot be *rehearsed* without being *realised*. The ephemeral reality of these movements is the memory that we cast of these. As we envisage our fragmented time of presence as spectators, and the sheer impossibility of experiencing the exhibition in its totality, the experience of duration itself renders those who made the exhibition the memory of this elapsed time.

To envisage interprets realising an exhibition, reminds us that if, classically, the curator curates the exhibition, the artists create the art, the question becomes one of the status of those who "embody" the pieces. Subjects that, despite appearing as objectified, object to being an object. With no stage or dramatic setting, the gesture resonates in the empty space, and the body calls for the entire attention. Flowing in a continuum, the gestures become abstract forms happening and wandering within the space. The relation to the spectators is thus fundamentally shaken, as they no longer evolve around objects, but twist around subjects and become carried with these conflicting movements. The proximity with the bodies becomes uncanny, as their movements are unpredictable, and forces the spectators

to move, to constantly reposition themselves. The exhibition is being formed as it is revealed in time. It crystallises itself in the mind, as all that remains ultimately is the memory of the gestures realised.

Museums operate upon a calendar that is saturated with empty boxes to be filled, time allocated for possible exhibitions and other events. These boxes are preceded and followed by moments of free time, slots devoted to the mounting and taking down of exhibitions. Too often, the exhibitions format is intrinsically linked to museums and other host institutions' constraints. Yet these imposed formats can be envisaged as the place for possible actions. The nature of the time of an exhibition and the reality of these constraints are materials to work, try, force, and with a necessary tension, break. The institution's given conventions are not edicts to be followed or respected. Nothing is conditioned, and we do not have to insert ourselves within a program.

An exhibition is not the illustration of a text. And in equal manner to the works that compose it, (and which without it could not exist) it does not call for a paratext and is not derived from an imposed format. Its form is neither predetermined nor dictated by a presentational text and by its inscription in space at a given time.

What remains of an exhibition, once it has run its course, is crystallised in its catalogue, the materials it generated, and the memories of those who experienced it. Hans Ulrich Obrist, discussing the memory of exhibitions, asserts that it has always been clear to him that "an exhibition which does not produce a catalogue does not exist." As a residue of its programmed disintegration, a catalogue becomes the sole trace of an exhibition. A catalogue generally makes available the details of the works that were included in an exhibition. It "reproduces" images of the artefacts that made it be and/or views of the exhibition itself. Catalogues are, at best, the memory of an exhibition; at worst, its checklist. Yet the exhibition that once was is also a material—equal to any other—and as such can be reprised weeks, months or years later, and in different contexts. To reprise an exhibition can be seen as an attempt to envisage its memory, to re-insert it in reality, by using its catalogue as a score for another exhibition to be. To do so is to curate an exhibition without choosing any of the works: a distant echo to the original, an exhibition evolving from what once was, and in constant expansion.

As such, the material *exhibition* is re-envisaged, and even though nothing changes, everything changes. As these are reprised, forms mutate and are deformed, and yet all are ever so close to the originals. Only the prism of reading has shifted, and we do not envisage so much the original material as we do its re-presentation.

Myriam Van Imschoot, in her essay "Rests in Pieces: On Scores, Notation and the Trace in Dance," confronts Peggy Phelan's and Rebecca Schneider's views. Van Imschoot reminds us that Phelan, "rather than deploring [performance's] impermanence, its lack of durability, [it] must be celebrated as it constitutes performance's political resistance. Because

it cannot become an object and cannot be reproduced, performance resists commodification and hence capitalist exploitive regime." Rebecca Schneider's view is that, contrary to "performance as disappearance, since it happens once and only once before it enters the mnemonic field of memory, Schneider speaks of performance as memory." What we collect and archive is more than an echo to the original, as it becomes both a score for it to be reprised and the memory of what it once was.

To challenge the production and distribution of art in established—and highly conservative—systems, we must appraise the overall potential nature of the art. As such, we must (re)envisage the spoken word, choreography, radio, internet, conference, sound, image, film, and conceptual objects, as mediums that, within their format, evade traditionally formatted exchange forums—forms that imply and generate a wide presentation, distribution, diffusion and sharing of their own. In paraphrasing Lawrence Weiner's "if you understand the work, you own it," through these re-materialised mediums, "if you remember the work, you own it." The copy is equal to the original.

An exhibition to be heard as it is read proposes speech as a material gesture. Both the texture of the word and its spoken qualities are inscribed in space and time through the act of reading. The vocal rendering of textual artworks constructs an abstract and ephemeral reality that can be said to sculpt the spaces in which it occurs. Spoken words, movements, in their physical absence, are of the same materiality as that of an exhibition. They are of no other physical reality than being the counterform to what makes it *be*. This immaterial presence becomes an element that fills, an event to be, a reality that is revealed, a force that fragments... To this, we must also envisage the memory of these re-materialised realities, the souvenir of those who lived the exhibition, experienced it, and whose presence made it.

To understand an exhibition as a mental (the *immaterial* thought) mandala (the *ephemeral* form designating the whole) envisages the construction of an exhibition that inhabits nothing other than the "inner self." It echoes to a conception of an exhibition that happens in no places other than the mind—an experience of the whole through the sensitive. A choreographed exhibition is an ethereal environment that is ultimately crystallised within the ones who complete an equation where the sole unknown is where this experience is situated. The spectator becomes the host, and the whole, of this plural environment. A mental mandala offers an understanding of an exhibition that looks at one, a sensitive experience.

An exhibition is a construction that reveals itself continuously. A reality that happens in front of our eyes, a series of experiences oscillating between permanency and the traces of a present that becomes past, a future already present. To envisage an exhibition as a reality that we experience is one thing. To envisage it as a possible future enables the understanding of its coming forms. Its score announces an open choreography, a polyphony constantly expanding. In its writing, and within its present, a score is a time in becoming, and thus

gives multiple possible interactions. A score is a proposition to be read and interpreted. It offers in equal manner a free choice and the possibility of permanency for an ephemeral and transitory object. An exhibition is in essence only time, and thus, a formless form.

Parts of this text were composed and compiled for "An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, At All Times, with Everyone," a lecture given at MoMA—Museum of Modern Art, New York, in April 2013.

Jérôme Bel

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
London, 22 November 2011

Mathieu Copeland I would like to begin by recalling our first exchanges while planning “A Choreographed Exhibition” at the Cité de la Musique, among other places, at the beginning of 2007... I never wanted a catalogue to accompany this exhibition because I didn’t want to substitute the representation of gestures for the gestures themselves. The present book originated in questions that came to me over the course of this “Choreographed Exhibition,” and it articulates what the show highlighted: the fact that my entire curatorial approach is based on the idea of choreographing an exhibition. For example, I increasingly think of my exhibition catalogues as scores. Hans Ulrich Obrist and I talked about the memory of exhibitions. He made this wonderful but nonetheless problematic remark: “It has always been clear to me that an exhibition which does not produce a catalogue does not exist.”

Jérôme Bel Yes, I’ve been struck by how many artists I know tend to work more on the catalogue than the exhibition. Catalogues only interest me when the exhibition is interesting, when I want to look into it deeper. Otherwise, my memory chooses what to retain.

MC Of course. But at the same time, there is a game with memory, because an exhibition, like the performing arts incidentally, corresponds to a given time. Afterwards, it no longer exists, even if it can be redone.

JB Exactly. I realised that recently. Exhibitions seem more sustainable, but in the end, they disappear too...

MC We could imagine gathering art “objects” together again to “redo” an exhibition. That raises the question of using time, and recalls Peggy Phelan’s thought, which you are very familiar with, and which Myriam Van Imschoot develops in her essay “Rests in Pieces,” published in this book. Besides, it’s interesting because I started off with a misunderstanding: I was sure that “to choreograph” meant to write movement in time. But it doesn’t necessarily mean “in time.”

JB No.

MC And yet I remain persuaded that we need the complement “in time” to define the word.

JB For me, it is writing movement in time *and* in space.

MC I would like to go over a series of concepts with you that you have applied in your practice: first, the idea of the author, which is fundamental in your work; then the signature; and finally, the spectator. Articulating these three concepts, in my view, goes back to this idea of choreographing an exhibition as I understand it—as something to come, but also as a step in wondering “at what point are we now?” First of all, I was struck by a statement in your catalogue that reasoned: “In any case, I work with language.” Ever since my discussions with the filmmaker Charles de Meaux, I’ve always thought that it is in the title that a coming programme is inscribed. Could you talk about your work on the subject of the title?

JB It is crucial. I know that I have my hands on a piece when I find the title. This usually happens pretty quickly. At the beginning, since my background is in dance, I didn’t use spoken language. In my practice at the time, the only language that I used was in the title. Some people think that the titles of the different performances form a sentence. I admit that I am very conscious of the effect of series. The title is a sort of reduction of the work, a concentrate.

MC So in that case, a reduction like in cooking!

JB At first it seemed to me that I was following a linear path, that the performances succeeded each other. Now I get the impression that I proceed more in the way that a tree grows. That is, I work on several projects at the same time, so there are parallel lines. There are also projects that I don’t produce until several years after I have the idea. I started working almost twenty years ago, and there have been two obvious periods: one, let’s say, the pre-language period, and the other, when I started to use language.

MC At the same time, if we follow the development of your work, the pre-language period was the wish to invent a language.

JB That came from Roland Barthes. My original project drew on Barthes who spoke about literature and the author. Every time that I read “author” and “literature,” I replaced them with “choreographer” and “dance.” Using his theories, I could carry out the artistic procedures necessary for my project, namely to invent a language. In fact, regarding my work, the critic Christophe Wavelet talked about a “discursive dance.”

How can an artist do something that is artistically relevant in an exhibition? In my opinion, it is only possible if he or she has thought a great deal about the memory of other exhibitions, about other works, about art history... I have not committed

my life to museums. I visit them as an amateur, and that serves me well. But the area in which I think I know all the rules, the whole history, is theatre. Maybe I can bring something that has not previously been thought to this area that I know so well.

MC We've come back precisely to this idea of codes.

JB Exactly. It seems to me that, for now, it is very difficult for a visual artist to create a choreography or for a choreographer to make an installation. But you have to keep trying. There are success stories. For example, even if it was a film and not a choreography, Tacita Dean's *Craneway Event* on the rehearsals of a Merce Cunningham's *Event* in San Francisco was a real revelation for the field of dance. She admirably filmed one thing that very few people, even we as dancers, know about.

MC Could you specify how?

JB In the sense that we didn't know how Merce Cunningham prepared *Event*. The way that Dean films it, no documentary filmmaker would take the liberty that she takes. She could do this because she made it for a museum, which is not the case for documentary filmmakers who work in television, who are restricted by other types of formats... It was poignant to realise that, thanks to this film, we learned something extremely important for dance.

MC In your work, I find fascinating, although you speak about the reification of codes, the overall grasp of the machinery. There is always this continuity, as if you were saying to yourself, "ah, but there is also this aspect that I hadn't thought about, that I hadn't considered..."

JB Little by little, I cross out on my list each of the elements or rules of theatre that I have unfortunately familiarized and that I can identify through deconstructive work.

MC And each time a new aspect emerges. Still regarding this idea about codes, I was wondering what for you was the influence of structuralism as it was developed in the fields of literature and film.

JB Reading structuralists like Barthes, Foucault or Lévi-Strauss was influential for me. I attempted to marry a very strong structure with the sensible side of the performer's body. The notion of structure is really important for me, even invasive. I want the spectator to see the structure, to see how the show is constructed intellectually. But at the same time, the presence of the performers (dancers, actors or musicians) produces a sensible experience. For example, when we recently did *Cédric Andrieux* in Brazil, we had Portuguese subtitles. Looking at them, I thought, that wasn't theatre. Theatre is precisely the embodiment of the text. I see a body and I understand a text. I have the intelligible experience of the text and the simultaneous sensible experience of the grain of the voice and the micro-movements of the speaking body. An aliveness.

MC I am fascinated by just that, the spoken word, and the way in which it can become as much a song as a field of work. After beginning "A Spoken Word Exhibition" in 2006, I came to wonder if speaking was a gesture. Speaking involves a gesture, but the result, the texture of the voice, is not the texture of movement. All that forms the original questioning that led me to "A Choreographed Exhibition."

JB I work with text choreographically; my technique isn't theatrical. When I began *Véronique Doisneau*, I applied choreographic rules. Since Véronique was a dancer and was used to these rules, I spoke to her about the text like I was speaking about movement. We relied on temporality, we counted, we set the pace. We were far from a psychological or semantic approach.

MC Just as the piece *3Abschied*, which you made with Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, went back to take up the text for the text.

JB Yes... I wanted Anne Teresa to work with the text because she is not accustomed to it. She usually works with musical form, musicality and abstraction, while I am obviously much more involved with text. That's why I persuaded her to sing the final part of Gustav Mahler's *The Song of the Earth, The Farewell* (*l'Abschied*), even though she was incapable of doing it. But that's the theme of the work, this struggle with death, so it worked perfectly.

MC Since you brought it up, I am very surprised to see the extent to which death appears in your work.

JB Me too, it's weird. First, it was theoretical: I realised that in live performance, performing death is the closest to theatre that you can get. Because as a spectator you know that the performer isn't dead. If an actor laughs, if he is happy, you say to yourself "Ah! Maybe he really is happy." The same goes for when he is sad. The character and the actor meet, reality and fiction can be mixed up... But death can only be performed, played. So that's where you get the power and the mystery of theatre. If I am moved because the character dies even though I know that he is not dead, that proves this twofold effect, which is usually irreconcilable.

MC I'd like to come back to the issue of the title. In 1995, you entitled a piece *Jérôme Bel*. You explained it very dramatically, saying "everything is named and I am naming myself."

JB Maybe names give language to a body...

MC In doing so, you take as much into account the show-spectator relationship as you do the status of the show as an object in itself. The show can only exist through the other's gaze, and it doesn't appear as just your show.

JB That comes from Michel Foucault. In a way, it is a political stance which consists in not taking control by asserting: "That's it!" Art and theatre have too much power... I find that artists are overestimated; they get more power than they deserve. Titling a show with my name is a way of saying: "that, that's only Jérôme Bel"; it's subjective. *Véronique Doisneau* is subjective, it's this dancer, this particular subject, who is expressing herself. Otherwise, I would have called the piece *Ballet Dancer*.

MC In any case, I have always signed "an exhibition by Mathieu Copeland." It's one of the crucial parts of my approach to exhibitions.

JB It is a way of saying: "I'm the one who thought that." Then everyone else can decide to agree or disagree. It opens up a discussion: "When I say that, how will you respond?" I am not interested in thinking that the artist has the power. I don't have

any more power than the doctor or the teacher who is in the audience. In this social situation, yes, I have a certain power for a particular time, from 8:30 pm to 10 pm But tomorrow, something else will happen.

MC That is exactly what gives encounters their complexity, the act of sharing.

JB It matters for me to say "this is a job. I work like you do..." It isn't magic. I can't stand the aura of the artist.

MC That's what you highlight in your collaboration with Xavier Le Roy when you say: "Me, I stop, but the work continues."

JB That's what work is. No matter who says or who signs, the point is that it gets done.

MC That reminds me of Brian Eno's idea of generative music: a system is applied, which is enough in itself to generate a work in constant development. To attain this detachment, this withdrawal that you're talking about, you need a mechanism, and I like observing how all that is set up. It's a matter of letting things happen.

JB I think it's the same when you do an exhibition. It is only by doing it that you are led to articulate something that you would not be able to say without it. Otherwise, it becomes programmatic and that's not very interesting. It's the exhibition (or the performance) that responds to the question you were asking yourself. If you already have the answer, you don't need to do the piece or the exhibition. Boris Charmatz talked about that recently.

MC I had the pleasure of speaking with Boris for this publication, and we talked for a long time about your retrospective "Jérôme Bel in 3 sec, 30 sec, 3 min, 30 min, 3 h" at the Musée de la danse.

JB Boris was the curator, and I gave everything to him with free reign to do what he wanted. He showed things that no one knew about, but the most successful thing, in my opinion, was the time factor. Boris put time back into the exhibition.

MC All the same, you have to be aware of the price of a live performance if you want to keep from illustrating it with photographs or whatever else remains.

JB I would rather make films than not show anything. Unlike Xavier Le Roy, Boris Charmatz or Tino Sehgal, I agreed to show videos. It became necessary in the project with *Véronique Doisneau*, thanks to an idea from the director of the Paris Opera. The ballerina Véronique Doisneau starts the performance saying: "Tonight is my last show at the Paris Opera." So then we decided to make a film, because it was the last show and we didn't want to lose everything. But much to my surprise, the film was almost better than the performance. Of course, filming a solo is easier than filming fifteen choreographed dancers. Here, the performer is alone, the spectator can feel the room... When there are fifteen dancers, you don't see anything anymore. Except for Merce Cunningham who re-filmed things in the studio.

MC With Charles Atlas in particular.

JB It's absolutely fantastic. Those two continuously switched things around. Instead of filming in the theatre, they made a film right in Wesbeth's dance studio.

MC That practice echoes "filmdance," the idea that Amy Greenfield invented to describe the memory of movement through the camera.

JB When I began performing, I made films for researchers, academics and choreographers interested in my work. Then I thought that I could come up with another way to mediate in the visual art world. That's why I agreed to show films. But I am always very clear about it: I will never install them. I tell curators: "act as if I were dead." These are archives and in no way art. When MoMA offered the atrium to me, it was different, because they developed a performance program inside the museum. The question that I always ask myself is: "how can I mediate a performance?" I am really interested in using new technology in the tradition of Merce Cunningham. For example, instead of being in the studio with the dancers, I talk to them on Skype. I'm in Brussels, they are in Vancouver. I rehearse like that. I wonder what this type of method will produce later.

MC Does this help you in your attempts to distance yourself? As if you were saying: "In the end, if I have asked you, Cédric or Véronique to be here, it's ultimately a way of allowing me not to be here."

JB Completely, I hadn't thought of that! There is something happening with distance that I haven't resolved yet, but I am very interested in it. One day in Beirut, Anne Teresa did a sort of performance on a table where we were all sitting, and at certain points, she was just a few centimetres away from me. I thought: "that isn't art, you need distance for that." The spectator has to be able to make a move towards the representation, towards the actor, the table or the sculpture. Sometimes even at shows I think it's better to be far away, although we often think it's better to be as close as possible. That's why there is a gap to fill, why the spectator has a distance to cover. If the show isn't good, I close my eyes and I think or I daydream... And it's precisely that space that I don't get in a museum. In a museum, I know that people are passing by and looking at me. I have to behave; it is a social situation... In the dark theatre, I'm free. Nobody can see me anymore. It's the height of happiness.

Kenneth Anger

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
London, 22 March 2013

Mathieu Copeland Talking about your 1949 film *Puce Moment*, filmstars from the silent era that "... were to be filmed in their actual houses," you made this definitive statement that you were, "in effect, filming ghosts."

Kenneth Anger It was referring to the 1920s, which was when the collection of gowns came from. They belonged to my grandmother and many of the gowns were from well-known silent stars such as Clara Bow, Barbara La Marr, and others of that period. So, when the clothes go by in the film, in a way, it's like invoking spirits or ghosts.

MC Does this apply to the actual actresses too. These were the past of themselves, mirrors of who they were?

KA Well, the actress who was playing in that sequence is Yvonne Marquis.

MC Malcolm McLaren said of working with the Sex Pistols that "it was an *art thing*. Instead of paint and canvas, clay or bronze, I used real people." This makes me wonder what happens when you film someone not solely for what he or she does, but for who he or she is.

Celebrating the icon of the body, and treating the body as an icon. In this, I believe that there may be a parallel with your latest film *Distinguished Dogs of Hollywood*.

KA I never show the owner, but in the end credits, I name whom each dog belongs to. But the dogs are more important than who owns them.

MC [laughs] This film is a kind of negative self-portrait of their owners.

KA There are no people in the film, just the dogs. And usually the camera is down on their level. See, we relate to dogs mostly by looking down on them like we're on the top of a skyscraper looking down at these creatures. But I get my camera right

down on their level and have it on a trolley so that it's moving along with them. Sometimes the owner is incongruous because some people have what I call "teacup dogs," which are these tiny little things. Women, particularly today, seem to favor these teacup dogs, which are like a little fashion accessory; often they are left hours behind the door being bored, home alone. It's rather sad, until the owner comes home and then they do a tail wagging thing and a greeting. At any rate, that's my *Distinguished Dogs*.

MC These dogs are some kind of icons too. This echoes to your seminal 1959 book *Hollywood Babylon*, or again this exhibition "ICONS," which brings together an archive of photographs, scrapbooks, letters and memorabilia from your own personal collection. These recreated rooms—based on a previous home of yours designed in red and blue in Los Angeles—mix these celebrities, their stories and our perception of them. Within these, we see ghosts.

KA Well, that's appropriate because of the connection with celebrities; they all belong to an actress or an actor in Hollywood. I also film them with a background that suggests the bedroom, the terrace or whatever, of whomever it may be.

MC When you approached the making of *Puce Moment*, History has it that you wanted to film the great goddess of the silent screen, or as Jack Hunter wrote, fading Hollywood stars in their crumbling mansions.

KA The project was for puce and women. I was raised in Hollywood, so even though I'm an avant-garde or experimental filmmaker, I observed all these professional tricks, like doing drawings that are shot beforehand. I did all of the production drawings, just to visualise the film before actually doing it.

MC In filming these stars, there is both a celebratory aspect and this other where the medium of cinema is a means to "capture" the person filmed.

KA Yeah. OK, that's good.

MC This brings to mind this comment that Roland Barthes made when he saw a photograph of Napoleon's brother, saying that: "I am looking at eyes that looked at the emperor." In your exhibitions, one looks at icons. This reading includes what one projects, and the actual history that one reads. Further to this, one cannot help but reading another history, and that is yours. All orchestrated through your own narrative. Whenever you are approaching filmmaking, and especially during the editing process, do you approach the notion of choreography as well?

KA I studied dance when I was a teenager in Hollywood with a famous teacher named Lester Horton, so I've always been aware of movement in a choreographic way in my films rather than just casual movement. I always choreograph it, plan it. Even in films like *Scorpio Rising*, the movements are actually quite choreographed. And I don't use dialogue; I basically make silent movies. It's music.

MC This comes back to what you were saying about using the "silent era." In *Puce Moment*, for instance, the use of music is fascinating. When you were filming, was it intended to have music?

KA It came later. Sometimes I try different music with the film just to see the effect that different music has on it. The music that is presently with the film was written by Jonathan Halper—a young man who became a Buddhist monk in Scotland. He was a talented musician, but since he went into the order of silence, we don't hear any more music. [laughs]

MC How would you define an icon?

KA An icon is an image that has clustered around it the aura of spirituality. Of course, in the religious sense, an icon like the Russian icons are images which have that power about them whether it's a saint or Christ, or whatever. It gathers the forces in it and it projects them out again. I've always liked the word icon.

MC When we first talked, you said something that is both evident and ever so true: cinema has to be larger than life.

KA My films should be seen on a fifty-foot screen and basically so should all films. Now you can see them on a tiny little hand-held thing, but that is not the experience, it's only a kind of memo of the film.

MC How do you place the spectator within your film?

KA Well, I hope that whoever is watching will experience them as images and not try to think literally about it. Just have it wash over them like a tide and not have them analyse it, but rather sink in, like a blotter.

MC Would you care to discuss your films on zeppelins?

KA There are three zeppelin films, which are studies of the one burned in 1937. That was the end of those zeppelins because they got such bad publicity. There's remarkable news-reel footage in black and white of the crash of the *Hindenburg* at Lakehurst, New Jersey, but I was the first one to hand tint it in color. In other words, I brought the colours of the flames, the oranges and reds, into the film. To tint a tiny little image requires a certain skill. I've hand tinted some of my films before like *Eaux d'artifice* (1953). The fan opens and it's green, and the rest of the film is in blue and white. You open the fan, and I hand tinted it that kind of green on the case over there, or in your tie.

MC [laughs] Again, you are making a film with history as material.

KA I made the film *Ich will!* [I want] (2000) using newsreel footage of the Hitler-Jugend movement. I recut it completely and then tinted it an amber colour like dead leaves. My films always relate to something in history.

MC And, of course, history is again the ghost of something that was. It's fascinating how you use history, and especially the history of Hollywood.

KA Also, I'm working with images; I do not work with dialogue. They're basically silent films, which to me, are like dreams. My dreams are always silent. They're not talkies. [laughs] I don't know why, maybe other people have talking dreams. I see images, but I don't hear them.

Malcolm McLaren

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
London, 16 February 2007

Mathieu Copeland In 1999, in your essay "The Casino of Authenticity and Karaoke," you wrote that "it was an *art thing*. Instead of paint and canvas, clay or bronze, I used real people."

Malcolm McLaren Was that comment in regard to the Sex Pistols?

MC Indeed, yet even though this quote addressed the Sex Pistols, it seems that it may be more evident with Bow Wow Wow and in your later work. What fascinates me is how this sentence echoes such a dense history, being at the crossroads between the work of Joseph Beuys and the concept of the social sculpture, and Gilbert & George's art of living sculptures.

MML Right, okay.

MC It all comes down to that quote and raises the notion of the "use" of people, and all its implications ranging from the act of abusing someone to that of transforming someone into an art form. Also, you've been talking a lot about these notions as an extension to the lessons that you have learnt in art school. I would thus be interested if you could explain your views on this.

MML Well, I come from a mid-60s art school education in England. At that time, art schools were still living in a world created for the practice of art education that dated back to the days of William Morris. They had, at their best, the desire to give an opportunity to the underprivileged to create beauty in their lives, whatever that form took. Most art schools taught you that you should surround yourself with beauty when you go out into the big wide world, and the only way they could do that was by making us all recognise that we needed to fail. To learn that this noble pursuit of failure would lead you to perhaps a more profound success. At that time we were still living within a culture of necessity: only consume what you need to survive. You would not be seduced by mere desires—people would be more suspicious of that—you had to have ideas that could never be sold and thus had a real value. We today live in a culture of desires where commodities are treated as things of beauty and as art. Back then, when you entered an art school, you really felt different, protected from the hoi polloi outside, from the misery of everyday life. They never wanted you to accept everyday life, they wanted you to go out there and change life. And how do you do that? By recognising the art of failure as being a common practice, therefore the principles you upheld were going to be wholly different from most people. So, in effect, those art school preachers, teachers, were inadvertently responsible for everything I have thought and practiced since. I will never forget one lecturer who said one day: "I suppose you all think you're going to be very successful painters, sculptors, graphic artists, designers—I don't know. What I do know though: not any one of you here is going to be successful, nobody." I was barely seventeen and had only been in this academy for maybe a week. There was a kind of silence, and he said, "No, what you're all going to bloody do is fail." Wow. Another deathly silence, and then he said, "Well, don't

think failure is such a bad thing, it helps take the pillow off your head in the morning. No, failure is a good thing, and your life is going to be a journey. But don't think you ever fucking arrive anywhere, because as soon as you arrive, you're bloody dead." I had never heard anyone speak like this, it was amazing. At that time, this guy was really quite a shock to the system and he went on to say, "If you decide now to practice the art of failure, I can assure you now that you will have a better life, because it's better to be a flamboyant failure than any kind of benign success. This should be your lesson in this art school."

Another profound moment at that period in my life was when one day I went to a lecture at the National Film Theatre in London, for an interview between Derek Malcolm, a well-known movie critic writing for *The Guardian*, and what was then *the* number one, cool dude director on the planet, Jean-Luc Godard. This guy asked, "Mr. Godard, who is your favourite director?" Godard thought for a moment and answered, "Roger Vadim." The film critic nearly fell off his chair. He said, "But why not Renoir? Why not Eisenstein?" Godard said, "Because he is the greatest amateur." It connected with what I had discovered in school, about the mistakes in paintings that sometimes give them life, as in the words of Pierre Bonnard; this notion of the amateur in the form of the Douanier Rousseau and of Baudelaire drifting through streets; the life of a flaneur: turn left when you're supposed to turn right, invite surprise into your life. These, to me, were all the artistic pursuits of how to follow the noble pursuit of failure. Invite chance into your life. Break the rules knowingly, and in doing so, change the culture. And if you succeed in making that grand failure? With it, you would change life. Suddenly I had a sort of behavioural pattern to follow.

When I finally left art school, I wondered how I could exist in this world. And I started to do what you've just asked me. I had, during the course of my student days, been an ardent collector of records. One day I decided to copy the cover of the record that sported a suit worn by Elvis Presley, looking very lean and desperate. I thought, "That suit—that is the sparkle that gives that guy life, that allows him to be dangerous, sexy, lean, mean, and cool. I'll make that suit for myself" and I did. I bought the sewing machine and, with my then girlfriend Vivienne Westwood, who was a teacher at the time, I made this suit. One day, I decided to put it on and walk the entire length and breadth of King's Road hoping someone might literally pick me up and take me on a never ending journey. I was happy to fail. I wanted to be seen.

King's Road was a place where I could cruise for a bruising, this fashion victim's paradise where all these rock'n'roll carcasses are lying in corners riddled with drugs. Just as I was getting ready to do that—admit total defeat—a guy crossed my path, and he asked me with a deep American accent what I was doing around here. I looked at him, so surprised that someone was talking to me, and I spluttered a few words: "I got stuff to sell, like this." He pointed across the road and said, "Go in there, you can sell that in there." I followed his instructions and swung in under this door, which had a little strange bamboo sign with the words *Paradise Garage*. I walked into this dark cavernous

hole, a tiny store with a disco ball sending speckles of light around the room, picking up odd artefacts that were pinned to the wall: guitar-shaped mirrors, bits of old denim rags, shirts, skirts with appliquéd rock'n'roll notes on them in a very old-fashioned, fetishistic style; and this extraordinary, gleaming, pink and chromium jukebox, blaring out all these oldies but goodies. I liked this place. The guy said, "Just go on round the back of the jukebox. There's a dance floor. You can put your stuff on there. Add twenty-five percent and that's mine, the rest is yours." There was this little square where maybe just me and you dancing and a table would fit. And I didn't let him say anything else. I couldn't wait to tell people—"I found a place! A place where we can run wild, do stuff in!" And that's how I began.

Not long after, I would reinvent ruins with this idea of selling clothes. I liked to ruin the clothes—T-shirts, shirts, jackets, whatever—burn and cut holes in them, scratch over them. Fetishise them in some way I suppose. And I decided never to open the store, and just have people knocking on the door and refused to let them in. I wanted this place to be a testament to my methods and attitudes gleaned in those heady days when I was a student. I thought: "No. You don't want to sell anything. No, not at all. You want this shop to fail." Friends camped in the shop with me. People would hound that shop, beating on the windows to the point where you would, in the most arrogant manner, open the door and say, "What the fuck? Don't you understand? This shop is closed, permanently closed. Nothing's for sale, mate. Nothing!" One day, a man arrived in a giant, gleaming, bright and shiny Rolls-Royce. I thought, maybe this guy's the real owner of the shop because the black Mephistophelean American guy had disappeared by then—having left the key with us. "Hide! Get in the crevices, the alcove, lie on the floor, don't say a word!" The guy was very determined. Kept banging on the door. Wouldn't leave. He wasn't going nowhere. Anyway, so I slowly opened the door. He said, "Are you open?" I said, "No, we're not open." He said, "Could I come in and look?" "Mate, there's nothing for sale." "But surely?" "There's nothing for sale, mate." "I was just interested. I read about the store." I said, "No, we don't do any press." He said, "But you sell records here." "No, I told you, there's nothing for sale." He went away, and came back the following day. Did the same thing, rapped on the windows. This time I let him in. "How much is that jukebox?" "It's not for sale, mate." "How much are these records?" "I told you, nothing's for sale." "Come on. There must be something here. Name your price." "Did you hear? He says name our price! What do you think, name our price—£500. There you go." He said, "Okay, I'm buying it." And we were shocked because it was so exaggerated a price. I said, "Oh no, we don't really want to sell it." "Well, I'll buy it for £500. I'll write you a cheque." "No, no we don't want any cheque." That guy turned out to be Charles Saatchi, and he eventually bought everything in that store. We were left literally with blades of wood. And I didn't know what to do, and I decided, I've got to move on, and so I convinced my girlfriend to leave her student teaching job and come and work with us. I set up a workroom in the house and started to create

things. I was basically practicing my craft, attached to a shop that was attached to the street. And then it wasn't enough to make stuff that didn't look like it was commercially for sale, or produced by any factory. Young kids got interested and I wanted to dress them up—as I'd dressed up myself to mess up—I wanted to dress up to mess up a whole bunch of kids. And so I began, and I named them the Sex Pistols, and that's how I started to use people to actually sell this “not for sale,” noble pursuit of failure. And punk really was about that and that's the story. Okay?

MC That's great!

MML And Charles Saatchi. Well, he disappeared when punk happened. Then after the Sex Pistols had gone, I went to the United States. I was working for Steven Spielberg. I was a muse, an ideas man. I had some success in the world of making records myself, creating concepts, doing stuff that was very much about creating and working with people—as you call it, body sculpture—and I then saw Charles upon my return. He wanted me to write the theme tune for British Airways. I realised by this time that Charles was this mega advertising tycoon. It didn't occur to me; it was of no interest to me. I did it and to Charles' amazement and thrill, he just fucking adored it, to such an extent he then wanted to manage me! So he would invite me around to his house in Chelsea, with big impresario agents, literary agents and advertising people, all slightly unsavoury characters, nobody terribly noble as I recall, Charles' typical friends. He said, “Malcolm, that's what you need now, you're an artist.” He didn't stop calling me, meeting me, setting up dinners, pulling at my clothes, “What are you doing next? Where are you going? What's your favourite thing?” Very much like a groupie. It was very strange, and suddenly in town was a guy called Larry Gagosian, who I vaguely knew as a poster dealer in L.A., and I knew he was really into getting involved in the art scene—where Charles now was buying shows wholesale, wherever they could be bought wholesale. These young *wannabes*—I was fascinated. They were always pulling me about, and they couldn't get me...

And at the dawn of the current decade I decided to be exploited by *The New Statesman*, who wanted to dress me up, and I became a politician and campaigned for mayor against Ken Livingstone, the other major candidate. I was kind of press-ganged into it. I didn't mind, I'm quite a submissive creature. Artists always like to be loved, whether they're a pop star or a Damien Hirst. They're all self-obsessed and I don't think I'm any different in that regard. So I liked being pulled into this political world. *Why don't I write the manifesto. And I'll create the posters. And we'll do these things on the streets.* And suddenly I was on the hustings and, hey, now I'm going to have to talk this way, or walk that way. One day, I saw Charles again, in Sheekey's fish restaurant, he was with these two little boy-wonder painters, whatever the flavour of the month was at the time. I said, “Hi Charles.” He said, “Yeah, how's the campaign?” I said, “Ah, it's an art thing.” “No. You'll never understand.” That's what it was like. I said, “Charles, it is. Like the Sex Pistols was an art thing.” He goes: [tutting sound]

"You'll never understand." So that kind of gives you a taste of one's life and times and an insight into my character, the way I work and what happens to me. Now everybody wants me to curate a show. MoMA, PS1, the Hammer, mostly in the US. They don't get too hung up by your precedent there, it's a different culture. If you can chop wood, start chopping—it's that kind of philosophy. Here, if you chop wood they're likely to enslave you and treat you as an asshole, you know. I was brought up by a real vigilant grandmother, deeply Victorian, utterly anti-English, who summed up England by being a culture of deception, a nation of liars, "Don't ever trust a policeman, Malcolm, whatever you do." I still vaguely believe in that philosophy, I'm afraid. I'm intrigued, and that's why I went to see Miltos Manetas last night. His work fascinates me. He's very typical of a time when certain artists were trying to grab at this outlaw spirit, which maybe once-upon-a-time existed in culture. Whether it existed in punk rock, or rock'n'roll, or Pop Art. Now it's very hard to maintain that outlaw spirit. Why art should speak to you when it's immediately accepted by all? Paint it yesterday, it's a hit tomorrow. But how can that be if you're actually challenging? Can it be that everyone is used to that form of critique? That the whole nature and practice of art is containable now within a culture that gives it a value, instantly commodifies it.

MC It's very true.

MML It's very odd. Manetas definitely has the right signage. He's definitely part of what I would call the rise and rise of children's art. A children's culture that is so prevalent and so desirable. As old people like to become young and as the world therefore is getting younger, children are becoming more and more sophisticated, as they're imitated by adults. It's an interesting phenomenon. You've got more than middle-aged women in L.A. shaving their pussies, running riot with their daughters on dating games and competing. You've got fathers and sons playing video games together. You've got the whole family going out for a picnic to watch the one-time rebel spirit band called The Rolling Stones. Sharing the same literature called *Harry Potter*. Mum buys a bag by Murakami that now is made by Louis Vuitton; it looked like her grandmother's luggage, but now it's like a children's comic. This is happening in every facet of culture. Maybe the future is the discovery of art now. The preserve of the senior citizen might now be the preserve of the very, very young because of the way the culture's going. So we may see the birth of teen or even pre-teen artists. I am fascinated by that world. I'm interested in how to climb aboard it myself and what I could bring to bear on it. I might reinvent the SEX shop, one of its incarnations, in that black hole-in-the-wall, which sort of preceded punk and was beautifully fetishised. I might just create it as a piece, as a re-enactment installation.

MC In a museum?

MML Yes, as part of this show about gaming culture and about all its effects and its sources. And punk is one of its true and generous sources.

MC If first you were using people to make art, are you using yourself to make art now?

MML Well I am now, yes. It's very sensitive and clever and poetic of you to pick up on that. One doesn't always realise everything one says, and it could really explain things. Frankly, nobody understood it and actually looked upon it as being really roguish, which in part I am. Artists are often a little perverse. You think, I'm walking on the wild side of things, as you should, but it's true that a lot of people have not picked up on many things I've said of that nature. Now I think the newer generation, Damien [Hirst] and all, they picked up on it. But I think they were so Thatcherite as creatures, they become very dismissive very quickly. They have too big an appetite to consume art as a commodity that they forget how to choose things. They think everything they do is magnificent. There's something wrong with that. I was taught by people like Peter Blake—believe it or not—yet there was a lecture by this visiting lecturer William Green that I absolutely adored. Actually, I was in the Tate Britain the other day, and I picked up a stupid little pocket book called *Art and Outrage*—primarily because I was just intrigued to see what they thought was outrageous. There were a few pages on William Green and how he was teaching these kids in art school—and I was one of these kids! He would come into the studio, and he'd say to the girls, "Go over there. Take your clothes off. All of you, naked." We were all about seventeen, and in those days you could do that because there was no such thing as PC. After all, he was an artist, and this was an academy, and the rules in here didn't have to bear the same rules out there. It was extraordinary. I was a bit shocked but I thought it was kind of amusing and... kind of the old twinkling and winking and looking and wondering and curious... They go behind this little screen—where the life model would take her clothes off—and they'd all be stripping off and then they'd all assemble, all slightly nervous, standing there like a wall of these seventeen or eighteen naked art students. We'd help Green roll out this huge canvas on the floor. And he'd have us come in with these giant buckets of paint. "Come on, get over there." "What do you want us to do?" "Slap that paint on them! Just slap it on! Come on, I'll show you." Now these girls are dripping with green and yellow paint—their whole bodies. And they're all standing there and too terrified to say anything. We came over, we'd slap more paint on their bodies. This would never be allowed to happen today, under any circumstances. Then he brings in a pushbike. Now he asks us to paint up the wheels, and the first thing he is going to do is ride the pushbike around the canvas, and then he grabs one of the girls and tells her to roll across the canvas and then another one and then another one... and then the boys. "What are you going to do? Get on that bike now!" Now you're riding on that bike, and then finished, and then he left. That's it. Clean up. That was the lesson. That was my introduction to *action painting*, to Jackson Pollock, Karel Appel, the Tachistes, Lucio Fontana, Georges Mathieu (who did the painting with a sword like a musketeer). That was our contemporary world until the arrival of Robert Rauschenberg, and very quickly after Andy Warhol, and America was everything, and everywhere else was nothing. And now it dominates us, probably because they were able to sell the culture of desire better than anybody else.

They were primed, clearly able, rich, without fear and really felt that they were unquestionably the centre of the world, because we all wanted it. Whether it was rock'n'roll, Marilyn Monroe, Coca-Cola, Levi's Jeans, Pop Art. No matter what it was, we were buying it, the movies and the television, every-fucking-thing. After that it was just America, and you forgot the likes of little William Green. And Lucio Fontana and Georges Mathieu faded. It's so far from this Anglo-Saxon butch, brute conceptual art. Dali might change that, as he's re-evaluated with the success of all these Young British Artists, and no one thinks it's so bad. How much of the prostitution that one thought back then and how he was kind of turned into nothing more than a fast-food painter. So he'll now become king of the trees, I think, for a little while.

Boris Charmatz

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
Paris, 28 October 2011

Mathieu Copeland Let's start quite simply with this fundamental gesture that is the Musée de la danse.

Boris Charmatz The Musée de la danse has different origins. First of all, it's an idea of Angèle Le Grand—the managing director of the Association edna.¹ When she put that word out there, I saw, stupidly, a sort of gallery next to a theatre, where there would be costumes and models for sets, that kind of thing... This idea of an object-relic gallery evoked something clearly negative for me. However, we had already put on the exhibition "Statuts," and the projects "Facultés" and "Éducation," and retrospectively, I say to myself that a large part of our activities at the Association edna were leading straight to a museum of dance... Talking it over, little by little and by impregnation, I realised that there was something important to do. That it was even, perhaps, the only thing to do, the most urgent thing to think.

There are two principle types of institution in dance, which are the school and the theatre. You might also say YouTube is the third institution today, but let's stay with the school and the theatre, to simplify. These are two problematic spaces that have trouble communicating and that keep the question of practice and training separate from the question of performance. The question of the museum came about as I was asking myself whether there weren't other doors to push apart from those of these two types of institution. Contemporary art galleries ask themselves the question of the transition from a museum of objects to a museum of ideas, a museum of movement. Having often "missed" performance, they interrogate themselves about their archives, about the way to exhibit them, to exhibit performance, and also, in a way, to become a living museum again. However, the Musée de la danse was not created with the necessary evolution of contemporary art galleries in mind, but rather, on the basis of the necessary invention of a new type of public space, which experiments through and for dance in a wide sense. In any art centre, there are always catalogues that act as the memory to what once was. Not in dance. Of course, the latter has generated the memory of the audience, that's our job. I'm all for that memory, but can it be the only one?

The other question we asked ourselves with the work in progress of the Musée de la danse was: What is a centre of choreography? Is it possible to invent this new type of public space on the basis of a residence that is, all told, rather closed? The artists are in a studio, which is more or less comfortable, to rehearse the works they're preparing, and which won't necessarily be performed in the museum. While a choreographer is in a residency there, what does that generate in the public space, in the city that hosts the museum? It's already essential to offer him or her proper working conditions, but if we want an art that deals with our society, with the city with a small "c," we have to change the paradigm. So we told

ourselves that “Musée de la danse” could be the name for that change, the name for a place where we can return, where the barriers between the visual arts and dance can be moved, as well as those between history and research...

For three years now, we've asked artists and curators what this project aroused for them. It had to be able to generate a different type of art. As you must have done with “A Choreographed Exhibition,” we need to be able to say to the artists: “Here, if we do this, what would you do?”, so that they can imagine something they wouldn't have done if there wasn't that frame. Instead of inviting Jérôme Bel or Tino Sehgal to participate in a festival, we say to them: We're making a museum of dance, what does that inspire for you? One of the particularities of this museum is to integrate forms of rejection. I have to say, I loved discovering just how afraid people were of the Museum, notably in the milieu of the performing arts. We said, “museum of dance” and very quickly, they heard “mausoleum,” “hospital,” “retirement home”... Me, I don't have any particular fear of the word “Museum,” or veneration, or adoration, but I realised that for a lot of people, the word “Museum” aroused anger or fear. They thought either that we had no right to get involved with such a thing because it wasn't our domain, or that this museum meant the death of dance, that dance couldn't be “contemporary” at the same time as entering the museum. At first, I thought of reassuring them by entertaining the idea of a living museum of dance, a museum that progresses. Then I realised that this question of the hospital or the mausoleum was very important because it introduced another: In what way is dance more of a performing art than writing or the visual arts? And so in what way would it be more afraid of death? Everyone is so afraid that the Musée de la danse will turn out to be a fixing of identity, a definition of what dance is, a canon, a *doxa*, that it has to start there, with the Musée Grévin.

So the Musée de la danse is a research project into institutional friction, say, a “Musée de la danse?” where the question mark doesn't appear but is understood! Imagining a museum of dance opens a question and that's what allows us paradoxically to affirm an existing institutional construction, because art and the institution don't go well together unless as the result of a critical and interrogative positioning...

mc In your 2008 manifesto for the Musée de la danse, you call into question the National Centre for Choreography in such a radical way. However, what fascinates me is that in the end you only do one thing: you rename. I'd like to see what that represents for you.

bc We are a museum of dance, even if the administrative structure remains that of a national centre for choreography. That's important, because it's a matter of defending a status that's in danger. Onto that is grafted, almost like a foreign body, the Musée de la danse, which becomes the centre for choreography.

mc Or the other way around.

bc It remains a complex place. We co-produce works, and it's not the job for centres for choreography to have collections.

So, what's the legal status of the works? It's still a real work in progress, but this chaotic aspect doesn't displease me—maybe because I'm an artist, and not a manager. We haven't cleared away anything to make something else. But renaming it, for us, was very important. We questioned ourselves a lot, for instance, about the fact of calling it "Musée de la danse." *A dancing*,² a museum that dances... But that designated more a three or six-year project, whereas the Musée de la danse is more institutional. I realised that with this school project that I initiated and which was called "Bocal" [Jar]. It was clear that we were making an ephemeral, yearlong school, that it wasn't just a research group assembled around some pedagogy.

MC Even if, *de facto*, you were one.

BC We were faced with complex reactions. The school representatives told us that we weren't a real school. Running up against these words from the institution generated a number of things, positive and negative, which I wanted to confront. If we had talked about an experimental research project or a yearlong laboratory, everyone would have wanted to take part. Hearing "school," people thought of themselves as too old or too professional to be students. They found themselves faced with old nightmares, marks, diplomas... There were people who wanted to break this project, like a school.

MC Some couldn't handle it and left.

BC But I don't regret having used such problematic, such charged words. With "museum" it's the same thing.

MC We'll come back to the word "school." What's fascinating with the Musée de la danse, is that you rename without *physically* transforming the spaces—the rehearsal studios or the performance space remain unchanged. In other words, you project something extra onto them. You tie together.

BC It's a graft onto things that exist. I don't want dance studios to disappear in favour of exhibition spaces. It's more complicated, and that has allowed us to enter a space of complexity where we struggle and debate.

MC Which envisages, among other things, what makes an exhibition, what an exhibition is, the moment of its presentation and of its repetition. Making use of the condition of the museum poses the problem of its format. A calling into question where you stop respecting its admitted and conventional condition in order to abuse it, and so generate another system. While working on "A Choreographed Exhibition," one of the aspects of this format that imposed itself on me was that of time. This time that defines everything. For your inaugural proposition, "expo zéro," it was "again" a question of the time of the festival—habitual for the *dance* format, and not that of the duration of the museum... On the other hand, the exhibition of Jérôme Bel at the Musée de la danse was nothing but an exhibition of time.

BC "expo zéro" was a "performative form" of discussions, a frame in which people who had complex relations with the idea of the museum met. Instead of being faced with a display, people followed us, like so many guides inhabiting the exhibition. If you followed me, you had a completely different idea of the exhibition than if you followed Tim Etchells or Padmini Chettur. Raphaëlle Delaunay said: 11 am to 7 pm,

for a dancer, that's a day's work. At 11, I warm up, then I rehearse, then I'm going to do a solo... And that's what she did in the exhibition. That reminded me of the musée des instruments at the Villette, where an instrumentalist rehearses every afternoon for four hours, as he would at home. In the same way, at the Musée de la danse, it struck me as important to always have a dancer there at work. Does that coincide with your "Choreographed Exhibition?"

mc Absolutely. One of the realities of the exhibition is to work continually with time. So, it was not a matter of "performances" activated in the presence of the spectators, but really a choreographed exhibition, in its time and in its form. On top of that, the choreography is not, in the end, solely that which is realised by the dancers, or the articulation of the works between themselves, but also the taking care of the whole of the spectators' movements. Which, in the end, coincides with the prerogatives of the museum.

bc "expo zéro" is really tied to that. In these empty spaces, you could suddenly come upon Tim Etchells in the midst of a dialogue with Georg Schöllhammer. You can also decide to stay four hours with them and that's enough. You're not obliged to want to see five minutes of everyone at all costs.

mc That reminds me of a discussion with Pierre Huyghe about his work, *The Host and the Cloud*, which was created at the Musée des Arts et Traditions populaires. Pierre had manipulated continuous layers of events taking place simultaneously. The visitors could then concentrate on one place, on one action, follow actors, or walk around and so capture fragments that even the artist couldn't have seen. Literally, such a beautiful multiplicity of points of view.

bc Yes, in "expo zéro," one of the guiding ideas was that we fabricate not one exhibition but ten, ten visions from ten participants, that could then conjugate very freely with the mental space of the visitors themselves.

For Jérôme Bel's exhibition, we decided to work on different temporal formats: three seconds, thirty seconds, three minutes, thirty minutes and three hours. I was asking myself how to make an exhibition where time was really taken into account. Generally, people don't spend more than three seconds in front of a work; so let's think about three-second works. To draw the spectators, little by little, into eternally remaining in the museum. Like an invitation to stay locked up in there... Jérôme's exhibition came out of that, these difficulties tied to time in the exhibition. At that stage, he had proposed to a number of artists he liked that they present a video to show what image of the body had been fabricated by the 90s. But it was a bit reductive; why only one film? That was the point at which I thought of a sort of *Reader's Digest*, admitting that the exhibition is a sort of reduction of the live performance. There's a form of reduction when you enter an exhibition space, or the media, etc. So why not, rather than overplaying, underlining the reductive aspect of the inventory?

mc A possible score for exhibitions would be to invite the spectator to count the number of paintings seen during his

or her visit to a museum, and so, just like a film, establish its number of images per second. Which of course doesn't fail to evoke that anthology scene from the 1964 film, *Band of Outsiders*, where Jean-Luc Godard has his three protagonists run through the galleries of the Musée du Louvre, highlighting the spectator's *exposure time*!

BC The word "museum" has become a project. The Musée de la danse has become a national centre for choreography, which in turn has become something else...

MC I like to think of that in parallel with the "musée du cinéma," the words Henri Langlois, its founder, had engraved in June 1963 on the entry to the palais de Chaillot after the Cinémathèque française had moved to the Messine avenue, or André Malraux's "Museum without Walls." Let's think one of the characteristics of the museum: its collection. Have you tried to develop that? Is it even possible?

BC It's a question that's always in progress. I love that there are questions that don't get resolved, aporias. Curators and artists often tell me not to make a collection. In this, we might be close to FRAC Lorraine, which works on an immaterial collection.

MC As it is, you collect something that isn't collectable...

BC The whole interest of the Musée de la danse is that it can't exist. The body ages and movement disappears. It has to be acknowledged. Today, we are in the midst of real archive madness. The Musée de la danse should not insist on the reverse, and I don't want to be a conservationist. However, the question of the collection is important. We lack collections in dance, organised archives. We have to ask ourselves the question in classic terms: how to conserve a work? Do we know how to do it? Does the artist accept? Very concretely, after three years, we need to make a list of the works in our collection. They each have different and complex legal bases. There are also material works: we have coproduced films and installations, but does the exhibition belong to us for all that? I don't think so. It belongs to no one. In parallel, there's an "immaterial" part of the collection.

MC Considering the archive and its transmission, could you talk to me about your project *50 ans de danse*?

BC With my arrival at the Musée de la danse, I made this project around David Vaughan's book on Merce Cunningham, *Fifty Years*. It contains fifty years of his work. More than three hundred images made by David Vaughan, the company's archivist. As if his whole life and work had been collected and condensed, and yet Cunningham isn't there. What remains for us in this book? Text, and photos of almost all his works, photos of life. I wanted to work with this book to make a performance that took the form of three hundred linked gestures in fifty minutes of dance, like a choreographic flip book, from the first image to the last. In dance, we still don't do enough work based on books. In the world of the visual arts, you can work on Duchamp, even without making the trip to see the urinal. In dance, we're obliged to work with the disciple who worked with the great master, the man who saw the man who saw the man... The work of those choreographers who haven't had

disciples, or who haven't originated a school, disappear more or less. We have a tendency to lose too much in the absence of oral or physical transmission. As a result, we don't work on the vanished dances, and too many artists are considered marginal. Cunningham is a pretext for producing other approaches.

mc Just as every exhibition catalogue can be thought of as the memory of an exhibition that has taken place, as well as the score for an exhibition to be executed. So it's a matter of proposing a reprisal without all that choosing what constitutes it.

bc With *50 ans de danse, Roman photo* or *Flip Book* (the titles vary according to the dancers who perform it³) we transformed a book into a score by means of a very radical protocol for the old dancers of Cunningham's, professional dancers or people who had never danced, in order to make them make amateur gestures, gestures that they knew how to do—I love the idea that Cunningham's dance, reputedly so difficult and virtuosic, gets performed by amateurs or non-dancers. In all, fifty minutes that make for a show with three hundred movements. Now it's part of our collection at the Musée de la danse, in the sense that it's a protocol, a sequence.

mc The Musée de la danse reminds us of the ephemeral character of dance, what makes it be, and what survives the accomplishment of a movement... From our discussion, I'm struck by proximity that you maintain with the idea of the museum, and by the distance you establish with it.

bc I wanted to be active in a certain place. Numerous dancers—for more than a hundred and twenty years now—have been invited to museums, like Isadora Duncan dancing around the sculptures of Rodin...

mc Starting in the 50s, the museum was the place of modern, then "postmodern" dance, one of the rare places it was accepted.

bc I wanted that question to be taken up again... For instance, Jérôme Bel is constantly asking himself the question of knowing what to do with an invitation from a museum, in this type of building, this type of format. It's an important question, but I also wanted another field of reflection to open based on the performing arts, saying: If we invent the Musée de la danse, what do we produce there? That doesn't necessarily resolve the questions the Tate asks itself, but it makes it possible to ask others. Or to ask them differently, without depending on invitations. With Xavier Le Roy, Jérôme Bel, and others, we questioned all the parameters at every moment we were making a work. What makes for a performance? The museum has to think about what it does, and how it does it, with performing art. I want to be a part of that reflection, but that doesn't stop us from saying to ourselves: What do we invent by generating a completely different context, which is not the contemporary art museum? What would the frame be if we had to fabricate it ourselves?

mc Do you find your double position as author and museum director problematic?

bc All national centres for choreography are run by artists, it's what makes for their strength and their fragility. It's

important for there to be places where artists are the engines. As artist-director of the Musée de la danse, I'm not neutral. I can imagine the Musée de la danse, for fifty years... but it has to be able to live on without me. At the same time, it has profoundly modified my work. One of the first projects that I produced as a choreographer at the Musée de la danse was called, *Levée des conflits*, a work for twenty-four dancers, where the principle was to obtain a vibration between immobility and mobility. It was also a question of time. It wasn't a choreographed exhibition that I wanted to create, but a work in which all the actors and dancers would be in movement, and from which a single image would detach itself. So the visitor could see in one second the whole choreography: the beginning, the middle and the end. This was composed of twenty-five successive and simultaneous movements. Someone makes the first movement, I make the second, the person to my right makes the third, etc., until we form a landscape. I wanted a work that would be at once totally immobile and a long series of movements. A sort of sculpture or subliminal image. The movements had to oscillate then, so there would be no scansion. They transformed themselves surreptitiously—the second movement is already sketched in the first, like in a choreographic canon.

mc Very simple movements... Is it a matter for all that of canonic forms?

bc It was through layers of trials that movements came out. So, there were movements of Odile Duboc's, movements of other dancers, everyday movements... it's not a "museum of dance," but rather a corpus of gestures that belong to different people. I dreamt of something rather meditative. I keep thinking that I'd like to make a long form of this work in a museum.⁴ With just six or eight dancers and a relay.

mc Another point of view on the same object, through the prism of the museum.

bc The Cunningham project is three hundred photos that together fabricate a single performance. There it's an image that's elaborated for three hours.

mc Could you talk to me about "Signataires du 20 août" [Signatories of the 20th of August], a project that comes out of a reflection on the school as such.

bc "Signataires du 20 août" was a collective of dancers, choreographers, researchers, teachers, brought together to think about the decentralising laws, about how to react... "Signataires du 20 août" was not a group of reflection on the school but it became one... We realised that the action of the school was central in what we were proposing. We were all pretty much obliged to teach in order to make work. And on the other hand, training dancers is a difficult area, of suffering sometimes.

mc In your opinion, what is the position of the school today?

bc I went professional at seventeen and I said to myself that even when I was professional, I had to remain a student, that it was possible to teach while inventing. What's certain is that I couldn't have started the Musée de la danse without the project "Bocal," which opened my work. The Musée de la danse follows

on from “Bocal,” by including other artists, mixing them up, opening doors.

mc Pedagogy is one of the prerogatives of the museum, but for all that, a museum is not the same as a school.

bc No, even if there is a pedagogic dimension to some of the projects.

mc I'd like to evoke what it is for you, the idea of exhibition. In *exposition* [exhibition], I love to play with the fact that it seems to be composed of the terms *ex* and *position*, a series of never-static positions, with an uncertain past and forever in movement.

bc At the moment, I'm torn by this idea. With *Brouillon* [draft], we tried to bring together objects: videos, score-objects...

mc ...conceptual objects...

bc And what do we do with these objects? How do we exhibit them, how do we mount them, how do we demount them? Institutions are often too clean, too enframed. So we made a draft. Instead of making a magisterial exhibition—rather than bringing in clarity, foresight, something of a line to the future... we produced chaos. Novalis wrote a *General Draft*, almost illegible. He tries to do everything at once, to put in everything, with bridges, notes. Diffracted and without synthesis, I adore that. Fundamentally, if I dream of an exhibition, it's “draft.” It's a place of knotting. Not to know exactly what you're observing, not to be in too simple a subject-object place. Not to be, I would say, the dancer in the exhibition...

mc That's one of the reasons I wanted to work with LeClubdes5 for “A Choreographed Exhibition” during its realisation at the Ferme du Buisson. Inviting a collective of performers who ask themselves the question of performance made it possible to see what it is to perform something that isn't reperformable. The exhibition couldn't be repeated without being realised. It was a question of an exhibition of a month and a half, and it's in the duration that it revealed itself.

To conclude, I'd like to come back to your book, *Je suis une école* [I am a school], and simply ask, why that title?!

bc François Chaignaud, who was in “Bocal,” said during one of the first exercises: “I am a school.” He didn't remember saying that, but for me it was a turning point. Not to make a school but to become a school. Obviously, I mean “I am” in a number of different ways. It wasn't an appropriation. But in fact, I think that when you finish a school, you've appropriated it. The Paris Opera keeps being the Paris Opera but in a way, I've integrated it. For better and worse.

1 Founded in 1992 by Boris Charmatz and Dimitri Chamblas, the Association edna received these artists' first works. Beginning in 1997, and alongside Angèle Le Grand, the association has developed a wide variety of projects that all have as their vocation to sketch a space open to multiple trials: thematic sessions, films, one-off programmes, the production of installations, the organisation of exhibitions, and projects.

2 In English in the text.

3 Elaborated in a few days, the performance adopts a different title according to the teams involved: *Roman photo* (students, amateurs or non-dancers), *Flip Book* (professional dancers),

50 ans de la danse (old members of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company).

- 4 *Levée des conflits* extended was presented on the 25th, 26th, and 27th of October, 2013, at MoMA in New York, as part of *Musée de la danse: Three Collective Gestures*. www.moma.org

Jennifer Lacey

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
Gare de l'Est, Paris, 16 October 2010

Mathieu Copeland I would like to begin this discussion with your initial reaction, and most definitive statement. As we began discussing "A Choreographed Exhibition" together, you told me that you wanted to, and I quote you, "fuck up [my] program!"

Jennifer Lacey Did I actually say that?

MC Indeed! I thought that this was perfect as it was exactly what I was hoping for!

JL I was probably reacting to what I perceive as a kind of romanticism about the form of choreography and dance held within the position of somebody who is not very intimately involved in the modalities of production of live performance. There are many layers of understanding and behaviour within the notions of the "dancer," the "rehearsal," and the "rehearsal process." As you proposed working with a certain kind of dancers, a repertory company with the Tanzkompanie Theater in St. Gallen, I suspected that certain foundation conventions of this world would be addressed. Even though each artist who contributed to the exhibition was incredibly respectful, and actually very curious and great towards the company and the situation, it seemed a general concept that these dancers would be used as the neutral material of the thing. This is such an old idea in dance, that of course still exists, but it is extraordinarily dated; so for me the specifics of the group were important, their process, not mine. I was also not interested in creating a tiny discreet piece of choreography for the exhibition. The displacing of a dance piece from the theatre was neither new nor challenging to me. Your invitation made me want to really consider and use my tropes within the tropes of the "exhibition." From there, I began to think about the "transitions" between the pieces—since they necessarily would exist one after the other, as opposed to one next to the other—I decided to work in the neglected, and thus open, space of the transition. I did not want to affect or influence anyone else's work, and I knew that I would if I was taking care of the frame, of the interstices. In effect I wanted to turn it into one work—which from the experience of the dancers was a long endurance piece. And that was a dialogue with the dancers that was extremely possible to explain to and share with them: I was really working with your experience in this exhibition. A few pieces that I did were quite visible as things or events, others were completely invisible, but I didn't care so much; it wasn't my goal that each of my gestures be palpable. The question of duration was also glaringly obvious to me. It was a crazy thing for the dancers to go in, to work constantly with all these different notions of performance and with the possibility of being exposed to maybe nobody all day long. So how do you do that and remain interested? I thus decide to work so that the people who were meant to deliver the work could stay engaged and really active in delivering the work.

mc I thoroughly enjoyed how you structured the exhibition in writing the transitions between each piece. I was also very taken by how you had this structure evolving in time. The first week was very defined, the second one was less constructed, and by the fourth week the dancers could pretty much choose exactly how to structure the transitions.

JL Yes, there were some vague instructions as how to permit themselves to follow what they were learning and this vagueness necessitated that they eventually take charge themselves.

mc Your instructions stated that the dancers would start with a book, open it randomly, and from the first letters of the paragraphs they would associate said letters to transitions.

JL My weird mystic *trip!* I do have to admit that I don't like to talk about it too much because there is an artistic position that is just ridiculous, or at least very wishy-washy. But it's definitely where I like to work—fun is important! It has to be something that you can take seriously, and at the same time recognise its absurdity.

mc When you arrived in St. Gallen, you rightly told me that you speak the same language as the dancers, which I don't myself.

JL I definitely was coming in and saying that this is my area of expertise and I know how this community functions! In general, I have moved further and further away from this kind of company system, from traditional contemporary dance production modes, but I know it well. It was a bit going back into my own history, working with the dancers. I felt strongly that the human level had to be considered: interest, fatigue, hunger, boredom, etc. As well as what is built into the general routine of the repertory company lives, which is a very particular skill set. In that regard, LeClubdes5 was a very different group. It was a different community, and it was interesting to talk to them about how they would change things.

mc The dancers in St. Gallen were terrific young dancers. Yet when we envisaged the exhibition for the Ferme du Buisson, we decided to invite LeClubdes5, a now defunct French collective of interprets whose self-professed motto was "what is it to interpret." For me this entailed in merging this statement with a question of my own: What it is to redo an exhibition solely based on live movements?

JL If I hadn't realised *Transmaniastan*, still a system of transition would have put itself into place. Either it would have been some fake neutrality, drops, or big empty spaces... or no space, and that would have made it difficult to tell which piece was which. So although I felt ill at ease initially with my "control" over the whole event, eventually I came to realize that it was hopefully helping rather than hindering the reception of the other artists works.

mc I was very fascinated by the way you took on the principle of evolution in time and embedded this in the actual structure of the exhibition. An important experience for me was to return to St. Gallen a month and a half after the exhibition had begun, and to be so very surprised that some pieces had changed so dramatically during this course. And I loved that. This was

something that I had been aiming at doing for so long, for an exhibition to have its own life! An exhibition that is very precisely crafted yet that would take its own evolution.

JL The idea of transition was something that was very much on my mind. In as much as a transition does colour the next part, the process of moving from one thing to another is never neutral. In my own pieces, I often work with ordered blocks of behaviour, and then somehow one should be able to go through all of them in performance. The transition is a very fetishised notion in the classical to the modernist idea of composition. The understanding is that there are ideas, and then spaces between the ideas, and somehow these should be filled with something that is like a sorbet, or that is invisible... But in fact it is very charged and important. That interstitial space is an interesting space for me, always.

MC This reminds me of some of your early work, for instance squatting the scene of other choreographers in order to make your own choreography once their show was over.

JL I realised the *Diskreter seitlicher Eingang—A Squatting Project* together with Nadia Lauro. We wanted to work on a notion that Nadia suggested, the *décor vivant*, and we used that *Diskreter* as an opportunity to experiment and discover what she meant exactly by that idea and how it functioned. We used what we learned in the piece *Mhmmm*.

MC You mentioned the use and possibility of space, and non-space. This in mind, can you discuss your views on art galleries?

JL I am not convinced that galleries are where the revolution is going to happen. I am having a huge nostalgic moment these days, spending an awful lot of time in documents related to the late 60s and early 70s and realising how the gallery shows have been successfully integrated into the entertainment industry for the better and for the worst.

MC If not the gallery, do you believe that it can still happen through the theatre or the opera scene, or...?

JL No. I think that it is the private, underground behaviour, or maybe the corporate personal development workshops.

MC So either within the system or completely out. I am trying to get to the idea of the location of art, where does art happen.

JL I was really excited about Thomas Hirschorn's *Musée précaire Albinet*. It was unstable and lively and weird. It was the same thing when I saw artist Richard Move, a very beautiful tall go-go dancer who was doing for years in the 90s the cabaret night club "Martha & Mother." He would run these club evenings in the Meat Packing district in New York, where he would show both the work of young choreographers and modernist works performed by Martha Graham dancers. One of the most splendid evenings was to see Richard as Martha Graham interviewing Murray Louise, who was the partner—both artistic and personal—of Alwin Nikolais who knew Martha Graham, about their trip to the southwest to see Georgia O'Keeffe. Merce Cunningham was sitting in the front row with his nurse and her giant bowl hair, and then these muscle guys in loincloths went out to do this intense Martha Graham choreography on a stage the size of a postage stamp. It was

really about that displacement of modernism, and it was so fresh and astonishing, but again, this displacement became so *de rigueur*.

MC Can you talk about the stage of the theatre at present?

JL For me it has always been a gigantic problem. My very fruitful relationship with Nadia Lauro was all about that question: how to generate a specific attention in the audience so that we could—without breaking down walls—have an atmosphere of reception that we wanted?

MC Somehow it seems to me that you always try to find a way out: if you get given a stage, you would rather work with the backstage!

JL The stage is an interesting place! I don't really appreciate it when it's unconsciously this non-space, this neutral space, which of course is indicated architecturally with the rows of these black box theatres, which are mostly what we expect when it comes to experimental dance: black boxes like television stages. I grew up in N.Y. where we were sometimes performing on these types of stages but often in other spaces that were very specific. You might find yourself in an old church, with a hole in the middle of the floor, and you would have to think what you were going to do with it this time. It is always about the context of the space, because the space imposes it on you. Pretending it didn't exist would always bring an aura of mistake to works, as if they were not really there. I always thought that the neutrality of the black box is very weird and in fact specific! What is interesting is that the world always seems to disappear. I realise now that it is possible to do what you need to do in a theatre, and that subsequent problems can be really fun.

MC I would very much like to discuss with you the idea of scores, and how you do score your pieces.

JL It depends if you mean for "posterity" or in terms of how they get made?

MC The way that you work on them.

JL The first gesture is the development of processes, it is deciding how you will work. How do you spend your time, from the beginning to the end? Right up to the time that I came to Europe, I was doing choreography that looked a bit more like choreographies, very intricate, very time consuming, two weeks to make two minutes. I liked this way of working, but as it turns out, I like something else more. So I figured out other ways to work, and it became really about the process of behaviour and the things that came out of it. One piece, *Les Assistantes*, is very much about translating these processes, translating the behaviour or possible stage behaviour into working methods based in utopian community models. And after the material that was evoked, it provided clear compositional rules that came from the material, and not out of some arbitrary aesthetics. It was all a big surprise... With the latest work, *I Heart Lygia Clark*, we couldn't rehearse it. We had to actually start and practice the piece right away, and I didn't expect this, but the process proposed clear rules! I feel quite strongly, certain pieces come instantaneously, without going into the studio. Certain ideas can become pieces fairly quickly, others not. The conditions of

the exhibition dictated a fast process and this was integrated into my thinking. Dance is about people spending time together, thinking by behaving, and modifying their thoughts by modifying their behaviour: it is potentially a very powerful work. And so when it becomes about a utilisation of all that, then that's how it works the best! I always joke that my shows look more and more like an end of year show. There is something a little bit shaky about them. I guess that I could fix them, but it doesn't seem appropriate.

MC Everything crystallises in time.

JL Oh yes exactly, in the *esprit d'équipe*. I work with very good people that are very aware of that! I don't need to control them; I only may need to help them.

MC And when you have to restage a piece?

JL Usually the sections are really clear: this kind of behaviour then that kind of behaviour, and if we have to, we go back to the videos. At this point there is less and less step-based choreography because of the economy of time around this way of working. I grew up in that kind of environment where we would spend an enormous amount of time developing, making, setting up the material, but I have never gone back to it.

MC So you do film all of your works?

JL I do, but badly! I don't often make the effort to document things correctly, and generally documents of stage shows are rather unsatisfying. The experience of the show is absolutely not possible to capture on video, since a lot of it has to do with the atmosphere that we were creating—a lot is happening on the sides, behind the audience, and the spatial distribution of sound is incredibly important.

MC I remember you telling me that story about you filming a dance piece of yours that you then projected and danced over it.

JL Actually it was a beautiful film, a weird and captivating document. I went back to the studio with the intention of redoing a piece from the 90s. I had this document that somebody had shot at the Ménagerie de Verre. The quality of this video is full of these sepia tones, it has a texture to it.

MC It is rather interesting that you would use the word "document" for videos and films.

JL I feel that way. I would like to make the document more resistant rather than less resistant, yet video is problematic. When I first started dancing and rehearsing, the video was rather new. Everything in rehearsal got videoed, and some people looked at it a lot in order to make their work. Reviewing the rehearsing video was something that I never did. I would tape everything and never watch it. It was only during *\$Shot* that we really looked at it and we would rehearse with it, but that was my only piece where the relation of the performers to their own image was really important. For *Les Assistantes*, we had some really nice documents, but they had absolutely zero to do with the final product of the show. It's not necessarily very laudable on my part that I am so resistant to that kind of document, but there you have it, I am.

MC But it's also a way to insist on the present.

JL I feel that there are a lot of dance artists out there whose products go quite well onto video. But then it's about their conception, their imagination, their reception being aligned to the reception and the imagination of the video document.

MC And the very frontal point of view as well.

JL And the edit that leads you to see this or that thing. One of the specificities of my work is that sometimes you are invited to look in a very specific place, but often you are not. And then what do you do? When live, it's an interesting problem, but on a TV it is much less so. How do you receive this vast field of vague activity where you are not really sure where to look? This instability I find to be very rich and ultimately very permissive and generous.

Pierre Huyghe

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
Abrons Art Center, New York, 6 October 2011

Mathieu Copeland Since the 1990s you have helped to write a new way of thinking about exhibitions, a radical approach that explores all the possibilities of the "exhibition medium." You have theorised about these possibilities considerably, both in practice and in speaking about them. But it seems to me that you haven't spoken about this in a while. To begin, I would like to go back to some of your exhibitions such as at Dia Center in New York, the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris or the Tate Modern, which were literally based on a physical choreography. I would like to think about the idea of an exhibition with you while addressing the score, memory, time, body and space, the five keywords which, in my eyes, form exhibitions.

Pierre Huyghe I have talked less about the exhibition lately. Maybe because I am trying to find other ways for things to emerge, because I am not sure I want to address what I do, because something can exist without being exhibited. Today, the temporal protocol is left up to the contingencies of the situation, so it is not written or at least not much. In 1993 for *La Toison d'or* [The Golden Fleece], I set up the terms.¹ The terms weren't so much a written score where every note had to be followed to the letter but a starting rule that generates itself in a set of operations. The question of writing has become more complicated; a score or a script seems increasingly limited to me, and the same goes for choreography. Narrative questions are always understood factually, as if they are materials. I've always felt uncertain about writing the link to connect A and B following a human construction, a fiction. I prefer a series of operations. Did you see *The Host and the Cloud*?

MC Yes, at your exhibition in New York.

PH So you saw the film. But before it took the form of a film, it was a constructed situation.

MC That was held at the musée national des Arts et Traditions Populaires, otherwise closed, on three particular dates: Halloween, Valentine's Day and Labor Day. On each of these occasions, you set up a real situation for a small group of actors and forty visitors who became the materials of this film entitled *The Host and the Cloud*.

PH We are talking about exhibitions, but we could just as well be talking about a set of time-based protocols and configurations that affect how we think about and perceive

things. For *The Host and the Cloud* experiment, everything really happened, everything was live. There was a starting rule and then a series of operations over which I had no control, a set of things that affected each other and constructed themselves. Nothing was “played.” I have often thought about the idea of an exhibition in this way, whether we’re talking about *Forest of Lines* at the Sydney Opera House, *This is not a Time for Dreaming*, or *Streamside Day*, which concerns the issue of return, because its emergence depends on a seasonal return. There is also the question of the site and the discursive sedimentation of this site. Space, to use your terminology, is temporally and narratively sedimented by a set of fictions, human constructions that settled there. Very often, I create a gap, a separation, an anachronistic archeology within these strata...

MC Cross-cutting.

PH Or shifts in the past. We can see this in Robert Smithson’s work and his “site/non-site” dialectic. Here you have something in the spot where it was made and the idea of finding an equivalent mode rather than a representational mode, a variation in intensity called a “non-site.” I wondered what a “non-time” would be, an off mode. Something that exists in itself, that grows outside of the exhibition, indifferent to light and to whomever experiences it. We end up with something that is and isn’t in the light, a flickering, a vibration, a rhythm. Working with the temporality of an exhibition quickly led to the question of programming an exhibition. How can you temporalise the space? How can you make these temporalities dance in the space? But this programming or dance of events seems very much directed towards an audience, designated for a subject, and is thereby often very formalistic. Is this dance formal or does it bear meaning? Does it have a place? Since all of these temporal entities are alive and interact with each other, their relationship produces an ecosystem. Maybe that isn’t the right word, because in an ecosystem, things need to feed off each other, and if an artwork needs to feed off something else, that would lead to a kind of entropy or metabolism.

MC And yet this idea of an ecosystem makes sense if we consider how an artwork in an exhibition only lives through the experience that we have of it. So maybe they do feed off each other. That is, the spectator perceives, and what he or she projects activates the work.

PH Yes, but the artwork does not need that to exist. To go back to your question about the exhibition and the possible limit in its protocols, I think we have to consider something outside of the exhibition. When something isn’t exhibited it still exists. Take a sculpture: does it exist only when it is exhibited? When it is in storage, it continues to be a living entity, I mean something that continues to grow. And then the person who comes to experience the work is also exhibited. So the question of the exhibition goes two-ways. Is the exhibition of the thing or of the person who experiences it? It’s about exhibiting someone to something and not the other way round. Whether we’re talking about *Forest of Lines* in Sydney

or *Double Negative* in Central Park, the audience was always present. Jérôme Bel and I once concluded in a conversation that we can say something took place because it had an audience. So it is a question of presence. But I'd rather call the audience "witnesses," "wild" or "undomesticated" witnesses who experience this temporality, which is accidental and not accidental.

MC This temporality is multiple and depends on how we remember it. This morning I had a discussion with Leah Singer and Lee Ranaldo who said that their preferred point of view is an eyewitness point of view, because if five people look at the same object, all five will remember it differently. A witness comes with both himself or herself and the memory of the event.

PH The idea of a witness assures that something took place because there was someone there. How can we prove that something happened? A film version? People and therefore a memory. But there was also a protocol for accessing and experiencing an event and that leads to the question of how to rethink the conditions of coming together and separating.

MC When you talk about the witness, it seems to me that, all the same, you are avoiding the pitfall of the spectator's objectification.

PH Because I don't put on shows [spectacle]. To go back to the example of *The Host and the Cloud*, nobody sees the same thing. There are only accidents. There is nothing beforehand like a press release or an audio-guide to preface the experience. *The Host and the Cloud* took place in the old musée des Arts et Traditions populaires, a really big building with a basement, a projection room, a conference room, laboratories, storage rooms, the museum itself, the lobby, the kitchen, etc. In this space, witnesses might see a group of people experiencing live situations. The witnesses went through the same experiences—someone getting hypnotised, people having sexual relations, a dog running, a teenager talking about his love life, and so on. Whatever affected these people also affected the witnesses. All of that occurred in different parts of the museum, at different times or simultaneously, as the people, the events, and the witnesses all circulated. People underwent states where they couldn't control themselves: hypnotism, alcohol, drugs, sleeping pills, and sex. It is harder to be in control under the influence of such things. In theory, it's...

MC ... Reality?

PH Let's say it's uninformed, unintended, indifferent and in itself. Without writing, dancing would just be people thrashing about in the street... That's not uninteresting, but it isn't written. Writing is at stake, a stance towards the world. To come back to the score, you can choreograph formal or narrative temporalities, but this writing does not control the conditions of the encounter. They construct themselves.

MC It becomes a question of the status of the work. Where do you situate the work? Is "work" a suitable word in the first place? Can we equate the work and the exhibition? You have made exhibitions without apparent objects. In this way, the exhibition is not a group of objects but rather the object itself.

PH If I think of its mode of appearance, this intensified presence as my object, then I don't specifically need physical objects. There are often objects present and important but only in themselves. As you said, when an exhibition ends, the artist leaves with his or her work and the curator has the book as a memory. Everyone leaves with something they made or said. I am less and less interested in separating these two instances. An exhibition lives on through variations in intensity, it overflows its frame or its script, and it becomes a series of operations. So it does not exist solely through its recording.

MC It's a unique point of view.

PH For the Venice Biennial in 2007, I found a small island in a lagoon where I wanted an icon to appear. She would attract visitors with her aura, but once they arrived she would be gone. I imagined an audience of monsters on this island, an island of Doctor Moreau, from Bioy Casares' *The Invention of Morel*, which I will come back to when we discuss the exhibition and writing temporalities. I wanted a boat to leave the Giardini and go around this unreachable island. Nothing would document this except for the living, subjective memory particular to each of the witnesses and possibly a mechanical memory recorded by people's cell phones...

MC Mechanical memory that makes it possible to record demonstrations while they happen just as we saw with the Occupy movement. Politics broadcasted in real time.

PH In *The Invention of Morel*, the tide activates a machine that projects an image on the real. For Casares, this image duplicates reality. Morel's machine records the real and rebroadcasts it life-size. The fugitive who lives on the island falls in love with a woman, but she is an image. So he decides to record himself to live with her; he will live with her eternally, but they will not belong to the same temporality. I am interested in this natural return that makes this exhibition possible. For example, in *Streamside Day* I inscribed a date, a show time, the birthday of a new village in the annual cycle. People can redo and change this celebration because they are celebrating the present, and the present has the most presence. In the same way, *La Saison des Fêtes* [The Season of Festivities] at Reina Sofia is a garden based on the calendar. At the Palacio de Cristal, the garden is circular, its plants symbolising different celebrations throughout the year—from the Christmas tree for Christmas to the rose for Valentine's Day and other celebrations from other parts of the world. So the garden is formed according to these dates. The plants propagate and colonise each other's space-time.

MC The only choice is the sign.

PH The living sign. The witness looks for a date like his or her birthday, for example, and positions himself or herself around this object/garden. In relationship to the choreography of an exhibition, there is circulation and entropy because the plants/signs spread, and the dates and positions get destroyed. In *The Host and the Cloud*, people moved around the abandoned museum and experienced different situations depending on where they went. I provide an impetus that generates fortuitous

co-presences. I'm not interested in the fact that this produces a narrative but in the conditions from which situations emerge. Every era has its own rules of the game, and we (usually as characters and rarely as protagonists) dance to the rhythm of life, which is constructed through its protocols, its modes, and its organisation. I am not looking to freeze this amorous moment of the encounter, the complexity, the chaos, the contingent, the indeterminate. You spoke about possibilities, and I have often spoken about this zone of unknowing, that is, a zone that can't be exhausted by the sedimentation of discourse, where the possibilities and speculation never run dry. To come back to what we said at the beginning, after *The Host and the Cloud* the word "exhibition," as I understand it, seems limited to me now. Something about the word bothers me, just like the word "performance." Performance is pornographic, hysteric, a subject who relies on the other's gaze to exist. But I understand the word "performance" in the context of the 1960s when it appeared, back when they performed something for a given amount of time.

MC Yes, and yet the word implies this idea.

PH Yes, and in that sense the body is the medium. That was the obsession in the 60s: to push the medium and the material forward. I'm not interested in performance, improvisation, theatre, or dance that aims for that, and I am not interested in an exhibition if it subscribes to that. An exhibition is an accidental moment of presentation, an intensification of the present. And if it is written or if I use past writing, it flows into the contingent and is thereby indeterminate or amorous. It is not a matter of working with issues of improvisation or chance. Cage used chance for writing, not for performing. He wanted the performances to be extremely precise. I differ from him in that way.

MC And 4'33" is a precise time. It's not 4'34"...

PH Yes, it's an object. Cage works with natural time. We are interested in a different kind of time than Cage's time.

MC The twentieth century produced the idea of "real time," a time that repeats itself whilst it occurs, as much as the possibility of a new and simultaneous time. To come back to the issues I've been thinking about, could you replace the word "exhibition" with another word?

PH With brief and indifferent emergence, but for things that do not always need to be exhibited. If we take the example of an accident, there is a set of given circumstances. There is a confrontation between certain entities and someone is the witness. But there is a before and an after. We could also think about an animal's need to present itself, to show itself, to present an image, an appearance. We could call it intensifying instead of exhibiting.

MC In the end, do you work with the question of time by default? Is time just necessary without being a priority?

PH Yes, I hadn't thought about it like that but maybe... The living, the intensification of what is, its vitality is more important. I see it as matter that pulses with rhythms.

MC We talked about celebrations, and one of my first questions is: at what point does the exhibition begin? To come

back to *Streamside Day*, the exhibition takes place from the moment that the village is built until its ruin. And even after. In the end, it is a time by default. The Association of Freed Time, which can only be embodied according to legally designated terms, is also a time by default.²

PH There is flow, not time but life or existence. Yes, The Association of Freed Time is a move outside of the frame. The runoff from a given body. François Jullien talks about silent transformations from Western conceptions of dramatised time to the question of death and Chinese thought, the seasons and the course of things. Dramatisation is a simplification. Complexity accepts things "corrupted," variations, the obscure parts, the paradoxes, the obligations. And it's this co-presence of things which do not combine but separately produce this complexity. We have the experience of duration but there is time "in-itself" that exists without us, that I can't understand. Maybe it understands me.

MC When we see an exhibition of your work, it seems to me that you have gone from the "mechanisation" of the exhibition, and that isn't a critique, to a "naturalisation" of the exhibition, to something more organic.

PH Right, the programming of events was somehow more written and mechanical, a constructed time-based staging but... that was not the case for certain situations like "Mobile TV," a group show based on temporalities where they had many unestablished events, or for the casting of *Uccellacci e Uccellini* when the exhibition lasted the indeterminate time necessary to find the actor. The roles weren't assigned yet. Actors, amateurs, and visitors came to see the exhibition without knowing who was playing which role. This suspension of roles interested me, as did the necessity of the duration of the exhibition. I'm not sure about the minimalist position and Michael Fried's brilliant texts, the theatricalisation of the exhibition space by the object and consequently of the person's body that experiences it. They made this a question of temporality, but it was still tied to the museum. For this reason, I am interested in Smithson and not in Judd.

MC So the Museum of the Void that Smithson proposes will ultimately be a timeless museum; the necessity of the museum preexists.

PH Minimal art needs the museum. It reallocates this space, gives it authority and not necessarily for the better. The thought that the temporal writing of exhibitions can fall into the same trap as minimalism would be disappointing. I found a more organic and chaotic approach that diverges from mechanising the temporality of the exhibition. To come back to the Association of Freed Time, what is the encounter within the context of a group show? It's people who know each other and decide to do something, then it ends, and everyone goes their own way. But wasn't there a way to find something other than this ritual, this social pact, and change the temporal protocol of a group show by changing its course and finding other exhibition formats? A format is a set of rules, conventions like a magazine, a detached house, a feature film, a conference, a school... Does an exhibition

make other formats possible? This comes back to your questions about temporal scores, about memory, and maybe your questions about space. Presence is necessary today. With "Mobile TV" in 1995 there was an exhibition space where events either occurred or not, and at different intensities. People were there to do things with the museum, outside of the museum, and, in an almost Brechtian way, people witnessed a construction in progress, an uncertain process. The image of this construction could also be seen elsewhere, at home. In this way, the Association of Freed Time made it possible to construct other modes of experience and of exhibiting.

MC As we said, the witness is the person who exhibits and is exhibited.

PH Absolutely.

MC Could you discuss your relationship with museums?

PH The museum cannot provide all the conditions. It plays a particular role; it must be educational, accessible, feel secure, and it should respect certain laws, morals, and audiences. It must follow formats and rules. It is a problematic format because it has to please the masses. Exhibitions like Jean-François Lyotard's "Les Immatériaux" [The Immaterials] could not happen today, but it was important for us, and we should do the follow up show. That said, I have always preferred to show in a museum, or better, in an art center rather than in a gallery. As counterexamples, art centers like Le Consortium or Bregenz are places for experimentation.

MC *L'Expédition scintillante: A Musical?*

PH Yes, that showed the fact that an exhibition is always a starting point and not the end of a process. In Bregenz, the exhibition was a viewing in speculative mode; it foreshadowed how it would flow into another reality, an expedition in Antarctica to navigate elsewhere...

MC Echoing the exhibition in Central Park that we discussed earlier...

PH Yes, the musical event in Central Park was also foreshadowed in Bregenz three years earlier with the skating rink on the top floor, a stage for a future event of which the subject was not yet formed. It's an exhibition that foreshadows another exhibition. Following this set of variations, I wanted to find another place to navigate history, to anachronistically sail through the past, through French history and its artifacts, its museology, and its ethnology, which looks back on its own sources. I passed by the musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires. I found myself in front of a museum even though in theory I was trying to avoid it. This museum was closed. It no longer functioned as a museum, and only the building and the memory of its past role and protocols remained. It was becoming a possible museum. For *The Host and the Cloud*, the witnesses became my subjects, confronted with the trial of Action Directe, a hypnosis session, people making love in the basement and many other situations. The film, a variation in intensity, was itself shown in a museum becoming in situ again. It's a memory of what happened, a score. It's never an ending, it's a moment of something.

MC In imagining all of your work together, I wonder what would be a retrospective of all these exhibitions, which were themselves based on time.

PH We played a lot on the retrospective by taking the retrospective subject as the raw material for an exhibition rather than showing things that were done and arranged chronologically. *The Host and the Cloud* is a retrospective. It exorcises influences, discursive sedimentations that have outlined a subjective mindset. Working on an exhibition depends on the request, the invitation. *The Host and the Cloud* is an exhibition experiment, a studio where I could try out an exhibition, test its configuration, its forms, and its subjects, which were all shown to witnesses who were themselves exhibited but never led to a resolution. It consisted of processes, unfinished experiments. Generally, the museum with its protocols and limits is not the place for this organicity of things. Like Robert Smithson, it's better to do something else, elsewhere.

MC How then? By working offsite?

PH By flow, by variation, an indifferent out-of-game, out-of-time.

MC We've come back to memory.

PH Yes, we have. *The Host and the Cloud* is made in a way that it is impossible to grasp everything. One part of what is shown remains underground, excluded. You can't have the total experience. But forty people can bear witness to what they saw with different versions. I'm interested in the factual, that's why the question of fiction escapes me.

MC Or rather, you escape from it.

PH Some type of event could be reconstituted in the factual.

MC At the very end of "A Choreographed Exhibition," in the last hour of the last day, I organised a public discussion between all the dancers precisely because they alone were the memory of what took place. As the curator, I only saw snippets.

PH That's what dancers like Jérôme Bel say. There are films and there are scores but obviously there is also the body which recorded the movements, the temporalities, the rhythms, and like you, I only saw snippets of *The Host and the Cloud* experiment. Some things occurred beyond the exhibition.

MC Yes, the recording is sensible and we can't change that.

PH And is shared, for example, by someone who talks about this bodily experience as they do it, as they show these moments of presence.

MC When you imagine a score, do you associate it with writing?

PH What do you mean by writing? A rule of the game?

MC No, the written word. I mean using writing rather than image, using the description of sensations.

PH I use written language, yes.

MC And do you go back to it later? Once the film has been made, for example?

PH Reality alters the writing. Projects can reappear and change, but everything begins with very short texts that I write and rewrite. It took time to establish the rules of the game, to

understand the stakes of *The Host and the Cloud*, but now it is a material I can draw on, so we're back at the score.

MC In the end, it's a way of redefining the filming period. Since it takes place in a museum, it takes a defined amount of time, so we can call this non-exhibition an "exhibition."

PH Yes, or "situation"...

MC ...semi-public

PH Yes, the witnesses were chosen.

MC It was about featuring the performativity of the filming period to make a film. In the end, more than a document, the film is a sensible memory of what happened.

PH Yes, but the event happened without the filming. The film, the second moment of intensity in this experiment, is both other and the same. It is as close as possible to what this should have been, according to what was there. I am not going to invent a posteriori.

MC The memory of an exhibition usually lives on through the catalogue. How do you attempt to work out the idea for the catalogue?

PH I have a hard time formalising books precisely because the complexity gets pinned down. The book can relate to research, to an ideal score and at the same time, to this obscure part that hasn't been shown. The book is what was not exhibited.

MC That's beautiful, because the score is also the obscure part. That is, the ideal score writes what hasn't happened yet, beyond this translation to reality. Maybe that's why I asked you if you write with words. The reality of a word is being read.

PH It is its nature, and that's why I don't say "exhibition." That will form other things, and a word will come and expose something else.

- 1 *La Toison d'or* (1993): Five teenagers wearing animal heads—typical of the characters one encounters in amusement parks and representing the symbols attached to the history of the city of Dijon—demonstrate and hang around in a playground.
- 2 The Association of Freed Time gathers the participants of a group exhibition giving it a social reality. It proposes to extend the time of these meetings and to be the departure point of a series of projects of an unspecified duration.

claude rutault

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
Between Vaucresson and London, May 2006

Mathieu Copeland I would like to begin by asking you to discuss your replacing of *definition/method #1* ("a canvas braced on a stretcher, painted the same colour as the wall on which it is hung") by *definition/method #1bis* ("to repaint a painting, i.e. an existing work, in the same colour as the wall on which it is hung")?

claude rutault by modifying the definition/method in which the word painting replaces the word canvas, i wish to exploit the paradox of producing a new painting without increasing the number of existing paintings, an idea that obviously lends itself to many developments. this principle also underpins *definition/method #68*, *collection 4*, *art for art*, that has kept growing since 1980. when we see the number of artworks coming and going every day in galleries, museums, antique shops, auction houses, it seems impossible not to ask why we should add yet another one. my materials supplier sells forty thousand stretched canvasses a month!

mc This helps strengthen our understanding of *definition/method #1*, and of your thoughts on painting. But it also raises the issue of nihilism (denying the possible vision of an original painting by concealing or destroying it). This also reminds us of the palimpsest (which reuses an old manuscript to give way to a new work), which echoes beautifully Douglas Huebler's famous sentence: "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more."

cr you mention an attitude reminiscent of nihilism. this is a difficult question. to be a nihilist is to view mainstream values, in this case artistic values, as obsolete, and to attempt to break free from their diktat. you seem to consider the act of repainting in those terms. let us refer to heidegger's text about nietzsche in *off the beaten track*, where a similar idea is developed, the difference being—as can be seen in my exhibition at the musée d'art moderne & contemporain in geneva¹—that the predominant factor in my work is not destruction, but construction, or at least an opening toward a possible construction. i have been working for the past few months on a text that deals with the idea of "repainting," but stopped on principle during the duration of the exhibition. now the exhibition is over, i am resuming this work. repainting an old work involves a simultaneity of two movements: firstly, capturing, for an indefinite time, a moment/a dead image (a mere observation), and secondly, highlighting the painting, that reminds us that something existed previously. i cannot go into more details for the moment, but you will receive a more comprehensive answer in the coming months. i can only say that the construction takes precedence over the deletion (a term i prefer to that of destruction).

mc Where do you see the text (the definition/method) within the artwork (and within your work in general)? Could you

explain the link between the texts (the definitions/methods) and their physical realisation—do they predate the artwork, or even act as artworks?

cr the text of the definition/method is not the artwork. the painting is “written” so that somebody else can update it according to his/her own understanding of the text, and according to his/her own taste. what would otherwise be the point of writing it? the writing requires the painting to be produced; it is not a form of intended or unintended poetry. furthermore, the person who takes charge of the work (the “taker”) does not acquire a text, but a painting produced from the text. the description acts as a contract and can only be delivered after the update, as it not only bears the address of the location where the piece is produced, but also the dimensions of the walls and canvasses, and a colour sample. this description has to be updated every time one of the parameters by which the artwork is produced is modified. the artist and the taker both keep a copy, which will be part of the artwork's history.

mc The painting only exists through its physical delivery and update, born out of the written terms of the text. The person who takes up the realisation of the piece acquires an artwork that he could have seen in a given context (gallery, exhibition, article, or in the mental image generated by the text itself). The text itself bears all possible realisations. Can the same be said about the painting? What happens to the multitudes of other's realisations outside of the one we see in front of us?

cr the question of the update versus infinite possibilities... let's take colour for instance: when i write that the canvas is painted the same colour as the wall, i do not mention the colour. therefore, the person who acquires the work has to choose the colour, lest the artwork won't exist. but a colour is always chosen to the detriment of all others. luckily, due to the nature of the text itself, its existence and its lack of precision, or rather its all-encompassing quality, the colour can be changed at any time. since nothing is fixed (paint, form, colour, number, format, place, position), and even though we have a painting in front of us, the artwork remains to be done. success and failure are now relative, tomorrow we will do better, or worse. that's life!

mc I am struck by the meaning of the word *exposition* [exhibition] that transpires from all your definitions/methods (from 1 to 274) ever since 1974, whether in the physical understanding of the exhibition space and its structure (e.g. in the size of the paintings in relation to the size of the walls, one painting per wall, etc.), in the silent captions and “legends,” and in your interest for the duration of the exhibition as much as for the time spent within the exhibition (some artworks even change during the time of the exhibition, such as the 1976's *Exposition limite 1—d/m #50*)...

If your definitions/methods reflect on the act of painting (you have often told me, “it is painting I am interested in”), could you tell me how the notion of exhibition naturally enters your thinking? How do you see the exhibition, and how has your perspective evolved to date?

cr in a way, there is no exhibiting of my painting, there only is a physical placement and an updating process in a given moment. one given text leads to different successive results. even though it is predefined, this work has no fixed element. take as an example the exhibition that you are working on;² let us suppose that it will travel. the results will undoubtedly be very different. maybe another painting will be repainted, or there will be a different number of artworks... and yet, it will be the same.

in the early days, i included processes such as the *definition/method #50* you are referring to, which i would be ready to update again. today, however, i have left behind this proactive approach, and instead i let things evolve more organically. my work is peculiar in that it is no longer a painting in the classical sense, nor is it wall paint. it does not endure time, time is its ultimate driver. unlike others, my works are not subjected to wear or restoration: "a stroke of paint, a stroke of youth." my painting does not embody time, it lives it.

mc I am fascinated by the notion of an organic evolution in time. There may not be an exhibition of your painting, but I believe that your painting holds within it all the different forms of an exhibition. Therefore, if we can see its obvious ongoing future in the resulting painting/exhibition, it is also great to see that many of the proposals you have written embody the abstraction of a space. The painting incorporates all the elements of an exhibition and therefore *creates* the exhibition.

cr the presence of the text means there is no difference between an update in a gallery, in a museum, or at the house of a collector. the artwork, if the definition/method is correct, will be different from one place to the next, each space exercising its own constraints and prerogatives. that is the reason why i insist that the painting should be first written, as everything stems from there, which doesn't necessarily mean that the text *is* the painting. this text is generic, it has holes and gaps that the taker has to fill; we now understand his/her importance. i cannot store the artworks, as he/she is the one through whom the painting will materialise. i am no longer the main spectator of my artwork. incidentally, i have not seen over half of my works. in any case, the artwork does not exist, we could even say that every successive update of a definition/method pushes the reality of the artwork a little more out of reach.

Between Vaucresson and London, March 2010

Mathieu Copeland During our impromptu public conversation at the opening of the exhibition at the CNEAI, you said that "we have to disassociate the painting process from the exhibition process," which struck me as significant: your work as a painter is linked to my work as a curator, and my work as a curator is linked to your work as a painter. If I may, could I ask you to develop this notion of dissociation between painting and exhibition?

claude rutault once the de-finition/method has been written, i consider my work as a painter to be almost finished. it's not that

i think of writing and painting as the same thing, but for me, from this moment onwards, the painting exists as a *possibility*. the writing has two roles: it enables me to distance myself from the artwork, and enables another person to appropriate the work. the nature of the writing is twofold: firstly, what is written, for instance, “to paint a canvas the same colour as the wall onto which it is hung” constitutes an almost generic “pictorial sentence”—with the exception of the un-painted, and secondly, this text is also unfinished. when envisaging the realisation of the artwork, we are now left with interpretation. the text does not stipulate the shape of the canvas, or its format, or its colour. all these parameters are incumbent to the person in charge of the work. without his/her contribution that turns him/her from a collector to a “custodian,” the painting is never updated, and it only exists as a text, as a project.

the distance between me and the work is real. since the publication of my book *définitions/méthodes le livre*,³ anyone can update a de-definition/method in my absence, as long as they follow the text's instructions. all the elements over which i voluntarily relinquish power constitute both a strength and a risk. the risk is that the painting can be hijacked, but this risk is offset by two essential principles inherent to the proposal: firstly, any update only exists for a limited time, and sooner or later it will have to be amended; but above all, this painting, as an unfinished object, remains open to many interpretations. the painting and its re-writing will thus evolve with time. this evolution, which is an integral part of the work, helps putting into perspective what at a given time may appear anecdotal.

as for the *de-finition/method #1*, the initial pictorial sentence, “a canvas stretched...” it would be absurd for me to go to the studio every morning to paint an update that i would have to delete immediately in order to start anew the following day. the studio is just a storage space, a place where i stock material, which over the years has become so full that a transit system had to be created (the start and arrival point of canvasses following each update, *de-finition/method #172: from stack to stack*).

thus, after this necessary digression, i can start to answer your question more directly. in the wording of the pictorial sentence, the word “ex-position” [“exposition” being the french word for exhibition] suggests a displacement of the painting from the place it is produced to the place where it will be exhibited, and does not exist with the d/m. the painting is in position, a word to which i prefer the word of update. as each painting varies from one place to another, we never have an exhibition, in its usual and precise understanding. the work showcased in another place is only ever just another moment along the path of the painting born out of the text. furthermore, it never *is* the artwork, only a moment of the artwork. the artwork, through its subsequent updates, remains forever unreachable. this idea was developed in two short books: *the end of the finished object*⁴ and *my paintings have a short life, but they have many lives*.⁵ this is the reason why i enjoy your title, “the continuous exhibition,” to which i would add: and so does the painting. we only need to see the

work materialise with each subsequent exhibition. we have now reached the stage, in the clearest possible terms, of repainting the exhibition.

mc And further to this, I would like to discuss the word and its form. The painting process runs into the exhibition through the written word, when the latter is read and interpreted (the word being the backbone of an exhibition). Your work has been organised since a very early stage around definitions and methods. Can you tell me more about the origins of the term de-definition/method?

cr for some time i have wanted to modify the word "definition/method." it is now done. the new term will be: de-definition/method. the word "definition," even associated with method, appeared narrow and restrictive. it did not sufficiently explain the simultaneity of the analysis and the construction processes within painting.

the text of any de-definition/method stems from a similar desire, to enable what was in 1973 a discovery—a canvas stretched... to become the driving force behind the painting. the first canvas in the same colour as the wall was a chance encounter, a happy coincidence, even though i painted a second canvas following the same process a few days later, in another room. it took me some time to draft a written proposal. marie-hélène breuil, who carefully studied this stage of my work, was not able to pinpoint exactly the advent of the word. what is certain is that i did not write any halfway version, a precise description of the painting, but the generic idea of this painting. very soon, it became obvious that the work should not generate an image, in other words that it should not be constrained by any definitive appearance. the proposal is therefore deliberately vague: the sentence uses the present tense, and constantly connects the canvas and the wall. in order to achieve a constant colour match, repainting is required.

mc I am very interested in how many of these de-definition/method proposals are not only proposals to become paintings that could form part of any exhibition, but also proposals for an exhibition per se, with its integrity and permanence. Could you discuss your understanding of the word exhibition, and the relation between exhibition and painting?

cr in the early 1990s, one aspect of the work remained overlooked: how to present it—what is usually known as an exhibition. that is how i started to think, in writing, about a possible "exhibition/method." these texts, that i consider unfinished, can all be found at the end of *définitions/méthodes le livre*,⁶ whose aim is to organise and link the contents of the exhibition, may this be in galleries, museums or any other places, and to connect these so as to further the understanding of each de-definition/method and even each series of updates. let us avoid the word "exhibition" altogether. this work will be incorporated in the near future into a new version of the d/m. i will then have to examine the very question of the title.

i updated one of the *exhibition/method #8*, dated from 1994, "according to its catalogue." the update is an invitation to make a pick within the catalogue of a previous exhibition,

to amend the works if necessary, and to link them in a new way... in this case, a first 1994 show in a museum in nantes entitled "à titre d'exemple" [as an example]. the second one took place at the creux de l'enfer in thiers, the following year. the catalogue from nantes was used in thiers with a new dust jacket that indicated the modalities of the repeat and the characteristics of a new update of the d/m. the re-use of a catalogue was a follow-up to the events of the musée d'art moderne de la ville de paris in 1983, where a catalogue was printed and organised as pages in a binder. this folder was supposed to be gradually filled with more and more material following the subsequent updates. unfortunately, soon after the show, almost all of these catalogues were destroyed by the publisher without my knowledge.

we could say that if the update generates a picture of the d/m, as soon as it is bought, it merges its existence with the life of the buyer. the *ex-position*/method is not a new piece, but a collection enabling a reading of various d/m, a different reading from any other organisation. the *ex-position*/method, due to its capacity for organisation, offers new paths of interpretation for the de-definitions/methods.

mc We could say that the root of this exhibition, and thus of the work of painting, comes from the re-organisation of the written words (this is the perfect chance to remember another past work of yours, *Peintures suicides* [Suicidal Paintings], and to imagine the original definitions and methods of these *Suicidal Paintings* in this exhibition, where the paintings are suicided by the exhibition!). But let us get back to the word and its form: the art to come/the painting to be repainted (or as Vilém Flusser beautifully put it, *in*-formation) is first and foremost written with words, and revealed with paint. I am fascinated by how our exhibition ultimately reveals itself through words, even though both the painting and its caption have been painted the same colour as the wall. If words are indeed present at the very beginning, it is only through other words that we can identify the canvas that has been repainted, since its caption is silent (or rather, only speaks of paint!). I would thus like to ask you about your relationship with word, written to be read, and that once read, write the process for the painting to come.

cr "the painting to come," an expression taken from maurice blanchot's *the book to come*, often crops up in my texts. it is the main consequence of the de-finition/method. for any d/m, the updates keep on coming, all just as fair and beautiful as the next (different strokes for different folks, etc.). they are merely different, and as time goes by, become indifferent to the accumulated differences or similarities that enrich and complicate them. are the paintings moving further away or closer to painting? is it even possible to tell? in any case, it seems like a limitless exploration. paintings are never completed (as much) as they can always (or for a long time) take unexpected turns. the update is an opportunity forcing it to endure. thus the update always needs to be erased in order for it to be replaced.

the painting is to come, because the text it stems from is not fixed either. already quite flexible in terms of its reality, it takes into account the differences, as slight as these may be, in the updates. the painting responds to the writing that must then learn from it. this response can then lead to the rewriting of the de-finition/method.

several specificities characterise the importance and the originality of the public update, still entitled exhibition. my work makes no difference between the update in a public space or in a private house.

this is why i choose to use the word update rather than exhibition. from this moment on, the "continuous exhibition" can interchangeably be called the "continuous painting" or the "continuous updating," as all these terms differentiate immediately this expression from a mere travelling exhibition. furthermore, all the artworks present in the exhibition focus on the *d/m #208bis*. repainting has become central to my work as a painter, which means painting is not only possible, but inescapable.

- 1 Exhibition held in 2010, where Rutault repainted over works he had himself produced between 1958 and 1973.
- 2 « L'Exposition Continue », Circuit & 1m3, 2008, CNEAI, 2010...
- 3 RUTAULT Claude, *définitions/méthodes le livre* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000).
- 4 RUTAULT Claude, BOUGLÉ Frédéric, *La Fin de l'objet fini* (Nantes: Joca Seria, 2005).
- 5 RUTAULT Claude, *mes peintures ont la vie courte mais elles ont plusieurs vies* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1994).
- 6 *Op. cit.*

Gustav Metzger

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
On Choreography
London, April–June 2012

Mathieu Copeland I would like to address psychedelism and a certain aspect of your Auto-creative art. You developed the art of *Liquid Crystals* and presented them for the first time as an installation in an exhibition in the window of Better Books in January 1966. On 31 December of that year, you projected

162

them at the Roundhouse, the famous London music venue. Since then, these projected shows became a fixture for the psychedelic generation. Would you discuss your feelings about this?

Gustav Metzger There were three groups performing at the Roundhouse: The Who, The Cream and The Move. I was approached by one of the managers of the event, and asked if I would do the light show. I said yes, because I wanted to work with Pete Townshend of The Who, and I was told The Cream was a new group that was amongst the best in the world. So I saw no reason why not. Thousands of people came—music lovers. I had problems with the Roundhouse; it was badly organised. The light went down when The Who were about to play. When they came on, it was pitch black. After this event, I was invited to a light show at the youth hall basement for a new band. On the one hand, I found it very exciting and I was prepared to go on, yet I decided not to follow it.

MC Your ongoing work with *Liquid Crystals* continued as you worked on “Extremes Touch,” an exhibition that took place in the Department of Chemical Engineering Filtration Laboratory at the University College of Swansea in January and February 1968. For this exhibition, you developed several liquid crystals techniques. As you wrote then, these were “intended for use in projects that are environment.” You proposed “cinema-like or bath-like situations where people [could] go benefit from the unique possibilities of these techniques.”

GM In Swansea, the step forward was the device mechanism. Up until then, it was always hand held. Also, it was running continuously for the duration of the show.

MC Coming back to your relation with Pop culture, I was wondering what your relation toward music was.

GM I was brought up on Jewish music. I remember that when I was thirteen, just before the war, music was at the centre of my Bar Mitzvah. And when I arrived in the UK in 1939, and looked at my future, I thought about composing. I went for an interview at the School of Music. In connection with that, when I came to London, I became utterly fascinated by dance. There was a time in 1946 when I thought I would switch from being an artist to dancing. This was a central fact in my development, and led to what I have done ever since: choreography, the transformation of sound and vision.

MC And this pursues our common interest in choreography and composition. Do you remember looking into the work of Laban and his method of notation?

GM During and after the war, I saw the work of choreographer Kurt Jooss whenever I could, starting in Leeds and Dartington. Jooss was connected with Rudolf von Laban, this important figure in dance history. Yet at that time, I had no theoretical knowledge or interest in that. I was very much looking for the movement. Also, Jooss was very political and strongly against war. I was reading Eric Gill's emphasis on socialism and concerns for art and society, and Edmund Székely's concerns with health. It was at the very beginning of my decision of becoming an artist. And then in 1944, after having met Henry Moore, I took his advice to study life drawing at an art school.

mc I would like to pursue this approach to choreography and movement in regard to your late paintings at the end of the 50s, and especially at the moment when you move from painting to projecting acid on stretched nylon. When one looks at the gestures that were at the centre of your practice, both through the marks made with the palette knife on the large steel plates and the marks applied with acid on the nylon painting, there is a continuity in the process and movements. There is something in this stylistic approach and the assumed expression similar to, say, the manner in which Jackson Pollock was painting.

gm I agree.

mc Would you care to comment on the following paragraph that you wrote in your 1965 self-published book *Auto-destructive Art: Metzger at the AA*. This is the first of the 10 points that you viewed as necessary in the understanding and making of Auto-destructive art: "1. Auto-destructive art is *material* that is undergoing a *process* of transformation in *time*. In designing a work the artist sees these three factors as *one*. The artist could be compared to a choreographer. A choreographer orders bodies in positions in space at certain times. Ideally the spectator responds to the time/material/process factors as a unified experience."

gm This directly relates to process: it is material and it has time. The time to make it, and the time to take it in. It is a unified experience. We come back to the observer for whom after all it is meant. It is the same as to when I make a drawing so that other people can respond to it, and can hopefully be stimulated or inspired by it.

mc This brings us to the emphasis on the spectator in kinetic art. The spectator's participation seeks to establish a unity between man, nature, and the man-made environment. There seems to be two choreographies in your *Liquid Crystals* pieces—the chemical and the mechanical motion of the liquid crystals, and the movement of the spectators as they negotiate with the artworks.

gm The *Liquid Crystals* piece has a directional flow. Inside our body, there is a constant reproduction of the flow that we are witnessing on the screen. The different components of our own bodies are in sync with what we are experiencing. As an indirect response to what we are seeing, the visual input equals an inner dance. The observer finalises the work, as without the observer, the work doesn't exist. I have been aware for a long time that the liquid crystals directly affect the human body. Liquids crystals are an inherent part of the human body, and it couldn't exist without its constant interaction—it's both there outside and inside us. The potential is explosive—its speed, its unpredictability, and its potential constancy. When you experience *Liquid Crystals* it is similar to watching and experiencing the universe, it's a step into another ongoing experience because, constantly, we are recreating ourselves.

mc Which echoes to the idea of a permanent movement, may it either be Foucault's pendulum or Trotsky's Permanent Revolution.

gm Well, quite. I was exactly thinking along the lines of the Permanent Revolution. *Liquid Crystals* may be my ideal

representation of revolution... So to sum up, *Liquid Crystals* are at the top of the potential experience because they are in us, and make us gel into this extraordinary experience between the visual, the material, and time.

MC Would you care to consider the experience of choreography with—and within—the spectators?

GM It is all about process within the material. This is scintillating with atoms. When the artist makes a work he sees three factors—material, process, and time—as one. Auto-destructive art is these three elements. At first they are present and expand, then they come together as a unity. They mingle and interact like atoms do, so we begin to approach why the artist can be compared to a choreographer who would order in time bodies into position in space.

MC Indeed.

GM Ideally, the spectator responds to a time that is imposed in a unified experience. You watch a dance on a stage and yet you experience the dance within. The artist, in designing Auto-destructive art, brings together different aspects of reality, the same way the director affirms a choreographic *statement* in ordering dancers bodies in positions in spaces at certain times.

MC Would you care to expand on the latest idea?

GM For instance, consider my biggest unrealised project, *Five Screens with Computer*. It is constructed so that the elements go out over a period of years at preordained times according to the choreography as decided by the artist. It is a material that undergoes a process and a transformation in time. Art on the whole is there, for all time, to be looked at in the now, and responded to in the now. Whereas with Auto-destructive art you have to envisage what it will be like after five years, then ten, and in twenty years it won't be there at all. This is a revolutionary problem.

Hans Ulrich Obrist

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland

The Fragility of Exhibitions

Stroll in Hyde Park, London, 31 October 2011

Mathieu Copeland I wanted to think about how the score of an exhibition can be used and therefore can write what will take place. Harald Szeemann worked a lot on “writing” exhibitions. I am interested in what that might mean. You have had fascinating experiences of exhibitions. A year and a half ago, we already spoke about the memory of exhibitions, about what might survive them and about the necessity of even just envisaging whether something could endure or not.

Hans Ulrich Obrist It's good that we came back to this park... I used to come here to jog and we did a lot of recordings while running! To begin, we need a prelude on memory. As Israel Rosenfield as well as Eric Kandel show, memory is a profoundly dynamic cerebral process similar to a sort of constant updating. If we think about the history of the exhibition, it is not a question of bringing back something lost but rather putting together a kind of toolbox, as Panofsky said, to invent the future based on fragments of the past. If you don't have these fragments of the past, then obviously, you have a problem. In the nineteenth century, the exhibition consisted more in gathering objects. Then, during the twentieth century, the exhibition became the medium, a medium in itself that also includes quasi-objects and non-objects. This of course changed the question of memory... Often the exhibition has a limited temporality. As Daniel Buren said, exhibitions are very rarely “collected” and very rarely recreated. One goes with the other. Philippe Parreno and I worked on an opera entitled *Il Tempo del Postino*—we can talk about that later because it is very much related to these questions about memory... It's incredible, we are surrounded by birds!

mc Ducks, seagulls, swans... A regular farmyard!

huo In the case of producing an opera, what happens is that everything must be put in crates, and ten or twenty years later, the props can be reactivated. Obviously, this becomes more complicated with exhibitions. Exhibitions are often dispersed, and it becomes very difficult to get them back together. We need to ask: once the exhibition has ended, how can we remember it? One possibility, advocated by Daniel Buren, is what he calls *photo-souvenirs*. Another possibility is to collect entire exhibitions or large ensembles. Buren also told me that the Belgian collector Herman Daled signed a contract with him: for one year Daled was only allowed to buy Buren's paintings. This was not only a method but also an exercise in avoiding dispersal. When the contract ended, Daled went straight to Berlin and bought... an entire exhibition of Lawrence

Weiner, as if it had become part of his DNA to buy ensembles... This is just one option; the others are obviously some type of documentation.

MC Documentation and publication.

HUO It has always been clear to me that an exhibition that does not produce a catalogue does not exist. If you look back at the very first shows, for example Manet's shows, you will notice that there was always a little book with the list of works. This is a crucial trace. I organised my first exhibition, "World Soup," in 1991. Boltanski and Fischli & Weiss encouraged me to do it because they noticed that my kitchen was always jam packed with books and I needed to clear up some space. The exhibition had only twenty-nine visitors in three months and then it became only hearsay. From that we tried to make a book, a kind of *boîte-en-valise*, where each artist made a book in the book. So, from the beginning, I believed that an exhibition not only needed a catalogue but also that the catalogue was an extension of the exhibition. The catalogue can also be an exhibition in itself because it is the mobile version of it. This idea came from discussions with artists who all place enormous emphasis on the book. This is also true of architects. From Le Corbusier to Rem Koolhaas, the book is much more than a secondary element. It is a medium in itself. Another thing that I realised is that we very often don't manage to document an exhibition because it is already over. There is a certain amnesia that marks the history of the exhibition, a remarkable lack of literature. So I started to do an interview project, which has now reached 2,300 hours. The starting point was to protest against forgetting, as Eric Hobsbawm would say, to learn more about certain exhibitions like Jean-François Lyotard's "Les Immatériaux" [The Immaterials], for example... I thought it would be interesting to talk about this missing history with my professional great grandparents and grandparents, to compile an oral history... And so Harald Szeemann told me of his heroes Willem Sandberg, Alexander Dorner, Félix Fénéon, Arnold Rüdlinger. After Szeemann, I met Walter Hopps, Pontus Hulten, Johannes Cladders... The idea was for them to recall their memories of exhibitions and their respective epiphanies. It was the opportunity to speak to these people in their old age, to get an oral history of all the experiences they might have lived through. For example, Philip Johnson told me about his visit to *Merzbau*. He is the only person I have ever met who saw *Merzbau*! Through Szeemann's generation, we gained access notably to many books on the legendary Sandberg, the anarchist graphic designer who directed the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam with feverish activity. This interview project led to *A Brief History of Curating*, which is only one part of my archive. The other part revolves around artists, philosophers and architects who speak to me about their exhibition histories. This oral history requires witness accounts, since it is always a matter of experience. This is really important, the way in which hearsay works in transmitting exhibitions. Another aspect is the question of the film of an exhibition. Most of the time we only have photographs taken the day before the opening when the exhibition is empty, dead, since very often the exhibition only

lives when it is visited. The spectator does at least 50% of the work, as artists from Marcel Duchamp to Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster would maintain. I realised that the exhibitions that I did in the 1990s—and it's still true today for certain shows—were not filmed. After a while, I started to film them myself. I also started to film my interviews. That is thanks to Jonas Mekas. It was in 1995 and we were in a cafe; I had a tape recorder, and he was filming me, the cafe and the people, and he said to me: "But if you are doing all of these interviews for the future, you need to film them to keep a record." Two days later, I bought one of the first digital videocameras with mini-cassettes, and that was when I began filming the 2,300 hours. I always had the videocamera with me and I thought during "Cities on the Move," "Laboratorium," "Utopia Station" and "Mutations," that these big complex ensembles were going to be very difficult to remember and recount. So I started to make movies in light of this complexity. The artist can film the exhibition himself or herself, or like in my case, the curator can film the exhibition.

mc ... there's also the bystander with a smartphone!

huo Right, now there is a whole archive created by visitors who film, but even then, photographs are much more common than films. We tried to photograph Philippe Parreno's exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery that Julia Peyton-Jones, Kathryn Rattee and I organised, and two days before the end I said: "We need to film it!" It was an obvious must. Same for Anri Sala's exhibition. These were shows that had a time code.

mc Of course, writing in time.

huo We often don't have this type of documentation. For example, it is really hard to find a film on Szeemann's exhibitions, on Lyotard's "Les Immatériaux," or on *Merzbau*.

mc It is interesting that the only existing films were made by journalists, by television. In that case, certain elements might survive but they are not made from the point of view of the curator, the institution or the artist.

huo And in television they often destroy a big part of the footage. All that remains are the 2'40" that go into the program. Whenever I talk to choreography or dance students, I notice that a big part of their education comes from YouTube where you can find a whole history of dance from Isadora Duncan to Jérôme Bel. And yet the history of the exhibition is pretty absent from YouTube.

mc Do you remember Philippe Parreno's wonderful statement: "Images are not photogenic." We could then ask the following question about the exhibition: Can we divide it into images? This is why film as a whole is a crucial issue.

huo The fourth thing is the archive of the exhibition, which is often distributed between the curator, the artist, and especially the institution. And we should emphasise the extraordinary fragility of all kinds of exhibition archives since we don't give enough importance to that. These archives contain letters, the broken up correspondence between the artist, the curator, the technicians and also the fundraising department. There are also the floor plans that the museum sends to the artist, and the artist's designs, the preparatory outlines, the sketches. Since 2000, all of that is done more and more digitally, which

presents a new archival problem... Before, nothing was thrown away. We could always find plans or interesting things in old folders. Today, it is difficult to access all the correspondences that the curator had with the artist... I remember that when I began curating in the 1990s I would always exchange letters with artists. In these letters, I would write twenty points to discuss, and the artist would respond to the twenty points. Today, that one letter would correspond to two hundred emails. And then, there's obviously the conversations that lead to an exhibition, which are often not recorded. That is why when I work with an artist, I consistently record our preliminary conversations. In fact, that leads to another aspect of interviews I do. On one hand, there are the interviews I do with artists where we talk about their practice, their exhibition history, their exhibition memories, and on the other hand, there are the conversations that I call "producers of reality." This is when we discuss an exhibition in the way that you make a book. Given how difficult and fragile the medium of the exhibition is in relationship to memory, the interview is essential for me because you can talk about everything. I recorded an interview with Pierre Huyghe during his exhibition at the ARC that was an integral part of the process—once he knew what he was doing, but before everything was already crystallised. For example, I remember that before the walls danced in the space, he experimented using dancers. The dancers moved around with sections of walls to test out the space. In a way, this is a very important part of the exhibition process.

mc That leads us to the question of research.

huo It's interesting that you use the word "research" because we often work with researchers too. Like for Philippe Parreno's exhibition when we went to see the inventor of virtual reality, Jaron Lanier, at a hotel in Paris to record an interview with him... Or Anri Sala who has many ongoing conversations with musicians in his exploration of the city and sound. This part of the research could be expanded, but it is difficult given the constant pressure that we have to produce. We all agonise over producing because, as Walt Disney said: "Deadlines make the world go round." This is true of exhibitions as well as of exhibition archives. This raises the question of archives without a deadline, archives of non-productivity, archives of doubt and archives of interrupted productivity. In my opinion, this is something absolutely crucial to exhibition history. Carsten Höller talked to me about this very early on in the 1990s; he talked about inserting doubt. He even founded a laboratory of doubt. The archive of doubt, of interruption, of non-productivity relates to projects like "Bridge the Gap?" or "Art and Brain." All of these non-conferences that I do are, in some way, a coffee break to revive ideas, to recharge our batteries, to reinvent. That's a fifth form of the archive. Boetti said to me: "We need to think about speaking to artists about unrealised projects." That is actually another archive that I put together, the archive of unrealised exhibitions.

mc Wonderful!

huo When we think about the history of the exhibition, we always assume that the archive comes during and after. I think

it is really interesting temporally when the archive comes before, when the exhibition hasn't happened yet, like the archive of a future exhibition. As I learned from Boetti, the unrealised is obviously very important because there are exhibitions that are too expensive, too big or too little to be realised. Yes, it can be too little, like for example, Cildo Meireles' project to show a miniature cube in a vast space. It took thirty years to convince a museum to show that. That relates to your legendary exhibition with John Armleder, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot and Gustav Metzger on the void, doesn't it?

MC Of course.

HUO There are also censored exhibitions and self-censored exhibitions. Although self-censorship happens particularly in authoritarian regimes, it occurs everywhere, as Doris Lessing pointed out to me a few months ago. These are the exhibitions that we aren't bold enough to do... So I started to compile an archive of unrealised artworks and exhibitions. In all of my interviews, that is the only recurring question. That could make a sixth category: the archive of exhibitions to come. It is the archive of desires in a way... I also ask artists: "What is your next exhibition?" Some do not want to talk about it out of fear that it won't happen. Others talk to me about it, but sometimes they prefer to discuss censored projects or failures. The archive of failed exhibitions: that could be the seventh category! We can learn a lot from failures. Talking about failed exhibitions is a sort of taboo.

MC But how can you define them?

HUO Right, and who defines them? That is another category, a subcategory. Going back to the space/time distinction, in my experience, I made a sort of transition from exploring space to exploring time. At the beginning, pushed by artists like Boetti or Fischli & Weiss, I worked a lot in unusual spaces from a kitchen to a hotel room to the sewer museum. Even for "Migrateurs," I explored unusual spaces in the museum. Then in January 2000, I had a conversation with Matthew Barney who told me that he really wanted *live*. Time-based exhibitions are always a matter of sculpture. From then on I started to do solo shows, all of which are related to the idea of a time code: Philippe Parreno, Anri Sala, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Pierre Huyghe, Steve McQueen... Then, through conversations with Philippe Parreno, I realised how rare group shows were where the curator gives time instead of space to the artists. *Il Tempo del Postino* came out of this idea and so did the "marathons." We set up the marathons as interviews, kind of like talk shows. Then I realised that this format worked really well as an exhibition format, by giving the artist fifteen minutes... So at the Serpentine Gallery we did the "Experiment Marathon" with Olafur Eliasson, then the "Poetry Marathon," the "Manifesto Marathon," and the "Garden Marathon" with artists' performances. These were a sort of a hybrid between a talk and an exhibition. But introducing time obviously raised another question: how to document these things? For *Il Tempo del Postino* we decided to set up a website with the Dutch designers Metahaven. On one hand, you have the timeline of *Il Tempo del Postino*, and on the other hand, you have all the interviews, the clips, the plans, the bonuses, etc.

For the marathons each year, we have a filmmaker film them and we also have a blog. The blogs or the websites produced by the exhibitions are archival forms of the twenty-first century.

MC But how can you render an account of these? For the "Poetry Marathon" in 2009, Mathias Augustyniak decided to draw all of the speakers, and during the "Garden Marathon" in 2011, artists and writers like Will Holder, Cally Spooner, and Francesco Pedraglio wrote down how they experienced the event as it happened.

HUO Will Holder came up with the idea to ask writers to write about the "Marathon" from their own perspectives and to make a book out of it. The idea was for the writer to extract their text from the marathon, whereas for you, the text can produce the exhibition. It is all very related. I love the idea of your "Exhibitions to Hear Read." In relation to that, we can say that these too are exhibitions in time.

MC Absolutely.

HUO An exhibition is also a "bookwriter." Maybe that is the eighth point... It is really important that the exhibition is not only documented, but that it becomes an *agent provocateur* of a book. Barbara Vanderlinden and I realised that when we did "Laboratorium." That was actually one of the most extreme exhibitions that I've been involved with, but paradoxically, the least well-known precisely because of this difficulty in documenting. "Laboratorium" was very much about this question of the laboratory in the scientific sense. With Carsten Höller, Rosemarie Trockel, Bruno Latour, Francisco Varela, and Gabriel Orozco, we took the FotoMuseum in Antwerp as a sort of relay race. Little by little, people came to install their laboratory in Antwerp. The graphic designer Bruce Mau suggested coming over from Canada and said: "That way I am a graphic designer in situ and everyday we produce the 'bookwriter.'" Every day, he made a mockup of the daily talk, and the book gradually filled up the whole museum. We made more than ten thousand pages which we then compressed into a two hundred or three hundred page book. This was interesting too. Generally, throughout the twentieth century, you collected objects, quasi-objects and non-objects, but very rarely did anyone collect archives. For example, in Switzerland they christened some trains "Harald Szeemann?" Can you imagine a Swiss TGV named "Harald Szeemann" speeding through the country, carrying his name through fields, countrysides and cities! But then at the same time, nobody was interested in his archive. After a few years, it ended up being saved by the Getty where it arrived just a few weeks ago... For now, very few people place importance on exhibition archives. It's like the *Stiefkind*, the undesired child. The ZKM in Karlsruhe conserves the archive of "Laboratorium." That's obviously the ninth point. In the twenty-first century it is essential that the exhibition archives are saved, that there are institutions to take them, to collect them, to lend them.

MC Of course, in any case, it is a living material and should be worked with.

HUO "Laboratorium" is at ZKM and *Il Tempo del Postino* is at LUMA, Maja Hoffmann's foundation. It is all preserved in

a container. If in twenty or fifty years from now the Sydney Opera wants to do it, it could be done.

MC It's a continuity; it ensures a possible score for a future exhibition and a memory of what took place. To conclude, are you convinced, as I am, of the necessity for exhibitions today? More than ever?

HUO Yes, but I think that curating always follows art, not the other way around. I can't stand the idea of art following curating. It's closeness with the artists that produces exhibitions. As long as you have painters who paint, painting isn't dead. And as long as artists have the desire to do exhibitions—and that desire is greater than ever—then exhibitions are necessary. What is certain is that artists today don't want exhibitions to represent reality but to produce it. The exhibition is also interesting as a format. When Agnès Varda, one of the great post-war New Wave filmmakers, tells you that she would rather see an exhibition than a film...

MC ... that says it all.

HUO It shows that there is a lot of freedom in the exhibition format. There are very few constraints. You can bring in any discipline. Bruno Latour was invited three times to the ZKM in Karlsruhe and before there was Jean-François Lyotard at the Centre Pompidou and Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida at the Louvre. Whereas for a film to be shown at a film festival, there are all kinds of format regulations. In an exhibition, it can last eighteen minutes, be divided between five screens. I think this freedom exists in every era. Diaghilev believed you could bring everything together in ballet; along with Stravinsky, Braque, Picasso, Gontcharova, and Popova, he invented a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. To go back to a Szeemannian idea, this *Gesamtkunstwerk* is possible today through the exhibition where you can incorporate all disciplines. So yes, I think the future is the exhibition.

Phill Niblock

in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
London, 22 November 2010

Mathieu Copeland I wanted to discuss your approach to film and dance. Let's consider your infamous series known as the *6 films* realised between 1966 and 1969 (*Morning, The Magic Sun, Dog Track, Annie, Max, Raoul*), or again the films that you realised in the mid-60s for the Judson Church choreographers and dancers such as Elaine Summers, Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk, Tina Croll, Carolee Schneeman and again Lucinda Childs. Recently I discussed with Elaine Summers the difference between *filmdance*, documentary, documenting dance, *cinedance*, or again dancing on film... I thus would like to begin by asking you how you approach filming the movement of "these people working"—the dancers—in your early work.

Phill Niblock I guess that there are a series of phases. I began working with Elaine Summers (in 1965), who was part of the Judson Dance Theatre. Through her, I began to meet other people at the Judson and started making film. But I was then essentially a contract filmmaker, and I was not at all theoretical. It was a period when it was very hip to have films in your dance piece, so a lot of choreographers wanted to have a 16 mm film segment within the dance piece, and that's what I connected in to.

MC The film was contributing to the dance itself.

PN It would be a segment of a dance piece, and that was something that really came out of Judson. There were a lot of different elements that were incorporated into dance pieces, in particular within the pieces realised by Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer, being on stage with sculpture pieces and people carrying big sheets of plywood... There were lots of activities.

MC Can you discuss the contribution you made to these dance pieces, was it mainly filming dancers?

PN Not necessarily. For instance, there was a piece that I did for dancer Tina Croll. She wanted to have a dancer in the piece paint a red chair. So we set up a particular chair that had been stripped of paint and she painted it red, and that was the film.

MC Was it both the film piece and the choreography?

PN The choreography had nothing to do with that. The film was simply part of the performance. There were all these episodes, and that was one of them in her choreography.

MC I understand that you formed a close relationship with the dancers themselves.

PN Well, I was a "free" contract worker!

MC For instance, you told me of you filming Vernita N'Cognita.

PN She wasn't dancing, she was not a dancer. I asked her if she would be the body in what was my choreography! I thus asked her to do lots of various movements. There was just enough light to see her...

MC You also mentioned the piece you realised for Lucinda Childs.

PN She had been ill and hadn't been working. Yet she is extremely spare, but she considered herself atrocious at the time. So I convinced her to do that piece in the nude, and it was done with Joe Schlichter who was then Trisha Brown's husband, and Sony Ross, who at 78 is still a very close friend. Yet she did not want that film to be shown, and took the print!

MC Can you tell me about your film *Annie*, and how you worked together, did you give instructions to be followed?

PN She was about sixteen at the time. I was choreographing the piece. I think that it was more or less intuitive, and when you look at the film, most of what she does is actually very similar to what happens in *The Movement of People Working*, even though it was long before I had the idea for this series of films.

MC Yet one could argue that most of your early films lead to *The Movement of People Working*. Your photographs of jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington in clubs and recording sessions realised in 1961-1964 were stills of movement of people working.

PN But the jazz photograph was not about movement, it was about people. What is good about these photographs for me as an artist is that they are about known people. So you were not looking at my "art," you are looking at them.

MC Whereas in *The Movement of People Working*, we focus on the movement and make an abstraction of the actual people, especially since you often filmed extreme close-ups of movement itself, focusing on the hands...

PN In the work before *The Movement of People Working*, I was only taking a "picture" and what you see is a picture. It is not about art, it is about these persons within their context. Somehow it is purely a documentation of something that is known.

MC And yet with *The Movement of People Working* you dismiss any possible idea of documentation, through an accumulation of thirty years of movements.

PN Absolutely, this is not about documentation. This is fiction! And that is what I find interesting about the material; I went

to film something we cannot go out in the street and see. If you look at documentaries, they go into a community and shoot that community. They are constructing a history, whereas I am taking segments and bring these back. It doesn't have any real relationship to either the process of their work or what they are making, and it doesn't have any real tie with the place, or anybody's personality. You never see the person, especially in the early stuff when I was shooting hands. You never see their face. And the person is not the hand.

MC Would you agree that the work you did with the dancers at the Judson Church influenced your later work?

PN Sure, and in some sense in a negative way, as I could not stand the artificiality of dance. I was trying to work with what I saw as a form of dance theatre, and in 1968 I began making the series of the *Environments: Environments* (1968); *Cross Country/Environments II* (1970); *100 Mile Radius/Environments III* (1971); *Ten Hundred Inch Radii/Environments IV* (1972). I was slanting them much more toward my visual work, yet it proved too cumbersome to do and I could not do these so often, too many people involved. So I needed to find a way where I could do a concert and still have that presence. That is what started *The Movement of People Working* in 1973. I wanted something that was both very natural and not "dancy-dancy." I wanted something that I could show and play music as a solo act to.

MC Just a projector and a film...

PN And music! The performance was the concert, and I saw the film as being a basic part of the concert. Ultimately, I became known as a composer, rather than a performer. The experimental people couldn't stand the film because it did not have any experimental language, it was extremely straightforward photography, I really suffered that I am really a photographer and I really like this incredible, straightforward photographic work! And the documentary people could not stand it because it was not "documentary," and so it was in a sort of limbo where I did not exist as a filmmaker.

A book by

Mathieu Copeland

the exhibition of a film

With

Mac Adams
Chantal Akerman
Fia Backström
Darren Banks
Eva Barto
François Bovier
Olivier Castel
Philippe Decrauzat
Peter Downsbrough

Tim Etchells
Morgan Fisher
Lore Gablier
Liam Gillick
John Giorno
Philippe Grandrieux
Joanna Hogg
Isidore Isou
Christian Lebrat
Benoît Maire

Anne Marquez
Charles de Meaux
Claudia Mesch
Philippe-Alain Michaud
Meredith Monk
Charlotte Moth
Mai-Thu Perret
Lee Ranaldo
Denis Savary
Laurent Schmid

Leah Singer
Susan Stenger
Phoebe Unwin
Andrew V. Uroskie
Ben Vautier
Alan Vega
Jacques Villeglé
Apichatpong Weerasethakul
Lawrence Weiner
Ian White

the exhibition of a film. A book by Mathieu Copeland. Published in 2015 by Les Presses du Réel – Dijon & HEAD – Geneva. 17 x 24 cm (softcover). 456 pages (16 colour ill.) All texts in English and French. ISBN: 978-2-84066-815-2

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- The Exhibition of a Film by Mathieu Copeland
- Morgan Fisher in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Ben Vautier in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Joanna Hogg in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Philippe Grandrieux in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Peter Downsbrough in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Fia Backström in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Benoît Maire in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Liam Gillick in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Lawrence Weiner in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Susan Stenger and Tim Etchells in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Leah Singer and Lee Ranaldo in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- John Giorno in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Meredith Monk in conversation with Mathieu Copeland

Book Content:

Commissioned texts to François Bovier, Anne Marquez, Philippe-Alain Michaud, Andrew V. Uroskie

Reprints by Isidore Isou, Christian Lebrat, Claudia Mesch, Ian White

Interviews by Mathieu Copeland (unless specified) with Chantal Akerman (Lore Gablier), Fia Backström, Tim Etchells, Morgan Fisher, Liam Gillick, John Giorno, Philippe Grandrieux, Joanna Hogg, Meredith Monk, Lee Ranaldo, Leah Singer, Susan Stenger, Ben Vautier, Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Artists' Pages commissioned to Mac Adams, Darren Banks, Eva Barto, Olivier Castel, Philippe Decrauzat, Peter Downsbrough, Charles de Meaux, Charlotte Moth, Mai-Thu Perret, Denis Savary, Laurent Schmid, Phoebe Unwin, Alan Vega, Jacques Villeglé, Lawrence Weiner

The Exhibition of a Film

Considering both the physicality of film and the different textures of cinema, “The Exhibition of a Film” offers a polyphonic choreography. Not envisaged as a structural or structuralist “epic” film, neither is it a series of sequences following one after another. Each discrepant layer that constitutes the ensemble opens up a whole range of fields of action. “The Exhibition of a Film”, an exhibition for a context, namely a film screened in a cinema and constrained by the properties particular to that social environment, is, at one and the same time, a film exhibited, a film of an exhibition and a filmed exhibition.

“The Exhibition of a Film” is constructed by the reality of the cinema theatre—a generic place—and exploits its modalities: a screen, spatialized sound, a particular duration, etc. The exhibition brings together Isodore Isou’s Lettrist cinema and Lemaître’s supertemporal frame, along with, among others, Ben Vautier’s frame through which the artist signs a fragmented reality, thus reconstituted, of the world. The filming of bodies—dancers and performers—in the body of an institution—the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London where a series of scenes was filmed—confers a cinematographic materiality to the location of the institution. Within the infra-thin of the paratext that are the scores, the performers embody the works, thus producing a different choreographed exhibition. The works as a whole exhibit a finite number of possible arrangements, the dramaturgy for a non-narrative film as written by Tim Etchells.

Situating its reality and materiality brings into question each considered artwork. Is it a work created for a film, or the filmed outcome? To give an account of the exhibition—and thereby create a memory of it—proposes a point of view on the exhibited film, and exhibits the exhibition of a film. The question arises of how to film the work and confer on it a cinematographic dimension. Are we creating a document or filming a document? Or, as Liam Gillick has put it, is an exhibition documentary or fiction? In this exhibition, the works are indexed to, and by, the screen. They become as many props to a film, while retaining their status of autonomous works. For a film to assert its apparent immateriality raises the question of the re-materialization of the work of art—or, as Lawrence Weiner reminds us, of a “different simultaneous presentation”. What is the status of the work and how should it be situated both in objective terms and as an object? “The Exhibition of a Film” denies the physical reality of the object whilst creating a conceptual object. As Pierre Leguillon has put it, we are not in the documentation of a gesture but rather in the fabrication within the images of a particular space for objects specific to that space.

Cinema is traditionally the place to forget oneself, as Morgan Fisher reminds us, and yet “The Exhibition of a Film” asserts the identity of the spectator. The museum is constructed upon the relatively free choreography of the spectator. Instead, and

following Claudia Mesch's analysis, let's consider this social sculpture as a counter-institution. The dark room of the cinema denies spectators both their mobility and their perception of space. On the contrary, "The Exhibition of a Film" invites them to reject their passivity vis-a-vis the film and assume an active role in its construction by concentrating their attention on a chosen work, on the confrontation between the different works and by contributing to creating this mental dramaturgy.

"The Exhibition of a Film" is articulated around reprises and leitmotifs, which give the film its rhythm and emphasize the time and the duration of the exhibition. In this unity of place, space and time, the film end credits become the exhibition's labels. Developed as a different kind of materiality, "The Exhibition of a Film" displays a sensitive architecture and highlights the fact that it could not exist without the artworks that make it be, thus producing an immaterial and lasting object.

"The Exhibition of a Film" could not have existed without the artists which bring it into being—to whom we express our gratitude—and without HEAD – Genève, Geneva University of Art and Design, and in particular its director, Jean-Pierre Greff, who produced it. It was made possible thanks to the HES–SO strategic fund. We would also like to express our gratitude to Anne-Catherine Sutermeister, Director of IRAD (Research Institute in Art and Design) of HEAD – Genève, and to research assistant, Lauren Huret.

We would like to thank Yann Chateigné, Head of the Visual Arts Department, and his team, as well as the Work.Master team, Laurent Schmid and the student body as a whole. Thanks to Lysianne Lécho Hirt, Dean of Studies, and Jean Perret, Head of the Cinema/cinéma du réel Department and his team.

We would also like to thank Sylvie Boulanger and the CNEAI=, Lionel Bovier, Philippe-Alain Michaud, Jonathan Pouthier and all at the Centre Georges Pompidou Museum of Modern Art, Beatrix Ruf, Fabrice Stroun and Sarah Zürcher for their initial and continued support, and Andrea Bellini and all at the Geneva Centre of Contemporary Art, the Biennale of Moving Images (BIM 2014), Andrea Lissoni and Tate Modern.

We would also like to extend our warmest of thanks to all the authors who contributed to this book, to Nicolas Eigenheer and Jeremy Schorderet for their graphic design work, and to Lore Gablier for her unstinting commitment to producing the present publication. Together, we would like to pay tribute to the memory of Chantal Akerman.

Mathieu Copeland

During our last discussion, you told us that cinema is to forget oneself, to be so completely absorbed within the film that one forget one's body.

Morgan Fisher

Yes, at least when you watch an ordinary commercial film. Then you are freed from being aware of your body and from having to think. That is the pleasure of going to the cinema.

MC

Over the past fifty years you have made us look at films looking at films. Your films reveal the structure of cinema through self-reflectivity. Among many others, we could mention *The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2)* (1968) or *Production Stills* (1970). Your question is, quite literally, what happens when you are not a passive, but very much an active spectator. What it is to occupy time with a film, as one would occupy space in a museum.

MF

When you go to a museum, you control your relation to what you are looking at. You choose the paintings you want to look at, you can look at each for however long you want. In the museum context, it's you who determines the duration. You expect to be active. At the movies, the only choice is the movie. Watching a conventional film, you expect to be passive. You are taking a vacation from yourself, from having to think. Commercial movies do your thinking for you. The rule in commercial moviemaking is that they control your relation to every second. How you react has already been determined. You willingly give up the freedom that you would insist on having in a museum. Can you imagine going to a museum and being told that you had to look at a painting for a given amount of time? You would just say, "No, forget it, I'm out of here!" So when you are at the movies, a successful movie, so to speak, you happily submit to it for its entirety. And when a film fails to relieve you of the responsibility of thinking, of being self-aware, then you have to decide whether or not you want to leave. It's not so much about boredom as it is about annoyance, annoyance that the movie isn't doing what we expected it to. My movies fail to relieve you of the responsibility of thinking, some more than others. They don't give the kind of satisfactions that conventional movies do, so people can find them boring, but in principle they are no more demanding than, say, a monochrome painting. It's just that you can take in a monochrome painting very quickly, maybe even in an instant—of course, thinking about it, understanding it, is a very different matter—but to see a movie you have to see the whole thing, and that takes time. Siegfried Kracauer has written on boredom, not as something to be suffered but rather as empowering and liberating. Which, of course, is John Cage's view. It does just depend on how you look at it.

MC

Pursuing structure, I would like to consider *Plaster Glass Glass Plaster*, your most challenging contribution to the exhibition "Waywords of Seeing" that, together with Philippe Decrauzat, we curated in 2014 at the Plateau in Paris. This piece made use of the structure of the exhibition space—the plaster of the walls, the

glass of the windows—in a similar structural way that you use the structure of films in your movies. Thoroughly revealing, in a similar manner that your 2009 exhibition “Portikus Looks at Itself”, in Frankfurt, revealed the exhibition space. Can you tell me what is, for you, the structure of the exhibition space?

MF

I think of an exhibition space as a generative situation. It is the details in the architecture that actually generate my work. This is in relation to my interest of getting away from composition. Then I can say that I did not make the work, the architecture of the space made it. The first time I did a work in relation to architecture, the paintings were done according to instructions. The paintings were L-shaped, and their overall dimensions were the heights and widths of the doors and windows they were hung immediately next to. I sent a paint sample to the fabricator that was middle grey, and didn't see the paintings until two days before the exhibition. The work did not have legitimacy until it was on the wall in the exhibition space. It required being hung next to the doors and windows that gave the pieces their dimensions.

MC

The context is fundamental to your work. May it be the physical architecture of film world—its celluloid, the film stock, the grain—and the architecture of cinema itself, as you proposed with *Screening Room*.

MF

Screening Room is a tracking shot into the theatre that is showing the film. Each time the film is realized, it's different in the sense that the image shows a different place, and yet it's always the same because there is always the same relation between the image and the theatre where you are watching it. I first realized *Screening Room* for a film festival at St Lawrence University in upstate New York in 1968. It was filmed hand-held, moving straight towards the building where the theatre was. As you are looking at the film you recognize the exterior of the building where the theatre is located that you are sitting in. The tracking shot enters the building then enters the theatre. The theatre is dark, just as it is as you are watching the film, but it's empty. On the screen is a rectangle of white light coming from the projector, which is running without film in it. Then there's a slow zoom into the rectangle of light, at the end of which the image looks like the rectangle of light that was on the screen when the camera first entered the theatre. Then the film runs out of the projector, so an image of the rectangle of light gives way to an actual rectangle of white light, just what you saw a picture of when the camera first came into the theatre. So the film moves from being a depiction of a past moment to being the moment that in fact you are experiencing in the theatre.

MC

Could you discuss of the genesis of this piece?

MF

One way I work is to look at an unexamined assumption with respect to a medium. An unexamined assumption about movies is universal “exhibitability”. A 16 mm print can be sent anywhere in the world, and what the audience sees is always the same. That's how you make money with a movie. You make it, and it gets

31

sent out and you receive rentals. *Screening Room* is always the same film, but you have to remake it, so to speak, for each new theatre. You have to spend the money for its production all over again every single time. It never generates money in the same way that a movie made once does. It goes against the model. Speaking in economic terms, this is preposterous, but that's the price for the film to be what it is. Each state of the film names the theatre for which it was made, including its address, and it can be shown only in that one theatre. The title goes on to say that for any other theatre, a corresponding version must be prepared; and under no circumstances can any version of the film be shown on television. So even then I realized, if vaguely, that the film was against the universal distributability of the moving image, that is, its commodification. Of course, this commodification was present in the movies from the beginning, because that is what a film print is, but it seemed less of an issue when you had to go to a theatre to see a film. That's a commitment. Then came television, and now there are cell phones. You can look at a movie anytime, anywhere. You can pause, as if you are reading a book. When you see a movie in a theatre you can't pause it. The old model of having to commit to a movie by going to a theatre is totally gone. I'm against everything that trivializes the experience of watching a film. To me a film is something you go somewhere to watch. Having made the effort, you're committed. At least that is the ideal, although I confess to sometimes watching movies at home.

MC

Considering the reality of the structure of movie theatres, I cannot help but think about the two great figures that are Ben Vautier and Maurice Lemaître. Lemaître offers a fascinating parallel with his "cinema infinitesimal et supertemporel". In *Un programme d'avant-garde* (1970), Lemaître plunges the cinema in complete darkness, inviting the spectators to imagine out loud the movie that is not projected. Ben Vautier with *Personne* [Nobody] (1966) organizes a play to no audience, as he does not allow anyone to enter the theatre, or again his attempt at filming an audience as they enter the theatre, and then to project on the screen them entering the space. The materiality of the space collides with that of the medium.

MF

Thank you for mentioning these examples, which I am sorry to say I am not familiar with. But maybe this brings us to the exhibition that I did at Portikus.

MC

Your work is concerned with the details, and the textures, of the space.

MF

When I visited the space, I was struck by how idiosyncratic it was for a space that was designed to show contemporary art. The lower part of the space was a conventional white space, but in the upper half were many unusual, I could say incongruous, details. From this imbalance, let's call it, came the show. What was in the upper half should be put in the lower half, but upside down, as if it were a reflection. So in the lower half they built an upside-down duplicate of the upper half. I didn't even have to do a drawing.

They had the plans for the building, with all the measurements, and thus knew exactly what to do. It is a very specific response to the space, and in its way was a criticism of the architecture. By reproducing the upper half of the space, the whole space became the exhibition.

MC

“Structure” seems to be such an important concept for you. May we think of the structure of film or the structure of the museum—it’s the architecture, the materials, the inherent politics and relation to the politics...

MF

One way to think about it is to consider Tony Conrad’s film, *The Flicker*. It is a movie, but it’s not as if you are meant to look at what is happening within the frame. It floods the theatre with light. It becomes an index, in the sense that it directs your attention elsewhere. Instead of being absorbed by the image, which is the rule in conventional movies, to create a world that absorbs you and makes you forget yourself, *The Flicker* is an index that points away from what is on the screen, so that you become aware of the totality of the space that you are in. You become aware of the fact that you are an embodied spectator sitting in the space. By showing you the space that you are in, *Screening Room* takes part in this mechanism to a degree, too. A successful movie just keeps you riveted so that you never become aware of the edge of the frame, or of the signs that say EXIT. *Phi Phenomenon* is a movie of a clock I made in 1968. It is an image, but an image that doesn’t take you away to somewhere else. It tells you what you already know. Movies use time to make you forget that time is passing. *Phi Phenomenon* doesn’t do that, instead it shows you the passing of time that movies try to make you forget, so you start to become aware of your body, and become restless.

MC

To reveal is also the principal function of your paintings.

MF

My paintings made in relation to the architecture are intended to make you think about what most paintings keep you from even thinking about. Conventional paintings offer themselves somehow on a similar model as that of a movie. You are meant to think only about what is happening within the confines of a given shape. Of course, it is easier to look away from even a good conventional painting than from a well-made conventional film. You’re aware of the edges of a painting, as you are not aware of the edges of the image of such a film. My monochrome paintings made in relation to architecture are in effect indexes. These are spray-painted, and as such are featureless, and gesture-less. The paintings become an index that directs you to think about things outside of their physical confines. You become aware of the distinction between the confines of the panel, and the wall that it is hung on. This brings us back to *Screening Room*. It ends by showing you the space where you’re sitting, so you become aware of yourself in the space. In making you aware of yourself, it does what *Phi Phenomenon* does, but not in so protracted a way. But as I said, for every place where you show it there has to be a corresponding state of the film. Making even one state wouldn’t pay for the cost

33

of making it, unless you were showing it in a theatre that seats hundreds of people and the theatre was packed. So the film is, to the point of being comical, a never-ending economic fiasco.

MC

The limitation on the “exhibitability” of the motion picture print is a manifesto in itself.

MF

That is a very good way of putting it. The film totally inverts the economic model of movies. Instead of making it once and collecting the rentals from repeated screenings all over the world, you make it over and over again, losing money every time. The more times you make it, the more you lose. And there is the repetition not just of the expense of the production but also the labour. I wish I could say that I thought of this aspect of the film when I first made it, but the truth is that it began with examining the assumption that you make a film once and it is always the same no matter where you show it. Rather than being universally exhibitable, the economic foundation of the motion picture industry, there is this drastic limitation.

MC

It is based upon the structure, the construct, and the concept of filmmaking, and cinemas.

MF

Of an industrially-based product. No industry; no film. When Kodak decided to stop making film, there were some people for whom it was not a problem. They could just switch to digital media. For some of the ideas I have, I need film. One of the things that I wanted to point out is that in film you understand the origin of the image. Peter Kubelka said that film is a stencil. There, in the projector, is a translucent piece of material. In effect, it is a stencil, and what we are looking at on the screen is a shadow. Most films are designed to make you forget the physical origin of the shadow that you are looking at, but nonetheless we know what it is, at least in the general sense. We all know that films have sprocket holes. Even though in a projected film we never see sprocket holes on screen, they are a necessary fact for the film medium to function. This is why sprocket holes have become the emblem of film. As for digital... What is going to become the emblem of digital?

MC

It's binary code of zeroes and ones perhaps?

MF

What a sad thought, and your suggestion exactly reveals the problem. With film you understand the physical origin. It's a stencil. With digital, there is nothing to visualize. The physical origin of a digital image is a mystery. And I think that this is a very significant difference.

Mathieu Copeland

This is my question: if you had an exhibition which was held in a cinema, rather than in a museum or gallery, what kind of exhibition would it be? I'm not talking so much about installing objects in this cinema as saying—here is a cinema, namely a room, some seats, a screen, projected images and broadcast sound. Take all that and make it into an exhibition lasting for one and a half hours.

Ben Vautier

Well that would be a change from galleries where you come glass in hand: "Nice painting you have there!—Thank you!" If I understand you correctly, after pushing exhibition to its limits by emptying it of its content, you are now challenging cinema and you want to subject it to the same thing and find out where its boundaries lie. I could tell you some anecdotes about cinema theatres. One day, Arman, Yves Klein, along with, if I remember correctly, Claude Pascal, decided to have a picnic in a cinema. The Rialto, I think. I don't know what film was on at the time but I do remember that it created a scandal in the theatre. On another occasion, I was at the Nice Cinemathèque with, I think, Jean-Marie Le Clézio who liked sitting in the second row. We wanted to turn round and look for a few minutes at the spectators who were staring at the screen, and then ask them: "So, did you like us?" The idea being that the spectators had seen us look at them, and that in a way made us the film! I seem to think that it might have been Le Clézio who just had the idea, and I played along with it. And then there is also the story about Salvador Dalí who was invited to come and see his film and said: "I can't sit with other people, it's just not possible!" So a gilt Louis-XVI armchair was set up in the aisle so that he could watch the film.

MC

I would now like to turn to an aspect of your art that we have mentioned only too rarely in our conversations: your relationship with cinema, essentially film—both the films that you have been producing and making since the early '60s and your relationship with the cinema avant-garde in the 20th century.

BV

At the moment, I am working on a film where the text, which is every bit as important as the image, reads for example: "Why are you still looking at this?", "This is going to be boring". What I am trying to do is make comments on the images in the film scroll past, in the style of Newsreels. But to get back to the cinema itself, I once made a short film where I filmed people entering the cinema, sitting down and waiting for the film to start. I wanted to project for them the film of them entering the cinema but it did not work technically. One other time, in Marseille, I had found a short, 8 mm, fairly hard-core porn film that I had decided to project on my bare belly while I sat on the cinema podium.

MC

As is the case with all of your art, it reflects a particularly structuralist desire to deconstruct the medium, in this particular instance, cinema and all its components.

BV

Talking about desire, at the moment I have a special relationship with boredom as a subject. Initially, boredom was enemy number

59

one... the last thing you should do is get bored. However after seeing *Last Year at Marienbad*, Warhol's films, and listening to La Monte Young's music, I got interested in boredom as a raw material. Boredom becomes interesting as soon as spectators understand that they are being offered boredom as something new.

MC

You have often talked to me about your relationship with Isidore Isou and Maurice Lemaître.

BV

Isou and Lettrism have often occupied my mind. I do not find Isou's paintings interesting because aesthetically they offer very little new. What does interest me is the question of the ego. The way I see it, in art there is nothing other than ego, in your art, Mathieu, as much as in anybody else's. Whether you do non-art, anti-art, "next-to" art, there is only ever ego. It is always present. And it has to be said, I have never seen such a challenging ego as Isou's. It is almost naivety, an unusual kind of art ego. So, in short, I find Isou important mainly for the way he asserts his ego. His cinema also contains his megalomania, and in this respect, it is authentic and new. I'd go as far as to say that Isou was even more pretentious than Yves Klein. And here, Mathieu, I see that the subject of our conversation has shifted from "boredom" to "pretentiousness".

MC

Isou's texts and books have been very important to you. How did you meet him?

BV

In 1963 I published *Moi Ben Je signe*, and I had received an insulting letter from him. A letter along the lines of "You are nothing more than *ersatz* artist, a Nazi." Then I met him and he was a lot more polite! I followed Isou, but I lived in Nice, and not Paris. So I didn't see him regularly and only met him on two or three occasions. I think he came to Nice to see me. I met with Maurice Lemaître more often. I've always been interested in the relationships between creative people. So I followed the relationship between Yves Klein and Isidore Isou, of which, in *Nouveau Réalisme*, few people were aware. I think it was Arman who pointed out to me the relationship between Klein and Isou. I then found out that there had been a huge discussion and then a dispute between Klein and Isou. At the time, that was tantamount to excommunication. Debord, Raymond Hains, Yves Klein, etc. were all excommunicated. But it should be said that Yves Klein was a man of the moment; he lived with his guns at the ready, and what he was doing was almost pop art. As for Isou, he lived with people from another period, people from the era of surrealism, etc. Klein's vision was more up to date. But I should add here that all, without exception, were looking for innovation as a place to put their egos. As for Maurice Lemaître, I met him in Nice. But I have always thought of him, perhaps wrongly, as an *ersatz* Isou.

MC

And yet *Has the Film Already Started?*...

BV

... is magnificent. Nevertheless, I always found that Maurice never quite measured up to his own genius in this film. He lingers on

discrepant cinema, chiselling cinema, and forgets all about his statements about the boundaries of cinema which can be found in *Has the Film Already Started?* Later, Lettrists like Hachette, Sabatier and Satié reduced Lettrism to its aesthetics.

MC

The Lettrist supertemporal involves the idea of a frame—a term which is absolutely central to your work. According to Lemaître: “The supertemporal frame, which applies to all arts, is a device infinitely open to audience participation, and, in this sense, constantly goes beyond finite time.” In 1964, you produced a poster for total art, representing an empty frame and placing the texts reading *death of art* and *free expression* in parallel.

BV

We had interminable discussions about frames in 1966-67, in Nice, with the Dezeuzes and that crowd. Viallat had said that they were going to deconstruct the canvas. But how were they going to deconstruct it? Dufresne did canvas backs. I too have been doing canvas backs since 1962. We argued over frames and canvases—it was hugely exciting.

MC

There was that magnificent performance in 1973 that you organized on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, where you have a large empty frame on which is written: “*Je signe la vie, entrez*” [I sign life, come in]. By doing so, you proclaim that everything that happens within this frame is your art.

BV

Yes, I did the same thing when I said: “Everything that happens within this frame is a living sculpture.” If you think of all the people who have made empty frames and everything that happens through the frame, you have a supertemporal frame. In the case of a signed empty frame, you actually have a supertemporal statement, but where is the frame?

MC

There is also that magnificent piece by Robert Page, *The Door*, from 1962. The piece consisted of a door and its casement, without any wall. A door that could be opened, an invitation to go through. In his manifesto of 7 October 1962, Page called for a “universal exposition” and declared that “the door qualifies everything visible to be a work of art”. Gustav Metzger concluded his manifesto, *Manifesto World*, also issued on 7 October 1962 at an evening event at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London organized for the *Festival of Misfits* which you attended, with the following words: “The Door by Robin Page is the catalyst of the new aesthetic.”

BV

Of course, that's true, but *The Door* had an issue with Duchamp. I told Page so at the time. In 1927, Duchamp had installed a door in his apartment in 11 Rue Larrey that never closed. Spoerri was the one who told me about it. When you closed it, it would open, and when you opened it, it closed.

MC

A door between the workshop, bedroom and bathroom. When the door between the workshop and the rest of the apartment was closed, the bedroom and the bathroom intercommunicated.

61

When you closed the entrance to the bathroom, the workshop and the bedroom intercommunicated. The door could also remain partially open. As Duchamp said, “the French proverb ‘A door must be either open or closed’, in this case, is clearly wrong!” Finally, the frame and outside the frame! Which takes us to on screen and off screen in cinema.

BV

People have always played around with the myths and the boundaries of cinema... even when you think that someone like Jonas Mekas has very strong views about cinema. I adore blockbusters, and I once told him that I wanted to go and see *Star Wars*. I go for the entertainment, but he was against that. His experimental cinema demands personal investment and, at a particular point, opens the door to infinity. Often when I am sitting in front of the TV, I imagine that what I am seeing in the film might be the boundaries of cinema. The other day, a character in the film, I don't know what it was called, said: “close your eyes”, stay in the dark. I found that magnificent, it sums up the boundaries of cinema. You start by “Please close your eyes” and you leave them in the dark for four minutes. I immediately noted it down.

MC

Getting back to Isou and Lemaître, I am interested in how the extreme avant-garde seized hold of cinema—the most popular medium, and the youngest one at a time—to deconstruct it entirely and reinvent it. In spite of riveting essays such as *Foundations for the Total Transformation of Theatre* by Isou and *Chiselling Dance and Mime* by Lemaître, boundaries appear to emerge when they tackle theatre, choreography, dance, all arts with a time-honoured history. Although they are able to use their genius to shatter the codes of cinema, they do not manage to handle the codes of these other fields with the same critical acumen.

BV

I have projected Isou's film *Treaty on Venom and Eternity* at least one hundred times at Centre du monde in Nice, a gallery, and concluded that his raw material was nothing other than ego. Pure pretentiousness!

MC

Isou, Lemaître and Lettrism in general have had limited impact outside France, and are all too absent from international discussions about film history. And yet the high points of their œuvre are the cornerstone of creative and intellectual thinking worldwide.

BV

I always thought so, and indeed I wrote about it in my book on aesthetics, *Qu'est-ce que le nouveau?* [What is New?], but you must admit that they failed aesthetically. They clung onto their graphic style, and when you mention Lettrism, the general public can often only bring to mind hieroglyphic drawings.

MC

Do you think that Debord went further with cinema than them?

BV

I have had my ups and downs with Debord. I met him for the first time in 1963, when I was sticking up a poster for my film, *I claim first prize for this film in Cannes, open your eyes, look*. Someone

tapped me on the shoulder and said: "It's very good". I said, "Who are you?" And he said: "I am Guy Debord." We sat down in a bistro to have a coffee or a beer, and we chatted about international politics. At the time, my vision of the world could be summed up in the following words: people exist, languages exist, culture exists and we have a right to differences between peoples and cultures. He was into universalism, situationism. I remember having bought all the situationist books and I considered situationism to be a political mistake. I thought it was an intellectual mishmash which had no connection to, for example, the real worlds of the Inuit or Malagasy peoples. And yet, the Situationist International had made an important statement about art and performance that I found both innovative and radical.

MC

Let us finish with Fluxus and *Zen for Film*, the film by Nam June Paik which can probably simply be summed up as being the pure projection of a frame, the frame of cinema and all it stands for.

BV

When you see it for the first time, you feel a shock. The next time, we simply told people: "Sit down, look."

Mathieu Copeland

I would like to envisage with you your radical approach to film-making, and how you articulate your relationship between the environments that are cinema and that of the museum.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Many issues are still mysteries for me.

MC

It seems to me that the reality and the notion of film reels have been an important part of your approach to structuring your films. You have often divided films according to the reels, such as with *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, in which the five reels give the structure to the film.

AW

The structure is a very conscious choice, similar to tracks in music. Even though things are changing with the coming of digital, I like to approach the film through its material. My interest and my background all come from experimental film, viewing the film as a physical medium, in terms of manipulation of the image itself or through the method of projection or whatever. So naturally when I work on a feature film, I cannot help but go through the process of breaking it into reels.

MC

The structure defines and divides, but is also what gives the unifying form to the film. I would, therefore, be interested in understanding how you compose your structures and how it is fragmented.

AW

What I try to highlight is the very nature of film. I make films to express myself. I'm always very conscious about the medium itself. In films I have to be aware of the reels, as I not only look for continuity, but for me the changing of reels is also part of the story—and it matters. It may not be visible on screen, but I like to make it present.

MC

This also reflects how you record sound. You treat sound just as you would treat the characters;; the ambient sound being as present as any presence featured in the film.

AW

Yes, it's about breaking down the elements and how they come together to create this illusion.

MC

Thinking about continuity, and this brings us within the realm of exhibition-making, installing several screens in a given space creates a new unity; it generates a physical environment. Unlike cinema, it is no longer only the unity of time that prevails.

AW

Indeed, and even with a single screen. I got into this by accident. A friend of mine is a curator and she decided to show my work in the gallery. I said, "No, it's not visual art, it is film." Even though when I make film I consider it an art piece, when it comes to the practical side of the art exhibition, I object. But it's interesting how it evolved and how I adapted this to what you mentioned: space and time are different. I have the feeling that in art I engage in a monologue. I'm experimenting, finding out what it is going

to be. But for film I'm aware of the audience, I'm aware of the rules of cinema. You have certain limits of time: ninety minutes or so. We are slaves to the rules of cinema and audiences.

MC

It talks about limits and constraints. You have to be seated, you have so many sources of sound, one source for the image, darkness, and silence is expected from the audience and so on. We often talk about cinema as a being a black room. In your films—one can consider *Tropical Malady* or *Uncle Boonmee*—you plunge the black room into darkness; creating a moment of great depth on and within the screen.

AW

It's all fixed rituals that you more or less follow. And yet, you cannot do more than you sometimes imagine. For instance, a black movie for two hours won't work in terms of theatrical exhibition, but that's what you can do in the gallery or museum space—where you can do anything. I appreciate that aspect, but they're really two different animals. Of course the gallery or museum gives you more freedom, but it does not mean that it is better. Sometimes the rules, the rituals in cinema, are beautiful.

MC

As you did in *Uncle Boonmee*, when you have a sequence of the film only constituted of stills of the characters posing together, revealing the fakeness of the monkey ghost. You said that you did so to remind the audience that it's all a construct.

AW

In many scenes you're really aware that it's an illusion. I think I'm really trapped in this game that I love: of reminding the audience, pulling them into the memory of the cinema we grew up watching.

MC

We could argue that in a museum gallery one is often self-conscious of one's own movement, whereas in a cinema, in a theatre, one loses oneself. As Morgan Fisher reminds us, the construct of cinema makes you lose your body, makes you forget yourself. I'm interested in knowing how conscious you are of the movement of people when working within the museum space, of that choreography.

AW

I only think about this from my own point of view. It's interesting because from my personal practice—in work and in life—there's quite a contrast. In life, I'm rather interested in Buddhism, which is to be aware of oneself. You basically watch your mind, you're aware of how your mind and body work. It is quite the opposite experience that you have in cinema. But somehow, when I make films, I try to keep that approach to remind the audience that they're sitting in a theatre, watching this artificial world. When I make an artwork, it's the other way round. I want people to feel immersed. I don't analyse myself so I don't know why I don't operate in art as I do in cinema... Why don't I remind people that they're watching a two dimensional thing. The most I do is sometimes to show the process of making it?

MC

In a gallery, one has a different approach to the sound that surrounds you, to the image that immerses you. The American

composer and filmmaker Phill Niblock insists on having a large image in the gallery so that we lose ourselves within the grain of the image, as an echo of his desire for one to lose oneself within the overtones of his music. In cinema, all is fixed. You are always within the same construct. Would it be so that a way of addressing your approach to exhibition-making would be in terms of sculpture?

AW

It is, perhaps, more in terms of competing with the people who walk around, whose attention you need. In cinema, you're in control and the audience is seated and confined. But in art, people often seem to have a very short attention span. In a gallery, you are competing with painting and with all that came well before video art.

MC

This always seems to be the crucial point. The main difference is time: the time imparted to cinema is fixed—traditionally between 90 to 120 minutes—whereas in the gallery, it ranges from a few seconds to six hours a day, sometime more! It's interesting to see how to play with that... should it be with a short loop so that even if one rushes through the museum one sees it? Or should it be a few hours film that defies the time we often give to a work in an exhibition? It's fascinating how these pieces can “juggle” with us, the audience.

AW

Yes, and at the same time, it is not so much about the visual itself but more about the process and the concept. It's about reduction. You can go in a cinema to see *Tropical Malady*—it's two hours long and it's an adventure. But as an art piece it would be enough to just express lightness and darkness, the attraction between two men... Let's imagine *Tropical Malady* as an art piece in a gallery: I could make it last five minutes. It comes down to the reduction of the elements to the point where it becomes just a core.

MC

Another consideration of time is the relationship that you establish with the actors in your films. You're extremely faithful to them as most return from film to film. How do you approach this contrast between the unicity of the actor and the multiplicity of his characters?

AW

They are like a landscape to me: a landscape that is obviously changing. You just need to revisit the place, or the person, to see the people aging, the filmmaker aging... All of this is another ritual, this time not a watching ritual but a making ritual.

MC

A ritual that you have developed with the technical team, too.

AW

Yes, the sound, the set designer... They are about references and our interaction with life in Thailand and how we can put that into the movies.

MC

When you mentioned the word “process”, this brings me to an aspect of your work that has always fascinated me: the idea of production. Again, you do this between the industry of cinema

and the possibility offered by the museums. Often, museums enable you to produce both the art that will be shown in the museum, and fragments of the feature film that will be shown in cinemas. For instance, the Haus der Kunst in Munich contributed to the production of *Uncle Boonmee*.

AW

Well, I'm surprised we could get away with that. People still have the "this is not art, it is cinema" reaction. And even though I am now convinced that everything is just a question of labelling, when you look at the institutions you have to understand that they don't operate like that... Funding in art, and in cinema, is very different. So it surprises me but at the same time it helped me expand. I wonder if we can push this practice further. For example, to make a movie—but only as an edition of two or three, or maybe even just one. How would this work... just for one collector?

MC

Films have this democratic nature. We understand them as being able to be seen by all, as a shared experience.

AW

Think about experimental films made to be shared with a small group of friends; sometimes just to feed the obsessiveness of scratching on film! So you create an artwork to release your obsession. I can say the same about me, that I gathered a hundred crew members just for my obsession of film. Looking at it from that angle it may not be so far-fetched to make it as a single edition.

MC

A recurrent trope in your films, especially in *Uncle Boonmee*, insists on the voice, on a filmed life. It's interesting how you circulate around yourself in your films, and yet it is never focused on you. We mentioned the duality between the actors and their multiple characters over time. I would like to know how you consider the duality between you—your personal life—and the film itself... it's all "one", and it's nonetheless separated.

AW

Sometimes it's not about the story. It's more about a certain moment. The story itself may be more like a façade. But within, I remember all of these moments—their construction. This is most important for me.

MC

"How to make the portrait of a landscape as one would make the portrait of a person", is a recurring question in Anna Sanders Films, the film production company set-up by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe, Charles de Meaux and Philippe Parreno. Anna Sanders co-produces your films, too. Your films portray the realities of political concerns, producing the feeling of situations, of persons, of different temporalities...

AW

Anna Sanders represents artists in their own voices.

MC

One of the strengths of a renewed approach to production! The same as how you have approached this in your own way. We discussed how different institutions enable the production of parts of your films. When it comes to the feature films, do you

keep separate what you film for the art context and what you film for cinema?

AW

I have to do it separately. I wish it wasn't so, but I don't know what is to come in terms of being freer in making feature films. The process already dictates how you work: you have to have a script for funding, a certain shooting schedule. So you can't just improvise. With tight budgets you have to plan ahead very carefully.

MC

Moving from post-production to presentation, have you ever considered what would be an ideal cinema for you? Is this a question that has ever interested you? Or is this a precise and given format that is sufficient for cinema?

AW

I recently spoke with Tsai Ming-Liang who shared with me how, to evade cinemas, he dreams of making a cinema in the forest, in the jungle. For me it is the opposite. My movies are about the jungle... I want to contain it in cinemas. I believe that the illusion is really important. It's enough for me that there's this light and screen. I'm interested in the technology within. Again, this is about the "fixed ritual". I also cannot forget the first cinema I went to: a theatre with red curtains! The cinema in my hometown is like a mother ship for me.

MC

Memory, along with rituals, is a central theme in your work. So much comes back in within the actual constraint of where to show them. Did you actually show your films in your hometown cinema?

AW

No, it is gone. Now it's all cineplexes, which is okay, it's basically still a screen in an enclosed space.

MC

The opposite of the possibility offered by the exhibition space, where you can offer different films, different feelings, as you recently did with your exhibition "Double Visions".

AW

It is about a dialogue between pieces. These were pieces produced between 1998 and 2013, all carrying the idea of light and of dreams. I think I gathered them because lately I've been interested in the idea of sleep and dreams as a way to escape—as a way to reflect upon certain political situations in Thailand. I don't think I thought about any of this when I made the pieces, but now I chose them for this space because they echo what I feel now.

MC

And the multiplicity of pieces creates a polyphony of thoughts, of times, of feelings... It's interesting to have that polyphony of several stories happening at the same time, thus fully engaging the viewer. The experience of those thoughts that occur when confronting the pieces one with the other. "Sleeping" and "dreaming" are recurrent in your work. Words so often associated with surrealism. Are you working from your dreams for your forthcoming film?

AW

Not so much from the dreams, more from the concept of sleeping. We will be filming in my home town for the first time. It'll really be something special for me.

MC

Throughout your films you have worked so greatly with the possibilities of the passing of time. I love how you will be able to put within your films the rhythm of sleep.

AW

Not long ago I watched Maya Deren's classic surrealist *Meshes of the Afternoon*... and it's all about sleeping! There's a beautiful synchronicity between the actors and the filmmaker as we see her from her point of view.

Mathieu Copeland

I would like us to discuss the word “Exhibition”, which is the title of your latest film. I understand that it was not its final title until after the production.

Joanna Hogg

It was called “JH Project 3”. It was also known as “The London Project”. I have code names for my films until I have to come up with a definitive title. I find it quite anxiety-making. Once you have the title, it is everywhere.

MC

This word gives a prism to read the film. As such, this could not be more precise, more explicit, and yet it could hardly be more abstract.

JH

It’s true. The same goes for the names of the characters. They remained “H” and “D”, which were my personal codes in my notebooks. To give them names would specify them too much. I wanted them just to be represented by those letters. H is for “husband”. Liam Gillick, who plays H in the film, was unhappy when I decided to call it *Exhibition*, possibly worried that people would think it was a film about him, and that there would be confusion between him as an artist and him as an actor.

MC

And somehow, *Exhibition* characterizes more her, Viv Albertine who plays D in the film. D is an artist; H an architect. I believe that you only met Liam right before the shooting.

JH

That’s right. It was very stressful as I could not find the right actor to play H. I never thought that I would get so far into pre-production without a cast. The production designer made all these costume designs but had no one to dress. I go into a trance until I find the right people. When I finally met Liam, it turned out to be very good timing for him. He was already interested in the problems of cinema, and my film became his way of responding to this. Literally, I met him in a pub in East London the Friday before the Monday we started shooting. I was very nervous as I had already cast him over the phone. I thought, what if I don’t like him? He was obviously nervous, too. So we met and we talked, then we got in a taxi and went to another pub where I introduced him to Viv. They hadn’t met before. This was not at all according to my plan. Here I was doing a film about a married couple who had been together for a long time, and I had hoped to find my couple months before the shoot. But what happened is they got to know each other during the shooting. I believe that it actually worked out since I was shooting chronologically, and so by the end of the film, the couple are more intimate and familiar with each other.

MC

Much of the film revolved around its paratext, and who the characters really are. H is the artist Liam Gillick; that D is the punk égérie from *The Slits*, Viv Albertine. This reminded me of these definite lines from Sonic Youth’s *NYC Ghosts & Flowers*: “Some famous stars were busted by the thought police down on fashion avenue/Impersonating real men/Not knowing who they really were”. The film is interwoven by a sub layer that could never be filmed.

111

JH

Yes, this sub layer was important. I knew I wanted this. And that's what was so difficult about finding the right people. I would meet an actor and think that yes, they would be able to act the parts, and that they would probably do it more easily than a non-actor. But there would be no life to it. There was nothing interesting about that. I like that aspect of casting somebody who is going to bring something of themselves to the part. When you have actors playing artists, it's not an easy thing to act. It's not always successful; I wanted to have those layers that you mention. Sometime Liam and Viv speak in their own words, other times I would be feeding them the lines. There was no rule to that. I never gave them a script, but as we were filming—sometimes just before shooting a scene—I would show them the dialogue written down. But not long enough for them to memorize the lines, just to get a sense of it. Viv and Liam are such different personalities and this shows in the work that they produce. Liam being the rational, intellectual one, and Viv the more instinctive one. That kind of dynamic didn't have to be acted. In a way, I set up a structure where they don't have to act. They just have to be.

MC

How did you envisage the casting? Did you consider other possible couplings?

JH

I met other artists, including Rachel Whiteread. Their response would often be: "Oh no, I wouldn't even consider that," and I didn't want to have to persuade someone. The performative element within the house being so important, I also thought of dancers and physical theatre performers for their body language. As it turned out, Viv does move very well. She's interesting to watch when she moves around the house. I think that both Viv and Liam surprised themselves with how at ease they were in the process. I have known Viv since 1984. Actually, I had been using her as a sounding board, asking her for ideas about who to cast. Of course, you don't think of the people who are sitting right in front of you.

MC

Could you tell me about the filming itself. How long was the shooting?

JH

About seven weeks. Part of the agreement was that Viv and Liam had to be living in the house while we were shooting. It was about getting them both to inhabit the space very naturally.

MC

Let us consider the third character, the house. You were very familiar with the building, and you dedicated the film to its architect, James Melvin.

JH

James Melvin was one of the partners of the architectural practice Gollins Melvin Ward, which was established in 1947. They designed the central campus of the University of Sheffield and Castrol House, a tower on Marylebone Road in London, in the '50s. Mostly commercial projects. Later, around 1956, Melvin built two homes for his family in West London. Then, in 1968, after his children had grown up, he built a house for himself and his wife

on the plot of land next door, which was part of the garden for the other two houses.

MC

It was a house that you have been able to explore and experience yourself quite extensively.

JH

I met the Melvins in the early '90s. Their house made a strong impression on me. If I had not been able to use the house for the film, then there would have been no film. I didn't see it as a location. It was completely the film, with all the sounds. I built the whole film around those sensations of the house, and how you can become attached to the four walls of a home. D says in the film that she feels the love of the couple who lived there within the walls. D and H disappear into the house and the house disappears into them.

MC

Exhibition also brings in the notion of exhibitionism, which is such an important aspect to the film. I would like to envisage the privacy of the film and its public exposure. Most of the film came from your own private life, seen through this double layering offered by Viv and Liam.

JH

I find it very hard to separate my work from my personal feelings. Yet at a certain point the work does take on a life of its own. It is a kind of personal diary, except it is not. If I could bring myself to watch the film, I would be surprised how separate I feel from it. But it's just not something that I want to revisit.

MC

Thoroughly personal, as you even considered casting your husband to play H!

JH

Another casting idea which I was very lucky that I didn't go ahead with!

MC

How did you work with the rhythm, and the pace, of the film?

JH

Rhythm is something that really comes about when you're editing. I like to leave images for a certain duration. Personally, when I watch a film, I like to have time to take things in. Actually, this was a faster pace than my other two films. I worked with Helle le Fevre, a wonderful Danish editor who has also worked on my other films. There was much time spent, particularly with the first third of the film, to get the rhythm right. I am a linear person and I really wanted to make this film non-linear and more dream-like: a play between dream, memory and reality.

MC

The diagrams that you worked with to construct the film are non-linear, a rhizome with multiple branches. One plot would end up in so many possible words. It shows you trying to reconcile the complexity of human relationships, and the linearity of a film.

JH

Yes, that's absolutely true. To add to that, the rhythm is akin to making music, in a sense. And that is why I don't use much music. I like the film itself to be musical. I am really obsessed with sound.

113

A lot of work went on in the construction of the sound and took longer to construct than the image.

MC

As Charles de Meaux often says, sound is literally the hors-champ. Not being in the field, but giving you the field.

JH

Yes, that's so true.

MC

How did you come to the word "exhibition" itself?

JH

I simply saw it written down somewhere and thought, that's it! It was so obvious, once I had the idea.

MC

You begin the film with the word "exhibition", and you end up with Viv talking about her exhibition to come. In the meantime, you have an exhibition of two selves, a reflection of the house. The house is the prism, the mirror, and the glass to see through—it exposes and exhibits. Which brings us to the question of the filming of a work of art, exhibiting it through the film! For instance, how not to think of Valie Export when Viv mirrors the shape of the house.

JH

Of course. And yet, the idea of D curling herself around parts of the house was about her physically showing love for the house and not wanting to be parted from it. It was also about Object Sexuality, and people who fall in love with inanimate objects.

MC

Your film *Exhibition*, and "The Exhibition of a Film" were released at the same time, and are two very different endeavours. Your film is narrative, whereas "The Exhibition of a Film" is self-reflective upon exhibitions and the materiality of film. I was considering the medium of exhibition itself, and how an exhibition can live in the given environment of cinema. Your film sees the word "exhibition" through the life of two artists. As such, both offer an understanding of the exhibition itself.

JH

Part of the challenge of working with two artists as your cast is that they are asking you questions that an actor would never ask. Actors tend to ask, "What was the life of the character before the film? What is the backstory?" Whereas Liam is always asking questions about the art being described. He was concerned with the art itself and how it was going to be seen within the fictional landscape.

MC

And nonetheless, he puts himself out there. This fictionalized modelling could be his real modelling. Another interesting parallel between *Exhibition* and "The Exhibition of a Film" is that both were shot at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. It seemed to me so important that within "The Exhibition of a Film", an institution would be both exhibiting and exhibited, thus questioning the locality of "The Exhibition of a Film". In your movie, Liam, who had been exhibiting and giving so many talks at the ICA, returns to his own stage. A beautiful moment of self-reflexivity, especially with the white screen behind.

JH

These connections between real life and fiction are really the essence of the film itself. The choices made, including the casting of Liam and Viv, are precisely because these mirrors and layers are what give the film a life and complexity which I believe pure fiction lacks.

MC

To conclude, Morgan Fisher recently told us that at the movies, you expect—and are expected—to be passive. Do you believe that cinema is the place to lose oneself?

JH

No. I think it is to find oneself.

Mathieu Copeland

“The Exhibition of a Film” considers the multiple relations between exhibition and film. Cinema gives the exhibition its constraints and format, and if the reality of cinema is that of a projected image on a screen and the spatialization of sound, what is the reality of the museum? I would like to discuss your experience within these two fields, first through the recent trilogy that you have produced, *Unrest*.

Philippe Grandrieux

Unrest is composed of three movements: “White Epilepsy”, “Meutrière” and “Unrest”. Each work consists of a performance with dancers and a film. The film is based on the performance, but it is not a film of the performance, it is a specific work made for film. The film is shot through a vertical frame. *Unrest* takes as a subject anxiety. The title comes from a collection of texts by Joseph Conrad: *Tales of Unrest*. “White Epilepsy” and “Meutrière” both work towards creating a very particular body and the aim of the performance is to produce this body. The film addresses quite different questions. The manner in which the staged body is filmed adds another level to the work. Ultimately, the trilogy will be an installation. When editing a film, we edit in a continuity that constructs a certain relationship with time. Once the film is shot, the editing can begin. In an exhibition space, one can enter, leave, look for ten seconds, return... This creates a floating temporality with a particular set of questions. In this situation there is no experience of totality. Instead, our experience is that of a fragment, with which we are not similarly physically engaged. Cinema makes us captive and presupposes an immobility of the body, whereas an installation presumes the mobility of the body. The rupture does not happen in the same manner.

MC

Cinema generates, and is, an environment. Yet, how can one transpose this into the exhibition space?

PG

This depends on images and sounds. Installations often lack a certain tension with images as they are too often driven by concepts. This is where cinema is powerful. It cannot exist only in conceptual terms. It is essentially concerned with sensation. The power of cinema is being able to connect moments of affect with moments of sensation. This is an aesthetic, emotive, affective and somehow erotic relationship. There exists a sort of conceptual dryness, which considerably limits the possibility of experimenting with images. This is undoubtedly a difficulty, or limit, in the possible porosity between cinema and exhibition. The field of sensation is a site that could be richly shared.

MC

Yet, a conceptual object is extremely sensitive. Consider the retrospective exhibition, “Voids”. In the absolute, there is nothing, and yet the body is real, that is, the body of the spectator, the body of the artist who claims this reality of the void as a work. To sign this nothing charges it emotionally, intellectually, conceptually, plastically and sensibly. Coming back to this double relation of the experience of cinema and the exhibition, I would like for us to

117

consider your experience at the Whitney Museum. When there is a body in space, on-site, a different relationship between the spectator and time unfolds.

PG

Something else occurs through the presence of a body. There is time in the other; the other is not outside of time, the other is in a temporality—this is what creates the relationship. A work of art has a temporality that is not engaged in this relationship. It has a temporality of an enigmatic presence: mute and silent. With dancers, actors and bodies, the temporality of the other builds our relationship to time. Cinema is different as it presupposes that we are captive. We can certainly leave, but if we stay in the screening room we remain fascinated. This is an extremely powerful device, perhaps one of the most beautiful apparatuses that we have conceived.

MC

An apparatus with fixed codes. Morgan Fisher reminded us recently that cinema is the loss of the self.

PG

Cinema is a world in which we evolve, in which we advance, in which we fall asleep. It is a projected world that demands a certain type of abandonment, to forget oneself, not dissimilar to certain forms of hypnosis. There is a fascinating attachment to cinema.

MC

Your films translate this in the sense that you generate an environment in which we lose ourselves.

PG

I do not have much interest in the psychological organization of stories. I prefer to have another relationship to the story, fiction or narration, which is closely related to reading and novels. I think that cinema affects me enormously when it leads me into a world that I do not know, a world that is not mine yet at the same time is akin to mine. That's why I love Tarkovsky.

MC

Sound brings together and unifies the whole, whereas editing and montage fragment.

PG

The paradox of cinema is that it exists in immobility, according to Jean Epstein. Cinema is a mechanism made up of a succession of stills that lead to the fiction of movement. There is, in the very structure of cinema, a question about the relations between stillness and movement, fragmentation and continuity. In this sense, cinema is considerably impoverished, because so often editing is nothing but the laborious attempt to construct a continuous space. Whilst editing should express the relation of intensities between shots, discontinuities constitute a psychic and affective continuity, and not just a narrative one. My work is situated in the belief that cinema can potentially grasp the real.

MC

Whilst envisaging "The Exhibition of a Film", together with Tim Etchells, we considered how to develop the dramaturgy for a

non-narrative film. How a film's orchestration and choreography could articulate the whole to assert a statement.

PG

What you say perfectly describes "White Epilepsy". Part of this work is made as a continuity of affective moments up until a certain moment of rupture. I was hesitant about this, as the film could have been nothing but that continuity. Yet the rupture brings something else that would render what was done as a form of incompleteness of the film.

MC

There is a double relation between the completed film and its future presentation in the discontinuous space of the museum. Your film begins in complete blackness, speaks of the grain and affirms the disappearance of the body.

PG

"White Epilepsy" is shot in deep darkness. I had already worked with this in *Un Lac* [A Lake]. To see the film, for the images to be visible, the pupil has to dilate. This is why there cannot be any stray light in the space—which poses problems in terms of security. The film should be screened in complete darkness, which is almost impossible in cinema, whereas it is possible in a museum. Cinema has this industrial aspect from the outset.

MC

Since the beginning of your career you have continuously oscillated between the exhibition space and cinema.

PG

This porosity moves me. From very early on I was interested in what video made possible. Whilst studying at film school in Brussels, I shot on video. I have always been interested, on the one hand, in the plasticity of images, and on the other, in the emotional capacity that images could contain, how narration reaches such affect. I have always had a problem with how images, sound and editing are subject to narration.

MC

In your films, dialogues are sporadic or rare—at least very precious. Language only intervenes when the image cannot speak anymore, or when the image tells us something else and takes us elsewhere.

PG

Dialogues do not construct the film. *Un Lac* is a film in French, but I wanted actors who were unable to speak French. I searched for a difficulty in the articulation of the spoken language, as if the tongue were slowed down by the mouth. The actress is Czech, the actor Russian, and they do not share the same language. This choice emphasizes the shared history between Czechoslovakia and Russia. To film two actors who are brother and sister in the story and who cannot speak to one another is already an act of decisive *mise-en-scène*. This affirms a certain relation to language, and questions our own relations to orality and the body. These are decisions that organize tensions and spaces, and are relations that interest me.

MC

In cinema, the screen can be divided as "split-screens", yet only one screen is fragmented, always maintaining the same

point of view with more or less interesting results. The museum space can offer a plurality of projected images on a multitude of screens. The viewer becomes the editor. To focus one's attention on several screens simultaneously is often impossible. These choices are not only those of the author, in the sense that the author becomes the viewer and the viewer becomes the author.

PG

Cinema requires us to be in a relationship of dependency to the film. As a viewer, one cannot decide to cut what one sees. We *want* to be dependent on what happens, and what can happen. We fear a potential great threat, or are caught within a great suspense. What will the relation from one shot to the other give me in terms of affective movement? How will my thoughts be deployed in this sensual and sensitive movement? It unfolds in an order that is not only that of the intellect, which divides, organizes and mounts. The sensation also lies within duration and flux. Cinema is akin to childhood. When we do not know, when we are very afraid or when we experience immense joy.

MC

We find in your recent films, yet with a different force, a psychological violence that comes from a certain loss. Your early films were questioning the medium, such as *Via la vidéo* presented in 1974 at the Galerie Albert Baronian in Brussels, or aesthetic considerations, such as with *La Peinture cubiste* that you realized together with Thierry Kuntzel in 1981.

PG

I went through a relationship with documentary that was decisive in the sense that it put into my practice, my gestures, what it means to film. This puts us in a certain relationship to the things that surround us, in a state where we are constantly on the lookout, as Deleuze says. To make a film, you have to be aware of what is at stake within yourself and the actors. The documentary gave me this opportunity to be extremely attentive to everything around me. These tensions construct what I am trying to make: a documentary tension, a plastic tension, an affective tension. I would say affective rather than narrative. This is the world in which I evolve.

MC

The champs and the hors-champs, the frame and the out-of-frame. Charles de Meaux reminds us that cinema is only ever located in the out-of-frame. *Unrest*, as in many of your films, seems concerned with the production of a body, the representation of a body, the production of a body and the bruising of a body... Would you care to discuss your recent experience with the body in space during these performances?

PG

Being able to work within a different temporality is very satisfying for me. With no camera, without having to frame or fragment space, and to be in a direct relationship to the body, with people. This was a new opportunity for me to take action and build. What is beautiful with choreography is that at some point it does not belong to us anymore. Once it is presented to the public,

we cannot act on it any longer. In cinema we control everything, down to each precise frame, whether it is the rhythm or the decisions on lighting or editing. When a film is projected, what is projected will always be the same. The film is recorded and nothing changes. With a performance, one no longer controls anything, you are part of the public, you are dispossessed. Initially it can be alarming as we would like to control things, but at the same time it is a relief.

MC

And yet, even if cinema is recorded, each presentation is unique. There will never be this moment twice, this room, and we the spectators will be different from one moment to the next... Could the expected and the unexpected, the recorded and the live, be of interest to you in cinema?

PG

It is a field of investigation, but always bearing in mind that cinema requires the movie theatre, a projection. It is a device from which we cannot escape. Even with something as conceptually strong as Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*, there is still something that is not achieved. The work recycles and addresses this question within the museum. It is an aesthetic decision, but the experience of a film in cinema is essential. The force of cinema is also its triviality. Films used to be projected non-stop, and different screening times did not exist. One could watch a film three times in a row. I had the chance to meet Toscan du Plantier—someone quite paradoxical—and he said to me: "Cinema: it's the cash register." Cinema began when people were made to pay to watch images. We pay, we sit, and then there is a show. There is something quite brutal about it that I enjoy.

MC

To follow up on the codes of cinema and return to its inherent darkness. This desire to dilate the pupil, as with "White Epilepsy", asserts a physiological relationship to the viewer.

PG

The triviality of cinema is adamant, yet its apparatus is so powerful that we must not abandon it entirely to laborious narration and the feeble psychology of characters. Cinema has a great force within this apparatus. In the darkness of the projection, the surface that is facing you enables a silent journey between your thoughts, the images, your emotions, the light, the sound. Within this apparatus there are opportunities to open paths that are still strong today, the problem is that somehow it has become more possible in the museum than in the cinema. In the museum, you can organize the apparatus as you wish, but it raises other issues such as the relations with the art market—the speculative part of liberalism. Collectors are not on a par with producers. The hors-champs of the museum is a political out-of-frame: the power struggles, the relation with money and politics. Artists are caught up within. The relations between cinema and museum, for once, put certain questions at stake. Fascinating yet decisive questions about this political and social out-of-frame. The relation to economy is the true political dimension.

121

MC

And the credits of a film are the inscription of the economy of cinema.

PG

It is that which inscribes these objects in the spaces of their production, and the spaces of their exhibition.

Mathieu Copeland

The word “situation” is a crucial component of your art. Is it equal to being a work in situ?

Peter Downsbrough

I have a disagreement with the word “in situ”. Everything is in situ. That is the situation at the moment, it’s there, here. You are, it is, we are “in situ”, constantly.

MC

Could you tell me how you first began creating your iconic works the *Two Pipes*, and the *Two Poles*?

PD

I started as a sculptor. A would-be architect who left school, I started making art, sculpture, experimenting, different ideas of materials, spaces, structures... for about nine years. In the meantime, I spent about two years building a studio and a house. The first *Two Pipes* were outdoors and made of metal gas pipes about three centimetres in diameter. The *Poles* were realized inside, made of wood, one hung from the ceiling of the studio, the other one affixed to the floor.

MC

Being parallel and not touching each other, the two pipes and poles define space.

PD

It’s in that overlap. Always eight or ten centimetres apart. The first time I did the piece in a gallery was in 1972-73. The exhibitions I had then in galleries were only the *Two Poles*, and nothing else.

MC

What led you to this radical reduction of means?

PD

I had been interested in architecture, and Mies van der Rohe’s “Less is More”. I started making sculpture when I was twenty or twenty-one, with this kind of energy and thinking that was not always very refined. It still isn’t! When I was building the house in New Hampshire, I was working with steel, making large works. One day I said “enough” and drastically reduced the size. I started making very small objects, reducing things. But I couldn’t reduce to zero because that made no sense for me. So I began working specifically with the space.

MC

Was your desire to reach a point of nothingness?

PD

Not as such. I need to do things physically. But it was getting near to that kind of point... *Writing Degree Zero*: the Roland Barthes book! The trick is to keep a balance between the zero and the plus one.

MC

I would be interested to consider the vocabulary of your art, both in form, and content. Could you tell me how words did first appear in your work?

PD

The book *Notes on Location* is the first time I used words.

MC

Until then, you reduced your entire vocabulary to just the pipes and the poles?

137

PD

And the two lines on paper with the stamp. Then I started to enlarge the vocabulary with the dice, and then the words on the dice. From that, I put the words on the walls.

MC

The words in *Notes on Location* are not typed, but hand written.

PD

Notes on Location is a facsimile of the original notes, published by Ted Castle and Leandro Katz who were publishing under the name T.V.R.T. (The Vanishing Rotating Triangle) in New York.

MC

Notes on Location: but which locations?

PD

The first page reads “9am, 800’ ASL”. ASL stands for above sea level. This was not about longitude and latitude, but the location in height where I was writing from. It still is the question of being here, being there, of position and place.

MC

It is a map of a moment.

PD

Yes, and refers to a larger situation.

MC

This brings us to Robert Barry. Since the late '60s, Robert has been giving the feeling, the sensitivity—the idea—of a work of art. In *Notes on Location*, you define someone through its location.

PD

A person or an object.

MC

Robert would give the quality, and you would give the location, the coordinates on an abstract map. Both of you have in common the use of words.

PD

I’m always thinking of the words as objects composed of letters.

MC

I would like us to consider books, and the occurrences when books and exhibition are one and the same. Should we begin with artists’ books?

PD

I want to interject with the term artist’s book. It’s a book. You don’t say “photographer’s book”, or “writer’s book”, or “scientist’s book”. You say it’s a book, whatever the subject is.

MC

Indeed, yet it’s not the subject, but it’s the nature which is interesting in as much as we are concerned with the location of the art. Is the book the artwork?

PD

For me the book is a work in itself. That is enough. If that work is literature, if that work is art, if that work is photograph: that is what it is.

MC

Should we consider the page, and attempt an adequacy between the page and the space.

PD

The book is the space.

MC

Where is the art within the book as a space?

PD

The book is the work. It holds together as art, and it's an object.

MC

Your books are not the document of what exists otherwise.

PD

No, they are the work itself. Maybe that is the criteria.

MC

When Lawrence Weiner realized his first artist's book with Seth Siegelau in 1968, he claimed that, "This is not a book, this is an exhibition". This consisted of twenty-four sculptures, written. Everything comes from the words, and, as such, these are sculptures.

PD

It comes from and is dependent on words.

MC

Could you tell me about the words that you use. Do you have a personal lexicon?

PD

My vocabulary is quite limited when I get working. I am trying to use the word as an object, together with my obsession with the question of time and space. What time is in terms of being a dimension in its own right, both a container and a contained at the same time. That is the complicated aspect.

MC

How do you approach this adequacy between words and time?

PD

I'm preoccupied, and confused, between the words and the time. There is place, time and these operative words: "here", "there", "in", "out", "and", "the", "then", for example. They all are contingent. I'm trying to figure out a way of articulating the question of time and place, where place is a basic three dimension, and time essentially the fourth. But it's a complicated situation because, again, it is both a container and the contained.

MC

As words are objects, what is the materiality of that object?

PD

It's made of either the vinyl adhesive letters I put on the wall, or the metal ones that I put on the floor or on a pipe.

MC

As Robert Barry once wondered, where do words come from? They have a specific meaning in language.

PD

Words come from the language. I use the words I use because they seem to fit and be able to articulate, or at least make an attempt to articulate, what I'm thinking about and how I see things. Robert Barry uses totally other words because of his ideas about it. Lawrence Weiner, too. We have all different attitudes. And the words are what can try to convey my attitude.

MC

I find extremely beautiful the adequacy between words and time. With time, we have space. So, how do words articulate space? Is there an adequacy between the poles that divide the room and the words that articulate the room?

PD

When I started using more words, it was very much a question of *in* the space and *in* the time. There wasn't a sculpture that was there that you would walk around. You had a sculpture that you would walk through. Therefore you entered in a kind of dialogue, dance—whatever you want to call it—with the work.

MC

How do you envisage the meanings of these words?

PD

A word is taken out of context when it's just used as a word. All words have multiple meanings and multiple nuances. It's the context, meaning the sentences that the word is used in, that defines and makes it "precise". When a word is taken out of its "normal" context and recontextualized in a space, how does it function? I have my ideas why I did what I did. But the spectator has to have his own ideas. Whether they correspond totally with mine or not, that's not a problem.

MC

I would like us to envisage the polyphony of words in space.

PD

You're going to have to define polyphony for me.

MC

The polyphony of different words that occur in a given space. The words do not add up to one sentence. The sentence is the space; it is what is defined. I am somehow trying to locate how all these words, all these voices, coexist together in space.

PD

The words, as words do in a sentence, interact with each other. Here, they may be stripped bare of some other words around them. They are isolated, but function with the page or with the wall. They are a beginning point to start thinking and talking about things. They are not an ending point. Words are vehicles. They are the common vehicles in and of daily situations.

MC

Is your vocabulary still expanding, or is it rather fixed in a definite form?

PD

It's got slightly reduced. At the moment, I'm making pieces with no words. That's fine: it comes and goes. I am doing some work on paper with what I call "word strings".

MC

Is there a font that you use?

PD

I use Helvetica. I did some "double word pieces" in the early '80s in which I used both Times Roman and Helvetica. Helvetica occurred at a point in which, in terms of typography and thinking in the world, there was a shift. That was a specific series of works. But now it's always Helvetica.

MC

Have you ever thought of designing your own font?

PD

I have, but I did not pursue that. Certainly it would have been an exercise, as my own font would have been a slightly modified

version from this or that so that I can call it mine. So what? I'd rather work with found material.

MC

We have talked about the space of the book, the space of the wall, and now I would like to speak about the space of the film.

PD

With the photographs, it's always analog, 35 mm. With the films, I use the format of the camera. The film is the window I'm looking through over the city. I don't always have a preconceived idea of what to do. There is a situation that would be interesting to film, so I film it. In the same way that I take photographs while walking around the city.

MC

When do you choose which words will be used? During the filming, afterwards?

PD

They come afterwards, whether I think I need to have some words, or I want to have some words. Whether there is some music, whether there is some wild sound, whether there are spoken words.

MC

Are you interested in the immateriality of the projected words?

PD

They are not immaterial. They are light, they maybe something else, but they are there. I'm interested in the words, and then the movement.

MC

When we worked together for "A Film to Be Read", your strings of words became the link between all of the works that made this exhibition be. It was the unifying factor. It both had its independence, its unique reality, and also was the link between one piece and the other.

PD

The word strings run through the entire "show".

MC

Referring to "The Exhibition of a Film", it is fascinating how the words define the space of the screen. The words literally sit on the very bottom, on the edge, of the screen. That is something that could only be achieved with the precision of digital cinema.

PD

To run along the edge, to fall over the edge, to be on the edge: this is essentially that basic attitude.

MC

Can you tell us about the specific words that you have used in "The Exhibition of a Film"?

PD

These/those are the words I use.

MC

You create one line of words that echoes with one line that then get dissolved into another.

PD

It is about the space, and an attempt at articulating space and time.

MC

Spoken words are yet another aspect of your work, another part of your vocabulary.

PD

The first audio work I did, in 1977, was published as a 33 LP record, *FROM*. It was released by the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven in 1982 at the same time as *OTHERWISE*, a record by Robert Barry. I used music and words. The music and the words were mixed together, slightly differently than now. The earlier audio works were two people speaking words, a fractured dialogue that didn't make sentences as such, "from" "here" "and" "there", "or" "as".

MC

In "The Exhibition of a Film", your first contribution was a series of animated Word Strings on the screen to be read, the second were your words spoken by the dancers, and the third and final occurrence, the words still spoken by the dancers but disembodied from their body, fragmented by F.M. Einheit. To read, to speak and to hear!

PD

It makes sense in a film to use the visual and audio elements that constitute the film, mixed with other things.

MC

Your words spoken are often recorded to the soundtrack of the city. F.M. Einheit was then working on recording Munich, which became a perfect occurrence!

PD

Because the city noise is not about "music". The question of "here" or "there" is touching something that is more real than music. The sound from the city is a very specific, real situation. We go in all kinds of places with the music. That is real, unreal, virtual: fine, that can be interesting, too.

MC

Does time orchestrate the words?

PD

There were phrases built up, dropped, edited and cut. I keep wondering—and I would like to do it some day in the recording: What would happen if I cut the word in half and then pick up the other half thirty seconds later?

MC

Do the words written on the wall and the words spoken in the recordings have the same materiality?

PD

For me, whether it is in steel, aluminum, vinyl, pencil or audio, they are coming from the same place and they're trying to get at the same place. I don't place a hierarchy there. The vocabulary stretches across the board, and can be used in different media.

Mathieu Copeland

In your exhibitions and your performances, you have envisaged over the years text and language in a wide variety of different forms, may these be readings, publishing, CDs, appropriated texts, slide shows... I wanted us to discuss, today, words and language, and to focus our conversation on the notion of polyphony.

Fia Backström

It is funny you mention the word polyphony, because I am part of a group called Group guattari. Three years ago we went to the Clinique La Borde, a psychiatric clinic south of Paris, which was founded by the late analyst and anarchist Jean Oury. He was influenced from meeting François Tosquelles, one of the creators of institutional therapy, who was a psychiatrist and an anarchist active during the Spanish Civil War. Félix Guattari worked at La Borde, which functioned as his experimental laboratory for his political and philosophical thinking. Here Guattari developed his form of institutional therapy and created the term "transversality" to think about collective formation in political action and therapy. Jean Oury employed an overlapping term, "polyphony". One of the main questions that I have been preoccupied with in my work is the terms for the formation of collectivity. How do we come together? Language of course is one of the main collective tools for sharing, but body and presence are also very important. So I've become very interested in thinking around how language operates on corporeal terms, and through other kinds of fluidities that might be a-signifying, like love or time.

MC

Your contribution to the Whitney Biennial in 2008 was a visual-verbal environment deriving language from commercial stock images.

FB

Well, for the piece, which was titled, *Let's Decorate, and Let's Do It Professionally!*, I searched for the word happiness in the Getty Image online database. A number of images came up that had been tagged with the word. They were also tagged with a group of other words. I invited the curators to participate in a clay workshop. To initiate the workshop, I gave a lecture-performance based on these images and the words that the images were tagged with in order to be searchable. I then provided them with a list of these words, a poem of sorts, and asked them to choose and create words in clay. They discussed their way through the list and went to work. I had been studying Reggio Emilia pedagogy, in which children are treated like artists, so I encouraged them to feel and experience the material, to give them their own agency in this perhaps polyphonic process. I was acting a bit like a kindergarten teacher, engaging them to explore different typefaces, and the surfaces of the clay on the letters.

MC

And what was the semantic polyphony that constructed this piece?

FB

The word "together" was prominent in the list, maybe it is seen as a more neutral, or business way of denoting collectivity. "Communal", on the other hand, speaks more to the romanticization of coming together, especially in some parts of the art world. So the curators went for the word communal although it was

not on the list. As they were working on the letters, I suggested they could switch to “commune” or “communism”, but they did not go for that. In addition, they chose to produce a few other expressions from the list such as “toothy smile”, “focus group” and “Caucasian appearance”.

MC

This approach of working within the museum as a production site reminds me of you singing lullabies to artwork crates in the storage of a museum. Again, a piece where language reveals the structure of the museum.

FB

Oh, this piece was realized for a magazine. I asked to be photographed with the crates in the Whitney basement. On the crates, language snippets were printed like FRAGILE and other messages to the handlers. Umbrellas were stencilled on the boxes against rain, which reminded me of Magritte. I also thought of his painting *Manet's Balcony*, where bodies are transformed into wood boxes or coffins. I had brought small multi-coloured plastic sculptures that we placed round as an audience. I went on to sing this melancholic Swedish folk lullaby about a troll mother who is putting her eleven troll kids to bed, tying their tails together, while singing the most beautiful words that she knows: “Ho aj aj aj buff, ho aj aj aj, ho aj aj aj buff buff buff, ho aj aj aj buff”. These words are nonsensical; they mean nothing. But these are the most beautiful words that she knows. So I’m sitting there among the casket-like crates with abstract master works by Calder and Pollock in them, singing this lullaby of abstract words, that kind of liminal space of language where words mean something, but also mean nothing, and cadence is primary.

MC

How did you begin working with text?

FB

I can’t remember. I have always been interested in language. There were personal events that made me acutely aware of language operations that changed my relation to it, but I have always written and been interested in poetry techniques, which I have also used in my visual work and for performance scripts. I’ve been a wannabe poet as long as I can remember, and I’m attracted to the wannabe in it. I remember this cartoon that I did when I was a kid, “Plop the Drop”. Each strip was about a drop of water that was fearfully dangling from the tap, or was hanging out with the other drops in the sink. It was a fluid kind of formation that moved between being engulfed into a collective and being a singular drop. That’s polyphony for you.

MC

Lee Ranaldo recently told me that being part of a quartet allows you to relinquish a big part of the ego. How do you situate your ego within the collective?

FB

The art world, or the commercial art world, rather, is quite narcissistically driven. But when it comes to collectivity, one has to give up one’s ego to become part of something else. I think the question of how to do so brings us back to polyphony.

145

In a polyphonic collaborative and collective form, you don't give up your difference, instead you turn it into a heterogeneous force. In the works that I did for the Whitney Museum or the Venice Biennale, there are differences operating at the heart of what it means to come together. In the last years, I have started to subject my own body more directly into the process, and not simply orchestrating collective situations. I recently did a show in Sweden with Malin Arnell and Imri Sandström. We wrote together in Google Docs. It's a great technology because you can write simultaneously and collectively—organically grow a text. It became very difficult to understand who wrote what. We became unsure of whose voice was speaking, if it was mine, Malin's or Imri's. All language is of course borrowed as in ready-made, but when spoken or written it is coming directly through specific bodies, which makes it specific and collective at the same time.

MC

You have mentioned the work that you realized for the Venice Biennale. In this piece you redefined nationality through spoken contributions as an affirmed desire to escape the national pavilion. Your piece was disseminated throughout the Giardini. Is being hidden and scattered a part of forming a collective?

FB

Well, at Venice, for the work *BORDERLESS BASTARDS—multi-culti abc*, each nation's representing artist is supposed to stick to their territory and not breach borders, so to speak. The project included at least three levels of collectivity. First, I had conversations on perspectives of national identity with a group of five to six people each from ten different countries who were somehow connected to that country, though not necessarily through citizenship. That group came about organically in a networked way, through friends of friends. After the end of our conversation, I asked them to choose a public sculpture that would signify what we had spoken about, which represents the second collective level. I asked that the sculpture would neither be related to a hero nor an historical event, but rather be of a common person. I then selected one for each country, and produced ten man-sized digitally printed aluminium cut-outs. It is in the placement of them that the third level occurs—the collective action of solidarity from the artists in the national pavilions. I negotiated with them to allow me to breach territory, to place the sculptures on their respective land. So, to come back to your question, the scatteredness and hiddenness were generated as an effect of the process and by the layout of the Giardini, where most of the national pavilions are located. The Biennale is a big operation where cultural departments of countries are involved in the decision-making. But we all know that without the artist's consent there is no work, and all but one ended up letting me place the sculptures. All the conversations were edited down to fifteen-twenty minutes for each country to be activated in a walk around this imaginary geography.

MC

You mentioned that after the Whitney and the Venice Biennale pieces you began putting "the body forward". What is your approach to the body?

and processed. Companies such as Amazon use algorithms that interpret all our consumer actions and serve us back our interests. Some may be off, but most results are uncanny, they seem to know more about my desires than I do. But even if they are on point, they are not equal to my desire and my subject. There is a gap between the two...

MC

The machine providing a feelingless feeling, and of course feelings relate to your contribution to "The Exhibition of a Film". A polyphony of conflictual feelings...

FB

...or compound feelings that lack a name. That piece was an attempt to map a subject through its fleeting feelings via a daily practice. To name feelings is to create the subject and the object. Feeling words are a way of making that split, whereas affect is sticky and exists in a collective space hovering in between us.

MC

Which echoes your contribution to "A Choreographed Exhibition", a collaborative piece between you and Michael Portnoy, where you brought together the "primal and animal" dance and the dried code from the stock exchange. It created through language a beautiful textual sensitivity, the texture of an abstract feeling. I would now like to discuss another important part of your artistic engagement, your approach to education.

FB

Education is a tool for collectivity, how we come together in a room and produce knowledge. There are many interesting questions about what knowledge is, and how it comes about in relation to nonsense and the body. You can do classes online, it's very convenient to sit at home with your laptop. But to me, to be in a classroom comes down to our bodies in a practice of meeting weekly together over a few months, and in each other's presence, creating energies, knowledge. People begin to articulate and get empowered with their thoughts and ideas. It's not dissimilar to artistic processes in that sense. The classroom situation, students and I become the material. We're co-creating. I don't want to imply that I am not an authority, unavoidably I am in this context, but the process is not authoritarian. The question is what knowledge is. Is it something that is treasured, and that we can possess, something that we can dial in and transfer to someone else? I believe knowledge, rather, is created between two or more bodies in the moment when we are there present for each other, working. I am older and have some experience, of course. But the students have other experiences, and all kinds of languages and ways to relate to the world. Together, something happens that one can call knowledge.

MC

And from education to presentation, I would like to ask you, What is your relation to exhibition-making as an artist?

FB

Hmm, "Exhibition" is such a complex term of what it is to show something framed, while reflecting on the act of showing itself. There are so many parameters to latch on to: the spatial, the

temporal, the structural. I haven't done an exhibition over the last two or three years, instead I have focused on collaborative processes, but of course I/we did have to contend with what an exhibition is at many points. An example could be the collaboration I did at Index in Stockholm last October called, "Kapitel, Kaput, Kapital, Kapitulera, Capitulum: header of a text and a part of the arm—a collaboration among others". The curator asked us at one point if what we did could be called an exhibition. Of course! We were departing from the terms of what an exhibition is, all these activities that we do relates to the format of what is perceived as "an exhibition". Our activities as artists would become meaningless if we don't have any reference points to the exhibition as a format, what it is and how it is conceived. For example, in the case of this collaboration, we changed the opening hours in relation to our presence working in the space. We were working in the exhibition, writing together and moving around the material. Everything was in constant movement, the work became its own materialization in both language and in the materials that we used such as transparencies, overhead machines, light, mirrors, projectors... As you walked through the exhibition, you would actually change the space, the exhibition, with your own body. You would block some projections, as other projections would start to show. The exhibition never came to a stasis. From the first to the last day, time was like a river in which the three of us, with the audience, swam in different ways. We came up with this word that I'd like to promote "densification". It is an event, a performance, and a Happening in one. During our densifications our work process was concentrated over the course of a couple hours using a script, rather than the scenarios spread across the whole day or week.

MC

As Michel Claura wrote, the exhibition does not finish when it begins! For you, an exhibition would be an umbrella term, the means to encompass all your activities in a given time?

FB

It operates surely as a framing device of heterogeneous actions, though not necessarily in a compact, delimiting way. For example the project and exhibition titled, "Studies in Leadership", from 2009, was realized across four instances, in four different institutions over the course of a year. This was a way to structure an exhibition across time through various contexts, such as art institutions, an art fair and a university class.

MC

"Studies in Leadership—the golden voice" was the incarnation of this series at the ICA in London, in May 2009.

FB

Yes, "the golden voice" was the second instance. The whole project was turned away from the collective, looking the other way round to the leader. The leader we get depends on the kind of collective we have, or if the collective chose to have no leader at all. This section or instance was focused on political and commercial rhetoric, the shifted language used around voting and consuming collectives. There were video analyses of public speeches that were broken apart and transmitted in the space,

149

broad­sides scanned from public speaking handbooks, and various events, such as a political economist analysing specific rhetoric strategies of Boris Yeltsin and Hillary Clinton. There was also a speech coach who taught me and the visitors public speaking of the rallying form.

MC

And thus, in generating language you envisaged ways of dealing with language.

FB

This is a very coded form, where meaning is not only what or how you say it, but also how you move your limbs, face, intonation and rhythm. You would have to engage your body in specific ways to be convincing when you speak. Political public speaking might not be poetry, but it surely engages many of the same parameters, though to create and amass a collective of voters puts very different kinds of pressures on language.

MC

All of these examples engage the institution in different ways. What is for you the relation between an exhibition and an institution?

FB

For reasons that are both personal and global there is a rupture in the way I work from 2011. Until then, a lot of the work was about getting deeply entangled with the institution. As you mentioned earlier in relation to the Whitney piece, the institutions need to be anarchically treated to deal with the power relationships. The work ended up productively antagonistic by putting myself into these convoluted situations. I was engaging with my forehead up against the institution, which was partly necessary, but these processes of refusal were also exhausting. Through my own experiences with political engagement with different groups, I realized that I didn't have to go head-on with the institution and come out with a bloody nose. One can walk round instead; there is a lot of space to work with there. I don't know yet what this space is or how it works. I will have to think about that in relation to what is an exhibition.

Mathieu Copeland

I would like to talk to you about “waste” and “indexed objects”, two terms which shape your work. This idea of “waste” has deeply influenced my thinking about your recent work and is probably central to conceptualising any work of art. The idea that a work is simply the waste product of a thought puts the focus on the fact that the thought is the work. And this naturally leads us on to the act of indexing. By calling it waste, we are already indexing it.

Benoît Maire

Decisions to produce objects mean that other objects are produced as a by-product. So why not keep these by-product, which are lost and to be discarded—these waste products of decided objects that know no name. As they have never enjoyed the status of existence, they escape the ontological classification of objects. They are merely potential objects which are then withdrawn. I have decided to keep them and, by indexing them, give them a status. There are several ways they can be indexed. You can index them with an article, a prefix or a suffix. You can also index them by a word or concept. That is what I do. The first indexing could simply be by pointing at it with a finger. The first time I indexed my objects I simply put a sticker of a hand on top of them. And not just any hand! The hand of *John the Baptist* pointing at sky. This is the idea of transcendental indexation as developed by Alain Badiou, which allows us to measure the power of the appearance of an event. It is a measurement tool. I saw the perfect illustration of this kind of transcendental indexation in the gesture made by Leonardo da Vinci's *John the Baptist*. So naturally I started indexing my objects using this sticker. I then indexed them with a sticker representing a wing, the wing of the announcing angel, also by Leonardo. Leonardo is pretty gifted when it comes to stickers... After that, I indexed them by using self-adhesive plastic letters which combined to make words such as “the”, “those”, “forgotten”... For your film, we decided to index a head that was almost a waste product. That was when I suggested a new type of indexing that appealed to me, indexing by fall. You let the head fall and its fall was the source of its stigmata—a piece of carpet it picked up when it hit the floor, a crushed eye—and this is what indexed it. Indexed objects are waste in practice, while decided objects are named.

MC

Indexed objects are not named but characterized by their length, width, by everything that makes them what they are.

BM

Exactly, their material characteristics. The backup plan is linked to the materialistic belief that retains the material properties of objects. Indexing addresses the fact that these waste items lack a nomenclature and it helps to store them. Given that they escape classical ontology, we need indices if we want to reference, classify or store them. Indices are used to save them, to include them in a backup plan which, in my most recent exhibitions, I have called “letre”.

MC

Ultimately, all works are waste. They are a waste product of thought, of desire.

BM

It's interesting to differentiate between decided objects and waste. In an exhibition, waste objects are abandoned in space. All that they express is this abandonment, their detachment from the decided object. In this case, is a work a waste object? I do not think so, because a work is definitely a form of expression, but it is inseparable from a particular direction, and this makes it a guided expression. It is this process of guiding expression in practice (in this instance, artistic practice) which both differentiates it and gives rise to different waste objects depending on choices that are made. I like to think of raw expression as being like chucking garbage out in front of you. But a work cannot be reduced to this type of expression, because it arises from choices which allow it to become more clearly delineated and separate it from its potential being. To all intents and purposes, the boundary between the waste object and the decided object is a fairly fuzzy one. You can still take a waste object for a decided object, and vice versa. However, what I am interested in is questioning, from a philosophical point of view, the boundary between the two and seeing the decided object as an object shaped by guided expression. This decided object, this work of art, has become cut off from whatever else it could have been, and during this process has generated waste products.

MC

Let us now turn to *Repetition Island*, the feature film that you shot in 2010 in 8 mm. Can you tell me how that film came about?

BM

In *Repetition Island*, historical characters meet in Paris and relive their entire lives in a loop. The film also introduces another character, Cordelia: the girl with eternal youth who never grows any older as she is a concept. The story is told on an aesthetic level—the idea is to explore John Keats' love for a concept. Søren Kierkegaard explains to Keats that the girl does not exist, but to no avail, Keats continues desperately to try to seduce the concept of Cordelia.

After the failure of the first attempts at filming which involved shooting in the street with people I happened to meet and to whom I gave the script, finally, in 2009, I decided to make the film with some actors and non-actors, and a small crew of four people in charge of the sound and the image. It was quite faithful to the story, to the screenplay I had written.

MC

Why did you decide to shoot in 8 mm?

BM

I wanted it both to be and to evoke a memory. The memory of the repetition of these characters.

MC

8 mm is quintessentially amateur cinema. It's the film people use for childhood and holidays.

BM

It is the format of our memories. The film lasts one hour. You always need to keep to a particular length.

MC

"The Exhibition of a Film" lasts for 90 minutes, the standard length of a feature film. When we first started thinking about it, we had

153

decided on 35 mm. We felt we ought to choose the materiality of celluloid given that our endeavour was exhibiting a film.

BM

In cinema, different formalist approaches exist depending on the object in question. Cinema generates formalist approaches based on a desire for an object which may be different from the approaches used by people who make films possibly like yours, or like mine, or in films made by visual artists. In a sense, what we want is to work with formal approaches that do not exist. And yet, there would seem to be any number of preordained formal approaches in cinema. In our case, the formal approach that emerges and will go on to structure the film comes later, when we are shooting.

MC

Apparently there is a huge amount of scripting in your film. The film has also gone on to enjoy a very varied life. Raimundas Malasauskas, for example, borrowed its title for his exhibition, "Repetition Island", at the Pompidou Centre in 2010, and your entire screenplay was included in the first "Exhibition to Hear Read" which I curated in 2011. It would now appear that the exhibition is the ideal format for its repetition. What else has come out of this experiment in film?

BM

The Shepherd, a short film shot in super 16 mm which revisits the concept of Cordelia and associates it with Glenn Gould. These two characters come into contact through the empathy embodied by two shepherds, one young and one old. The old shepherd is played by Lou Castel, the famous actor from Marco Bellocchio's film, *I pugni in tasca* [*Fists in the Pocket*], released in 1965. He is a very powerful screen actor. In the film, the shepherds place their hands on the shoulders of the characters at certain points and this contact serves to transmit energy. The shepherds give the characters the energy they need to cope with their repetition. This short film was designed as a preamble to a second feature film. Initially, I wanted to produce three films that would address, in turn, aesthetics, ethics and religion. *Repetition Island* addressed aesthetics and took the philosophy of Kierkegaard as its starting point. Ethics was to inspire storylines about commitment. Religion was to be called *Love Money*, the title of a TW Funk Masters remix from 1980. But I lost my appetite for the project, as I had other formal concerns in sculpture to occupy me. Nor did I have the resources or a scriptwriter who could help me tackle the script which is, after all, the formal mainstay of mass cinema. These days, if you have no script, you cannot produce a film even on a minimum budget. So I somewhat lost interest and I am now concentrating on a whole variety of different cinematic experiments.

MC

In *Repetition Island*, you create a visual and verbal language which goes beyond pre-established canons of cinema style.

BM

I think that I have managed, with this film, to create a situation and to have experienced it myself. However, my aim now is to annul time through film: to perceive an object in a second, even

if the film lasts one or two hours. The aim of cinema, in my view, is to offer immediacy. I see it as an apparatus to which the spectator must connect synchronously: much like a mollusc latches onto the hull of a boat, film and spectator must be united throughout the screening. Many “auteur” filmmakers say that spectators should be able to think during a film, but I think the opposite. Ultimately, the time for thinking comes after the film. A film experience is a bit like getting screwed and consenting to it. In making films, what I needed to do was to work towards my object via a screenplay, but I failed because the screenplay is one of the tools you need if you want to achieve the synchronicity of the spectator with the film, their momentary coupling. I later shot *Spiaggia* in Italy with a screenplay I co-wrote with Elsa Boutault-Caradec. But as I could not bear the thought that the screenplay might be read, I decided, at the editing stage, to replace all the dialogues by subtitles, cut-and-pastes of philosophical quotes which summed up and essentialized the different situations experienced by the film’s protagonists.

MC

You were indexing speech.

BM

Indexing allows you to store items, yet here it was used to idealise and to reduce everything to its essence. In a sense, I essentialised speech by philosophical quotes which replaced long speeches. What happens is that a character articulates four or five speeches, and only one of them is subtitled, and it alone condenses what has been said. It requires an abstract or general level of thinking.

MC

Given your fascination for this idea of waste, don't you think you could get a book out of all these unfilmed screenplay wastes?

BM

You have a point. I have a lot of material now. When I edited the screenplay for *Spiaggia*, I took the speeches and stage directions and added all the different kinds of indexing that we find in the film: finger and wing stickers and stuck-on words such as “repetition”, “the”, “those”, “forgotten”, etc... This text, effectively an *a posteriori* screenplay, is different from what we normally think of as a screenplay and includes all this indexing which makes this film one of my biggest pieces of waste!

MC

Polyphony through the paratext and the emotive experience of reading it. Readings of the text, the subtext and the image are all offered in parallel.

BM

You could say that these elements are superimpositions.

MC

And there is also the way these superimpositions echo each other.

BM

This is something that spectators can think about.

MC

“The Exhibition of a Film” brings to mind, amongst other things, the idea of cinema as a place where you can lose yourself. The spectator, working on several levels, has the choice between accepted passivity or active concentration. This brings us back

to a different formalist approach towards exhibitions and works. So let's talk about a broader form of polysemy, that of the exhibition. How do you see the reality of the place of exhibition?

BM

Dimensions are the keystone of a place of exhibition. And film adds a fourth dimension, that of time, which can upset the receiver's time. I am interested in the use of duration in this sense. A film is an object caught in a duration. I now present my films in objects. I show them, for example, on a computer screen. A film shown on a computer still lasts for a certain length of time, but this way of showing it takes away from the time imposition you get with a cinema screening when you seem to be told "Just sit down and watch for the time it takes". What's more, we often feel guilty about not having watched "for the time that it takes". When an animated object is screened on an iPhone or a laptop it acquires, in a manner of speaking, "objecthood". Admittedly, it moves, but we do not feel that we have to watch the film right the way through. In this way, I give films the same status as other objects in the exhibition—it is all to do with sensitivity and feeling. I place the computers on the ground among a pile of other decided or indexed objects, and I give the impression that they contain unlimited time. I want to get rid of the fourth dimension of temporal objects.

MC

You want them atemporal?

BM

I want the object caught in time also to have the opportunity of being out of time.

MC

By calling it waste, you are displacing the ontology of the object. Do you think that, by indexing it as "waste", you are doing away with the temporality that it would have had when it disappeared or was destroyed? By becoming a waste item in an exhibition, you are giving it non-time.

BM

I am giving it infinite time. But the entire issue turns on the duration of the gaze on the object. You cannot view a film in five minutes if it lasts for an hour. That is my problem. I would like to be able to consider a temporal object and immediately own it.

MC

This brings us back to the need to essentialize film. But do we really need to return to the object? As Lilo Nein has said, "is performance art because it produces an object or because it does not produce an object?" What happens to the elements used for, or occurring as a result of the performance? In his first manifesto for auto-destructive art, Gustav Metzger wrote that "when the process of disintegration is complete, the work must be removed from the site and thrown away". Let us take, for example, your contribution to "The Exhibition of a Film": showing the statue falling cannot essentialize this fall—the new reality of the indexed object. Film alone can do so.

BM

That raises the issue of ownership of objects, which brings to mind a work by Pierre Huyghe which I have never understood: *I do not*

own the *Musée d'Art Moderne* or the *Death Star*. Why would you say that? What I wonder is: Do I own a cup when I see it? Do I own a cup when I drink coffee out of it? Do I own a cup when I break it? When exactly do I own a cup?

MC

The way Pierre Huyghe sees fiction lets him question the reality of an object from popular culture, conveyed by words and memory. Much like the way in which he used *The Third Memory* to see whether a man can own his own personal history when fiction has wrested it from him. Who is he and what belongs to him, or to whom does he belong?

BM

You have to view a film in its entirety. You cannot view it in five seconds like you can view a painting.

MC

View or watch?! It all depends. Do the three running protagonists in Godard's film, *Band of Outsiders*, actually see the paintings in the Louvre? Do they experience the museum? Can it not be said that considering film as an object is a formal approach par excellence?

BM

I want to consider film as an object like any other, with an additional quality, this fourth dimension. This particular object's essential quality is that it is complete when it has been viewed within a specific period of time. You could say, in the same sense, that a piece of sculpture is incomplete in space when you cannot see it from every angle. In any case, my contention is that the aim of film is to annul time.

MC

When people call a work an object of art, I tend to focus on this object quality and think about its value, and wonder how exactly it fits into a trading scheme. But let us take its non-object dimension: How can it not be an object, when the gaze on the object thus defined remains subjective? In your recent exhibitions, you have shown a growing interest in "making objects" in this sense.

BM

I am passionate about the object. The title of my current research is "the object of criticism". What is the object of criticism? I think that we can essentialize speech, although possibly not objects. We might not be able to essentialize films either.

MC

Nevertheless, indexing annuls the object while giving it a reality.

BM

It saves it, but the aim of humanity is to create a world where there are no longer any decisions to take, and where too there is no more waste. A world before man, where the droppings of a bird benefit a palm tree; or a world where man has determined that it should no longer be possible to produce waste. That is our ecological challenge.

MC

What is interesting about waste is the sentimental value we give to it. We index it with a feeling which makes it inalienable. It gives it world value.

BM

Which brings it into existence. A work of art has a particular existential status. You could say that there is no need for a work of art and that it only exists on account of its own need. A work of art belongs to an ontology where the notion of need is totally obsolete.

MC

Obsolete and at the same time negotiated between all those who judge it necessary.

BM

Indeed. At one and the same time necessary and not necessary. The ontological status of a work of art is that of a deleted need.

MC

Waste that we index.

BM

We index it consensually by predicating that a particular object is art. This is in line with Georges Dickie's theory about the institutional recognition of art. The art object becomes in this way a paradoxical conjunction of need and contingency. We could even go as far as to say that it is related to radical contingency. However, I don't really want to take advantage of the speculative turn.

MC

Nevertheless, to make an "object", and to seek to objectify film, is clearly in the realm of the speculative!

BM

Precisely. We are victims of our times!

MC

I can see this desire to index what is yours in the title of the exhibition which offers a reading of the film through the prism of the exhibition.

BM

You are pigeonholing it.

MC

Not just that! There is as much a desire to think "by" as there is to think "like". This semantic polyphony that we get from the film, that runs right through it, is a reflection of your objects and I see them as waste, as indexed objects, or as sculptures, coming under very strong codes of conceptual art. While Peter Downsbrough and Robert Barry seek to generate objects through words, you would appear to be doing the opposite. By indexing a particular reality, you change its status. The object becomes the word. The same visual codes generate two different relationships.

BM

It's a question of rematerialization.

MC

And not "dematerialization", to use Lucy Lippard's term. It is a change in materiality that does not effectively change the intrinsic reality of the object in question. Calling an object waste is a forceful action insofar as it gives it a value beyond its reality. In short, it makes it an ideal catalyst. One last question, which could have been the first one: Why did you use this term "waste" when it has such a negative value?

BM

I wrote in one of the texts in *The Aesthetics of Disputes* that the act of speaking was that of chucking garbage in front of you. By talking of garbage I was able to place myself on the accursed, dark side of philosophical genealogy. This garbage which is extracted from the bottomless pit of our consciousness and which we throw out in front of ourselves, is what allows us to move forward. A negative value has been ascribed to something which effectively drives expression. What is interesting about expression is its bottomless or groundless part. The groundlessness of expression in expression is what matters to me. My idea was that all that we write and speak involves chucking garbage in front of us. We are purveyors of garbage. My next thought was that the artist was a garbage collector. Then I talked about this with a friend, and it was his turn to be the garbage collector... An illustration of how we throw things in front of us when we speak. An illustration of the garbage collector who picks things up from the ground and gives them meanings. So, when I make sculptures, I am forced to make a decision and this guides my objects and gives them qualities. And I subtract the parts of these objects that I am going to throw away. Ultimately, it is the waste that attracts me, and perhaps it is this particular waste that is linked to the strongest ontology, as it is the reverse of the teleological ontology which guides my objects through decisions. The non-decided part of the object remains in the waste. And the waste, as it is non-decided, is what contains the greatest power. A power that we cannot delineate, nor can we name it because it is unrelated to any decisions arising from the naming process. All that we can do then is to index it, to point it out with a finger.

Mathieu Copeland

“The Exhibition of a Film” begins with a question: What could an exhibition in a cinema be? What would an exhibition be like if we changed the environment from the gallery, museum, or Kunsthalle, to that of the cinema? Given the construct of the film, and given the structure of cinema—the surround, the spatialization of sound, etc. the consideration of the social space that is cinema which echoes so deeply with your art—ranging from your platforms for communication to the social structures you have enabled and the environment pieces you have created.

Liam Gillick

What you are saying is important to think about at present, because there have been a lot of assumptions that if you bring outside structures into galleries or institutions, you somehow avoid the problems of traditional art objects or structures. In fact, the way you approach cinema seems to me a more productive way to go about it. Instead of bringing cinematic components, or the logic of cinema, which of course includes documentary cinema, into the gallery or the museum, you occupy the cinema the other way around: you go and change cinema, if you call it change. I think we are in a time when people want certain things in their place. They’re worried about this idea of occupation, of re-occupying something. It’s partly because there’s a drive towards research and new art history.

To put it simply, the question of documentary and fiction has been forgotten. For me, the potential of what you’re talking about has a lot to do with questions that Philippe Parreno and I used to talk about years ago: Is an exhibition documentary or fiction? You could say, for example, that an exhibition by Carl Andre might be documentary, whereas an exhibition by Philippe might be fiction. But if the Carl Andre exhibition is fiction then what is fiction? Because, of course, it is about his early influences, his childhood, his experience working on the railroad, his love of certain kinds of Calvinistic values, aesthetics, etc. It seems that your project has the possibility to reinvigorate some of these questions.

MC

Do you think the exhibition is still a valid format?

LG

I see the exhibition not so much as a failed form, nor as a successful one, but rather as a series of moments and encounters that are different. If you go to these big museums on a normal day, just to see what it’s like on a Tuesday morning—to see what’s there, what kind of people—you find from anecdotal experience that the people that are there are not who you’d think.

MC

It reminds me of a recent conversation with John Armleder about how we take for granted the fact that there will be an audience within the museum.

LG

I’m not so sure I agree, because it depends if we are talking about an audience or a public. I think there are different understandings of audience and public. John may be talking about “audience” and not “public”. In the last twenty years the public for art has grown enormously, but the audience hasn’t necessarily grown or

161

become sophisticated. In other words, there are a lot more people who assume that wherever you are, you should go and look at the museum and the gallery. But does that mean that there is a specific audience that is activated, or understanding, or that has special interests? That's another question altogether. What is the difference between audience and public? One can create an audience for anything. John is old enough to remember when the audience for late modernist art was very, very small. But that's not the same as the public. A public can remain indifferent but still turn up.

MC

A key factor for you seems to be the relationship with the spectator. One of the first exhibitions you saw as a child was the Robert Morris exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1971, an exhibition for which Morris created "Bodyspacemotionthings", a "participatory" exhibition that was closed after four days. As the Guardian newspaper wrote at the time: "The participation seems likely to wreck the exhibits and do the participants a mischief."

LG

In order to understand the visitor, participant, user, viewer, or whatever we call it, the audience, the public, etc., we have to also look at other studies of group behaviour. We are looking at a sociological or anthropological question that's not limited to the museum or art gallery. And this is why the question of cinema is so fascinating. Traditionally, cinema has quite tight boundaries—certainly the architecture of cinema—but it also has different temporalities, different time endurances, and so on. The problem for me with cinema, the actual experience of the cinema in the theatre, is the problem of being alone together with other people. The model of contemporary art that stole and reframed the space of cinema, as a place to walk or to sit on the floor, is quite a radical shift.

MC

Whereas in the theatre, as Jérôme Bel reminds us, one can lose oneself and feel completely anonymous.

LG

But you're not anonymous in the theatre at all. You're an entirely visible part of an audience. When I go to the cinema here they have eight screens; and I want to watch those eight films together at the same time. Because of the nature of the cinema I can't do that. I want to literally be able to walk. There should be a walkway, a promenade, where you can walk around in a loop and see all of the films in open arenas if you choose. I find the policing of the architecture of cinema disturbing. I think that the space of contemporary art is often a space of disappointment in terms of art, of course, but it's not at all disappointing when it comes to the interplay with people. It's extremely interesting as it ruins things for people. The Tate in London, or the Guggenheim here in New York, are absolutely packed, all the time. People come even when there's no exhibition. They want to be together in this flaneuristic state, wandering through and having reasonably profound experiences, the space of liberal encounter. You never bother someone in a museum. People can be close, but not as close as in the cinema.

MC

Philippe Parreno once said that he should design his own ideal cinema to show his films.

LG

Exactly. And to a certain extent he's done that, but with ambient effects. Coming back to John Armleder, I think it's not about assuming something, it's about being as indifferent to the audience as they are to you—if you can imagine a new way to use this word “indifference”. I think Philippe Parreno's show at the Palais de Tokyo is somehow indifferent to the audience. It's not determined by and does not exist for the public. Furthermore, one does not ask whether a gallery is open or closed, but if the exhibition is on or off. That's the thing for Philippe: is the exhibition on or off?

MC

And when the cinema is turned off you only have an empty screen in the dark.

LG

The way cinema lays itself down and becomes meaningful over time is related to values, generations, etc. Contemporary art has a very different temporality to that of cinema. When Duchamp was interviewed in 1959, he talked about how art should only have a life of about twenty years, which can be shorter than the life of the artist. Twenty years is about the lifespan of an artwork of any use. Beyond twenty years, it's only useful to art historians. Everything else is just either you're kidding yourself, or it's an illusion, or you're a fool. Effectively this is what Duchamp's work is about, too. The more extreme things he did at the beginning were really to prove that, in fact, art only has about twenty years' significance. Anything else and you're kidding yourself, it's an illusion, or you're a fool.

MC

Furthermore, Gustav Metzger wrote that auto-destructive art can last for anything from an instant to twenty years.

LG

We exist in a self-described period of contemporary art, meaning that the people involved in it described it. It was not given to them later on, as was the case with the Renaissance. Cinema and contemporary art are not at all synchronized in the way they lay down meaning over time. It has to do with how they function in terms of laying down memory; that's also a question of collective memory or expectations.

MC

Cinema is traditionally the place where you lose yourself. And yet, with “The Exhibition of a Film”, you're bringing back the focus onto the spectator.

LG

Cinema tends to work when it does the opposite, when it becomes more dry, more formulaic and formalist. Philippe Parreno, for example, did try and make people lose themselves in his exhibition. Philippe made the exhibition a manipulated cinematic experience in order to manipulate their emotions. Coming back to this idea of what constitutes an exhibition and what constitutes cinema, contemporary art, to a certain extent, has some qualities it shares

163

with non-conformist structures, such as cults and communes etc., even when it's manifested in a gallery. The equivalent in cinema, therefore, is the cowboy movie or the road movie and so on, genres that even a kid recognizes very early on. I think that comes back to the question of encounters: What kinds of encounters are taking place in this new cinematic takeover?

MC

I would like to consider "A Syntax of Dependency", the exhibition that you made together with Lawrence Weiner at the M HKA in Antwerp in 2011, and the possibility of different narratives. There you have a narrative coming through his work, one coming through yours, and then both of you create yet another, depending on how we define narratives.

LG

You don't in fact. You can also say that he had his work, his structures/sculptures in the form of language, and actually my work was the element that had narrative. The experience of being in a location was fundamentally shifted by taking everything onto the floor. In fact, in doing so, you have to have a battle with the institution. They see a lack, an emptiness; they see walls with nothing on them. We had to have a battle with them about how to stop things happening, not about how to make things happen. In such situations we assume that someone is making something happen, whereas in fact you're often trying to make things not happen. And that leaves space for the development of narrative. So Lawrence's statements, combined with my occupation of space, or occupation of a terrain, creates a potential for narrative. Lawrence's work is not about narrative; although he's using some sort of aphorisms or neo-poetic statements they are not in themselves narratives. They establish conditions that define relationships between people, and between people and objects.

MC

A recurring word in your writing is that of "structure". It is a word that is also important for Lawrence Weiner and that, from the perspective of his work, is also entirely redefined.

LG

Lawrence refers to it in a different way, as a thing that can potentially exist or that you can carry as an idea, whereas I tend to mean it in a sociological or urbanistic way. I think he's indifferent to that. He has issues about authoritarianism that are different to mine; we see it in different locations. He sees it in typefaces, in the choice of words, and I see it in roots and directions, and points of departure.

MC

Prototype Conference Room is a work that you realized for your 2002 exhibition "The Wood Way" at the Whitechapel Art Gallery for their cinema/auditorium. This is a work that affirms in its very core its social nature. I would thus like to discuss the possibility of the social sculpture as defined by Joseph Beuys.

LG

When I see a work by Joseph Beuys I always just think about Beuys rather than social sculpture as a collection of things. I think about a very particular way of considering what the artist represents in

the culture, rather than anything else. It always made me question the idea of an artist with a vision, and never an actual object or situation; to me, it doesn't exist without the artist. It's the same with Thomas Hirschhorn and his *Gramsci Monument* in the Bronx. It has no meaning without Thomas Hirschhorn; as soon as he goes, it's just some old stuff near some public housing. What's different is that it's not even about the intentions of the artist, it's about the proximity of the artist as a kind of moral figure, and without them a sculpture isn't social either: it's just stuff. It's why it was so shocking to see Joseph Beuys' work not long after he died. His presence had confounded the way the work would be enacted in order to remove focus from questions of form and content, and to displace them onto the question of the social, or the social function of art, or social sculpture. One of the biggest problems of our time is not the problem of money or the market; the problem is instrumentalization, and who is controlling what is good social work. So I would say probably most artists right now have a battle with the forces that want to instrumentalize culture. It's a contested field right now; a lot of people have looked to academia to try to evade some of these problems.

MC

And yet, didn't you use the term social sculpture when discussing the auditorium and cinema piece for the Whitechapel?

LG

That was partly an ironic reference to some of these earlier things, a social structure for something, but it doesn't mean that this is taking place there, as if the work existed in parallel to the reality that we are living in, as if things had started from a different point, you might have ended up with that. I think that these questions of social sculpture, when discussed in a meaningful way, are often connected to time games, which are longer and bigger than it seems to be in a work.

MC

Returning to your relation to film over the years, you wrote that rather than production itself, your interest lies in pre- and post-production.

LG

I still think that to a certain extent, but because the technology of cinema has changed, these have merged a lot more than they were before. With the emergence of digital storage there's no more processing happening. I acted in *Exhibition*, a feature film by Joanna Hogg, which was filmed in 2013 in London, and saw that in relation to technology pre-production and post-production have come closer and closer to the moment of production; and that's because of digital equipment.

MC

You proposed earlier a new architecture for cinema, with the idea of a concourse leading from one to the other. This leads me to wonder what would be your idea of a museum? What can a museum be now, and is it still relevant?

LG

Very much like Lawrence Weiner, I like to deal with material facts. I don't want to have a new model of the museum; I'd rather have a new model of a shopping mall. I prefer doing a government

building. And yet museums are the places where you really see the difference between art and architecture, more than anywhere else, so you need museums.

MC

And to consider a form that you have worked with so often, that of the platform, would you consider that museums are platforms for communication?

LG

They already are platforms for communication. They are places where certain political ideology is spread. And frankly, right now, they are places just to take selfies! But if someone asked me what would I really do, that is another question; because, of course, it is never that easy. I still put that challenge back to people when I encounter a museum.

MC

I recently had a conversation in Zurich with Christian Bök, Kenneth Goldsmith and Karl Holmqvist that dealt with the possibility of platforms and communication. Christian thought that “language is a flat form for language”; Kenneth asserted: “language as a platform *against* communication”; and Karl reaffirmed his desire to create a platform through his words and “to make language a platform (for) communication”. If I may, and to use a very cinematic word, are your platforms a “prop”? Can they not exist and still be abstract spaces?

LG

Yes, because they designate a space for something to take place. They are there as long as they are required, and then they could just go away. You start to get into the problem that Lawrence talked about: the failure of conceptual art in relation to the two most simplistic understandings of what it was against—money and things. So very quickly conceptual art became a synonym for “nothing”. Lawrence always said to me that the problem with conceptual art was that the people who were curating it in the early '70s thought that if they did exhibitions about nothing, then it would have something to do with conceptual art. Conceptual art became synonymous with the representation of nothing, rather than a certain kind of Wittgensteinian understanding of the limits of things, or the lack of limits of things, or the notion of exchange, which was so central to Seth Siegelaub's understanding of the potential of art. The designation or nomination of things, or the description of relationships came to be about “nothing”, but I am convinced that is not the way to understand its potential. Conceptual art is about democratization and carrying an idea in your head. I am just as weary about this as he is in the face of neo-conceptual art that suggests we can find new forms of exchange via “nothing”. “Nothing” is always surrounded by a context. As the Zurich conversation shows, you need platforms in order to designate a space until a better context appears. This is why my work has always been semi-autonomous. It needs something to hang on, or hang off.

Mathieu Copeland

“The Exhibition of a Film” follows another film that I curated in 2013 titled *A Film to be Read*. It consisted of a succession of artists’ texts, works that are intertwined in a leitmotif of a string of words created by Peter Downsbrough. Unified by their typography of white letters on a black background, the works, whilst retaining their integrity, are both the subtitles of a film without images, and mental projections constructed in the mind of the person reading them.

Lawrence Weiner

Not taking the work out of its context! Your idea of using the cinema, is that the cinema becomes the spectacle.

MC

“The Exhibition of a Film” asks for the spectator to take on an active role, as one decides to focus on one piece or another, making their own personal sense of the polyphony that is the exhibition.

LW

Not a *mise-en-scène*, but vibrant information going on simultaneously.

MC

Indeed, and for all the works that make the exhibition be, there is a multiple yet finite number of possible arrangements. To this end, I invited Tim Etchells to write the dramaturgy for a non-narrative film.

LW

Even when you put a clear leader on, you have a narration. There is no way to avoid it.

MC

Since each of the works has its own integrity, each tells its own story.

LW

You are not trying to get away from narrative because everything tells a story, but you are trying to get away from empathy. But you have to put yourself in some place in order to be there. Cinema at its best, even fantasy cinema, doesn’t make you be the person in the cinema. People identify with the actor. In fact, you are in another world without having any kind of obligation put on you.

MC

I would like to consider with you two terms: rematerialization and dematerialization.

LW

You do not dematerialize anything. There are no magicians.

MC

Rematerialization as the mediation from one form to another?

LW

Maybe this is not necessary. Maybe it is simply another word: presentation. And the factor of simultaneity. To rematerialize would be changing what the artist is saying. It is about finding a different way of presenting. And how does a text fit into this? Is it context rather than content?

MC

A content creating its own context. There is both an autonomous aspect to the text, and it fitting the overall structure. Together

with Liam Gillick we were discussing the understanding of structure. For instance, you have often replaced the word “exhibition” with the word “structure”.

LW

That also replaces the idea. I could also call it a movie. Once you make it as a structure, you have no idea what’s holding it together. And it is not important that anybody any longer knows what is holding it together. The same applies to your idea of using the cinema as a spectacle. It is no one’s business how you digitally timed it.

MC

How you set up something to be.

LW

This is a structure. Liam and I made the exhibition “A Syntax of Dependency” at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp. If you take artists and let them be artists instead of theorists, you get something that works. And the two walk away the same friends that they walked in. The point is the work. A structure means that each player, and I am using the word player, in the movie—in the structure—is aware of what they are doing in the context, but not the overall. Without anything being said, the players can ascertain that this will not be going against any of their basic morality. That is how a structure works.

Mathieu Copeland

I would like to begin our conversation with the notion of “structure”, a term that has been a constant fixture of our respective discussions over the years. Susan, we have often spoken of the structure of the *Three Disembodied Love Songs* that you have realized for “The Exhibition of a Film”.

Susan Stenger

I’m interested in a wide range of song-form structures. To make my *Three Disembodied Love Songs*, I drew on three archetypal sets of song “vocabulary”, both tonal and lyrical. All three songs reflect a kind of obsessive internal dialogue about love. *Johnny is My Darling* is based on idioms of Appalachian folk ballads, which I had the opportunity to study in 2013 on a research fellowship at the Appalachian Sound Archive in Berea, Kentucky. They use a very focused language of intervals, of melodic structures; there’s also a unique tonal quality to the voice and the fiddle and the overtones they create. The words tend to return to the same types of images—in this case, the red rose. In this layered arrangement, I tried to capture that sound quality as well as the florid nature of the melodic ornamentation and lyrical symbolism. The second song, *Bye Bye Baby*, is based on the conventions of American “girl group” pop from the ’50s, by groups such as The Shirelles and The Chiffons. There is a structure to the way the singers react to one another. Sometimes it’s a question and answer, a certain rhythm, handclaps, finger snaps... There’s an edge to this kind of female exploration of the dangers of “bad boys” that I’ve always found very seductive! I took these archetypal forms and drew certain elements from them, then rearranged them in a completely different context: a slow-motion, dream-like melancholy. The essence of the third song, *Middle of the Night*, came from a certain piano sound. I played with Nick Cave for a few years as a bass player and got to know him well. I was always very moved by his touch on the keys, by the delicate way he coaxes sound from the piano in slow ballads. When we went into the studio near Brighton to record, I asked him to go deeply into what I think is one of the saddest chords, A minor. It appears in a lot of his songs. But I didn’t want him to take it anywhere harmonically, but just to hover in that A minor world, to reflect that kind of “feedback loop” of emotion one can get into during a sleepless night. It was the same for his vocals. I chose a couple of phrases from an Alan Vega song, which I gave to Nick and asked him to repeat however he wanted. Then I chose a few words from a Nick Cave song, and asked Alan, who was in New York, to sing those however he liked. I just gave him a pitch sound as a reference. Afterwards, I combined their voices into a kind of abstract duet. As I wanted to join this “disembodied group”, too, I played the alto flute that intertwines with Nick’s voice and added the drones. I wanted to distil the kind of deep sorrow that Nick manages to capture in so many of his songs.

MC

You exploded the structure of each of these songs, both in their conventions and spatially in the space of the cinema using the surround sound.

SS

I'm interested in the innate qualities of materials, rather than trying to impose an agenda based on my own "self-expression". I like to find a way to work with elements extracted from various sources and to process, rearrange and respond to them in a way that allows them to bloom into something fresh and new; the essence already exists within, although the resulting form might be very different.

MC

Tim, our initial discussions about "The Exhibition of a Film" were concerned with how to create the dramaturgy for a non-narrative film. In this desire to create an overall structure, the notion of "forms" had a strong echo with the work that you have developed with Forced Entertainment, the seminal and influential company that you co-founded in 1984 in Sheffield.

Tim Etchells

A lot of the company's early work drew on television and movie genre. We took images, displacing and reworking them into new structures. Many of the projects I've done with the company, and independently, rest on identifying a territory, identifying a frame, or a set of rules and constraints in which to operate. My desire is to tease out what is possible within that particular frame, to activate the possibilities of that particular space. For example, with Forced Entertainment, I developed the durational performance "Quizoola!" which takes the form of questions and answers. Three performers work in pairs through the six-hour period, taking turns to ask each other questions and to improvise answers. The questions range from: "What's the capital city of Spain?" to "How many scars have you got?" or "What is economics?" Anything that could be a question is potentially a material for the piece. It is an experiment within these parameters, on how you can articulate the dramaturgy, creating a shape or journey through six hours.

SS

Does the material take shape on its own?

TE

The basic dramaturgy over six hours is that people get tired! But the shape also emerges in relation to compositional impulses and decisions made by the performers in real time. Across the piece there is always something about setting up relations between the performers, establishing and developing the kind of dialogue that one has with another. Time always allows certain structure and possibilities. Certain questions develop an energy, or a particular currency too... they become points of return, allowing the performers to make shape by gesturing back to previous moments and exchanges. You learn what the situation, and the material, offer. It has a possibility so that something can float and blossom.

SS

You work both within structure and improvisation.

TE

I identify what might be a sense of formal content, or strategic limitations. We then work together to find ways of expanding and contracting, of amplifying and reducing what's shown.

185

MC

You have often mentioned that your work process is for you to film yourselves as you improvise every day. And from this material you identify elements and sections that you feel work, and gradually come to a crystallization of the piece. Very much like an algorithmic equation, you know where you start and then let it develop naturally. It gradually comes to a form, with no preconceptions.

TE

There are, crudely, two different kinds of projects. The first is where we work in an identified parameter or frame. A piece like *Quizoola!* is improvised inside such a frame. We don't make dramaturgical decisions about that in advance of a presentation, we just do it—the shape comes from improvisation inside the rules. When we are making what we'd think of as "theatre performances", though, we don't necessarily have a clearly identified parameter to work inside. Instead, we explore different sorts of materials, trying different approaches, improvising and rejecting a great deal of what we do. Our attempt is to end up with an accumulation of material that does not necessarily cohere. Working with this material is a matter of figuring how things resonate, how different elements might do something together, or speak to each other. It can be a matter of looking at things on a timeline—where can things become a "block" of connected materials. What are resonant switches or juxtapositions? How can you push the material around, restructure it, remix it, to make a thing that has a shape in time? Any sequence you create with the materials is a kind of journey, dramaturgy, or structure—a work which unfolds in a particular way over time. I think that's where we came together for the film, to think creatively about the journey in time that it makes, to work on the way that it reveals information over time. Information of all kinds—sound, image, story, words, bodies, projected thoughts. And how does one think about structuring those elements through an hour and a half? That's the core of the task.

MC

All become a paratext within the overall structure. *Middle of the Night*, the third disembodied love song between Nick and Alan is a beautiful piece. And yet, to read into its construction reveals a denser world. Alan becoming Nick's voice; Nick's writing incarnated by Alan's voice. All brings a unique understanding to light. This paratext becomes a form in itself.

SS

When I invite someone to contribute to a project, I think of them in a sense as "raw material". When making *Soundtrack for an Exhibition* at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Lyon in 2006, I involved ten different people in the project. I realized a super-structure of a song that lasted ninety-six days. The structure was that of a classic pop song with an intro, verses, choruses, bridge and outro. Except that those sections, rather than being in bars or measures, were in days. The intro was four days long, the verses were sixteen days long. Each verse section drew on conventions and idioms of a different genre. I considered the instruments, the chords, the keys that were almost clichés

of certain styles, and invited certain people, some of whom I knew well and some of whom I just admired, to take part. By giving them a score, a set of instructions, a question to answer, some material to record, I was in a sense treating them as another instrument, or element of composition. I applied a similar approach to the *Three Disembodied Love Songs*. I wanted a certain piano sound, and it just wouldn't have worked if I had played it myself. I needed that particular touch of Nick's, as well as the specific quality of Alan Vega's moans, Sam Gleaves' tradition-drenched fiddle style and singing, and Cosey Fanni Tutti's and Laetitia Sadier's "cool" vocals. I first came to music as a listener and then as a performer. Composition came from needing to learn, analyze and think about sound structure in order to play properly. The music that especially interested me at the time was that of Christian Wolff, John Cage and Morton Feldman. Many decisions are left up to the performer, and there is a lot of thought and analysis that goes into playing this music with commitment. I also had a grounding in visual art from my mother, so in many ways when I make a sound work, I approach it as if I were drawing or painting. I just ask myself what materials I want to work with and how I should organize them. Sometimes, I even draw what the work should be, making a visual image before I complete a sonic version of it.

MC

This is the process that Tim and I went through whilst working on "The Exhibition of a Film". We talked for over a year about "nothing" concrete. Somehow trying to find a structure for that nothingness, thinking what could be the exhibition of a film. How it would be organized and structured. You were talking about structure as a composer. We asked ourselves what it is to compose a film. Tim even brought one day the classic structure of a film as a possibility.

TE

This Robert McKee's book that every aspiring scriptwriter has to read. We studied his breakdown of film structure.

SS

I'm fascinated with those kinds of archetypal structures—sets of rules—and how to use, and abuse, them.

TE

There is a tension between, on one hand, this attraction to meta-structures and rules, the frames, and the typical structures of something as building blocks, and on the other hand the material to play with. When you talk about the particular way of touching the piano, or the particular qualities of a voice, these are actually about embodiment. They are about the very specific performative energy and sense that musicians, performers or speakers have. I am sensing two things there: firstly, this interest in the "meta", and secondly, this interest in the absolute concreteness, or the fabric, of things. It's through that materiality, that embodiment that one occupies those big frames. Those qualities exist in a sense outside of the structural scaffolding. When we step into these structures, a song, a narrative, a dramatic architecture, inevitably we try to occupy them. The way that Nick touches the piano, or the way somebody speaks, those are particular embodiments.

187

SS

Yes, for me it's very much about the intersect between these meta-structures and the particular and personal. I had this epiphany when I was in Kentucky for my Appalachian sound archive fellowship. I went on a bourbon distillery tour, and there was this really great tour guide who brought us into a room with five huge glass jars; each contained one of the elements from the bourbon recipe. He explained that there is a very specific proportion for each. And then, he said this great thing: "And then there are the wild notes." That's exactly what I was finding, sitting in the archive listening to all these amazing old fiddle and banjo players who were part of a tradition and yet had very distinct characteristics that were uniquely their own, those undefinable "wild notes". That's what gives it the magic... like the temperature of the air, the yeast in the atmosphere, the minerals in the water, that give each batch of bourbon its own quality. There are things you can control and things you can't. I'm drawn to that element of tension between very specific choices and approaches and the intervention of the unexpected.

MC

For several sections of the film, together with Tim we invited artists, choreographers, performers... to write instructions for movements, and others artists, writers, poets... to write instructions of texts. A structure was set, informing us how to develop it.

TE

As we combined these invitations, one contributor's material would meet another's. Something always happened in this kind of meeting, and, of course, in a sense, we had no idea of what would arrive.

SS

I find this very liberating. If left to my own devices, I know exactly what I want! I like encountering something that I would never have predicted, and trying to figure out how to mix it in. Did you make use of everything you were given?

TE

Almost everything. Sometimes people sent three things and we used only one. Also, for a few things, I looked at them and wondered what could possibly come out of that. Actually, some of those things are there and they are great. Other things looked great on paper, but in the materialization, in the room, working with the three performers that we worked with, somehow it didn't quite happen. We gave ourselves enough flexibility to have an interpretative gesture in relation to these scores. Sometimes that was successful and we made a discovery about how to do something. For others, it didn't happen.

MC

The gestures and the words float from one piece to the next. You look on a screen and see a given piece whilst you are listening to another piece, you hear a text whilst looking at a choreography. Different schemes occur at any given time. These parallels give the construct of an "exhibition". We have talked extensively about how we would approach the making of the choreographed scenes within the film, and how to choreograph each piece in relation

to the others in the overall scheme, revealing these structures, these different feelings and emotions.

SS

I wonder how it felt to make this film, to curate these sounds and images into this form. Was it something new for you, to “install” an exhibition in this way?

MC

Completely new. We had to learn, and invent, the techniques to make this film be. As we gathered all these works of art, senses started to emerge, forms began to resonate with one another. Some of the invitations were very precise—curated so to say. Others were an open invitation. And yet, I believe that “The Exhibition of a Film” is only one of the many propositions that could occur within that form. With that same material, you can imagine a vast number of different films. Philippe Decrauzat told me that my great desire would be to be able, every time the film would play, to press a random button in the projection booth in every cinema, as all “*adéquation*” would work.

SS

I still feel that within all the wealth of the material from “Soundtrack for an Exhibition”, I could constantly reconfigure that material and never repeat myself.

TE

With any set of objects, there is a potentially large but finite number of ways in which they could be arranged. And in the case of the film you are arranging objects across layers (sound/image etc.) and through time. Each possible arrangement produces a different kind of journey because the information would flow out in a different way. Of course, they are all valid versions of that information. Each would say a different thing. Some would be very argumentative, perhaps, to push in a particular thematic way or agenda. Other arrangements might be more or less playful, or more chaotic. You can imagine many different deployments of the same material; as with a song, you can remix it, take the tracks and position the voices differently, strip things away, beat things up. For me, that is the process of working on the film. And in the end, what we have is one arrangement of the material.

MC

Working an exhibition as a film is to envisage the parameters of cinema. This gives, for instance, its time structure. And time becomes a limitation. A generic feature film last ninety minutes. Only so many permutations allow you to reach that length. The construct of cinema is its inherent polyphony, its 5.1 surround sound. Sound elements collide in space, and thus generate sense. “The Exhibition of a Film” creates what Phill Niblock calls an “environment”. An environment to live with, be in, and experience. Susan, drawing from the wealth of your work and experience, what would be your notion of polyphony?

SS

The very first song that we recorded for Band of Susans did not have a chord progression. It was essentially an E chord, from beginning to end. The momentum came from the way we layered multiple textures. I was playing bass patterns on the low E string. One of the guitars was playing a cyclical E chord part. Another

guitarist had her guitar in open E tuning, banging and resonating it in time. The brilliant Robert Poss, who conceived the song, used everything he knew about hand position and rhythm playing to ring overtones out of all the various permutations of an E chord and tie things together with the drum riffs. The vocals melodies rode on top. In a conventional sense, it didn't go anywhere. The primary movement didn't come from chord changing. It came from a vertical structure and all the variations within it that propelled the song forward. I've always been more interested in polyphony than in harmony. I like simultaneity, layering, but not so much in conventional musical progression. I've been working with these types of forms for years, stacking tracks that move in a variety of time frames, like different levels of consciousness... combining things from different sources. I've taken to calling it "sonic geology".

TE

This makes me consider my role with Forced Entertainment, which is a collective of six artists making performance. We are all very different, and yet we have spent thirty years working together, improvising, making things. In the process, everybody brings in their own agenda, their own understanding, their own way of being there. Although we agree on some things, it doesn't come from a single author. It comes from a set of tensions among six persons in a room. It gives us a conflicting negotiation. Not a harmony or a single state, but rather a set of different positions and propositions that vibrate and conflict with each other. In a dramaturgical sense, I'm not so interested in forcing the material we make towards narrative. If you cut the other way—towards this idea of things in conflict and vibration—there is a lot of dynamic tension. To me that's more interesting than narrative.

MC

This echoes what Susan was saying about the vertical structure. Furthermore, six of you working is a polyphony.

TE

There is a common fantasy of collaboration that sees it as a harmonious utopia. The reality is very tense and difficult. To me, it's better thought of as a set of problematic relations that are sustained in a generative way.

Mathieu Copeland

Lee, I would like to begin our discussion with the two most beautiful pieces that you realized with the reading of John Giorno's poems. These were recorded for "The Exhibition of a Film" during a memorable session in Geneva in March 2012. John is so fantastic with his presence, his voice. After the recording, knowing that you and I had been talking for a while about the film, John told me I should give you the material, thus creating the first of the many layers of "The Exhibition of a Film" to come. What was your reaction when you received the material?

Lee Ranaldo

The two segments I used really jumped out to me. Both had something very visual about them. The first one, "The Death of William Burroughs", seemed so evocative. It spoke to our shared friendship with William (John obviously much closer to William than I was, and over such a long time), and wrapped around it a lot of other mutual friends, such as Allen Ginsberg. It was one of the last "William Stories", completing his journey. The second one, "Just Say No to Family Values", is so boldfaced! It is John being himself, all out on the surface, so up front! As soon as I put them together with the musical tracks I worked on, they got on in a very natural way. Not knowing what was going to happen to the music besides a coupling of some of my sounds with John's voice, I thought that I would present you with a range of recordings that I felt could function in your cinematic polyphony.

MC

You thoroughly worked the modulation between the music and the voice, at times the music "attacking" and taking over the voice.

LR

The voice is in the foreground, and yet occasionally, you want it to be challenged. There is this foregrounding/backgrounding when you are listening that points more to the music or more to the voices.

MC

Leah, I would like to discuss the way you approached "The Exhibition of a Film", the divided, and the "reproduced" screen. During our initial discussions we were very wary of the "split screen".

Leah Singer

I tend to think in segments, leitmotifs of re-occurring images. The Russian olive trees, mirrored across the screen, exist as four different segments turned in on themselves. I was very attracted to the muted colour of the leaves, white and grey, moved by the wind. Turning them upside down, bringing them back in different configurations was very much like dance. The leaves appear to be different. The movement and the cadence are different. But it is just staring at something that is the same, with little variations—a call to meditation almost. A movement often repeated in a poetical performance.

MC

All contributing to a non-narrative story.

LS

I see them as non-temporal devices. A memory as a collection of images, smells, sounds, that somehow pop-up any time. Anything

can trigger a memory, and the memory can come back in very different forms.

MC

Can you tell me how you began working with film?

LS

My first films were shot on 16 mm. When my Bolex camera died, I couldn't afford to get it fixed, but I had all this film in my refrigerator. So I loaded the 16 mm motion picture film in my still 35 mm camera. The very first thing I shot was a self-portrait, moving my head, gesturing. I went to a film lab and begged them to develop it. The filmstrip was uncharacteristically short and not typical of what the lab printed. The film looked brilliant. It was horizontal because I had the camera sitting on a tripod. It was like Warhol's *Screen Test*. After I established how to shoot with a still camera, I needed to project these films. I had to use analytical film projectors that could slow down a film, frame by frame, without burning it.

LR

Leah's films were conceived for performance situations.

LS

Because my films weren't linear—neither narrative nor sequenced—I still wanted a narrative of some kind, so I used two film projectors for a double screen, in dialogue with each other.

LR

Ken Jacobs, who was a professor of mine, was the only other filmmaker I knew who used the same projectors as Leah. Ken lives on the next block from us and we have been neighbours for thirty-five years. Leah and Ken really bonded over the technical aspects of the kind of films that they were doing. Nobody else was using those analytical projectors besides football coaches and the US government!

LS

Slowing the film down was very important to me. It's about examining something in movement, in an almost sculptural manner.

MC

Could you discuss the relationship pattern when you perform together?

LS

The interest was first to improvise. Music is unifying. I love the idea of being able to expose my work, being in an inclusive setting; you could do that in performance.

LR

In the early days, I was reading my poems on stage. Reciting my words while other people's words played on a tape track in a spatial environment of the film and the sound. I came into possession of a bunch of cassettes of Robert Smithson lecturing, from a couple years before he died. Smithson is such an important artist for me. I used some of him talking. I also had voices of poets—I had recordings of Raymond Carver, Carson McCullers, who are other touchstones for me—crossed with all sorts of different people, friends of mine, Leah—public and private voices, in an assortment of languages, that I was recording. This is how I started constructing these polyphonic pieces. In the late '90s and early '00s I spent time making sound pieces isolating these

193

different voices, and leaving out my own. I did an exhibition of these at the brilliant sound gallery, Studio Five Beekman, that Michael Schumacher had in Lower Manhattan in the late '90s.

MC

Works so different to the ones created with Sonic Youth, where you too rarely used your own voice.

LR

I sang on the very first Sonic Youth record, but I was always the third singer. Even though I was the main singer in The Fluks, the previous band I was in, by then I was more interested in music composition, especially after having worked with Glenn Branca. Kim and Thurston immediately had ideas for vocals, so they became the main singers. I like the idea of singing words with the group, but at the time I was really interested in the idea of writing both poetry and journals. This is something that I have always done. Once we started travelling a lot with the band, there was a lot of food for thought. By the mid-'90s, the New York publisher Soft Skull Press got wind of the fact that I'd been doing all this writing. This became *Road Movies*, my first book.

MC

Discussing the reasons why from 1989 onwards he did not want music anymore, John Giorno was telling me that he thought that within the John Giorno Band, music destroyed the words. What is your relationship to words?

LR

Well, in terms of John talking about words and music together, I love the layering of the two! From my perspective, they can augment each other. From a very early age, I was interested in music, visual imagery and language. They have been my fixation in all the different things that I've done. From having my poems as words on paintings, which I was doing maybe six or eight years ago, to putting out some of the writing generated during travel, or combining spoken word with a musical performance—or singing songs—to incorporating films into the live music presentation, I've wanted to find more ways for language, music and moving visual to come together.

MC

What is your relation to film, ranging from your film studies through to you working on film soundtracks with Sonic Youth?

LR

I started making films seriously in university, studying, among others, with Ken Jacobs. I began shooting and grabbing images in a very diarist approach. Immediately, the question of sound arose. Especially since back then we were working with Regular 8 and Super 8 film, which had no sound. I always felt that images demanded sound, and was interested to see how the two relate. In 1986, Sonic Youth got asked to score a film called *Made in USA*—not the Godard film, but a California feature realized by first-time director Ken Friedman. We spent six weeks or so in a studio out in Los Angeles, watching the images and trying to figure out how to attach sound to them. It was such an interesting process. On one hand, almost any time you put a sound to an image it works in some way.

LS

Visuality and aurality together is so very strong. Even though there is no intentional sync, everyone finds their own narrative, matching the sound to the image. That is what our shows are built on. Lee does not score my work, nor do I. Our process is far more organic. I am often mistakenly asked if I make a narrative film to which Lee provides a score that he does live. Yet, I still call a lot of my work narrative, but it's not an expected linear sequence.

MC

As Phill Niblock often says, the music is not the illustration of the films, and the films are not an accompaniment to the music.

LR

Exactly correct! We use all these images from the different places where we have been. It is very personal on a level.

LS

We are rarely represented in the films, but our lives are. We try to make it universal. Filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas produced a real movement in this diary film.

LR

He was part of that generation that started turning the camera on themselves in more poetic or diaristic ways.

MC

Lee, together with Alan Licht and Ulrich Krieger, you formed, in 1999, *Text of Light*, with the idea to perform improvised music to the films of Stan Brakhage and other members of the American Cinema avant-garde of the '50s-60s. You first played to Brakhage's film *Text of Light*, which gave the group its name.

LR

There's such a strong improvising community in New York. When I got involved, I really fell into it quite hard. It was really exciting to make that kind of music. On the other hand, as an audience member, even though it was always exciting to hear, there wasn't a lot of visual stimulation. Usually, there's a bunch of players with their heads down. When Ulrich proposed to Alan and I to put a show together during his visit to NYC, we immediately thought: "Let's have a film component." The films added another layer of stimulation, an organic juxtaposition. There's such an affinity between image and sound. With Brakhage's films it worked especially well.

MC

And thus generating a dense and intense multilayered, temporary, yet all-encompassing environment of projected images and music.

LR

Leah and I had been working together with film and music for more than ten years by then. And Sonic Youth had realized some performances with films over the years, including a concert to Brakhage's film, too, and in the early days an extravaganza at Folk City on 3rd Street in West Village with filmmaker Richard Kern's films projected across multiple screens hanging in the performance space. For one tour, in the mid-'00s, inspired by Dan Graham's work we had a screen behind us, and a camera at the front of the stage pointing at the audience, projecting the audience looking at us, behind us. Every night, the audience would look our way, and behind us, we would see them looking back at themselves.

MC

With Sonic Youth you have been commissioning many film-makers, such as Richard Kern, Charles Atlas, Tony Oursler, Spike Jonze or Claire Denis, to realize videos to your songs.

LR

Asking all these different people was a way of acknowledging shared sensibilities, of recognizing like-minded artists. We had a platform we wanted to use. In 1990, Geffen Records had a budget to make a video for our album *Goo*, and we thought that instead of making one expensive video, we could make ten smaller videos for every song on the album. It was a way of bringing attention to a lot of people that we were working with or interested in. The same, later, with Harmony Korine, who realized a beautiful film to "Sunday", a song from our *A Thousand Leaves* album. We'd loved Harmony's films, and knew him from around town.

MC

Also, you were able to invite numerous bands on tour with you, such as Pavement, Nirvana or Boredoms.

LR

Sonic Youth always tried to take the spotlight off ourselves and put it onto the things that we are interested in. When you have a public platform, it is always great to bring onto the stage people who are inspiring us, and who would hopefully inspire others.

MC

And you have done so, too, with the covers of your albums, featuring works of art from artists including Gerhard Richter, Raymond Pettibon, Mike Kelley, Richard Prince or, again, William Burroughs.

LR

Partly, this is about bringing more and more people onto the project. Different ideas, images or films bouncing against each other in an interesting way that creates this atmosphere.

MC

Which echoes how one loses part of oneself within the group, within the collective, in order to create a new multiple personality.

LR

Well, that is very interesting. It is the dichotomy between an individual standing alone and strong, as opposed to giving it over to a group. You submerge a part of your ego to this greater project, whether it's a duo, a quartet or something on a more massive scale like a political party. Collaborations are social in nature. The classic image of an artist or a painter is one of solitary studio life. The music or performance situation allows the ability to collaborate with different people. There is the chance to end up with something greater than the sum of its individual parts. You hope that you will work towards something unified that will represent you all. It is a less egoistic, more social, endeavour.

LS

In my early years making film, I was inspired by the experiential structuralist approach. I wanted to experiment in an expanded way with my projectors. I often worked directly on the film with paint, ink and collage. Some of it existed in the early days

of DRIFT, my collaborative project with Lee. Then I began mixing the film I shot with found material, such as black and white pornographic movies from the '40s and '50s I found in a trash can in New York.

LR

You used some in our early shows.

LS

Some of them were gay porn made in somebody's basement. These were not commercial pornographic movies, but films circulating in the real underground porn world. I also have an intense interest in manipulating the sound, distorting the audio track. So I subverted these porn films, blew them up so you didn't know what you were seeing. I manipulated the material of pornography into abstraction. There isn't a figure that you can grab on to. I have this body of work that deals with the silhouette, this empty full shape.

MC

Which we find in your contributions to "The Exhibition of a Film".

LS

The tree sequences come from this desire to offer the experience of sitting on a bench in front of a tree blowing in the wind, killing fifteen minutes and just allowing yourself to sit and watch that tree dance. You take in the experience that most would find boring, tedious or wasteful. In fact, all these little movements become really expansive, important moments. With filmmakers such as Michael Snow, Warhol, Jonas, or Tarkovsky—you need to be patient. But it really is interesting how in the current modern world we are so impatient. We move in life at a certain pace. We expect things to match the pace of our own rhythm, our body rhythm. Pacing, cadence in music and the way a film moves, the way an actor moves, the way a dancer moves... it's all very subjective and tied up to who people are. As an audience, a participant, and as a viewer and a listener, you really have to go in with an understanding of what you're witnessing. You can't be dismissive.

MC

Your work offers such a striking feeling of the texture of video.

LS

I found myself in the '90s, making music videos that I shot on 16 mm film in a 35 mm camera. Each frame was extremely sculptural. Isolated pictures that were not sequential, projected extremely slow or extremely fast. Back then, when MTV was showing the work of independent bands, filmmakers had outlets to show their work. I did videos for bands, such as You Am I, Sonic Youth, Band of Susans, Men without Hats. With my camera-ready montage, I hardly had to cut my film. I embraced the mistakes. I would get a lot of superimpositions, all happening inside the camera without me knowing. I wanted to keep the integrity of whatever I shot. I have always loved the grain of the 16 mm film format. I struggled when I had to shift to digital video. I went in with a similar attitude to that of the artist Tacita Dean and her crusade against the demise of cinema and film, until I realized that I didn't have the choice. I had to find how to make it work for me. For our digital, non-film, installation

197

performance exhibition at Magasin 3, I used a small Lumix digital camera that I always had with me. So wherever I was, I could shoot whatever struck me. We do performances where the projections are huge, and I was fine with the result, I liked it. It often meant that the pixels were pronounced or distorted. The digital quality was apparent, but it felt akin to film.

MC

Did you abandon projecting all your older film work?

LS

I still have all my films and my modified projectors, but they are labour intensive mechanical machines that I didn't use gently! Lee and I made a DVD version of our DRIFT show that accompanied an exhibition we did in 2005. It also served as a way to archive it, because we knew film was dying and over, but we wanted to celebrate it, too. So we made a studio version of our performance, re-photographing films by digital means. Captured on video, it has a different rhythm. I think that the experience of cinema is gone. Projection is probably very alien to most kids. It's not that I am nostalgic nor sad, it just is another thing. The experience has moved inside, into your home. I like that, too, but it's isolating as well. You lose that experience of other people. Lee spoke about collaboration. You also collaborate with your audience. "The Exhibition of a Film" has this great impact on the audience. It's not only a collaboration between these people that came together and created these sequenced series of filmmaking and sound experiences. The audience is collaborating, too.

MC

"The Exhibition of a Film" puts the entire focus onto the spectators. In an exhibition you edit your own time. You may want to spend a long time with a given work, and very little—if at all—with another piece. You negotiate your time as you wander around. In a cinema, if you don't like a piece, you cannot edit the film and simply move on. It asks for an active decision to either accept it and live with it until it is over, or focus on another piece, or leave. You cannot fast forward your attention.

LS

It isn't easy. But who wants it to be easy all the time? I'd rather be challenged with something. If you're not challenged, then there is no discourse. If it's confusing, you try to talk about it, make sense of it, think about it for a minute... that's great value. You have to be really invested and willing. You have to learn to be patient. You don't just become patient.

Mathieu Copeland

Within your poetry, your recordings, the poetry systems, or again your exhibitions, you have—to such beautiful extent—thoroughly embraced the notion, possibilities and extended meanings of *polyphony*.

John Giorno

It means a lot of different things for me, and has changed many times. Polyphony is simply sound. For the last fifty years, I have been performing with the sound of my voice. I started in 1962, when Ted Berrigan said, to my surprise, “The next poet is John Giorno”. He had published my poems, which I had never read, and didn’t expect to read. I had rubber-band legs, shaking violently, looked like I was having an epileptic fit, sweated, and could barely say the words... From 1965 for fourteen years, I made complex sound compositions. Working with polyphony through repetition and electronics, recording on sixteen and twenty-four track tape recorders. The idea was to bring out the musical qualities inherent in the words in the poem. I wrote one or two long poems a year, and made them into sound compositions. So it evolved until one day when I felt that I had done everything possible, and did not want to do this ever again! So I stopped. I started working with musicians, and over the course of the following nine years, there were three configurations of the John Giorno Band. Since 1989 I’ve been working with the polyphony in my voice, the many sounds of the solo voice in performance.

MC

Could you discuss your early recorded sound compositions of your words repeated, going in and out of phase, echoing your voice with itself?

JG

There were many layers of the same voice slightly off-sync, moved about in relation to each other. This was the '70s, and it was technically difficult to do, whereas now digitally it is very easy to do. It involved creating a composition of the repetitions of musical phrases in the poem, technically continuously evolving. Many people wrongly believed, when listening to the LP, that I only pressed the reverb button... On an LP format many subtleties were lost.

MC

Would it be fair to say that, like the Pop artists, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, and others to whom you were ever so close, using these repeated images somehow echoes the way you repeated in these recordings your words, these poetic sentences?

JG

My work evolved a lot from 1962, when I first used the found image inspired by Andy, Rauschenberg and Jasper. If they could do it with art, I can do it with poetry. I had studied it all, DADA, Duchamp, the Italian Futurists and the Russian Constructivists, but they were not the influence; the living artists were the inspiration. In 1965, I met William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, who were deeply involved with the cut-up experiments and “poésie sonore” —sound poetry. Brion suggested that we do a collaboration, so we did a new poem called “Subway” that became “Subway Sounds”.

Brion then proposed that we send it to Bernard Heidsieck in Paris. At that time, there was a movement in France that became a tradition in Europe of poets working with sound. Heidsieck wrote back to me, saying that he was going to present the piece in the Paris Biennial at the Musée d'art moderne in October 1965. I was very happy and decided to do more sound poems. In the '60s, I was part of the tiny scene in Lower Manhattan. Everybody went to each other's performances, whether they happened at the Judson Church, in galleries, or at the School of Visual Arts. I performed with Max Neuhaus and Steve Reich. They made loops and I thought that I could do that, even though I'm not a musician, and make a sound poem. I started doing layered loops of phrases. In 1963, Karlheinz Stockhausen gave his first concert in America at NYU. I went there with Andy—everybody you could ever dream of was there in this audience of a 150 people. We were all bewildered with the electronic and repetitions. It was a very strong influence. In 1966, I worked with Bob Rauschenberg in *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*. I was the video cameraman in his piece, and I didn't have to do many moves and could handle it. Through Rauschenberg, I met Bob Moog, who had recently invented the Moog synthesizer. In 1966, only a handful of rock and roll bands had bought it, but nobody had used it yet. In 1967, maybe a hundred bands owned one and it was on twelve LP releases. In 1968, every band had one, and every album released used the Moog synthesizer! Beginning in January 1967, for a year and a half, I visited Bob Moog up in Trumansburg, New York, where he manufactured the synthesizers. I made the sound compositions with him as the engineer.

MC

How did your work with the Moog synthesizer influence you to create new material?

JG

Until then, I had been working with two tape recorders, going from one tape recorder to the other, layering the sound. Bob Moog introduced me to possible "oscillations that affect mental attitudes". Some were pleasing, making you feel good, others made you feel really negative. He told me he was doing research at Cornell University for the United States Army, and one interesting project was finding the sound oscillation that released or loosened the sphincter muscle. During a public event, such as a riot, it could be played on a loud speaker and people would shit in their pants. I thought this was such a brilliant idea! I asked him to put the oscillation in my poem. He hinted at a certain oscillation, but said he didn't know, as he didn't work directly on the project. In 1969, I met the brilliant engineer Bob Bielecki, and we have been working together for forty-five years. Today, in 2015, we are working on lots of projects.

MC

I would like to address your relationship with "words", and how your approach has changed over time. You began working with found material, text appropriated from newspapers.

JG

I was picking words that, in their nature, have some kind of melody, something transcendent, inherent in the ordinary

201

journalism. All words have melodies in them that are brought out when performing. In the '60s and '70s what I did had a strong element of chance with the found material and dealing with electronics. I didn't really know what I was doing, and was determined to forget everything I had learned and proceed guided by intuition.

MC

You create out of the materiality of the words. Either on your own, or with the John Giorno Band, you were producing recorded pieces until you became primarily reliant on your live spoken word. This is such a fascinating schism, moving from the mechanical to the natural, and yet you continuously deal with the poetry and the possibility of the voice, your voice.

JG

We were doing all different kinds of rock 'n' roll, hard-core, industrial... To me it was seamlessly continuous, I wanted to get rid of the over-polyphony of the sound compositions, as it obscured the words. It was a distraction. With the John Giorno Band, the musicians obscured the meaning. In the battle between the electric guitar and the human voice, you know who always wins. And my words were complicated. I decided early on that I was not going to sing. I did not know how to sing, so I wasn't going to take the route of Patti Smith and Jim Carroll, trying to make pop songs, which I didn't want to know how to do. Then one day I said to myself that I have had enough with electronic and music! I'm a poet and there were only the words, the voice, and whatever was inherent in the words and voice. My thing has always been working with the sound of the words. These phrases have musical qualities, and these musical qualities are brilliant! When I finally understood that, I didn't need any music.

MC

How, and where, do we internalize words and poems? Even though a poem is always the same, each time it is performed it is so beautifully, radically different. Slight changes happen. It flows naturally between the breaths, the words, and of course, within the poem, within the echoes of the lines. When read, they become a mantra and a sutra.

JG

I have been saying for years, that the last sixty years, 1950 to now, has been a golden age of poetry that never existed before in the history of the world. Poetry got a bad name, because many of the traditional poetic forms died, happily. Anybody who says that poetry is dead is a failed poet. Poetry is like human nature; you can't kill human nature. And poetry, the sublime use of language, has evolved in countless ways in our culture. For me the culmination in the Internet is miraculous, beyond a dream come true... What I did, being a poet, was to develop different skills. One thing is writing the poem, another is performing the poem, and bringing out the musical qualities of the words, and doing so with deep breath more like an opera or rock singer, than a poet, and I'm not trained musically. I memorize all the poems, and I'm not trained as an actor. Then there is the art I make from the words, which meant developing skills over many years in silkscreen and oil paintings, watercolours and drawings. Poetry manifests in all these many ways.

MC

Artworks that become a new habitat for your poetry! Chosen sentences that are repeated over and over again.

JG

Words and phrases that work on the page, and work in performance, always work as paintings and drawings... When I perform I realize that the poet is a mirror, in which the audience sees themselves. I'm saying these dumb words, and the audience is having a deeply profound experience. It is clear that the audience is seeing what is already in their minds, recognizing the wisdom that is already there. They think it's a great poem, but it's not. It's a mirror. They are seeing themselves. "Oh, that is a great poem." An example is Allen Ginsberg's "Howl". In the 1950s and '60s it was the reflection of the minds of millions of young people, me included, and transformed the culture. But now "Howl" is in a museum like a Rembrandt and a Picasso. Its job is done. It doesn't have the same effect anymore. It's like Yeat's "Second Coming", not exactly a reflection of the culture now. Great poems, of course, but ancient history.

MC

Liam Gillick reminded us of this 1959 interview when Marcel Duchamp discusses that art only has about twenty years significance, after that it is for art history. This also brings me to Karl Holmqvist whose poems use such popular materials, so that whenever he reads these, the audience automatically repeats mentally these sentences that are embedded within popular culture. Through his spoken words, he creates a platform for people to live on.

JG

William Burroughs was a mirror. William was a great writer and patriarch of junk. Every junkie in the world saw him as the reflection of their mind: somebody who can be profound and seminal, and use junk. But again, he was a mirror to another time.

MC

I would very much like to envisage the "mirror" that are the films that Andy Warhol made of, and with, you. In these films of very simple actions, where is the mirror? Who is mirroring whom?

JG

In 1963, Andy hadn't made a film. Two or three times a week we would go to Jonas Mekas' filmmakers' co-op to see all these films. Andy and all of us were really interested in the movies, but the latest movie was always fourth on the programme. We had to see some of the movies over and over again. We saw *Flaming Creatures* for the twentieth time and Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* for the fifteenth time! And when you see them over again, what's wrong with them is obvious, and what is great is obvious—Andy would say: "Why did he do that? That's so terrible!" Andy quickly learned how to make movies. He filmed everyday activities. Everybody watches the person sleeping next to them. It was what everyone sees, and so the movie *Sleep*. His early short films were *EAT* with Bob Indiana slowly eating a mushroom; and *Haircut* with John Daley, Freddy Herko, Billy Name and James Warring. I liked to sleep, slept a lot, and it made me feel good. Andy was

203

seeing me sleeping and wanted to film; no problem. He was using me as a found image, as I was using found images in my poems.

MC

It became such an iconic film, a masterpiece. As Jonas Mekas wrote in *The Village Voice* in September 1963, it was about “making the longest and simplest movie ever made, an eight hour long movie that shows nothing but a man sleeping”. In this film, that last five and a half hours based on edited and repeated footage of you sleeping, what do we look at? We see you, sleeping, dreaming, as we project our dreams onto yours, as we go within your dreams.

JG

Everyone sees themselves. Something you do all the time, sleep and watch somebody sleeping next to you.

MC

The exhibition of a film, and the exhibition within a film. In these films, what is exhibited is your exposition. And thus, from the film to its exhibition, could you discuss what, for you, is an exhibition?

JG

The expression of a poem is an exhibition. Obviously, when I have shows of paintings of the words these are exhibitions. When I perform the words, it is an exhibition, the poem in another venue. Reading a book and reading a screen are the displays of an exhibition... The world has changed so much in fifty years and so much in twenty with the internet—which is a good thing! I recently read in the *New York Times* online about some research that showed two-year-olds should not watch an iPad for more than one hour a day. Those babies will really change poetry.

Mathieu Copeland

I would like to begin our discussion in remembering maverick choreographer Elaine Summers who recently passed away. It was Elaine who introduced me to you for the first time.

Meredith Monk

When I first came to New York, I would go and see concerts at the Judson Dance Theatre, and this is where I remember seeing, in 1964, Elaine's evening long piece called *Fantastic Gardens*. Elaine was a person who, very early on, was doing alignment-breathing work. She was one of the first people I knew who did that, and she was very knowledgeable in terms of anatomy. When I was in my twenties I had a bit of a knee injury, and I worked with her. She usually taught in her own studio, aligning the body and getting the breath through the body.

MC

Thank you. I would like us to consider the notion of polyphony. I have always been very drawn into what "polyphony" offers. When first conceiving what was going to become "The Exhibition of a Film", I reflected on how polyphony occurs in the physical space of cinema. I must say how indebted I am in considering and conceiving this exhibition in regard to your art. You have dealt with such mastery through the years with polyphony, may it be the polyphony of the voice, or the polyphony within space. I would thus love to begin by asking you, what is your notion of polyphony?

MM

I love the idea of polyphony in music. But in a strange way I feel that throughout my whole work, from the beginning onwards, I was actually thinking in terms of polyphony of perceptual modes. In a way, in my large works that included music and gesture, light and film, sound and objects, I was thinking of that as perceptual polyphony.

MC

This brings me to a discussion I had with curator Jon Hendricks who was describing one of your first shows at the Judson Church where he was the curator from 1965 until June 1968. This was *16 Millimeter Earrings*, a 1966 multi-layered installation where you had, among others, several reel-players installed in different parts of the space thus creating a polyphony of the recorded material.

MM

At that time, we weren't really using multi-tracks. My cousin was a sound engineer, and I recorded four different pieces on these long loops that went all the way from one room to the next, and we put it on reel-to-reel tape. In the performance, we literally had four tape recorders going on at the same time. It was very primitive technologically, an accumulative sound environment where one element is added to another element, and so on.

MC

For this piece you recorded this most beautiful piece *Nota*?

MM

That's right. In *16 Millimeter Earrings* I would perform the material live. I sang with my guitar, and then over that came a tape of just a loop of the first phrase. The piece was a very early meditation on the power of media in relation to a live performance. I'm not sure many people were thinking about that at the time. The next layer

was a text that I had found from Wilhelm Reich's book called *The Function of Orgasm*. I made a tape of me reading that passage, intercut with the description of a dance that I should have been doing—a large, epic kind of dance, but I was just doing these tiny little movements. It was very ironic in relation to what you were hearing and seeing. And the first few words became a second loop of this environment. I was already thinking about the relationship between live performance, and the recorded medium.

MC

How would you have defined these works at the time? Would you have called them environments, exhibitions, events?

MM

Since I always loved performing, I was definitely thinking of them as performance pieces. It wasn't so much an installation at that point. Later on, with pieces like *Juice* or *Vessel* that are site-specific pieces, I included in the concept elements of installation. *16 Millimeter Earrings* was a performance piece, even though I was thinking very visually, in a sense, in a very painterly way.

MC

Furthermore, this piece reflects upon itself. *Nota* talks about a note, and the note keeps on evolving, spatially too. And to pursue delving within the concept of polyphony, I wonder how you approach the physicality of the "voice", both within your own voice and the voice of others?

MM

I had my revelation of the voice being an instrument in the mid-'60s. From that point on, I was always trying to find all the possibilities of what the human voice could do, or particularly what my voice could do. You can think of that as working with the concept of polyphony in that I was trying for a wide variety of sound, production, colour, texture, character, landscape, age and gender. I was trying to expand the voice as a world, and worlds within worlds. To create a vocabulary based on my own voice and to not limit it in any way was always part of my thinking. Within one song, there might two, three, or more, aspects of the human voice. That was how I was thinking, and I still work that way.

MC

There is a great dichotomy between the human voice and the words. It seems to me that most of your art has been about going within the syllables, and to a certain extent to communicate directly without language.

MM

Because I came from both a music and dance background, I trusted that non-verbal communication could go to a deeper place. It could find and delineate a fundamental energy for which we don't have words. Sometimes, the filter of words and language gets in the way of our direct experience. I intuitively knew, even in my twenties, that the voice has that power to get to the beginnings of human utterance, emotions between emotions, the shades of feeling, which has a much more complex and profound power than the emotions that we have words for, such as fear, anger and so on. You could say that emotions with names are more like primary colours, whereas what I was

207

trying for was a more subtle palette of feeling. I have always believed that the voice is experiential, that it goes directly to the human heart. That is why we have been able to tour the world easily without having to deal with language. We can communicate directly heart to heart anywhere in the world.

MC

Which is so remarkable and beautiful. You have often said that during your upbringing you realized that the voice would be a material in its own right. In the same way that one uses the body, one could use what the voice embodies, and all the characters it has.

MM

Exactly.

MC

The voice being experiential affirms that the voice goes within oneself, revealing oneself.

MM

Well, there is an old quote of Martha Graham that says that the body never lies. I feel the same way about the voice. The voice never lies. You are going so deeply into fundamental, essential and profound energy when you work with the human voice.

MC

It reminds me of the discussion you held with Edward Strickland, where you talked about the qualities of the voice as being both universal and very much one's own instrument.

MM

Yes, exactly.

MC

Which in turn echoes this fantastic thought by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben that the voice is the interface between the soul and the body. Now, from the voice to the words. You have dealt to such an extent with written words, I wonder what is for you the materiality of the words?

MM

The irony is that actually I love words, I love language, and I love the eloquence and quality of language. I believe that language is really pointing to something. It's very hard to get a purely abstract language. Poetry is closer to that. Language, and the precision of language, is telling you what you're looking at. What I'm trying to do is actually to go beyond that part of the mind, to a more fundamental experience, without numen.

MC

John Giorno tells us how within his poetry he is not trying to use the thinking brain, but rather the intuitive brain.

MM

Words become abstract when you think of them musically.

MC

It seems to me that in your approach to writings and your approach to "silence" within the use of the voice, you often allude to something that is close to an idea of nothingness, of emptiness.

MM

Yes, that's one aspect. Another aspect is that often, particularly when I'm working with a cappella music—for instance with a vocal solo—a lot of silence is built in. Silence is part of the music. I'm

thinking of *Songs from the Hill*, a series of a cappella pieces in which silence is so much part of what's going on musically.

MC

There is such a great materiality to silence, too. Now, I would like to discuss with you about an "invisible theatre", this beautiful expression that you have used to describe your debut album *Key*.

MM

This was the way I wanted that piece to be listened to. When you make a record or a CD, you are asking a lot from your audience, such as sitting down to listen to something. I don't think I would be presumptuous enough now to say that someone would stop everything to just sit and listen. But in those days, my ideal way of listening was to be in the dark, maybe one candle or two on, and literally sit and listen. The reason I talked about an "invisible theatre" is that you would have your own images. The whole album is structured like a journey and this is the reason why I called myself the "travelling voice". And then there are all these moments of text—text within *Key* came from dreams. Again, it is very atmospheric, and very visual.

MC

The beauty of an "invisible theatre" is that you generate a mental image within the mind of the one who listens.

MM

Exactly.

MC

Dreams have that complex beauty, and I have always wondered if it would be possible to generate a dream in someone else's head, to create a mental image within someone's mind.

MM

I love the idea that people can have their own images, and that they have their own freedom. That is why at a certain point I got disillusioned with theatre in the sense of theatrical images, with all the senses filled in. I became much more interested in working with music concerts. The music-concert form felt much more fluid to me. Each song becomes a world, and a transformation. It isn't that it is only one world for the whole evening. In a music concert, the audience and the performers are in the same space at the same time, there is no illusion of a fourth wall. And at the same time, it allows each and every person to have their own images and their own psychic narratives and feeling palette.

MC

Another element that I find fascinating with *Key* is that Dick Higgins was part of the choir as a companion voice. The scene then was very permeable from one environment to the other, from music to visual-arts, from Fluxus to dance.

MM

I graduated from Sarah Lawrence College where I had been in the voice, the dance and the theatre departments. Since it is a very progressive school, in my last year, I was allowed to create my own programme called "Combined Performing Arts". I started to make pieces that were utilizing the voice, music and gestures, objects and theatre. When I first came to New York, I met Dick Higgins at one of his happenings, and later was in one of his pieces.

Happenings were coming to an end, but a few people were still doing events. Dick and Alison Knowles immediately welcomed me, took me under their wing. I think that they saw who I was and they saw that I was fluent in these different forms, that I wanted to use voice, gesture, character and space as a performer and as an artist. I had already presented a piece of my own called *Break*. I was very determined to do my own work. I loved that the artists from Fluxus had this “anything-is-possible” mentality. That generation was really daring, fearless! So, I was asked to often perform in those pieces, with Jackson Mac Low, Dick and Alison... there I met Geoff and Jon Hendricks, Name June Paik... The Avant-Garde Festival happened every fall uptown at the Judson Hall. It was run by Charlotte Moorman. She was such an extraordinary person. I took part in some of those. I knew those people very well although they were definitely a generation older than me, and in a lot of ways my sensibility was very different from theirs. But they were very kind, encouraging and generous to me.

MC

You never were Fluxus, and you often said that you were never keen with the word minimalism either. I find this in-betweenness in your art so striking.

MM

That is always the way I have thought about everything, but it has given me some pain over the years.

MC

Your art and life encompasses La Monte Young and John Cage, Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra, Phill Niblock and Yoko Ono! Can you tell me of your early memories of meeting Yoko?

MM

When I met Yoko, I was working on presenting for an avant-garde festival some poems by Jackson Mac Low. I had organized a group of people to realize those poems as performances. Yoko came to one of the rehearsals. I visited her at her and Anthony Cox's home when they were together. Then I remember her presenting in 1966 a beautiful installation, *The Stone*, at the Judson Gallery that Jon Hendricks curated. It was a white room, a white platform with white curtains all around. You were given a black bag, and even though it was opaque, you could see through. You would zip yourself into this bag, walk up onto that platform, and as you sat in any position you were becoming a stone in the room. When somebody else walked in, there was another stone. I remember loving that piece.

MC

This recollection brings me to the thought and consideration of the score. Especially how to score the voice. Would you care to tell me how you have approached “scores” throughout your career?

MM

I have always been resistant to it, and I still am! I can't stand it. Just even looking at a fairly conventional looking score drives me crazy. I feel that I don't want to put every dynamic marking in there. Still to this day I hate that feeling of music being fixed. Some of my vocal solos are un-scorable, and I never want to score them. There is no reason to score them. I consider the score only a mnemonic device. I have had to do so for my choral works so that

other people can perform it. But with some of the vocal solos I would never, never put any on paper except for a kind of graphic score. For *Our Lady of Late*, which is a piece that I did with voice and wine glass, I made a series of drawings so that you got the feeling of what the principle was in space. That said, I have been very fortunate to be working with Boosey & Hawkes since the late '90s. Some of the pieces, like the choral works, the orchestral works and the piano music, can and need to be scored, although a piece like *Panda Chant II* took more than two years to complete! We ended up with a map of the structure, a linear score and very detailed instructions about how to perform it. What I like about scoring some of the pieces is that it is a way of passing on the joy and challenge of performing the music to future generations.

MC

Is your reluctance to scoring the means to allow more improvisation?

MM

My forms are always very set. But as a soloist I always allow myself to have room to play—yet always within the overall structure. There are places where it might be different on a given night, as I may want to follow a branch, but I would always come back to the trunk! That state of mind is very hard to teach to another person. And that's why with most solos, short of doing these graphic scores that are just an indication of what the principles of the pieces are, I really do not feel like I'm going to, in my lifetime, necessarily make some of the solo vocal pieces into scores.

MC

Furthermore, since you have been working with the same core group of people for so many years, there must be another kind of non-verbal language that allows one to remember the piece, and also to follow the score that *you* have in mind.

MM

Exactly. It is like imprinting, and that is the reason why the performers are so incredibly flexible. When I try to do some of these pieces with other groups, it is much more difficult for them. My group can just imprint material so that if I come back the next day and say, "Instead of three of those and two of those, I've listened to it and I actually would rather have two of those and three of those". They immediately erase what happened the day before and imprint the new one. It is that instant adjustment that comes from working in an oral tradition, rather than working at a piece of paper where you have to go through another path of what is memory through a kind of visual memorization. This is imprinted right in the body, right in the voice.

MC

And where do the words come from? How do we internalize the words and poetry as John Giorno wonders? I am fascinated in your words that "beautiful language is the right space for the right piece". I love the idea of something being both site-specific, and that can travel everywhere, too. And thus, I wonder what would be the idea of space for you?

MM

In my lifetime, I have had the most wonderful experiences performing in a wide variety of spaces. I have done two different

211

projects at the Guggenheim Museum here in New York. In 2009, we did a piece called *Ascension Variations* which was basically using the material from *Songs of Ascension* that I created for Ann Hamilton's Tower. I also incorporated a little bit of the material from *Juice* that I had done in 1969, also in the Guggenheim. The tower is a very particular and idiosyncratic space. It is eight stories high but the circumference is not very wide. Inside it are two staircases forming a double helix that meets at the top. I had the performers on one staircase and the audience on the other. There are only two small doors, which you have to crawl through to enter, so once the audience and performers were in, that was it. Entrances and exits during the piece were hard to do. The Guggenheim is almost the opposite. It is huge and if you are not right up against the front of the ramp, you cannot be seen from below. For the first part, I placed the audience on the floor looking up and played with performers appearing and disappearing. You never knew where the next event would come from. We only got to perform *Ascension Variations* twice in one night—museums have their limitations in terms of how much you can do since they have their exhibits. I remember lying down on the floor singing—which is the last image of *Songs of Ascension*—and I felt that the whole museum was levitating, that the audience was levitating. We were all levitating! I thought, this is as good as it gets! It was transcendent! I would say that this is one ideal space for me. I usually do not like theatre because of the framing arch that makes something into a pictorial experience, rather than a three-dimensional immersive experience. But one theatre I do love is the BAM Harvey Theatre. A large theatre that is yet very intimate. The audience is looking down, giving more of a three-dimensional feeling to it. In a sense, if you were thinking of a film, it would be a place where you could do close ups and long shots.

MC

I remember when you did *Songs of Ascension* in this fantastic theatre in Brooklyn, you had dispatched the performers *in* the audience, throughout the space. And that was such a beautiful taking into consideration of the space, a fantastic use of its inherent polyphony.

MM

Absolutely. And the beauty of the Guggenheim architecturally is that it is built for polyphony, too. The integrity of the architecture was what I was definitely working on when I made *Juice* there. Even those parallel lines of the ramps already imply a spatial polyphony.

MC

I would now like to consider the space of film. You have dealt with film very early on, and quite consistently through the years.

MM

I love the fluidity of time and space in film. One can go so easily from one space to another, from one time to another. Time is a sculptural element in film. Furthermore, editing film to me is like writing music.

MC

And its singular time stream brings forward narration.

MM

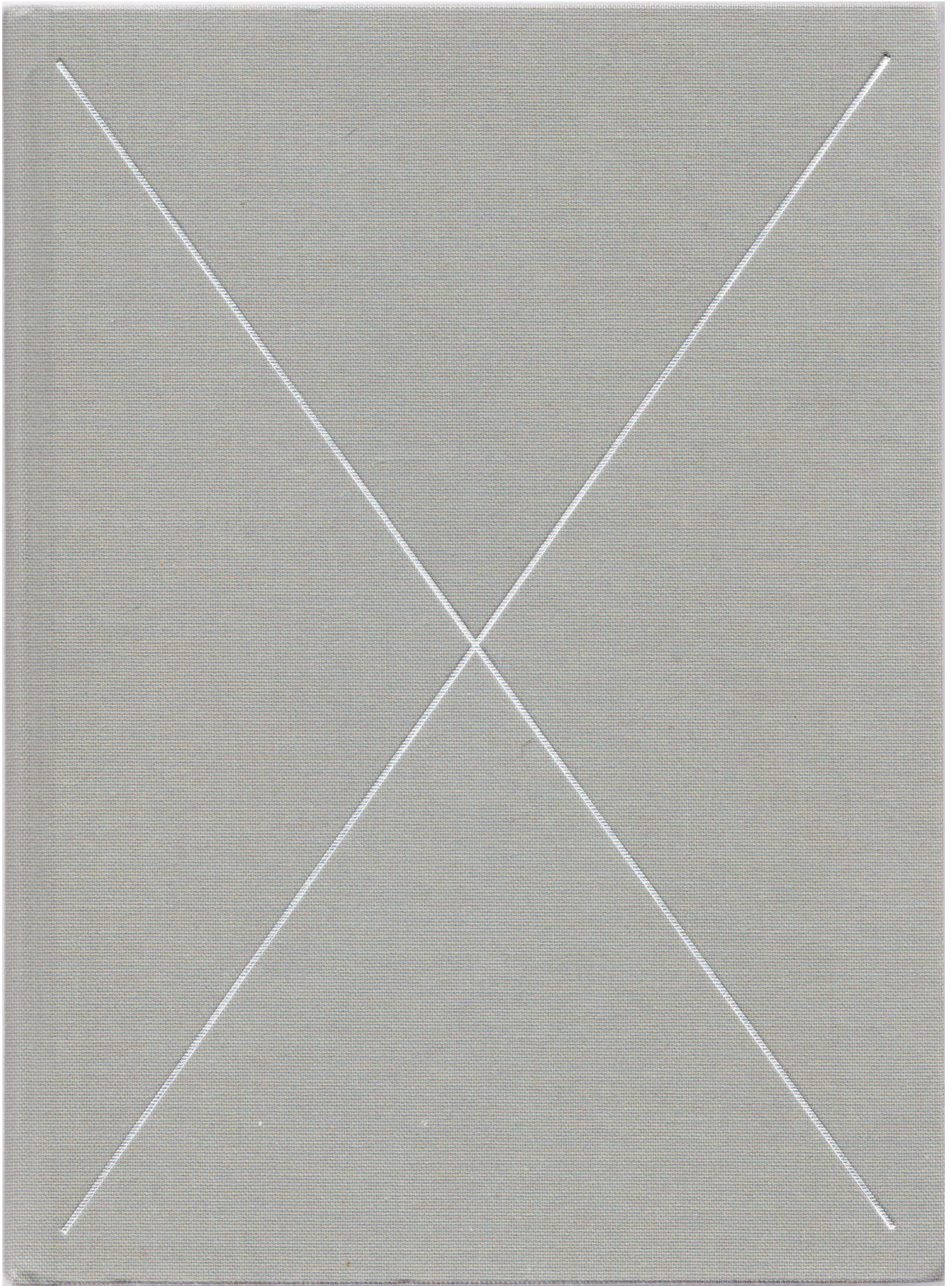
I have tried to make films that do not have narrative per se. Film syntax implies simultaneity in a different way than on stage. On stage, you can have all your activities going on at the same time, you can have simultaneous dimensions, in actuality. In film, by intercutting you are able to imply simultaneity. *Book of Days* is as close to a narrative structure as I have ever worked with in my life. It was really challenging to figure out how to make a non-narrative film and yet include narrative strands. *Book of Days* was a mostly silent and musically structured feature length film. We, as human beings, seem to want to grasp onto story and narrative. That's a different instinct.

MC

Your films convoke a "sound" syllabus. To conclude, I would like to envisage the *Click Songs* from the *Volcano Songs*. The clicks of the voice that you orchestrate demonstrate yet another use of the body, another part of your syllabus. It creates an evocation of a universal knowledge, a shared experience.

MM

The *Click Song #1* is really interesting. My early training was in Dalcroze Eurhythmics. As such, rhythm was always a very natural language to me. When doing the *Click Songs*, and all those songs that I call *Light Songs*, I think of those as duets for solo voice. With the *Click Song #1*, I'm making a polyphony within one voice. I do a counter rhythm with the clicks, while singing a melody. It is wonderful to perform.



The Anti-Museum. Edited by Mathieu Copeland and Balthazar Lovay. Published in 2017 by Fri Art – Fribourg Kunsthalle & Koenig Books, London, in partnership with KW, Berlin. 215 x 280 mm (hardback). 794 pages (280 b/w and 30 full colour ill.) ISBN: 978-3-96098-003-2

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016) by Mathieu Copeland
- Graciela Carnevale in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Daniel Buren in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Robert Barry in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Lefevre Jean Claude in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Plamen Dejanov in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Svetlana Heger in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Henry Flynt in conversation with Mathieu Copeland (part 1, 9 October 2012)
- Henry Flynt in conversation with Mathieu Copeland (part 2, 10 February 2016)
- Jacques Villeglé in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Claude Rutault in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Ben Vautier in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Mierle Laderman Ukeles in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Lydia Lunch in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- Genesis Breyer P-Orridge in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
- John Armleder in conversation with Mathieu Copeland (part 1, 1 March 2009)
- John Armleder in conversation with Mathieu Copeland (part 2, 20 May 2016)

Book Content:

Commissioned texts to Reiko Tomii, Stewart Home, Henry Flynt, Branislav Dimitrijević, Krist Gruijthuisen, Déborah Laks, Véronique Follet, Nicolas de Oliveira and Nicola Oxley, Balthazar Lovay, Bob Nickas, Johannes Cladders, Sören Schmeling, Olivier Suter, Allan Wallach, Michel Giroud, Richard Goldstein, Beatriz Colomina, Matthieu Saladin, Thibault Walter, Erik Bullof, Fanny Schulmann, Kenneth Goldsmith, Ryan Holmberg, Mai-Thu Perret, Olivier Quintyn, Paulo Pires do Vale

Reprints by Akasegawa Genpei, Graciela Carnevale, Michel Gauthier, Jim Drobnick, Robert Morris, George Maciunas, Yvonne Rainer, Dora Vallier, Billy Childish and Charles Thomson, Stanley Fisher, Lil Picard, Boris Lurie, Iris Clert, Storm van Helsing and Gareth James, Tim Griffin, Peter Weibel, Jean Toche, Jon Hendricks, Guerrilla Art Action Group, Achille Mbembe, Andrea Branzi, Ettore Sottsass, Alessandro Mendini, Yona Friedman, Takis, Roberto Jacoby, Zach Blas, GX Jupiter-Larsen, Guillaume Apollinaire, Steven Parrino, Jakob Jakobsen, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Robin Page, Ben Vautier, Hans Hollein, Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux

Interviews by Mathieu Copeland (unless specified) with Graciela Carnevale, Daniel Buren, Robert Barry, Lefevre Jean Claude, Svetlana Heger, Plamen Dejanov, Maria Eichhorn (by Katie Guggenheim), Henry Flynt, Jacques Villeglé, Claude Rutault, Goran Trbuljak (by Andrea Bellini), Ben Vautier, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Piero Gilardi (by Andrea Bellini), Lydia Lunch, Genesis Breyer P.Orridge, John Armleder

A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016)

Mathieu Copeland
2016

Hi Red Center, the Japanese avant-garde art collective whose core members were Takamatsu Jirō (1936-1998), Akasegawa Genpei (1937-2014) and Nakanishi Natsuyuki (born 1935), closed the Naiqua Gallery in Tokyo from 12 to 16 May 1964, for their exhibition the “Great Panorama Exhibition.” In sealing the gallery, Hi Red Center turned the whole world that existed outside the gallery into a readymade, thus offering a great panorama of the world, canned.

Historically the first incarnation of the radical gesture of using closure as an artistic medium, Hi Red Center announced, “right now, the gallery is being closed by the hand of Hi Red Center. When you have free time, please make sure not to visit it.” Emphasising the reality of closing a common location where art is experienced—the gallery—the collective printed a map indicating where one could find the closed door of the sealed gallery. Akasegawa insisted that this was an invitation to “never ever come to this, because it will be a waste of your time.” A conceptual approach defying the visitor’s physical experience, a closing party marked the reopening of the space. The public witnessed a moment between closure and closure, with a brief moment of opening: Jasper Johns took the first nail out of the wooden planks of the closed gallery, a reopening witnessed by a crowd that included Yoko Ono and Sam Francis.

In October 1964, the Naiqua Gallery in Tokyo was once more the site of an act of closing. With “Ah, Nil, Ah, A Ceremony of Psi’s Secret Embodiment Drowning in the Wilderness: Prototype Exhibition,” Matsuzawa Yutaka (1922-2006) declared the gallery an “anti-venue” through the act of closing it. This exhibition was conceived as a double-venue solo exhibition. The gallery, the “anti-venue” in Tokyo, was left empty and closed. In his hometown of Shimo Suwa, the “venue”—his bedroom—was theoretically offered for viewing, as the site of discovery of “Non-Sensory Painting.” As Reiko Tomii explains in her essays in the present anthology, “the closing of the gallery, which resulted in the impossibility of entering it, illuminated the theoretical conceit of ‘anti-venue,’ and the distance, which signified the unlikelihood of traveling to the ‘venue,’ ensured the enigma of [Yutaka’s] Revelation”—to “vanish matter.”

For her exhibition in October 1968 as part of the *Ciclo de Arte Experimental* [Experimental Art Cycle] in Rosario, Argentina, Graciela Carnevale (born 1942) locked unaware visitors inside the gallery. After four hours, a passer-by smashed the gallery window, thus releasing the spectators inside.

The violence of the piece and the locking-up of the public remains an uncompromising historical precedent. The audience

taken hostage came as a stark reminder of the absurdity that galleries and museums continued to function despite the political situation of the time, blissfully forgetful of the repression of a military government.

This piece embodied a most striking violence, not only towards the public, but also towards the institution, the cycle of exhibitions and the artist herself. As Carnevale wrote, “to experience enclosure is a physical relation and perception. Closed, the possibility of seeing or escaping becomes a challenge. It refers to the possibility of transforming the status-quo, leaving our passive role of citizens.”

For his first solo exhibition in a gallery, on 23 October 1968, Daniel Buren (born 1938) presented at the Apollinaire Gallery in Milan a work that consisted of white and green striped wallpaper entirely covering the entrance door, thus closing the gallery for the duration of the exhibition.

With this gesture, the artist created a dialogue between his refusal of the traditional use of the walls and his acceptance of the gallery and some of its purposes. In deciding to show a work not in the gallery, but on the gallery, the artist closed the gallery not as an end in itself, but for the work to exist, and be experienced.

Robert Barry (born 1936) announced in 1969 that during the exhibition the Art & Project gallery in Amsterdam would be closed from 17 to 31 December, that for the exhibition the Sperone Gallery in Turin would be closed on 30 December, and that the Eugenia Butler Gallery would be closed from 10 to 21 March 1970. As the artist told us recently, Robert Barry was “using the art world as his medium.” “Anti-gallery,” this series of works constituted an attack on the gallery system.

The statement that the closure itself was the work makes this piece a fundamental milestone of conceptual art. The statement substitutes for the whole, and shapes its form. The sentence deliberately annuls the traditional location of art—the gallery.

Lefevre Jean Claude (born 1946) took advantage of the summer closure of the Yvon Lambert Gallery in Paris in 1981 to announce an exhibition that existed only in the form of a text. Affixed to the gallery windows, the layout was in the same font as all of the gallery’s written communication. The text simply announced “an exhibition by lefevre jean claude 11.07/31.08 '81.” Not closing the gallery itself, but using the closed gallery to show a work that required the gallery to be closed, the artist proposed “A WORK, JUST A WORK or maybe AN EXHIBITION, JUST AN EXHIBITION. The very location where reading takes place will become the very location of the work; in this case, the parts that make an exhibition truly happen in this exact place.”

Maurizio Cattelan (born 1960), for his first solo exhibition in a gallery, closed the Neon Gallery in Bologna in 1989, leaving only a small sign that read “torno subito” [BE RIGHT BACK]. This kind of announcement, in the form of a sign of the type found

in small shops everywhere, plays with the notion of time and patience. Profoundly marked by the possibility of disappearance as a work of art, the exhibition seized upon ambiguity as a means of abusing the expectations of spectators awaiting an imminent coming-back. As Francesco Bonami writes in *Maurizio Cattelan: The Unauthorized Autobiography*, impersonating the artist, "when I put the BE RIGHT BACK sign, I was already trying to transform my flight, my disappearing act, into a work of art. But the thing really clicked when I was invited to do an exhibition in a castle near Turin: The night before the opening, all the artists were supposed to sleep over at the castle, but I climbed out the window using a rope of knotted sheets and escaped: That was my work: The knotted sheets hanging out of the window. At first, everyone thought I was kidding, but then they realised I was gone, they understood that it was no joke."

This work announced a long series of pieces in which the artist would use escape as a form of art. Invited by the De Appel Arts Centre in Amsterdam to create a piece for a group show, Cattelan created "Another Fucking Readymade" (1996), for which he stole an entire Paul de Revs show from the nearby Bloom Gallery, exhibiting it (including all of the Gallery's office furniture) as his own work until the police insisted he return the loot on threat of arrest. Another incarnation of the motif of closure and the questioning of the art system can be found in "The Wrong Gallery." Between 2002 and 2005, Maurizio Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni and Ali Subotnick created the smallest exhibition space in New York, located at 516A 1/2 West 20th Street in Chelsea. As the *Wrong* dealers announced, "The Wrong Gallery is the back door to contemporary art, and it's always locked." Among the pieces that one would have experienced, as Christopher Turner wrote in *The Guardian* in 2005, "if you ever visited the Wrong Gallery in New York, you might have been greeted by a blunt notice: 'Fuck Off We're Closed.' [...] Few passers-by would have guessed that the 'Closed' sign — a piece by British artist Adam McEwen — was itself the work on view."

Swetlana Heger (born 1968) and Plamen Dejanov (born 1970) developed a collaborative practice in the mid-nineties that offered a deep consideration of the conditions of labour and leisure. In 1997 the duo began a series of works in which the production budget of their contributions to exhibitions was spent on them going on holiday. First initiated at the Secession in Vienna, their work would be them holidaying for the duration of the exhibition, a work only manifested by a sign that announced the dates of their holiday, displayed in the gallery or the institution.

In February 1999, when Swetlana Heger and Plamen Dejanov were invited to realise an exhibition at Mehdi Chouakri's gallery in Berlin, the artists asked for the entire staff to go on holiday, thus closing the space. Again, only a coloured sign affixed on the metal shutters of the gallery that read "Galerie wegen Urlaub geschlossen" [gallery closed for holidays] along with the dates "12.–28.2.1999" signalled the existence of the exhibition, as the gallery remained closed.

As an echo to a financial crisis that shook Argentina, in September 2002 Santiago Sierra (born 1966), with the same corrugated iron used by Argentinean banks to protect themselves from their clients, blocked access to another type of financial institution: the Lisson Gallery in London.

Between 1998 and 2002, Argentina went through a complete and chaotic default on its public debt, the economy contracted by 28% and unemployment soared to 22%. The banking system came close to collapse, causing the government to ban bank withdrawals—introducing the so-called *corralito*—and establishing capital controls. The Spanish word *corralito* was coined by the journalist Antonio Laje, and is the diminutive form of *corral*, which means “corral, animal pen, enclosure.” The word here was commonly used in the sense of “small enclosure”—“a child’s playpen,” an expressive name that alludes to the restrictions imposed by the measure, and the banks barricading themselves against their own clients.

In a similar gesture to that which had led Santiago Sierra to burn the interior of the newly built Art Deposit Gallery, in Mexico City during November 1997, or again not to allow non-Spanish citizens entrance to the Spanish Pavilion when he represented the country at the Venice Biennale in 2003, the artist projects his own radicality in shutting the space. Inspired by mass action, and by hooligans—who, as the artist tells us, show a popular way of performing, with no conscience of performance—for the grand opening of the brand new space of the Lisson Gallery in London, he let the audience stay outside, waiting for something that will never happen.

Rirkrit Tiravanija (born 1961), when invited in 2007 to inaugurate Toronto’s OCAD exhibition space, decided to brick off the entrance to the gallery with cinder blocks. On these, Tiravanija reprinted the Situationist slogan “Ne Travaillez Jamais” [Never Work].

This piece is reminiscent of *untitled 2001 (no fire no ashes)*, in which Tiravanija closed in 2001 the entrance to the Neugerriemschneider gallery in Berlin, only leaving the back door open, and a second iteration for which the artist entirely closed the Neugerriemschneider booth at Art 36 Basel, on 16 to 20 June 2005. The booth left empty, as the artist recalled in an interview with the *View on Canadian Art* journal in 2007, the staff of the gallery “had an understanding of what (that piece) means. The text ‘Ne Travaillez Jamais’ is from the Situationists in the 1960’s, which is interesting in this hypermarket of art! Perhaps it is important to block out some doors, people will be amused, or confused.”

Maria Eichhorn (born 1962) requested that the entire staff of the Chisenhale Gallery in London withdraw their labour for five weeks, thereby closing the art centre between 23 April to 29 May 2016, or for the duration of “5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours”.

For her exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern in 2001, the artist decided to devote the exhibition budget to the renovation of the building, leaving the exhibition spaces empty. The radical practice of Maria Eichhorn interrogates and goes beyond the

limits of the gallery and the museum. An exponent of institutional critique, she takes up its convention as she exposes the structures—material, financial, artistic or political—which surround every artwork. As often with Maria Eichhorn's art, the formal aspect of her work takes shape "by necessity." The temporary closing of the Chisenhale Gallery is not a goal in itself, but the collateral result of a definitive action, a true conceptual gesture informed by a great concern with economy. The art lies in asking for all the employees to withdraw their labour. The closure of the art centre is the necessary result of such a radical gesture.

A present, in retrospect

Since the early 1960s, artists have seized the radical gesture of closing a space as a work of art. In these uncompromising pieces, we are confronted with a closed space, and invited to experience its physical, sensory and conceptual realities. Over the course of three months at Kunsthalle Fribourg in Switzerland, in repetition of a seemingly recurrent pattern, "A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions" experiments with the retrospective genre, and explores the extreme limits of art, while defying visitors' expectations and bringing into play questions of aesthetics and politics, among many other things. To envisage "closure" is to confront spaces being sealed. A retrospective offers us the opportunity to experience a work in the present, as an echo of what it once was. Re-enacted today, these historic works highlight changes in context, different effects and different meanings, with regard to their initial iterations.

The temporary closure of an art institution, in a climate of inflicted austerity, offers many levels of resonance. To close a gallery in 2016 exemplifies the realities of our time. The current context is both one of opulence and one of self-imposed—or imposed—austerity. In the face of a major humanitarian drama on the shores of Europe, in Italy and Greece in particular, the act of closure bears a terrible parallel to the European Union closing its own boundaries.

A retrospective of closures tackles a contemporary moment when politics are disengaging themselves from culture. In early 2016, the ministry of culture in Brazil was temporarily closed and merged with that of education. Many art centres across Europe and the USA are closing, or being threatened of closure. Art schools all over are being closed or threatened of being closed, such as the ones in Sydney, Avignon, Perpignan.... To embrace the act of closure as a work of art embodies a decided gesture that encompasses all of these.

The gesture of closing reminds us that a simple act encompasses an infinity of meanings. An action re-envisaged signifies a new action in a different context. These closures may only be temporary, but they problematize and ultimately transform the institution.

To close a gallery as a work of art embodies an attack on the commercial aspect of the “art system.” A retrospective in a Kunsthalle allows us to envisage anew these gestures, displaced from their original venues—principally commercial art galleries—and transferred to the public domain. When performed as an artistic gesture, such a work questions the reality of the institution.

Though closed, the institution is fulfilling its commitment—the venue is still functioning, and is showing art—to what too many would argue is a waste of space, a waste of time and, for public institutions, a waste of public funds. It asks the question, does a museum serve its purpose when it is closed? Yet, what is it that is “closed” actually? The spaces? The infrastructure that encompasses human labour? Ultimately, these are works of art to be seen, experienced. Let us remind ourselves of the necessity of any institution to show the most radical art, even if to show implies to close.

When enouncing the conceptual statement that “during the exhibition the gallery will be closed,” Robert Barry strikes a blow, a conscious attack, on the commercial gallery system. And so does Santiago Sierra in closing the Lisson Gallery. Again, in using the same steel used by Argentinean to forbid entry to their customers, the artist claims that to close a gallery is to close another institution of power and money.

These actions often encapsulate a conscious attack against the very notion of systems, and redefine the reality of a work of art. A consideration affirmed within the pages of this anthology, as we can see, among other things, in the historical parallels between Jean Tinguely’s destructive machines and Gustav Metzger’s Auto-Destructive Art. As Frank Popper wrote in 1966, “Artists or producers of auto-destructive like Gustav Metzger or Jean Tinguely are revolutionaries in the true sense of the word: they want to have done with things whose original impulse has been dissipated and whose values have become pure repetition or outright dynamic refusal.”

To close is to show, too.

A retrospective of closed exhibitions forces us to confront a history that encompasses not just the act itself, the gesture, but also very much the work of art, even its visual incarnation. The works shall be not only envisaged and summed up for their closings. These closures are works of art, radical gestures carried out by artists as violent acts, and thus approaching what Ben Vautier labels “the limits of art.” To envisage these anew and close the gallery in 2016, as Daniel Buren reminds us, is to offer the experience of a work of art. The closed gallery is an essential component of a work, as it informs and gives it a form, yet each experience has far-reaching resonances.

In a retrospective of closed exhibitions, each work concerns the entire venue. As such, the work of art and the exhibition are one and the same. To close a venue as a work of art is to exhibit. It exhibits a work, as it is the work. It is the exhibition of an exhibition, and in the accumulation of exhibitions, it is envisaged anew as a retrospective of exhibitions.

Such works radically expand and redefine what is accepted as art. The contextualisation of such gestures echoes in our world, where political and social situations do not tend anymore towards opening to the other, but to the contrary towards a closure on one's self.

Both Daniel Buren and Maurizio Cattelan seized upon their first one-person exhibitions in a gallery as opportunities to close the gallery with, or as, their work. For most artists, the closed venue is a necessity, not a desire to close in itself. Whether to test the limits of the institution in sending the staff on holiday for Svetlana Heger and Plamen Dejanov—and thus having the gallery closed de facto—or, as with Maria Eichhorn, in asking the entire staff of an art centre to withdraw their labour for the duration of the exhibition and keep their salaries, the closure is the necessary form for the realisation of the work. These works embody an alternative consideration of labour, work and leisure, sometimes with regard to a history of social contestation, an oppressive government or a military dictatorship, such as that which motivated the extreme response in the work of Graciela Carnevale.

To enclose a show

The formal incarnation of a closure, and the formality of closing, is a recurring pattern in the history of modern and contemporary art. Many artists have seized upon the formal closure as a powerful image. A partial history of this includes Jannis Kounellis, who began in 1969 his series of *Untitled* pieces, in which a seemingly blocked door with accumulated flat, dry stone is built into a doorway in the gallery space. As Kyla McDonald wrote for the Tate in May 2010, "sometimes referred to as 'blockages,' these works close off space and deny access to something hidden [... evoking] the blocked doors and windows of the houses left by Greek people who fled their villages during the country's civil war in the late 1940s." For his contribution to the exhibition COPENHAGEN 93, Joachim Koester boarded up all the windows of the Nicolai Wallner Gallery in 1993, thus making the view into the gallery impossible. PAC, the artist collective from Fribourg, Switzerland, that included Jörg Bosshard, Julia Crottet, Gaël Hugo, Vincent Kohler, Adrien Laubscher, Fabian Marti and Stephanie Van Dam, closed their exhibition space CAP on Rue du Criblet in 2000. The windows and the doors were blocked with raw wooden planks. On a closer look, one could see in between the planks and be a witness to what was happening within the gallery, a place where the artists would hold meetings. For the final show of the

Galerie Barbara Weiss in her location at Zimmerstrasse 88/89 in Berlin in February 2011, Maria Eichhorn boarded up the entire surface of the gallery windows with maritime pinewood panels, the kind commonly used for buildings due for demolition or during the renovation of properties.

Working on the threshold of closure, Arman filled the Galerie Iris Clert with detritus and junk from 25 October to 5 November 1960, as a non-invitation to enter. Robert Filliou proposed in his "No-Plays," in 1964, "a play that nobody must come and see. [...] That is, if the spectators come, there is no play. And if no spectators come, there is no play either ... I mean, one way or the other there is a play, but it is a No-Play." In 1966, Ben Vautier signed as a work of art the moment when museums are closed at night, as yet another understanding of the possibility of closure and this conception of Total Art. When Jean Toche was invited on 4 May 1969 to contribute to a series of exhibitions at Gilles Larrain's studio and gallery at 66 Grand Street in New York, Toche realised a piece aptly entitled "Welcome," which consisted of a large poster bearing this word affixed to a closed door. In 1970, invited to contribute to an exhibition at the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts d'Anvers, Jeff Geys proposed to dynamite the institution, considering that museums are nothing but a jail for artists. He subsequently ended all his artistic endeavours, considering them as void, only to resume his activities in 1979. For her piece "The Keeping of the Keys: Maintenance as Security (1973)," Mierle Laderman Ukeles locked and opened all the doors of the Wadsworth Atheneum for an entire day, making her way through the entire museum, closing one area after the other, including the curators' and administrators' offices. For his solo show at the Lucrezia Gallery in 1975, Gino De Dominicis affixed onto the closed door of the gallery a sign that read "Ingresso riservato agli animali" [Entry restricted to animals]. Not allowed to enter, viewers could see from outside the gallery through a peephole a living cow, a living chicken, a living donkey... In 1975, invited by Wolfgang Becker to exhibit at the Neue Galerie, Jacques Lizène proposed to close the entire museum... He would only be allowed to close one room. On 20 September 1980, Ghislain Mollet-Viéville closed the door of his gallery for the opening day of an exhibition at his gallery on the Rue Beaubourg in Paris. Mollet-Viéville put up a sign on the closed door on which were written the names and addresses of the artists so that visitors could make appointments with the artists to meet them at their places. As the sign read, "a gallery has no other functions than within / in accordance with an artistic consideration that today disrupts the structures and patterns of usual presentation." Both opening and closing the institution, Stefan Brüggemann with "Opening" in 1998 closed the entrance door to the gallery, whilst moving the large glass window inside the Museum of Installation (MOI) in London. Between January and February 2001, Storm van Helsing and Gareth James curated wRECONSTRUCTION, at American Fine Arts, Co. The "doors remained locked except to those guests invited to participate in scheduled private conversations concerning

what the gallery might do or be when open." With "During the month of August ESSEX STREET will be closed." Park McArthur used the summer 2013 closure of the gallery to propose a dense and complex work. Outside of the closed gallery, hung clothes on hangers hanging from chains. On the awning of the gallery, the artist wrote the address "1918 1st Avenue," thus connecting Essex Street to a disused building that was once a nurses' training facility and residence. As Park McArthur wrote in an email conversation in June 2016, her desire to work with a gallery while it was already closed was for her a way to highlight the moment when a gallery goes into recess. It is the space of care that the gallery enters in order to care for itself, that of vacation. So rather than testing what a gallery is able to do if it is closed, or what kinds of decisions must be made in order to successfully close a gallery while it is intended to be open, the artist's interest lay in all the kinds of life and work that are able to occur elsewhere while a gallery is already closed.

All Is Art

Novalis stated in 1798 that "Every man should be an artist. Everything can become a fine art." The Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Lucien Ducasse) claimed in 1870 in his collection "Poésies II" that "Poetry must be made by all. Not by one." Joseph Beuys considered that "Every Man is an artist," as he explained in 1972. These radical ontologies are to be seen in parallel to Ben Vautier's lifelong statement that "all is art," a declination of the great Dadaist Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, who wrote "Poetry: Art, not poetry: Art. Words as a game: Art. Pure sentences: Art. Only meaning: Art; no meaning: Art. Words picked at random: Art. The Mona Lisa: Art. The Mona Lisa with a moustache: Art. Shit: Art. A newspaper ad: Art."

Wolf Vostell furthered Duchamp's qualification of the object into art, in qualifying life into art. Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, in his 1959 "Manifesto of Industrial Painting: For a unitary applied art," wrote that "The machine may very well be the appropriate instrument for the creation of an industrial-inflationist art, based on the Anti-Patent; the new industrial culture will be strictly 'Made Amongst People' or not at all!" A consideration that finds a profound resonance in Jean Tinguely's concept that "All machines are art. [...] art is also: the achievements of engineers and technicians, even if they express themselves unconsciously or purely functionally. Art is everything. (Do you think art ought to be made only by 'artists'?) And: art is everywhere—at my grandmother's—in the most incredible kitsch or under a rotten plank."

Yoko Ono's recurrent attack against the museum system can be seen in several pieces that form her iconic anthology of event-scores "Grapefruit"—for instance, in the 1963 "Collecting Piece II": "Break a contemporary museum into pieces with the means you have chosen. Collect the pieces and put them together again with glue." Through this play on words, Ono

proposes yet another understanding of the anti-museum as the artist sets the institution against itself, in the same vein as in her contribution to the anti-art movement in Japan with her exhibitions, publications and proximity to avant-garde groups, including the Hi Red Center. In 1964, Ono claimed that “art is not a special thing. Anyone can do it. [...] If everybody were to become an artist, what we call art would disappear.”

The Anti-Museum

“All Is Art” assumes a clear, complete acceptance of everything and anything as Art. It also leads to a negation of the institution. If all is art, how can we conceive of a museum within such a context, a context which requires no consecrated environment dedicated to sanctifying non-existent specialities? Paulo Pires do Vale considers the art of the end of art, on a par with the religion of the end of religion—a call to destroy all temples. The temple is now everywhere, in everything.

A retrospective of closed exhibitions does not illustrate the possibility of an anti-museum. Yet, it proposes a radical stance that problematizes, questions, confronts, challenges and expands the relevance—even the very existence—of the institution. A retrospective of closed exhibitions can be approached as an anti-exhibition, when envisaged within the classical frame and understanding of what constitutes an exhibition.

A retrospective of closed exhibitions questions—even negates—the reality of the institution—that is, as a space to be seen and to see. Echoing Yona Friedman’s statement that a museum is not a physical building, coupled with calls for a museum without walls, the gesture of closing the exhibition offers the possibility of an anti-exhibition, and denies the very reality of the museum, while affirming art, or, in keeping with Graciela Carnevale’s formulation, “artistic practices.” Negating its purposes and roles, in using its architecture (to close is to show the edifice), such a retrospective validates the existence of the institution—at least its physical surface, its carcass.

As Olivier Quintyn writes, “in the Hegelian dialectic, the point of negativity, the anti-x, becomes the first sign of an identification, or of an identitary movement in which the concept surpasses the original opposition between an idea’s self-positioning and its contradiction. Theodor Adorno’s negative dialectic seeks to maintain the negativity of the anti-x in a deepened awareness of the non-identity of subject and object, of the conceptual and the non-conceptual.” The anti-museum surpasses the dialectic of the positive and the negative, one thing and its contrary, the x and the anti-x, as it reflects an anti-position that exposes, reveals and displays a state in flux. The anti-museum does not adequate the museum to a mausoleum, nor shall it be approached as being the mausoleum of the museum as it function would be no more than a museum for museums.

When asked to define *radicality*, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge offers a profound definition to a word so present in considerations of a retrospective of closed exhibitions and the anti-museum: "Actions taken in a social, political way that are beholden to no other philosophical, political or economical groups, completely independent of any other pressure group, for the sake of a belief which is so strong that you can risk everything you have."

Anti-art questions the possibility of the museum itself. A too brief overview of the history of the anti encompasses that of destruction and a total redefinition of art. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti called in the *Manifesto of Futurism* on artists to "turn aside the canals to flood the museums! [...] Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discolored and shredded!" Marcel Janco remembered that at the onset of Dada, artists had lost confidence in culture, "everything had to be demolished. We would begin again after the 'tabula rasa.' At the Cabaret Voltaire we began by shocking common sense, public opinion, education, institutions, museums, good taste, in short, the whole prevailing order." Alexander Rodchenko, in reducing "painting to its logical conclusion," affirmed "this is the end of painting," a consideration furthered in "The Programme of the Productivist Group," which was co-written with Varvara Stepanova in 1920 and which stated: "1. Down with art, long live technical science. 2. Religion is a lie. Art is a lie. 3. Destroy the last remaining attachment of human thought to art. [...] 6. The collective art of today is constructive life."

When asked by Richard Hamilton in 1959 what his definition of anti-art would be, Marcel Duchamp responded that he does not like the word *anti* as it "is very much like the word atheist in relation to the believer. An atheist is as much religious as a believer. The anti-artist is as much an artist as the others. Rather than artist, I would rather say anartist, that is, not an artist at all." Boris Lurie, together with Sam Goodman and Stanley Fisher proposed a complete reaction to the very existence of what was accepted as art. Stanley Fisher wrote in 1961 for the "Involvement Show" that he believes "in a new art of committed violence. [...] art should destroy all things before they become items of international trading, before they become utilitarian symbols of useless longevity. This is the new art, the shock art, the anti-art..." And while Sam Goodman proposed the aptly titled "Shit Art," Boris Lurie furthered their NO!Art stance, and defined it as anti artworldmarket-investment art, anti Pop-art, anti chauvinistic... The Guerilla Art Action Group relocated the battleground within the museum, in actions that included removing Malevich's painting *White on White* from the walls of the Museum of Modern Art, as it demanded among other things that the "Museum of Modern Art be closed until the end of the war in Vietnam."

Henry Flynt advocated for the demolition of serious culture, and the razing of institutions. Allan Kaprow claimed that the concept of museum was completely irrelevant, and Marshall

McLuhan called for artists to create anti-environments. Marcel Broodthaers, discussing his *Musée d'Art Moderne – Département des Aigles* in an interview with Johannes Cladders in 1972, said that “to talk about my museum means discussing the ways and means of analysing fraud. The ordinary museum and its representatives simply mean speaking about the condition of truth. It is also important to find out whether or not the fictional museum casts a new light on the mechanism of art, the artistic life, and society. I pose the question with my museum. Therefore I do not find it necessary to produce the answer.”

The possibility of the Anti-Museum is approached in the present anthology through the understandings of anti-art, anti-artist, anti-exhibition, anti-design, anti-architecture, anti-technology, anti-music, anti-cinema, anti-writing, anti-culture, anti-university, anti-philosophy and anti-religion. Within these parallels are felt the conditions for the existence of an anti-museum. A polyphony arises from each contribution, as historical reprints echo conversations and resonate with commissioned texts. A plural reality defined by antagonisms, the anti-museum is another side to what is, encompassing all that it is not, making it what it can be.

Mathieu Copeland To begin, I would like to ask you about the origins of the Ciclo de Arte Experimental.

Graciela Carnevale The group was formed in 1967 by young artists who studied at the university and by others who were attending a workshop that was led by the autodidact artist, Juan Grela. He was a militant of the communist party and worked as a hairdresser. He organised these workshops that were both very progressive, innovative and very rational. He gave a lot of importance to form and content, to language, whereas the teaching at the university was traditional.

MC It was quite a statement to call yourselves the Vanguardia, the avant-garde.

GC Our work was not accepted by the institution here in Rosario. In Buenos Aires, it was different, but here, things were more conservative.

MC How many people were involved in the group originally?

GC Ten to fifteen. We debated and discussed a lot between us. We evolved through "primary structures," minimal art to more conceptual art, followed by a political or radical art production that had to do with the socio-political context of the times.

MC How did the group function? It was a place for you to work together whilst each maintaining your own identity. You did not sign the works under a unique group label?

GC We continued to do individual works, and some worked collaboratively. It had to do with the discussions, and trying to relate our work to the context. We were doing what we felt had to be done. If we were changing it did not matter. It was about exploring new possibilities. Later, in 1968, we began to think of collective works that were not individually signed.

MC Can you tell me about your development between leaving art school and the beginning of the group and the cycle?

GC I left school in 1965, and went to Buenos Aires. At the time, it had a strong impact. I returned to Rosario in 1966, and began to ask myself who I was, what I was doing and why. What my education in the school of art had to do with reality, and with art. I began painting, and then working with representation of plants and vegetation. I continued with more abstract forms in painting, and then began with these organic forms. I think of this as a constant exploration and experimentation, even if I worked completely differently. Then in June 1968 I realised the piece *Piezablanca* at the Galería Lirioley in Buenos Aires. The piece consisted of a room entirely painted white, strongly illuminated and with the recorded sound of a heartbeat amplified.

MC A most beautiful piece announcing a reduction of means in your practice, and a consideration of the gallery as an active material to work with, and on. As it was reported in *Señales de vida*, and published in *Primera Plana* (No. 285, 11 June 1968), this exhibition also featured artists Lía Maisonnave, who placed a

writing machine, a table and a chair in an empty room so that the public could write and work; Noemí Escandell, who began to paint the wall of her space, and left all the utensils used for painting exhibits; and Fernández Bonina, who “enclosed his space with a transparent plastic to point out that there, in that emptiness, was something to see and deprive of its nature: the gallery itself.”

gc At the end of 1967, since we had almost no place to present our work, we decided to organise our own space. We rented a space in a commercial gallery and organised there the Ciclo de Arte Experimental. In 1968, we decided on the program. Every member of the group would exhibit for fifteen days. We made our publicity, we wrote our own criticism and reflections. We were autonomous, and we were putting subversion into action. We began the cycle in May 1968, and ended with mine in October 1968. It was supposed to continue, but because of my action, they did not want to rent us the space anymore.

mc Can you tell me about the organisation of the cycle?

gc Our space was on Cordoba 1365 here in Rosario, very near to the faculty [of Humanities and Arts of the Universidad Nacional de Rosario]. Norberto Puzzolo was the first one to exhibit from 27 May through to 8 June [1968]. Puzzolo put chairs in lines, looking at the street. People outside were looking inside and the audience looked outside. The second happened from 17 to 29 June and was realised by Lía Maisonnave. Her work consisted in big black and white squares on the floor in the completely empty space. She gave the people indications to construct this floor wherever they wanted. Tito Fernández Bonina (1-13 July) forced the public to leave their bags at the entry and they couldn't speak or smoke. I believe that these works had to do with the times. The sense of oppression, prohibition and censorship was very strong in those years.

mc The following exhibitions were realised by Noemí Escandell (15-27 July), Jaime Rippa (29 July-10 August), Rubén Naranjo (12-24 August), Martha Greiner (26 August-7 September).

gc Then Eduardo Favario closed the space from the 9 to 21 September. He dealt with censorship. At that time, we were under a military government, so he made a mess of the place and invited the public to go to another place. I think that we were feeling that this place that we had created was no longer meaningful. We had to go outside of the institution, outside of the art scene. To close the gallery and to invite the people to go out, to walk outside and go to a bookshop acted as a metaphor. This was a bookshop where a lot of leftist people from the faculty of philosophy, and intellectuals, would gather.

mc What happened to Eduardo Favario?

gc He later joined the PRT [Workers' Revolutionary Party], and then the ERP—the People's Revolutionary Army. He was killed in 1975 by the governmental army.

mc Was his contribution to the cycle his last action as an artist?

gc No. He was part of “Tucumán Arde.” Since the summer we had been working on “Tucumán Arde,” a very complex action that we did at the end of 1968, and in which we denounced the social problems in Tucumán that were due to the governmental

politics. It is after "Tucumán Arde" that he became involved as a militant. Then Favario's piece was followed by Emilio Ghilioni and Rodolfo Elizalde who decided to work together, leaving the gallery empty and making a simulacra of a fight—an argument—in the street. So they began to argue about art as if they were really debating, and people started to interfere. At that time, you couldn't be together in the street.

MC This work, announced from the 23 to 28 September, became known as *La Pelea*. And finally came your most radical work, on 8 October 1968. Could you tell me about the origins of your piece?

GC At the very beginning of the cycle, everybody was given their dates. Mine was October. I did not know what to do exactly until August or September, when I decided that I had to do something with the political and social moment. I wanted people to understand what was going on. To make them aware of how censorship and repression were shaping our lives. I finally had the idea of imprisoning people. I began to write about the project, and to think about the details: how and when. I also tried to relate to our experience, to art. So I wrote some notes, and then I asked the help of Nicolás Rosa, a member of the group who was a critic in literature. He and Carlos Militello were the only ones who knew what was going to happen. I thought that if I talked to my companions, it would not work. If you knew what was going to happen, then it would have no sense.

MC What happened to the notes and the final text?

GC Let's go back so I can tell you what was the climate then. In June, the French embassy nominated some of us for the Braque Prize. For years, it had been a very important prize. But, the invitation stated that the organisers had the right to make any modifications to the work, and we had to tell which text would appear in the work. Together with several artists from Buenos Aires we decided to boycott the prize. Since other artists decided to participate, during the opening, we made some disturbances, and we wrote this manifesto: "Siempre es tiempo de no ser cómplices" ("It is always time not to be an accomplice"). We decided not to participate to any prize, and to any institution from then onwards.

MC Such a radical engagement.

GC Ten of our companions went to jail for one month. I was there but I wasn't arrested, luckily... For the cycle we had asked the Instituto Di Tella to give us a subsidy. But, as things went on, we decided not to accept the money and to return it. When Romero Brest came in July to do a conference in Rosario, we decided to make a political action. Some of us stayed at the entrance and switched off the light, as you can see in the photos of the audience in darkness! And we read a manifesto.

MC Which brings us back to the cycle.

GC Yes. This is how we explain our use of the term "experimental." In our view, language and canonical forms were no longer significant at that moment of our situation. We decided to think of experimentation as a way to find new languages, new materials, and new ways of thinking about art. So we decided to organise this cycle.

MC Your piece first came through as text, the announcement card.

GC The piece had no name, it was just an action. It is now known as "Encierro." In the text, I say that I have the persons as prisoners and that I don't know what they are going to do. They can exercise, or they can try to set themselves free, or that somebody from the outside could do that.

MC You decide to leave the gallery entirely empty.

GC With no chairs, nothing at all. It was a very small space. I covered the windows with the posters so that at first no one could see inside. I invited the people in. I then told them to wait for a moment, and I locked the door.

MC Some people remained outside?

GC Yes, those who were late were outside. So there were people outside, and people inside. I put the lock on, and I left.

MC Where did you go?

GC I went to my studio. I was alone until midnight. It was terrible. If it was really an action through which I wanted to make people feel the violence—because I was being violent—I was also violent to myself. I'm not such a violent person! I could not go back. Nowadays, we have cellular phones, but not then. And I told nobody where I was going to be. No one came to the studio. Later in the night, I went back home. It was not until the following day that I would know what had happened.

MC The way that you carried your action was entirely open, allowing everything to happen.

GC Yes. Carlos, who is now my husband, was a witness outside and took all the photographs. My brother and sister, and some very closed friends, were inside.

MC Except for Carlos, who knew not to go in, no one else knew what was to happen. The work was set in motion, with no planned outcome.

GC No, and some of them, one especially, did not speak to me for a long time. There was a tension between the inside and the outside. Those outside felt a responsibility for what was happening. Some tried to open the door from the outside. Nobody was outside of the action. All were involved. There were twenty or twenty-five people inside. After some time they began to tear down the posters. In some photographs you can see people trying to take out the window..

MC There are no pictures of the actual breaking of the window, only of the moment of release?

GC No. It was so sudden that Carlos was not prepared. He couldn't register that moment.

MC It was someone who was outside who broke the glass. Not someone who had been locked inside. Do you know who that person was?

GC Yes, it was someone we knew, but he was not from the group. He was a young writer, but I can not remember his name. Then everybody left, and the police arrived, someone must have called them.

MC What reactions did you experience?

GC Some stopped talking to me. Others asked why I was doing that.

MC Your most iconic piece finds itself in a fascinating history of closed exhibitions that begin with the "Great Panorama Exhibition" piece by Hi Red Center in Tokyo, where the collective closed the Naika Gallery in May 1964. Except for a cockroach, no one was inside. Also on 23 October 1968, Daniel Buren closed the Apollinaire Gallery in Milan with a green and white striped wallpaper. The following year, Robert Barry realised his closed exhibition series...

GC Does this have to do with a critique of the institutions, with the fact that they were something out of time?

MC If I may, what do you mean by "out of time"?

GC The fact that galleries and museums were still going on, under repression of a military government, as if nothing was happening outside. It made no sense.

MC Would you consider this action as being "anti" gallery, "anti" museum?

GC In a way, all the cycle was "anti." But it was also a proposition. I insist that it was not only a critique, but also a proposition of the possibility of doing things differently, of thinking differently, of considering art differently—with a role in society. I still believe in this.

MC I agree. This proposition of the anti-gallery proves to be extremely violent. This reminds me of the violence that can be found in Marinetti and the Futurists' call to flood the museum, or André Breton for whom "the simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd," or Gustav Metzger's 1959 manifesto "Auto-Destructive Art," or closer to "Encierro," the Destruction in Art Symposium that took place in September 1966 in London...

GC In Buenos Aires, Kenneth Kemble had a group called Arte Destructivo. We were not related to them, but knew of them. We considered ourselves as artists. This was our ability. We came from this old-fashion concept that artists are privileged, creative persons. Due to our national context—the military government—society was very mobilised. People were fighting in the streets everyday. You thus enter into a contradiction with your old way of working. We tried to answer these questions, these contradictions. We needed to look for other ways of making art. This is why we made this cycle not in a cultural place, but in a rented space. We were looking for another audience: the people in the streets. We were looking for something that had to do with everyday life not with representation.

MC How did you feel after having done such a radical, violent gesture? Having reached this extreme point, did you ever ask yourself what to do next as an artist?

GC As I was telling you, in the summer of 1968 we were also embarking in the realisation of "Tucumán Arde." As we were doing that, I felt that this was going to reach a limit. It was a very complex project through which we decided to denounce what was happening in the province of Tucumán, which is 1000 km northwest from Rosario. We imagined a project that had different layers: one was publicity; another consisted in going and registering the situation; and finally for us to realise an exhibition with all of that.

mc How did you start working on “Tucumán Arde”?

gc We had a meeting about avant-garde in Rosario at the beginning of August, followed by a second meeting in Buenos Aires at the end of August. In September, we decided to work in collaboration with the non-official CGT (Central Workers’ Union). And during the second part of October, we were in Tucumán. Every day we sent all the material. Students from the university were helping us with the publicity and the materials for the exhibition. The exhibition opened in early November in the CGT, in Rosario. It was a project involving our group and artists from Buenos Aires. We sent letters to the authorities of Tucumán—to the director of the museum, etc... We worked on two levels: one version was intended to the authorities, and another was the real version. We worked with the Central Workers’ Union there, which had also a very different situation. It was an interdisciplinary group that included anthropologists, writers, filmmakers, and people without any experience in art.

mc Such a radical and social engagement with the people and their struggle.

gc Our intention was to make people aware of what was happening in Tucumán, because neither the press nor the government were talking about the situation. It was about denouncing the reality. At that moment, almost everyone—and not only us—stopped practising art for some time. This work and the group changed my life, my way of thinking, my position, my overall conceptions on life. “Encierro” was in October, and the exhibition “Tucumán Arde” was in November. After “Tucumán Arde,” we began to gather to discuss what to do next. We couldn’t reach any conclusion, and then the group dissolved a few months later. I continued to collaborate with some of the artists, but it is only in 1994 that I came back to art.

mc From 1968 to 1994, a 26-year withdrawal from art.

gc I no longer had a group, and I considered as valid the principles that we were thinking at that time. During those years, the reality and the context also changed. I began working at the university in 1983-1984. But I was still thinking in sixties terms. It took me a lot of time to understand that the context, the reality, had changed, and that I could not work in the same way anymore.

mc Did you also feel that you had to stop because you had reached your limits, that you had managed to go as far as you could?

gc We did all this. We had arguments. We read certain things that gave us theoretical weapons. But we really went further, beyond what we could have afforded, I think. We found ourselves not knowing what to do next. We reached the limits. We were not able to continue in this alternative way of working.

mc And yet you would never have been able to go this far without the group. As you reached a certain sense of the limits of art, did you ever question what was the art in such works?

gc Today I don’t speak about art, I prefer speak about artistic practice. I think that this work was an artistic practice. We also spoke about art as living. Most of us thought of that moment as a group dynamics. From mid-July to November 1968, we

gathered every day, we met every afternoon and every night to discuss on decided topics. This transformed our way of living. Living was then an aesthetic experience.

81

Daniel Buren
Papiers collés blanc et vert, Apollinaire Gallery, Milan, 1968

Daniel Buren in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
Paris, 15 March 2016
Revised and completed in Naples in August 2016

Mathieu Copeland I would like to discuss your exhibition at the Apollinaire Gallery in Milan, which began on 23 October 1968. A radical work.

Daniel Buren It was the first time I was personally invited to do an exhibition for a gallery. The gallery was located in a courtyard typical of many Milanese apartment buildings, and I decided to entirely cover its glass door with striped paper. It was actually impossible to enter the gallery without destroying the work that concealed its entrance. Even though the gallery was closed and empty, a work was nonetheless on display, precisely the one blocking the entrance. I was always against the idea of conceptual art that rejected the object in favour of the idea, however interesting and beautiful such a rejection may be. For me, it seems quite reductive to say that one has found the solution to the problem of the object by claiming that there is no object to be seen. The question of the object, its presence, its meaning, the stumbling block it may have served as, this question, which was asked repeatedly by major artists throughout the twentieth century, can precisely only be asked, at least in my mind, through the object itself. It can only be asked through the formal visualness of a "thing." So, yes, I did indeed close the gallery for over a month. But what I did in closing it was to bring to light a work which today — more than at the time — is typical of a certain approach to its material. The rest of the story, which likely has no importance, is nonetheless interesting. Guido Le Noci, the gallery owner, who at the time was seventy-five years old and still very active, was so enthralled by this exhibition, which incidentally was sharply criticized within the small Milanese art world, that he decided, at the end of the exhibition, to pay tribute to it and close his gallery for good! And thus his last exhibition was also my closing of his gallery. I had absolutely not intended to close his gallery, nor any other, for good. It was more to question the necessity of a gallery in general. The work's logic thus played with the architecture of the gallery, which I closed without saying it was closed, yet this logic showed as best as possible that which allowed me to close it, all while still openly exhibiting my work. Here, the object pasted to the door led us to ask both what it was covering (as in all of the other works I have made and continue to make by directly pasting them to the wall) and what this covering implied, the absolute non-necessity of a gallery's interior walls, the self-evidence of a work's presence and its inaccessibility to property. In this case, the commercial gallery could exhibit (which was its primary goal) but could not physically sell the exhibited work (unless it sold the gallery with it!).

MC The terms that you use to describe your work are characteristic. You title it "White and Green Pasted Papers," referring to the reality of the stripes and not at all to the closing. You only use the word "closed" in the work's description, which states that "the work consisted in closing the gallery during the entire duration of the exhibition by completely covering the front door with striped white and green paper, in the same way that one puts a door under seal."

DB The idea was to explain a new kind of work. It was fairly ambiguous, or rather ambivalent, for the time. At the same time there was, on the one hand, a work exhibited at a well-known gallery's usual address, and, on the other, the fact that the gallery was completely closed! There were people who only saw the closed gallery, since it was impossible to go inside, and who could not imagine that the striped pasted paper could be a work of art. Some saw it as an attack against the gallery. They even thought that I might have works inside of the gallery. The gallery as a final hiding place? Another very important point that few people likely noticed was the fact that this closed front door, transformed by a work, resonated like a kind of drum-head as soon as one understood that this work, this skin, not only covered a physical space but also the entire history of the space, resonating alongside forty years of the gallery's activity, everything that took place within it, the good times and the bad. In the same way that a drum's sound quality will depend on the size and quality of its soundbox, so too will a gallery's. A gallery is not only a physically defined exhibition space; it is also a soundbox of the past and sometimes even the future. This soundbox partly determines the quality of the interpretation that will be made of the work it exhibits. Daring to close one of postwar Italy's legendary galleries when you yourself are a famous nobody is a bit like detracting from what happened there beforehand, hence the rage of the gallery's usual visitors and connoisseurs. In their eyes, I had absolutely no right to undertake such a gesture.

MC The soundbox of the empty gallery amplified your work's reach. And, for the first time, you requested a fee.

DB It was a way of making my way into the field without knowing if there would be many exhibitions to follow. As much as I did what I pleased in the street, I would pay for my posters and no one would bother me apart from the police on occasion, I always told myself that if the "system" ever invited me in, I would never work for free. No one imagined being able to sell my work, let alone buy it. That is why every time my work was exhibited, I asked for a fee or offered the alternative of buying one of my pieces (generally in a special way). I was invited very often after this initial, and initiatory, exhibition, and for years, this attitude allowed me make a living from my work, which would almost never sell as an object.

MC It is fascinating to draw a parallel between asking for a fee and covering the gallery's exterior. These two approaches deconstruct the system that the gallery represents, one in physical terms, the other in conceptual terms.

DB In conceptual terms, but also in terms of business. It also

meant that I accepted the gallery to serve as a commercial back room, even though I do not think I helped any of my many art dealers make any money at the time.

MC Asking for a fee in such a context was a way of closing the interior, revealing what was, all while insisting on the fact that a work of art was at play.

DB From inside the exhibition, we could have carried out a transaction of works and business, all while sustaining the piece's underlying thread. Galleries that exhibit my work today know very well that the completed piece is almost never directly moveable. Since I work with architecture, it is a question of trying to find a link between the abstract and the concrete, maintaining the abstraction of the idea and transposing it to someone's space, which in the end gives us a completely new and unique piece. To give an example, let us imagine a collector who is interested in a work of mine which takes a window as its material, a work which cannot be moved anywhere as such. We could then suggest creating another specific piece on one or more of said collector's home's windows unless, their home has absolutely no windows, which would be bizarre and unusual to say the least! So, by taking the visible exhibition as a starting point, a particular work can be acquired in this way, like a variation on a given theme. The initial situation eventually allows for doing other things afterwards.

MC In "Exhibition Of An Exhibition," you write that the work and the exhibition are one and the same. The work becomes action, gesture, but also the visual aspect that we discussed. I am fascinated by the moment when the adequacy becomes complete.

DB I must say that the text you are referring to, which dates back to 1972, was concerned with the role of the exhibition's organizer regarding the artists invited to the group show in question. The group's exhibition de facto became the head artist's exhibition, that is to say, the organizer himself. We know full well today where such tendencies can lead a group show! Still, the same can be said of an individual exhibition, except that it does not have the same consequences, as the author of the work (or works) and the organizer of the exhibition are one and the same. Compared to my friends at the time who did similar things, like Robert Barry, the big break or big difference is precisely that I could not content myself with a simple gesture, even if it was of the utmost interest to me. When I heard about Barry's piece, I told myself that it was the same idea, if we are talking about ideas. But I think that for him, his way of rising up was to say: I am closing the gallery, implying that it has run its course, that it is no longer worth anything.

MC "During the exhibition the gallery will be closed" was a way for Robert Barry to physically attack the business of the art world. In closing the gallery, did you feel like you were attacking the idea of the gallery?

DB Like I was attacking the usual working of the gallery, yes, in a certain sense, but not the essence of the gallery (otherwise I would have stopped exhibiting ages ago). I have always considered that the question of the business of art,

when it is very difficult, falls back upon the artist to be resolved. The possibility of selling something always felt absolutely natural to me, even if I sold nothing for nearly fifteen years. Yet I never succumbed to making more sellable things at the cost of the work I wanted to make, even if it would not sell. Still, I never said it was unsellable. To me, making art and being against selling it is something so unreal, so far from reality, that it becomes completely absurd. If you risk exhibiting something, you risk selling it just as much as you do not. When the market, as it stands today, overwhelms everything, denigrates anything that is unlucky enough not to please anyone and therefore not to sell, then we can ask questions about its consequences. Not selling becomes a negative, prohibitive criterion. This was never the case when I began working (and I was not the only one to whom this case applied). Selling one's work or not selling it was never taken into account in the criteria for judging it. Of course it was better for the artist and the dealer to sell rather than not sell, but not selling never cast a shadow upon the situation. It took fifteen straight years of my exhibiting at the John Weber gallery, for example, at the rate of one individual exhibition every two and a half years, before the gallery, which paid me the requested fee every time, sold a single piece! That is one example among tens of others I could quote.

mc I imagine that Guido Le Noci had his desk inside. Thus, with the gallery closed, he could no longer work.

db To be completely honest, there was a small door in the building's entryway, at the back of the courtyard behind the actual gallery space, that allowed him to reach his desk. But no one could go in that way. The gallery space was truly closed.

mc As the photos of the exhibition show, and as you have written, placing the paper on the door could also be read as putting the space under seal. It thus becomes impossible to enter the gallery without leaving a trace of one's passage, without tearing up and destroying the work.

db There are different sides that must be distinguished within the idea of one's exhibition in order to understand the possible differences in meaning between closure and closure, if I may say so. For example, one can interpret Bob [Barry]'s claim that "during the exhibition the gallery will be closed" in different ways, namely the possibility that mysterious things are happening in the gallery but that you will not be able to see them. This could also mean that the actual exhibition (which you will not see either!) is taking place somewhere other than in this closed gallery! Or even: that this exhibition consists in looking at the outside of a closed gallery! Those are three interpretations that arise from reading Bob Barry's claim. Like him, I could have said, but did not do so, that the gallery was closed, in which case I would have had to add that the exhibition was nonetheless happening there. In my case, the gallery was closed during the exhibition, but the very exhibition of the work found itself there, implied that closing. The difference here is crucial. Speaking of closure does not mean speaking of the same kind of closure. Since the paper was pasted onto glass, when the gallery spaces were lit, it all became translucent. I later made

an exhibition in Belgium which played upon the same idea. The gallery was not closed, unlike the one in Milan, and the front window was entirely covered. There was nothing in the gallery apart from said window showing the other side of the paper. And, depending on the time of day, this other side was lit by the sun, or, when the gallery was lit and the sun had set, it was almost entirely white inside of the gallery, because all one could see was the underside of the paper. These perceptive effects were not seen by anyone in Milan and—at best—could only be imagined, which likely reinforced the gesture's violence, the closure that overtook every other aspect of the proposal. That said, my goal was to say: "look at this exhibited work which, given its specific position, in situ, is closing the gallery," practically the opposite of "during the exhibition the gallery will be closed," since this claim does not really tell us whether something is exhibited or not, unless it is the claim itself?

MC What I find fascinating is that you carried out this radical gesture for your first individual exhibition.

DB That is what gave the gesture a certain power. The intent, the result: I am very conscious of all that. The part of the work made up by formal closure is, by definition, a gesture. We should ask ourselves if this makes the act possible without becoming simply illustrative. What I do know is that if it had been a question of closing another gallery, something I could have done with all of my galleries, I would not have taken the slightest interest in it.

MC The experience of the work insists on the fact that we are confronting ourselves with it. On the exhibition's poster, you show and claim that: "We are displaying vertical strips of equal size, alternating between white and colours, 8.7 cm wide, that are only vertical strips of equal size, alternating between white and colours, 8.7 cm wide, that refer to vertical strips of equal size, alternating between white and colours, 8.7 cm wide, that are only vertical strips of equal size, alternating between white and colours, 8.7 cm wide." The situation forces us to concentrate on an external surface which denies the interior, and thus resolves the whole.

DB I would even say that in this case, it is not the artist who says that he is closing the gallery; it is the work that closes the gallery. The work carries out an exploit. All while being visual and aesthetic in its own way, it says: I am here and I am closing the gallery. Physically it is there; it is not inside of the gallery but outside of it. If one wants to start dissecting what is really being seen, there are enormous amounts of readings and parameters caught within one another. It is inside of the gallery, but outside. It is on the door, but it seals it off. It remains a part of the architecture and it takes the form given to it by the architecture. It touches upon the working of the gallery, upon the fact that the gallery has an exterior and that maybe this exterior does not entirely belong the interior? The questions are numerous and the gallery's closure is but one of many.

Robert Barry
During the exhibition the gallery will be closed,
Art & Project, Amsterdam, 1969
For the exhibition the gallery will be closed,
Sperone Gallery, Torino, 1969
March 10 through March 21 the gallery will be closed,
Eugenia Butler Gallery, Los Angeles, 1970

Robert Barry in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
New York, 10 February 2016

Mathieu Copeland Studying all the variations that you have proposed for the appellation of your closed gallery exhibitions reminds us of your precise and radical work with language. When you first realised the piece in 1969 in Amsterdam at Art & Project (17-31 December), the piece was entitled: "during the exhibition the gallery will be closed." In Torino at Sperone Gallery on 30 December, the title was: "for the exhibition the gallery will be closed." Finally in 1970 at the Eugenia Butler Gallery, the mailer read: "March 10 through March 21 the gallery will be closed." In keeping with the original credo, for the redux version of the piece at the Kunsthalle in Fribourg, you have produced a variation that states "during the exhibition the kunsthalle will be closed."

Robert Barry Closing the place down in my name for one week with very specific dates seems a strong thing to do. My feeling is that I am completely shutting the place down in putting a sign up at the front that reads that for the exhibition, the museum will be closed.

MC When you put together your announcement, your mailers, you ask for the gallery to keep their usual criteria and design. You only provide instructions on the text and the content, not the form?

RB In those days, I used whatever the font, whatever the style of the mailer of the gallery was. Well, what does that mail normally look like? What does their advertising look like? What were they sending to the public? Was there a specific font that they would use?

MC And the same goes for the Kunsthalle in Fribourg. It is also fascinating to envisage how the series of closed gallery exhibitions announces, in its construction, the series of "Invitation Piece," which you would realise in 1972-1973. Both follow the September through to June gallery season schedule. And both use the structure of the communication device standardly used by commercial galleries. For the "Invitation Piece," "Paul Maenz invites you to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Art & Project, Amsterdam, during the month of November 1972;" "art & project invites you to an exhibition by robert barry at jack wendler gallery, london, during the month of december 1972;" "Jack Wendler invites you to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Leo Castelli Gallery, New York during the month of January, 1973;" "Leo Castelli invites you to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Yvon Lambert

Gallery/Paris, during the month of February 1973;" "Yvon Lambert invites you to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Galerie MTL Brussels during the month of March 1973;" "Galerie MTL invites you to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Galleria Toselli, Milan, during the month of April 1973;" "Galerie Toselli invites you to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Galleria Sperone, Turin during the month of May 1973;" "Gian Enzo Sperone invites you to an exhibition by Robert Barry at Paul Maenz, Cologne, during the month of June 1973." Each was realised by the gallery, following their own design, and all occurred during another artist's show over the course of seven months.

RB I also proposed to Konrad Fischer to be part of the closed gallery exhibitions, but he didn't do it. Konrad sent a letter back in which he told me that he was not going to do the same thing that Art & Project would. That if I wanted to do a show with him, I have to do something different, something specific. He later told me that he had made a huge mistake, and that he should have accepted.

MC Was closing the gallery a means to attack the gallery system?

RB Yes. I was anti-gallery. I will say that, yes. You know who else hated galleries? Robert Motherwell, who was my teacher in 1957.

MC You have often told me that you felt independent and anti-establishment.

RB Yes.

MC Did you attempt at transposing this attitude to museums, too? Or were you really against the gallery system and the commercial system?

RB Everybody.

MC Do you believe that in doing so, you were testing the limits of the institutions?

RB No, it wasn't about that in those days. I remember the Art Workers Coalition was talking such things. And I figured out how I was going to function in the art world, in the commercial art world.

MC Were you close to the anti-art movements?

RB Not really. The problem with a lot of that work was that I did not think that is what art was about. I did not find it interesting, full of clichés and old ideas. I wanted to open up. To me, art was always about doing something unexpected.

MC Was it your attempt at considering the institution—the gallery—as a material to work with?

RB Later, yes. But even then, I was doing that. The early shows, they all had to do with the gallery and the art world itself. When I was invited to take part in the conceptual art exhibition "Art in the Mind," in 1970 at Oberlin College, Ohio, my contribution was to recommend another artist to show a work. I recommended to the curator Athena Spear this friend of mine, James Umland. I met Umland when he invited me to be interviewed on his radio program on the FM station WBAI in NY. On his show he interviewed artists like Carl Andre, Lawrence Weiner... He was friendly with John Cage too. He was also an artist who made paintings and "sound pieces." He showed a couple of times in NY in the 1970s in galleries.

MC Do you think that by closing the gallery, you reached a limit of art, to use Ben Vautier's expression?

95

RB Yes. I was pushing the art world context, and the gallery system.

Robert Barry, "during the exhibition the gallery will be closed," gallery mailer, Art & Project, Amsterdam, 1969
Courtesy the artist

< See illustration p. 8-9

Lefevre Jean Claude
Une exposition de Lefevre Jean Claude à la galerie Yvon Lambert entre le 11 juillet et le 31 août 1981
 Yvon Lambert Gallery, Paris, 1981

Lefevre Jean Claude in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
 Paris, 29 October 2015

Mathieu Copeland I would like to start with the letter you wrote to the Parisian gallery owner Yvon Lambert and his assistant, Laurence Reverdin. It is a typed letter, dated 3 June 1981, in which you propose the following:

project for an exhibition that would take your gallery's holiday closure as a point of departure. The exhibition would start the day after closure (for holidays) and would end the evening before the gallery, located at 5 Rue du Grenier St-Lazare, would reopen. A note/card would be distributed as soon as the work was completed, and not beforehand as is customary. This proposal would not allow for the usual 'art opening.' Given that the announcement will not precede the work, we will avoid any misunderstandings regarding this point. The 'text' which will be the proposed work's form is to be made with the same material used to write the name Yvon Lambert on the gallery door. Given that the dates of your holiday are not yet known, the text on the model does not contain the information required to complete the work. As for this 'text' on the door, on the righthand section of the window display, still using the same font (lower case white letters), my name will stand for the poster that traditionally accompanies exhibitions in your gallery (with the exception of the Buren exhibition). For technical reasons, this task will be accomplished outside of the space and, actually, does not require the gallery managers' permission. In order to avoid any misunderstandings and also because it is the very point of the 'possibility of work' that interests me, part of the exhibition will have to appear inside of the gallery (visible from the outside), such as: an informative note, a model of the proposed work, etc. This proposal is very close in spirit (and in letter!) to Ghislain Mollet-Viéville's work in your (and E. Fabre's) gallery. This type of work can only make sense and take shape if we agree upon the possibility of its existence. A WORK, JUST A WORK or maybe AN EXHIBITION, JUST AN EXHIBITION. The very location where reading takes place will become the very location of the work; in this case, the parts that make an exhibition truly happen in this exact place.

Lefevre Jean Claude There was a beautiful Cy Twombly exhibition a year before, at Yvon Lambert's gallery on the Rue du Grenier Saint-Lazare. Inside, on a little ledge made of travertine, I had written a text as I had done at Éric Fabre's. I had written: "A pretext and an intervention, a composition by Lefevre Jean

Claude in response to a proposal by Ghislain Mollet-Viéville at the Lambert Gallery for a presentation attached to the current and future exhibitions and events over an indeterminate period of time, starting on a date noted by the three parties associated to the project." And, at Éric Fabre's, "Saturday, 27 September, 1980."

MC It was a proposal that took into account the structure of a preexisting exhibition, and tried to take part in it.

LJC The invitation proclaimed: "Currently: Lefevre Jean Claude, on behalf of Yvon Lambert's and Éric Fabre's galleries."

MC With no date or any other indication.

LJC No, we would just send it out like that. The date was the one noted on the postmark.

MC It is fascinating to see this exhibition as an announcement for the one that follows it, in 1981. Indeed, Yvon Lambert replied to your letter: "Dear Jean Claude. It is with great pleasure that we accept your offer to create your piece during the summer. Come meet with us. See you soon. Warm regards, Yvon." Then came the invitation card.

LJC That I printed out.

MC So this exhibition did not cost him a thing!

LJC No, nothing.

MC By making use of the gallery's summer closure, you indexed the space to your presence and stated: "An exhibition by Lefevre Jean Claude." The invitation card referred to the obligatory use of a communications strategy.

LJC Today I can see that this card did not only function as a card, but also, in its piling up, as a sculpture.

MC In the letter, your use of the words "work" and "exhibition" plays a very important role. How do you define the word "exhibition"?

LJC At the time, in my mind, exhibiting still meant exhibiting on a wall in a gallery. And at the same time, I was still doing a lot of mailing that I did not see as mailing or as Mail art, but as a way of doing exhibitions. I could not think of any other way of phrasing it, but for me, mailing something from Tokyo about Yves Klein was doing an exhibition. Of course, it does not fall into the same space as a classic exhibition. But it is the same work. When I create a project that I send to forty or fifty artists, I think of it as building an exhibition.

MC And you build up an audience. I am fascinated by such moments when work and exhibition become one, or when one and the other become mixed up. The work becomes an exhibition, because an exhibition is only defined by its time, its length. Here, length is what makes up the exhibition, as suggested by your use of the term "until," which announces the exhibition's length, "until August 31st, 1981."

LJC Yes. You could see, through the dates, that the gallery's activity would pick back up again on 1 September.

MC Can you tell me about your approach to the period of closure? If you will allow the term, might there be a certain opportunism in wanting to work outside of the institution, knowing full well that the exhibition needs it? Using the period of closure is choosing the period when the gallery is least inclined to say no.

LJC That was indeed why. Unfortunately, I would have wanted for the gallery owner to invite me back each summer to do the exhibition, which did not end up being the case.

MC And yet it can happen in any gallery, during every summer closure, and, as you note in your first letter, without having been invited to do so. Let us come back to the exhibition itself. You recently spoke to me of the importance of having the invitation in the gallery. It was a part of the communications strategy, and yet you claimed that the card was unnecessary since it could not exist before the exhibition.

LJC Yes indeed, I only sent out the card once the exhibition had begun.

MC Your proposal calls into question the very existence of the institution. At the time, the Lambert Gallery was one of the biggest galleries in Paris. It is thus the institution that the gallery represents which becomes the exhibition. I would like to discuss the concept of indexing with you. By affixing your name to the gallery's front window, you are indexing the artist. Can you tell me about your very particular approach to signature?

LJC I use my administrative name: Lefevre Jean Claude. By choosing this name and this form, without hyphens, I make three blocks of it. Lefevre is my usual last name. I had asked myself how to turn a usual last name into an "artist's name." When I was a boarder in high school and roll would be called, it was always Lefevre Jean-Claude. And I reused this, shall we say, official or administrative construction. At the time, I must have even written that it was as if my name were "Chair Table Three," a bit like Kosuth. This name, let us call it an artist's name, almost makes you anonymous.

MC I would like to come back to your letter's conclusion, and to this crucial phrase: "A work, just a work, or maybe an exhibition, just an exhibition."

LJC You had asked me about the line written on the window display: it could have been a work by Lefevre Jean Claude. But the term work is really quite heavy. With the word exhibition, we know what we are dealing with. But "work:" that is using the French word to say "oeuvre." But it is true that people have their misgivings about calling something an oeuvre...

MC When you write that "it is the very possibility of work that interests me," are you referring to the possibility of this work in particular or the possibility of working in general?

LJC Of working in general. In such a structure, there will always be work. It will lead to a proposal, a work. But it is nonetheless best to use the term "exhibition."

MC This leads us to ask what constitutes an exhibition, an invitation to something we cannot see. The work thus opens itself to a Marxist reading.

LJC Yes, a materialist one. Work, obviously. Even someone who works little still works. I thought it was best to say exhibition.

MC You cut all of the proposals down to text. So, to what extent is it a Lefevre Jean Claude exhibition, or an exhibition of a Lefevre Jean Claude exhibition? The name, the act of naming, brings us back to your own indexing. I think of your piece in the same terms as Robert Barry's famous series of closed

exhibitions, "during the exhibition the gallery will be closed." The artist showcased the fact that the space was closed. It seems to me that for you, on the contrary, the closed space justified the exhibition. Did you go see your exhibition during that summer of 1981?

LJC No. I was on vacation in Granville at the time, but Ghislain [Mollet-Viéville] took some photos of it.

MC Looking back, can we see this exhibition as a point of transition in your approach, a fundamental piece in your work?

LJC Yes. Especially given that it corresponds to a period, 1979-1988, when my work, my thinking, was always focused on cutting down the text as much as possible. Reaching one line of text, that was fantastic. The 1988 exhibition "La Promenade," which I made for Durand-Dessert, inspired by the work of André Cadere, made one thing clear to me: I had to write a two-page long text for Michel Durand-Dessert, and while writing it I understood that I was doing the opposite of everything I had done beforehand, that is, cutting things down. I was supposed to come up with the most information possible. And ever since, I write very long texts on the wall or on papers, or I do very long readings. I want to allow everything to be read and to be heard. You could say that there are two periods in my work: a conceptual period and a period that I would call "critical and biographical."

Swetlana Heger & Plamen Dejanov
Galerie wegen Urlaub geschlossen [Gallery Closed for Holidays], Mehdi Chouakri Gallery, Berlin, 1999

Plamen Dejanov in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
Vienna, 21 May 2016

- Mathieu Copeland You begin the “holiday” projects in 1997, using the budget of the exhibition to go on vacation.
- Plamen Dejanov We used the money to produce the plate, and the rest we used to go on holiday, leaving on the day of the opening.
- MC Whilst on Holiday, did you produce anything?
- PD We wanted it to be understood that the holiday is the work, and not reduce the work for example to drawings or photographs related to the holiday.
- MC Did you stay away for the entire duration of the shows?
- PD We tried to be on holiday for the whole duration, even if at first the budget was not enough. During the entire time, if anyone asked us to do a show, we would send a plate that said the dates of the period that we were on holiday for. We would go on different vacations, or one vacation with different budgets.
- MC Life and art are on the same level. In your series “Plenty Objects of Desire,” begun in 1997, you would also rent your labour.
- PD It starts from daily life.
- MC As Ben Kinmont says, “Sometimes a nicer sculpture is to be able to provide a living for your family.”
- PD On our platforms we sometimes had sheets of paper with our qualifications and skills that everyone could take. They could contact us if they wanted to offer us a job. There were some interesting ones. A director of a private circus offered me a job assisting the clown, but most of them were related to the art world. People would come to the gallery and ask me to teach their kids to draw. I gave many private lessons. For the same reasons that we didn’t take pictures on holiday, and didn’t want to reduce the work to photographs, the children’s drawings were not the work. Not everything became art. It all went very quickly for us. We had many good shows, so we had to be careful to be precise.
- MC I would like to discuss your 1999 exhibition at Mehdi Chouakri’s Gallery in Berlin. As a continuation to the holiday series, you asked for the entire staff of the gallery to go on holiday.
- PD Not to repeat the holiday projects for ourselves, we wanted to see if this was possible for the institution. So when Mehdi asked us for a show, we said that we wanted the whole staff of the gallery to go on holiday, and he accepted. They were paid their salary, and no one was working. We were very precise not to make it artificial. When you called, you would hear on the answering machine, “Hello, we are on holidays.”
- MC Can you tell me about the “opening” of the exhibition, on 12 February 1999?

PD It was announced as a show, and not that it was going to be closed. We didn't want to go and stand in front of the gallery, even though it was an honour, our first show in Berlin. Many people came. It was February and it was cold so everyone said "they closed the gallery, there is nothing here, let's go to the next bar."

MC Did you give Mehdi and his staff instructions of what to do whilst on their holiday?

PD No, they were totally free.

MC Did they have to take photographs and do documentation?

PD Everyone was free to choose how they wanted to present our project. Some were telling stories. Mehdi took many pictures as he went to Tenerife, during the Carnival. We helped him do a nice album of these.

MC Your desire was not to close the gallery, but the gallery had to be closed for everyone to be on holiday. For the first part of the show, there was just a sign on the metal shutters of the gallery that read "Galerie wegen Urlaub geschlossen 12–28.2.1999" [Gallery Closed for Holidays 12-28.2.1999]. Then comes the second part of the show, when all returned from their holidays.

PD Everyone started working again but we kept the main gallery space empty. For the second part of the exhibition we asked the gallery owner and his staff simply to talk with the exhibition visitor about the holiday they did. In the back gallery room we also presented a new platform piece. During this whole time we were preparing new pieces, as we were not on holiday.

MC In the second movements of the exhibition, along with the holiday album that Mehdi would show, you had the installation *Parallel Life (Plenty Objects of Desire)*, a platform that featured a drawing by Karen Kilimnik, a glass model car by Daum, vases by C-22 and Cenedese & Albarelli, a Vistosi lamp, and a glass top table designed by Frank Gehry.

PD For me, the show was more strong and radical when everyone went on holiday and the gallery was really closed for vacation. When they opened, they took the sign down and it was no longer exhibited. It wasn't the focus of the main work anymore.

MC Then came your exhibition at the Air de Paris Gallery in Paris, "***** Plus (See You !)," that opened on 10 March 2001. The gallery was left empty as you went, together with gallery directors Florence Bonnefous and Édouard Merino, to Dubai for twelve days.

PD This time the idea was to take the gallery to another country, open a branch and work from there. The Air de Paris Gallery was left totally empty.

MC There was an opening in the gallery held on the very day the directors arrived to Dubai—you would only join them a few days later—and a series of events were organised with your approval at the gallery during your twelve days away.

PD The staff in the office would explain that the gallery was not closed, but in Dubai. We had a little office there between a Hertz car rental place and some small shop, and Florence was always working hard to manage the gallery.

MC One of the inspirations for the project was you hearing that Andy Warhol wanted to develop a business with Dubai,

and may even have spent some time there in the 1980s.

PD It was not a holiday, it was more like working in the sun. Everyday that we spent in Dubai we produced an artwork and exhibited it in the gallery. Florence and Édouard also made a diary about everything we did in Dubai, all the meetings, lunches, discussions we had, the people we met. We chose Dubai because it was a place with money, so we could try to explain contemporary art and sell it. We were always talking with people. Édouard, Florence and I were speaking with everyone who looked like a prospective buyer, even if it was a guy at the airport who bought tickets to get in the draw to win a car, or the Italian guy in the hotel lobby. The idea really was to work.

MC Using the gallery as a medium, closing it, working with the staff, relocating the gallery... you worked the "commercial gallery" as art.

PD The staff from the gallery would go away, but work. We wanted to try another version of what we did for Mehdi, to have new experiences and to test the limits.

Mathieu Copeland I would like to discuss the exhibition that together with Plamen Dejanov you realised at Mehdi Chouakri's Gallery in Berlin in 1999.

Swetlana Heger We had a solo exhibition in the gallery when it was still on Gipsstrasse. It was in February, and when everybody arrived to the opening, which was announced as an opening, the gallery was completely closed. On the gallery shutters there was only a sign saying, "Gallery Closed for Holidays." That caused a bit of troubles, people had made arrangements to meet other friends, they were freezing, they were mad, but also found it kind of funny, and then everybody gathered next door in a bar.

MC Did you sent out an invitation to the exhibition?

SH Yes. The gallery had a corporate identity design that mentioned the name, the address and the opening hours. There was no title to the show. It just said the dates of the show. People did not know that the gallery was going to be closed. That was important. Whereas the sign displayed in front of the gallery said the dates for which it would be closed for sixteen days.

MC You were not there yourselves during the opening?

SH No. The production money—and as we know galleries are not usually keen on spending too much money—was spent this time on Mehdi and his employees on their holidays. They went on vacations separately, enjoyed different types of holidays and Mehdi brought back souvenirs and pictures when he returned.

MC Holidays had been an important fixture in your work since 1997.

SH This piece was following our holiday pieces, when we went on vacations several times within the institutions' frameworks. When we had exhibitions or projects during the time when we were on holiday, we would only send a sign stating that we were "on vacation." For example, there was a conference in Copenhagen to which we were invited during our holiday project. We hired a person to go there and to talk about our work and whatever was the topic of the panel, and she also had a sign on the actual panel that said that we were "on vacation."

MC Formally, the gallery being closed was as a result of the gallery staff being asked to go on holiday.

SH Yes.

MC As you were preparing for this exhibition, did you consider historical precedents, the history of closed exhibitions that encompasses, such as Daniel Buren's at the Apollinaire Gallery in Milan in 1968 or Robert Barry's 1969/70 series of closed gallery exhibitions? Or were you rather focused on the idea of leisure?

SH Since the series of works that we have realised before were very much related to work, to labour and to artistic work, when we began to conceptualise this project we were working against the expectations that curators and others had at the

time on us to do again something with the notion of work, and relational aesthetics. So we thought, what is related to *work*? Well, it is *holidays*. Artists are never expected to go on holidays, following the cliché of a bohemian artist who never works anyway or Guy Debord's "Ne travaillez jamais" etc. Artists seem to others somehow always on vacation (or unemployed). So we said OK, we set the sign up and we go on holiday. It was interesting to see the limits of institutions when it comes to production money. If an artist says that he or she needs 500kg of coal for an installation, then that is not a problem. But if we proposed to go on vacation, then there was always a discussion about the production budget for such a project. And of course, this is not acceptable.

MC This is so true, and this brings to mind such endeavours as *The Association of Freed Times (L'association Des Temps Libérés)* that Pierre Huyghe founded in 1995, or again the idea of leisure as developed by Philippe Parreno and Liam Gillick.

SH And Maurizio Cattelan's "6th Caribbean Biennial." So there were many different ideas and levels. There was the leisure aspect. There also was the gallery craziness coming up in Berlin at that time, with so many gallery openings. And on another level, what is the life of an artist, and how it is defined.

MC Where were you during the show? Did you stay in Berlin? Where you traveling?

SH We were in Berlin, staying in the apartment of Paul Maenz, who actually used to represent Robert Barry and had realised one of the invitation shows with him in his former gallery in Cologne.

MC And then Mehdi brought back a visual diary, photographs taken during his holidays to Tenerife.

SH The show lasted until 1 April 1999. The gallery was closed between 12 through to 28 February. The album with the photographs that Mehdi had taken was then on display behind the counter. It was part of the project that Mehdi had to mediate the project to the visitors after the holidays. The exhibition at Mehdi was quite strict and radical. The piece was sold to a private collection with the advice that the new owner should go on vacation during the period of February every year. I would have loved to have such a piece myself.

MC This exhibition announces in its form the exhibition "***** Plus (See You!)" at Air de Paris in March 2001, where you would relocate the gallery from Paris to Dubai. Can you tell me the origins of the name of the piece? What do the stars represent?

SH Usually the most luxurious hotels are five stars, ours was even more luxurious because it was part of a unique experience. Therefore we decided on six stars, something that does not exist in reality, but indicates somehow luxury. Luxury to go away, luxury to take time off, the luxury of a unique artwork...

Mathieu Copeland I would like to begin our discussion with the demonstration "Destroy Serious Culture" that you realised together with Tony Conrad and Jack Smith in 1963, picketing institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York. A precedent to this could be seen in your having destroyed all your early works.

Henry Flynt I did go through this phase of true iconoclasm. I actually had this anti-art insight in February 1962. I outlined this philosophical perspective in *Blueprint for a Higher Civilization*. It was a reaction to the self styled avant-garde that I was very much in the middle of. The only way that I could react then was to write my *Down With Art* pamphlet.

MC You advanced the notion of "concept art" in 1961, in your essay published in *An Anthology* (1963) stating that "Concept art' is first of all an art of which the material is 'concepts.'" As such, you predated by far the definition in Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," published in the Summer 1967 issue of *Artforum*, in which LeWitt defined conceptual art as "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work," adding in a footnote, "in other forms of art the concept may be changed in the process of execution."

HF Indeed, well before all this happened.

MC This seems such a logical conclusion, or rather beginning, to your art and philosophy.

HF Anti-art! I was surrounded by people who were saying: that's my sculpture, like it or not. I was thinking about how they would claim that "nobody has ever done anything newer than that." I thought it over, and arrived at the idea of the civilisation in one mind. The civilisation in one mind where nothing is written down, there are no memorabilia or anything like that, you're just walking around with all of these understandings in your head.

MC Such an important statement for a culture that celebrates all the artefacts, and waste, that are produced. Considering furthermore this moment of time, could we discuss Fluxus? Despite the close links you enjoyed with many of the artists linked to the origins of this movement, you never joined.

HF You have to understand that there is a stereotype of me which is extremely inaccurate. The same way that concept art was swallowed up when Conceptual Art came along. One of the reasons why I get classified with lots of this is because I was looking around. George Maciunas and I had a special relationship on art in relation to the social question. We proceeded on the premise that it was going to be explicitly communist. When Maciunas got to New York at the end of 1963 and started having these events in his loft on Canal Street, I realised that this had nothing to do with me. It was vaudeville as art, very much in the tradition of cabaret. However, George and I continued with this idea of art and the social question. It is a total

misconception to classify me in the Fluxus sensibility—I have no sympathy for that whatsoever. Furthermore, I am concerned that the vaudeville-like spectacle has become the norm—even if some of my work played to that convention when I wanted to out-mock the mockers.

MC Not only would you demonstrate in front of the museum, picketing the institution, but you would accompany this radical gesture with a theoretical grounding through the lectures you were giving at the time in downtown New York.

HF Actually, in Walter De Maria's loft! There was a lot of talk about the end of art, about artists per se, about no more art. That was part of the environment that I was in. In other words, the people who today are considered to be the grand old masters were going around then saying that art is over! This is forgotten because they all went on immediately to fabulous careers and canonization as classics! A sociologist could stand back and look at this and ask why they began by pretending to be iconoclastic.

MC I am curious as to how you started picketing and demonstrating. And thus, what was your understanding of "demolishing serious culture?"

HF It started before I moved to New York. You may know the book *An Anthology* that La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low edited in 1963. Robert Morris had a section that he pulled out of the book in two very separate acts. In March 1961, La Monte Young, Bob Morris and Richard Maxfield came up from New York and we did a concert at Harvard University. Once he got back to New York after that concert, Bob Morris pulled a chunk of his submission to the *Anthology* out. Very curious. If he had left it in he would be given credit for the entire conceptual art development. In other words, he pulled out absolutely the best he had to offer. One of the original subtitles for his section was: *Anti-art*. You actually see that, when he pulled it in April 1961. We still have the mechanical [layout] where Maciunas crossed out "Anti-art" so that it would be retouched out by the printer. And the essays that he wrote, which he apparently thought were too shocking to publish, and you see that Maciunas has written on them: out, out, out. You look at those today and think that he would have been sort of the godfather of everything that was post-pop. He really did himself an incredible disservice; apparently, he was afraid that it would hurt his art career! And then in 1962, he pulls the rest of his section out. I was in this milieu. John Cage was then rather well known for saying that there is no point to be a composer, and Christian Wolff picked up on that and said it explicitly at the end of his *die Reihe 7* essay. It may sound terribly ironic that I'm giving a lecture in a young sculptor's loft for a group of about to be famous, avant-garde artists. But there is nothing ironic about it at all because I thought that I was just telling them: "if you guys are on the level, then I'm telling you what you are saying. If you really mean it, then this is what you're saying."

MC Through the notion of destruction, anti-establishment, anti-culture, you have continuously posed the question: what is art? And as such defied the possibility of it being an object.

HF I moved to New York because I had become a convinced left-winger. I was in a sectarian Marxist organisation for five years. This was when I was working with Maciunas on "art and the social question." For example, the pickets against Stockhausen in 1964. For me the audience was this organisation that I belonged to, *that was* the audience! I was trying to convince them first, just as in 1963 I had been trying to convince the avant-garde artists first. They were my primary audience. I didn't convince anybody, but we're still talking about what I had to say.

MC How would you qualify these lectures? Are your lectures an art form?

HF Not at all. I assumed that if you had a point of view then you gave a lecture. I was just expounding on what I had to say about politics in the mid-60's. If you want to know what I think now, check out my videos on the web with the title *Autopsy of the Left*. To complete this footnote, I would say that I was not an actual communist then, I thought I was. Now I would say that I *am* an actual communist. I understand it well enough to know what it ought to be about. In other words, I am in favour of a higher civilisation. In the old days, without any deep understanding, higher civilisation would have been synonymous with Communism in the sense that it would have to be an economic system that was not capitalistic. It would be an intrinsically high-tech society—not coincidentally high-tech. You have to have high-tech first for this higher civilisation to be possible.

MC You have developed so many scores throughout your career, be them musical scores or art scores for art pieces. How do you score art?

HF Before anti-art happened, in 1959-60 that is, I decided to make my personal move in visual art. I took abstract expressionism and action painting for granted as a teenager. Most of the people whom I knew ridiculed it, but I didn't. For me, it was self-evident. For many people around me, they thought it was charlatanism. I had no desire to be the kind of abstract expressionist who hung out at the Cedar Tavern. That was where Jackson Pollock tried to throw Philip Guston out of the second floor window! At any rate, that sort of thing did not attract me at all. When I finally decided to make my move, it was all about translating the techniques of what would have been called the avant-garde composers of the new music, making that translation to the visual image. I was totally about that, and in particular aleatoric painting. The first one I ever realised was spoiled with dust in 1961, I destroyed both the painting and the score. It was irretrievably lost. Starting in 1988 and 1993, I realised two of these aleatoric paintings without a formal score, just from memory. It's a performance with a score that uses a canvas and the paints, the brushes, the palette knives, the linseed and everything like that as props basically, for the performance. It takes approximately a half-hour. And then the residue of the performance is a painting, which is exhibited in a vitrine or a shadow box. When I decided that I was going to do the third aleatoric painting in Germany, just recently for the retrospective I had at the Kunstverein Düsseldorf, I decided that I needed

to write everything out so that I would be very clear about the process. Everything has an installation diagram. Some of my geometric abstract paintings have elaborate numerical tables because I was trying to translate so-called new music procedures into the visual image. I was working with random number tables; I was working with theories.

MC Are installation diagrams a score to make an art piece?

HF I don't think of design diagrams, and installation diagrams, as scores. It's more like what an architect does—it's a plan, a blueprint.

MC And who can execute them?

HF It has to be me. I have to approve of the site.

MC Do you think that people could just take up your scores, either your musical scores or your art scores from the 1960's and 1970's, and just interpret them their own way?

HF There is one called *Work Such That No One Knows What's Going On*. It's from 1961, one of the first concept art pieces. One just has to guess whether this work exists. And if so, what it is like. That's the piece, from 1961 and appearing in print in 1963. [What is stated is correct, but I was wrong to intimate that the interpretation is "anything goes." The piece has "solutions" which are highly counter-intuitive; I only have a few of them. — HF, 2016]

MC To conclude, thinking about it sixty years later, can we consider *Demolish Serious Culture* as being a score of Henry Flynt?

HF I want to maintain that this is a form of militancy. I called on artists to discard their own art. In other words, there was no suggestion that that itself was art. It was iconoclasm. At some point in the past there had to have been the real iconoclasts because that's where we get the word from: the Byzantine destruction of icons. I have to admit that I was about that. In other words, when the Byzantines destroyed icons, they didn't think of that as a special kind of icon, that was not the motivation.

[Postscript, references:

Like Morris, Wolff wrote things early on which he pointedly never pursued:

One might say that [irritation] is at least preferable to soothing, edifying, exalting, and similar qualities. Its source is, of course, precisely in monotony...

"Immobility in Motion," *Audience*, 1958

...in the end, no longer to write, or perform music: a perfectly valid possibility still leaving much available for the ears to focus attention on.

"On Form," *die Reihe 7*, 1960 (English tr.)

Wolff provided the venue for me to make my first public anti-art proclamation, May 1962. Young and Conrad were there. Wolff could have said, "I said it first," but he didn't. — HF, 2016]

Mathieu Copeland For the first of your two performances at Yoko Ono's loft, on Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 February 1961, you announced that "experimental concert jazz, Flynt music, or poetry will be improvised," and the following day you added a possible "exhibit of scores, reading from writings of his work, playing of recordings." Since your very first pieces performed, then, you have worked through a reduction of means.

Henry Flynt I would say so. A couple of musical pieces that I performed in Yoko Ono's loft in February 1961 can be accomplished with just my hands. The instrument for one piece is a rubber band, and for the other one is two flat tooth-picks. I also intentionally did not prepare. I walked in cold and started grabbing props. It was deliberately a pick up situation, a deck of cards and one thing and another.

MC The radicality that you would develop over the next five decades began with an acute understanding of scores, and your early involvement in "new music."

HF I was in fact composing visual art, and ended up making exhibition pieces out of these ideas. *Aleatoric Painting* is such a composition. The original was destroyed by dust, and later I recreated it.

MC Destruction plays an important part in your work. Not only have you destroyed much of your own work, but you also advocated for destruction on a grand scale.

HF Yes, but please note that the painting was destroyed from negligence. And it does not have anything to do with Destruction in Art by people like Gustav Metzger. I was aesthetics-heavy in those years. I had a conversation with Simone Forti the day after my second performance at Yoko Ono's loft. She said, in effect, that I was top-heavy with theory. It didn't mean anything to her, but it meant a lot to me. I had stepped into a milieu where a lot of things were already happening, and came with little preparation. I was first hit by the so-called new music at Harvard in 1957. I decided that this was the bandwagon I had better get on. At that point I was a teenager. I wasn't ready to say: "No, *that* is what *you* do but this is what *I* do." The only thing I could think of was to try to outdo them at their own game, and that accounts for 1959, 1960, the Yoko Ono situation, and the Harvard March 1961 situation. I was trying to make moves in their game, although I was already mentally disconnected from it.

MC Do you remember Yoko Ono's *Painting to be Stepped On* that was first shown at her loft? Was this work an influence on your development of thinking that the art is not rooted in the object but in the idea?

HF No, not at all. But I will tell you about that evening, as you probably won't meet many people who were there. People were walking in, starting to take a step and realising that something was there on the floor in front of them and everyone was dancing around it to avoid stepping on it. Me too.

MC Yoko Ono often said how she regretted that Marcel Duchamp did not acknowledge the piece, as he came to the loft on 112 Chambers Street. You appeared at the AG Gallery on 15 and 16 July, preceding Ono's exhibition "Paintings & Drawings" that took place there from 17 to 30 July 1961.

HF Well, as a matter of fact her show was installed when I appeared. For me that was a coincidence. Back then my own evolution was extremely rapid. I call those the "years of compressed development." I tried to open the first loft performance playing jazz piano. I thought, to hell with these people, I will give them a jazz concert. But I couldn't get anything going because the room was so square that it was just impossible. Instead I gave them a post-dada performance, or whatever you want to call it. I had a confrontation with Cage after the first event.

MC John Cage had been a great influence on you at that time.

HF As late as 1959 at Harvard, I was involved in imitating him. So meeting La Monte Young in New York in December 1960 was a shock. His first words to me were: "Cage is over, forget it." I have never seen such an obvious example of somebody trying to usher the predecessor off of the stage so that he could command it himself. La Monte would say to people that he had never heard of John Cage. *Two Sounds* is a noise saturation piece. I heard it in December 1960, and it wiped out everything that had gone before it, once you accepted the assumptions of the game that was being played. New music had been tip-toeing around one carefully calculated note here, followed by a carefully calculated note there, and then La Monte just hits them with this wall. [For completeness, David Tudor may have proposed something like *Two Sounds*, as reported in *A Year from Monday*.]

MC A tabula rasa by noise, cleaning the slate to start anew.

HF When I heard this wall of noise, all these inadequate and very timid aesthetics were rendered irrelevant. Cage was no longer the person that you had to resemble.

MC Your "years of compressed development" included these six months, from February to July 1961 during which you defined "Concept Art."

HF There is that, and many other things happened and kept on happening right into 1964 and so on.

MC You were much involved in the genesis of the avant-garde in New York, the onset of a new understanding in art, in music, until you denounced the avant-garde mystique.

HF The avant-garde was *their* game. By February 1961 I had already decided that I was finished with modern music. I was going to turn toward ethnic music, the field in which I have published twenty-five albums or so. My guiding lights for that were Coltrane, Coleman and Bo Diddley. They showed how a renewal of tradition can be done, which in my humble opinion is extremely rare. There are no formulas for the renewal of ethnic music and for its reconstitution.

MC Would you say that the avant-garde became a genre in itself, and that it became more interesting for you to come back to the traditional or popular roots of culture through music?

HF This is where we get into aesthetic theory. I was accused

of being top-heavy in terms of aesthetics. Cage and so on had a new aesthetic of their own, but I found it very unsatisfactory. They saw Dada, and they endeavoured to make an art institution out of it.

MC Did you feel that there was more freedom in genres such as hillbilly music?

HF Freedom doesn't come into it. Finding out about the Mississippi blues really converted me and turned me right around, one hundred and eighty degrees. Coltrane's *Chasin' the Trane* showed me the possibility of taking this blues-influenced jazz, or jazz that is "wearing the blues on its sleeve" so to speak, and renewing it to the point where it was abreast of modern music, but was not modern music. That was an overwhelming influence for me.

MC Taking a tradition as a material to be reworked.

HF I wanted an acute clarification. The whole post-Cage and Neo-Dada was a bluff. It was all intimidation. They were taking advantage of the fact that Cage had managed to gather an audience that expected to go into a legitimate concert hall and be treated a certain way.

MC Was the notion of contempt important then?

HF Cage and his colleagues believed they had a new aesthetic, and that could not have existed without Webern. (In the same way, you might say without Coltrane, no Flynt.) It was not a direct line, but the precedent set is important. Musical pointillism and atonality enabled Cage or Christian Wolff. And they were all exploiting that in their game. I accepted La Monte's *Cans on Windows* as art. Its only value is as an aesthetic experience. But it doesn't have any of the usual defining features in music. It is a wall of noise. If that is worth doing and a genre can be made of it, then there surely needs to be a label for the genre. They were deliberately confusing the issue, and I wanted it unconfused.

MC Would it be correct to say that you have consciously infused the avant-garde with subversion?

HF If you want to have all of this so-called music, don't call it music, but auditory art—call it "audart." A lot of these pieces were head games, pseudoscientific garbage, in a concert hall. I did a lot of backing and filling, and became a kind of art historian for my own purposes. What I now know is that to prove that a piece of music is bona fide twelve-tone music takes immense expertise. You cannot tell just by listening to it.

MC As you told me, you were not in the game to enter the Museum of Modern Art. You were denying "Serious Culture."

HF That comes later, as we are still moving towards June 1961, when concept art first appears. So there was this idea of the head-game as a work of art, and I had my entire background in mathematics and my own ideas. I was so permeated by the avant-garde mystique that, as I learned mathematics, I questioned—where was the avant-garde in mathematics? The latest important development at that time was Grothendieck in France, or Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. On the one hand I had those precedents, and on the other hand I had overwhelmingly La Monte Young—and

maybe Cage. There had to be a genre that had no precedent. That was Concept Art.

MC Did your contemporaries use the expression “Concept Art” for their work?

HF The label was immediately picked up. In my scholarly investigation later, the first word piece was Dick Higgins in 1957. This is a very subtle point in our history. George Brecht and Dick Higgins were earlier than La Monte. [For completeness, that is not straightforward; it has to be considered carefully.] I am now fascinated by what was the going thing before I arrived. For instance, there was the whole New York Painting scene.

MC Which you respected tremendously as a young man.

HF Maybe as a very young man. When I came back to the art world in 1988 as a calculated, strategic move, I decided that it was necessary for me to produce paintings. My assistant at that time was into New York painting, so I had another encounter with this. It had its own mystique. A painting is also just a surface to hang on a wall. In 1960-61 we had a little coterie. La Monte was my primary New York contact, and we decided that painting was corny, and so was opera, dance... Or rather, I thought that all of us agreed about that. I later discovered that “all of us” was a fantasy in my head. For example, La Monte routinely performed as the pit orchestra for dancers. I was just refusing to see it because it didn’t fit my picture of the radicalism I was interested in. In addition to audart, visart, lingart, there was concept art. The next step I take is the “activity,” towards the end of 1961 and into 1962.

MC Could you give some example of the works that you realised under the appellation “activity”?

HF “Mock Risk Games,” which was originally called “Exercise Awareness States,” from mid-1961. It came off of La Monte, who was providing very careful specifications about what to do in case something you don’t expect to happen, happens. I had a very elaborate set of situations. I had a piece called *Freak Dreams and Goop Drip* in which you were supposed to go into this room where there would be the minimal requisites for survival, and remain there for a couple of days devoted to dreaming. My exhibition at Audio Visual Arts in November 2014 was in the same vein. Both give you an opportunity to enter a schizophrenic headspace. At AVA, the texts—sentences, statements or scores—came to me in the drowsy state of just waking up. I had to arise to write them down. For 1961, I was encouraging the participant to sleep, and maybe they would dream. I unfortunately destroyed the score for that piece. Then came *Perception Dissociator*, which I keep coming back to and reworking. At that point I was no longer interested in what the cultural community called “art.” I did not want to take any of this into a gallery or a concert hall. I felt that it would nullify its originality.

MC Did you consider the institution a burden?

HF Absolutely. Early in 1962, all of the concept art pieces were to be reframed so that they become pieces for an “Optical Audioplayer.” You would take a visual image, and the optical audioplayer would read the information, and convert it into sound in a systematic way. That makes any flat visual work a musical

composition. In other words a Rembrandt painting becomes an unintended musical composition. That was my electronic music.

MC In this unrealised proposition, everything became a composition.

HF As some art historian told me, "very subversive." Do you know my reconstructed 1961 piece *Music of the Future*? Like *Each point on this line is a composition*, it is a word piece. That was not concept art, but it was leading toward concept art. I was trying to show that I could have an uncountable infinity of compositions. *Music of the Future* was defined as the first piece of music composed (and placed on record) in 2961. In other words, I stole it from the future. Then I could say, "you see, I really am newer than you are."

MC The theory of "the new" and signature brings to mind the work of luminary Ben Vautier.

HF In the United States there was the military draft. You had to go for a physical exam to see if you were physically able to be in the army. For all of us who did not see the army as the thing that we wanted to be doing, this was a personal catastrophe.

MC How did you avoid it?

HF I had a couple of psychiatrists' letters saying that I was too crazy for the army. We were very conscious that this two-year interruption in your life was a possibility, and that you would not be able to have your library, your photographs, your records with you there. You would have nothing. So I started thinking, what if all of your "culture" is just in your head?

MC "All in your head" is also live in your head—the real-time of a place to live in, the mental abstract space.

HF The only thing that matters is that you yourself enjoy the experience. You end up with things that you do spontaneously and for your own pleasure, and I was ready to reject everything else. And something else was happening which started when I met Maciunas for the first time in June 1961, getting ready for July 1961.

MC That was when George Maciunas co-ran with Almus Salius the AG gallery on Madison Avenue in New York City, where you would appear twice in July 1961.

HF La Monte and Jackson Mac Low took me up to the AG Gallery to be photographed and to meet Maciunas. I talked with Maciunas about the Soviet Union, and he told me that at the beginning they were the most radical. Whether or not you find his admiration for the Constructivists credible today, Maciunas was the first person I had ever met who thought that the Soviet Union could be respected for culture. The other avant-gardistes, La Monte for example, were all lap dogs of the bourgeoisie. I began to notice that—and I was not happy with it. It made it much easier to dislike grand opera, ballet, symphonic music and all of that.

MC To dislike Serious Culture.

HF Yes. That is where the term Serious Culture gets coined. The first step is that you throw everything away, and the only thing that is left is what is in your head, or to be more precise self-engendered moments. You don't write them down because

that detaches them from your own valuing of them. If you write it down then we are back to "This is my 14th symphony [throws ball point pen cap on the table]: like it or die." I arrive at my exposition, "My New Concept of General Acognitive Culture" [on the Flynt web site.] I started giving these lectures, first in May at Harvard, and then in July in New York, and then back at Harvard in August 1962. Listening to the Mississippi blues had made me socially conscious. I started paying attention to the Left-wing press. It was Maciunas who had triggered it, although Jackson Mac Low was the card-carrying anarchist. I used to have these violent quarrels with Jackson Mac Low because he would tell me that the Chinese, the Cubans and so on were just Nazis wearing a different coat. At that time I did not see that at all. Of course a great deal has changed and I now understand that my picture of the world in the 1960s was unrealistic. To those of us back then, it looked like Communism was just as real as the republican revolution had been in 1789.

MC I would like to address the semantics and the origin of "veramusement," a word that you have developed and theorised.

HF The word "veramusement" becomes "brend." I was changing the word from week to week. I was searching for the perfect neologism for "general acognitive culture," a label that created a great deal of confusion, unfortunately. It became "pure recreation," then became "true amusement", a term only documented in a letter that I sent to Earl Brown. This word went through a lot of incarnations before it finally ended up as "brend."

MC "Brend" crystallises your ideas then, do you still find it appropriate for today?

HF That has not changed.

MC I would like to return to pushing forward a new agenda, promoting, picketing, with the idea to demolish serious culture...

HF That was 1963.

MC Were you ready to actually demolish the museum, to "demolish serious culture"?

HF I thought that that was what I wanted, yes. As I look back on it now, of course, I realise how naïve I was.

MC I would rather say utopian, or idealistic...

HF The problem was that I thought that if you wipe the slate clean, then you could start all over again pristine. What has now been brought to our attention, been flung in our face, is that there are plenty of people out there with their own agenda, who do not give a damn about modernity, about 1789. They would be delighted to cut your head off on television, if it came to that. In 1962-3, I assumed that it would somehow be effortless to go forward from where we are now. In reality it is the opposite of effortless.

MC In 1963, you proposed the radical view of demolishing to create a clean state, and then a few years later you set out your *Blueprint for a Higher Civilization*.

HF More than a few years, we are jumping from 1963 to 1975. Let me tell you of a science-fiction story that I read around 1960 that influenced me so much. The idea was that the earth people are discovering new planets in their rocket ship. They come to a planet that is very agrarian, bucolic, pastoral. They assume

that these people are primitive. As they begin to interact with these people, they realise that the reason they do not have any skyscrapers and so on is because they are so much more advanced, and have left materialisation behind. I thought that was how it ought to go. The problem was that I had absolutely no idea of how to get from here to there. In July 1962 I went into the headquarters of various left wing organisations here in New York. In February 1963 I had decided that I wanted to be part of what I saw as a global movement, which I thought was the next political order after the bourgeois republic. The bourgeois republic, the constitutional republic, was 1789, and I thought that what we were seeing now, perhaps beginning in 1917, 1949 China, 1959 Cuba... was the gathering threads of a new global political order. I almost feel today that I have to defend myself for thinking that. Knowing what I know now, it obviously does not have the credibility that it did then. Though I think that I had to go through it. What they call functional ignorance. I picked up the idea that you had to have demonstrations!

MC A demonstration is a medium.

HF In the book manuscript *From Culture to Veramusement*, I began by giving a series of objections to Serious Culture, then proceeded to didactic art. Then it came to breed, and after breed, to the shape that life will have in this utopia. I think that my springboard for this would have been the *1844 Manuscripts, The German Ideology, Critique of the Gotha Program*. Also I had the romantic idea that Africa was going to be "it."

MC Would you say that you then became a professional revolutionary?

HF From the moment that I walked into Workers World (WW) Party, yes, I was a professional revolutionary. This organisation was a split from the old Trotskyists in New York, with an opening to Maoism, because many at that time accepted the contentions of the Chinese. In 1963, I met a student from Ghana who was finishing sociology at Harvard. He told me that that he would learn how to be a guerrilla revolutionary. They were going to start spreading the Revolution across the world, *pushing into the West from the periphery*. That strategic perspective left no place for WW. As he saw it, the WW people were running around and going to parties; they were not in the field with a rifle. I didn't know whether WW could "succeed," but I knew that I had a chance here in New York, not in the field. That settled the matter for me. The reason I am telling you this is because it is mixed up with the aesthetic theory. As it developed, in 1964 I decided to make an issue of serious modern music and of Stockhausen. For me that was a retreat, because, supposedly, I was so advanced that I had left behind "one music versus another" as a point to fight over. I was trying to come up with an aesthetic posture that would mean something to my Communist comrades. As naïve, and as involved in a miscalculation, as I might have been, there were certain things I saw in 1964-65 that were all too true. Soviet culture during the Khrushchev era was putting on the Western business suit. I realised that they were desperately eager to get in on the ground floor of bourgeois respectability. The ultimate to them was to put on their jewellery

and go to a grand opera. I was predicting what actually happened, but my prediction was disguised as an objection to the Soviet cultural outlook.

Mathieu Copeland Today I would like to discuss the concept of destruction and, to begin, the act of making work out of tearing posters off of the wall.

Jacques Villeglé The posters came from cubism. Until then, collage had been the most powerful form of art to me. Nowadays there is nothing more classic than Braque's collages, and Picasso was very clearly on the side of destruction. Before Paris, I only lived in demolished towns—Nantes, Rennes, Saint-Malo—even though I have never lived through any bombings. Everyone used to speak of the beauty of destruction. Personally, I was less taken by it. For me, destruction was more Picasso and less urban destruction.

MC Your first rusted metal sculptures, made as early as 1947, stem from destruction.

JV From demolition. I did not have the money to buy enormous scraps of metal, but I pictured myself making sculptures out of them. Destruction is harbours, harbour gates, canal locks, and it is what inspired me to sculpt. There was something romantic about destruction. Hubert Robert's forms of destruction are poetic; they are the ruins of time. I never would have gone out to paint or draw the destruction of a city, but I could use metal parts and erect them into monuments. You cannot imagine the immense poverty that existed after war. The metal sculptures used steel that was meant to build the Atlantic Wall. We lived on debris; there were pieces of metal everywhere.

MC Do you see a connection between the metal sculptures and the lacerated posters?

JV The only connection would be that they are both waste, something that is no longer useful to life. I dreamed of painting, and so I stopped sculpting.

MC There is no better term for your lacerated posters than "waste."

JV It is something that can no longer be used. When I find a poster, I take something that can no longer be used as an advertisement. The posters were a search for the illegible. I had noticed that when a word was cut up, people tried to guess what it was. I told myself that in this way, we could make those who are uninterested in art take an interest in it. Going toward the illegible created an interest in art.

MC In your posters, there are two kinds of destruction. The kind carried out by anonymous passers-by who tear off bits of the poster, and yours, which takes hold of the poster and tears it off of the wall. This change in status is part of what makes up the act of creation.

JV I turn waste into a work of art through an act of framing.

MC "Framing" is a word we have often spoken of together. What leads you to this need to make a choice?

JV I was showing Raymond Hains around the School of Fine Arts, and we came across a painting that was not too bad. He

was a photographer, and so he would frame things. Hains had said to me that "what works in this painting is this square over here." It had made me think, and I asked myself: "Will it work if I cut this piece off?" So I took the painting with me, I sawed into it, and I realized that by making an entire piece out of a detail, it falls apart.

MC How do you approach framing when you take something directly off of the wall?

JV Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, who was a critic and photography specialist, would ask me the same question, and rightfully so. First you have to start with photography. I tried to do some but I am incapable of framing something properly. I cannot look into a lens. It is a good subject for a photographer, but taking a photo of it would not work.

MC You frame reality.

JV Hains was the only person I could discuss cultural, contemporary things with, and the word "framing" came to us naturally.

MC And it is framing?

JV I told myself that we could not bring the posters as such, that to get them accepted they had to be framed. We only did framings for the first exhibition in 1957, that is, eight years later. I liked to think of myself as Viollet-le-Duc working on a restoration as I did my framing.

MC Alfred Jarry's work was very important to you. I would now like to understand to what extent the lacerated posters make a form of writing emerge through destruction, through violence against the public.

JV I made an art of behaviour.

MC When tearing paper off of the wall, would you and Hains discuss the concept of destruction that the act embodied?

JV It was reconstruction in view of making a work. I understood how rich the lacerated posters were, and the fact that they could make up an entire work.

MC There is violence in the word laceration.

JV I prefer the word laceration to the word tearing. Tearing is sentimental, like a life torn apart. Laceration is more like the Marquis de Sade, as Marcel Broodthaers suggested to me when we discussed it in Germany.

MC What role does violence play in your work?

JV There was violence in the posters, but the color gives us the music of this violence. Leisure culture started just after the war, while we were still in a period of hardship.

MC Looking at your past work today, one can see marks of the aesthetics of the time. The aesthetics of that period's popular culture emanate from it. Does it make sense to speak of a certain aesthetic in your work?

JV I have no issue with the term aestheticism. The golden ratio can be found in some of the posters. Picasso used to say that, by cheating a little, you always find the golden ratio in paintings. It is true. For me, it only had to be new.

MC This aesthetic of destruction, of violence, of laceration, was it a conscious decision?

JV Some of the posters are very much arranged. It is a dialogue with painting.

MC When you work on your lacerated posters, do you establish a set of rules to follow?

JV There is one rule: take the piece from the wall as is. I only cheat when, for example, a politician is too visible, in which case I take off a piece of their nose. Or when an advertisement is too visible, I erase it. I want to erase political slogans and business smiles. Art is about evoking things. That is the rule. We are closer to Dadaists than to Surrealists, with their strict rules.

MC And yet, your art is not apolitical.

JV I have no political orientation. I judge politics based on individuals.

MC How could we think of this movement from destruction to creation?

JV I worked with architects who would tell me that when they worked, they dreamed of ruins. When we do something, we think of the end. Since the sixties, we say that when something is built, it is for twenty years.

MC A temporary form of architecture; there is an interesting parallel to be drawn here with the lacerated posters, where you take hold of something ephemeral on the wall to create a lasting work of art.

JV Architects no longer think of their buildings as being eternal.

MC To end our discussion, I could like to speak of your socio-political alphabet. Once again, there is violence in some of the symbols used. The swastika, the A of "Anarchy," the double S...

JV The idea came to me from an anonymous tag, once again on a wall. I wanted to work on a socio-political alphabet, all while avoiding the danger of becoming a painter. So I took on the modest role of an encyclopedia plate illustrator, who makes drawings to highlight an alphabet and make it known.

MC Are you also looking for violence or confrontation through letters?

JV No, it is a historian's idea, an idea that can be found in the posters. When the communists would rebuke me for lacerating their posters I would answer: "I take them when they are lacerated, I bring them to the museum, and I write your history for you." I am not going to hide the swastika, for example, because it is a part of our lives.

MC You thus create history by, and through, destruction.

JV I am someone who picks out the signs of our history.

Mathieu Copeland I would like to turn the focus of our conversation today to the notion of “de-painting” and talk about how this project came about.

Claude Rutault The idea was to continue with the rationale of repainting an image and then making it disappear. If we were not going to simply fetishise the top layer, we had to work out how to make this top layer disappear. The idea was to get back as close as possible to the starting point, to the blank canvas stretched on a frame. We soon realised that we can never really get back to the blank canvas. Some traces remain, pigments embedded in the canvas, even shapes. There is a time when you have to stop or else the surface is destroyed. Indeed, an old canvas ultimately becomes no more a painting than a canvas covered by the same colour as the wall. It is another time, another choice, but [it] remains a radical proposal.

MC For the task of de-painting, you hired Adriana Blendea, a professional restorer, and you asked her to do the opposite of her normal work.

CR Precisely, and indeed that has raised some issues. For example, she wondered whether she should do it, whether she was actually entitled to do it. By doing exactly the opposite of restoration – and this recently gave rise to eleven pages about her in the CRBC [a restorers’ journal] – she could be said to be doing a restoration brought back to the starting point.

MC Your old paintings are the first paintings that you decided to “de-paint,” the ones you made before 1973 and your *definitions/methods*. During our last discussion at your exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in 2015, we talked about whether you could carry out this de-painting work on paintings which were not your own.

CR Unfortunately, it's a bit tricky. When you repaint somebody else's canvas, with all the technical means at your disposal, you could almost remove the added layer.

MC You refuse to use the term “destruction,” and argue that, by repainting the canvas the same colour as the wall, you are ultimately conserving the original painting.

CR This is one stage amongst others. As soon as you have de-painted, you can prepare the canvas and do other things. You could not de-paint fifty times because that would wear out the canvas, for it does actually suffer. But that could also be another way of starting again. It's almost as much the idea of starting again as the idea of destroying. That is part of a process.

MC And by doing so, you come back to your initial statement: a canvas stretched on a frame. This brings to mind particular words—“canvas”, “frame”, “stretched”—but from the opposite point of view.

CR It is not so much the opposite point of view as the construction of a work. The interesting thing is to have a series. When you put the non-painted beside the de-painted, it's very

clear; you can see the difference. Both of them [are] becoming paintings.

MC There is a relationship with the support seen as a place for addition or subtraction. By de-painting, you return to the canvas. However, if you go on this way, the acids end up destroying the canvas, and you end up with a magnificent echo of Gustav Metzger's auto-destructive art. Conversely, by repainting the canvas the same colour as the wall, on each occasion a new layer is created, and this puts the "surface under pressure." In short, these two actions, repainting and de-painting, attack the canvas.

CR The canvas is essential. The canvas has suppleness, a lifelike quality, a fragility.

MC With de-painting, you confront painting itself head on; you confront painted painting. Your *definitions/methods* are an invitation and a foretaste of potential multiplicity and the creation of objects. On the contrary, with de-painting, you attack the object itself, which, moreover, is an existing object that you had worked on before 1973.

CR There is a great risk when you go back to a picture. However, I think this risk remains at the level of painting, of covering and uncovering. I only de-paint half of the work, a bit like some restorers who use it to show the passing of time. There is significant destruction of the pictorial layer.

MC This takes us on to how you index this pictorial layer: do you keep a reference image of the original? When you de-paint one of your canvases, what do you retain of this painted past? Do you see this past as important, or, on the contrary, are you trying to erase this past?

CR My aim is not to erase the past. It is simply to speed up a story. Recently, I created *suicide-painting no. 9*, which is a small canvas that the owner chooses—it can be an oval, a rectangle. When you purchase this work, you undertake not to resell or bequeath it, you can display it under certain circumstances, but, most importantly, you take it with you to your grave. If you are cremated, it will be burnt with you and your ashes are mixed together. In *suicide-painting no. 9*, there is total erasure.

MC The first series of *suicide-paintings* dates back to 1978. Do you see a parallel between the *suicide-paintings* and *de-painting*? Is de-painting the suicide of painting?

CR I think it's about the construction of another painting.

MC The construction of another painting that you do not make.

CR What I have not done is repaint a de-painted canvas.

MC I would now like to talk about retrospectives and ask you what Claude Rutault's ideal retrospective would look like. In a sense, a single canvas could possibly suffice and include everything. A canvas painted the same colour as the walls, de-painted, repainted, etc., would embody all of your proposals.

CR Yes and no. There are, all the same, some anecdotes. But it's true; these elements are the fundamental principles.

MC One of your best-known quotes is, I think: "My paintings are yet to come." You do not anchor your work in its production, but rather in the fact that it is an instruction for a future.

CR When you say that a canvas stretched on a frame is painted

the same colour as the wall, that is one thing, but when you have it in front of your eyes, you think, "okay, fine, it is painted in the same colour as the wall, but whatever." So, either you wait for the next one or you think about what could be produced next.

MC This can also be found in the painter's actions—you often say that you only rarely paint canvases yourself... With de-painted paintings you completely cancel out the original action, and yet again, it is not your action which erases the painted action.

CR You can always abandon the canvas. A de-painted painting acts a little bit like a trace of this order—of an erasure, a loss.

MC An inverted palimpsest. The accumulation of works from before 1973 to which you returned in 2015 offers us a destruction of these works while allowing creation to arise from the act of de-painting. This brings into question the potentiality of the work itself and its inscription in time.

CR It's all quite simple, in fact.

MC You have chosen to de-paint a specific period of your paintings, from before 1973. Could you do the same thing with all your paintings, especially those which are painted the same colour as the wall?

CR That could be all the paintings that I have kept, which ultimately are very few. It doesn't really matter, because I can also de-paint my canvases which are the same colour as the wall. But there is less point in that, because doing so already has rather a more impersonal, less traditional side. With de-painting, what you are doing is attacking the production of the picture. And a canvas of the same colour as the wall is not exactly a picture.

MC They are generic.

CR Yes, it's a very different process and result, and indeed attitude, towards painting. It's very different from what Rauschenberg does when he erases a De Kooning drawing. Firstly, because in this case it is a single action—not something that he has repeated on more than one occasion and which has become a part of a historically situated work.

MC The act of de-painting one's own work is strongly linked to Jasper Johns, John Baldessari and so many others who have destroyed all their supposedly youthful work and then stated that everything they produce from that date on shall henceforth be their work.

CR However, I have first taken photographs of them. I have not denied them. I undo, I redo. However, it does clearly relativize all my previous work.

MC I would like to come back to the word "destroy." You effectively refuse to consider de-painting or repainting as destruction, arguing that it is actually creation.

CR Yes, of course.

MC So, in your eyes, what is anti-painting? Your work has that tremendous quality of being as much against painting as being a fundamental questioning which goes to the very foundations of painting.

CR I'm very interested in the canvas placed in front of the landscape—it is no longer painting in a material sense. You read the landscape by looking over the canvas, which means

that you no longer need to paint it. I get great fun out of being able to do without painting while remaining in the pictorial field.

MC Another historical precedent of the de-painting proposal is by Gil Wolman, who, at the end of his life, produced several texts on the idea of de-painting. Having already fragmented the word *ex-position*, he then proposed the possibility of "de-paintings." Another work by Wolman which could be placed in parallel with the blank canvas and the landscape is a work in which he invites us to consider a book of reproductions (let's say a book on Picasso with many reproductions). With this, Wolman makes us look at a series of blank canvases that he has signed, and tells us: "to look at this canvas, please refer to such and such page of the Picasso book." So it is a painting that you project onto the canvas yourself.

CR When you have the landscape and the canvas, you do not project as long as you go over the top of the painting. The painting remains behind and you go towards the landscape with your gaze. It is a place of passage, an intermediary, a presenter. It is something that shows. Indeed that is what Jean-Marie Straub says about his cinema, that it is there to show. He does not particularly tell stories. As a cinema director, what he does is show.

MC Nevertheless, I get the feeling that you do not so much show as say. Your work is inhabited by the word.

CR That too is the case.

MC The strength of the term "to de-paint" lies in its very name. With the term "de-painting," we know exactly what it means and yet the result remains to be seen.

CR Ideas come through writing.

MC Writing does not replace the work, and yet it allows the work to exist.

CR To a certain extent it leads towards it.

MC Again, we have a place of passage. Do you consider your *definitions/methods* to be scores?

CR You can adopt that line, of course, except that virtually no notes remain. Obviously there's the history of the support, but apart from that there is nothing else. We are still in the realm of improvisation compared to what could be... Of course it's a score, but after that I am no longer responsible for it. There might be a sentimental side to the paintings that I have not put there. But as soon as you adopt the view that once a person has a project in front of them, it is up to them to work it out, I no longer intervene.

MC I was just about to come to another fundamental question: the idea of interpretation. Can someone else de-paint a picture? And if they can, would it still be a work by Claude Rutault?

CR They would simply need to say that it was. I do not own the idea. Essentially ideas escape their owners. Initially they belong to those who articulate them, then they are disseminated and become distorted. They can replace anything. They lead to a loss which leads you at some point to create something.

MC That loss is ultimately what will create the canvas, and if we go back to the beginning of our conversation, with de-painting we return to the canvas stretched on a frame.

CR You are quite right. We haven't gone very far! We've virtually stayed put!

221

Ben Vautier in conversation with Mathieu Copeland
Nice, 29 August 2015

Mathieu Copeland
an anti-museum.

I would like to discuss the possibility of

Ben Vautier Museums only show ego and so an anti-museum would be an anti-ego place. The material of an anti-museum show would have to do with breaking up the ego and trying to find what constitutes the ego. We may discover that, looking behind the mirror, trying to show a non-ego museum is 100% an ego project. And yet, this would be a deceiving show, as to satisfy your ego, you are using the idea of a non-ego non-museum.

MC In order to approach what an anti-museum could be, one must look at what makes a museum, and dismantle every one of its parameters, including its architecture, the art it hosts, the notion of the artist, the possibility of artworks...

bv If we consider contemporary art, museums are only a question of ego. If we go back in history, we find that museums contain the memory of cultures, and their roots. Museums contain the memory of people. For instance, the French memory could be [Jacques-Louis] David and *Le Sacre de Napoléon*. Painters who end up in a museum represent the power of a culture, as this culture wants to be represented. We are looking at a multicultural world in which each culture has to defend itself. John Cage has merged the European mentality together with the Japanese and Chinese understanding that everything could be art and that everything could be non-art. A non-art museum could be a museum where we would discuss the idea of non-art, the limits of truth, the limits of art...

MC I am fascinated by the inherent proximity between "tout est art" [everything is art] and the concepts of the anti-museum.

bv Everything is art, "tout est art," comes from Dada, through Duchamp and Cage, and puts us in a difficult situation. If everything is art, how can I be an artist, how can I bring something to the world which is mine? If everything is art, then my shoes are art. Yet when I show shoes in the framework of "tout est art," I become a variation of Duchamp. What are the variations of non-art? What are the variations of "everything is art"? One could say "screw art," and decide to become a butcher. But why would you be becoming a butcher, and not a non-artist? It has to do with consciousness and intention.

MC Dada radically tackled these notions, as Hans Richter encapsulated this in the title of his autobiography, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*.

bv Henry Flynt is one of the limits of art because he has decided that humanity would destroy humanity. If you destroy humanity, you return to a non-art situation. The uncompromising position of Henry Flynt seemed to me one of the most radical. He claimed that all works will disappear, that erosion will destroy all work within twenty years.

272

MC Gustav Metzger infamously wrote in his first manifesto

published in 1959 that "Auto-destructive paintings, sculptures and constructions have a lifetime varying from a few moments to twenty years!"

bv Most of the artists today have a conscience that everything is art, and thus have changed the limits of art. I want to know what the limits of art are. I did a few paintings on the limits of art. One of the limits of art is death. Contemporary artists who are interested in the limits of art should kill themselves! Then we will know the limits of art, unless we have a surprise! Death contains the limits of art, as everything else is art. Robert Filliou thought that art is what makes life more interesting than art. I thought that life makes art more interesting than life. We did the opposite, but it is the same thing. Say you sign life as the limit to art. To sign life, you consider it as art and not as life. It either is an artwork or it is life. If you decide to drink a beer, you could say that this is life. If you say that you want to drink a beer, but you sign it as art, then life is different. It is either art or life. If it is life we do not know about art; if we know about it in art it becomes art. If it is art, there are dates, names, signatures, ego, it either belongs to you or me. There is no art without ego.

mc I would like to come back to this memorable discussion that you had with Marcel Duchamp, especially about the definitions of the words "artist," "anti-artist" and "anartist."

bv I once asked Marcel Duchamp if he was anti-art. He replied that no, he was anart. At the time I thought he meant anarchist, but Duchamp told me that it meant indifferent to art. Now, I still don't quite understand how you can be at the same time anart, indifferent to art, and an artist? He tried, I would say. People such as John Cage and Duchamp tried to *survoler*—fly over—the situation. They looked at the galleries, the artists, all that jungle and said, oh my god, I want to be over that. But I think they are in the jungle.

mc Towards the end of his life, Jean Tinguely decided to create his own foundation, the "Torpedo Institute." He used to define it as an "anti-museum." This brings me to his work involving destruction. His infamous "Homage to New-York," as realised at the MoMA on 18 March 1960, his "Study for an End of the World No. 2" at Jean Dry Lake, Nevada in 1962, or again "la Vittoria," realised to celebrate the 10th anniversary of New Realism in Milan on 28 Novembre 1970... When artworks destroy themselves, is this anti-art?

bv Tinguely wanted to reach the limits, and he did so in front of this church in Milan. He wanted to push things to the end. I see a difference between what Tinguely wanted and what he became. Tinguely always wanted to go further into anti-art. He would open onto other fields, but art would always bring him back. I have an inferiority complex with scientists. Those who study the brain may find creation, they will localise non-art, they will localise non-art creation, they will localise everything.

mc What could be the physics of anti-art?

bv Some would answer that creation is in the Higgs Boson. We have to prove that the ego particle exists too. I propose that the particle of ego is everywhere. Yet how can I be sure that it exists? Well, only by comparison. It is a proposition that I call les

propositions invraisemblables — the improbable proposition by Ben Vautier.

MC Would you consider Arman's "Full Up" from 1960 as being anti-art?

BV Arman's "Full Up" was a fight between him and Yves Klein. In 1958, Yves Klein had done "The Void" at the same gallery, Iris Clert.

MC In 1947, on a beach in Nice, Arman, Klein and Pascal decided that they would split the world between themselves. Arman took the earth and all its possessions, Claude Pascal the air, and Yves Klein the sky and the infinity.

BV Arman had the objects, and used these to fill it up, and did "Full Up."

MC Can we think of any other who could be considered as anti-artist?

BV Who would be interested in questioning art? We return to Duchamp, to Cage, and to people that I do not know! I am sure there are many young artists who would ask about this. Now we have a new generation interested in what art is, in what the limits of art are, or again how we can do anti-art.

MC A necessary focus on anti-art and anti-museum is to be found in destruction. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wanted to flood the museum, George Maciunas wanted to purge the art of dead art, Jeff Geys wanted to legally destroy a museum...

BV You could even start with the story of the president of France [Émile François Loubet] visiting a museum, where an advisor stopped him and told him: "No, not in this room! This is the room of shame!" It was the impressionist room. Every time there is newness, there is contestation. Street art was considered an anti-museum art.

MC Abbie Hoffman talked about the "museums of the streets."

BV It is the question of the ego turning into an ego-museum with an ego-show.

MC How would you characterise Fluxus' attitude to the anti-museum, to anti-art, and the limits of art?

BV Maciunas produced his famous statement "What was Fluxus and what was art?" Art was elitist, and Maciunas and Fluxus, in creating mass art, wanted to do the opposite. But it did not work. Fluxus went to art. Dada did not work either. Because they brought in something new, there always is someone who would bring back into art what was once rejected. It is un engrenage infini — an infinite cycle. You cannot stop it. Newness becomes old, and so on...

MC This makes me question your fascinating work, *Ben n'expose pas* [Ben doesn't exhibit]. This piece can be understood as a powerful statement, an injunction, a withdrawal that states that Ben does not show! But it can also be understood that Ben rejects this gallery, or to the contrary that Ben is not shown in the gallery!

BV I wanted to do a show at the J Gallery in Paris, but they never invited me. So I decided to park my van in front of the gallery and give myself a show. The exhibition consisted of a poster that read: "Du 18 Juin 1966 au 18 Septembre 1966 Ben n'expose pas à la galerie J" [from 18 June 1966 to 18 September

1966 Ben does not exhibit at the J Gallery].

MC Your entire life, you have dealt with both the notion of the limits of art and the understanding that everything is art.

BV Together with Roland Sabatier, I went to meet Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes here in Nice to discuss the idea that everything is art. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, who was a great Dadaist, had written a tract saying: "tout est art." "Tout est art" is not Duchamp! So we proposed to realise an edition of "tout est art," but Ribemont-Dessaignes told us that we should be looking at the poems that he was making now! We did not want his poems, we wanted to publish his "tout est art."

Annie Vautier So Ben began to talk. Once they returned, Sabatier told me that it was impossible, because Ben talked way too much, he could not stop himself, and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes did not talk enough!

MC You often use this sentence, "everything is art," in your paintings, in your writings, in your tracts, and this in many different languages... Is your understanding of "everything is art" similar to that of Ribemont-Dessaignes?

BV I did not have his. I did mine in 1962, but he did his much before!

MC Is "everything is art" similar to your Total Art?

BV I transformed "everything is art" into Total Art. I wanted to become the creator of Total Art. Since 1961, I have theorised that Total Art could exist in sculpture, in poetry...

MC As you wrote in this manifesto, published in 1965, "Total Art in SCULPTURE is everything that can be lifted, carried, picked up," "Total Art in POETRY is to say anything or to repeat a hundred times the same sentence," "Total Art in MUSIC is to listen to anything..."

BV But Dada was before!

MC We have previously discussed at length your most radical work PERSONNE [nobody], which you realised on 16 June 1966, a play where no one was allowed in to watch the performance, as you played in the closed theatre to no audience. I would like to conclude our discussion in asking you your thoughts about closing the gallery as a work of art?

BV Georges Brecht and Filliou did it! They invited me to realise my first exhibition, a retrospective, in 1966 at La Cédille Qui Sourit, in Villefranche. On the day of the opening, they put up a little sign that read, "the gallery is closed, we are at the bar!" At 6pm! At the time of the opening, it was closed! The exhibition that I realised for them! They told me, if you want to open it, go and open it! As a matter of fact, it was closed!

Mathieu Copeland I would like to discuss about your 1973 piece "The Keeping Of The Keys," in which you closed and opened the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, CT, for one day. Could you tell me about the origins of the piece?

Mierle Laderman Ukeles In 1969, I wrote "Manifesto For Maintenance Art." I sent a copy to Jack Burnham, who was writing about systems aesthetics. Part II of the Manifesto was a proposal for an exhibition called "CARE." It would take up the entire space of a large museum. There were three scales, the personal, the societal and the planetary. In the first part, I would take care of the maintenance of the museum. I would live there with my husband and my little baby. I would wash the floor, dust, and keep the place going. I would cook for visitors. It would be a complete place to live, but it would be empty of what people knew as art except that my working would be the work. The second part, taking up the entire second floor, dealt with maintenance of society. It would question how everybody else deals with necessity, with keeping going. It would raise the question of what happens to one's freedom, to one's dreams, when most of one's time is devoted to surviving. The remaining two floors would be devoted to Part III: taking care of the planet as our home. Every day different trucks would deliver to the museum a container of polluted air, a container of polluted water, a container of garbage, and a container of ravage land. It would be processed in the museum, and returned, revived and robust, to the city. The museum would thus be the fulcrum for transformation. The city was the body, a circuit for the planet.

Jack Burnham called and asked to reprint parts of my manifesto in the article "Problems of Criticism, IX: Art and Technology" that he was writing in *Artforum* (January, 1971). Lucy Lippard then called, and invited me to be in her exhibition entitled "c. 7,500." This was one of the early shows of conceptual feminist artists. The show travelled to several locations, including the Wadsworth Atheneum. I spoke to Lucy and she suggested that I contact the curators in each location. I felt that the museum as an institution was filled with so many maintenance practices. It would be a very handy place to articulate quite a few of them. I gave the curators at the Wadsworth proposals that dealt with who gets to touch the art, about the guards, and about maintenance. Maintenance is not only cleaning, it is taking care in a broader sense. Society confers value to material objects through the museum that takes care of these.

MC A notion that is also to be found in the etymology of "to curate," which comes from the Latin *curare*, to care. The definition of a curator is "the one taking care of." The pieces that you realised for the exhibition include "Transfer: The Maintenance Of The Art Object: Mummy Maintenance: With The Maintenance Man, The Maintenance Artist, And The Museum Conservator," "Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside," "Washing/Tracks/

Maintenance: Inside," and "The Keeping Of The Keys."

MLU I wanted to deal with the security and the keeping of the keys. Who keeps the key and what happens to them. Guards have this latent power, and yet they do not normally exercise the power on their own. They only use it because they are told to do so by the official security apparatus that is the institution. Guards do not go around making decisions. There is a collusion of power and non-power. The maintenance workers are committed, yet highly constrained, to take care. They are not exhorting their own individual will or desire. Through the guard, you can understand how the whole art world of maintenance locks down the individual's freedom. This is what I wanted to articulate. I wanted to question if this could be done in other ways. I also wanted to make it extremely clear that the institution defining cultural value makes decisions about what gets in (the art objects) and what is kept out, as well as who gets in and who is kept out and when (open and closed hours). Security dominates access.

MC It also brings in the notion of responsibility.

MLU To have the responsibility, but not the autonomy. The museum curator Jack Cowart accepted my proposal, and I took the key of each guard who had been invited to participate in this artwork. I would clean the key as a measure of subsequent transfer. And during the open hours of the museum, I locked and opened all the doors. First, I would post a notice stating that: "Dear Person, The security of this area is now being maintained as MAINTENANCE ART by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, artist. It will be normalized shortly and transferred to appropriate guard when the alarm rings. Please feel free to wait or to return when area is transferred." I wanted to give people a warning about what I was doing to be understood. Some were locked in, others were locked out. I moved through the entire museum, closing one area after the other. I did an absolutely thorough and complete job. I even went downstairs to the curators' and administrators' offices, as I considered that these were part of the building too. All of them, except one who sat there and let me lock him up for a while, got up and ran away as I entered. I think they were pissed off that I entered their domain, but I was articulating security in the whole building. It was not about them. I just wanted to step up the consciousness of who has access. I wanted to question what happens in the institution.

MC You locked the public in and out—what was their reaction?

LMU They did not like that, and some were scared. I did not ever lock the entire museum. It was a sequence. I would close the main door—this main entry area—then I would open it. Then I would move to the next. It was very methodical: lock, open, lock, open.

MC Ultimately, at the end of the day, everything was re-opened to be closed!

LMU I also had my little baby there. My husband Jack was watching him while I was doing that performance. Many times, as I locked the doors, he was there in his stroller, and I did this child game with him: "Open, close them/Open, close them/ Give a little clap/ Open, close them/Open, close them/Put them in your lap." I did that when I put up the notice too.

MC From the pictures we see that you actually were running throughout the institution.

LMU I put a notice on the door and locked it. People were either locked in, or locked out. But if there was another door, I had to run as fast as I could to make my system work and lock it.

MC This raises the question of trust, as you not only dealt with the public that was present, but also the museum's permanent collection.

LMU They trusted me then. But when the museum invited me back twenty-five years later, as I walked in all the staff including the security people looked at me and said: "Don't even think about it!" I learned that they did not have the keys anymore, and that I was not going to have access to their computer! Issues with security have swallowed our entire way of organising everything. It has become our culture's obsession.

MC This action has a great freedom. The closing is both a very drastic, radical gesture and a generous one in that you are maintaining the institution.

MLU I wanted people to see this, and to be aware of this.

MC I would like to return to your manifesto, especially to these definitive lines that you wrote: "Everything I say is art is art. Everything I do is art is art." There are no distinctions to be made between your everyday activities and your art. From then on all that you will do will be one and the same. Everything is art. This echoes to a deep history that encompasses Novalis, the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse), Dada, Fluxus, Ben Vautier, Joseph Beuys... In your manifesto you go even further in claiming that life itself is art. I find that so empowering.

MLU The reason I wanted to be an artist had everything to do with freedom. Any material whatsoever was malleable, but it had to be about freedom. Freedom enables everything. In the manifesto, I say that I have the right, and everybody has the right to say: "this is art." My focus was that so many people, including Duchamp, and Dada certainly, were trampling on the boundaries of what had been acceptable to be aesthetics. That is why I'm so connected to them. The maintaining person takes the second place whereas the autonomous artist always is the first person out there, upfront, and moving forward. The maintenance person agrees to take on the responsibility. This takes precedent.

MC Redefining the rules.

MLU Absolutely. It's a revolution. I stumbled into the humane limits of my Western education and culture of those who have power. In my art, everybody is in this picture. Everybody. If I call it art, I do not care if you do not call it art. I am just as much responsible as anybody else. I am talking about a lot of people who were not in the picture. That is why instead of being trapped and lost, we have to look around, to look at all the people. Art has to be for them too.

MC How you make yourself available is beautiful. You put forward the relationship with one and the other, the art being a discussion in action.

MLU What was interesting to me was that people began to enter the performances. That first happened during one of the

performances in Soho, in 1974, as part of the "c. 7,500" when it came to New York. A super of a factory building across the street had been watching me clean the sidewalk. As I was running out of rags, he came across the street with this huge role of very strong industrial rags. I was so moved that he did that. I did this free act; he did a free act. Before, I would become the guard, the cleaner, the washer. When he walked in into the work, the work opened and I consciously started to incorporate others.

Mathieu Copeland The notion of “anti” has often been associated with your art. Together with Jim Sclavunos we recently talked at length about your time together in Teenage Jesus & the Jerks, and how you used to describe your music as “anti-music.”

Lydia Lunch As an anti-artist, “no wave”—which I still consider myself—is the connective tissue between situationism and surrealism. It is absurd and antagonistic. Absurd the way surrealism dealt with basic objects elevated to art. I am giving an art attack on reality. I see music as a machine gun whose bullets come out of my mouth. A vehicle to either add discomfort, or more comfort, to the words that I am saying, depending on my mood or the concept. I don’t like the term artist, musician. I consider myself a journalist and an historian. There goes anti-art. I do not do performance art. I am a spoken word artist. There is no artifice surrounding what I do. I deal with reality, and this is not a popular commodity. I am breaking down all levels on the heartless nature of war. My main topics have always been the unbalance of power, injustice, male homicide, genocide, insanity—whether it starts in the nuclear family or ends in nuclear fusion. I have always attacked the father, the father of this country, and god the father, which is the devastating factor of this planet. I’m only using “art or music” as a vehicle to further express reality.

MC As Genesis Breyer P-Orridge was reminding us, Mark Perry in the magazine *Sniffin’ Glue* called to “learn three chords and form a band.” Your reaction was to say “why even learn one chord!” Yet another stance on anti-music.

LL I still don’t know a single chord, a single note. My purpose is to create anything original for this hopeless world. Poetry is still the most naked possible form of art. Nothing surrounds it, just black words on a white page. It is the most intimate form of communication, in the sense that you are communicating one on one. I was influenced by The Stooges, David Bowie... that was just not the route for me. It was just not primal enough, and the origins of my music were really primal. Art can heal the universal wound. The reason why I continue to create is because I know I am not alone in my extreme views, my extreme passions, my extreme frustrations, anger, and my extreme need for pleasure.

MC Universal feelings as seen through the prism of the “anti.”

LL I have always had a solemn mentality. The impact of performances is extremely personal and confrontational. I want to be able to look everybody in the eye. I am impregnating them. I’m looking more into the audience than they can see in me.

MC The primal aspect is ever so important, yet what about the notion of anger?

LL Teenage Jesus & the Jerks was based on irrepressible anger. The focus and the hatred were so extreme I was silent. The

anger it brought back was such I could barely speak. It represented the most primal temperament of my existence.

MC Is “anti” the most appropriate word to qualify your art?

LL I prefer “No”! I love No Wave, which means “audience unfriendly.” It is rarely melodic. It is personal insanity, instead of political insanity like punk rock. In the beginning of my musical schizophrenia, I was anti-everything, even anti-my own music by constantly contradicting it. I was not immune against my own anti-nature. I am anti-what you see. I am anti-definition, anti-categories, anti-genres... My work always focuses on what everybody else tends to avoid—the darkest obsessions, death and sex. And I continually have to find a new musical language to embody these subjects. *Retrovirus*' songs, for much of these, are obsessed with physical discomfort, physical pain, contortion, agony, death-defying behaviour.

MC And this can be found too in the film work that you have produced over the years, especially with Richard Kern.

LL These films are documentaries. *Fingered* is definitely a document of my psycho-sexuality, almost a documentary of a period of my life. The point being the victim becomes the victimiser. Driven by exploitation, I had no idea that this would become the ultimate cinema of transgression film. With all of my music, all of my writings and works, I now realise what at the time was my status, my position, my insanity, and the political insanity.

MC The primal aspect you mentioned is both visceral and intellectual.

LL These films show a certain mind-set, a need for acceleration at any cost. What causes controversy is what is interesting to me. My first solo performance, a one woman political tirade, was all about getting fucked, fucked-up, fucked around with, especially by octogenarian assholes who were fucking the entire planet. What's not primal in war? Nothing is shocking to me about what's going on now because this is the same as it ever was. I did a piece called *Real Pornography* and it was all about war. The God bullies. America's genocidal tendencies. These patterns are the same as it ever was.

MC You are exploiting yourself and your own body. You are your own materiality.

LL As a woman it has been held against me, unlike a [Charles] Bukowski, unlike [Jean] Genet, unlike Henry Miller, unlike many of my literature heroes. It was not held against them that they used themselves. We are in a hideous time amidst a cultural vacuum right now. Everything is about glamorisation. It has to be surgically perfect. My thing was never about being beautiful, but about being real, and reality is not pretty. I always say to women in live concert: “don't be afraid to be ugly”. Ugly music! I and Diamanda Galas! The cultural pandering by women now is what gives me even more fever to continue doing what I do. To be the anti-Madonna, to be the anti-Kardashians.

MC Violence and destruction are embedded within the philosophy of the “anti.”

LL It has to be really strict. If you're going to be anti everything, you'd better be precise. You better be a machine gun. I

had a clear vision of what I wanted to achieve. How the sound came about is absolutely mysterious because I knew nothing, but I knew it had to be the sound of my blood.

MC The spoken word is, as you said, nude materiality.

LL Within the spoken word, there are many different formats. When I first started, it was a hysterical ten-minute tirade. People thought it was just verbal boxing match, machines loaded with violence. In the beginning of my spoken work, I would have to write in, sometime with Richard Kern, acts of faux violence in order to curve the actual violence. It was so aggressive. I was so over the top, hysterical, bashing everything. There were no precedents for this. When you start at such a hysterical level, you can only go so far. So in my spoken word, whether it's political tirade or stories, I had to learn to finesse the delivery. Being more seductive so that I can actually deliver with my tongue the punch in the face. I'm using the enemies' language of anger and violence. There is poetics within this brutality.

MC To this end you also co-founded the spoken word label Widowspeak together with music producer Paul Smith.

LL I had to curate in order to allow the spoken word, and to force many people to the spoken word stage for the first time, including Nick Cave and Vincent Gallo. In curating these performances together with people who had never done it, mixed with small acts of violence, this allowed me to experiment more and develop different methods of spoken word. Forcing people out of their comfort zone. The stories I want are them telling the truth. I want real life mémoires. I'm not looking for poetic exercise. I'm not interested in fiction. I'm looking for something that might be poetic, but based on real experiences. That is what people need to hear. That is what I want to hear. That's the only type of literature that moves me.

MC The narrative is on par with the quality of the voice.

LL You start as a falsetto when you are seventeen, and you end as a baritone. Eventually only dogs can hear you! There are different kinds of impact. You can impact by screaming at someone's face, or by whispering into his or her souls—so beautifully horrific.

MC You have spoken of your performances as public psychoanalyses, as an invitation to go within yourself in order to come out.

LL It is public service!

MC You use narration to tell a story, and yet there is an abstract beauty to it.

LL Poetry in the most blunt form. It is "in-camera editing;" it is experiential.

MC We come back to the beginning, your manifesto, so to say, that music is an excuse for the spoken word.

LL It's the machine gun for the bullets.

Genesis Breyer P-Orridge in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 12 February 2016

Mathieu Copeland You have constantly confronted the limits of art, of music, of genres and of society itself. Considering the possibility of the anti-museum, I would like to begin discussing anti-culture with you.

Genesis Breyer P-Orridge The first thing that comes to mind grew from conversations with Brion Gysin and his book, *The Last Museum*. What happens to the spirit and consciousness when they are separated from the material world? That got me thinking about alternative museums. We have been troubled for decades about the most extreme or radical non-conformist artists that we have met. Often they do not have a family or a close partner who act for them. What happens to all the work when he/she goes? It gets destroyed or lost. A landlord probably comes and throws it in the trash. This is bound to be commonplace all over. The most radical and important people, all the ones who are more likely not to have their art protected. So we came up with this idea of the Last Museum. Any artist, musician, anybody creative, philosopher, whatever it might be, if they knew that they had no filial backup, no one to take care of their work and preserve it, they could donate it to the Last Museum. The Last museum would take care of it, preserve it, catalogue it, do exhibitions, etc. It would become one of the best museums because it would have all of the difficult works, the works that would have upset the status quo the most. We have thought about trying to set it up as some not-for-profit charity. It could really exist even if it was just a warehouse to begin. And we have seen other people's work disappear in the meantime. It is really important to consider how the most abrasive, subversive works survive. So that has to be one aspect of an anti-museum.

MC Together with COUM Transmissions that you founded in 1969, and especially through the "Prostitution" exhibition in 1976, you tested the limits of the institution to its breaking point.

GBP-O I could only see that as an affirmation that the work is obviously upsetting the establishment. Certainly these questions raised about us in Parliament, and you must be aware about the all thing with the royal family and the queen. We have gone up against her over and over again.

MC The show caused a debate in the British Parliament about its public funding, and you and Cosey Fanni Tutti were labelled as "wreckers of civilisation." You also were confronting yourself with the institution...

GBP-O ...doing it with popular culture itself. What was interesting was that all the photographs of Cosey were from magazines that were on sale in news agencies and newspaper stores all over Britain. That was something that you could buy around the corner. But we cut them out and framed them, she signed them and then we said: this is a political statement as art. That made them really dangerous. Changing the context, when

done skilfully or when you are fortunate enough to hit the right moment, shapes everything.

MC When you were considering the notion of prostitution in 1975, to what extent was it you prostituting yourself with the institution?

GBP-O It was based on what became the title of the Pop Group's "We're all Prostitutes." Everyone sells some kind of skill to survive and that is the real story of capitalism. It is all about prostitution and everyone selling themselves to someone. It is not about exchange, it is not about mutual support, networks. It is all about selling whatever you have. It was rampant in the upper class of British establishment. We are living in a society that is so corrupted, especially the royal family. The top of the pyramid in any power structure trickles down all the way in different forms, and in different degrees.

MC Was the institution—the Institute of Contemporary Art in London (ICA)—important to you when you considered the preparation of this exhibition?

GBP-O It was fortunate that it happened at the ICA, which was owned by the queen. The director, Ted Little, was a supporter of COUM. He had worked in the Birmingham Arts Laboratory, a very independent, radical space. The exhibition was threatened to be closed. Little refused and stood up despite all the threats. And when they told me that, we just said: "Well if they try and close the ICA we will just occupy it."

MC What is, for you, the definition of radicality?

GBP-O Actions taken in a social, political way that are beholden to no other philosophical, political or economical groups, completely independent of any other pressure group, for the sake of a belief which is so strong that you can risk everything you have. What is radical to me is when you dismiss all the different common sense, which you are supposed to exercise to protect yourself from the reactions of the people who you are attacking.

MC Does your decision to embrace a radical life coincide for you with the moment that you changed your name?

GBP-O No. That was definitely an important one, but the moment was in 1967. We always suffered from severe asthma as a child. Sometime in the 1950s, they came up with this new steroid cortisone that was seen to be very helpful with asthma, and they started giving it to me. By 1967, we were seventeen and we did not have an asthma attack for several years. The doctor took me off the pills. A couple of days later, we could not breathe very well, we passed out and we were going in a coma. They took us in an ambulance to the hospital. When we woke up, the doctor explained that what happened was a side effect of the pills. He said: "You could live a normal life or you could drop dead any day." We thought it was a very positive thing because that was when we quietly told ourselves: Ok, nobody knows how many days they have got. We are lucky because we know we do not have any guaranteed number of days. Therefore we should make the best use of every single day. And what is it that we really want to do? We want to be a bohemian, travelling, beatnik, artist, and poet. There is a Sufi saying: "Live every

day as if it is your last, and your all life will be just on that one day." That is how we have lived, ever since that day.

MC You see the structure in life, and confront it in order to make it shift. You have done so with art, and with music first through Throbbing Gristle.

GBP-O We had to deconstruct music the way we have done everything else. That is how we do nearly every project. We deconstruct it. And we also seem to have developed feelers that are in popular culture, enabling us to sense what is inevitably coming. The undercurrents waiting to be released like a virus into the super culture, to corrupt it or break it in some way. We did not know industrial music would end up being global phenomena.

MC As you proclaimed, "industrial music for industrial people." You released an undercurrent that mirrored a society that was in a stage of near collapse.

GBP-O Punk and Industrial were parallel. But punk was not as radical as it pretended because it was still rhythm. And that is why when Mark Perry in *Sniffin' Glue* said "Learn three chords and form a band," my answer was: "I do not know any chord." He tries to be so anarchic, mild and nutty, but he is still sticking to the structures. As Lady Jay was saying: "see a cliff, jump off." You cannot be afraid.

MC You use popular culture to bring about its end.

GBP-O It is wonderful stuff to play with. That is why when asked to define our occupation, we said: culture engineer. We take popular culture, we analyse it, we cut it up, reassemble it, and look for the weaknesses and the positive. We do not just theorise. We feel that it is a sense of duty to actually do it. Use anything that is at your disposal to make it happen.

MC Which brings us to the memory of an ephemeral trace, impacts that when revealed to society generate culture. And yet, the performance is in the moment, not in the still of a moment.

GBP-O We normally do not allow any video to be made of a performance artwork. They are intended to be experienced in the moment by those present alone. The smell of other audience people, shuffling, coughing, incense, music, the sense of time and space... none of these as yet can be recorded adequately. And with delivered ambiguity and density of meanings and references, our attention creates a unique experience and meaning purpose. There is also an aspect impossible to describe in words, whereby moving as slowly as possible, linear time is confronted and stretched or condensed. And instead of a few pieces of documentation, these works are my most intimate projections of philosophical and spiritual allegories.

MC Did you ever envisage that if such is art, then you are realising anti-art—that if such is a museum, you are constructing an anti-museum—that if such is music, you are making anti-music.

GBP-O Not in an overt way. With "Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth," yes. We thought very clearly that it was an anti-cult. We did not use the word "anti" but we used to say: when in doubt, reverse it. If you have done something to solve an aesthetic problem, contradict it the next time. We would not use the word "anti" but "contradictory." And reversing the strategy, yes. That

- is a really important tool to break expectations.
- MC Your own too?
- GBP-O Mine too, yes, that is why the cut-up is so very valuable. Outside of your control, you get new combinations and collisions that you would never get, no matter how smart or aesthetically sophisticated you are. Cut-ups are so valuable because they present the nearest to random. Of course, as Burroughs used to say, how random is random...
- MC How do you feel about the present? What are your feelings about the current undercurrent of contemporary life?
- GBP-O The Internet has been a disaster, for sure. Some people want to police it, to own it. People want to turn it into a commercial enterprise. People with money and power want to be able to control it, and they turned it into a big shopping mall. It was meant to be a free zone where you could say and do anything, where everything was free with no censorship. Facebook will not show nipples—our nipples! We wrote to tell them that our nipples were men's nipples, why does it bother them; they have not banned other men's nipples, is it because our nipples are on bigger breasts than other men's nipples?
- MC Which is ludicrous given your invaluable contribution to the shifting understanding of genres, especially as proclaimed and realised through Pandrogeny.
- GBP-O That is having an effect. People keep on saying that Pandrogeny is so esoteric, and yet look at how much talk there is about transgender issues now. Look at Caitlyn Jenner, what that person is trying to do is disgusting, is it really just an addiction to attention? How dare they have the voice of people they have never met. Again, we saw the undercurrent but also knew not to use words that already existed, that have baggage and are too easy to dismiss.

Mathieu Copeland Following “Voids”, the retrospective of empty exhibitions that, together with Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot and Gustav Metzger, we co-curated at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, an exhibition that many are trying to read as something of a statement, many have asked me—after having realised such a show—how one could simply continue working and return to his/hers usual practice.

John Armleder To pretend that nothing happened!

MC Exactly!

JA I cannot see how this could be a question for us? This would imply that we would envisage that all the possible extremities would have been reached?

MC Consider Bethan Huws, who after having realised the Haus Esters Piece in Krefeld in 1993, leaving the museum entirely empty, Bethan stopped “making art” for about five years, this exhibition having opened up too many questions. Or again, Laurie Parsons for whom realising the exhibition at the Lorence-Monk Gallery in New York in 1990 and leaving the gallery empty somehow announced her definitive retirement from the art world.

JA So the question would imply that we—the curators—did this exhibition as artists, which is diametrically the opposite of our intentions. And therefore that through such an exhibition we would have been able to evacuate all the questions that could be asked.

MC Robert Barry told me that when many saw Ad Reinhardt’s black painting as the death of painting, it was for him just another way to paint. The same was to be said when Barry came to produce exhibitions that were apparently empty, he did not envisage this as a full stop, but rather as another means to make art. For him, to paint is as good ultimately as to produce empty exhibitions!

JA I believe that this is one of the solutions, even though there are no problems. One uses the instruments that are available, and through the “Voids” retrospective we are considering artists who came to, for some, produce the same work in different contexts; and for others to re-play the original “void” in an extremely different manner. It has to do with the idea of vintage years!

MC Talking bubbles again!

JA Indeed! And this coquetry is rather interesting: to convoke an old piece and yet to claim that this is a fundamentally new piece, as opposed to do a piece again as it is never over.

MC And somehow the same can be said of all of the pieces, these voids are historical voids, yet also new voids.

JA In our desire to realise this retrospective, we have deliberately chosen dated artworks, yet some artists tried to avoid this historical place, either in re-actualising or in modifying them—and therefore in working on the vintage years! But ultimately

we are always referring to the original, as if these were envisaged as scores. This is also one of the reasons for which we decided to not reconstruct the original spaces.

MC Let's envisage what is contained within the container, the air. These molecules travel, and in line with Robert Barry's gas pieces, when he was dispersing noble gas in the atmosphere in the late 1960s (molecules that, as one can envisage, are still travelling today), we can envisage that some of the molecules that are present at any given time inside the empty spaces of the retrospective may well have been those present during the original pieces. And due to the very nature of air, mixed with molecules that were never there then! So, logically, these would partly be 2009, 1958 and 1972!

JA So are these molecules the authors?! They are the ones that invade from time to time the personality of the passer-by!

MC And referring to the artwork by Art & Language presented in the retrospective, this has to do with the air conditioning! Shuffling the air!

JA And indeed we are doing quite our fair bit right now! But to return to the question of what one can do after, I believe that this is a false question. Even if the gesture is radical, it is no more radical than any other gestures. The production process, from the moment it is envisaged as a radical gesture, is the same in any artwork.

MC Inasmuch as the ready-made is a fully accepted tool in artistic practices, it has to be the same with the void. It must be one of the colours of any artist's palette!

JA And I believe it has always been! The pieces that we are showing could not have existed prior to this moment, or hardly. These are ultimately dependent on the process of exhibiting, contrary to, say, a painting. The so-called *Atelier exposition*, which is in itself an intellectual game, deals with a very poignant coquetry!

MC And yet Barry did an exhibition in emptying his studio, and filling it with radio waves; Robert Irwin envisaged exhibiting nothing only when he got rid of his studio.

JA Of course, and we could say that anyone that uses a desk as a studio could envisage these pieces! Yet, these are entirely dependent on the notion of calling for an audience. And this is maybe slightly different when it comes to a painting, but maybe not after all!

MC To pursue our consideration of the gallery, the exhibition that you are currently preparing for Andrea Caratsch Gallery in Zürich is a "limit case." The exhibition is called "John Armleder: Olivier Mosset New Paintings." You open your exhibition on the exact day when the exhibition of Olivier Mosset's new paintings closes. And for the exhibition, you will not modify at all the hanging of the previous exhibition.

JA The exhibition uses a previous exhibition by another artist, and does not alter it in any way. In fact, it is a very favourable occurrence that the very exhibition that is used is that of Olivier Mosset, but it could have been any other. It is therefore a false evacuation: the author is evacuated, but he is ultimately included in the title, and is the purpose of the artwork thus announced.

MC It makes me think about a discussion that I had with Haim Steinbach, who was telling me that when he displays upon his shelves objects that are rather expensive, the price at which he sells the artwork is the price of his work plus the value of the object displayed. Sometime a slight variation in price happens, yet let's envisage if he was to display a Picasso! So to return to your exhibition, what is fascinating is the transubstantiation that is happening in the gallery, all changes yet nothing changes physically!

JA We could say that in the case of Haim's shelves, what would be delicious would be that a person who would want to buy his piece, thinking that it would be too expensive, would ask him to replace the displayed objects with more affordable ones! Or to the contrary, that a collector would go to De Beers to buy diamonds in order to display these on top, so that the piece becomes "more serious"! This would be somehow rather fluxus! In my case, it is only a score written on a piece of paper. The title of the exhibition that is about to open is only a temporal anecdote, but it is not the piece.

MC And yet someone could buy all of Olivier's paintings too! Acquiring as much the conceptual piece as the physical piece as it was presented for the first time.

JA Of course, someone could re-enact this very realisation of the piece, and there would be at the very least two artworks, since the exhibition by Olivier is constituted of many paintings. But in fact to only have my piece, a person could have none of Olivier's paintings, and he can buy all of Olivier's paintings without buying my piece!

MC This work somehow pursues upon the history of BMPT (which Olivier Mosset co-founded with Daniel Buren, Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni in 1966). One of the manifestations included signing and appropriating the paintings that defined each other's "motif."

JA I proposed to Andrea that we realise this piece at this very moment partly because together with Olivier we have a strong relationship over a long period of time, and also as it was in a moment when I was reconsidering these kinds of projects. I had recently realised a piece in the same spirit with Jacques Garcia, where I invited him to build an apartment in the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris, yet I had no control over his activities. Jacques understood right away that this was an invitation for him to do a work that would be exactly what one would expect of him. To pursue this series of works, we could mention the exhibition "Again," also realised in the summer of 2008 at the Andrea Caratsch Gallery, where I had an exact replica of the fresco that is painted at the Kronenhalle brasserie, which is a neighbour of the gallery, realised in the gallery.

MC So the logical reasoning would be that the Kronenhalle is equivalent to Olivier Mosset?

JA There is something similar! Except for the fact that there is a process of fabrication involved in realising a copy of a fresco which is not present when exhibiting an already existing exhibition in a gallery. Another work realised pretty much at the same time, for an exhibition in Lugano, was to ask to have reproduced

and painted in the exhibition spaces an existing fresco from a local pizzeria. Later, the artist who realised the fresco confessed to me that the wall painting thus produced was not a reproduction of a fresco that existed, but paintings of the real salami that were hanging in the shop window! The work thus being a new fresco realised for the exhibition! A slight slippage occurred there! In taking over an existing exhibition there are no interventions, no removal, except that of the author.

MC And yet respecting the original author. Had you called this exhibition "John Armleder: New Paintings," this would have meant something radically different.

JA Very much indeed, and this is what Olivier wished I had done in fact! Whereas in truth, what I signed was the exhibition, not the artworks.

MC Could you have envisaged signing all that would have happened in the gallery over a year?

JA No, as after this you end up realising the base of the world! Another possible work would be to reconstruct the same exhibition a year later, and to sign it. This would be very different than to leave it as it is without ever taking away the paintings.

MC Even though this would appear as being just the same!

JA The result would be equivalent, and yet not at all! During this time many things changed. Not only the vintage year that we mentioned earlier on, but also the ambiance, the context, everyone's age; some people would be born; some others would have died; the prices of the paintings by Olivier would have increased... All this would make this a fundamentally different piece. I have envisaged other pieces that would be mine, but only for one second after the closure of the previous exhibition, making this piece almost imperceptible. These are all works that I had done more or less in the 1970s.

MC This reminds me of the "invisible ready-mades" that Olivier has been developing since 1967. He was describing these to me as the ideal ready-made: already present, not announced and kept secret by the artist! So after the exhibition in Zurich, where do you go from there?

JA Well, listen, this is exactly the question that people are asking, after having realised an empty exhibition, how can one do something else?

Mathieu Copeland I would like to discuss the statement “everything is art.” For Ben, this statement was an eye-opener, an epiphany. He discussed this with Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, the great Dadaist artist and poet, whom Ben assumes came up with the expression. And although this exact statement is not to be found directly in Ribemont-Dessaignes’ writings, it often reappears in Dadaist writings, notably through questions of violence and destruction. Ribemont-Dessaignes’ work has more of an all-encompassing quality to it, which likely amounts to the same. Does the exhibition “John Armleder: Olivier Mosset New Paintings” play with this idea?

John Armleder Maybe. It likely fits into the same approach that led me to invite Garcia for an exhibition, actually.

MC You are referring to your exhibition at the Swiss Cultural Center in Paris in 2008, during which you delegated the project’s entire undertaking to the French decorator Jacques Garcia, who transformed the space into a truly neo-bourgeois apartment in the spaces.

JA It is not exactly “delegation.” There was delegation going on, of course, but that was the least interesting part. It is more a form of abstinence. In fact, it is very contradictory. For me, the artist is art’s collateral damage. In such a piece, the signature is essentially what signals the work’s existence. If you remove the artist, you also remove the work, in a way. And it is hard to replace the work with that of another. You should be able to, but it is a bit complicated.

MC Which brings to mind that wonderful anecdote where, one day, you found yourself with Sylvie Fleury in a store that sold rolls of carpeting. She looked at them and said that it resembled one of your pieces. You immediately bought these carpets, and have since shown them as a piece of yours. Such a gesture brings to mind the idea that everything is art, just as it brings us to think about signature and appropriation.

JA As it happens, the appropriation came from someone else. From the way that someone considered an identity, or something identitary or iconographic, to be related to a person. And that made for a piece with a more radical stance than mine.

MC To pursue this idea that “everything is art:” Did you discuss this with Joseph Beuys, with whom you wanted to study?

JA Going to study with him was, first and foremost, a way of escaping Geneva. I was in a kind of old-fashioned school, and I thought to myself that it would be better to go study in Düsseldorf. So I enrolled, but I did not go, because I went to prison instead. At the time, I really liked Beuys and still do, even though I do not like the myth that is being built around him. In any case, it was a choice that seemed perfect for what I was going through at the time. It was not that I admired his work more than someone else’s. I was already more Cagian and Fluxus.

MC Also, in Beuys' work is this other fundamental idea that complements "everything is art," his claim that everyone is an artist.

JA I think that he believed it, but with the kind of seriousness that I do not have.

MC This brings us once more to that fundamental discussion between Gustav Metzger and Joseph Beuys, where Metzger retorted to Beuys that if everyone was an artist, Goebbels was too. Beuys' response, that with the right education it was still the case, always seemed key to me. A similar philosophy can be found in the work of the Comte de Lautréamont/Isidore Ducasse, who in his collection *Poésies II* claimed in 1870 that "Poetry must be made by all and not one," just as Novalis stated in 1798 that "Every man should be an artist. Everything can become a fine art." Did this philosophy resonate with you in a significant way?

JA Of course. One cannot go against it. Since it is not clear what exactly an artist is, it becomes difficult to refute such a claim. This was exactly my luck. By dying once, I realised that we do not always know what death is and, retroactively, what life is. To continue the analogy, from the moment you say that everyone is an artist, we imagine the artist to be one thing and not another, since such a thing is inscribed into our cultural system. If everyone is an artist, this claim no longer works. And that is truly what I believe, but in keeping with Cage rather than Beuys, who has a more messianic side to him.

MC This desire for the whole and for inclusion, which can be found in the work of Novalis, Lautréamont or Beuys, fascinates me with regard to the ideas of anti-art or the anti-artist. Indeed, every time we find ourselves confronted with anti-art, is it not in fact art? Is being an anti-artist, or even Duchamp's position as an anartist, not the same as being an artist? Duchamp says: "John Cage made art of silence, and I thought I had made art of idleness." Approaching this idea of the object through its negative: does this negative not, at the end of the day, still want to be art? "Everything is art" thus seems to be one of the most complete solutions.

JA But what conclusion does this lead to? That one is the opposite of the other?

MC Does it not seem like every time the very idea of anti-art or anti-museum comes up, we are brought back to a vindication of art and of museums?

JA From the moment you ask yourself this question you are already in a losing position—if you want to play chess—or you have already answered incorrectly. If you do not worry about the question, and the possibility of an answer thereafter, you are confirming this maxim in positive terms. From the moment you think about it, you deny it, and that is exactly what Ben does. It was what Duchamp always did. But it is very difficult to be perfectly indifferent. Cage was, a little bit, but he was also involved in the question. All of these people turned this idea upside down. And in the end, it is useless because it brings out the vanity of the person who discusses it. And since in vanity there is death, which we cannot define, we end up going in

circles. I think there is no point in preoccupying oneself with these kinds of things. After all, our concerns with identity already try to make sense of our lives, or of our relation to our lives. In fact, it is the base, the theatre of this entire restlessness. But in the end, not very many people care about it.

MC And yet, maybe bringing it all back to the theatre of art by claiming that everything is art allows us to resolve the question of our relation to the world.

JA In a certain sense, yes. But does that really count? I am not so sure. Again, I think that it makes everything much more comfortable. I do not know what is essential, what the true questions of our time on this Earth are, the true stakes, but in the end, since we have to stay busy, it is a good way of busy-ing ourselves, all while glorifying the whole process. And all-inclusion is an opposite form of generalised refusal.

MC Let us consider the other obsession we were discussing with Ben: the limits of art. You have often implemented a possibility of displacement into your exhibitions—the claim that, “that too is art.” It seems to me that by retaking into consideration an element, an event, you bring up the question of the signature. Is it fair to say that you are searching for, or at least interested in, the limits of art? Or do you think that the way you approach the world through your art is enough to answer the question, without asking about the limits of art.

JA I think that one way or another, as individuals, we are like the surveyors of a platform. And after having measured it, we make it available to others. We pass things on. This is what the artist does. To take the example of my redoing a restaurant fresco in the gallery next door to this very restaurant, if we are indeed dealing with art, we do our utmost not to answer where exactly the art is to be found. Is it the fresco in the restaurant? Is it the redone fresco? Is it the displacement from one to the other? Is it the blurring of spaces? In the end, it is completely traditional art. It is like painting a landscape in a way, I mean, inasmuch as that is traditional. In fact, you make a kind of vegetable *macédoine* and you serve it on a plate. And that is likely what the artistic gesture is. But in reality, art is the person who tastes the food from the plate, and we have no idea how it happens or what it represents. In the same way, we know that colours are scientifically measurable. Still, the way that colours are seen differs from person to person. We cannot know how it happens. When you study the ways in which colours can be defined, it is only a study of the embodiment of colours. Inuits make each different shade of white into another color, whereas we see them as the same. Just like green for the Irish, by the way. It is a cultural convention, validated by a form of scientific knowledge that corresponds to our culture. It is called into question by the cultural legacy that is language. And without language there is nothing. And at the same time, what is completely fascinating about what we presume to be art is that we have absolutely no need for it, but that we have never been able to do without it. There are cultures that have no concept for art but that nonetheless produce things which we consider to be art.

MC Inuit culture is absolutely magnificent, but until recently had no words to refer to its own works of art. The members of the Inukjuak cultural committee and Nanvik dialect experts had to invent the word "Takumunartut" to try and define the aesthetic qualities of pieces and the emotions they evoked, which are such that we constantly want to see them again and again.

JA There are places like that in Polynesia, where what we call culture or art are absent. For example, since I have a passion for Hawaii, let us take the example of Hawaiian music. They had no idea what they were doing. A German pastor introduced the idea of music to them when he arrived there. Until then, they were just beating on bamboos of different lengths to accompany rituals, and he codified this practice to make it a musical art. It is through the resonance of their practices in that codified form that they began to perfect and understand what art might be.

MC We confronted ourselves with the possibility of the voids, which could be understood as one of the limits reached by artists. Yet, how can we approach the notion of limits?

JA It is interesting, in Ben's case, because he is fascinated by something completely contradictory. How can you state that everything is art and yet speak of the limits of art. This would mean that there is something else. That is the very concept of the infinite. Understanding the infinite implies that there would be borders to the infinite, which is completely contradictory.

**Gustav
Metzger**

Writings

Content submitted for Portfolio:

- Introduction by Mathieu Copeland

Book Content:

- Introduction by Mathieu Copeland

- p24 Dear Mr Cooper,

- p27 Borough Bottega

- p30 Trades Union Congress

- p34 Sculpture Exhibition at Thirty Queens

- p35 Sculpture Exhibition at Thirty Queens

- p36 These Artists are Possessed: They Gamble with Life

- p39 Exhibition of Paintings by Monica English

- p42 Treasures from East Anglian Churches

- p43 Treasures from East Anglian Churches

- p44 Treasures from East Anglian Churches

- p48 North End Protest – Answer to Mayor

- p52 North End Society

- p56 Three Paintings by G. Metzger

- p57 Manifesto SDA Self Destructive Art [Draft]

- p61 Cardboards Selected and Arranged by G. Metzger – Auto-Destructive Art (First Manifesto) [preliminary version]

- p63 Cardboards Selected and Arranged by G. Metzger – Auto-Destructive Art (First Manifesto)

- p66 Manifesto Auto-Destructive Art (Second Manifesto)

- p68 Auto-Destructive Art, The Temple Gallery, London, June 1960

- p70 The First Lecture/Demonstration

- p71 Metzger Paintings 1945–1960

- p76 Auto-Destructive Art, Machine Art, Auto-Creative Art (Third Manifesto)

- p77 1959–1961: From Painting to Spraying with Acid. Sketch of a Development

- p82 Machine, Auto-Creative and Auto-Destructive Art

- p87 Manifesto World (Fourth Manifesto)

- p90 Lecture/Demonstration at the Bartlett Society

- p92 Centre for Advanced Creative Studies

- p96 Five Bubble Machines

- p97 On Random Activity in Material/Transforming Works of Art (Fifth Manifesto)

- p100 Auto-Destructive Art: A Talk at the Architectural Association London by Gustav Metzger

- p133 The Chemical Revolution in Art

- p138 Art of Liquid Crystals

- p139 The Possibility of Auto-Destructive Architecture

- p143 Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) – First Announcement

- p145 DIAS – Flyer

- p146 DIAS – Press Release (27 April 1966)

- p148 DIAS – Press Release (May 1966)

- p151 Symposium on Destruction/Creation

- p159 DIAS – Papers are Invited

- p162 Auto-Destructive Art

- p165 DIAS – Press Release (June 1966)

- p167 DIAS – Press Conference (15 June 1966)

- p168 DIAS – ICA Bulletin
- p170 DIAS – Art and Artists
- p172 DIAS – Wolf Vostell
- p174 DIAS – Some of the Artists Taking Part in the Symposium and Events [Draft]
- p177 DIAS – Some of the Artists Taking Part in the Symposium and Events
- p179 Gustav Metzger
- p182 An Overwhelming Concern with Shelter!
- p188 DIAS – Press Release (September 1966)
- p191 DIAS – Initial Programme
- p192 DIAS – Programme Saturday and Sunday [Draft]
- p194 DIAS – Symposium Programme
- p197 DIAS – Ban Animal Slaughter
- p198 DIAS – Wolf Vostell
- p200 DIAS – AMM
- p201 DIAS – Two Evenings with Yoko Ono
- p205 DIAS – The Final Evening
- p206 DIAS – Conclusion
- p208 Excerpts from Selected Papers Presented at the 1966 Destruction in Art Symposium (Introduction)
- p210 DIAS – Preliminary Report
- p222 DIAS Information 1
- p223 DIAS – Policy Statement [Draft]
- p224 DIAS – Policy Statement
- p226 DIAS Information 2
- p227 DIAS Information 3
- p228 DIAS Information 4
- p230 Extremes Touch
- p232 DIAS Information 5
- p233 References to Cybernetics and Computers in the Published Writings of Gustav Metzger
- p236 Development in Art
- p242 Theory of Auto-Destructive Art
- p243 Five Screens with Computer
- p246 Automata in History: Part 1
- p257 Straitened Circumstances
- p258 Five Screens with Computer (1963–1969)
- p260 PAGE – Opinion
- p262 Notes on the Crisis in Technological Art
- p266 PAGE – Your Mind is a Computer
- p267 PAGE – End Peace
- p268 Zagreb Manifesto
- p270 PAGE – Why Use Computers in the Arts?
- p271 PAGE – Toolish? & Benthall at Zagreb
- p272 PAGE – Just what is it that makes tomorrow’s software so different, so appealing?
- p273 PAGE – Shelter in the City & Since Event One
- p274 PAGE – Social Responsibility
- p275 On Friends of Arts Council Operative (FACOP)
- p276 Extremes Touch
- p283 DATAFAIR 69
- p285 Automata in History: Part 2 – Mechanization of an Idea
- p311 PAGE – An Announcement
- p312 PAGE – Blood among the Cyborg-Men
- p313 PAGE – One More American Communicator

- p316 Two Lectures
- p317 Five Screens with Computer – A Sculpture Project, 1963–1969
- p323 New Ideas in Plotter Design Construction and Output
- p332 Do You Eat?
- p333 Interview with R. Buckminster Fuller
- p349 PAGE – Background to Computer Art No. 1
- p350 PAGE – Background to Computer Art No. 2
- p352 PAGE – How Myths are Formed
- p353 PAGE – Quote of the Month
- p354 PAGE – Background to Computer Art No. 3
- p356 Kinetics
- p361 Harmony
- p365 PAGE – Social Responsibility and the Computer Professional. The Rise of an Idea In America – Part 1
- p372 PAGE – Gordon Hyde
- p374 PAGE – A New Anti-War Organization is Compiling a Computer Data Bank on Congressmen
- p375 PAGE – The Art World Erupts: International Coalition for the Liquidation of Art
- p377 PAGE – Background to Computer Art No.4
- p378 PAGE – The Environmental Crisis and the Artist
- p382 Bombs + Explosives
- p388 Development in Art Continued
- p391 Five Screens with Computer (1963–1970)
- p392 Five Screens with Computer. Computer Graphic Aspects of a Sculpture Project
- p399 Paper for Computer and Visual Research Symposium
- p406 Sculpture with Power
- p411 PAGE – The Editor’s Login
- p413 PAGE – Hide Your Car
- p414 PAGE – Roundup
- p417 PAGE – A Climax in the Campaign for Social Responsibility in the Computer Profession
- p418 PAGE – And Babies
- p419 PAGE – WOW! & WAHHM!
- p420 PAGE – The Emperor Hath Clothes?
- p422 PAGE – Thought for Today
- p424 A Critical Look at Artist Placement Group
- p429 PAGE – At Last Casus, South America, Spain & Germany
- p431 PAGE – The Oldest Game in the Universe
- p433 PAGE – Runabout & New Journals
- p437 Second Floor
- p439 PAGE – Provincial Papers Please Copy
- p440 Stockholm June
- p442 PAGE – Spot on Laser
- p443 PAGE – Goodies & Literature
- p446 PAGE – How Many Western Digits to Delete these Asian Digits
- p447 The Constitution of the Artists Union
- p460 Artists Union – National Membership Campaign
- p462 Notes on Recent Works & Projects for the British Thing Show
- p466 PAGE – Gustav Promoted & Gustav Metzger
- p467 Executive Profile Presented by Gustav Metzger
- p468 Executive Profile
- p469 From the City Pages

- p474 Realized and Unrealized Projects (1970–1972)
- p478 Years without Art
- p480 How Long ... before all Artists Cease to Mutilate themselves in the Interests of the Art Trade?
- p482 The Art Dealer: A Bibliography
- p495 When is Political Art Political?
- p498 Art in Germany under National Socialism
- p502 AGUN – International Symposium Art in Germany under National Socialism
- p506 Fascism Germany – Outline. Analysis. Fight
- p508 Collective Cordula Frowein, Gustav Metzger, Klaus Staeck
- p511 Passive – Explosive: Proposal for an Exhibition
- p516 Artists Support Peace
- p518 Artists Support Peace
- p520 Samson Schemes
- p532 Weiner Aktionismus 1960–1974
- p536 Earth minus Environment [Draft]
- p540 Earth minus Environment
- p544 Nature Demised Resurrects as Environment
- p558 Outline for a Retrospective (1959–1974)
- p574 Yves Klein
- p576 The Cardboards Exhibition
- p577 Historic Photographs
- p584 Life/Live
- p585 Earth to Galaxies: On Destruction and Destructivity
- p592 BREATH INg CULTURE
- p601 Proposal for a Commemorative Slab
- p602 On Yoko Ono
- p606 Hubble Telescope: The Artist in the Eye of the Storm
- p611 The Artist in the Face of Social Collapse
- p616 Two Notes – Museum of Modern Art Oxford
- p620 Killing Fields: Sketch for an Exhibition
- p630 Conference on Nothing
- p638 Ethics, Aesthetics and Biotechnology
- p646 Fight Against the Sun
- p647 On Marc Camille Chaimowicz and Three Life Situations
- p650 Little Earth
- p654 Today's Question, Road Signs & Teaser Bills
- p662 Reduce Art Flights
- p664 On First Seeing a Performance by Lee Holden
- p665 British National Press
- p668 Empty and Emptiness, and Emptying
- p670 6 Evenings. 6 Masseurs. 6 Models. 6 Forms of Massage
- p672 Extinction
- p674 On Coming in from the Cold
- p678 Extinction
- p680 Lift Off!
- p681 Action Mass Extinction
- p684 We Must Become Idealist or Die
- p685 For Ivor Davies
- p688 Remember Nature

Introduction

Mathieu Copeland

In August 1944, Gustav Metzger was torn between becoming a professional revolutionary or an artist. Spanning seven decades, from 1953 to 2016, this anthology of his writings serves as a compelling reminder that ultimately he never chose. Challenging, critical, uncompromising, essential and radical, these texts form a guidebook to our lives, providing indispensable reading for anyone concerned with art in constant flux, the changing states of society and the politics that shape the world in which we live. To answer his own original question, recalled in 'The Artist in the Face of Social Collapse' (1998), Metzger became a revolutionary artist, as well as a radical theorist, philosopher, historian and critic of our times.

Metzger's entire oeuvre is defined by his writings. Since 1959, his manifestos have been the cornerstone of his radical and everlasting impact on art, art history and society. However, too little is known of his extensive corpus of texts. Since their original publication, only limited selections have been reprinted over the years. Many were missing, and some simply unknown. This all-encompassing anthology includes both his published and unpublished writings.

Born to Polish parents in Nuremberg, Germany, on 10 April 1926, Gustav Metzger came to Great Britain as a refugee in 1939, and here he remained until his death on 1 March 2017. Metzger wrote relentlessly, and throughout his life. For him writing was a means not only to disseminate his critical thinking, but also to make his work exist. While he embraced the ephemerality of his art, defined so often by its transience – an art only too frequently realized in semi-private contexts – it was through pamphlets, handouts and self-publications that his work existed in the public realm and consciousness. He authored accounts of his own developments and achievements, such as '1959–1961: From Painting to

Spraying with Acid. Sketch of a Development' (1961), 'References to Cybernetics and Computers in the Published Writings' (1968), 'Development in Art' (1968) and 'Development in Art Continued' (1971), or the major unpublished document 'Outline for a Retrospective (1959–1974)' (1993). As Metzger recalled during the preparation of this publication, writing about his own work was literally the only way for it to have an existence, as too few people were aware of it, and no-one seemed willing to write about it on his behalf. To this end, it is important to note that Metzger often wrote in the third person, even when writing about himself.

Metzger experiments in his writings with an art of propositions, as these are the first, and often the only, realization of any work. For example, *Five Screens with Computer* – a major project, never realized, that preoccupied him from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s – returns repeatedly in his texts. This helps us follow the evolution of an idea that was to remain just that: an imagined public sculpture of great radicality. Other similar cases include the Trades Union Congress sculpture entry for a competition to commemorate the Trade Unionists who lost their lives during the two World Wars (1954); 'Realized and Unrealized Projects (1970–1972)' (1972); 'Proposal for a Commemorative Slab' (1997); 'Fight Against the Sun' (2005) and '6 Evenings. 6 Masseurs. 6 Models. 6 Forms of Massage' (2009), which was based on an event that Metzger organized in 1972 at the Henie Onstad Art Centre in Norway. All were fundamental proposals, scores to be enacted. Although they generated writings and sketches at the time, they did not become physical objects. The lack of materialization of the works does not characterize them as failures. Enounced ideas and principles are sufficient to ignite a revolution, as words are a concrete reality.

When he was invited to participate in the exhibition *Art into Society – Society into Art: Seven German Artists* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London in 1974, Metzger agreed to take part with contributions that would appear only in the catalogue. This allowed him to reformulate his on-going disdain for the 'art trade' in 'How Long ... before all Artists Cease to Mutilate Themselves in the Interests of the Art Trade?'; to assert a proposition that

could be reformulated as 'bibliography as art' with 'The Art Dealer: A Bibliography'; to ask the painful and necessary question 'When is Political Art Political?' with radical outcomes and to announce his call for the 'Years without Art' that he would put into practice between 1977 and 1980 (all four texts 1974).

In 'Sculpture with Power' (1971) Metzger wrote that 'since 1958, [his] work as an artist has revolved around power and information'. He saw the daily newspapers as a powerful affirmation of the present, and appropriated their words and articles as weapons. For his first 'lecture/demonstration' at The Temple Gallery in London (22 June 1960) he completely covered the walls with the day's newspapers. As he later recalled, this served to emphasize that the actuality of his art was as real as the daily news stories.

Metzger often worked with newspapers as material for his art – as in his rejected proposal to paste all the pages of the London *Daily Express* on the stairwell of Gallery One every day for the 1962 Festival of Misfits; or his 1977 piece *The Sun Page 3 Girls*, consisting of the gradual accumulation of all the infamous page threes from the *Sun* tabloid newspaper printed throughout the duration of an exhibition. The work *Mass Media Today*, realized for the exhibition *Art Spectrum* in 1971, began Metzger's 'political art' phase. It was followed in December 1972, 'with the exhibition *Executive Profile* at the ICA. There too I used newspaper cuttings to attack the system', Metzger explained in his 'Outline for a Retrospective ...' in 1993. He continued these ideas in his article 'From the City Pages' (1972), recounting: 'Like many people, I am fascinated by newspapers. Newspapers are informative; they distort reality and foster illusions; they serve the interests of governments and big business; they record history; their design is fascinating; the comparison of newspapers and journals is an absorbing activity [...] The rather horrifying similarity of content, nudes and advertisements [makes] further comment superfluous.'

—

Metzger did not keep an archive of either his published or his unpublished writings. For the preparation of this anthology we are very much indebted to the early bibliography compiled by Clive Phillpot for Gustav Metzger, *Damaged Nature, Auto-Destructive Art* published by Coracle, London, in 1996. This bibliography was

later updated by Luise Metzger for the publication *Gustav Metzger, Manifeste Schriften Konzepte*, published in 1998 by Verlag Silke Schreiber, Munich, and subsequently extended and updated again by Anna Artaker, in consultation with Metzger, for *History History* published by the Generali Foundation and Hatje Cantz in 2005.

Most of the documents brought together in this volume are being reprinted here for the first time since their original publication, and some have never previously been published. The texts have been transcribed as closely as possible to their original manifestation (hand-written manuscripts, typescripts or printed texts) published or not. The process of editing and harmonization undertaken in the interests of clarity and consistency has taken care to preserve Gustav Metzger's personal writing style and is restricted mainly to correcting grammatical errors, misspelt names and miss-prints. Unless deemed disruptive to the reading of a text, Metzger's idiosyncrasies of punctuation and capitalization have for the most part been preserved. In drafts and notes not originally intended for publication, Metzger's crossings-out and question marks have equally been typographically replicated.

This anthology is presented in chronological order, beginning in 1953 and running through to 2016, according to the date of writing rather than the date of publication. This classification disrupts certain thematic groups, for instance the texts relating to the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) written between 1966 and 1968, and the unity of the texts published in *PAGE – Bulletin of the Computer Arts* between 1969 and 1972, which are interrupted by texts on other subjects. However, this organization allows us to follow the evolution of the artist's concepts and his process of writing – an all-encompassing approach in which everything is intertwined. The titles are by and large the artist's own; where a text was not titled either because Metzger viewed it as a working document or because its title was self-evident (as in the case of an announcement) or unnecessary (for example a letter), the title was taken from the text's main content. Where titles recur – particularly when a published text is preceded by its draft version – this difference is indicated in square brackets; similarly, for particularly important texts whose status is not evident from their titles (such as manifestos), this status is identified in round brackets. More detailed notes on the nature and purpose of each text

and its publication history may be found at its end, at the bottom of the page. Occasionally, further explanation has been added, including information about the author's handwritten additions and amendments.

Posters and flyers designed by the artist have been reproduced as text-only; where their graphic composition is a clear component of the text's structure, their layout mirrors their original published design. Several texts are accompanied by the illustrations selected by Metzger for their original publication – for example, the diagrams accompanying the various versions of 'Five Screens with Computer' (1968–1971); the rich iconography gathered for 'Automata in History: Part 2' (1969) and the graphic compositions and images chosen, often reworked and annotated, by Metzger during his time as editor of *PAGE*.

The only two surviving pages of notes that Metzger prepared for his first 'lecture/demonstration' in June 1960 are not transcribed, following the artist's decision to reproduce these as images for the cover of his self-published lecture *Auto-Destructive Art, Metzger at AA* (1965). The *DIAS Information Sheets*, numbers 1 to 5 from 1967–1968, are reproduced as facsimiles because of their layout, which features a mixture of press clippings, statements and images.

For 'Today's Question, Road Signs & Teaser Bills' (2006), only the portion of Metzger's text depicting, interpreting and commenting on the work of Eva Weinmayr is reprinted here – images of Weinmayr's works discussed by Metzger may be seen in the artist's book, *Water Found on Mars* (Hatje Cantz, Stuttgart 2006).

In addition to the writings authored by Metzger or clearly identified as his own, all his significant collaborative texts have also been included. Among these are seminal texts that Metzger co-authored, and important texts to which he contributed either in the writing process or in the lead-up to the writing itself. These attest to the importance of community, and the shared engagements that the artist viewed as essential to life and art in society. They also cast significant light on the continuous and extremely varied interests and research that Metzger would engage in throughout his life.

With his fellow students from David Bomberg's class, in 1953 Metzger co-founded the Borough Bottega, and acted as the chairman of this artists' group. Metzger worked on its constitution, and helped with the organization of their first exhibition, *Borough Bottega*, at Berkeley Galleries, London, from 16 November to 4 December 1953.

In 1957 Metzger founded the North End Society, of which he was the secretary. The society's aim was to protect North Street and Pilot Street from King's Lynn Borough Council's plans for the wholesale demolition of the area, and to work towards the repair and improvement of the properties in those streets.

The 1963 statement for the Centre for Advanced Creative Study was co-written by Metzger and Marcello Salvadori.

Both public and private communications for DIAS during 1966 to 1968 are included in the anthology. Ivor Davies and John Sharkey were DIAS' principal organizers together with Metzger, who was DIAS' secretary. DIAS' honorary committee included Mario Amaya, Roy Ascott, Enrico Baj, Bob Cobbing, Jim Haynes, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Barry Miles, Frank Popper, and Wolf Vostell.

Metzger was the editor of *PAGE – Bulletin of the Computer Arts Society* from 1969 to 1972. *PAGE* offered Metzger an ideal platform not only to publish his own writing, but also to voice both immediate and lasting concerns and highlight causes he campaigned for. All the entries from *PAGE* reprinted in this anthology were chosen in collaboration with the artist. Some are clearly not Metzger's, but they are included because they are contextualized by his selection, and in many ways are given a renewed visibility here. They include a selection of news clippings as well as the anonymously authored text 'The Art World Erupts: International Coalition for the Liquidation of Art' (1970), a manifesto that was endorsed by the artist.

In 1971 Metzger translated Herbert W. Franke's book *Computergraphik – Computerkunst* into English, providing further testament to his commitment to computer arts. His translation was published as *Computer Graphics, Computer Art* by Phaidon Press the same year.

The 1969 'Zagreb Manifesto' was co-written by Metzger with Jonathan Benthall and Gordon Hyde.

The 'Harmony' manifesto of September 1970 was drafted by Jerome R. Ravetz, and co-signed by Metzger with Kit Peddler, David Dickson, Robin Clark, Ravetz and Peter Harper.

In consultation with Metzger, the collectively-written 1972 'The Constitution of the Artists' Union' has been included – not only as a tribute to this important historical document of an artists' union, but also because it offers a renewed platform for Metzger to share, with a group of fellow artists, his concerns around such issues as the artists' role in society, as well as to 'act as a consciousness-raising group on the state of relationships between art, science, technology and industry'. The members of the Artists' Union included Conrad Atkinson and Margaret Harrison, Barry Barker, Stuart Brisley, Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Stuart Edwards, Gareth Evans, Gerry Hunt and Kay Fido Hunt, Mary Kelly, Carol Kenna, Robin Klassnik, Don Mason, Jeff Sawtell, Colin Sheffield and Peter Sylveire. Metzger was vice-chairman of the Artists' Union in 1972.

With the German artist and art historian Cordula Frowein, Metzger co-organized the international symposium Art in Germany under National Socialism (AGUN) at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and Drill Hall, London, from 17 to 19 September 1976. The documents relating to this symposium are included here.

The collective comprising Cordula Frowein, Klaus Staeck and Metzger authored the documents relating to the exhibition *Passiv – Explosiv* [Passive – Explosive] in Cologne in 1981.

The 1984 Artists Support Peace communiqués were released by a coalition consisting of Roger Ackling, Conrad Atkinson, Guy Brett, Stuart Brisley, Colin Cina, Richard Cork, Fenella Crichton, Rita Donagh, Hans Haacke, Richard Hamilton, Margaret Harrison, John Hilliard, Peter Kennard, Klaus Meyer, Maureen Ripley, Norman Rosenthal, Jeff Sawtell and Maurice Wilkins. Tim Head, Glenys Johnson and Metzger were the co-ordinators.

—

Unpublished transcripts of a conference and an interview have been included in this book. Both are important historical documents that shed significant light on Metzger's concerns, and complement the other texts in the volume. The conference transcript is an unpublished edited draft by Dom Sylvester Houédard of the conversation between Metzger, Mark Boyle, Ivor Davies and Houédard held during the Symposium on Destruction/Creation at Ravensbourne College of Art on 23 May 1966. In retrospect,

this conference may be seen as a prelude to the Destruction in Art Symposium that took place the following September. According to Metzger in his 'Outline for a Retrospective ...', another precursor of DIAS may be found in his 1965 lecture at the Architectural Association – a lecture that would lead to the first publication devoted solely to auto-destructive art, and for which Metzger set up his own imprint called Creation/Destruction. The imprint ultimately only produced this single, eponymous title. As the artist recalled, the demonstration that followed the 1965 lecture 'should have taken place in silence. In fact it turned into a very noisy affair, with violent overtones. This experience had quite a strong effect on me. It was one strand in the development which led to the formulation of the DIAS proposal.'

With Alan Sutcliffe, Metzger conducted an interview with Richard Buckminster Fuller in 1970. The interview was unearthed some forty years later during research in Sutcliffe's archive on his work and collaboration with Metzger. A pioneer of computer arts and co-founder of the Computer Arts Society, Sutcliffe published an unedited transcript of the interview with facsimile reproductions of two pages of the original transcript with Metzger's hand-written additions and some explanatory notes in *PAGE 67* in spring 2011. The version included here has been re-edited from the original transcript edited by Metzger.

The selection of press releases, exhibition announcements and reviews included in the anthology contribute to a wider understanding of the entirety of Metzger's practice. The artist used the opportunity offered by public communications to introduce his concerns, expand the topics addressed and further the reach of his ideas. These texts can often be clearly identified as being fully, or significantly, his own writing. Such examples include the press releases for the exhibitions *Three Paintings by G. Metzger* (1959) and *Executive Profile* (1972). The inclusion of the publicity statement 'On Coming in from the Cold' (2009) was decided on in collaboration with Metzger for the same reasons.

No documents relating to the anti-nuclear-war Committee of 100 set up by Bertrand Russell and the Reverend Michael Scott feature in this publication, despite the Committee's importance to the artist. Metzger was one of the Committee's founding members

in August 1960, and coined the name with Ralph Schoenman. Metzger did the graphic design for the first pamphlet entitled *Act or Perish*, but he often stated that he did not actively contribute to the writing of the texts. However, his actions spoke volumes, and in September 1961 he was sentenced with 32 other members for calling for a demonstration against the British atomic weapons policy, and served a one-month prison sentence in Drake Hall Open Prison, Staffordshire.

Despite every effort, and investigations diligently carried out over many years, a few key unpublished texts are missing from this anthology. Among these are analyses undertaken by Metzger during the 1980s, a period in his life mostly spent outside England and mainly devoted to research, learning and writing. They include the extensive study 'German Book Design from 1927 to 1959', completed in 1988 – a document that Metzger never published, and the whereabouts of which are unknown. Another key missing text is Metzger's monograph on Johannes Vermeer, which he began in 1990. Fortunately, the completed manuscript that Metzger had loaned for safe-keeping re-surfaced in January 2018; we hope it will be published soon. Other missing texts may come to light, and will be included in any future reprints of this anthology.

A large selection of seminal texts and projects not included here will form the content of a second volume devoted to Metzger's letters, notes, lectures and interviews. These include, among many others, two important lectures absent from this publication: 'The Exclusion of the Spectator in Art' and 'Mad Cows Talk', both from 1996. The artist's 'Outline for a Retrospective ...' and his 'Historic Photographs' essay present a number of the original ideas that led to the radical conception described in the former; an extract from the latter is presented in 'The Artist in the Face of Social Collapse' (1998).

—

The texts that form this anthology are testimony to an artist whose vision defined and challenged the 20th century, and helped to shape the 21st. Metzger's philosophy reflects on past reality, the art of the present and challenges to the future. These writings constitute a unique account of the evolution of an artist's thinking

and concerns over the course of 60 years. In Metzger's words in 'Earth to Galaxies: On Destruction and Destructivity' (1996), 'As the years have passed, I observed the changes taking place and have found confirmation of so much I had believed in. Scientists who predict future developments in their field qualify for the Nobel Prize. If this principle applied in the field of the visual arts, my work would have received wide recognition. Right across the spectrum of developments in society, in science and technology and in thought and invention, there are links with ideas that I have worked with [...] And beyond this, there are attitudes towards the environment, the critique of capitalist consumer society, the critique of science and technology and the emphasis on individual responsibility.'

I am very grateful to all those who made the realization of this work possible: les Archives de la critique d'Art (Rennes), Irene Aristizábal, Jenny Baumat, Stephen Bann, Jonathan Benthall, Stuart Brisley, Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Maximus Copeland, Mary Margaret Copeland, Robert Craig, Ula Dajerling, Samuel Dangel, Ivor Davies, Philippe Decrauzat, Clément Dirié, Leanne Dmyterko, Xavier Douroux, Nicolas Eigenheer, Elizabeth Fisher, Adrian Fogarty, Andrew Gammon, Nicolas Garait, Franck Gautherot, The Generali Foundation, Adrian Glew, Svetlana Heger, Jon Hendricks, Stewart Home, Joe Joelson, Elisa Kay, Pontus Kyander, Robert Lands, Nicolas Leuba, Jacqui Lichtenstern, Catherine Mason, le Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, The Estate of Gustav Metzger, Déborah Metzger, Olivier Michelon, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Yoko Ono, Hervé Percebois, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot, John Plant, Frank Popper, Claire Potter, Jerome R. Ravetz, Thierry Raspail, Jasia Reichardt, Emma Ridgway, Sir Norman Rosenthal, Beverley Rowe, Harry Ruhé, Daniella Saul, Sören Schmeling, John Sharkey, Erica Shiozaki, Kristine Stiles, Alan Sutcliffe, Tate Archive, Ben Vautier, Jacques Villeglé, Eva Weinmayr and Andrew Wilson. I thank them all for their unfaltering help and encouragement that have resulted in the publication of this anthology. I am particularly grateful to John Armleder, Hélène Guenin, the Zurich University of the Arts – ZHdK, and Pete Townshend for their incredibly generous support.

This anthology is the result of a continuous dialogue with Gustav Metzger, who oversaw and approved the final form it was taking

for publication. It is a tribute to his art, philosophy and uncompromising way of life, and is dedicated to his everlasting memory.

Gustav Metzger remains a moral compass, a constant reminder that integrity comes at a price, and that fighting for your convictions can indeed change the world. Metzger has done more than raise awareness. His art and philosophy are a stark testimony to the alternative world for which he strove. When Metzger radically challenged what art can be in defining auto-destructive art, it was equally essential for him to define auto-creative art. Destruction and creation are two sides of the same coin. His art and memory live on. His writings and philosophy must be disseminated and shared in order to foster his fundamental beliefs and his lifelong concern that *we should all fight against extinction*. Extinction does not have to be inevitable, and we must constantly challenge the status quo.