ARTFORUM

MARCH 2008

INTERNATIONAL

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KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN
ZOE LEONARD

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Nick Mauss and Ken Okiishi

New York–based artists Nick Mauss and Ken Okiishi recently collaborated on an exhibition at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart in Germany. A book accompanying the show will be published by JRP Ringier this month.

From above: **Maria Thereza Alves, *Garden Proposal for an "English" Landscape Research Institute: Seeds of Change*, 2006**, collage, ink, and colored pencil on color photograph, dimensions variable. From *Wake*, 2001–. **Georges Perec and Bernard Queysanne, *Un Homme qui dort* (A Man in a Dream), 1974**, still from a black-and-white film in 35 mm, 93 minutes. **My Barbarian, *You Were Born Poor & Poor You Will Die*, 2005.** Performance view, REDCAT, Los Angeles, 2006. Photo: Patterson Beckwith.

1 TITUS 1 The "new" Museum of Modern Art's main movie theater still looks the same as it did when the old Goodwin-Stone building opened in 1939, and it continues to have the most distinctive and expansive film and video programming in the world. The sleek International Style exit signs at the front have framed so many of our favorite cultural encounters—and we don't just mean what happens on-screen. The regular crowd here is notoriously cantankerous, out of it, crusty, and audaciously dressed. We'll never forget the moment when, during a screening of Leonid Trauberg and Grigori Kozintsev's 1929 silent film, *The New Babylon*, an octogenarian sitting right next to the piano, but somehow oblivious to the fact that it was being played live, kept screaming: "Turn the music down! Turn the music down!" —*NM & KO*

2 MARIA THEREZA ALVES, *WAKE*, 2001– A stunning meditation on history and site, Alves's amateur botanical study of Berlin's "seedbed" begins with the simple acts of collecting seeds from the roughed-up earth of the city's construction sites and trying to germinate them. Lying dormant for hundreds of years, seeds, once sprouted, point back to their far-flung origins; and Alves manages to tease out an intricate lace of sociopolitical interactions that defies every historical narrative. Alves's research and speculative flourishes introduce us to ideas like "political seeds" and "floral accidents" and to the thought that seeds travel around the globe in trouser cuffs. —*NM*

3 GEORGES PEREC AND BERNARD QUEYSANNE, *UN HOMME QUI DORT* (A MAN IN A DREAM, 1974) The recent release of *Un Homme qui dort* on DVD is the biggest film event since the complete print of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* was found in a closet in a Norwegian mental institution. The English-language dubbing of Perec and Queysanne's masterpiece was only printed once and screened a handful of times, even though it features a flabbergasting voice-over by Shelley Duvall. Three years later, the relatively unknown Duvall would win best actress at Cannes for her portrayal of Millie Lammoreaux, the emotionally hermetic character in Robert Altman's epically weird *Three Women*. The voice of Millie that says with famous disaffection, "I guess she's never lived in a decorated place before," speaks Perec's stark experiment in psychological exhaustion with the same softened Texas accent: a fabulously odd chimera. —*NM & KO*

4 MY BARBARIAN Founded in 2000 by Malik Gaines, Jade Gordon, and Alexandro Segade, My Barbarian is the wartime cabaret we deserve. Slipping in and out of genres as if they were flimsy veils or sweaty bodysuits, My Barbarian combines the one-woman show with abusive psychedelic experimental theater, operetta, *Lehrstück*, queer happening, and classical tragedy to propel an incongruous, self-annihilating plot. Acts like *Voyage of the White Widow*, 2007, and *You Were Born Poor & Poor You Will Die*, 2005, give *Verfremdungseffekt* a new meaning, with audience members doubled over laughing, squirting tears, and then flushed with embarrassment at their own complicity. —*NM*

5 **ANNA OPPERMANN** Oppermann's dense ensembles destroy description, as they throw the borders between seeing, thinking, saying, remembering, and materiality into ongoing crisis. While a resolution could be found in the word *schizophrenic* or *traumatic*, uttering anything so stupid becomes impossible when actually experiencing the work. —*KO*

6 **IXTHYS, PALLASSTRASSE 21, 10781, BERLIN** Eating at this tiny Korean restaurant in Schöneberg is like being in a liminal zone between Berlin as it is and Berlin as it could have developed in an alternate, more *Ausländer*-friendly universe. Anyone who has spent any significant time in this still underpopulated city knows what a pain it can be to find good everyday "ethnic" food; indeed, it feels a bit silly, in 2008, to even use the term "ethnic" anymore. But alas, cosmopolitanism is still a strangely problematic idea here. For American visitors, lunch at Ixthys involves the bizarre experience of trekking way into the West to satisfy that hankering for bibimbap, only to find walls covered in extensive passages from the Christian bible written by hand in large letters resembling the script used when teaching the ABC's. Closed on Sundays. —*KO*

7 ***L'ENFANT ET LES SORTILÈGES*** Ravel's light-as-air 1925 opera, composed to a libretto by Colette, tells the story of a child's belongings seeking revenge for having been treated cruelly by him. Rarely performed, *L'Enfant* will be staged this month at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples, with sets based on sketches by Marc Camille Chaimowicz. The various paintings, furniture, scenarios, and texts by Chaimowicz, collected in the most precise and beautiful artist's books I have ever seen, remake the world as a sensitive registration of the often unbearable coming to life of things, rooms, memories, words. —*NM*

8 **MICHAEL CLARK COMPANY** During the past three years the legendary Michael Clark Company has been developing and performing several pieces set to Stravinsky's music for ballet. Each time we've seen them, we felt that the sky could crash in at any given moment. This June 4 through 7 the entire tripartite *Stravinsky Project* will finally have its US premiere in New York, at Lincoln Center's Rose Theater. —*NM* & *KO*

9 **STIL DISCOTHÈQUE/STIL AUDIO NUMÉRIQUE** Based on the utopian principle "Nothing in common," Stil was started in 1971 by Alain Villain as a way to create a new rhythm in the production and distribution of books, films, and recorded sound. Grand projects include a beautifully produced LP box set of the first performance (1982) of *Carmen* in China (transmogrified into Mandarin, which, as a tonal language, raised new questions about translation); the rediscovery and publication of Rameau's final *tragédie lyrique*, *Les Boréades*; and the first recording of the same composer's *ballet héroïque*, *Zaïs*. While these productions are of obvious importance, what I find most remarkable is Stil's recorded documentation of the reemergence of *notes inégales* (an idiomatic rhythmic flexibility, which is not written in the score) into the performance of French baroque music. While contemporary, historically informed performers make these innovations sound more "natural," Stil recordings of musicologist Antoine Geoffroy-Dechaume, organist Jean Boyer, and, most spectacularly, harpsichordist Scott Ross document the experimental phase, when translating historical research into performance was a new and controversial act. Ross's recording of Rameau's music for solo harpsichord is perhaps the most splendorous account of the stricture of "authenticity" as a rhythmic liberation. —*KO*

10 **CLAUDE CAHUN, *AVEUX NON AVENUS* (DISAVOWALS), (TATE, 2007; MIT PRESS, 2008)** Seventy-seven years after it was first published, Claude Cahun's essay-poem-novel *Aveux non avenus* has finally been released in English translation. The book includes reproductions of the photogravures she made with Marcel Moore and charming emblems that divide each utterance: heart, star, record, lips. —*NM* □

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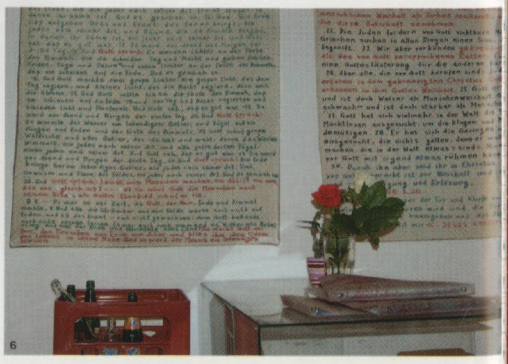

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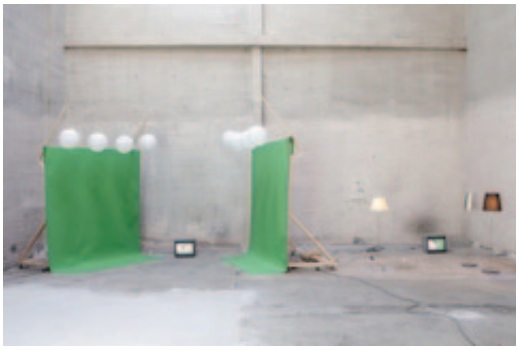
Clockwise from above: **Anna Oppermann, *The Artist's Task to Solve Problems (Problems of Space)*, 1978–84,** mixed media. Installation view, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1981. Photo: Réné Block. **Interior of Ixthys Korean restaurant, Berlin, 2007.** Photo: Ken Okiishi. **Page from Claude Cahun's *Aveux non avenus* (Disavowals),** (Tate, 2007; MIT Press, 2008). **Michael Clark Company, *O*, 2005.** Performance view, Barbican Theatre, London, 2005. Melissa Hetherington and Adam Linder. Photo: Hugo Glendinning.

ARTFORUM

“Nobody Can Tell the Why of It”

1857
Tøyenbekken 12
May 27–August 14



View of “Nobody Can Tell the Why of It,” 2011.

This remarkable artist-run space confronts all who curate here with a peculiar two-part challenge: a main space—a huge, outdoor-feeling concrete hall that was formerly a lumberyard—and a smaller area that sports a bright orange 1970s floor covering. The current group show, featuring Nicholas Byrne, Nick Mauss, Ken Okiishi, Josef Strau, and Timothy Furey, negotiates these constraints nicely. The smaller room is allotted to Byrne’s work; in the hall follow Furey’s four large canvases, Okiishi’s films and set pieces, Strau’s text posters and lamps, and Mauss’s drawings and wooden staircase.

Experiencing the concrete hall filled with precisely these works is partly like venturing into a church and partly like entering a theater or film set before any actors or audience members have assembled. But a set is meant for plays, with performances of which are governed by a preexisting script that ensures a certain order and outcome. In guest curator Esperanza Rosales’s setup, the opposite just might be the case: “Nobody Can Tell the Why of It” is hard to pin down and feels open-ended. Among its stated themes are male hysteria and mysticism, but with time it becomes apparent that what’s really at stake is the very process of exhibition-making, the long-lasting endeavor of collective creation. Language, social interaction, and communication are thus conspicuous topics. Rosales, a writer, has said, ”I build from the gut.” The same spirit of tentative, visceral ventures is expressed in the title of Franz Schubert’s “*Wohin?*” (”Where to?”), a song whose lyrics appear as Okiishi’s contribution to an accompanying publication. This printed bonus volume to the show references the participants’ ongoing correspondence as well as the converging and diverging references behind their work, revealing all the productive fumbling that takes place prior to what audiences normally access.

— Johanne Nordby Wernø

‘Nobody Can Tell the Why of It’ at 1857, Oslo

by mousse

June 14~2011

‘Nobody Can Tell the Why of it’ takes its name from an inflated and slightly exaggerated as well as archaic idiomatic translation of the title to an engraving by Francisco Goya.
This exhibition at 1857, curated by Esperanza Rosales, is a means of engaging threads of mysticism in five contemporary practices and invites the artists – Nicholas Byrne, Timothy Furey, Ken Okiishi, Nick Mauss and Josef Strau – to produce new work in a former lumberyard in the center of Oslo. Linking mysticism to

certain forms of male hysteria, it brings works spanning the fields of drawing, painting, writing, video and sculpture, together in a non-exegetical fashion. Furthermore, it examines the paradox that exists at the site of communion between individual practitioners and collective efforts.

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For ‘Nobody Can Tell the Why of It’ New York and Berlin-based artist Nick Mauss has built a platform and stairs, on and around which ten new drawings are placed under glass. Partly inspired by Adolph Appia’s theatrical sets, the flight of steps dramatize the experience of looking, and also serve as a means by which to experience changing views of the exhibition. Visitors to the exhibition are invited to enter this area of pilgrimage, visitation, and vicissitude traversal in which the paper works, pressed beneath glass, can be encountered.

Nick Mauss, *I want it undetectable by others in my voice*, 2011

During the week leading up the exhibition, New York and Berlin based artist Ken Okiishi filmed local bands and performers in the exhibition space. The musicians were given the main theme from Jacques Demy's musical melodrama, *Les Parapluies des Cherbourg* (1964) and invited to do whatever they wanted to with it. What was filmed was the moment of interaction between the performers and the musical script in front of a green-screen set, which allows for endless overlapping and compression of the image during editing.
The resulting film, *parapluis/paraplyer/'nobody can tell the why of it'/1857/oslo/2011*, includes musical contributions by several Norwegian performers including Hanny, Camp Sounds, Pseen, Goylem Space Klezmer, boy soprano Torkil Swensen Høeg, a string quartet (Thomas Huang, Mateusz Røstad, Johannes Hafsahl, Ulrik Sverdrup-Thygeson Jr.), and Nils Bech.

Ken Okiishi, *parapluis/paraplyer/'nobody can tell the why of it'/1857/oslo/2011*, 2011

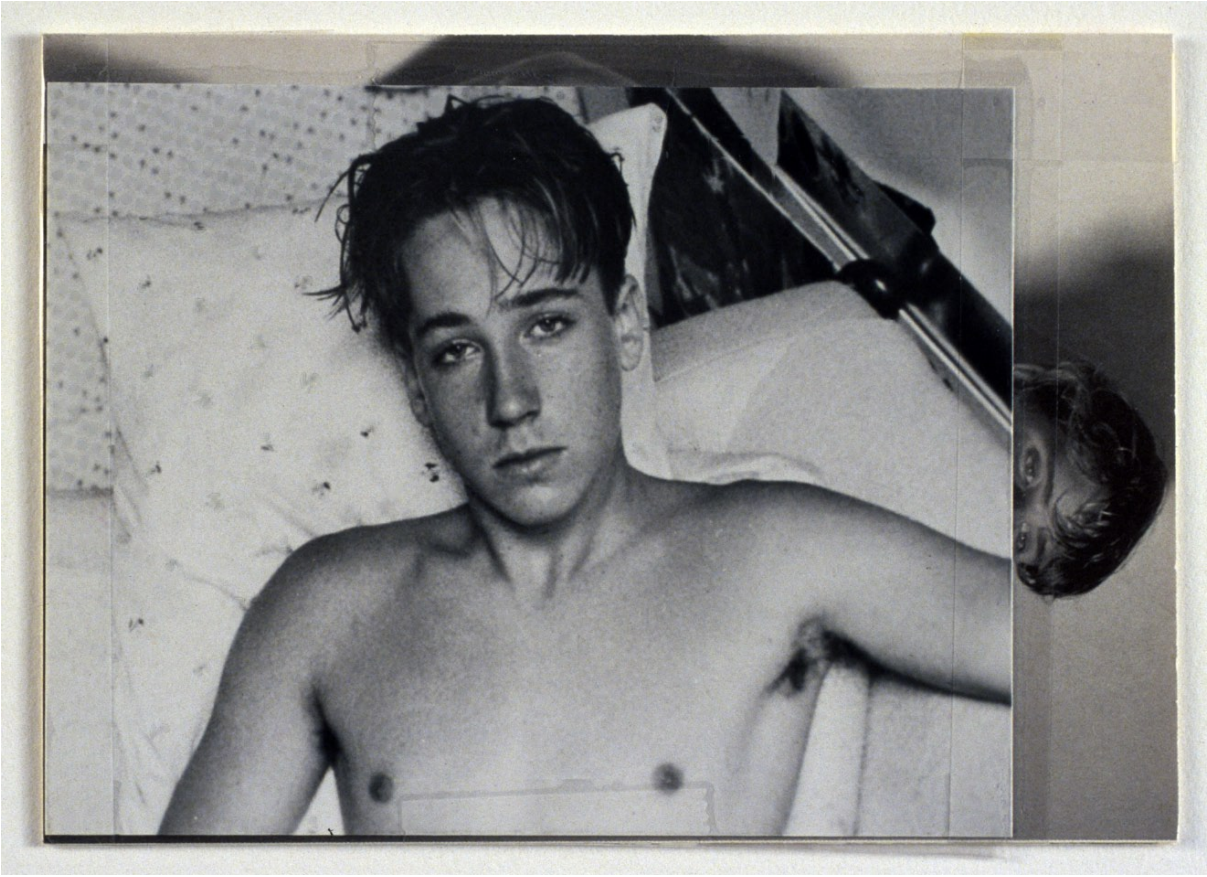
Ken Okiishi, *parapluis/paraplyer/'nobody can tell the why of it'/1857/oslo/2011*, 2011

Ken Okiishi, *parapluis/paraplyer/'nobody can tell the why of it'/1857/oslo/2011*, 2011

Images courtesy of 1857, Oslo

Wish I were here, 1997-2001, series of 5 inkjet prints, 50 x 34.5 cm each

Exhibited at Artists Space, New York (2013); Mathew, Berlin (2012); Balice Hertline, Paris (2008); LTTR at Andrew Kreps, New York (2003)



4 July 1997 Paris
Dear Bruce Weber,
This is a picture of
my straight best friend,
who I am in love with.
He just got out of the shower.
Does taking photographs of
straight boys lying around
without their shirts on make
them gay in real life?
I mean, he looks pretty
gay in this photo, right?
Sincerely, Ken Okiishi

8 July 1997 Venice

Dear Jack Pierson,

I'm 19 years old, travelling around Europe with my straight best friend, who I am in love with. Mr. Pierson, I was thinking of you when I took this picture of myself. Do you fuck all those pretty boys you photograph? Do you find me attractive? What if I took off my shirt and were really out of focus? Then would he sleep with me?

Sincerely,

Ken Okiishi

10 July 1997 Bari, Italy

Dear Nan Goldin,

I've never done drugs, but I feel really fucked up anyway. I'm travelling around Europe with my straight best friend, who I am in love with. Like you, he was a drug addict who went to rehab. But he says he can only feel like soulmates with someone he does drugs with, who is not me. Do you feel this lack of "soul" now that you are "clean"? Sincerely, Ken Okiishi

11 July 1997
Dear Cindy Sherman,
I am lost—not physically,
but emotionally.
I am on a cruise ship
to Greece with my straight
best friend, who I am
in love with. Acting
like "The Girl" is getting
me nowhere with him.
Did it get you anywhere?
Sincerely,
Ken Okiishi

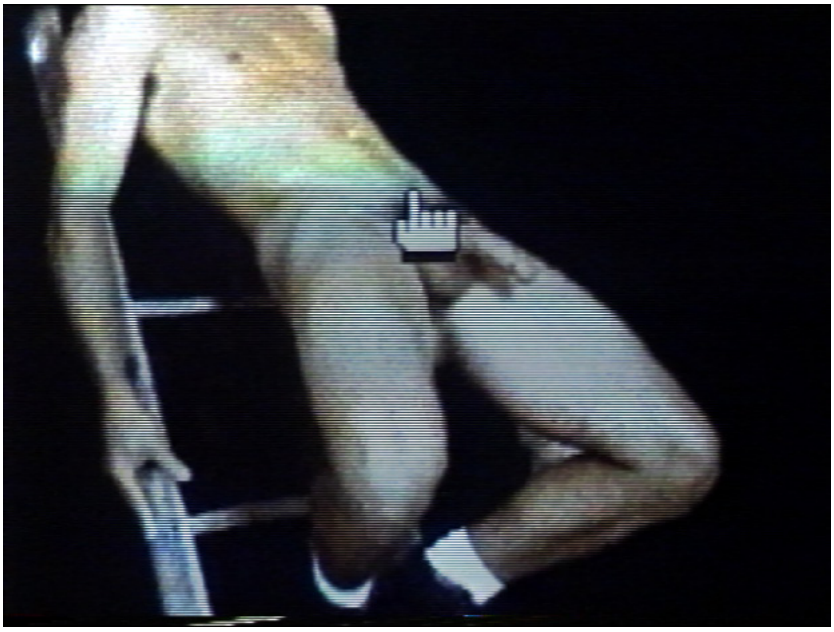
16 July 1997 Corfu Island, Greece

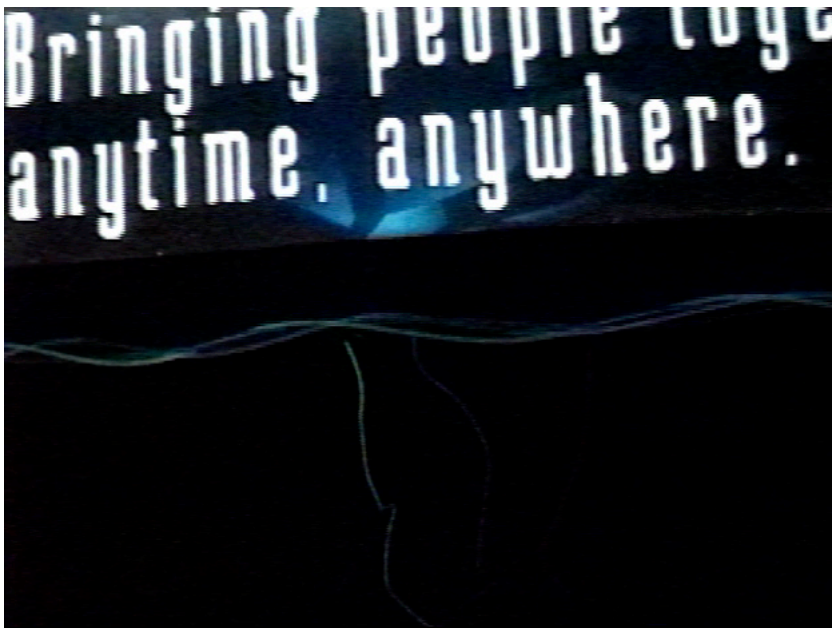
Dear Larry Clark,

I bought The Perfect Childhood at the Centre Pompidou in Paris 2 weeks ago. Apparently, it is banned in the U.S., so I feel lucky to own it. What I don't feel lucky about, though, is that I'm in love with my straight best friend who I've been travelling around Europe with for the last 2 weeks. This is our 4th day in Corfu. I AM SICK OF JUST LYING AROUND ON BEAUTIFUL BEACHES ALL DAY! I would ask you the same questions I asked Jack Pierson (do you fuck those boys you photograph? etc.) but I think I already know the answer. As you have insisted on showing me many times, no matter how sexy he poses for you, he only lets girls suck his cock.

Keyword: Love, Hi8 transferred to digital video (color, sound), 20 minutes. 1998.

Exhibited at Mathew, Berlin (2012); The Museum of Modern Art, NY (2014)





Telly & Casper, digital video (color, sound), 27 minutes. 2000

Exhibited at Mathew, Berlin (2012); Broadcast on The Good Luck Galleon, Manhattan Neighborhood Network Television (2001)

Description from Artists Space:
Telly & Casper (2000) takes place in an early internet NYC, where affects were just beginning to circulate in the digital / social network way (pre-Facebook, pre-YouTube, etc.). The city was beginning to feel more like a website than a mise-en-scene, as data flowed and redistributed urban experience along lines of legal and real estate "development," gaining speed and efficacy of control through increasingly precise technologies of collecting data streams. In Telly & Casper, the glitches this produced "in real life" are inputted into urban space and narratives: the Larry Clark/Harmony Korine film KIDS, treated as a cinematic data set, is thrown onto adolescent bodies attempting to become something in these emerging networks of control and redistribution. The genres of remake and appropriation loosen control, as references fail to move in linear, fixed paths, while also being increasingly recorded and re-posted. This is the opening both of the possibility of new subjectivities and the possibility of in-real-time control of consumers and vampires addicted to feedback loops. Telly & Casper offers a view into a transitional state, when the body was starting to "freak out" (and "shut down") against the pressure of so much social data.

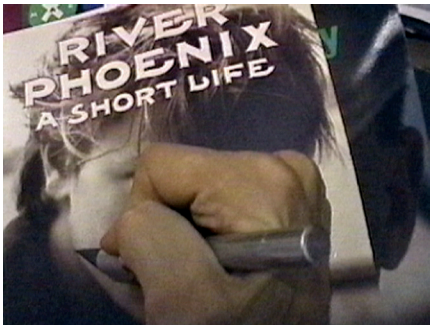
Description from ubuweb.com:
Telly and Casper is loosely based on Kids (1995), Larry Clark's melodrama about teenagers terrorizing New York City and each other. The two male protagonists of Okiishi's video seem to be stuck negotiating the territory demarcated by Clark's film, and rehearsing its erotic fantasies about adolescents and urban decay.

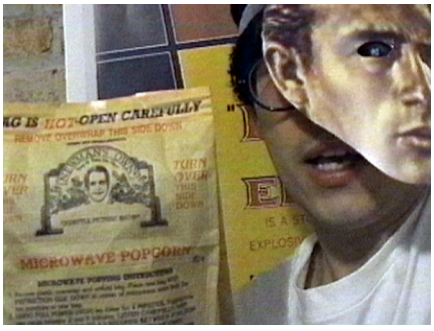
Death and the College Student, Hi8 video transferred to digital video (color, sound), 32:15. 1999

Exhibited at Mathew, Berlin (2012); Herald Street, London (2011)

Description from Annie Godrey Larmon:
Death and the College Student (1999), Telly & Casper (2000), and (Goodbye to) Manhattan (2010) variously locate the precariousness of the subject within a nascent history of global data streams, feedback loops, and the metabolism of neoliberal capitalism, as portrayed by bodies that have become cognitively and affectively congested. Okiishi's characters trace some embedded virality and versioning that is symptomatic of paying attention within an attention economy. The artist lolls around in a dorm room, sandwiched between a television playing My Own Private Idaho, The Matrix, and Rebel Without a Cause, and a wall consumed by posters of the same films. Boys hanging around an early internet New York City unwittingly slip in and out of reenactments of the Larry Clark film Kids. Diane Keaton's character from Woody Allen's Manhattan spouts a busted script, translated by google: "We do not haven ourselves often argued and I, I could my identity longer to a so brilliant, dominating man subordinate." Each of these works troubles and exposes some potential for unmediated spontaneity within virtual spaces and networks.

Description, from ubuweb.com:
In what appears to be a college dorm room, Okiishi delivers a freewheeling presentation on the intertextual martyrdoms of James Dean and especially of River Phoenix, tortured film stars who became queer icons in their untimely deaths. Readings are interspersed with half-reenacted scenes from My Own Private Idaho (1991), Gus Van Sant's classic of New Queer Cinema; and from The Matrix (1999), the blockbuster fantasy starring Keanu Reeves -- object of gay desire in Van Sant's film, now in the role of action star and messianic hero.





E.lliotT.: Children of the New Age, digital video (color, sound), 19:28. 2004

Exhibited on http://www.keystoourheart.tv/ (2012); at The Camden Arts Centre, London (2009); at Evas Arche und der Feminist, Berlin (2006)

Description:
E.lliotT.: Children of the New Age excavates the television universe c. 1984-1997 in the present (c. 2004). It follows the banal evening narrative of suburban life--dinner, T.V., hygiene, going to sleep--with intervening dialogue, imagery, tropes and soundtracks culled from the Vegetarian Cook Book of The Los Angeles Lodge of The Theosophical Society (c. 1919), Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone (c. 2000), Alice Bailey's Treatise on Cosmic Fire, the Scientology website, esoteric alien literature, "holistic medicine" advertising, Rudolf Steiner's lectures on Waldorf education, memories from the artist's childhood, Raëlian scriptures, Reality T.V., Who's the Boss? (late 1980's-early 90's sitcom), the consumer "crisis" over food purity, cooking shows, Heaven's Gate and Jonestown, the New York Times, MSN News, collective memory of hippies and "life-reformers," and the initial launching pad for the video: Steven Spielberg's E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (and Michael Jackson's audio retelling).

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Ken Okiishi
E.lliotT.: Children of the New Age, 2004
Digital video (color/sound)
19 minutes 28 seconds
Edition of 5 plus 2
(OKII 2004001)

Video stills

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Installation view: *Phantom Limbs*, Pilar Corrias Gallery, London, 27 June – 1 August 2014

Issue 7: Tourism | Travel | Criticism | 9/11 | Television

Never Forget to Remember

On disaster and tourism

KEN OKIISHI

Photos of the World Trade Center site in New York, 2001-2, by Olivier Culmann

For many tourists, traveling to New York City is a voyage inside the TV. It is a pilgrimage to the mise en scène of countless television series and films — indeed to the physical space of fantasy. Certain tourist attractions literalize this feeling: *Good Morning America*, and *Total Request Live* invite you to wave, for an instant, out of the screen. In New York City, everything can become charged with a televised memory.

It's like it was happening on TV, like it was a movie, like it wasn't real. So many New Yorkers echo the same feeling about the events of September 11. The events — all of our language, every way we try to retell it, the narration becomes epic and filmic — and, by now, saccharine, generic, mythic. That looping image of the towers exploding — *everyone, everywhere*, was watching, over and over.

Nearly five years later, tourists still flock to Ground Zero, squinting in silence at informational placards attached to the "viewing fence." A woman sobs as she stands with her three-year old daughter in front of the heading: "No history is without its heartache." Her daughter dutifully looks up at the sign like it should be speaking to her. Her mother seems to misrecognize the vacant expression as the shock, the sadness of patriotic reality. She squeezes her daughter's already tightly clenched hand even harder.

All cameras are pointed up. How do you photograph an absence? Tourists also zoom in on well-known images printed on the "historical" placards: memorial candles encircling a photo of the towers ablaze, "The Heroes" — you know the rest, as everyone does by now.

I look down into the concrete pit. It's bizarrely vacant. The only person I see is a security guard walking up and down the temporary metal stairways. Gazing through the "viewing fence," past the I-beam cross, I try to locate the site of the escalator I only ever stumbled upon by chance. Looking into this memory ditch, I try to remember what it was like to go up that escalator, tucked away behind, or in front of…it was always in shadows, there was a bridge, cars honking, around a corner the escalator opened directly onto the sidewalk, floating up the tunnel, an automatic revolving door, a series of vacant sky-walks, and then — all of a sudden — a shopping mall coliseum with palm trees and a stage and immense windows framing the glorious Hudson River. I used to love the way this space made everything seem totally containable. It was when the aesthetics of corporatism still held a secret awe, when it seemed sort of cool that even air and water were being commodified.

The palm trees, the stage, the shopping mall and the corporate village is still there. The World Financial Center is a survivor. But the approach, that wandering into sublime disorientation, is gone. *Over there, I think, it was over there; no, over there. Over there* is as precise as my memory gets, pointing into this pit. I too am sucked into a hazy void of nostalgic non-communication. Like the tourists I deride, I have been standing at Ground Zero hushed, traversing the foggy path of memory charted for us each day on Fox News or Oprah. We may not all be traveling through the same details, but the destination, a sacralized silence, is the same.

Susan Sontag, just days after 9/11, was able to write her notoriously incisive words because she was away, in Berlin. The words still ring true, even if they no longer seem so explosive: "We have a robotic president who assures us that America stands tall…The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators in recent days seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy." Upon her return home to New York, one month after penning those words and two weeks after they were printed in *The New Yorker*, she blamed her polemic on a TV "overdose," from watching "CNN for 48 hours straight" directly following the attack. In a subsequent *Salon.com* interview with David Talbot, Sontag disengaged from her previous critique with zingers such as, "I'll take the American empire any day over the empire of what my pal Chris Hitchens calls 'Islamic fascism.'" While traveling from the alienating comfort of the American Academy in Berlin to an assaultive public in a glitched-up New York City, Sontag swung from a caustic attack on the hollow rhetoric of American pseudo-democracy to an apologia for imperialism.

What happens when disaster strikes at home while you're "away"? Why do all of these people make this pilgrimage to visit my home, my Manhattan, in stagnant shambles? Tourism is supposed to be about escape, about skimming a location — a dream that flutters in the space between projection and materiality. At Ground Zero, disaster and tourism collide for reasons more spiritual: the diffusion of political dissent.

Originally published in:

Tourism, Spring 2006

Photo by Born O'Brien O'Connell. Styling by Avena Gallagher

The New York Times

Art in Review

‘Perfect Man II’

By HOLLAND COTTER
Published: October 6, 2011
320 West 13th Street, West Village
Through Oct. 15

In 2007, at the gallery White Columns, the artist Rita Ackermann organized an exhibition called “The Perfect Man Show” that consisted almost entirely of art by women and took 21st-century feminism as its theme. By implication, “the perfect man” of the title either didn’t exist or didn’t matter.
Now comes the sequel, and, as if to right a balance, it’s a nearly all-male affair, one that attempts to take the measure of — what to call it? — contemporary masculine-ism, a subject so weighty, not to say leaden, that

Ms. Ackermann recruited a second curator, Parinaz Mogadassi, to help out.
It looks as if they had fun with this project. They’ve given it a heroicizing description: “The focus of this exhibition is on those men who are on a quest, on the cold and sharpest blade of a knife,” and so on. And — what really counts — they’ve made smart, offbeat choices of art and artists.

The visual testosterone level is fairly high. Markus Lüpertz’s gigantic bronze “Shepherd” dominates the beginning of the show, along with a prickly junk relief called “Hammer of Doom,” by the hip-hop-inspired Rammellzee, who died in 2010. And there are sports-bar themes in Malcolm Morley’s painting of a hockey goalie and an installation by Antoine Catala with college football broadcasts blasting from facing flat screens.

Mr. Catala adds a third element, though. Between the facing screens he has placed a distorting mirror that turns both the broadcast pictures and the figure of the reflected viewer into cartoon images. A lot of the show looks that way.

In a gallery devoted to the theme of labor, everything appears to be either absurd or a failure, or both. In a video from 1968 we see Richard Serra’s hand repeatedly trying, without success, to grasp bits of falling matter. A 1983 photograph by the Hungarian avant-gardist Miklos Erdely (1928-86) records a man hammering two nails into a wall just so he can have something to hang the hammer on. And there’s Dan Graham’s 1966 “Detumescence,” a written account of a chronic male performative shortcoming.
One of the show’s messages seems to be that when men don’t try hard to be “male,” they do better. The modest delicacies served in paintings by Kai Althoff suggest that a new type of man, imperfect and proud, has emerged in art in the last few decades, though not without resistance, as Ken Okiishi’s astute video on one questing man illustrates.

In this piece, the best in the show, Mr. Okiishi revisits the artist David Wojnarowicz’s 1980s diaristic accounts of his obsessive search for sex on abandoned piers that once lined the Hudson River near Chelsea. The video, however, transports Wojnarowicz (pronounced voy-nah-ROH-vitch), who died in 1992, into the present (via an actor playing him) and has him frantically pacing around the colossal family-fun sports-and-entertainment center called Chelsea Piers, which has replaced his old, illicit haunts. For better or worse, and probably some of each, the time of living on “the cold and sharpest blade of a knife” is over.

"David Wojnarowicz" in "New York," 1999. Hi8 video transferred to digital video (color, sound), 18:05. 1999/2000

Exhibited at White Columns, New York (2011); Daniel Reich Temp space at the Chelsea Hotel (2006)

Description, pulled from a review of "Perfect Man II" at White Columns in the New York Times by Holland Cotter, October 6, 2011:

"One of the show's messages seems to be that when men don't try hard to be "male," they do better. The modest delicacies served in paintings by Kai Althoff suggest that a new type of man, imperfect and proud, has emerged in art in the last few decades, though not without resistance, as Ken Okiishi's astute video on one questing man illustrates.

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'David Wojnarowicz' in 'New York,' 1999-2001, series of 25 color photographs, 10 x 13.5 inches each
installation view, Greene Naftali, New York, 2011

'David Wojnarowicz' in 'New York,' 1999-2001, series of 25 color photographs, 10 x 13.5 inches each
installation detail, Greene Naftali, New York, 2011 (note, pixelization is in the printed photographs)

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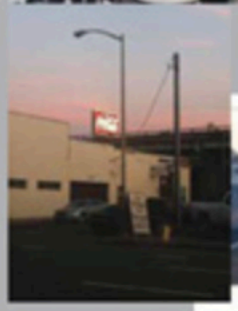

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Ken Okiishi, *David Wojnarowicz in New York*, 1999-2001,
from a series of 25 color photographs, 13 × 10 inches each

The Threat of the Provincial

Ken Okiishi

First take (begin voice-over):

"New York feels like New York again." So many people have said this recently—that is, since we wandered downtown trying to find Zuccotti Park (none of us had ever heard of it before). Wandering through the grid—around Wall Street the grid of the city really intensifies, with towering structures, a sense of descending down, the multiplication of barricades, of police presence, of men and women in suits, rushing around; electronic identification stations allowing/forbidding access into "spaces," where the flows of financial capitalism are formed by the words exchanged, the screams across the trading floor, the towers of typing fingers. (The security state at the financial nodes of power. The silvery chic of violence in the air. The legitimacy that aesthetic solidity gives to notions of certain bodies being more valuable than others...) We read about "Occupy" also on the screen, typing into search engines, flipping through live streams, anxious twittering and Facebook grandstanding—and then ran out "onto the streets" to be part of the action.

This is the paradigm shift in which I now find myself trying to write—and the shifting is still all over the place. When I said yes to writing for this issue of *May*, that was "before Zuccotti," as people now say... And I find myself confronted with how, exactly, to write into a paradigm shift like this, in the moment of the shifting. It's December now, you will read this in May, June, who knows... October? Just two or three months ago, I was down on global cities, and had a fantasy about up and moving to a "provincial" city I'd never visited before. I wanted to write about the charms of provincial life as a programming glitch or blind spot or unintended zone of crystalline decay—or really, the forgotten modes of abjection—within the matrix of global financial capitalism that the "provincial" can (unknowingly) become. But my mind now wanders to back to New York—strangely. Partially because, like in many cities, we suddenly have this nostalgia for the 1990s. But partially because all of this Occupy stuff—down to the grunge + sportswear aesthetic—has reminded me of a time in the late 1990s in New York when we were feeling the speed of a different force, a more "local" force, what is now a bit dryly well-known as "gentrification"—and I mean the specific kind facilitated by the globalized culture industry/corporate real estate investors. (It has been amusing, as a New Yorker, to go to small cities around Europe where people almost brag about how terrible "gentrification" is "in their city too," as they point out all of the "cool" contemporary art venues, bookstores, coffee shops, and other boutiques they "also" have.) The process of gentrification, in this now almost archetypal narrative (from Soho to Chanel boutique and Best Buy; from public sex piers to fashion photography studios, jogging, and contemporary art), was in the last gasps of resistance circa 1999.

cut to:

One of the most disheartening things experienced by those of us who moved to New York City in the late 1990s was the rapid reterritorialization by Mayor Giuliani's "Quality of Life Campaign" of what we had experienced in movies, in books—in our dreams—as the essential flows of urban experience: the random danger of the street, the cacophony of the club, the endless unfolding of encounters with anonymous others, the sense that anything was possible, that the unexpected would not be unusual—that life could have the texture of cruising, of chance sex in the public realm. At this particular conjuncture, we could *still* fantasize about holding on to a "former" possibility because there were still pockets of this cinematic experience available to the narratives of our day. For example, Giuliani was just beginning to be effective at having the police spend time enforcing arcane laws about not dancing in bars or operating a sex shop within a certain number of feet of a residential building or church. Eventually, the aggressive enforcement of these laws really brought an end to a certain vibrancy of existence in the city. But, at least for a moment, there were still huge clubs, a few movie theaters where porn was still a physical, shared activity—and that "Hmmm, what's going on here?" feeling that you get when you suddenly find yourself in a cruising zone—or, really, zone of any sort of illicit activity. And it wasn't just interior—things were still happening out on the street, and those things didn't need social media to exist or for any of us to find them. Now, I get text messages telling me to come to The [new] Cock [which is where The Hole used to be] on Sundays, because it is so "crazy" (the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene inspectors, apparently, don't work on Sunday nights...); the entire texture of urban experience has been relegated to a handful of bars, and only on specific nights of the week... (And then, of course, there is the completely privatized and mediated realm of the iPhone cruising app, Grindr, where everyone else with the app in a certain proximity of your current global positioning, anytime, anywhere, will show you a photo of their penis so you can potentially meet up and feel the real thing. Just as semiocapitalism would have us remove all borders of time to work, we are also now meant to have no borders to sex as well.)

cut to:

What would now be called "corporate" in terms of the look, was then called "suburbanification" or "Disneyfication." The Disney part referred specifically to what had happened to Times Square in order to attract consumer spending to a dilapidated sector of the city. Corporate investment, in collaboration with city government, expelled small businesses (with the "grit" that we all love) in order to make it have a more "big time" appeal and become desirable to "families"—i.e. middle-class tourists. Huge versions of stores they already knew from home—The Disney Store, Toys"R"Us, etc.—carved a hyper-suburban hole into a zone that was formally known as a gray zone of prostitution, drugs, sex shops—and original theater and musicals not based on Disney films (i.e. an urban zone that had an escapist place within the daily narrative of urban life—not a sector to avoid at all costs). Literally, it became Disney. Whether or not it was intended to be desirable only to

tourists is questionable, but, as we have all learned in the last ten or so years, once corporate bodies take over our space, we "little" bodies can no longer compete. We don't, on the financial scale of the corporate body, exist—except as a mass of consumers. And they will find other bodies to consume if we don't want to...

cut to:

In addition to the now world-famous "WE are the 99%, YOU are the 99%," I also heard a good old-fashioned "Whose streets? Our streets!" at the last OWS Day of Action, as the march moved from the sidewalk to the street. I looked around. I was the only person I knew in the crowd who actually lived in the neighborhood—or Manhattan, for that matter. "Our streets," have been sold to "corporate greed"; and now there are all of these other bodies claiming a metaphoric hold on "our streets," or the symbolic hold of "the streets," that belong to everyone, all 99%. I'm not sure what I think of this most recent appropriation of "our streets." So I won't say anything at all.

cut to:

The provincial/urban as a border-organizing principle which, upended, shifts vision everywhere. A new hierarchization of global vision... but different from the first post-modern version of this. We actually want to become authentic characters within this *mise-en-scène* supposed to be lost to global bodies and tourists...

Demarcations uptown, downtown, etc. and globalization frame financial scale change subjectivity

cut to:

Think about the aesthetics of privately owned public space. Sixty Wall Street as Deutsche Bank lobby. Deutsche Bank lobby in Frankfurt as invited art chaos six months before... Can occupation really be "hosted" and/or "sponsored," when critical conceptual art is already the type of "entertainment" desired by people who work in finance (at least the "European" ones)? Does the soft-host theory of occupation hold any water?

Second take:

When asked to write for *May* related to the "provincial" and the "local," especially as these designations have gained a positive (rather than purely pejorative) sense, or at least a certain cache within "vanguard" art-world concerns in the last ten or so years, I began immediately to wonder how I might complicate this by pitting it against urban contexts—or with "city people," since I have lived all of my adult life in New York City, and moved here, like everyone, to escape the blandness of everywhere else in America. To put it more bluntly, I thought about how this could be articulated in a way that rubs up against my own snobbism, which still thinks that "provincial" is a legitimate insult. I have to admit, I have witnessed a dilapidation of urban experience—of the possibility of a psychogeographical friction in the potential for danger and spontaneous emergence

of experiences and ideas—since I moved to New York City in 1997. And, at least in the late 1990s/early 2000s, this was often described in terms of a suburbanization—in terms of corporate eradication of neighborhood infrastructure and liveliness, and the implementation of the police state to enforce a "Quality of Life Campaign" of aesthetic cleansing. And I have felt the pain of running out of ideas that this increased blandness produces. I first felt this sense of being deprived.

cut to:

Insert into the present a split view, a reflective mode, a fold of recent histories crisscrossing the accelerated time of "direct action."

cut to:

"Whose streets? Our streets!" rings false. As a demand, it is not that "we" want the streets to belong to "us"; we want streets that excite transformations of subjectivities outside of an ability to recognize the street as "ours" or "yours"—but as an unfolding... no, think this through. Blah and blah... The urban street is not cruising...

This city has become so provincial-on-speed that I am exhausted and empty. I need to start at a point of reminiscence, at a point in time when I could feel my own subjectivity-in-transition more clearly set against a city that still had an edge—where the cleansing of space felt threatening, rather than totalizing and complete. I can only try to remember the moment when shedding the... When the shift was still visible as a shift. Before the urban became an intensification of the friendly and safe suburban, and the suburban became a vacuum of state-corporate austerity (Walmart, endless foreclosures, no health, no care). Maybe I can slow down the view for a second—remember what it used to be like to walk down the street. What it felt like to push, to be able to push against, the increasingly narrow and financially coercive scripting of subjectivity...

rewind to:

September 24, 1999.

I walk into the Astor Place Kinko's copy center. I'm dressed in "Everybody in Vests" (GAP). In my backpack is a pair of well-worn, tight-fitting stonewashed jeans, a tight-fitting white t-shirt, a jeans jacket with the arms torn off, a pack of cigarettes, *The Waterfront Journals* by David Wojnarowicz, the catalog from the Wojnarowicz retrospective at the New Museum, and a Kinko's copy card.

I walk over to a copy machine and dump the contents of my bag on the floor. I lift the lid of the copier, open the catalog to page 92—the picture of David Wojnarowicz with his mouth sewn shut—place the image on the glass, shut the lid, and insert the copy card. While that is copying, I remove my GAP costume and put on the jeans, t-shirt, and jeans jacket.

I chant an excerpt from David Wojnarowicz's "Untitled" (1992), over and over in my head. [Text screen-printed red over photograph of bandaged hands—reprinted on page 83 of *Brush Fires in the Social Landscape*.]

Ken Okiishi, *David Wojnarowicz in New York*, 1999-2001,
from a series of 25 color photographs, 13 × 10 inches each

I am a xerox of my former self.
I am a xerox of my former self.
I am a xerox of my former self.
Etc.

I continue chanting as I cut David's head out of the xerox print, make a hole for eyes and mouth, and scotch tape the mask to my head. I walk outside and hail a cab on Broadway.

I tell the driver, "Hey, man, take me to Chelsea Piers," as the daytime talk show host Sally Jessy Raphael's recorded voice reminds me to buckle up for safety. The phrase "buckle up" always reminds me of highway driving back where I grew up—the signs posted by the DOT along the road: "Iowa: We Make You Smile" and "Buckle Up: It's *Our* Law."

I chant from "In the Shadow of the American Dream: Soon All This Will Be Picturesque Ruins" (*Close to the Knives*, page 26).

Driving a machine through the days and nights of the empty and pressurized landscape eroticizes the whole world fitting in through the twin apertures of the eyes

Driving a machine through the days and nights of the empty and pressurized landscape eroticizes the whole world fitting in through the twin apertures of the eyes

Driving a machine through the days and nights of the empty and pressurized landscape eroticizes the whole world fitting in through the twin apertures of the eyes
Etc.

The cab pulls up to the main parking garage entrance of Chelsea Piers Sports and Entertainment Complex. Sally Jessy Raphael's voice reminds me to take my stuff with me (and, joking, asks if I've found her iconic red glasses in the backseat). A parking attendant dressed as a "Chelsea Boy" dressed as a "Sailor" directs the flow of traffic. A large GAP billboard across the West Side Highway directs the line of people waiting to enter Pier 59 ("the world's largest fashion/entertainment photography studio complex"): "Everybody in Leather." The Spectacolor Video 1.5 billboard next to the Chelsea Piers Roller Rinks reminds us to be grateful to our corporate sponsors, who made this all possible. Because I think he's kind of cute, I ask the "sailor" for a light. He doesn't have one because he, of course, doesn't smoke.

I enter the partially enclosed walkway adjacent to the various sections of the four-pier sports and entertainment extravaganza. The whole walkway is made of concrete: the floor is painted red and the walls are painted blue. The ceiling is decorated with nylon banners advertising the suburban family fun inside.

I chant from "Self-Portrait in Twenty-Three Rounds" (*Close to the Knives*, page 3).

So my heritage is a calculated fuck on some faraway sun-filled bed while the curtains are being sucked in and out of an open window by a passing breeze

So my heritage is a calculated fuck on some faraway sun-filled bed while the curtains are being sucked in and out of an open window by a passing breeze

So my heritage is a calculated fuck on some faraway sun-filled bed while the curtains are being sucked in and out of an open window by a passing breeze
Etc.

These are some of the things I pass as I chant:
The Chelsea Piers Store; an Evian vending machine; a POWERADE ("The Official Drink of the Olympics") vending machine; a Sprite vending machine; a 5 x 5 grid of color television monitors broadcasting real-time surveillance images from various parts of the complex—the footage exchanges from monitor to monitor in a "cool" pattern, rendering the surveillance decorative; a portion of the massive parking garage; a Coke vending machine; an Evian vending machine; another Coke vending machine; the dock for Celestial Cruises around Manhattan Island; a very selective history of the piers, printed billboard-style on huge aluminum squares (some random soldiers off to war, a forgotten movie star, Olympic athletes who rode boats that rode past the piers); Pier Sixty Event Center; another portion of the massive parking garage; a Reebok store; Rita's Burgers; another Evian vending machine; another Coke vending machine; a Fruitopia vending machine; another POWERADE ("The Official Drink of the Olympics") vending machine; Chelsea Piers Bowling.

These are some of the people I pass as I chant:
A group of toddlers in gymnastics class; two groups of thirty-something men playing indoor soccer; a group of thirty-something women playing basketball; four or five Hasidic Jewish families on Sukkot holiday; many trendy sporty rollerbladers; a few Chelsea boys on a jog; businessmen from Lands' End (shop-by-mail clothing) and Shop.com exchanging business cards.

I arrive at Pier 59, The Golf Club, which "with 52 heated and weather-protected hitting stalls of four levels, a computerized automatic ball tee-up system, and 200-yard, net-enclosed artificial-turf fairway, is the most technologically-advanced golf driving range and teaching center in the United States." Middle-aged businessmen in khaki pants and starched white button-downs hitting little white balls into nowhere for hours after another day of pretending to look busy at work through random internet browsing.

So my heritage is a calculated fuck on some faraway sun-filled bed while the curtains are being sucked in and out of an open window by a passing breeze

Ken Okiishi, *David Wojnarowicz in New York*, 1999-2001,
from a series of 25 color photographs, 13 × 10 inches each

I sit down on a bench at the end of the pier which is the golfing practice range. The sound of golf balls smacking the fence makes me think they're actually hitting the back of my skull, only something is preventing me from being able to physically feel the pain.

The sun is beginning to set, but it won't be anything to put on a postcard. The sky is so heavy with unfulfilled rain clouds that I can only tell the sun is setting because the band of clouds at the horizon has moved from a nondescript pale pink to a yellowish light gray. A friend told me about this sunset he once saw where the cloud cover made the sun into a perfect square of the most intense yellow he had ever seen. Today, the clouds are too thick for that minimalist fantasy. But the sky, right now, that thick mistiness, like a grainy black and white photograph printed really big; like that Félix González-Torres billboard with the two birds flying free among the clouds—only the birds in this sky have to share the clouds with circling police and corporate helicopters.

I pull out *The Waterfront Journals*, and read:
He's got me down on my knees and I can't focus on anything I have no time to understand the position of my body or the direction of my face I see a pair of legs in rough corduroy and the color of the pants is brown and surrounded by dark shadows and there's a sense of other people here and yet I can't hear them breathe or their feet move or anything and his hand suddenly comes up against the back of my head and he's got his fingers locked in my hair and he's shoving my face forward and twisting my head almost gentle but very violent behind the gentleness and I only got half a breath in my lungs and the smell of piss on the floorboards and this heavy bulge in his pants getting harder and harder as my face is forced against the front of his pants the zipper tearing my lips I feel them getting fat and bruised and all the while he's stroking my face and tightening his fingers around the locks of my hair and I can't focus my eyes my head being pushed and pulled and twisted and caressed and it's as if I got no hands I know I got hands I had hands a half hour ago I remember lighting a cigarette with them and I remember how warm the flame of the match was when I lifted it towards his face and my knees are hurting real bad from the stone floor hurting because they banged on the floor when he dragged me down the cellar stairs I remember a door in the darkness and the breath of his dog as it licked at my hands when I reached out to stop my head-long descent its tongue licking at my fingers and my face slams down and there's this electric blam inside my head and it's like my eyes suddenly opened on one huge bright sun and then went black with the switch thrown down and I'm shocked and there's pressure on my face on my forehead and something cold and wet and his arms come swinging down he's lifting me up saying looking for me? and he buries his face and I feel his saliva running down into the curve of my neck and my arms are hanging loose and my head is way back and I can see a ceiling and a dim bulb tossing back and forth and suddenly I'm on my knees again and my face is getting mashed into his belly and sliding down across rough cloth and the metal zipper

and there's this sweet musty smell and I can't breathe and my head is pulled back and his dick is slapping across my eyes...

When I look up from reading, I notice a blond-haired boy my age standing twenty feet to my right, at the corner of the pier. He's wearing khakis and a white button-down, like the middle-aged golfers behind us. He has some luggage with him, like he just arrived from somewhere or is just about to go somewhere. We make eye contact, and for that split second he's wearing crotch-hugging stone-washed jeans and a tight white t-shirt that hasn't been washed in months. And he's beckoning me over to light that cigarette seductively lingering between his lips. A Tribeca yuppie family walks in front of my hallucination—the little boy is beaming because he just found a golf ball that managed to escape the caged golf range, and his parents are walking five feet in front of him, oblivious to his joy. A private yacht docks in the first stall of the pier, my fantasy boy picks up his bags and walks towards it. His girlfriend is waving at him with a big smile on her face.

As the sun sets completely, the golf driving range floodlights become brighter. The metal railings protecting me from the Hudson River glow harsh white against the now dark mauve sky.

I put *The Waterfront Journals* back in my backpack and leave Chelsea Piers Sports and Entertainment Complex via the Surfside 3 restaurant.

I make my way down the pedestrian walkway between the West Side Highway and the Hudson River, down to where the Hudson River Park Redevelopment project is still in the planning and building phases—where I can still "get some." When I finally reach the intersection of the highway and Christopher Street, there is a police patrol car parked right by the pier, like it's just waiting for me to walk down that last poorly lit portion of the Hudson Riverfront that isn't fenced off for construction. But do I even want to go there, police or not? The patrol car moves on, so I have to go for it now.

Near the entrance of the pier, someone has spray-painted on the asphalt pavement: "Why doesn't the U.S. government help people implanted—Computer chips"

It's amazing how quickly the prospect of public sex becomes unromanticized when you realize everyone on the pier is at least twice your age and weight. And it's amazing how romanticized it again becomes when you notice a beautiful blonde boy about your age looking your way from the end of the pier. And it's amazing how unromanticized it again becomes when you realize he's the one you saw holding hands with a girlfriend at MoMA last Friday night. The one you wished so hard was single and gay because he was so pretty. The one whose dick you would now try to suck, knowing all too well that he wouldn't even tell you his name, or even say thanks after he came in your mouth. No breakfast the next morning. No holding hands in Central Park. No long, sweet kiss goodnight.

La menace du provincial

Ken Okiishi

Première prise (commencer en voix *off*) :
« New York ressemble à nouveau à New York. » Tant de gens ont dit ça récemment – c'est-à-dire, depuis qu'on erre en ville à la recherche de Zuccotti Park (aucun d'entre nous n'en avait entendu parler auparavant). En passant dans le périmètre encerclé autour de Wall Street, le quadrillage de la ville s'intensifie nettement avec les structures des tours, la sensation de s'enfoncer dans la ville, la multiplication des barricades, la présence de la police, d'hommes en costume et de femmes en tailleur, qui courent et s'affairent ; des stations d'identification électroniques autorisant/interdisant l'accès aux « espaces » où les flux du capitalisme financier circulent par des mots échangés, des cris sortant de la salle des marchés, les tours des doigts qui tapent sur des claviers. (L'état de sureté au cœur du pouvoir financier. Le chic argenté de la violence dans l'air. La légitimité que la solidité esthétique donne à l'idée que certains corps ont plus de valeur que d'autres...) On accède aussi à « l'Occupation » sur les écrans, tapant dans des moteurs de recherche, surfant sur des sessions en direct, via un chat anxieux sur Twitter et aux premières loges sur Facebook – avant de « descendre dans la rue » pour participer à l'action.

C'est le même déplacement de paradigme que celui dans lequel je me trouve actuellement, en essayant d'écrire – et le changement est encore très confus. Quand j'ai accepté d'écrire pour ce numéro de *May*, c'était « avant Zuccotti », comme on dit maintenant... et je me retrouve confronté au problème de la manière d'écrire, dans un déplacement de paradigme comme celui-ci, au moment du changement. Nous sommes en décembre, et vous lirez ceci en mai, juin, ou... qui sait, octobre ? Il y a seulement deux ou trois mois, j'en voulais aux villes planétaires, et je fantasmais à l'idée d'aller dans une ville de « province » que je ne connaissais pas. Je voulais écrire sur les charmes de la vie provinciale, comme si celle-ci était une erreur de programmation, une voie sans issue ou encore une zone au déclin transparent involontaire – ou vraiment, des modes de vie sordides oubliés – dans la matrice du capitalisme financier mondial que le « provincial » peut (à son insu) devenir. Mais aujourd'hui, mon esprit vagabonde et me ramène à New York – bizarrement. En partie parce que, comme dans beaucoup de villes, on a soudain la nostalgie des années 1990. Mais en partie seulement parce que toute cette affaire d'Occupation – descente dans le grunge + esthétique du sportwear – m'a rappelé une époque à New York à la fin des années 1990, où nous sentions l'arrivée rapide d'une force différente, une force plus « locale », ce qu'on appelle maintenant, de manière désabusée, « gentrification », et j'entends par là le genre spécifiquement encouragé par l'industrie de la culture/des investisseurs

Documenta 12

KEN OKIISHI

Ai Weiwei, *Template*, 2007, installation of wooden doors and windows from the Ming and Qing Dynasty. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Urs Meile

Kassel
Documenta 12
Aue-Pavillon
July 16–September 23, 2007

When Roger M Buergel, the artistic director of Documenta 12, first released the three leitmotifs in February 2006 that would "correspond, overlap, or disintegrate — like a musical score" in the exhibition, I was struck with wonder. "Is modernity our antiquity?" "What is bare life?" "What is to be done [with education]?" These questions seemed provocatively elusive, strangely scattered, and perhaps just a bit too (academically) trendy. When he and the curator of the exhibition, Ruth Noack, failed to release the hotly anticipated list of Documenta artists — a list that functions more for marketing and social-climbing than anything else — I was even more intrigued. And in January of this year, when Buergel participated in a New Museum "Hot Button!" panel at Cooper Union and delivered an impromptu meditation on, among other things, a photo of the shipping containers used as "Art Positions" galleries at Art Basel Miami ("an allegory of an aesthetic of death"), I was in love.

While walking through the exhibition, my high hopes shifted into mixed reactions: dissatisfaction flipping into infatuation; awe that quickly wore thin and then ballooned into tears; and, in the aftermath, heated arguments about why it's "good" that the fantasy of building a Crystal Palace to house the curatorial paradigm of the twenty-first century ended up as such an ostentatious aberration. Yes, I even thought the screwed-up engineering that allowed this summer's climate-change torrential storms to seep water into the Aue-Pavillon added to an aesthetic of disarticulation. And when Ai Weiwei's neo-imperial "Template," a twelve-meter-high temple of wooden windows and doors salvaged from "all over China," was knocked down by strong winds, even better. What, you might ask, could possibly be so interesting about one of the most important international art exhibitions in the former West becoming such a mess?

In some ways, Documenta 12 was an attempt to revisit the improvisatory spirit of Documenta before it became such a major institution. Originally enacted in tandem with the German Federal Garden Show of 1955, the "first" Documenta (whose organizers were unaware of its position as the first of many) was meant to serve multiple postwar governmental and cultural aims, from pragmatically redirecting tourism to the marginalized, war-torn city of Kassel to emblematizing the potential for the recovery of a shattered civilization. Literally, roses grew out of piles of rubble, and art was displayed in the "scantily renovated" ruins of the Enlightenment-era Museum Fridericianum. It goes without saying that much has happened since 1955, but Documenta 12 pulled from the original a Shubertian sensibility, the melancholy beauty of high hopes in the void. Documenta 11 (2002), whose thematics gained electrifying legitimacy as fatigued academic discourses shifted into popular overdrive post–September 11, was a massive and sometimes tiresome overview of art and architecture related to the curatorial team's ideas about globalization. Documenta 12, on the other hand, found its five-year cycle smack in the middle of the current global situation: the banality of apocalypse. Rather than attempting to give an overview of responses, or preaching about current events, Buergel and Noack took the more old-school position of curator-as-dilettante-nerd — in the sexiest sense of that accusation. They tried out too many ideas, mostly only halfway; they tracked down obscure, rarified artists and decorative objects, many previously "unknown in the West"; they used the site for experiments in weirdness, digression, fantasy, and play; and they gave the proceedings a quaintly retro, early nineties sense of sexual transgression. But what could it mean to recover the subjectivity of an intellectual upper class after so many challenges to and reconfigurations of the notion of curator as wayward aristocrat?

Ai Weiwei, *Template*, 2007, installation of wooden doors and windows from the Ming and Qing Dynasty. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Urs Meile

Noack and Buergel — but especially Buergel — can be accused of flinging out some pretty bizarre provocations. (When asked in a German news conference about the perceived failure of the "Crystal Palace," Buergel responded that "in order to raise money, I endorsed it as a Crystal Palace. Now it's a favela.") But whatever can be said about their public statements and sometimes flippant treatment of individual artists included in the exhibition (complaints on this front circulated wildly in the art world), I found the curating to be radically lyrical — with a particular generosity to openness in the spectator's imagination. This went against the grain of the now orthodox practice of treating artworks, particularly "political" artworks, as having meaning or meanings determined by various contexts, with the explanation of these contexts determining what connections are made and what is "learned" by the spectator. What was strikingly new about Documenta 12 was that a no-explanations-needed, "high" art curatorial approach — one that usually aligns with a more conservative idealist aesthetic of beauty or speculative aesthetic of marketing — met a taste for third world, sociological, queer, Eastern, diasporic, feminist, and other disruptive aesthetics. Indeed, the most political aspect of this show lay not in giving visibility to outsiders, as some have argued, but in an arrangement of artworks that caused spectators to confront and question multiple, perhaps previously unrecognized, subjectivities as complex, artistic, and politically implicated.

It's not that there weren't aspects of the exhibition design and individual artworks that I didn't like; but not liking became an additional element in a complex blend of emotions, sensations, passing thoughts, and reconsiderations. In "best of" survey exhibitions, I often feel like I'm flipping channels between individual art careers, forgetting one as soon as I pass to the next; with Documenta 12, it was passages, mazes, gardens, back alleys — intense encounters mixed with a detailed accumulation of memory. Emblematic of this was a passage of artworks inserted in a sort of void space behind an exhibition of Dutch paintings, *Of the Aristocracy of Painting: Holland Around 1700*, on view in the Old Masters Portrait Gallery of the Schloss Wilhelmshöhe. I made my way through.

Where is the Documenta part? Oh, behind this wall — a video projection (Danica Dakic, "El Dorado," 2006–2007). *A black teenage boy, standing in a museum, speaks in piercing, broken English about some terrifying experience in the Frankfurt airport: strange rooms, a chasm of unwitting, confounded non-communication. Another "ausländisch" teenager kickboxes with a bucolic wallpaper in the background. The story in voiceover starts to cohere: the dissociated experiential details of seeking asylum in Germany. Cut to the director of Kassel's Wallpaper Museum, lecturing in crisp High German about a nineteenth century wallpaper called El Dorado: a panoramic view, from Africa to peacocks to South America, mixed with mosques, Chinoiserie, and tropical foliage — in the countryside of Europe? The boy's voiceover starts again, while other teenagers do repetitive activities throughout the museum, one running in place, some performing less coherent movements: "Will try everything to reach my goal. Because now I am alone and I must work hard to survive. I must start a new life. Yes, a new life. Life doesn't stop." It reminds me of late nineties Nike ads — but what could "just do it" mean to a refugee in Germany, where nationality is still defined predominantly by blood, and an entire life can be passed under the legal status of "guest"?*

Dias & Riedweg, *Funk Staden*, 2007, video installation. Courtesy Galeria Vermelho and Galeria Filomena Soares

Another dark room with little spots of light illuminating individual artworks, like floating thoughts awaiting nexus. The blur of tears makes Mira Schendel's notebooks look like diagrams of what happens to language and mathematical logic during acts of torture, during the "unmaking of the world" (Scarry) at the nucleus of "bare life." What do you get when you add AE/, with a tiny arrow pointing into the E, + ooo(uxyz), with an arrow pointing straight up like a comma between the x and y, hovering in warped, folded, shattered planes with similar marks and symbols reaching for descriptive clarity as the body receives another blow? An anonymous drawing from Calcutta (circa 1900) of a courtesan dressing her hair starts to reverberate Matisse, while in a sketch by John McCracken a cartoon bolt of lightning strikes one of his emptied, alien slabs; Hokusai's drafts for the ornamentation of artisan craftswork start to prefigure minimalism — how does this recrumple the stories of the wrapping-paper dialogue between Imperial Japan and colonial Europe? Extraordinary Mogul Indian Miniatures from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries by Haddschi Maqsud At-Tabrizi, Mihr Chand, and others left unidentified, rip apart the connecting seams: several museums are nested one inside the other, and these crystallizations of narrative, emblem, history — Persian calligraphy, Hindu iconography, Chinese styling — start throbbing.

Through another passageway, a video projection — what the fuck is going on here? (Dias & Riedweg, "Funk Staden," 2007) *Big, sexy sausages on the grill, booty dancing, a circular array of camcorders atop a wooden rod spinning around by a bonfire, sixteenth-century colonialist illustrations of encounters with "wild cannibals" in Brazil, two sweaty guys humping a blow-up doll, funk music…*

Dias & Riedweg, *Funk Staden*, 2007, video installation. Courtesy Galeria Vermelho and Galeria Filomena Soares

In this passage, the three leitmotifs of Documenta 12 incited a crisscrossing of formal, emotional and intellectual elements — and set the spectator's self-reflexive imagination on fire. But it wasn't simply an open-ended fantasia: what emerged as a ligature connecting the leitmotifs was a questioning of what to do with the concept of otherness that has grounded European paradigms of identity since New World encounters spawned the "noble savage" at the core of "know thyself." This is not a new line of questioning, but one that seemed particularly relevant given recent reterritorializations of otherness as essential and functional. Documenta 12 suggested that there is a picture of reality more interesting than what is produced by a society coordinated by networks of "in" and "out" groups; to see that reality, however, demands dealing with the feeling of one's smug, stable, Western self-losing coherence.

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Documentation of the exhibition by Ken Okiishi & Nick Mauss at *Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo*, *August 9 – 27, 2014*:
https://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2014/09/nick-mauss-and-ken-okiishi-at-mendes-wood-dm/

Ken Okiishi
Eggleston und Andere, "reality bites"
16.09. - 18.10.2014

Mathew gallery is pleased to announce a new exhibition by Ken Okiishi.

Okiishi continues his formal and conceptual investigation of a cluster of preoccupations: urban space and experience de- and re-territorialized by internet-networks; forgotten zones; hybrid singularities; historical tracks that do not have to arrive at the pre-programmed outcomes; slicing open subjective frames of vision, where recognizability becomes an estranged conceptual operation; and languages also becoming estranged as they are crudely translated (and chaotically re-signified) into financially amenable--but otherwise totally incompatible--contexts.

At first glance, this appears to be a small exhibition of ostensibly documentary photography in a hybrid of the late-20th century "objective" of the Düsseldorf school of photography and the American color photography tradition of Eggleston and others; to a viewer unfamiliar with the area of (former) West Berlin that is pictured here, the photographs could appear to be "from the 80s or 90s"--but to anyone who has walked around the corner from the gallery, the time of these photographs appears rather difficult to place (it could be 20 years ago, or yesterday). But the sense of the photographic-object is also one of alienation--since the viewer may also find that s/he has no idea what s/he is looking at or why s/he is looking. What is perhaps documented here is the struggle, hidden behind an unflinching face, both of a place and of the photographic eye to cohere and to loosen from identitarian structures that over-signify blankness and some sort of "international" (i.e. Americanness) in this "forgotten" zone of formerly West Berlin. Many of the photographs, it turns out, are of objects and images in shop windows. (FYI: these photographs were taken in the summer of 2007; sat on various hard drives since then; and were printed, as a group, for the first time last month.)

Appearing into this exhibition, as if from a parallel but entirely alien zone, are two new works from Okiishi's recent series, gesture/data, where media histories and technologies of display, distribution, viewing and reception--from the affective condensation of "mark making" through television viewership through the greasy touchscreen swipe of network-hungry swarms--are thrown into formal and material collision. (In this series of works, flat-screen televisions are used as readymade support surfaces for weirdly gestural paintings, that somehow, in the process of working in the studio, also became studies in different modes of color-generation, perception, and simultaneous combination of pixel-light, pigment-light--or, of throwing generally undifferentiated modes of "how we see now" into obvious conflict (such as, the screen-image is not the same as dirt, etc.).

On the way from Airport Tegel to Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, it often looks as if not even a speck of dust has moved in this city in 20 years. Yes--still after all of the gentrification-terror (and its gentrification-paranoia--and -ice cream).

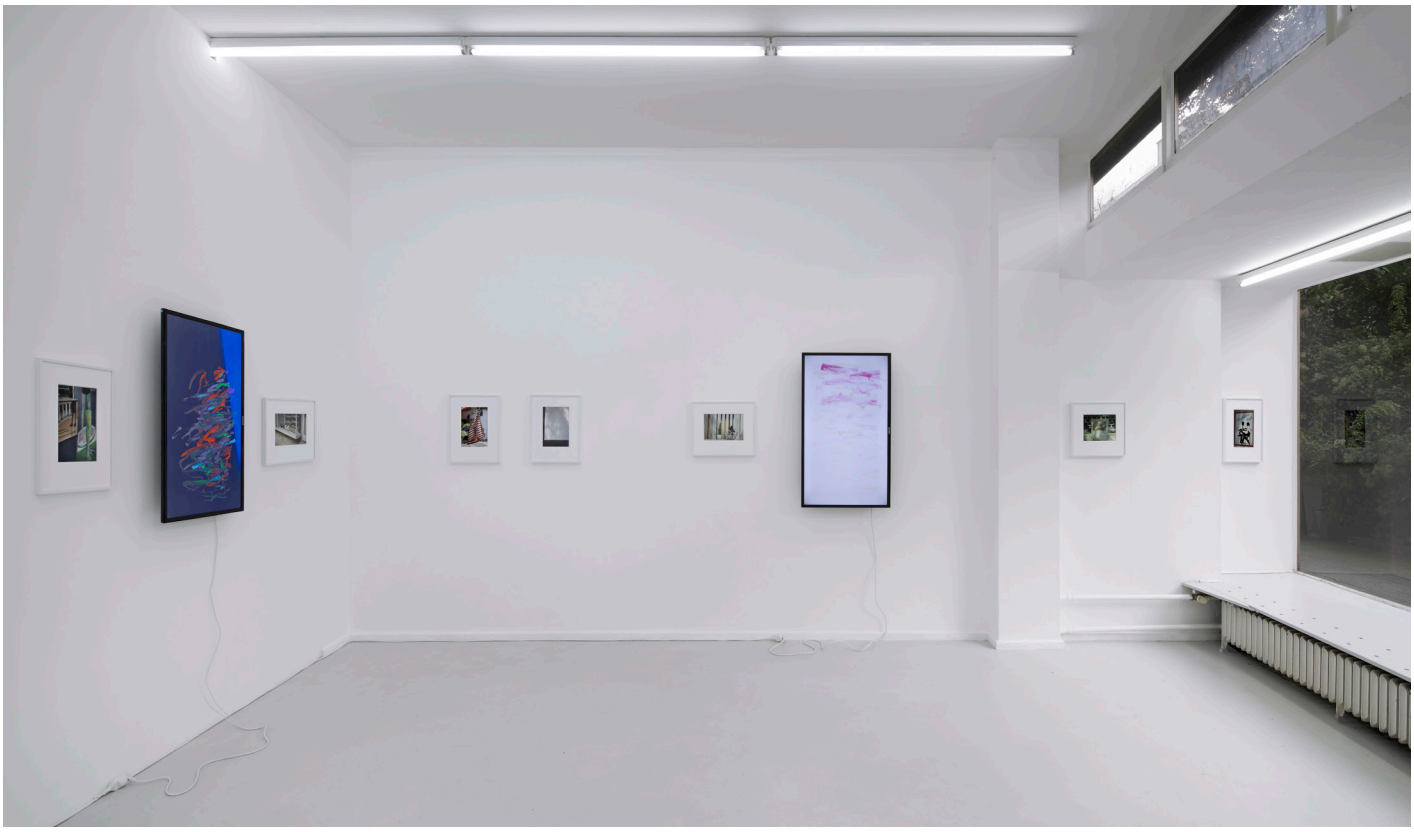
I also noticed, at Manzini, that while there was still an elderly man eating only a raw cucumber with his hand while his retired junkie and/or professor friend ate her fries with stumbly fingers, that the room was also now populated with somewhat rich, middle-aged women, eating alone.
Many holes have been at least partially filled, and new objects and types can be seen in the gaps that used to--so pleasurably--offer a freak-bourgeois escape to flat neoliberal "experience." Investments have both gained and lost value; rents have generally skyrocketed--but the evidence suggests it is a completely open question as to whether or not anything has developed.

There is also a robot-bitcoin-discotheque-pet at the bottom of the stairs.

Ken Okiishi (born 1978) has recently had solo exhibitions at venues including Reena Spaulings, New York; the MIT List Visual Arts Center; the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard Center for Curatorial Studies; MD 72, Berlin; and Pilar Corrias, London. Okiishi was featured in the Whitney Biennial 2014 and Based in Berlin 2011; and has been in numerous group exhibitions at venues including Artists Space, New York; White Columns, New York; Museum Fridericianum, Kassel; Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria; ICA Philadelphia; Frieze Projects, Frieze Art Fair, London; Greene Naftali, New York; Bortolami, New York; GAMeC, Bergamo, Italy; Peep-hole, Milan; Herald Street, London; Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw; Camden Arts Center, London; Broadway 1602, New York; and American Fine Arts, New York. His upcoming exhibitions include Cut to Swipe at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and a solo project at the Museum Ludwig, Köln.

Documentation of the exhibition *Eggleston und Andere, "reality bites",*
September 16 – October, 18 2014:
https://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2014/10/ken-okiishi-at-mathew-2/

Installation views and details from *Eggleston und Andere, "reality bites,"* Mathew, Berlin. 16 September - 18 October, 2014.
More images available at: http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2014/10/ken-okiishi-at-mathew-2/

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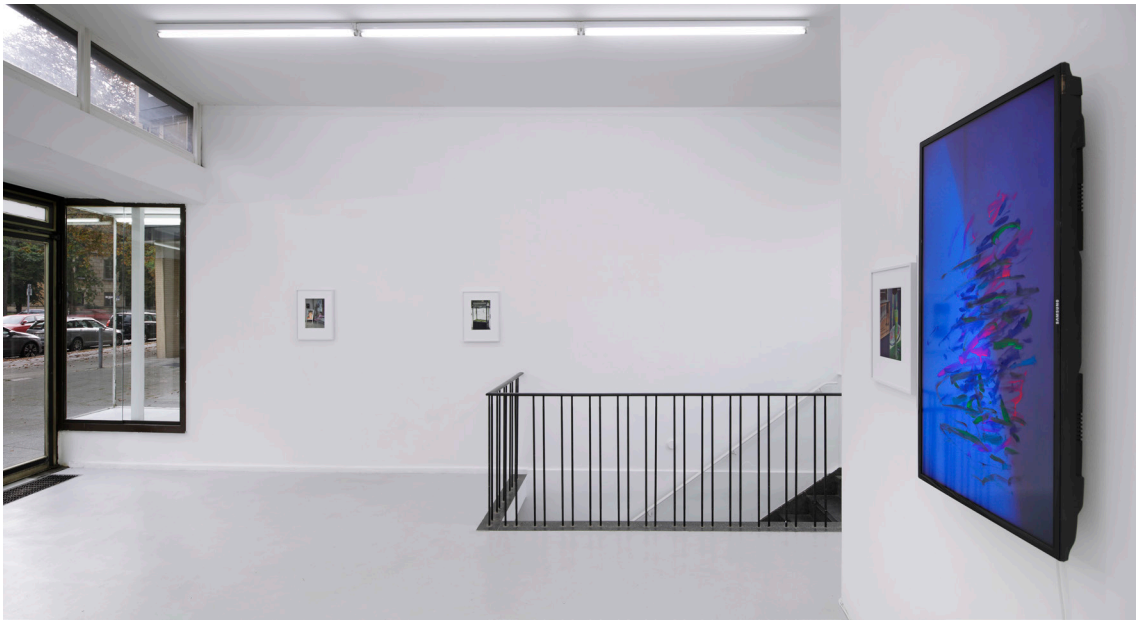
Die neuen Modefarben.
Die können sich sehen lassen.



William Eggleston on Pallasstrasse, Berlin (Former West) , 2007-2014
Injket prints, Frame size 18 11/16 x 14 x 1 1/8 inches, Image size 11 x 7 5/16 inches.

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William Eggleston on Pallasstrasse, Berlin (Former West) , 2007-2014
Injket prints, Frame size 18 11/16 x 14 x 1 1/8 inches, Image size 11 x 7 5/16 inches.

cyphers. But this impersonality is itself belied. Algün Ringborg's film *A World of Blind Chance* (2014), presented in another room, shows an actor performing a script composed of example sentences; he fleshes out their bland formulations with rhetorical flourishes. Ringborg's voice is spliced into the soundtrack, issuing instructions to the actor as though she, and not the dictionary phrases, were directing his gestures.

—Mark Prince

BERLIN
KEN OKIISHI
Mathew

American artist Ken Okiishi's second solo show at Mathew, "Eggleston und Andere, 'reality bites,'" made numerous art historical references while at the same time attempting to free itself from them. The main body of work consisted of 12 small color photographs, all titled *William Eggleston on Pallasstrasse (2007/2014)*, which depict various scenes devoid of people along a single street in the former West Berlin, passing through a bustling commercial area that has ossified since unification.

"FYI," Okiishi remarked in the press release, "these photographs were taken in the summer of 2007; sat on various hard drives since then; and were printed, as a group, for the first time last month." He spells out this procedure because most of the images might otherwise be impossible to place in time: for example, an advertisement for patterned women's stockings so retro they could almost be fashionable again, or a hair salon's sandwich-board plaque bearing a crinkled photograph of an '80s-style shag.

The photographs' identical titles point to their connection with the work of William Eggleston, the photographer who, along with Stephen Shore *und andere* (and others), pioneered American color photography in the 1970s, wryly focusing on mundane aspects of everyday life. But Okiishi's recognizable (and explicitly identified) Berlin setting also places his images in the company of Eggleston's German counterparts: the Düsseldorf School of photographers, including Candida Höfer and Jörg Sasse.

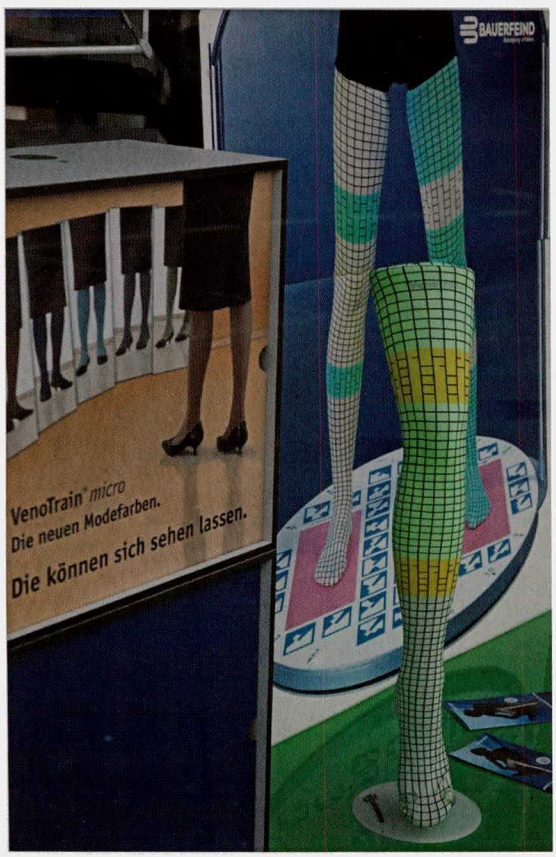
Wedged rather tightly among these photographs on the main gallery walls were two new pieces from Okiishi's ongoing "gesture/data" series, comprising abstract oil paintings smeared directly on the screens of flat, vertically hung video monitors. Earlier works from this group, like those shown in New York at the 2014 Whitney Biennial, offer complex interplays between their colorful brushstrokes and the figures flickering across the screen beneath. But the two pieces displayed at Mathew—involving only sparse, scattered marks and glitchy monochrome video fields, one white and one blue—are the least visually complex of these works to date.

As the series title promises, Okiishi has here reduced the pictorial content and signification potential of both painting and video to only the gesture and the data. This minimalism foregrounds the physical nature of painting as well as the size, brightness and aspect ratio of screens in comparison to traditional canvases or photographs, shifting attention to the various apparatuses by which images are created and exhibited. The artist has said that these overlaid compositions were inspired by the work of the Abstract Expressionist painter Joan Mitchell, which he once photographed with his cell phone during a visit to the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Clearly, the 36-year-old Okiishi is aware that the technical means artists employ and the art historical lineage within which they place themselves greatly influence how viewers experience and interpret the artworks. But the final piece in the exhibition resists any easy categorization.

Alone in the gallery's basement lay the floor piece *robot-bitcoin-discotheque-pet* (2014), a pair of disco balls stuck together to form a revolving contraption with an image of a bitcoin taped to one end and a QR code to the other. It's hard to tell whether the artist is protesting this new digital aesthetic, making fun of it or capitulating to it. In any case, the humor poked a hole in the overall logic of the show and its net of historical references. Yet given the deftness with which Okiishi operates, we can assume that rupture was calculated.

—Elvia Wilk



Ken Okiishi: *William Eggleston on Pallasstrasse (2007/2014)*, 2007/2014, inkjet print, 18¾ by 13½ inches; at Mathew.

(Goodbye to) Manhattan, digital video (color, sound), 72 minutes. 2010

Exhibited at Alex Zachary, New York (2010); MD 72, Berlin (2010); Kunstlerhaus Stuttgart (2010); Based in Berlin, Berlin (2011); Anthology Film Archives, New York (2011); IMO, Copenhagen (2011); Take Ninagawa, Tokyo (2012); MIT List Visual Arts Center (2013)

Description from Artforum review by Victoria Camblin of the solo exhibition at MD 72, Berlin.
"Chapter One. He adored New York City," begins Woody Allen's 1979 Manhattan. "To him it was a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture. The same lack of individual integrity to cause so many people to take the easy way out . . ." Allen's line may be an allusion to suicide, but one less radical departure for New York creatives has been, traditionally, to move away. With seemingly exponential increase over the past decade, asylum seekers have turned not to Brooklyn but to Berlin, inaugurating in their wake a love-hate fantasy wherein the German capital is cast as a utopian center of artistic production, and New York as a place to sell, not to make—a sexy but commercial hell. The success of Ken Okiishi's film work (Goodbye to) Manhattan, 2010, is its dismantling of that bipolar fantasy, of which its protagonists are ostensibly a part.

Okiishi has been living between New York and Berlin since 2001, and (Goodbye to) Manhattan combines materials from that experience (filmed between 2006 and 2009) into a seventy-two-minute, semiautobiographical transposition of Allen's classic. Okiishi's cast of characters is pared down to Manhattan's three female protagonists, interpreted by key players in the artist's actual New York/Berlin life; its script is the Google translation, into English, of the German version of Allen's original. The resultant semantic layering is mirrored in the video's sometimes vertiginous, pixelated editing; still, if there is anything neurotic here, it is only in both films' intuitive, historicized preoccupation with Germanness. Okiishi's work indulges the hysterical potential of that transatlantic transaction; its Technicolor destabilizes a black-and-white cliché. One sees a zany shopping and dining experience in West Berlin's KaDeWe department store; Manhattan meanwhile languishes under a sound track of slightly decelerated Gershwin tunes that have the metallic quality of a recording made, perhaps, in the hull of a Berlin-bound Boeing 757.

(Goodbye to) Manhattan's presentation in Berlin this summer, after its debut at New York's Alex Zachary Gallery earlier this year, provides an opportunity to view the work in the space in which it was partly conceived and filmed: Galerie Neu's apartment annex, where Okiishi once briefly resided. Viewers, too, thus find themselves green-screened into the film's Berlin/Manhattan hallucination—the work, after all, is about you.

(Goodbye to) Manhattan, digital video (color, sound), 72 minutes. 2010.
Installation view, Alex Zachary, New York, 2010.

(Begin voice-over.)

Chapter One. Manhattan: an actual geographic place; a city and a population undergoing massive crises in identity and economy; a ruckus of monologues of urban experience; a blue rhapsody; a movie by Woody Allen...

Ken Okiishi's *(Goodbye to)* **Manhattan** is a totalworkofart (minus men) teetering on the brink of the following phenomena: Manhattan-as-shopping-mall-going-out-of-business; the traffic of artists and culture between NYC and Berlin in the 2000's; the malaise of transnational bourgeois cultural life; the failure of communication, translation, and dating; and the crisis of subjectivity of those of us who will be thirty-something in the 2010's. In *(Goodbye to)* **Manhattan**, the Manhattan that circulates as an assemblage of neurotic ideas and narcissistic fantasies is brought to the foreground, taking literally the grandiose analogies that have led to questions such as, is Berlin the new New York? Is this about ME?

--1 moving picture (color/sound, 72 minutes, filmed in Berlin and Manhattan between 2006 and 2009)
--6 lobby cards (somewhere between Ku'damm and Madison Ave.)
--1 movie theater (split in two, in the basement)

Starrring:
Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen as Mariel Hemingway as Tracy
Nick Mauss as Diane Keaton as Mary
Pati Hertling as Meryl Streep as Jill

On the walk home from the opening:
Mary: Tschau, tschau!
The taxi drives off. Ike and Mary cross the road and continue.
Mary: Hmh. I know.
Mary: Those are err funny. Mad people, and Bella is a genuine friend. She is a brilliant woman, knows you.
Mary: It is a genuine genius, a genuine genius!
Mary: I it by Jeremiah became acquainted with, mean ex man.
Mary: I do not understand you.
Mary: What to be called, "why is you you separate let", hä?
Mary: What is for a question? I hardly know you.
Mary: Well, I... we had simply n heap of problems. We do not haven ourselves often argued and I, I could my identity longer to a so brilliant, dominating man subordinate.
Mary: It is a genius, a genius, a genius. Genius!

A breakup:
Tracy: We have a lot of fun together. I take care of me to you. Your problems are my problems. We pass in bed tol.
Tracy: Yes, but do you love me not?
Tracy: Is this true?
Tracy: You have to know someone?
Tracy (off): Did you talk with another?
Tracy: O ever. Suddenly I go far not good. (sighs)


MANHATTAN


ew York was his town
d it always would be."


LOCAL
-1


Manhattan


ing a book on ou
one.
MANHATTAN


Rinchi
INTERNI
marc melze


Lauter Bekloppte. Die sitzen alle
im 30er-Jahre-Radikalismus fest.


Mary und ich haben eine "Akademie
der Überschätzten". Dazu gehören

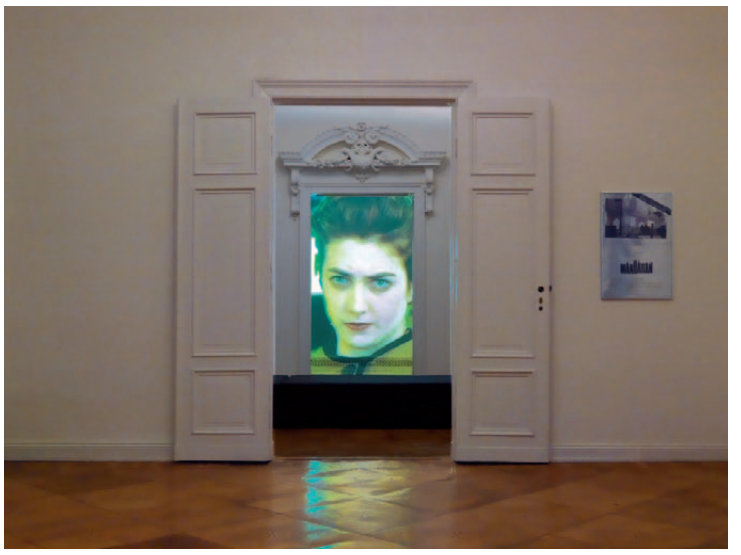
NEVERLAND

BY DAVID LEWIS

Manhattan is a catalyst for projections. But so is Berlin. Perhaps in the powerful wake of Woody Allen's movie, Manhattan has turned into Neverland in the collective imagination. Ken Okiishi goes there to become part of a game that bounces between two artistic universes: Manhattan translated through Berlin and vice-versa. In the interview that follows, David Lewis explores this project and the artist's collaborations with Nick Mauss, discovering why Broadway will be the next stop on the journey.

`david lewis:` Can we start by hearing about your most recent project? Where did the idea for *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* come from, and how did it develop?

`ken okiishi:` I had done a piece of writing based on two parallel mis-translations of Rimbaud's "Une Saison en Enfer" – a Google digital "translation", and one in which I let my bad French run wild on the original French text. I ended up combining these, or sort of taking "dictations" from these texts, sometimes leaving the odd language untouched from the google translation. Sometimes I would write down some thought that popped into my mind, and sometimes I would play language games with the "repressed", bad, or even flagrantly wrong translation. What appeared from this was a manic, hybrid text where everything is unhinged but not completely random. So your mind attempts to make sense and also spins. Or, at least when I read it, images start to form but then I'm confronted with "just language." Or the problem of language keeps the narratives and images all glitchy...



I was working on this during one of the summers that I was living in Berlin (I think 2006, but maybe 2005). I was also filming different things that struck me for whatever reason, riding my bike all over the city, in this cracked-out headspace that happens here, where language falls away. But there is just also so much empty space where you keep on thinking, where are all the people? And one of my main interests, which I'm only just beginning to be able to talk about, was what happens to discourse when language becomes obfuscated or destroyed (due to not really speaking German at the time, and the harshness of Berlin – but also since Berlin was in this crazy flux with people from all over the place looking to actualize all of these personal fantasies, from the baby-boom in Prenzlauer Berg, to Americans who think it's New York in the 60's/70's/80's, to international party people, to "guest workers" – and the English we all ended up speaking was so bizarre... as well as social interactions, which could be quite baroque... and the emptiness, which really lets one's historical imagination go crazy...) There were all of these complex and fragmentary linguistic glitches that opened up passages into various dissonances and repressions.

I should probably mention that this interest has a very personal genealogy that I don't really speak about but think should be addressed. I've always had the feeling, even though I grew up in America and went to excellent schools and come from a well-educated family, that there is always this sense of mourning for native language. My father and his family, who were 2nd and 3rd generation Japanese in Hawaii, in order to avoid being put into an internment during WWII, had to over-perform Americanness in a way which included throwing all of the family relics in the ocean and refusing to speak Japanese... My grandfather also worked at Pearl Harbor and the entire family was from Hiroshima... But let's not talk about that...

Anyway, Berlin and New York have become sites where I can play with various aspects of a shattered languages and cultures in a way which doesn't feel like a family trap... or like I am some sort of authenticity parade. Although, if you are ever in Berlin during the "Festival of the Cultures of the World", it is just hilarious and INSANE but also, whoa, these people really want to escape the strictures of post-war Germany...
Anyway, what I wanted to do was see what would happen if this process were

expanded to the moving image. Also, I had this idea to completely dislodge language from character and acting and plot. I don't think *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* really succeeds in this, but there is a shuttling between incomplete subjectivities that can be witnessed. Especially in Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen's brilliant performance; she performs this garbage language like it actually makes sense, and ends up coming across as shuttling (or really, bleeding) between at least three distinct subjectivities: her own; the Tracy character from *Manhattan*; and an American in Berlin.

> dl: But I do think that what you describe (dislodging language from character and acting and plot; language becoming obfuscated and destroyed, etc.) comes across very clearly throughout the film. For me the whole film steadily drained structures and situations of the kind of presence, and meaning, that one expects, leaving a kind of poetry of traces. And this struck me as almost entirely opposite Allen's *Manhattan*, which was about foibles and traces accumulating, however ironically, into heroic self-realizations and celebrations of various kinds. I.e., *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* empties out *Manhattan*. Which leads to: how did you came to Manhattan in the first place.

ko: That's a good question, and it's hard to remember exactly after all of this, but I think I was drawn to it initially because other people seemed to have such a strong emotional connection – some people have even claimed that that is why they came to New York, or that is how they imagine real life, or "I was Tracy in high school, etc." It is a narrative that has marked the city in real ways. And with this silly tug-of-war between Brooklyn and Manhattan: "Which is better?" Actually – and this is a bit embarrassing – the first time I moved to Berlin in 2001, I had said that I would rather move to Berlin than Brooklyn. And then New York drew me back. Through the movies, actually: watching NY movies in the middle of my first Berlin winter. And this was also right after 9-11, and was just so intense. And that's how the whole split-city thing started. I guess *Sex in the City* would have been more current, but I don't really like that. Also, I wanted something that had permeated the culture so much that an intervention in it would reverberate almost on the level of the unconscious.

I was also trying to come up with a way of thinking Berlin and New York at the same time – but also a way of problematizing the false analogies that have been made, such as New Yorkers coming to Berlin and jizzing all over about the (relatively) cheap real estate with the fantasy that NeuKölln is the next Bed-Stuy; and on the other hand, people coming to New York from Berlin with outdated information, such as freaking out about how "free" they feel in America or how wild New York is. And I found a copy of the German DVD of *Manhattan* that had all of these tracks of dubbed and original dialogue and subtitles in German and English. It seemed like projections could be re-circulated and fractured in all directions.

> dl: In what sense is *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* a collaboration? I know it's an obvious question. I was thinking of some of your previous collaborations with Nick [Mauss], like the Rimbaud book. But it's the whole sensibility that interests me. There is a sense that everything in (and around) *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* is shared; as if nothing belongs to anyone alone, and never really could; everything is relationship, and in-between. It's for these reasons that I wonder about collaboration, and how it works and what it means for you.

ko: Answering this question is a bit tricky, since there is so much difference between what happens when you are in the middle of making something and then what remains in the end, what can be seen... But if there is a common thread, I think, it is that I like to set up limits (words to be spoken; events; how to move the body; a site to film; a set of references) but then let it happen, really whatever, and edit it based on a mixture of musical score / script / set of social relations. (Of course, this is a linearization, but it gives you an idea of my process.) And I like to see a struggle between various elements. Such as: I will come up with text to be spoken by an individual that I know will create a spark of dislocation. I work with people that I know very well, so I can work with this musical scripting in fairly precise counterpoint. But it is always, when writing the script or figuring out the action, a question of "what if?" – and then watching what happens when it is performed/filmed. I think this leads to a sense of shared everything; but I also see things this way, actually, everything as relationship, everything in-between.

For *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* I didn't really write the script in the conventional sense – although I do think of what I did as writing – but with a mutant diagram of production, and a burred registration. Like you are playing something on a pipe organ with some of the stops only partially opened, and in combinations that make the sound have a strange sense of space. But I don't really see a difference between collaborative and "individual" work, in general (except maybe for a dogmatic or marketing emphasis). It's a shift I've made in point of view that leads to a certain aesthetic shift, which for me started while studying at Cooper Union in the late 90's / early 2000's, coming out of but also as a reaction against the obsession with contextual and formal control in certain strains of "institutional critique" and 90's feminism.

> dl: But is there a more specific relationship to collaborative work you've made with Nick?

ko: Actually, maybe, well yes. When we did the show in Stuttgart, at the Kunstlerhaus, Axel Wieder really gave us an open platform on which to experiment with whatever, and it became a moment for me and also I think for Nick to reflect on what we had done and open up or "workshop" ideas for the future. I had all of this raw footage that I had shot while wondering around Berlin (which eventually ended up as backgrounds in *(Goodbye to) Manhattan)*, but also in Marseille and at this airport hotel by the Milan Malpensa airport, where, in the very early morning haze after a totally chaotic flight delay, I was confronted with this fantastic combination of suburban big-box store landscape, postmodern hotel design, and this totally abandoned Rationalist concrete house that looked like it was stuck in a limbo of historical preservation, there was a fairly new children's playground butted right up to it, but I really have no idea what was going on – but it crystallized that morning this emotional configuration, a floating memory zone of inner experience actualized in physical space... When Nick and I were discussing what could happen in the Kunstlerhaus show with this footage, Nick came up with an expansion of something he had done on a smaller scale in New York: drawings, scraps, found photographs, displayed on these make-shift stands in a meander through the gallery space. We developed a proximate counterpoint, where the video footage and Nick's stands were arrayed to spark physical movement and mental associations and images in the viewer. We also showed a piece where we had walked around Corona park in the ruins of the World's Fairs (1939, 1964) – the leftovers are shockingly still there, falling apart, but also buried underground, and we walked around taking photos of each other in the landscape, sort of like Roger Fenton's landscape photographs where this little body is in the landscape, maybe just to indicate scale, but also something else. I would stand or Nick would stand in a part of the landscape, and then we would switch places. We were also thinking of something like Valie Export's body configurations – but zoomed and flayed out into a melancholy zone, where the landscape/ruined cityscape is overtaking the body, making it small, confused – but also full of potential. And, of course, the landscape in these is ruins and fragments of ideas about future cities, future ideologies – many of which were such horrific utopias... Also, at this time, New York City itself felt completely done, totally depressing and claustrophobic. But there is one of us looking at the other through the camera, having a distant conversation... Anyway, we also recorded each of us sight-reading on the piano a musical "Portrait of Florine Stettheimer" by Virgil Thompson that was printed on pink paper in the Americana Fantastica issue of *View* magazine (1943), which Nick had stumbled upon in the library – And we made an LP which was a soundtrack of this, each clunky first encounter with the written music, one on each side, and the cover looks like someone was holding a blank record sleeve out the window on a windy day in Manhattan, maybe there's a parade swirling by, and a flurry a paper flies through the air and poof, the pink pages from 1943 cling onto it. It's a performative but also conversational relationship to histories – sort of as if the past is actually hanging in the air, ready to be activated and recombined at any moment...

> dl: And what are you are you working on at the moment?

ko: I'm trying to bring the subtext – or really this musical substructure that runs through a lot of my work – to the surface. I did a little harpsichord concert (Rameau, Bach) at the end of the summer in the Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin. And I recently had the idea of renting a studio in one of those beehives of Broadway (and hopeful Broadway) musicians practicing and rehearsing near Times Square. What I'm trying to say is that I'm working on a musical.

Opposite – "(Goodbye to) Manhattan", 2010, installation view, Mehringdamm 72, Berlin. Courtesy: the artist, Alex Zachary, New York and Mehringdamm 72, Berlin.

Next pages – (Goodbye to) Manhattan lobby card (Sonia Rykiel Enfant), 2010. Courtesy: the artist and Alex Zachary, New York.

(Goodbye to) Manhattan lobby card (Ku'damm Karree / 86th and Madison), 2010. Courtesy: the artist and Alex Zachary, New York.

MANHAT


E 86 ST
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STORE FOR LEASE
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Will Divide
DORI SEDRANSK

TAN

DI DAVID LEWIS

Manhattan è un catalizzatore di proiezioni. Ma anche Berlino lo è. Forse sulla scia potentissima della pellicola di Woody Allen, Manhattan si è trasformata nell'immaginario collettivo nell'isola che non c'è. Ken Okiishi vi approda per renderla parte di un gioco che fa la spola fra due universi artistici: Manhattan tradotta da Berlino e viceversa. Nell'intervista che segue David Lewis indaga su questo lavoro e sulle collaborazioni dell'artista con Nick Mauss, scoprendo perché Broadway sarà la prossima tappa del viaggio.

`david lewis:` Possiamo cominciare dal tuo progetto più recente? Da dov' è venuta l'idea di *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* e come si è sviluppata?

`ken okiishi:` Avevo scritto un pezzo sulla base di due mistraduzioni di *Une Saison en Enfer* di Rimbaud – una traduzione digitale effettuata con Google e una in cui avevo permesso al mio pessimo francese di sfogarsi liberamente col testo originale. Alla fine ho combinato questi testi, in un certo senso lasciandomi "comandare" da loro e, talvolta, mantenendo intatto il bizzarro linguaggio della traduzione di Google. Qualche volta scrivevo dei pensieri che mi balzavano alla mente, altre volte facevo dei giochi di parole servendomi della traduzione "repressa", cattiva o perfino palesemente sbagliata. Quel che ne è venuto fuori è un testo maniacale e ibrido, dove tutto è scardinato ma non del tutto casuale. La mente cerca in questo modo di trovare un senso a quel che è scritto e, al tempo stesso, continua a macinare pensieri. O, almeno, quando io leggo la traduzione e mi trovo di fronte a quello che è "puro linguaggio", nella mia mente cominciano a formarsi delle immagini. Oppure il problema del linguaggio fa sì che immagini e narrazioni rimangano difettose...

Ci lavoravo durante una delle estati a Berlino (penso fosse il 2006, ma forse era il 2005). E inoltre me ne andavo in giro in bici per tutta la città, filmando quello che, per una ragione o per l'altra, mi colpiva e lasciava un segno in quello strano stato mentale che si viene a creare quando il linguaggio viene meno. Ma, quando si pensa, c'è anche una quantità di spazio vuoto, dov'è la gente allora? E uno dei miei interessi principali, di cui solo ora sono in grado di cominciare a parlare, era quel che accade al discorso quando il linguaggio diventa confuso e frammentato (a causa dell'incapacità, a quell'epoca, di parlare realmente tedesco, alla crudezza di Berlino, ma anche al fatto che Berlino a sua volta era al centro di un folle flusso di persone che venivano da ogni dove per cercare di realizzare le loro fantasie personali: dal baby boom di Prenzlauer Berg, agli americani che pensavano si trattasse della New York degli anni Sessanta/Settanta/Ottanta, dai *socialites* internazionali ai "lavoratori ospiti". Così l'inglese che parlavamo era piuttosto bizzarro... e nondimeno lo erano i rapporti sociali, che potevano essere piuttosto barocchi... e il senso di vuoto, che faceva sì che l' immaginazione storica potesse impazzire...). Vi era una complessa e frammentaria moltitudine di difetti linguistici che lasciavano aperti dei varchi di accesso a varie forme di dissonanza e repressione.

Dovrei probabilmente menzionare il fatto che questo interesse ha una genealogia estremamente personale, di cui non parlo mai veramente, ma che credo debba essere affrontata. Sebbene io sia cresciuto negli Stati Uniti, abbia frequentato scuole eccellenti e provenga da una famiglia con un buon livello di istruzione, ho sempre percepito un senso di luttuosa mancanza di una lingua madre. Mio padre e la sua famiglia, giapponesi di seconda e terza generazione che vivevano alle Hawaii, per non essere internati durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale, dovettero inscenare in modo perfino eccessivo la loro "americanità", arrivando al punto di gettare nell'oceano tutti i cimeli della famiglia e di rifiutarsi di parlare giapponese... Mio nonno lavorava anche a Pearl Harbor e tutta la famiglia proveniva da Hiroshima... Ma non parliamo di questo...

Berlino e New York sono divenute per me luoghi dove poter giocare con i vari aspetti di lingue e culture frantumate, senza la sensazione di essere imprigionato in una trappola famigliare... o di fare sfoggio di autenticità. A dire il vero, se ci si trova a Berlino durante il "Festival delle culture del mondo" si assiste a qualcosa di ridicolo e di FOLLE. Allo stesso tempo, però, questa gente vuole davvero sfuggire alle censure della Germania post-bellica...

Quel che volevo fare era vedere che cosa sarebbe potuto accadere espandendo questo processo all'immagine in movimento. Avevo in mente di staccare completamente il linguaggio dal personaggio, dalla recitazione e dall'intreccio della storia. Non penso che *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* sia riuscito in questo intento; nonostante ciò, in esso, si può assistere a un continuo movimento tra soggettività incomplete. Questo avviene specialmente nella brillante performance di Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen, quando parla questa lingua-spazzatura come se avesse davvero un senso e finisce per fare la spola (o, in realtà, per perdersi) fra almeno tre soggettività distinte: la sua, quella del personaggio di Tracy nel film *Manhattan*, e quella di un'Americana a Berlino.

`dl:` Io credo, però, che quel che descrivi (lo scollamento del linguaggio dal personaggio, dalla recitazione e dall' intreccio della storia; il fatto che il linguaggio sia confuso e frammentato, ecc.) emerga molto chiaramente nel film. Per me, tutto il film attua una costante rimozione del genere di presenza e di significato che le persone si aspettano, lasciando in vita una sorta di poetica delle tracce. E questo mi pare sia quasi l'esatto contrario di quel che avviene in *Manhattan* di Woody Allen, che parla di manie e di tracce che si accumulano, per dare origine, anche se ironicamente, ad autorealizzazioni eroiche e a celebrazioni di vario genere. Quindi *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* rappresenta lo svuotamento di Manhattan. Il che fa sorgere una domanda: come sei arrivato a Manhattan?

`ko:` Questa è una bella domanda ed è difficile ricordarsene dopo tutto quel che è seguito. Penso di esserne stato attratto perché le altre persone sembravano avere un legame emotivo fortissimo con *Manhattan* – alcuni affermavano addirittura di essersi trasferiti a New York per quel motivo, oppure d' immaginare che la vita descritta nel film sia reale, o ancora dicevano cose del tipo: "Quando ero alle scuole superiori io ero Tracy," ecc. È una narrativa che ha segnato veramente la città. E poi c'è lo sciocco braccio di ferro su quale parte della città sia migliore, Brooklyn o Manhattan. A dire il vero – e ciò è un po' imbarazzante – la prima volta che mi sono trasferito a Berlino nel 2001 avevo affermato che avrei preferito traslocare a Berlino che a Brooklyn. E poi New York mi ha di nuovo trascinato indietro. È successo attraverso i film, guardando pellicole che parlavano di New York durante il mio primo inverno berlinese. Era anche l'inverno successivo all'11 settembre, per cui il coinvolgimento emotivo era ancora maggiore. È così che è iniziata tutta la faccenda della città divisa. Probabilmente *Sex and the City* sarebbe stato più attuale, ma non mi piace. Inoltre volevo qualcosa che avesse permeato così tanto la cultura che intervenirvi avrebbe avuto una risonanza a livello quasi inconscio.

Stavo anche cercando un modo per pensare contemporaneamente a Berlino e New York, e per problematizzare parallelamente le false analogie che sono state tracciate tra le due città, come il fatto che i Newyorkesi vengano a Berlino andando in visibilio per il costo (relativamente) basso degli immobili e fantasticando che Neukölln diventi il nuovo Bed-Stuy; e dall'altro lato persone che vengono da Berlino a New York senza essere aggiornate e vanno letteralmente fuori di testa declamando quanto si sentano "libere" in America e quanto sia pazzesca New York. Ho trovato una copia del DVD tedesco di *Manhattan* in cui erano presenti tracce con i dialoghi originali e doppiati e sottotitoli in inglese e tedesco. Ho avuto l'impressione che le proiezioni potessero essere rimesse in circuito e fratturate in ogni direzione.

"(Goodbye to) Manhattan", exhibition view at Alex Zachary, New York, 2010. Courtesy: the artist and Alex Zachary, New York.

Opposite – "(Goodbye to) Manhattan", 2010, installation view, Mehringdamm 72, Berlin. Courtesy: the artist, Alex Zachary, New York and Mehringdamm 72, Berlin.

dl: In che senso *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* è una collaborazione? So che è una domanda ovvia. Stavo pensando ad alcune delle tue precedenti collaborazioni con Nick [Mauss], come il libro di Rimbaud. Ma ad interessarmi è la sensazione complessiva. È come se tutto ciò che c'è dentro (e intorno a) *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* fosse condiviso, come se nulla appartenesse a una persona sola e non potesse mai appartenerle veramente; tutto è rapporto e territorio intermedio. È per questi motivi che m'interrogo sulla collaborazione, su come funzioni e su che cosa significhi per te.

ko: Rispondere a questa domanda è un po' complicato, perché c'è molta differenza tra quello che accade mentre sei nel bel mezzo di un lavoro e quel che rimane alla fine, quello che si vede... Se c'è un filo conduttore, allora quello consiste nel fatto che mi piace fissare dei limiti (parole che devono essere pronunciate; eventi; come muovere il corpo; un luogo da filmare; un insieme di riferimenti). Poi lascio che le cose accadano così come vengono, per poi procedere a un montaggio sulla base di un mix di colonna sonora / sceneggiatura / insieme di rapporti sociali. (Ovviamente questa è una linearizzazione, ma ti dà un' idea di come funzioni il processo che metto in atto.) Mi piace osservare la lotta che si viene a creare tra i vari elementi. Per esempio propongo un testo che dovrà essere declamato da un individuo che so che creerà una scintilla di dislocazione. Lavoro con persone che conosco molto bene, in modo da potermi servire di una partitura musicale che funge da contrappunto in modo abbastanza preciso. Quando si scrive una sceneggiatura o si inventa un'azione è sempre una questione di "che cosa accadrebbe se...?" E poi si vede che cosa succede nel momento della performance / delle riprese. Penso che ciò conduca alla sensazione che ogni cosa sia condivisa. E poi è vero che anch'io vedo le cose a questo modo: tutto è un rapporto, ogni cosa è un territorio di mezzo.

Per *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* in realtà non ho scritto una sceneggiatura convenzionale, anche se considero quel che ho fatto scrittura. Mi sono servito di un diagramma di produzione modificato e di una registrazione confusa, indistinta. Come quando si suona qualcosa su un organo a canne in cui alcuni dei registri siano solo parzialmente aperti e secondo combinazioni che fanno assumere al suono uno strano senso dello spazio. Tuttavia, in generale, non vedo una vera differenza tra lavoro collaborativo o "individuale" (eccetto, forse, per un'enfasi dogmatica o di marketing). È un cambiamento nel punto di vista che conduce a un certo cambiamento estetico. Tutto è iniziato quando studiavo alla Cooper Union tra la fine degli anni Novanta e l'inizio degli anni Duemila, come reazione all'ossessione per il controllo della forma e del contesto in certe correnti di "critica istituzionale" e femministe degli anni Novanta.

dl: Ma c'è un rapporto più particolare con le opere collaborative che hai realizzato con Nick?

ko: Forse sì. Quando abbiamo realizzato la mostra alla Kunstlerhaus di Stoccarda, Axel Wieder ci ha offerto una piattaforma aperta su cui poter sperimentare a nostro piacimento. Quello è diventato per me, e credo anche per Nick, un momento per riflettere su ciò che avevamo fatto e per pensare o "elaborare" le nostre idee per il futuro. Avevo molte ore di girato ripreso vagabondando per Berlino (filmati che hanno finito per fare da sfondo a *(Goodbye to) Manhattan*), ma anche a Marsiglia e in un hotel dell'aeroporto di Milano Malpensa. Qui, in mezzo alla foschia mattutina, dopo il caos per il ritardo di un volo, mi trovai di fronte una fantastica combinazione di superstore suburbani, hotel dal design postmoderno e una casa in cemento armato, completamente abbandonata, di architettura razionalista, che sembrava intrappolata in un limbo di conservazione storica. Proprio attaccato c'era un parco giochi per bambini piuttosto recente. Non ho idea di che cosa stesse accadendo, ma quel che vidi quella mattina servì a cristallizzare una configurazione emotiva, una fluttuante zona della memoria, dove un'esperienza interiore si concretizzava in uno spazio fisico... Quando con Nick abbiamo cominciato a discutere di come avremmo potuto usare questi filmati per la mostra alla Kunstlerhaus, a lui venne in mente di espandere una cosa che aveva realizzato, su scala più piccola, a New York: disegni, ritagli, fotografie trovate, il tutto esposto su supporti improvvisati, disposti in modo labirintico nello spazio della galleria. Abbiamo creato una sorta di contrappunto, dove la prossimità tra i filmati e l'installazione di Nick doveva servire a stimolare il movimento fisico e la formazione di associazioni e d' immagini mentali nello spettatore. Abbiamo anche esposto un lavoro nato da una nostra passeggiata al Corona Park, in mezzo alle rovine delle Esposizioni Universali (1939, 1964). Scandalosamente i resti sono ancora lì, pericolanti oppure sepolti sotto terra. Abbiamo fatto un giro, scattandoci fotografie a vicenda in mezzo a quello scenario, un po' come nelle fotografie di Roger Fenton, in cui si vede quel piccolo corpo immerso nel paesaggio, forse semplicemente per indicare la scala o forse per qualche altro motivo. Io mi mettevo in un punto, oppure ci si metteva Nick, e poi ci scambiavamo i posti. Pensavamo anche a qualcosa di simile alle configurazioni corporee di Valie Export, ma trasportate in una zona malinconica, dove il paesaggio naturale o il paesaggio urbano in rovina prendevano il sopravvento sul corpo, rendendolo piccolo, confuso, ma anche pieno di potenzialità. Ovviamente questo paesaggio rappresenta anche le rovine e i frammenti di idee di città future o ideologie future, alcune delle quali erano utopie orribili... A questo punto anche la città di New York appare completamente consumata, deprimente e claustrofobica. Ma c'è uno di noi che guarda all'altro attraverso l'obiettivo della macchina fotografica, come se fossimo impegnati in una conversazione a distanza... Ci siamo anche registrati a vicenda mentre suonavamo al pianoforte, senza averla mai vista prima, la partitura del *Ritratto musicale di Florine Stettheimer* di Virgil Thompson, stampata su carta rosa nel numero "Americana Fantastica" della rivista *View* (1943), in cui io e Nick ci eravamo imbattuti in biblioteca. A partire dalle registrazioni abbiamo realizzato un LP che serviva da colonna sonora e che riportava, uno per ciascuno dei due lati, i nostri goffi approcci con la musica scritta. La copertina è realizzata come se qualcuno, a Manhattan, in una giornata di vento, avesse tenuto una custodia per dischi bianca fuori dalla finestra, magari mentre di lì passava un corteo; ed ecco che è arrivata una folata di vento, ha sollevato un turbine di fogli e le pagine rosa del 1943 si sono appiccicate sulla custodia bianca. È un rapporto performativo ma anche colloquiale con le storie, come se il passato fosse sospeso nell'aria, pronto per essere attivato e ricombinato in qualunque istante...

dl: E a che cosa stai lavorando in questo momento?

ko: Sto cercando di portare in superficie il sottotesto, o questa sottostruttura musicale che si ritrova in molti dei miei lavori. Alla fine dell'estate ho tenuto un piccolo concerto di clavicembalo (Rameau, Bach) allo Schinkel Pavillon di Berlino. Recentemente, inoltre, mi è venuta l'idea di affittare uno studio in uno di quegli alveari di musicisti di Broadway (e della Broadway promettente), che si esercitano e provano nei paraggi di Times Square. Quel che sto cercando di dire è che sto lavorando a un musical.

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

From the Inside Out: Ken Okiishi

by michael sanchez 02/17/10

Ken Okiishi's name has appeared alongside that of Nick Mauss in several collaborative exhibitions, but *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* is his first showing of solo work in New York. In a long video and an array of presentational supplements, Okiishi puts pressure on what he calls, in his press release, the grandiose analogies underlying New York's art fantasies about Berlin, and vice versa. Acknowledging his position of no distance, complicit in everything he presents, Okiishi uses his friends (artist-boyfriend Mauss, curator Pati Hertling and student-critic Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen) as conduits for these Germano-American misfires. Filmed against a green screen and reciting a garbled script, the actors wander aimlessly in a permanent haze of jetlag. But even as he deflates the art world's perpetual transatlantic quest for "something else" or the "next big thing," Okiishi refrains from a knowing cynicism.

(GOODBYE TO) MANHATTAN. VIDEO STILL. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND ALEX ZACHARY

MICHAEL SANCHEZ: In *(Goodbye to) Manhattan*, you make use of the tropes of a certain scene that shuttles back and forth between the art worlds of Berlin and New York. Yet every component of the exhibition, from the video to the posters and lobby cards that advertise it in the gallery, inhabits a fiction-the framework of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1992). The people onscreen are ostensibly playing roles taken from the movie *Manhattan*, but they are also playing themselves (or typified versions of themselves). Could you talk a bit about how your exhibition dramatizes this social constellation?

KEN OKIISHI: If there is an overarching concept for the exhibition, it is that Manhattan is translated through Berlin and back again. This is, on the one hand, an autobiographical reality (I've been going back and forth between Berlin and New York for the last nine or so years); it is also an often fraught channel of cultural exchange. From the New York perspective, the dream of Berlin eventually always becomes framed in terms of real estate (well, really, in New York, what isn't eventually framed in terms of real estate...?) In Berlin, everyone still finds New York so glamorous-from a fantasy of mingling with the progeny of exiled high-bourgeois German-Jews to living in a Ryan McGinley photograph, to a retrograde exoticization of "black culture"... In neither place is the discussion really that interesting—but what I've found in going back and forth is that the slippage in understanding, the terrible translation, has an amazing catalyzing force. The idea of the city, and how one makes a life in it, is thrown into ongoing crisis; and the dialectic that emerges from this actually feels alive and like it might develop in unexpected ways. The inter-text that seemed to handle projections from all sides was Woody Allen's *Manhattan*. And the site of the exhibition, this abandoned period-piece early 80's renovation of a brownstone in the ritziest neighborhood in Manhattan, seemed the right place to articulate this assemblage of displacements.

SANCHEZ: Because your exhibition was the first to be held in Alex Zachary's space, it's almost as if the gallery was making its debut alongside your work. At the opening, people compared the low ceilings and carpeted floors to everything from a suburban den to a gallery in Cologne in the 90s—another slippage like the ones you're describing. One of the things that struck me about your video is the way it demystified the reciprocal glamorizing of New York and Berlin... while still, perhaps, taking some pleasure in it.

OKIISHI: Demystifying? Yes, in terms of a certain hype—but also opening up the possibility of authenticity. It matters that all of the people, all of the locations, all of the social interactions involved in making *(Goodbye to) Manhattan,* including ones that didn't pan out, were real; that the approach was from the inside out; that it took three years of not really knowing what I was doing, but doing it anyway; that two of my best friends from my New York-Berlin-New York life and my partner of more than nine years are the "stars"; that the background of the gallery chitchat scene in the video was filmed in the material space of the intersection of Berlin/New York art worlds, at an Evas Arche und der Feminist performance upstairs at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, where I was performing, as background music, crappy piano versions of songs used as soundtracks in Woody Allen films; and that, through a convoluted series of events, I ended up showing it with someone who had also become a close friend and who grew up in the mise-en-scene of *Manhattan.* This focus on "reality" and working from the "inside out" probably sounds like a contradiction, because, of course, the entire screenplay was "written" from outside of an already existing screenplay. When I extracted the three main female parts, and then ran the official German translation back into English via an online digital translator, I wasn't exactly conveying "real life." Or was I? Aren't our social narratives so continuously mediated and determined by various normative forces that manipulating the social scripts on the level of the script is the only way to convey something other than a predetermined narrative track with bland dialogue? And what could be more pleasurable than this opening up, this possibility of a new experience?

SANCHEZ: All these dislocated positions (which, in another time, might have been signs of an anomie) are handled without a trace of angst. In fact, the video is quite hilarious. Would you agree?

OKIISHI: Yes, sometimes it is absolutely bonkers! But some people have also cried while watching certain parts-sometimes the same parts where others laughed the hardest.

SANCHEZ: This frenzy on the cusp of ecstasy and total breakdown. It seems to run throughout the video. I see it in your camerawork—which is jittery, distracted, impatient, but also fascinated by whatever is around it and eager to take it in. On the other hand, the people on the screen seem rather detached.

OKIISHI: I think this has to do with how I filmed them, which is meant to bring out an estrangement from language, or dislodge the naturalistic alignment of character and speech, but also to bring out real emotion. There is a lot of silent space where you can see them concentrating but not really knowing what is going on--which is also space for the viewer's mind to wander, but then you are confronted with this mangled language which coheres enough that you start to form an understanding that interrupts your thoughts, or mixes with or frays. Emmelyn is really quite brilliant at all of this: in her performance of the Tracy/Hemingway character, she manages to plow through the garbled language in perfect "Tracy voice" like the lines actually makes sense, and the way she moves—it's this perfectly articulated liminal performance. And her face speaks so many things at the same time!

SANCHEZ: These estrangement techniques, at least for certain Brechtian filmmakers, are usually used for exactly the opposite purpose: to get rid of emotion. In spite of inflicting communicative handicaps on your actors' language (at times, you completely drown out their voices with blaring classical music), you still seem very interested in the possibility of communication. An affective communication that, nevertheless, refuses to direct your viewers into feeling a certain way. You spoke earlier about your work opening up the possibility of a new experience. What kinds of new experiences are you looking for?

OKIISHI: I think following Brechtian strategies with a reified image of politics—an input-output approach, such as, *if the situation is A, and you do B, then the audience will realize C*—I think this trend in contemporary art is terrible! But I think this also mirrors how, at least in Germany, Brechtian theater is totally normalized. To me, the Brechtian actor, at worst, can look like a zombie following a strict, ideologically determined, morally "correct" script. In showing you the actor acting, we are left with something even worse: a de-subjectivized person drawn along some inevitable path without agency—well, the only real agency being that of the author as god-substitute, who can even convince the audience that the actor is making real decisions! And as regards the "relaxed audience," the always-in-the-head, self-critical-smug-ideal audience of Brecht: anyone who's ever been to Germany knows that squelching emotion is not the problem! One thing I've never understood is when people say that they don't like to be "manipulated" by movies. How many times do you have to be shown that "it is just a movie" to get it? Aren't we smart enough to be able to deal with complicated emotional responses? So, I am happy that you are asking me this question, since this is not my interest at all, a standard set of self-reflexive cinema strategies. My real interest is intervening in sites of subjectivity formation in order to activate agency.

(GOODBYE TO) MANHATTAN IS ON VIEW THROUGH MARCH 7. ALEX ZACHARY IS LOCATED AT 16 EAST 77 STREET, NEW YORK.

ARTFORUM

Berlin

Ken Okiishi

GALERIE NEU
Mehringdamm 72,
July 8–July 31

View of "Ken Okiishi," 2010. From left:*(Goodbye to) Manhattan*, 2010; *(Goodbye to) Manhattan (split in two)* (detail), 2010.

"Chapter One. He adored New York City," begins Woody Allen's 1979 *Manhattan*. "To him it was a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture. The same lack of individual integrity to cause so many people to take the easy way out . . ." Allen's line may be an allusion to suicide, but one less radical departure for New York creatives has been, traditionally, to move away. With seemingly exponential increase over the past decade, asylum seekers have turned not to Brooklyn but to Berlin, inaugurating in their wake a love-hate fantasy wherein the German capital is cast as a utopian center of artistic production, and New York as a place to sell, not to make—a sexy but commercial hell. The success of Ken Okiishi's film work *(Goodbye to) Manhattan*, 2010, is its dismantling of that bipolar fantasy, of which its protagonists are ostensibly a part.

Okiishi has been living between New York and Berlin since 2001, and *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* combines materials from that experience (filmed between 2006 and 2009) into a seventy-two-minute, semiautobiographical transposition of Allen's classic. Okiishi's cast of characters is pared down to*Manhattan*'s three female protagonists, interpreted by key players in the artist's actual New York/Berlin life; its script is the Google translation, into English, of the German version of Allen's original. The resultant semantic layering is mirrored in the video's sometimes vertiginous, pixelated editing; still, if there is anything neurotic here, it is only

in both films' intuitive, historicized preoccupation with Germanness. Okiishi's work indulges the hysterical potential of that transatlantic transaction; its Technicolor destabilizes a black-and-white cliché. One sees a zany shopping and dining experience in West Berlin's KaDeWe department store; Manhattan meanwhile languishes under a sound track of slightly decelerated Gershwin tunes that have the metallic quality of a recording made, perhaps, in the hull of a Berlin-bound Boeing 757.

(Goodbye to) Manhattan's presentation in Berlin this summer, after its debut at New York's Alex Zachary Gallery earlier this year, provides an opportunity to view the work in the space in which it was partly conceived and filmed: Galerie Neu's apartment annex, where Okiishi once briefly resided. Viewers, too, thus find themselves green-screened into the film's Berlin/Manhattan hallucination—the work, after all, is about *you*.

— *Victoria Camblin*

THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 8, 2010

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

KEN OKIISHI

Okiishi's hilarious, if rambling, video is a tale of two cities: New York and Berlin. Woody Allen's black-and-white film "Manhattan" is dubbed in German and subtitled in English. Okiishi's footage, shot in Berlin, stars the artist Nick Mauss ("as Diane Keaton as Mary"), the curator Pati Hertling ("as Meryl Streep as Jill"), and the critic Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen ("as Mariel Hemingway as Tracy"). At times, the action unfolds on a split screen; at other times, not. What connects the two towns? An art-world diaspora: twenty-somethings now flock to the German capital, where the rents are cheap and the bars are open all night, and New York circa 1979 has assumed a mythic aura—a little like Weimar Berlin. Through March 7. (Zachary, 16 E. 77th St. 212-628-0189.)

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2010

Art in Review

Ken Okiishi

'(Goodbye to) Manhattan'

Alex Zachary
16 East 77th Street
Manhattan
Through March 7.

A few years ago it seemed as though the entire New York art world might move to Berlin. Then the real-estate market imploded, giving New York artists and galleries a reason to stay.

A wry video by Ken Okiishi explores the Berlin-centric scene that might have been. It's a reimagining of Woody Allen's "Manhattan," starring artists and dealers with dual art-world citizenship. And as the first show in a new uptown gallery run by Alex Zachary, a director of the very downtown Gavin Brown's Enterprise, it's another kind of border crossing.

Language and geography are fluid, as is gender. (Mr. Okiishi's frequent collaborator, Nick Mauss, plays Diane Keaton's role of Mary.) On the lower half of the screen Mr. Allen's film appears, with German overdubbing and English subtitles. On the upper half Mr. Okiishi's actors flit through Berlin cafes and apartments by means of crude digital editing.

Their dialogue, from the original movie, has been translated from English to German and back again. Mary says, for instance, "We do not haven ourselves often argued and I, I could my identity longer to a so brilliant, dominating man subordinate." Even stranger is the total elision of Mr. Allen's parts.

In a side gallery are photo-collages that combine shots of empty New York storefronts, circa 2009, with lobby cards from "Manhattan." They're doleful, unless you look at all that real estate as potential exhibition sites.

Mr. Okiishi draws reflexive parallels between creative narcissists of the 1970s and the aughts. And at 72 minutes, his film is quite long for a mash-up. It's funny, though, because neurosis is the same in any language.

KAREN ROSENBERG

MAY

N°7 10/2011

formation of Minimalism into a fashion studio, Gerard Byrne produces a film which is undoubtedly irreverent with regard to Serra's work, but which invites us, as Brummell did in his day, to consider that between "an item of clothing and a 'thing,' there is such a radical difference with the result that an object which is apparently used in as banal a way as a jacket, ends up finding itself occupied by an ineffable essence"[4], —something which Antonioni would not have gainsaid. In Byrne's film, it is impossible to say whether Serra's work acts as a backdrop for the photographs or whether the photographs enable us to look at Serra. The two entities seem "toned down": Byrne gives free rein to the contemporary shock absorber, that of present time, which bypasses the monumentality of Serra's work as much as the glitz of advertizing. Just as the photographer in *Blow-Up* is invited to almost grammatically re-qualify his whole relationship to images, Byrne's films, which make plenty of room for style and décors as forces interpreting objects which he produces, are spaces where contradiction is dealt with.

Serra has long held a mistrust toward photography, declaring in particular: "Most photographers use advertising as their example, where the image must have a maximum content for a facile Gestalt reading."[5] Byrne is aware of this complexity, and inserts the photograph, the pause, the snapshot—the void of the vintage—as a diegetic driving force of the film. It is not so much a matter of calculating the resistance capacities of a Serra piece to advertising assaults, as making it possible to relate the enigma of photography to the rust of the *Five Elevations*, a minimalist phantom vessel grounded in an English garden. *Translated from French by Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods*

4 Giorgio Agamben, "Le beau Brummell ou l'appropriation de l'irréalité", in *Stanze* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1998), 94.

5 Richard Serra and Clara Weyergraf, *Interviews, etc. 1970-1980* (Yonkers, Hudson River Museum, 1980), 170.

(Goodbye to) Manhattan

Karl Holmqvist

Ken Okiishi. *(Goodbye to) Manhattan based in Berlin*, Berlin
8 June – 24 July, 2011

Trying to find ways to say something will have us searching for words and enter a repetitive mode. Stopping and re-starting, stutter come again. This is somehow what structures the entire film *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* by Ken Okiishi from 2010. It opens with the famous opening sequence from the classic 1979

Ken Okiishi,
(Goodbye to) Manhattan,
2010, still

Woody Allen film *Manhattan*, where the main protagonist is trying to formulate the first few lines of his novel. At once a declaration of love to the city and an attempt to take revenge on his ex-lover's tell-all book in which he is prominently featured, it's a question of getting things right. As opening lines are important, they set the tone for the rest of the work and draw you in, both either as writer or a reader. They will somehow influence how what follows will develop. Or not. Sometimes these books never get written.

As indicated by the title *(Goodbye to) Manhattan*, in Ken Okiishi's film it's more about a farewell letter, and also a way to erase or neuter somehow the towering presence of the Woody Allen epic. Of saying goodbye, thereby switching out the light, emptying the store. This is done in a rather *hands-on* manner, where through green-screen and other tricks with voice-overs, translation and simultaneous over-cuts, Woody Allen's film is omni-present, but quite literally reshuffled to the state of a controlled obsession, or the way people who stop drinking too much, sometimes say that they are now sober alcoholics.

The transition is from New York to Berlin, and in this sense is semi-autobiographical since the artist himself has made frequent trips between the two cities, and has been moving from one to the other. Together with many other Americans of his generation and even younger ones, one might add. It is this phenomenon of a New York exodus to Berlin that Ken Okiishi's film is set to portray, among many other things. While typical New York activities such as MoMA fundraiser galas or endless walks in Central Park play out in the background, we get to see sets of new footage of "typical" Berlin things such as the KdW meat counter, visits to the collection of the

Ken Okiishi, *(Goodbye to) Manhattan*, 2010, Still

Gemäldegalerie, or a street scene with a couple of buskers running out of batteries for their transistor.

What is at the heart of the film though, is a certain big city alienation, a type of *verfremdungseffekt* brought out through the way the actors speak past each other, sometimes from different picture planes or in mixes of German and English at the same time. As Diane Keaton as Mary (in a cameo appearance by the artist's boyfriend Nick Mauss) tries to pay for her purchases, she can neither find any appropriate coins or bills nor any credit cards that are accepted and finally her entire purse is spilled on the floor where she leaves it lying as she trots along in a hunched over gait. All the characters of *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* seem to share the loopy logic of a similar type of movement in place. As if the elegant strolls through Central Park from Woody Allen's original had been replaced with the mad determination of a treadmill. Examples of how to expediate the maximum amount of energy while doing a bare minimum. Or else thinking about what to do, or else talking about another typical big city activity. Talking to oneself even, the way typically in which big cities house large amounts of people while many of them still go around feeling quite isolated and lonely.

A section of a city breakdown plays out images of Roberto Rosselini's *Germany Year Zero*, with the heartbreaking scene of the child jumping to his own death through the rubble of the bombed-out city. Here it's not a question of isolation, but rather of people being outright hostile and unkind. The film's status as a semi-documentary purveys the mood, shame and desperation that must have haunted the city of Berlin only little over half a century ago. The

crying voice of teenage heartthrob Mariel Hemingway in the break-up scene with Woody Allen is acted out alone by a character strangely swaying back and forth as if she was on a tricycle, while the street wildly whirls about around her. This is how the film ends, except for another *Manhattan* outtake where the traffic flows in reverse as we are magically transported into the sky and away, panning out on the famous skyline.

What's conspicuously absent from the film is any stand-in for the Woody Allen character himself whose narcissistic presence holds such a center stage in the original adaption. This creates a type absence-presence for the artist himself as if the entire film represented one long attempt at trying to make it as a statement. As if it was all playing out, inside his own head, as a memory or a dreamlike obsession. The way we don't really star in our own dreams, even if we steer its narrative. Should I stay or should I go? Big City mythology day and night in color and black and white. What's the use of any of it? Will there never be a place or moment where I can freely breathe? Is this what we have come to define as civilization? Culture? The meaning of art? A rapture. Screened out of doors as part of the survey exhibition *based in Berlin*'s extensive program of performances and lectures, this film is a contemporary classic on issues of transition and migration.

(Goodbye to) Manhattan

Karl Holmqvist

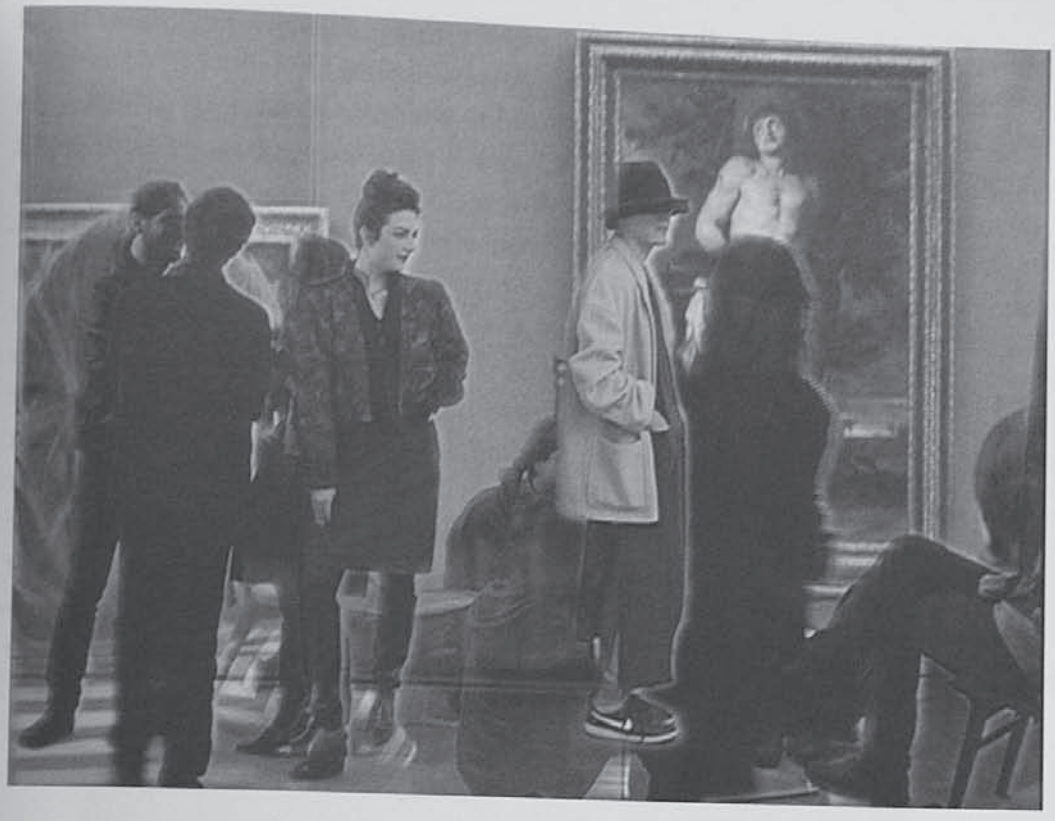
Ken Okiishi. *(Goodbye to) Manhattan*
based in Berlin, Berlin
8 juin – 24 juillet 2011

Pour trouver la manière d'exprimer quelque chose, nous cherchons les mots et nous entrons forcément dans un mode répétitif. Arrêter et recommencer fait revenir le balbutiement. D'une certaine façon, c'est ce qui structure tout le film *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* de Ken Okiishi (2010). Il commence par la fameuse scène d'ouverture du *Manhattan* de Woody Allen (1979), où le protagoniste essaie de formuler les premières phrases de son roman dans lequel, tout en déclarant son amour à la ville de New York, il entend prendre sa revanche sur l'autobiographie publiée par son ex-femme, où il tient une grande place. Le problème est de mettre les choses au point. Les premières lignes sont importantes, elles donnent le ton de la suite et elles vous attirent dans le livre, en quelque sorte, aussi bien en tant qu'écrivain qu'en tant que lecteur. D'une certaine manière, elles vont avoir de l'influence sur le développement de ce qui va suivre. Ou bien non. Il arrive que ces livres ne soient jamais écrits.

Comme le titre *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* l'indique, dans le film de Ken Okiishi, il s'agit plutôt d'une lettre d'adieu, et aussi d'une manière de gommer ou de neutraliser, d'une manière ou d'une autre, la présence imposante du film culte de Woody Allen. Donc de dire au revoir en éteignant les lumières, de fermer boutique. C'est fait d'une manière très bricolée : écran vert et autres truquages avec voix off, traduction et écrans fragmentés, ce qui rend le film de Woody Allen omniprésent, mais littéralement remanié, rendu à l'état d'une obsession contrôlée. Un peu comme les gens qui arrêtent de trop boire, peuvent dire qu'ils sont maintenant des alcooliques sobres.

La transition se fait de New York à Berlin, et dans ce sens elle est semi-autobiographique, puisque l'artiste a lui-même fait de fréquents voyages entre les deux villes, et qu'il a déménagé de l'une à l'autre – comme de nombreux Américains de sa génération, et même des plus jeunes, pourrait-on ajouter. Et c'est ce phénomène d'exode de New York à Berlin que le film de Ken Okiishi entend montrer, entre nombreuses autres choses. Tandis que passent en arrière-plan des scènes new yorkaises typiques, comme des galas pour des collectes de fonds au MoMA ou d'interminables promenades à Central Park, nous voyons défiler des nouvelles séquences représentant le Berlin « typique », telles que le rayon boucherie du KdW, les visites des collections de la Gemäldegalerie, ou encore des scènes de rue, avec deux musiciens qui perdent les piles de leur transistor.

Cependant, ce qui est au cœur du film, c'est une certaine aliénation urbaine, du type *verfremdungseffekt*, qui vient de la manière dont les acteurs parlent de manière isolée, quelquefois dans des plans différents, en anglais et en allemand



Ken Okiishi,
(Goodbye to) Manhattan,
2010, photogrammes

en même temps. Comme lorsque Diane Keaton/Mary (avec l'apparition en guest star du petit ami de l'artiste, Nick Mauss) veut régler ses achats, et qu'elle ne peut jamais trouver ni pièces ni billets, ni carte de crédit qui soit acceptée, que finalement tout le contenu de son porte-monnaie se répand sur le sol, et qu'elle le laisse là, s'enfuyant en courant, courbée en avant. Tous les personnages de *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* semblent partager la logique déglinguée de ce genre de mouvement. Comme si les déambulations gracieuses dans Central Park de l'original de Woody Allen avaient été remplacées par la froide détermination d'un tapis de jogging. Des exemples de la façon d'expédier un maximum d'énergie tout en faisant le strict minimum. Ou encore de penser à quoi faire, ou d'en parler, autre activité typique d'une grande ville. Même parler tout seul, à la manière typique des grandes villes, qui hébergent des foules de gens mais où beaucoup d'entre eux tournent en rond en se sentant totalement seuls et isolés.

Une séquence montre des images du film *Allemagne année zéro* de Roberto Rossellini, avec la scène bouleversante de l'enfant qui erre dans les décombres de la ville bombardée avant de se suicider. Là ce n'est plus une question d'isolement mais plutôt d'individus carrément mauvais et hostiles. Le statut du film, semi-documentaire, donne le ton, et reflète la honte et le désespoir qui doivent avoir hanté la ville de Berlin, il y a à peine plus d'un demi-siècle. La voix pleine de sanglots de la bouleversante Mariel Hemingway adolescente, dans la scène de rupture avec Woody Allen, est exprimée par un personnage qui oscille étrangement d'avant en arrière, comme si elle était sur un tricycle dans une rue qui tournoie frénétiquement autour d'elle. C'est comme cela que le film se termine, à l'exception d'un autre emprunt à *Manhattan*, où la circulation routière

se fait en sens inverse, alors que nous sommes transportés par magie dans le ciel et poussés par un panoramique vers la fameuse skyline.

Ce qui est manifestement absent du film, c'est une quelconque doublure du personnage de Woody Allen lui-même, dont la présence narcissique est le point de mire dans l'original. Cela crée une absence/présence pour l'artiste, comme si tout le film représentait une longue tentative pour faire de ce film une déclaration. Comme s'il était tourné entièrement dans sa tête, comme un souvenir ou une obsession de type onirique. De la même façon que l'on n'est jamais vraiment la star dans nos rêves, même si on en maîtrise la narration. Devrais-je rester ou partir ? La mythologie de la grande ville, de nuit et de jour, en couleur et en noir et blanc. À quoi ça sert, l'un ou l'autre ? Y aura-t-il jamais un lieu ou un moment où je pourrai respirer librement ? C'est ça que nous en sommes arrivés à appeler civilisation ? Culture ? Sens de l'art ? Un ravissement. Projeté à l'extérieur lors de la grande exposition *based in Berlin*, où il était inclus dans un vaste programme de performances et de débats, ce film est un classique contemporain sur les problèmes de transition et de migration. *Traduit de l'anglais par Michèle Veubret*

American Prayer

François Aubart

Richard Prince. *American Prayer*
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
13 mai – 13 juillet 2011

Dans *American Prayer*, Richard Prince expose quelques-unes de ses œuvres ainsi qu'un nombre important de documents et de livres de sa propre collection, presque tous sont des premières éditions et beaucoup sont dédicacés. L'ensemble est ainsi marqué du sceau de la rareté. On n'est donc pas vraiment surpris que la Bibliothèque nationale de France appuie sa communication sur le caractère exceptionnel d'une telle collection. De fait, si en visitant l'exposition on était passé à côté des notices qui toutes signalent ici une dédicace et là une édition originale, et si on n'avait pas pris conscience que Richard Prince possède une collection des premières éditions de *Lolita* de Vladimir Nabokov, en une vingtaine de langues et, surtout, l'édition originale annotée par l'auteur, pas d'inquiétude le catalogue est là pour le rappeler.

Concédons-le donc que la collection de Richard Prince est d'une richesse éblouissante. Cependant, il semble que ce ne soit pas uniquement la dévotion collectionneuse de l'artiste qui soit seule en jeu dans ce projet. Il dresse bien, comme l'explique Robert Rubin dans le catalogue, « une typologie de la culture populaire et des contre-cultures américaines – science-fiction, *fantasy*, *pulp*

ARTFORUM
April 2010, p. 95

TOP TEN

DAS INSTITUT

Founded in 2007 as an import/export agency by German-born, New York–based artists Kerstin Brätsch and Adele Röder, DAS INSTITUT is an ongoing collaboration that creates hybrid forms of artistic production and reproduction through painting, design, and performance. This past winter their installations were included in "Leopards in the Temple" at the SculptureCenter in New York and as part of Ei Arakawa's "Non-Solo Show, Non-Group Show" at the Kunsthalle Zürich. Next month a solo exhibition of their work opens at New Jerseyy in Basel.

3 KEN OKIISHI, *(GOODBYE TO) MANHATTAN*, 2010 This video, made between two cities and shown for the first time at the opening of Alex Zachary's gallery on New York's Upper East Side, offers an enigmatic urban encyclopedia channeled through a restaging of Woody Allen's *Manhattan*. Of course weird communication errors abound, but the unclassifiable, inexplicable, and just plain messed-up social interactions carry a positive potentiality. Yet Okiishi's characters don't just have Manhattan; they also have Berlin. Authentic, heartfelt, and conjuring the kind of emotional interspace that occurs when you "don't belong," the work is filled with mistranslated, overdubbed dialogue and out-of-sync subtitles in two languages. Subject to this constructive crisis are nonactors Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen, Pati Hertling, and Nick Mauss, who, cast by Okiishi as the female leads of Allen's original, simultaneously play prototypes of their real-life selves—art critic, curator, and artist, respectively.

CORRECTED SLOGANS

READING AND WRITING
CONCEPTUALISM

TRIPLE CANOPY

AARON KUNIN & KEN OKIISHI, MODERATED BY KATIE RAISSIAN

LUCY IVES We named this panel after a French adverbial phrase that doesn't really have a good idiomatic translation into English.[1] Some of you may recognize it as the title of a novel from the end of the nineteenth century about a man who decides to withdraw from the world in order to test the capacity of his senses against art.[2] The production of art replaces everyday living and thinking. Nothing much happens in the story, except for the appearance of beautiful art objects and the occurrence of sometimes disturbing aesthetic experience.

We were inspired by the oddness of this book, but the phrase itself, *à rebours*, is also evocative, of going against the nap of a textile, going against the text in a certain way, testing it. This is a panel about translation, but not about translation in the sense in which we often think of it, as producing perfect, transparent, or exact meaning—a replica in another tongue. This is a panel about translation as a *form* in which one may work, as Ken Okiishi and Aaron Kunin will discuss. Here translation may bring us to a place where we

1 In Old French the adjective *rebors*, as in *poil rebors*, describes fur or hair brushed against the pattern of growth. *À rebours* literally means "against the nap" but is generally used to mean "backwards, in the wrong direction."

2 Published in 1884, Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours* is a novel about the aesthetic experiments of a wealthy recluse, Jean des Esseintes. First translated into English in 1926 as *Against the Grain*, it was touted on the title page as a classic of decadence: "A novel without a plot. The book that Dorian Gray loved and that inspired Oscar Wilde: 'It was the strangest book he had ever read.'"

4 First performed in 1893 and later adapted into an opera by Claude Debussy, Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* is a masterpiece of symbolist drama. The plot centers on a doomed medieval love triangle, though Maeterlinck's repetitive, symbol-laden script cultivates a dreamlike atmosphere more than a traditional narrative. In 1890, three years before the premier of the play, Maeterlinck articulated a theory of symbolist theater, arguing that human presence on stage was incommensurable with the fragile purity of art. "The stage is where masterpieces die," Maeterlinck writes, "because the presentation of a masterpiece by accidental and human means is a contradiction. All masterpieces are symbols, and the symbol never withstands the active presence of man." He continues, "One should perhaps eliminate the living being from the stage. It is not inconceivable that one would thus return to the art of distant centuries, whose last imprint may well be borne by the masks of Greek tragedians. Will the day come when sculpture … will be used onstage? Will the human being be replaced by a shadow? a reflection? a projection of symbolic forms, or a being who would appear to live without being alive? I do not know; but the absence of man seems essential to me. Whenever man penetrates a poem, the immense poem of his own presence snuffs out everything around him."

5 Jeff Dolven, in *Scenes of Instruction* (2007), a study of pedagogy and early modern poetry, describes literate learning as an act of translation, or transposition, of pronouns: "Sense experience is first-person by definition, as is the kind of learning by experience that Aristotle describes; precept, which may be taught, moves us into the third. … Experience can be got, that is, in the safety of the schoolroom or the study, from the exempla (or even the stories) of history: his experience (or hers) can be mine. Not just knowledge, or learning, but experience itself."

want to talk about something that's not even in the original text, strange affective or disjunctive states that are associated with or intentionally produced via translation.

KATIE RAISSIAN Aaron, your collection of poems, *The Sore Throat*, has two distinct parts. In the first you call upon Ezra Pound's poem *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*.[3] The second part is related to Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*.[4] To what extent do you consider your poems to be translations? Have you somehow translated yourself into these texts?

AARON KUNIN Just a moment ago I was talking with Jeff Dolven about poems I have a personal relationship with and poems I don't have a personal relationship with. Jeff was saying that he's always felt that Marvell was a little strange to him, though undeniably great, whereas Donne was one of *his* poets. I felt exactly the opposite about Donne and Marvell.[5]

I feel now and then that I've read everything, which is not true. But I tend to get this feeling at the end of the school year around May when the term is finishing. The freedom of summer: I can read anything I want. But oh no, I've already read everything; there's nothing I haven't read. That feeling is really the feeling that I've read all the books that are for me, and the rest of the books are for someone else.

Within the category of books that are for me, there is a subcategory that includes works like Pound's *Mauberley* and

3 Pound understood *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) as a pendant to his earlier *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919). Both poems ostensibly illuminate the struggles of an artist in the cultural aftermath of World War I and were eventually published together as *Diptych Rome-London* (1958). *Homage to Sextus Propertius* elicited strong criticisms for its seemingly inept translations of Sextus Propertius's Latin into English. Steven Yao argues in *Translation and the Languages of Modernism* (2002) that *Homage to Sextus Propertius* played a central role in the "refiguring of the very dimensions of 'translation' as a literary mode during the Modernist period." Still, in a 1932 letter, Pound questioned "how far the *Mauberley* is merely a translation of the *Homage to S.P.*, for such as couldn't understand the latter?" For Pound, *Mauberley* was "an endeavor to communicate with a blockheaded epoch."

6

"Toward the coast of earth beneath,
Down from the ecliptick, sped with hoped success,
Throws his steep flight in many an aery wheel;
Nor staid, till on Niphates' top he lights"
Gustave Doré, illustration for John Milton,
Paradise Lost (1866)

Paradise Lost. (I have that schizophrenic feeling that Milton actually did write *Paradise Lost* just for me.) This category doesn't just consist of works that I love or that were written for me, but works that want to be turned from undying masterpieces into something else. That's the beginning of making art: finding a place where more work can be done.

KR So translation is the insertion of your own subjectivity into the text?

AK That already happened when Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* because, without realizing it, he was addressing me.[6] I'm talking about an additional step of creation.

KEN OKIISHI With Rimbaud, there was the sense that it was written for "me"—but in my case, this was greeted with a feeling that I couldn't read it, that I couldn't read the translation and that the translation was totally unsuccessful. There was this extreme alienation. But then, at the same time, I also came to like the strange syntax and diction that emerges out of the attempt to translate something that perhaps isn't translatable.

Another side of my interest in the kind of language that emerges from attempts at translation had to do with a job I had working in a writing center. I was working with undergraduate and graduate students who didn't speak English as their native language, but who were very advanced in their thinking, and this strange language would emerge. I had to figure out a way to facilitate communication on a high level by short-circuiting language—to figure out a way of speeding it up somehow, or developing something beyond direct translation.

When reading the texts these translations would produce, a strange thing would happen in your brain, where different connections and relationships would emerge.[7] A real headache—but also totally fascinating. It reminded me of the then-new Google translator. And, actually, I think sometimes the students would just use the Google translator and bring

8 In 2010 Dmitriy Genzel and a team of researchers at Google published the results of a similar experiment. Using a statistical machine translation (SMT) algorithm, they attempted to produce accurate translations of poems that maintain the meter and rhyme of the original work. Part of this process involved quantifying poetic structures so that the computer could detect and replicate lines written in blank verse, couplet, haiku, cinquain, dodoitsu, quinzaine, choka, fib, tanka, lanterne, triplet, and quatrain. To evaluate their system, the researchers inputted a French translation of Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) and then compared the results to the English original.

Wilde's original:

He did not wring his hands, as do
Those witless men who dare
To try to rear the changeling Hope
In the cave of black Despair:
He only looked upon the sun,
And drank the morning air.

French translation, translated back into English by Google:

Without hands twisted like these men,
Poor men without hope, dare
To nourish hope in our vault
Of desperation there
And looked toward the sun, drink cool
Until the evening air.

10 "For in its afterlife—which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a change. Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process. The obvious tendency of a writer's literary style may in time

me their digitally translated texts to try and "fix" them. I was supposed to be ethically disturbed by this, but really I just it found amazing that this horrible-sounding language could appear real to anyone, and I was fascinated by what would emerge as we tried to work on the text.

This was in 2005, just as Google translator was becoming popular. I loved the weird, glitchy language that it produced. A translation machine operates according to a set of rules. It represents a very limited understanding of language, as opposed to how the brain actually forms words, sentences—speaking—connecting objects and actions in the world. As a result you get these funny, nonsensical blips. Your brain still interprets the translated texts, attempts to make connections between words and objects, but the results are illogical. I had the idea: Why don't I insert the French text of Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* into Google translator and see what happens?[8]

KR Is this an attempt to translate the untranslatable?[9]

KO I get the sense of the impossibility of translation when reading something like Adorno in English. I'm really thinking, "This can't be." I'm constantly made aware—in the awkwardness of the syntax or the difficulty in grasping the idea—of relationships between words in

7 In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha describes translation as a "staging of cultural difference": "Translation is the performative nature of cultural communication. It is language *in actu* (enunciation, positionality) rather than language *in situ* (énoncé, or propositionality). And the sign of translation continually tells, or 'tolls' the different times and spaces between cultural authority and its performative practices. The 'time' of translation consists in that movement of meaning, the principle and practice of a communication that, in the words of [Paul de Man] 'puts the original in motion to decanonise it, giving it the movement of fragmentation, a wandering of errance, a kind of permanent exile.'"

9 "If I say A has beautiful eyes someone may ask me: what do you find beautiful about his eyes, and perhaps I shall reply: the almond shape, long eye-lashes, delicate lids. What do these eyes have in common with a Gothic church that I find beautiful too? Should I say they make a similar impression on me?" Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (1977; trans. Peter Winch, 1984)

wither away, only to give rise to immanent tendencies in the literary creation. What sounded fresh once may sound hackneyed later; what was once current may someday sound quaint. To seek the essence of such changes, as well as the equally constant changes in meaning, in the subjectivity of posterity rather than in the very life of language and its works, would mean—even allowing for the crudest psychologism—to confuse the root cause of a thing with its essence. More pertinently, it would mean denying, by an importance of thought, one of the most fruitful historical processes." Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (1923; trans. Harry Zohn, 1968)

12 William S. Smith: Ken, an interesting moment of ambiguity occurred in the discussion here. I was convinced that both you and Aaron used the term "demonic." And the image of your handwriting did indeed look "demonic."

However, I believe that Aaron was actually saying "demotic." In either case, maybe you would like to either change this to "demotic" (and change my footnote.) Or you could comment on the (mis)translation of the term in discussion.

KO: You are totally right: I did indeed say "demonic." That is precisely what I meant. Actually, I had no awareness that Aaron was saying "demotic." I think I was also spacing out a bit at that moment, and then latched onto what I heard as "demonic." That is funny, actually. I was spacing out and the word "demonic" refocused me. Leave as is.

AK: I noticed that Ken heard "demonic" when I said "demotic," and I decided to let it go. The word is completely appropriate since translators communicate with an outside source, and we are all demonized by language. Email exchange (November 2012)

Page from a draft of Ken Okiishi, *One Season in Hell* (2006) ☛

a sentence and relationships to other texts in a wider body of knowledge that are not coming through in translation. Reading Rimbaud in translation, I got the sense of an elevated and somewhat archaic language. It felt historical. But then I realized that perhaps it was the translation itself that was dated. There were all these layers of time.[10] My brain was coming up against these words and getting stuck; I couldn't fall into the text.

AK Ken, I just wanted to say your translation really succeeds as a translation, which is in part a statement about how much *A Season in Hell* can accommodate, but also a statement about your interpretation of *A Season in Hell*. On the one hand, Rimbaud represents this pure romanticism: "I'm going to invent a new language every time I sit down to write." On the other hand, in *A Season in Hell* he's forming a kind of canon for himself. He's placing himself in a tradition. Daniel Tiffany's idea of infidel poetics is helpful for thinking about the Rimbaud tradition.[11] It's an obscure literary tradition but not the obscure literary tradition of the elite. It's not Latin; it's thieves' Latin. It's the vulgar, the vernacular, the demotic.

KO I worked with the text by placing the French on the left and the Google text on the right. And then I kind of let myself go in the middle. This is the demonic part.[12] My handwriting starts to fray a bit.[13] The first word of *A Season in Hell*, "Jadis,"

11 In *Infidel Poetics* (2009), Daniel Tiffany discusses the social valence of textual obscurity. Rejecting the received wisdom that "obscurity is principally a feature of works considered to be arcane, virtuosic, or deliberately experimental," Tiffany argues that "literary conceptions of obscurity may be rooted in the social misunderstanding of demotic speech, thereby shifting the phenomenology of obscurity away from its conventional association with elite culture and toward the lyric vernacular—especially poems composed in slang, jargon, or dialect. From the perspective of the educated elite, therefore, lyric obscurity, by its ability to evoke the dangerous speech of various social underworlds, produces a kind of sociological sublime. … Instead of reinforcing the traditional association of sublimity and elevation, lyric obscurity may trigger a variation of the sublime associated with the abject: a vernacular sublime."

Le sang païen revient! L'Esprit est proche, pourquoi Christ ne m'aide-t-il pas, en donnant à mon âme noblesse et liberté. Hélas! l'Évangile a passé! l'Évangile! L'Évangile.

J'attends Dieu avec gourmandise. Je suis de race inférieure de toute éternité.

Me voici sur la plage armoricaine. Que les villes s'allument dans le soir. Ma journée est faite; je quitte l'Europe. L'air marin brûlera mes poumons; les climats perdus me tanneront. Nager, broyer l'herbe, chasser, fumer surtout; boire des liqueurs fortes comme du métal bouillant, - comme faisaient ces chers ancêtres autour des feux.

Je reviendrai, avec des membres de fer, la peau sombre, l'oeil furieux: sur mon masque, on me jugera d'une race forte. J'aurai de l'or: je serai oisif et brutal. Les femmes soignent ces féroces infirmes retour des pays chauds. Je serai mêlé aux affaires politiques. Sauvé.

Maintenant, je suis maudit, j'ai horreur de la patrie. Le meilleur, c'est un sommeil bien ivre, sur la grève.

Blood songs pain reinvent!
~~The Spirit i~~ There is an ~~esprit~~
~~E.s.p.r~~ ESPRIT store coming,
why Christ does not help me,
~~while giving to me end~~
give to me nobility and
liberty. Alas! the Gospel
is ~~passé~~ over! The Gospel!
The Gospel.
I wait for God ~~with~~ like
a gourmet. I am of
~~the~~ an inferior race for all eternity.
Me here on the American beach. That the cities
~~are~~ are all lit up in the evening. It makes my
day; I leave Europe. The Marina air will
burn my lungs; the lost climates will tan
my hide. Nigger, bring me some ~~weed~~
herb, Chase
down ~~with~~
a blunt, smoke me up; to drink strong
liquors like ebullient metal, — like pheasants, the
cheers of ancestors around the campfire.
I will return, with iron members, dark skin,
furious eyes: ~~you~~ you'll a big
~~my~~ mask and judge me of a strong race.
I will have gold: I will be ~~idle~~ notice my lazy and brutal. Women look after
these wild disabled men who return from hot countries.

Pagan blood returns! The Spirit is close, why Christ does not help me it, while giving to my heart nobility and freedom. Alas! the Gospel passed! the Gospel! The Gospel. I await God with greediness. I am of lower race of any eternity. Me here on the Armorican beach. That the cities ignite in the evening. My day is made; I leave Europe. The sea air will burn my lungs; the lost climates will tan me. To swim, crush grass, to drive out, smoke especially; to drink strong liquors like ebullient metal, - as made these dear ancestors around fires. I will return, with iron members, the dark skin, the furious eye: on my mask, one will judge me of a strong race. I will have gold: I will be idle and brutal. The women look after these wild disabled person return of the hot countries. I will be mixed with the political businesses. Saved. Now, I am maudit, I detest the fatherland. The best, it is a quite drunk sleep. on the strike.

13 In *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964), Angus Fletcher describes "daemonic agency" as a central characteristic of allegorical literature. The allegorical hero is "a personified abstraction or a representative type. In either case what is felt as a narrowed iconographic meaning is known to us the readers through the hero's characteristic way of acting, which is severely limited in variety." In this sense, the perfect daemonic agent, according to Fletcher, "is not a man possessed by a daemon, but a robot, a Talus," or a machine. Fletcher continues, "There is no such thing as perfection in this world; daemonic agency implies a *manie à la perfection*, an impossible desire to become one with an image of unchanging purity. The agent seeks to become isolated within himself, frozen into an eternally fixed form, an 'idea' in the Platonic sense of the term."

15 In a 2008 interview in *Seneca Review* with Tom Fleischman, Kunin said, "I sometimes describe myself as a practitioner of negative anthropology. It's a joke that doesn't seem to get old for me. It comes from the Raúl Ruiz film *Three Lives and Only One Death* (also known as *Three Double Lives and Only One Death*), where Marcello Mastroianni plays six characters, one of whom is a professor of negative anthropology. In my case this imaginary branch of anthropology might suggest a slight skepticism about the reality of my academic appointment, which is in an English department. Negative anthropology could also be an unrecognizable name for misanthropy, and in this sense it is genuinely relevant to my work. I'm not really interested in the hatred of humanity, but in something more objective: the act of withdrawing from the world. What happens to the world when the misanthrope withdraws from it is that it becomes two worlds. There's the human society left behind, and the new and potentially better society that the misanthrope projects."

I made into "Jewels and Daggers." I liked what comes out of the sounds, but more than that I liked that the sounds could evoke multiple registers of language. I didn't want to simply do a sound translation. I let my brain open and wrote down what came out.

KR So what in your opinion is the function of a translator? Is it to bring out the demonic elements of a text that are otherwise untranslatable?

KO A very good, accurate translation is important. But for me this work was about questioning this *other thing* that happens—what comes into your brain besides the literal meaning, and how could that stream of semiconscious froth or the aporia before the "right" translation emerges be tweaked or brought to the surface? I guess with Rimbaud in particular, this skewed approach actually makes sense in terms of the content of the poem. But talking about the successfulness of the translation makes me very uncomfortable.

KR Why?

KO I think I want to hide behind the other figure, hide behind the relationship that translation proposes.[14] But there are also moments when my system breaks down and I just let myself say something. Aaron, could we talk about the translation method you use in *The Sore Throat*?

AK I don't know that I think of either activity—translation or writing poetry—as hiding. But I know all about hiding, I know all about wanting to be invisible. That's something that I've explored in other areas of my life.[15]

The Sore Throat is two groups of poems, both of which are conceived in somewhat different ways as translations into a very lim-

14 "The element of privacy in language makes possible a crucial, though little understood, linguistic function. Its importance relates a study of translation to a theory of translation as such. Obviously, we speak to communicate. But also to conceal, to leave unspoken. The ability of human beings to misinform modulates through every wavelength from outright lying to silence. This ability is based on the dual structure of discourse: our outward speech has 'behind it' a concurrent flow of articulate consciousness." George Steiner, *After Babel* (1975)

16 The Voice of the Earth

"Sigh" is a word
For a kind of sobbing;
"Sobbing": that is
A kind of weeping;

A whine, a gasp, a sort of a sigh:
That is "talking"—
Out of the throat
Cast.

Aaron Kunin, *The Sore Throat* (2010)

ited vocabulary. The vocabulary is based on a nervous habit, something that I've been doing for a little more than twenty years. I transcribe conversations, things I hear people say, things I say, and things I read, into a binary hand alphabet that a friend of mine invented. It was supposed to work like a sign language, but it functioned more like typing or playing the piano. She and her friends tried to talk to each other in this way.

It turned out that it didn't work for communication. People could learn how to tap out letters with their fingers, but no one ever learned how to read it very well. But before we figured that out, I learned it and really internalized it. It appealed to a very deep part of me. At the same time I had some other nervous habits, seemingly more destructive nervous habits, like knotting my hair, biting my nails, and obsessively brushing my teeth. The signing completely absorbed and colonized these other habits; I started to do it all the time.

After I'd been doing it for a couple of months I realized that sometimes I wasn't actually transcribing anything. I started paying attention to these moments: My hand would fix on a phrase and repeat it over and over again. Occasionally I would know where the phrases were from—two of them were from *Mauberley*. But otherwise it seemed to be a very pure, automatic writing. The phrases of obscure or unconscious origin tended to be very melancholy. Like "We have no choice," "We have no choice," over and over again, or, "It won't be easy and can't be a pleasure."

So I wrote those down, and at some point I declared that to be my vocabulary, a vocabulary I had a very personal relationship with, although it was a part of me I wasn't consciously aware of. In *The Sore Throat* I translated these two poems I love by Pound and Maeterlinck into this vocabulary. I actually did the Pound translation line by line and word by word. It's a close translation in the sense that all of my decisions were dictated by Pound's decisions or they were responses to Pound's decisions.[16]

17 "I believe in an ultimate and absolute rhythm as I believe in an absolute symbol or metaphor." Ezra Pound, introduction to *Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti* (1912)

18 THE JOY OF UNDERSTANDING Come, sister, come, do not keep us waiting any longer. … We are strong enough, we are pure enough. … Put aside those veils which still conceal from us the last truths and the last happinesses. … See, all my sisters are kneeling at your feet. … You are our queen and our reward. …

LIGHT (*drawing her veils closer*) Sisters, my beautiful sisters, I am obeying my Master. … The hour is not yet come; it will strike, perhaps, and I shall return without fear and without shadow. … Farewell, rise and let us kiss once more, like sisters lost and found, while waiting for the day that will soon appear.

Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Blue Bird* (1908; trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, 1910; ellipses in original)

With the Maeterlinck translation, I started with a play written in dialogue and I translated it into poems. It's a translation in a much more impressionistic sense. In both cases, what you get is very different from the source text.

KR Can you tell us more about staying faithful to the Pound poem? Were there elements of the original that you felt compelled to retain?

AK Ultimately, I don't think that the poems I wrote are very close to Pound. I did try to retain what I love most about *Mauberley*, which is the beautiful off-kilter rhythm.[17] And I was trying to stay as close as possible to the paraphrasable content of Pound's poem. But I can see a lot of places where that clearly didn't happen.

KO I like this passage in *The Sore Throat*:

> I'm inventing a machine for
> concealing my desire.
> And I'm inventing another
> machine for concealing the
> machine. It's a two-machine
> system, and it sounded like
> laughter.

How did you arrive at this, and what is the significance of the figure of the machine, both in relation to your work and your process of translation?

AK I actually don't remember. There are some poems in that sequence where I can see I'm actually translating dialogue from Maeterlinck into a dialogue whose paraphrasable content is completely different. But I can see that there's some basis for the decisions I'm making in Maeterlinck's decisions. That's a poem where I started with something in Maeterlinck and that suggested something else: a series of veils and baffles where one reveals what one is feeling through the attempt to conceal it.[18] So you can see that I do know all about wanting to be invisible.

19 Affect is central to the theory of human emotion that Silvan Tomkins developed in the 1950s. Adapting concepts and terminology from the field of cybernetics, Tomkins defined affect in mechanistic terms as "sets of muscular, glandular, and skin receptor responses located in the face (and also widely distributed throughout the body) that generate sensory feedback to a system that finds them either inherently 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable.' These organized sets of responses are triggered at subcortical centers where specific 'programs' for each distinct affect are stored, programs that are innately endowed and have been genetically inherited." The affect of shame, Tomkins observed, "includes lowering the eyelid, lowering the tonus of all facial muscles, lowering the head via a reduction in tonus of the neck muscles, and a unilateral tilting of the head in one direction." Silvan Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (1962)

KO This machine keeps appearing in *The Sore Throat.* Where does the machine come from?

AK The machine isn't a translation of anything in particular in Maeterlinck or Pound. It's a very consistent figure throughout the collection. It's one of the 178 words in the vocabulary.

KR Concealment or distraction is a big part of your work. Can you tell us more about how the self is revealed through the attempt to confine or hide it? You've talked about the power of the feeling of guilt or shame, about that being the most exciting point you can reach in your work. There's a great physicality throughout the poems. I love the lines, "The throat is / sore for a / word."

AK I don't think the poems I wrote about shame really are about concealing. They're about a kind of expression that occurs in the outermost surface of the person, in the face and the clothes. The way I was thinking about shame when I was working on those poems is pretty directly informed by the psychoanalyst Silvan Tomkins, who had this really beautiful system for interpreting facial expressions.[19] The universal instinctive expression of shame is just eyes cast down. I guess you could say that there's a failed attempt at concealment in what Tomkins takes to be the universal expression of shame. It's an expression. It's truly externalized. It's not inside and being revealed on the outside. Shame, like all affects, lives in the face.

KO Aaron, you referred to your sign system as typing. Typing represents a specific kind of language that we're all familiar with: typing into the computer, cutting and pasting text. It's not a spoken language. It's a disjointed, jarring language.[20] It's

20 Martin Heidegger worried in his Parmenides lectures (1942-4) that typing—"the irruption of the mechanism in the realm of the word"—would tear writing away from "the essential realm of the hand," which holds "the essence of man." "Mechanical writing deprives the hand of its rank in the realm of the written word and degrades the word to a means of communication.

"In addition, mechanical writing provides this 'advantage,' that it conceals the handwriting and thereby the character. The typewriter makes everyone look the same."

21 *Inside. A fine food shop. Day.*

Taped onto greenscreen, a bunch of "Local" arrow signs from whole foods, pointing in at Emmelyn… She's carrying a whole foods basket? Or is she carrying one of those -1 bags? Inside the bag or shopping basket are some of those collapsable funnels that she pulls out and plays with and inspects, befuddled, setting the scene before starting to talk.

Tracey and Ike.

TRACEY. I believe, it was very nervous.
Oh, she seemed real nervous.

TRACEY (kichert). I do not understand at all, why you excite yourself in such a way.

Tracey packs something into the purchase basket.

TRACEY (kichert). Oh, is actually it the loving of Yale?

Tracey takes a bottle from the shelf and puts it into the basket.

TRACEY. I believe however that Yale likes it very much.

TRACEY. Tja, thus I does not know. Perhaps Man is not at all made for only a deep relationship. Perhaps, you know, are rather intended humans to through-live a set of relations different duration.

Tracey and Ike stand at the cash. The cashier takes her things from the basket.

TRACEY. Thus I mean, such opinions nevertheless quite became outdated. I mean, that kind of thing's gone out of date.

TRACEY (kichert). You were nevertheless in the Second World War straight only eight years old.

Tracey *(laughs)*

Ken Okiishi, *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* (2010), digital video (color, sound), 72 minutes

also a language that has a strange relationship to the body and to speaking. I've been thinking about how a confrontation between language and the body could be performed in space. Shortly after writing the Rimbaud text, when I was living between New York and Berlin, I made a video that began with running the official German translation of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* through Google translator. I cut out the Woody Allen character, but had friends who fit the other characters perform the translated text, reading it off a teleprompter.[21] I used a green screen to set up visual situations that have some similarly glitchy relationship to the original film. The piece is called *(Goodbye to) Manhattan*. The whole film also takes place somewhere between New York and Berlin, as if on an airplane in your head.[22] To me, the effect is a bit like crying in an airplane.

KR The film switches at certain points between English and German subtitles and English and German dubbing—why did you choose to interchange these bilingual elements?

KO The dialogue is from the German DVD, because in Germany they always dub. They don't want to read when they're watching the movie. They want to hear the voice, even though the voice that comes out of the screen doesn't feel real, or doesn't feel like it is out of the mouth of the actor.

AK *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* uses an incredible economy of means. You take the sound from one place and the im-

22 "What's most authentic about *Manhattan* is its fantasy. The New York City that Woody so tediously defended in *Annie Hall* was in crisis. And so he imagined an improved version. More than that, he cast this shining city in the form of those movies that he might have seen as a child in Coney Island—freeing the visions that he sensed to be locked up in the silver screen. In a way, *Manhattan* is Allen's personal *Purple Rose of Cairo*—the movie in which he successfully projects himself into Hollywood make-believe. It's his version of an Astaire and Rogers musical, as romantic as *Casablanca*, as slickly metropolitan as *Sweet Smell of Success*. It's also as haunting a celebration of the transitory as a Lumiére *actualité*." J. Hoberman, "Defending *Manhattan*," *Village Voice* (July 3, 2007)

23 "Well, for an American in Berlin is of course always some intrigue, and certainly somewhere microfilms are passed. I do not think I could write a spy movie, but it will think is an American first, when he thinks of Berlin: trench coats and border crossings. Talking about Berlin not necessarily to two lovers who meet. And I think in Berlin not to something funny. I think in Berlin on something serious. It was always the city, serious composers, philosophers and writers. To an American, the German personality is serious. They will simply not as frivolous, but rather as incredibly efficient and powerful. They also think constantly about life close. The German philosophers are now even those who have thought very profound about life." Woody Allen, "Berlin ist nicht komisch, sondern ernst," *Die Welt* (August 24, 2011; translated from the German by Google)

age from a different place and create an impossible space.

KO The piece took way too long to make. I rode my bicycle around Berlin filming stuff to use as backgrounds.[23] I filmed in a studio on Union Square in New York. I opened the window so I could get the street noise—the whirring sound you always get in the Warhol films, which were also filmed in a studio on Union Square.[24] That's the process: By opening the window, I got that sound. By riding my bicycle around, I got something else. I thought, What if these were to come together in the space of video?

KR In both of your works, I perceive a process of mirroring and splitting. This happens in Ken's video when New York and Berlin are presented as incomplete reflections of an imaginary space. In your recent work, Aaron, mirroring also seems to play a big role.

AK Lucy and Will suggested the work that we're doing—the things we're calling translations—might be called mannerism. I really like the mannerist impulse in art, but I don't think what we're doing is mannerism. One example of a really great mannerist artist is Thomas Carew. Carew is a brilliant intellectual mimic: He inhabits the styles of other poets, and he inhabits them perfectly. His elegy for Donne sounds like a Donne poem and his preface to George Sandys sounds exactly like the book for which he's writing the preface. He wrote a poem addressed to Ben Jonson about the failure of his play *The New Inn*. The implication of the poem is that Jonson has reached a stage in his career where he's never going to be able to produce the Jonson music

24 Stephen Koch understood Warhol's early films as enacting a dialectic between a desire to connect with reality and an alienated mode of reproducing the world. In *Stargazer* (1973)—one of the most influential accounts of Warhol's motion pictures—Koch writes, "Warhol can only achieve his romantic immediacy in the regions of alienated perception. But, of course, one can get help from friends. The romantic ideology, drugs, painting itself are very helpful. Most important of all, there is a machine—one of Warhol's beloved machines—that performs and mimics that function, serving as both its reality and metaphor." That machine, of course, was Warhol's Bolex camera.

25 The Spring

Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost
Her snow-white robes, and now no more the frost
Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream
Upon the silver lake or crystal stream;
But the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth,
And makes it tender; gives a sacred birth
To the dead swallow; wakes in hollow tree
The drowsy cuckoo and the humble-bee.
Now do a choir of chirping minstrels bring
In triumph to the world the youthful spring.
The valleys, hills, and woods in rich array
Welcome the coming of the long'd-for May.
Now all things smile; only my love doth lour;
Nor hath the scalding noonday sun the power
To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold
Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold.
The ox, which lately did for shelter fly
Into the stall, doth now securely lie
In open fields; and love no more is made
By the fireside, but in the cooler shade
Amyntas now doth with his Chloris sleep
Under a sycamore, and all things keep
Time with the season; only she doth carry
June in her eyes, in her heart January

Thomas Carew (1640)

as well as Thomas Carew can now produce the Jonson music.

Carew absorbs the styles of other poets and then reproduces them. I guess you could say "The Spring" is a love poem.[25] But it is a description of nature that is taken entirely from books. It is as if Carew had never himself been in love but had read about it, or Carew had never experienced the passage from winter to spring but had read a poem about it. He's really great at this.

I think what Ken and I are doing is rather different. We're not inhabiting styles; in fact, we're completely ignoring styles and just reproducing forms. That, I think, is how to describe translating from source text or source film to the art that we're making. Another way to think about it is the difference between parody and travesty, which is not a distinction that people usually make, but it's a rather important distinction. It's actually a distinction between style and form. In parody, what you're imitating is style. Travesty is ignorance of style and reduction to form.[26] There is style in the work that we're producing, but it's our style and not the style of the source.

26 "In all cases, travesty functions not only as a kind of transstylistic diversion based on what Charles Perrault called the *disconvenance* [impropriety] between style and subject, but also as an exercise in translation. … For what travesty does is transcribe a text from its distant original tongue into a nearer idiom, one that is more familiar in all the senses of that word. The effect of travesty is the opposite of alienation; it naturalizes and assimilates the parodied text, in the (metaphorically) legal sense of these terms. It brings it up to date." Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982; trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, 1997)

REBECCA WOLFF Forgive my ignorance, but I'm wondering whether either of you is willing to talk about experiences with the other form of translation, the translation that purports to replicate?

AK That is something I do sometimes, but it's always been a very private activity. It's not something that I'm qualified to do. And like singing, it's not something I'd ever do in public.

KO I have two very American answers. One is kind of a joke,

27 "We think we are at ease in our own language, we feel a coziness, a familiarity, a shelter in the language we call our own, in which we think that we are not alienated. What the translation reveals is that this alienation is at its strongest in our relation to our own original language, that the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular alienation, a particular suffering." Paul de Man, "'Conclusions' on Walter Benjamin's 'Task of the Translator,'" Messenger Lecture, Cornell University (March 4, 1983)

which is that I don't speak other languages very well so I wouldn't be qualified to do it. The other has to do with the fact that my father, who is of Japanese descent, grew up in Hawaii during the Second World War, and he could not learn Japanese because it wasn't possible to speak it in public without being put into a camp. So I have a sense of native language that doesn't exist.[27]

JENNIFER NELSON Aaron, you said that you chose works that you felt had already chosen you. For you, does translation consist of explaining that relationship to people?

AK I think a very good motive for reading poetry is trying to get outside of your head. Or, it's trying to have someone else think their thoughts but using your head. That's something that I try to do when I read poetry, so I think that'd be a great use of my poems.

FRANKLIN BRUNO Aaron, can you say a little more about a book as being "for me"? In what sense is it *for* you—for comfort, for solving a particular problem? When I heard that, I thought, There are some books for me to hate more than anyone else could possibly hate them.

AK The idea of a book being written to hate makes a great deal of sense for me. The books that were written for me are the tools that I use to think. There are books that are undeniably great, that should interest me, and that I never think about. Proust is, embarrassingly, an example of that. I've read Proust, and I never think about it. Weirdly, I use work that's not as good as Proust to do work that could be done better with Proust. I'm into these lesser versions of Proust. I love the writing of Denton Welch and I think it's really for me, and yet I can see that it's interesting in the way that Proust is interesting, except Proust is better. Donne is a similar example for me: a great poet whose work I respond to when I read and then never think about afterwards.

AUDIENCE MEMBER Ken, you composed your film using all sorts of conceptual processes and constraints. Do you ever

28 "Social, economic and cultural inequality haunts translation; it is not an abstract transit lounge, an esperanto of artificial possibility, a direct mapping of one grammar onto another, a conflation of dictionaries. As words, concepts and images travel from one language world to another they lose as much baggage as they carry. At stake here is not just the 'natural wastage' of inevitable cultural difference. In a world where international capitalism relentlessly seeks to impose cultural conformity, yet constantly and conspicuously fails to do so, what are really put at risk are all the universalizing concepts: world government, a global economy, the very figure of Man, humanism and all its derivatives … to say nothing of the canonical achievements of art and literature, the avant-garde adventure of Modernism, or even the day-to-day routines of the international art world. If translation between all human languages is, in principle, possible, if works of art are readable by all, then these hopes and presumptions of modernity are at least grounded in some kind of adequate human communication. If not, then they, too, are lost causes, pointless activities. At most, they are partial enactments, shabbily simulating a past that was itself always a sleight of hand." Terry Smith, "The Tasks of Translation: Art & Language in Australia & New Zealand 1975–6" (1990)

29 "From the first it has been the theatre's business to entertain people, as it also has of all the other arts. It is this business which always gives it its particular dignity; it needs no other passport than fun." Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1947–1948; trans. John Willett, 1964)

embark on a project and have it fail? Are there interesting failures or just plain failures?

KO I like what is usually deemed failure so much—but not because it actually fails. Part of what I like about certain moments of so-called failure is the ruptures they produce.[28] A lot of these processes and constraints—such as the glitchy translations—seem like they should be techniques of alienation. I measure success when these so-called alienation techniques actually create a sense of closeness or embarrassment—a moment when you actually empathize. I found that when reading Aaron's work, this "pushing away" of conceptual language—as it is traditionally framed in Brechtian terms—becomes something else. You actually fall into the language; you feel a sense of empathy. I don't know why that happens, but that's what I want from my work as well. That's how I decide what stays and what gets edited out.

AK Your relationship to Brecht seems very different from most of the tradition that comes out of Brechtian performance. You recall the part of Brecht that's about fun. He always insisted that theater is entertainment; even that theater is first of all entertainment.[29]

ADA SMAILBEGOVIĆ I was quite intrigued by your bringing up Silvan Tomkins, because he relates cybernetics and machines to affect. There are constraints with the machinic modes and procedures that you both employ, but there is also a looseness to those constraints. How do you think of the relationship between machines and affect?

KO Working with actors is like watching a brain rub against this machinic language. In that kind of performance, sometimes bits of real subjectivity emerge, bits of what could be recognized as a kind of genuine affect. I don't know how to describe it, exactly.

AK Pascal writes about that. What he calls "the machine" is a process of conversion where you perform rituals over and over—at first without any spiritual commitment, without any

30 "For we must make no mistake about ourselves: we are as much automaton as mind. Proofs only convince the mind; habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed. It inclines the automaton, which leads the mind unconsciously along with it." Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1670; trans. A.J. Krailsheimer, 1995)

31 "Andy Warhol: Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way. Russia is doing it under government. It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way. I think everybody should be a machine. I think everybody should like everybody.
Gene Swenson: And liking things is like being a machine?
AW: Yes, because you do the same thing every time. You do it over and over again.
GS: And you approve of that?
AW: Yes, because it's all fantasy. It's hard to be creative and it's also hard not to think what you do is creative or hard not to be called creative because everybody is always talking about that and individuality. Everybody's always being creative." Andy Warhol, interview by Gene Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?" *Art News* (November 1963)

feeling, and without real meaning.[30] At some point grace intervenes and you're not just performing the ritual, you're actually having a spiritual experience. For Pascal, the answer to spiritual cynicism is the machine.[31]

1 This text is an excerpt from a longer work in which Paul Legault "translates" abstract terms included in Harry Zohn's translation of Walter Benjamin's famous essay on translation into "simpler" phrases. A lexicon of selected terms by Matthew Goodman follows.

FROM "WHAT THE TRANSLATOR HAS TO DO"[1]

RESPONSE TO À REBOURS

PAUL LEGAULT

It tells very little to those who understand it.
—Walter Benjamin

If you are trying to like something that someone else made, don't think about what other people think about it. Besides the fact that talking about a lot of people or the people they get along with makes it difficult for you to get what they mean, the idea of the perfect idea: that someone would get what that idea means, isn't helpful, at least when it comes to something which is thought about, because all that says is that people are like this or like that. It says that people really exist and that people also exist sort of, though nothing really cares either way. Poems and things that you can see and things that you can hear that are made to be thought about and other stuff like that don't care about you.

Are translations for people who don't get what they were before? I guess maybe a little since it makes more sense then that where they are isn't where what's important to a lot of people comes from. Not to mention the fact that it makes more sense then that people keep talking about how things stay the same over and over. What does something talk about? And what does something talk about in order to let other people know about something? It doesn't talk that much about stuff in order to add to what the people who get it know. What's most important about it isn't the fact that it says something or says

On Georges Perec's *Un Homme Qui Dort*

KEN OKIISHI

Stills from *Un Homme Qui Dort*, 1974. Courtesy La Vie est Belle Films

You haven't died and you're no wiser. You haven't exposed your eyes to the blinding of the sun.

The two tenth-rate actors haven't come for you, clutched you, fastened themselves so closely to you that if one were crushed all three would perish.

Merciful volcanoes have shown no concern for you.

The text of Georges Perec's 1967 novel, *Un Homme Qui Dort*, was written "invisibly" at the interface of other pieces of writing, including Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and Franz Kafka's "The Burrow." Images, narrative lines, direct quotations, and obtuse reprocessings are disappeared into the final text, which acquires the off-kilter yet smooth surface that Perec's highly complex experimental writing is famous for. As texts originally written in English and German, then translated into French and worked through the wild formalistic interior of Perec's personal language games, what emerges back into English is an echo chamber of mutant allusions and distant laugh tracks.

In the film version of the novel, made in 1973–74 in collaboration with Bernard Queysanne, a compressed version of the text is read continuously in voiceover. In the French version, what mattered to Perec — as the text is written entirely in the second person — was that the voice was absolutely distinguishable from the sole "man" featured onscreen; he didn't want the viewer to collapse the film into a simple internal monologue. For Perec, the solution was to have the voice of "a woman." Whereas in French, the gendering functions quite flatly to produce difference, a miraculous thing happens in the English-language dubbing: Shelley Duvall.

The text of Perec's novel was spoken by Duvall in English long before a complete translation was published. (Harry Mathews unpublished translation for the film is also radically different from Andrew Leak's 1990 translation.) How it is that Shelley Duvall ended up as the first American voice of Georges Perec is a fascinating mystery; all I can confirm is that Perec loved *Brewster McCloud* (1970). But Perec was a member of the Parisian literary group Oulipo, which developed pataphysical literary techniques out of the most disfiguring aspects of translation, and I can imagine that he considered Duvall's voice an experimental choice. Duvall, with her famously weird affect and softened Texas accent, manages to get under the skin of a split "you": "you" the protagonist, an increasingly dissociated (male) college student walking around Paris in the late 1960s; and "you" the viewer, brought to the point of psychological exhaustion.

Three years after the release of the film, Duvall won best actress at Cannes for a different film, Robert Altman's *3 Women*. Bizarrely, *Un Homme Qui Dort* had been formally invited to and then formally rejected by Cannes. (Perec and Queysanne decided to have posters printed with "Cannes Official Selection 1974" anyway and showed *Un Homme Qui Dort* "out of competition" at the festival.) In an interview for French TV, in the midst of her big win for *3 Women*, Duvall, the marvelously untrained actress, rehearsed PR lines with the same emptied-out disaffection she is known for onscreen: "No, not successful at the box office, but very successful with reviews. We got every big critic, [pause] every critic that was necessary. But the box office, no, uh, because, uh, United Artist's artists, uh, didn't put [pause] a lot of money into publicity."

On and offscreen, in and out of character, Duvall acts from the outside in, like a puppet master of her own body: erasure, elimination, nullification, deletion, dissolving, disappearance, obscurity, withdrawal.

One day in Paris, circa 1967, a university student wakes up to find himself radically dissociated. Somehow, that student has the body of *un homme* and the voice of Duvall, and, on walking into Paul Virilio's classroom (he lent it, full of exam-taking students, for the filming of this scene), s/he "would prefer not to." Listen to the voice:

You get up too late. You're not going to say on four, eight, or twelve ruled pages what you know you should think about alienation, or the working class, or modern life and leisure, about the white-collar worker or automation, about other-directedness, about Marx's critic [sic] of de Tocqueville, or Margaret Mead versus Marcuse. You wouldn't have said anything, in any case, since your knowledge is small and your opinions are nonexistent. Your seat remains empty. You won't get your degree, you'll never begin your advanced studies. [Sound of a rotary alarm clock ticking very fast.] You'll give up your studies altogether.

It's been a long time since your alarm clock stopped at 5:15. Time no longer enters the silence of your room: it's outside, a lasting, obsessive, inaccurate, rather dubious medium. Time passes, but you never know the time. It's ten o'clock, maybe eleven, it's late, it's early. Day breaks, night falls. The sounds never stop altogether, time never stops altogether. Even if it's no longer anything but a tiny breech in the wall of silence, a somnambulant murmur forgotten bit by bit, scarcely distinguishable from your heartbeats. Your room is the most beautiful of desert islands, and Paris is a desert that no one has ever traversed.

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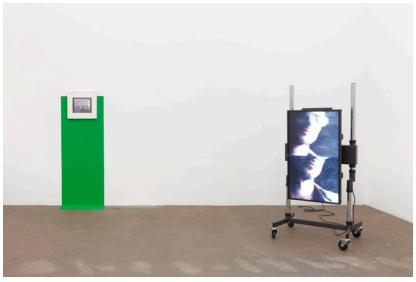
Marchel Duchamp's studio on Streeteasy.com (dust breeding), permutation 5 (at Bortolami, New York), 2011-2012. And Marcel Duchamp's studio on Streeteasy.com (the Picabias are in the catskills), permutation 5 (at Bortolami, New York). 2011-2012. Inkjet on pictorico pro hi-gloss white film, chroma green paint. Dimensions variable. Installed at Bortolami, New York.



Marchel Duchamp's studio on Streeteasy.com (dust breeding), permutation 5 (at Bortolami, New York), 2011-2012. And Marcel Duchamp's studio on Streeteasy.com (the Picabias are in the catskills), permutation 5 (at Bortolami, New York). 2011-2012. Inkjet on pictorico pro hi-gloss white film, chroma green paint. Dimensions variable. Installed at Bortolami, New York.

Marcel Duchamp's studio on Streeteasy.com (the Picabias are in the catskills), permutation 5 (at Bortolami, New York). 2011-2012. Inkjet on pictorico pro hi-gloss white ilm, chroma green paint. Dimensions variable. Installed at Bortolami, New York. (Photo shows the work after hurricane Sandy destroyed the gallery.)

Marchel Duchamp's studio on Streeteasy.com, permutation 4 (at Peep-hole, Milan), 2011-2012. Installed at Peep-hole, Milan.

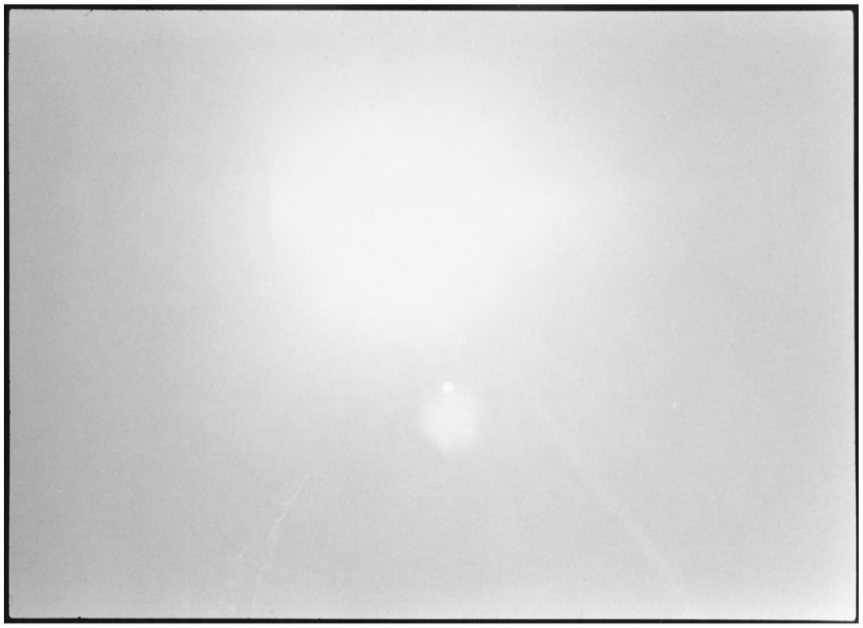
Marchel Duchamp's studio on Streeteasy.com, permutation 4 (at Peep-hole, Milan), 2011-2012. Installed at Peep-hole, Milan.

Detail, *Marcel Duchamp's studio on Streeteasy.com (the Picabias are in the catskills)*. Inkjet (Epson Ultrachrome) on pictorico pro hi-gloss white film, chroma green paint.

April 4, frame 2

Destroy the Destroyer

Ken Okiishi and Nick Mauss
on Zoe Leonard's
Sun Photographs



April 5, frame 10

April 5, frame 15

2-3 / 21

April 7, frame 30

A black dot appears on the surface of the eye, circling the traces of the sun on film, through the lens of the camera projected back to the surface of the paper – as if immediately, a transparent process of accumulation of light. We know that the black dot appears as a memory in the synaptic mesh of the mind. "Don't look at the sun" – and you peek anyway, after-images forever circling inside that prohibition, that sudden burst of light, like a hollow space in the centre of vision.

But the black dot also appears to form, like particles attracted to a magnet, on the surface of the photograph, spinning around the centre of what must be the sun – you know it must be that – but cannot see it, as a blisteringly white dot in the centre of endless variations of gray becomes increasingly abstract in the mind – increasingly overwhelming.

How do you compose a picture of not understanding? A picture that is urgency and persistence? It has never been seen this way before and can only be seen this way now. Leonard has a way of picturing the inherent slash through the image. Atget, too, photographs like an alien. I project a bitter dignity into these images, the early light, the 'missing' subject. All other images are cleared away, deliberately shed.

Not pinned, but nailed to the white walls, these photographs throb with an oversensitivity that verges on high-pitched pain. It is their starkness, their inescapability, that cracks the foil of subjectivity. I flinch at the first encounter, actually contort my body in the gallery, a kind of atavism. The alarm of words beyond me triggering synaptic rewiring. Stunned, I fall into the picture, travel with my eye around and through a meshed zone not of chains of associations, but of senses, observations, and intuitive measurements blooming with blinded acculturations, loosening and unmaking. The delicacy of the silver halides exposed across the full range of their capacity, suspended in the emulsion coating the paper fibers, against the nails that hold them to the white paint, the plaster beneath, the concrete floor, the ceiling, hurl the mind through inner space to the terminus of nerve endings. The thought of bodies slamming into these walls.

Wavelengths of infinite gray make hints at where the locus of the sun might be – as you look, the lighter spot begins to disappear – the sun that you are not supposed to look at hides – the prohibition blanking out the image into a flat, gray, hovering rectangle. It shimmers in the mind, as knowledge gives way to visual interdiction. As the camera searches for what to photograph – what possibly could there be to look at anymore? Zoe looks up.

This is an industrial sun in the post-Ford age. The sky around it is desolate: cloudless, birdless, colourless, held still by this radiation. The naked sun. The sun of an economy of permanent war. I can't see it, but I know that what I can see I perceive through the invisible tumult of digital clouds, where images and information now live – as if immaterial, as if floating above us. As if information, itself, were stored in the sun, completely opaque and visible at the same time.

The image reaches its generic state, as if the brain itself has become a camera, recording the thought of looking away. These are the images we yearn for when we don't want identifying strictures anymore – a gap where our particularities can remain as such: particles, appearing here, in this impossible encounter.

August 4, frame 9

August 6, frame 7

August 6, frame 19

8-9 / 21

August 6, frame 32

December 3, frame 3

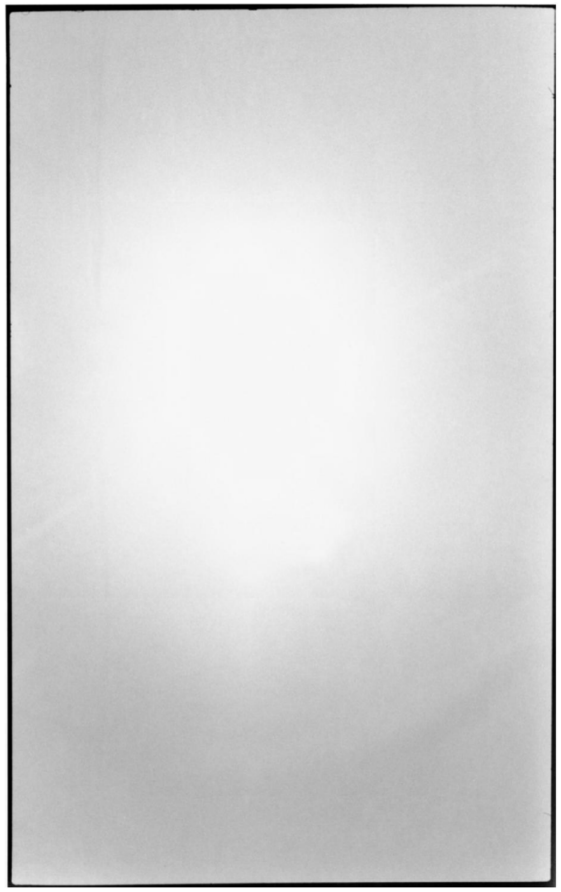
10-11 / 21

February 12, frame 6

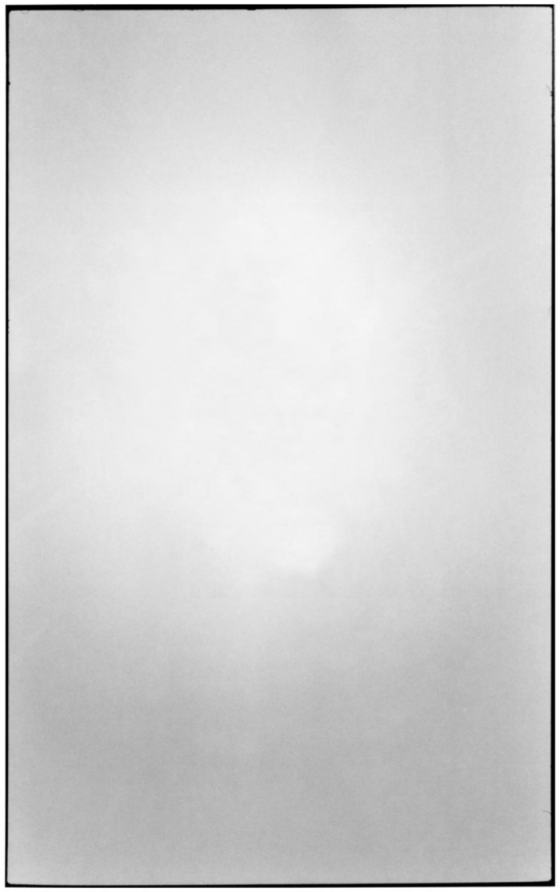
February 27, frame 11

12-13 / 21

February 27, frame 17



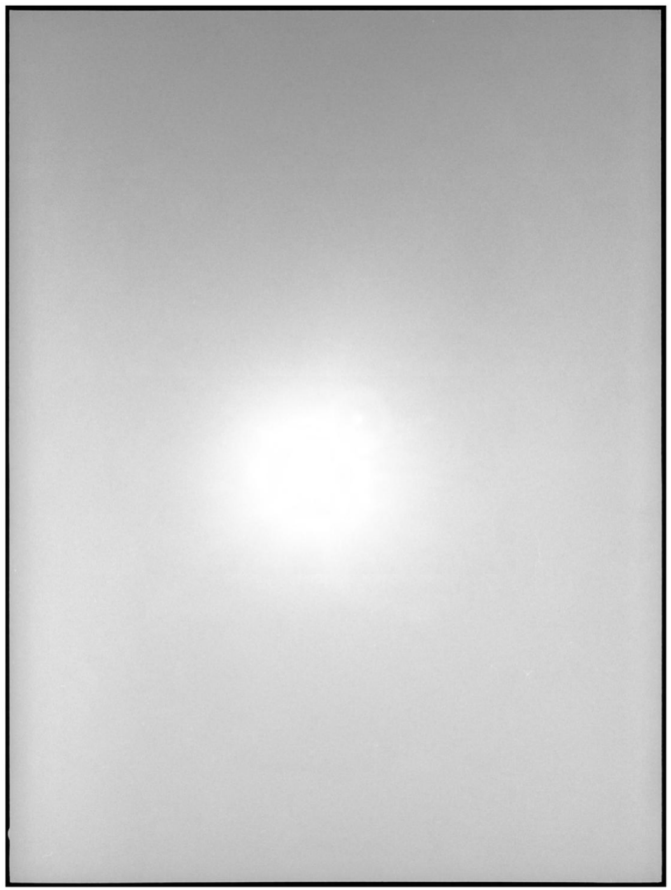
February 27, frame 25



February 27, frame 30

January 23, frame 8

16-17 / 21



January 27, frame 8

January 27, frame 9

July 19, frame 33

June 3, frame 33

Words by Ken Okiishi and Nick Mauss
Stromboli, Aeolian Islands and Saas Fee, Switzerland, August 2012

Zoe Leonard, *Sun Photographs*, 2011–12, gelatin silver prints, various dimensions
Images courtesy of the artist and Murray Guy, New York

Issue 14: Objects | Art | Exhibitions | Performance

Carey Young
If / Then

KEN OKIISHI

Carey Young, *Body Techniques (after Encirclement, Valie Export, 1976)*, 2007. Lightjet print. Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

New York
Carey Young: If / Then
Paula Cooper Gallery
December 1, 2007–January 12, 2008

Carey Young's performance-based art visualizes "impossible" overlaps in political spectrums. First focusing on the curious ways in which the countercultural aesthetics of the '68ers have been inspirational to the right-wing "avant garde" of global corporatism, Young began doing performances such as *I Am a Revolutionary* (2001), in which she just couldn't get the words "I am a revolutionary" quite right during a business-presentation-skills training session. This performance was filmed in an office that seemed to float in a grid of identical glass cubes surrounding a factitiously glorious atrium.

In her recent gallery exhibition at Paula Cooper, Young extended her line of inquiry into specific art-historical referents, bringing feminist and Marxist aesthetics into a speculative dialogue with corporatism. In a series of largescale photographs, Young, dressed in her signature gray power suit and sensible heels, re-created iconic performancebased artworks — by Bruce Nauman, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Valie Export, Ulrich Rückriem, and others — amid construction sites in Dubai and Sharjah. The photographs framed the landscape in a way that emphasized the virtuality of a megalopolis springing up so quickly in the middle of the desert. They recalled both the wide-open landscape of the colonial imagination and the fantasies afforded by computer-based architectural rendering.

Indeed, the virtuality of the landscape and the way her body was miniaturized in it made it seem like our protagonist, "Carey," was somehow trapped in a video-game version of 1970s performance art. In one game level, she was required to craft what looked like a UFO circle (after a performance by Rückriem) in the middle of the desert, with a row of six identical mini-palazzos in the flattened-out distance, each painted different shades of Miami pink, yellow, and beige. In one of the Export levels (there were two), Carey, lying in the gutter, molded her body into a perfect arc around a circular plaza in a postmodern village reminiscent of the Disney-owned Florida town Celebration; she earned bonus points for bringing the red that Export used to highlight the curve of the gutter in the original photograph onto her gray suit. In the Ukeles level, it was game over; Carey couldn't capture Ukeles's unique class consciousness and performance affect and ended up looking like she was just mopping up the construction site prematurely.

In a text-based piece, *Inventory*, Young gave a nod to Martha Rosler's and Eleanor Antin's well-known problematization of scientific and artistic objectifications and fragmentations of the female body. Young smoothed over the psychological and emotional disruption of these feminist classics by subbing out an explicit second-wave-feminist ideological analysis for a simple economic one. She gave the statistics of her body to two university scientists, who figured out the actual net worth of the chemical elements of her material being: carbon, £12,329.960; oxygen, £35.972; samarium, £0.000; etcetera. Total current market value (and the sale price of the artwork): £13,003.23. The Marxist proposition that money is the ultimate abstraction led Young logically into the commodities analyst's snuff fantasy.

The back room of the gallery featured a new performance video, *Product Recall*. There, as in her strongest performance work, she produced a disorder in the ordering systems that make us complacent. After Young had entered into an haute-bourgeois psychoanalyst's office and planted herself on a Le Corbusier chaise longue, the analyst read a list of well-known advertising slogans and asked her to recall the attached brand. Some, such as "Knowledge without boundaries" (HSBC), Young quickly identified; others, such as "Ideas you can't live without" and "Where imagination begins" were "gone" from her memory bank. The scenario highlighted a curious overlap in advertising and therapeutic lexicons and aligned the simple logic that advertisers use to create a sense of belonging and transcendence (fulfillment through shopping) with trends in therapy among the rich that favor hypnosis over deep analysis.

While much of the work in 'If / Then' bordered on a sort of absurdist science fiction that could leave the viewer with a quickly forgotten awkward smirk, the exhibition held the potential to stir up something beyond a trendy critical ambivalence. In certain sectors of the New York art world, an antimarket-versus-pro-market dialectic — a Marxist understanding of the dematerialization of the art object versus a naive marketing strategy — has become increasingly dodgy and often downright delusional. What 'If / Then' demanded of its viewers was an acknowledgment that art's primary contribution to the global economy has nothing to do with the production or suppression of luxury commodities; it's the radical gestures, the transcendence, the rethinking of the body's threshold, that inspire "us" and "them" to "Think different" (Apple).

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