Contents

Introduction

There is something inherently satisfying in that the authorship of the quote, "lesser artists borrow, great artists steal" is a matter of dispute. Pablo Picasso and Igor Stravinsky, those two titans of the modern, are both credited with this candid rejoinder which tacitly acknowledges the creative act as an accumulation of cultural circumstance.

From those brazen days of modernism emerged a set of strategies that reshaped the creative act. Appropriation developed a set of gestures that tangibly incorporated elements of the everyday into art, producing a relational system that is co-dependent and co-culpable. Appropriation represents a permissive quality within art practices, sanctioning theft under the double-barrel of artistic radicality and critique.

As post-modern impulses of the 1980s and '90s artworld reinvested appropriation strategies, they also revealed their limitations. Maurizio Cattelan's work, *Another Fucking Readymade* (1996) pointedly replayed and parodied such approaches. In this work, Cattelan connected appropriation with the theft of material property: stealing the contents of a commercial gallery (including the exhibition, furniture, files, etc.), moving them to de Appel, and exhibiting the haul as his work. *Another Fucking Readymade* was about the art system, and the work's implications played out only within that system: the gallerists were annoyed for a short time, no charges were pressed, everything was safely returned. The gesture stands as a stage-managed in-joke that is cushioned by the limits of the system that it mimics and critiques.

There is a Criminal Touch to Art, a work by Ulay in 1976, also involved the theft of art, but the implications engage a wider socio-cultural sphere. The work simultaneously questioned the authority and role of both art and social institutions that confer cultural worth. Ulay's "Action in 14 predetermined sequences" involved the artist entering the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, stealing the Carl Spitzweg painting *Der Arme Poet*, subsequently placing it in the home of a Turkish immigrant family, and ultimately being arrested. Implicit in the full details of the action is the suggestion that art is not isolated but has implications and leverage within society.

As suggested by Cattelan's work, appropriation has long since ceased to be controversial within contemporary art and society. As a relatively commonplace gesture, the radicalism of appropriation and the attendant moral, ethical, and political questions may risk being overlooked. Lifting examines a strain of work that incorporates the act or evidence of what might be described as "theft" (as distinct from the copyright infringements and object recontextualizations that traditionally mark the category of appropriation). When considered as acts of appropriation, these instances of lifting reinvest the transgressive nature of appropriation, while shifting it into a more immediate, social realm.

Lifting is rooted in the intersection of individual experience — that of artist, perpetrator, viewer, and victim — and socio-cultural signification. Given the typical absence of an absolute marker of ownership upon stolen items, the details of lifting survive primarily through rumor and faith. A stolen object changes location, but need not be materially altered. It can pass as an unaltered

object, yet the space left behind, or what is known about the act or circumstances of a particular theft, can raise issues surrounding ownership, exchange, attribution, and the cultural significance of both the act and artifact of theft.

The terrain of theft is one of clues and secrets, bravado and boldness, rumors and speculation. It is fuel for filmic intrigue, schoolyard fights, video games, neighbourhood watch. The thief "liberates" the object and "violates" the owner, putting themselves at risk of retribution and gain. It may be spurred by desperation, skill, addiction, circumstance, ambition, generosity. In certain circumstances, the act is rationalized through a belief that *lex injusta non est lex*, or "an unjust law is not a law."

The artists in Lifting do not share a common rationale for stealing. Yet a recurrent factor is that the claim of theft does not necessitate that a crime has been committed. In most instances we only have the artists' word that the object, documentation, or report is evidence of an act of moral, ethical, or legal contravention. This can produce comic or whimsical effect, such as in the work Joel Ross' *Room 28* (1997), in which a stack of suitcases purportedly contain the entire contents of an anonymous motel room, cut up and packed. An accompanying image and text evokes a narrative of lost love and misplaced sentiment, rendering the gesture criminal, poetic, heroic, or pathetic, depending on one's romantic disposition. This contrasts starkly with the implied violence of A-1 53167's *El Préstamo* (2000), in which the artist claims to have held up a stranger at gunpoint, in order to raise funds for an exhibition. The relation between the seriousness of the event and abscence of proof may alternately implicate and mitigate the individual or institution in these morally troubled waters. And to what extent does the believability of A-1 53167's claims affect the legitimacy of the action as art? In these circumstances, Plato's dictum that artists should be kept out of the republic due to their reliance on fiction, takes on a more sinister and subversive intonation.

Lifting presents various measures by which individual, institutional, and societal lines may be confronted. With works such as Allison Wiese's collection of wooden doorstops (*Untitled*, 2002–ongoing), the theft is of such an insignificant object that it likely operates below the interests of the law, and to some may be considered less ethically problematic than other types of theft. With other work in *Lifting*, the exaggeration or mimicking of "normal" behavior is employed as a strategy to reorient a familiar act, critiquing and displacing the act on its own terms. This approach is evident in, for example, Ann Messner's film, *stealing at the summer end sale* (1978), in which Messner is shown in a department store, piling on layers of t-shirts and stuffing them into plastic shopping bags.

Jon Routson's bootlegged films (*Bootlegs*, 1999–2004) occupy the edge of a material/immaterial boundary. Routson takes an immaterial source and, in producing DVDs, creates material objects. The incursion of the film theater environment, patrons, and inconsistent focusing produces documents that are poor analogs for the actual cinema experience, but gain the texture of immanence and visceral intensity. Routson's bootlegging stopped when it became a federal offence to video record within a cinema , but irrespectively, the bootlegged works are commercially moot within the gallery system. When exhibited at Team Gallery, New York, these legally nebulous products could be exhibited but not sold, due to the way in which copyright infringement is understood in relationship to intention and commerce.

In confronting the claims of theft within *Lifting*, an initial engagement—with elements including aesthetics, humor, economics, doubt, violence—in turn reveals moments where individuals and institutions are confronted by their own role and ethical standpoint in a given system. This explication of discrepancy, nuance, and culpability illuminates art's potential as transgressive, dangerous, and socio-politically provocative.

–Gavin Morrison & Fraser Stables

Frazer Ward

Episodes from a History of Lifting

Lifting. What might come to mind is "heavy lifting." Hard yakka. Honest work. But there is also shoplifting. Five-finger discount. Light-fingered taking, pickpocketing, perhaps—plainly, theft—but not far from there to sleight-of-hand, illusion, something unreliable, untrustworthy, when it isn't illegal. Something like art, perhaps. In parts of Britain even "chore" carries a double sense: a task, but there's also "to chore," to steal (perhaps derived from Romani, appropriately enough, given the suspect stereotypes attached to gypsies). As Leo Steinberg has pointed out, "the word 'art' is the guilty root from which derive 'artful,' 'arty,' and 'artificial.'"[1] Steinberg identified Robert Morris' proto-minimalist *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961) as an antidote to this suspicion:

> A plain wooden box and a tape recording of the sawing and hammering that put it together. The work strips the adverb from the definition of art. A thing done—period. … All honest work, from hammering to engineering, is preferable to *facture* and *cuisine*, or whatever it is the French put in their painting.[2]

But the association of minimalist self-evidence with *work* is not so clear cut. As Hal Foster suggests, Clement Greenberg (and subsequently Michael Fried) smelled a rat hiding in those sawn and hammered timbers: "the arbitrary, the avant-gardist, in a word, Marcel Duchamp."[3] And in fact Morris' *Box* "can be understood in terms of the artist's self-apprenticeship to Marcel Duchamp," insofar as it evokes the French former painter's *With Hidden Noise* (1916).[4] Kimberley Paice describes the relationship between *Box* and its antecedent; Duchamp's work is:

> a ball of twine sandwiched between metal plates that contains within it something unidentifiable that makes noise when the object is shaken …. Contrary to Duchamp's intentions, however, the sound emanating from *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* is meant to dispel the idea of secrecy, substituting instead the experience of an intelligible process and its duration.[5]

So the minimalist "evokes"—or, lifts—the structure of the art object from the French trickster (sound within a container assembled from readymade, "non-art" materials, using "non-art" methods), but replaces its coyness—or playfulness?—with earnest self-explanation. Trying to have it both ways, though, might also be a form of artifice, a balancing act, a pose (the working man's Duchamp?).

Anyway, shouldn't honest work produce something useful? If *With Hidden Noise* exists only to keep its secret (or to announce that there is a secret), *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* merely confesses: secrecy and confession are sides of the same coin. As an aesthetic strategy, lifting, in its light-fingered variety, has its roots in Duchamp's readymades. The readymades, consumer objects lifted from non-art contexts and repositioned

in art contexts, may by now customarily be understood to represent the most thoroughgoing epistemological challenge to the status of the work of art in the twentieth century, insofar as they reject specialized skill, and making, altogether. And, theoretically at least, the bottlerack could go back to the kitchen, the coat rack could be put back on the wall.[6] That won't happen, of course, because in their very uselessness, the readymades have accrued particular kinds of value, as embodiments of intellectual-aesthetic propositions, as pillars of institutional savvy, and, deeply ironically (as Duchamp effectively predicted[7]), as luxury commodity goods.

Morris' *Box* indicates that lifting can and does appear as *both* honest work and sleight-of-hand, making *and* borrowing. Chris Burden's *Honest Labor* (1979) is a performance that perhaps sums up this duality. Burden was invited by the Emily Carr College of Art and Simon Fraser University in Vancouver to be a visiting artist for a week, and describes the piece as follows:

> Rather than meet with students to present and discuss my past work in a teaching context, I requested that I be provided with a wheel barrow, a shovel, and a pick ax. On the first day of my visit, I immediately began, in a vacant lot that had been provided for me, to dig a straight ditch about 2 ½ feet wide and 3 feet deep. Each following day, students could find me digging from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. I did not have a specific length or goal, except that I would be digging during the times that I had designated.[8]

Here, Burden conformed to post-Duchampian, conceptual mandates, by performing what in an art context is not unskilled but "deskilled" labor. At the same time he ironically reversed the historical transformation of aesthetic practice from physical engagement with material to conceptual engagement with convention and context, and substituted manual labor for the white-collar labor of the visiting artist[9]: Burden's work was, again, both heavy lifting *and* a conceptual ploy. But, further than Morris', this *Honest Labor* not only didn't produce anything useful, it didn't even generate a luxury commodity, just a hole in the ground. *With Hidden Noise* relied on an unknown, physical object for its noise, *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* on a tape recording. By the time we get to *Honest Labor*, we can begin to map the shifts in aesthetic strategies onto broader shifts in the organization of work, and, at least by implication, shifts in the functioning of the global economy.[10] The "dematerialization" of art accompanied the dematerialization of labor, that is, its globalization—the switch in emphasis in developed industrial nations from production to information (a development that tends to undermine the term "industrial" and the idea of nation), the shipping offshore of much of the heavy lifting (where "offshore" might include that internal other country peopled by immigrants legal and illegal), and the worldwide expansion of the service sector. Morris' *Box* may intend to provide a model of transparency, but, crucially, it relies on technological mediation to explain itself, that is, it incorporates into its structure an element that might signal changes in what constitutes work (let alone the work of art). To return for a moment to Steinberg, the crucial move, for him, that articulated post-1945 practices as "post-Modern," was that profligate borrower and quoter, Robert Rauschenberg, tipping the picture plane over from a vertical onto a horizontal axis, onto "the flatbed picture plane," a term Steinberg borrowed from "the flatbed printing press":

> The flatbed picture plane makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards—any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed—whether coherently or in confusion.[11]

Where Duchamp, in the nineteen-teens, was subjected to the "demand of shop windows,"[12] and engaged the emergence of commodity culture, by the mid-1950s, Rauschenberg's surfaces, spilling over with images lifted from art history and mass media, were already almost continuous with what we now understand as the information economy. Burden's rugged Vancouver days—or the image that remains of them—suggest that the conceptual artist might as well be a laborer as a clerk,[13] if in the end both of them are just moving information around (picking it up, putting it down). At the same time, though, Burden found that moving the dirt around was a lonely task: "Occasionally, someone would offer to dig for me, but after trying it for a few minutes they would return the job to me."[14] As if it were the kind of work we have undocumented immigrants for, *Honest Labor* is shadowed by the black economy that is integral to globalization.[15]

Constructed almost twenty years later, Miguel Calderón and Yoshua Okón's *A Propósito…* (1997), presents art as continuous with other forms of globalized labor. Their stack of stolen car stereos—lifted from the cars (in part by the artists themselves, as the accompanying video demonstrates), then lifted into place—is a virtual treatise on the structuring continuity between legal and illegal work in a globalized economy. That the physical commodities in question are *car* stereos, wrenched out of place and traded on the black market, seems first to ironize the idea of mobility associated with globalization; that they are stereos at all then points to a different kind of commodity, music—which is to say, intellectual property—which is under duress altogether in the newly prevalent economic conditions (at the same time as *A Propósito…* generates cultural capital for Calderón and Okón); that the stereos are stockpiled, their sheer quantity (which would in other circumstances require administration: inventory control, tracking numbers, etc.) demonstrates the operation of an overarching law of supply and demand that trumps other legal or moral distinctions.

It follows, perhaps, that the complex character of *lifting* should emerge so clearly: there is the physical explosion of theft itself, the hammer, the shattering of glass, the danger, there is the drearier labor of lifting and stacking the units (which is also a form of the administrative labor of organizing information); and there is also the aesthetic aspect, the ordering of the grid of objects, the art-historical evocations due both to street performance and video and to stacks of industrial

units, and the sleight-of-hand of the repositioning of the hot objects in the cool shade of art, which, like a brute economic exigency, but with a lighter hand, renders questions of legality naïve.

The projects, performances, and objects of the artists in *Lifting* may broadly be seen to extend the legacy of the readymade, but they are less concerned with commodity culture than were Duchamp, Andy Warhol, or the "appropriation artists" of the 1980s (Jeff Koons and Haim Steinbach, among others). They foreground instead the interrogation of the kinds of labor that might constitute the work of art. Art appears both as a category under investigation, and as a reflexive and elastic context which absorbs (and forgives, even rewards) behaviors that might be too experimental, outside it. Much of the work tracks the relationships between differently shaded areas of economic activity (black, gray, underground, bootleg, institutional, official, etc.), by moving things around (or bits of information: there is a sustained investment in mediation and its effects on perception and circulation), by substituting one thing for another of the same, similar or different kind, by releasing things into distribution systems or removing them, and quite often by reorganizing and rearranging things in new, or different, more or less formal, more or less idiosyncratic collections and classification systems. Such collections perhaps make it most poignantly clear that there is a history of lifting, in which art takes a view at once melancholy and sly of the globalized economic system in which it is too often trumpeted as a triumphant player (see the endless round of blockbuster global biennials, etc.). In this minor-key history, the globalized world is a derealized, fragmented realm in which everything rushes by, and experience is tied to the possibility of grabbing things and bits of information from their relentless flow and re-placing them, to make eddies, ox-bows, and tiny dams.

1 Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 56. Steinberg discusses a specifically American response: "Americans have always felt suspicious and uneasy about art. Traditionally, the idea of art has had too many untoward associations—with High Culture and High Church religion, with aristocracy and snob appeal, with pleasure, wickedness, finesse." But the point need not be limited to that context.

2 Ibid., 60.

3 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 38. Greenberg had written: "Minimalist works are readable as art, as almost anything is today—including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper," "Recentness of Sculpture," in *American Sculpture of the Sixties* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967), reprinted in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1968), 180–186, 183.

4 Kimberley Paice, "Catalogue," *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1994), 89–301, 104.

5 Ibid.

6 Duchamp described *Trébuchet* (1917), a word with connotations of trap and trip, as "a real coat hanger that I wanted someone to put on the wall and hang my things on but I never did come to that—so it was on the floor and I would kick it, every time I went out—I got crazy about it and I said the Hell with it, if it wants to stay there and bore me, I'll nail it down" in Anne D'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1983), 283. See Helen Molesworth, *At Home with Duchamp: The Readymade and Domesticity*, PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1998, for an extended discussion.

7 Duchamp claimed that the aim of the *Boîte-en-Valise* (1936–41) "was to reproduce the paintings and the objects that I liked and collect them in a space as small as possible .... Then it occurred to me that it could be a box in which all my works would be collected and mounted like a small museum, a portable museum so to speak," "Interview with J.J. Sweeney," in *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp,* ed. Arturo Schwarz, (New York: Abrams, 1969), 513. Benjamin Buchloh glosses this as revealing Duchamp's "anticipation of the final destination that his œuvre would reach in the immanent process of acculturation: the museum" "The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers," in AA Bronson and Peggy Gale, eds., *Museums by Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 45.

8 Chris Burden, "Chris Burden: Original Texts 1971–1995," in *Chris Burden* (Paris: Blocnotes, 1995), n.p.

9 See Helen Molesworth, "Chris Burden," in *Work Ethic*, ed. Molesworth (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 115.

10 Helen Molesworth, curator of the exhibition *Work Ethic*, proposes the following thesis: "After World War II, the basis of the United States economy shifted from manufacturing to service, transforming traditional definitions of labor. As the conditions of labor changed for the vast majority of the American populace, so too did it change for artists. Many artists (like their working and professional counterparts) no longer felt compelled to offer a discrete object produced by hand. Rather they explored ways of producing art that were analogous to other forms of labor," "Introduction," Work Ethic, 18.

11 Steinberg, op. cit., 83–4.

12 Molly Nesbit quotes a note that Duchamp wrote to himself in 1913: "From the demand of shop windows, from the inevitable response to shop windows, comes the end of choice," in "Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model," *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 59.

13 Sol LeWitt described the serial—soon to be conceptual—artist as a clerk: "The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premises," "Serial Project #1, 1966," *Aspen* 5/6 (Fall/Winter 1967): n.p. This is also the issue of *Aspen* in which, famously, both Duchamp's text "The Creative Act," and Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" also appeared in translation.

14 Burden, op. cit.

15 Two instances form the burgeoning literature on globalization that make this relationship clear: In *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) Saskia Sassen examines the ways in which financial services centers (the "global cities" of her title) at once generate and rely upon a range of grey and black occupations; in *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), foreign affairs analyst Moisés Naím argues that the trades—legal and illegal—in drugs, armaments, people, and copyrighted materials are not peripheral but central to the globalized economy.

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Digital Media and the Informational Politics of Appropriation

Controversies over cultural appropriation continue to hold interest for artists, scholars, and industry. Digital media and portable electronic devices facilitate the casual reproduction and rapid transmission of expression and enable new forms of derivative and referential creativity. At the same time, proprietary claims over cultural forms are multiplying. Some claims invoke intellectual property rights, insist upon exclusive revenue streams, and are rightly considered acts of corporate overreaching. Others assert the moral rights of individuals or the normative priority of community values over the ease of mass availability. The proliferation of claims has reinvigorated investigation of the rationales for intellectual property regimes and heightened scrutiny of the ways in which these mechanisms of cultural property control and shape the production of meaning.

What is cultural appropriation? How does it relate to other forms of artistic *lifting*? What difference does the increased spread and availability of digital technology make to the way we address these questions? Are all cultural forms (material and immaterial) merely information in a digital media ecology that enables everyone to access and make use of the cultural properties of others? Do distinctions between tangible and intangible goods remain relevant under contemporary pressures of globalization and the digitizing capacities of electronic media? These questions all suggest that we must engage with assumptions and/or relations of *propriety* with respect to the use of expressive objects in our creative and scholarly activities. When an art is described as involving the practice of appropriation, the assertion is made that a text has been moved or removed from its authorizing context, or, in some other significant sense, *taken*. In some cases this decontextualization is deliberately and critically intended—to challenge the fields of meanings in which the object *properly* figures, to assert an alternative *ownership* over it and/or to consider the importance of other realms of connotation in which it might signify. The tendency of corporate capital to seize upon new forms of cultural difference and to exploit them in the "conquest of cool" is also described as an activity of appropriation.[1] Other allegations of appropriation are more like accusations; they are made when a cultural text is understood to have been *improperly* recontextualized to the outrage or injury of those who have serious attachments to its positioning in specific worlds of social meaning.

Research into appropriation extends to diverse cultural fields, including fan subcultures, feminist political practice, visual art, fashion, and the industry of popular music. The production and consumption of unlicensed derivative *Star Trek* fiction within fan communities[2] indicates that the corporately held and controlled economy of officially authorized works is bound to the creative and appropriative activities of fans through sophisticated and dynamic negotiations. Encounters occurring within this zone of mutual engagement are not easily explicable as consumer theft, commercial domination of consciousness, or corporate exploitation of consumer labor. Similarly, research on the appropriation of indigenous themes in Australian settler art suggests that cultural borrowing acts as a trigger for broader appreciation of Aboriginal art by non-traditional audiences,

and promotes the valorization of Aboriginal art by non-Aboriginal Australian art communities.[3] Feminist artists, filmmakers, and writers reconstitute patriarchal imagery and narratives through counter-hegemonic framings and rhetorical improvisations. These appropriations neither simply reinforce nor subvert the normative ideologies of their "originals" in an ideologically uncomplicated either/or. Moreover, in the commodity culture of the London fashion world, ethnicity and difference provide resources for emergent "multicultural imaginaries" that make easy assumptions about the exploitative commodification of difference problematic.[4]

Nonetheless, power relations at work in global cultural industries may ensure that acts of appropriation perpetuate old inequities in new ways. Numerous legal and anthropological analyses reveal a problematic and complex dynamics of appropriation at work in a global music industry that often takes advantage of Western law's colonial prejudices and blind spots (including fair use provisions, public domain assumptions, and legal denials of the values of oral cultures and non-literate histories) in order to perpetuate systemic relationships of inequality. Even in cases where the estates of performers recorded by ethnomusicologists are "fairly" compensated according to contemporary industry standards, the calculation of a sample's importance may unduly privilege the derivative work over the creative work of the sampled performer.[5] Such inequities, characteristic of most cultural industries, reinscribe power relations existing between privileged and underprivileged classes, dominant and marginalized cultures, and developed and developing nations.

For example, anthropologist Steven Feld traces the sampling of a Solomon Islands Baegu lullaby by world music producers who earned handsome profits from their derivative work and the associated licensing fees without compensating the singer or her community.[6] Such appropriations are ultimately predicated on opportunistic legal interpretations of *oral tradition* that shift meaning from "signifying that which is vocally communal to signifying that which belongs to no one in particular."[7] The status of ethnomusicological recordings as informational goods is also questioned by Coleman and Coombe who (as a moral philosopher and legal theorist, respectively),[8] show us that in certain indigenous societies, music fulfills functions beyond those of expression or entertainment. Music works performatively in some societies as a legal mechanism that transfers property rights and responsibilities between groups, families, and individuals. The categorization of such recordings as informational goods ignores their social functions to the injury of a community. Both free sampling of these recordings and restrictions of access to the work of a peoples' ancestors (by virtue of intellectual property protections over the recordings) serve to perpetuate histories of colonial subjugation in which indigenous peoples' cultural heritage was systematically collected for the profit of others while targeted for eradication in their own communities. These studies suggest that community rights and the social contexts of cultural heritage are insufficiently recognized, both under global intellectual property regimes and under the prevailing ethos and ethics of a digital cultural commons.

In a globalizing world, the ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of power relations by social actors within and between world cultures can rarely be reduced to commercial exploitation from above, or to subversive anti-capitalist strategies from below. Such extreme relations unequivocally exist, but never in cultural or political isolation. Across an interdisciplinary spectrum of inquiry, power relations emerge as always relational, contingent, and provisional. The valences between *theft* and *appropriation*, *borrowing* and *sampling*, *copying* and *referencing* index the embeddedness of social actors and invariably, if not always intentionally, express the contexts of their positioning in the nature of their cultural encounters. An acknowledgement of these contexts for appropriation enables us to explore a broader range of social, economic, and political implications.

Communications research into popular music suggests that the concept of cultural appropriation is more productively understood as a continuum of power relations ranging from outright exploitation to an easy egalitarianism.[9] Many cultural studies theorists in the past few decades have placed emphasis on the transformative power of cultural engagement, prompting a focus on the dialogic, relational dynamism of hybridity and transculturation that militates against conceptions predicated on the very *existence* of static or bounded societies or cultures.[10] Anthropologist Arnd Schneider advocates for renewed attention to the agency of individuals, rather than social groups, and posits appropriation as a persistent and fruitful complement to raw originality in the artistic process.[11] For Schneider, appropriation is a heterogeneous, and continuous brokering—neither a top-down coercive strategy, nor a bottom-up cultural refusal or reconfiguration of dominant cultures. Moreover, controversies over appropriation are inextricably linked to broader considerations of multiculturalism, trans-nationalism, diaspora, cosmopolitanism, and the vexed politics of community. In so far as globalization is stimulated and enabled by global information communications, the politics of appropriation are inseparable from the substantive social repercussions of technology.

Technology amplifies the amount and arguably the significance of copying, plagiarism, appropriation, and theft. Inexpensive, user-friendly hardware and software facilitate easy manipulation of digitized culture in cut-and-paste environments and tiny mass storage devices provide the means to physically transport vast amounts of data. Philosopher Albert Borgmann sees this shift in transmissibility as a transition from linguistic "information *about* reality" to the purposive transcription of "information *for* reality" and finally, as technologies enable massive and instantaneous informational flow, "information *as* reality."[12] This final, coextensive informational condition renders the lived environment and the social interactions that occur within it extensively accessible for capture and transmission. "Information *as* reality" can also be understood as manifest in the cultural imperative to reveal and document the minutiae of the everyday through self-monitoring socio-technological practices. Blogging, social networking, and other forms of life-logging populate the informational environment with a proliferation of cultural data no longer

legitimated by the curatorial expertise and institutional rationality of the archive, the museum, or the gallery, or for that matter, by religious authorities, elders, or governments.

According to media theorist Lev Manovich, the logic of cut-and-paste belongs to a set of "operations" deployed across a wide range of software, platforms, tasks, and data types.[13] These organizing tropes of the graphical user interface extend beyond the screen, come to play an important role in the recombination of culture and "become our general cognitive strategies."[14] Numerous contemporary cultural activities or techniques express the operations of selecting and compositing, including sampling in hip-hop and electronic music, the mixing of DJ sets, modding of video games, and practices of blogging. Increasingly, more of our lived experience and social interaction is mediated by digital technology and, by extension, susceptible to these new logics. Yet at the very moment when culture is almost everywhere, and nearly always accessible, digitizable, and instantaneously transmissible, its contents are increasingly closely held by intellectual property and emerging cultural property regimes.[15] Commodity culture propagates the total penetration of brands, products, and marketing into the sinews and fissures of the everyday and simultaneously demands tighter and tighter controls over commercial culture as intellectual property. Not surprisingly, battle lines are being drawn between users and consumers, who see themselves as active producers and creators in digital environments, and corporations determined to control their activities.[16]

One unanticipated consequence of this new logic is a new anxiety about the transmission of cultural forms by minority communities who fear *both* corporate appropriations and those of digitally savvy consumers who champion a global cultural commons in which expressive use takes precedence over all other social values.[17] Although these communities' interests are rarely served by simple commodifications, they are encouraged by powerful global institutions to consider their culture possessively as a resource in need of protection in a neoliberal economy.[18]

In empowering users to easily transmit and share data, digital informational ecologies give rise to a shared social imaginary in which *all* informational goods can be moved freely. It is not that duplication technologies do not exist prior to the widespread adoption of digital technologies, but rather, a matter of the ease of reproduction and distribution. Dragging and dropping, cutting and pasting, uploading and downloading are convenient, easy, and quick in comparison with photographic darkroom techniques or magnetic tape recording. The unrestricted circulation of immaterial cultural expressions via digital technologies may be naturalized as a form of artistic commonsense promoting the social transference of similar attitudes and propensities to material cultural expressions. Net.art and new media art often navigate the expressions of informational culture by deploying the World Wide Web as a vast store of source materials to remix, recontextualize, and reconstitute within new, derivative works or projects. Mark Napier's works *FEED*, *RIOT*, and *Shredder*[19] disassemble the text, images, and other properties of websites and present them in reconstituted interfaces, while the artist's *stolen* comprises a collection of images of body parts harvested and retouched by the artist. Before the Internet, these photographs of physical subjects would probably have remained personal ephemera. With the World Wide Web, photos in digitized format are accessible, downloadable, and easily modifiable for authorized and unauthorized uses. Material, or in this case corporeal, objects thus enter into a symbolic economy in which the immaterial representation circulates in unforeseen ways.

Other new media works explore the intersections of information culture, the Internet, and intellectual property by opening up private information and data to the Internet, as in the case of 0100101110101101.ORG's *Life Sharing* project, a "real-time digital self-portrait" that made the full contents of the artists' personal computer available online, in real-time, potentially converting the intimately personal into the radically public as an invitation to appropriation.[20] If these projects open up or explore the limits of information exchange and intellectual property, other works engage material objects in what can be viewed as an informational manner, perhaps incited by the normalization of digital information transfer. Joel Ross' *Room 28*[21] is noteworthy as an expansion of the digital cultural logic of cut-and-paste applied to the material physical setting of a hotel room. Immaterial, affective associations linked to the hotel room in the artist's character narrative are literally, and materially, cut and pasted into suitcases, made as portable as the memories they suggest. In contrast to the use of photography to establish setting in Ross' mixed media work, the documenting of the hotel room itself is conducted materially, as if in this instance the use, manipulation, and organization of photographs would have been insufficient to realize the artist's intent.

Within the circuits of appropriation we have described, creators ceaselessly test the limits of legal-juridical rationality. They interrogate the architecture of intellectual property regimes. They challenge expectations of originality and venture into the contested terrains of intellectual property regimes to question the social construction of originary genius in literature and the arts, and the legitimacy of all authorizing contexts. Artistic processes toy with the limits and contours of intellectual and cultural property regimes that brand one creative act as theft or piracy and celebrate another as a novel interpretation or arrangement. While artistic works that grapple with the socio-political construction of theft clearly predate the last decade's digital media ecology, the curatorial logic under which they are compiled is arguably incited and inspired by the cultural logic that underpins digital media. The intensification of flows and the intensification of governance over the movement of digital cultural goods will provoke new anxieties and new anarchies with respect to cultural appropriation and transculturation that promise to animate both arts of lifting and the controversies in which they are bound to figure.

1 See Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation, and the Commodification of Difference* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); and Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, "Introduction to Cultural Appropriation: A Framework For Analysis," in *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, eds. Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 1–27.

2 Henry Jenkins, "*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," in Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 37–60; and Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); both discussed in Rosemary J. Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

3 Nicholas Thomas, "Appropriation/Appreciation: Settler Modernism in Australia and New Zealand," in *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*, ed. Fred R. Myers (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2001), 139–163.

4 Claire Dwyer and Philip Crang, "Fashioning Ethnicities: The Commercial Spaces of Multiculture," *Ethnicities*, 2 no. 3 (2002): 410–430.

5 David Hesmondhalgh, "Digital Sampling and Cultural Inequality," *Social & Legal Studies*, 15 no. 1 (2006): 53–75.

6 Steven Feld, "A Sweet Lullaby for 'World Music'," in *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies,* ed. Simon Frith (London: Routledge, 2004), 62–86.

7 Ibid., 76.

8 Elizabeth Burns Coleman and Rosemary J. Coombe, "Broken Records: Subjecting 'Music' to Cultural Rights," forthcoming in *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, eds. Conrad Brunck and James O. Young (Malden: Blackwell, 2008).

9 Celia Colista and Glenn Leshner, "Traveling Music: Following the Path of Music Through the Global Market," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication,* 15 (1998): 181–194.

10 Richard A. Rogers, "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation," *Communication Theory*, 16 (2006): 474–503.

11 Arnd Schneider, "On 'Appropriation'. A Critical Reappraisal of the Concept and Its Application in Global Art Practices," *Social Anthropology*, 11 no. 2 (2003): 215–229.

12 Albert Borgmann, "Information and Reality at the Turn of the Century," in *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition: An Anthology*, eds. Robert C. Scharff and Val Dusek (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 571–577.

13 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 117–175.

14 Manovich, op cit., 118.

15 See Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law* and Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 148–150.

16 Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Anarchist in the Library: How the Clash Between Freedom and Control is Hacking the Real World and Crashing the System* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

17 Rosemary J. Coombe and Andrew Herman, "Rhetorical Virtues: Property, Speech, and the Commons on the World Wide Web," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 77 no. 3 (Summer 2004): 59–74.

18 Nicole Aylwin, Rosemary J. Coombe and Anita Chan, "Intellectual Property, Cultural Heritage and Rights-Based Development: Geographical Indications as Vehicles for Sustainable Livelihoods," forthcoming in *Intellectual Property: The Human Rights Paradox*, ed. Willem Grosheide (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar).

19 Mark Napier, *potatoland*, <http://potatoland.com>.

20 Discussed in Mark Tribe and Reena Jana, *New Media Art*, ed. Uta Grosenick, (Cologne: Taschen, 2006): 26–27.

21 See page 100–107.

Kelly Baum

From Lifting to Gifting: Misappropriation as Redistribution

> Lay partiality aside, and answer me: is theft, whose effect is to distribute wealth more evenly, to be branded as wrong in our day, under our government which aims at equality? Plainly, the answer is no: it furthers equality and … renders more difficult the conservation of property. There was once a people who punished not the thief but him who allowed himself to be robbed, in order to teach him to care for his property.
>
> –Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1795)[1]

The act of exchange is fundamentally relational. No matter what form it takes, exchange is that which establishes and reproduces the various ties, kinships, dependencies, and constituencies comprising the social body. Inasmuch as exchange has consequences for human relationships, so too does it have consequences for the very stuff being exchanged. Objects in particular are enlivened upon changing hands (and not necessarily at the expense of their producers, as Marx believed). Exchange puts objects in motion, and putting an object in motion generates myriad new possibilities for its use, value, and meaning.[2]

Theft, too, is a type of exchange, but it is an atypical one, occurring without permission or reciprocity, and violating (instead of reinforcing) the social contract. Although many would describe theft as anti-relational, the more compelling instances are actually *counter-relational*. Indeed, when pursued with something other than just personal gain in mind, theft has the ability to radically recalibrate dominant social and economic relations. This is largely the argument advanced in *Lifting*, which frames theft as both a creative and a political activity. Closely aligned with the tradition of the readymade, in which familiar objects are made strange through reclamation, decontextualization, and reinscription, theft is embraced by the artists in *Lifting* not for its own sake, but instead for its disruptive potential in the present.

The story does not end there, however. For many of these artists, including Miguel Calderón & Yoshua Okón, Ivan Moudov, Scott Myles, Dennis Oppenheim, Jon Routson, Savage, Ulay, and Timm Ulrichs, theft was only the first step in a much more protracted sequence of actions, the ultimate goal of which was the "gifting" of an object to another individual.[3] The structural interdependence of lifting and gifting is most apparent in the works of Moudov and Routson.

Between 2002 and 2005, Moudov stole small objects—pieces of sculptures and assemblages by various modern and contemporary artists—from dozens of museums and galleries. He arranged these items in suitcases and then displayed them at venues in Europe, including his native city of Sofia, Bulgaria. We might interpret Moudov's "portable museums"[4] as savvy ripostes to Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1935–41), which similarly parses the relationship between art, institutions, and the mechanics of distribution. Important differences separate one from the other, however. While Duchamp sought to ironize the larger social and economic apparatus in which artistic production is enmeshed, Moudov aimed to ameliorate, through systematic acts of theft and ensuing acts of generosity, an aesthetic and intellectual deprivation, specifically the lack

of access to modern and contemporary art in Bulgaria.

Routson's project is similar in spirit to Moudov's. For a period of time in the late 1990s, Routson illegally recorded Hollywood movies with a handheld video camera. He gave copies of the bootlegs to friends and screened them free of charge at a gallery in Brooklyn. Riddled with wobbles, shifts in focus, and ambient noise, the artist's home movies make no pretensions to perfection. Indeed, the flaws that so frequently disrupt our experience of visual pleasure and narrative closure serve an important purpose. On the one hand, they evidence the true subject of Routson's interest: less the movie than its reception at a specific time and place. They also insist, almost defiantly, on the initial act of copyright infringement. For his part, the artist has described the series as a whole as an exercise in "sharing" as well as a rebuke to the Recording Industry Association of America, which exerts a ferocious grip on the exchange of creative expression.[5]

Clearly, the projects described above do not involve traditional acts of giving. Nor do the objects thus bestowed constitute gifts in the conventional sense of the word. When I use the term "gifting" in relationship to the artists in *Lifting*, I'm referring to the process whereby an object is displaced from one either narrow or elite context to another more expansive or democratic context. Thanks to this displacement, which coincides with an instance of theft, a shift in access and ownership occurs: the private property of a single individual, corporation, or institution is relocated to the public sphere (Calderón & Okón, Moudov, Oppenheim, Ulrichs); wealth is redistributed (Moudov, Ulay); or goods are offered free of charge (Routson).

Admittedly, there are a few problems with my interpretation. It assumes that the places where these "gifts" are presented (usually, but not always, galleries and museums) are more inclusive than those from whence the objects originated, but this isn't necessarily the case. Moreover, it overlooks the fact that these same gifts acquire another kind of value—market value, specifically—upon being put on display. This makes it all the more likely that the transition from private to public realm will be fleeting, a momentary lapse in the inexorable (recuperative) march of capitalism. There are other artists, however, who pursue gifting to its more or less logical conclusion, largely by infiltrating extra-artistic systems of exchange. Most such projects will be installed in a gallery or museum at some point, but only as documentation of an intervention that has already transpired, not as the gift itself. What is more, all are preceded by an initial act of theft or misappropriation.

Take Scott Myles, for example. For several months between 1999 and 2000, Myles transferred magazines, which he had not purchased, from shops at one bus or train station to shops at another bus or train station.[6] In his interview with the editors of this publication, the artist described his project as nothing other than an experiment in gift exchange, one informed by his reading of Marcel Mauss' 1923–24 essay "The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies" and Lewis Hyde's 1979 study *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*.[7]

Myles can be fruitfully compared to two other artists who are not included in *Lifting*, but who similarly affect collisions between thieving and gifting: Seth Price and Zoë Sheehan Saldaña. The Internet is Price's primary tool, the means by which he and others pirate, post, download, and exchange information previously confined to the hands of corporate and government entities. For the most part, Price pilfers images and music. This body of readymade material is incorporated into videos and compilations that he either presents at galleries, sells relatively cheaply at book, music, and museum stores, or makes available on the Internet, where it can be downloaded for free. Price also avails himself of that highly democratic distribution apparatus, Electronic Arts Intermix. For her part, Saldaña practices a technique known as reverse shop-lifting (or shop-dropping) in which new or altered items are returned to the stores from which they were originally purchased.[8] In 2005, for instance, Saldaña bought a hat from Wal-Mart that she later reproduced in her studio stitch by stitch. She then revisited the same store and discretely set the copy on the shelf, where it remained until it was purchased by a consumer for a mere $3.23.[9] As with Price and Myles, gifting is implied by Saldaña's deliberate effort to expand the context for her practice, to make the labors of this practice more accessible and more affordable.

If Price, Saldaña, and the artists included in this publication are any indication, gifting is an endeavor inextricably bound to lifting—lifting understood as either the literal theft of an object or, more generally, as the misappropriation of something already made. Together lifting and gifting constitute a complex, multifaceted strategy of reclamation, on the one hand, and redistribution, on the other.

1 Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, in *Marquis de Sade: Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings*, eds. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 313. This is an excerpt from de Sade's fascinating (if frustrating) post-revolutionary, pro-Republican "pamphlet" "Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans," which was published in this novel.

2 This more dynamic interpretation of the relationship between objects and exchange relations is informed by Arjun Appadurai's excellent "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). See too my essay "Things-in-Motion," in *Conrad Bakker: Objects & Economies*, ed. Patricia Hickson (Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center, 2007).

3 Gifting is also operative, but in a different way, in the thefts perpetrated by Joel Ross and Rys Southan.

4 See page 142.

5 *Ibid*., 124–125.

6 *Ibid*., 109, 114.

7 Mauss' essay focuses on a specific instance of gift giving: the potlatch, a system of exchange common among Native Americans living on the Northwest coast. During a potlatch, the leader from one tribe would bestow a gift of considerable wealth on the leader of another tribe, who was then obligated to reciprocate with a gift of even greater value. For our purposes, it is important to understand the differences separating the potlatch from a market economy, since this difference is the source of much of its interest to artists today. First, as a type of gift economy, the potlatch obviates the need for currency. Second, it frequently results in the nonproductive expenditure (as opposed to the rampant acquisition) of wealth. "In certain kinds of potlatch one must expend all that one has," Mauss writes, "keeping nothing back. It is a competition to see who is the richest and also the most madly extravagant … In a certain number of cases, it is not even a question of giving and returning gifts, but of destroying, so as not to give the slightest hint of desiring your gift to be reciprocated … It is therefore a system of law and economics in which considerable wealth is constantly being expended and transferred" (*The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* [New York: W.W. Norton, 1990], 37). For all of these reasons, Mauss claims, the societies that practice the potlatch exist in a "perpetual state of economic ferment," one that is, paradoxically, "very far from being materialistic. It is far less prosaic than our buying and selling, our renting of services, or the games we play on the Stock Exchange." (72) George Bataille was likewise fascinated with the antagonistic, extra-utilitarian, and anti-capitalist dimension of the potlatch, and he published a number of articles and books on the subject from the 1930s into the 1950s. See his essay "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) as well as *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

8 The artist Savage also practices shop-dropping, but this aspect of his practice is not the one showcased in *Lifting*.

9 Along with Conrad Bakker, Daniel Bozhkov, Eugenio Dittborn, Christine Hill, Emily Jacir, Ben Kinmont, and Cildo Meireles, Price and Saldaña were featured in an exhibition I curated in 2007 titled *Transactions*. See Kelly Baum, *Transactions* (Austin: Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, 2007).

Kenneth Goldsmith

Conceptual Poetics…i had always had mixed feelings

…. i had always had mixed feelings
about being considered a poet
poet i dont want to be a poet
poet i dont want to be a poet
i'll consider it"
–David Antin[1]

"if robert lowell is a
if robert frost was a
if socrates was a poet

Conceptual writing obstinately makes no claims on originality. On the contrary, it employs intentionally self and ego effacing tactics using uncreativity, unoriginality, illegibility, appropriation, plagiarism, fraud, theft, and falsification as its precepts; information management, word processing, databasing, and extreme process as its methodologies; and boredom, valuelessness, and nutritionlessness as its ethos.

Language as material, language as process, language as something to be shoveled into a machine and spread across pages, only to be discarded and recycled once again. Language as junk, language as detritus. Nutritionless language, meaningless language, unloved language, entartete sprache, everyday speech, illegibility, unreadability, machinistic repetition. Obsessive archiving & cataloging, the debased language of media & advertising; language more concerned with quantity than quality. How much did you say that paragraph weighed?

In their self-reflexive use of appropriated language, the conceptual writer embraces the inherent and inherited politics of the borrowed words: far be it for the conceptual writer to morally or politically dictate words that aren't theirs. The choice or machine that makes the poem sets the political agenda in motion, which is often morally or politically reprehensible to the author (in retyping every word of a day's copy of the New York Times , am I to exclude an unsavory editorial?). While John Cage claimed that any sound could be music, his moral filter was on too high to accept certain sounds of pop music, agitation, politics, or violence. To Cage, not all sounds were music. Andy Warhol, on the other hand, was a model of permeability, transparency, and sliver reflectivity; everything was fodder for Warhol's art, regardless of its often unsavory content. Our world turned out to be Andy's world. Conceptual writing celebrates this circumstance.

With the rise of appropriation-based literary practices, the familiar or quotidian is made unfamiliar or strange when left semantically intact. No need to blast apart syntax. The New Sentence? The Old Sentence, reframed, is enough. How to proceed after the deconstruction and pulverization of language that is the 20th century's legacy. Should we continue to pound language into ever smaller bits or should we take some other approach? The need to view language again as a whole — syntactically and grammatically intact — but to acknowledge the cracks in the surface of the reconstructed linguistic vessel. Therefore, in order to proceed, we need to employ a strategy of opposites — unboring boring, uncreative writing, valueless speech — all methods of disorientation used in order to re-imagine our normative relationship to language.

David Antin's sentiments in the epigraph are correct: conceptual writing is more interested in a thinkership rather than a readership. Readability is the last thing on this poetry's mind. Conceptual writing is good only when the idea is good; often, the idea is much more interesting than the resultant texts.

And yet … there are moments of unanticipated beauty, sometimes grammatical, some structural, many philosophical: the wonderful rhythms of repetition, the spectacle of the mundane reframed as literature, a reorientation to the poetics of time, and fresh perspectives on readerliness, but to name a few. For an ethos claiming so much valuelessness, there's a shocking amount of beauty and experience to be siphoned from these texts.

Uncreative Writing

I teach a class at the University of Pennsylvania called "Uncreative Writing," which is a pedagogical extension of my own poetics. In it, students are penalized for showing any shred of originality and creativity. Instead, they are rewarded for plagiarism, identity theft, repurposing papers, patchwriting, sampling, plundering, and stealing. Not surprisingly, they thrive. Suddenly, what they've surreptitiously become expert at is brought out into the open and explored in a safe environment, reframed in terms of responsibility instead of recklessness.

Well, you might ask, what's wrong with creativity? "I mean, we can always use more creativity."(1) "The world needs to become a more creative place."(2) "If only individuals could express themselves creatively, they'd be freer, happier."(3) "I'm a strong believer in the therapeutic value of creative pursuits."(4) "To be creative, relax and let your mind go to work, otherwise the result is either a copy of something you did before or reads like an army manual."(5) "I don't follow any system. All the laws you can lay down are only so many props to be cast aside when the hour of creation arrives."(6) "An original writer is not one who imitates nobody, but one whom nobody can imitate."(7)

When our notions of what is considered creative became this hackneyed, this scripted, this sentimental, this debased, this romanticized … this uncreative, it's time to run in the opposite direction. Do we really need another "creative" poem about the way the sunlight is hitting your writing table? No. Or another "creative" work of fiction that tracks the magnificent rise and the even more spectacular fall? Absolutely not.

One exercise I do with my students is to give them the simple instruction to retype five pages of their choice. Their responses are varied and full of revelations: some find it enlightening to become a machine (without ever having known Warhol's famous dictum "I want to be a machine"). Others say that it was the most intense reading experience they ever had, with many actually embodying the characters they were retyping. Several students become aware that the act of typing or writing is actually an act of performance, involving their whole body in a physically durational act (even down to noticing the cramps in their hands). Some of the students become intensely aware of the text's formal properties and for the first time in their lives began to think of texts not only as transparent, but as opaque objects to be moved around a white space. Others find the task zen-like and amnesia-inducing (without ever having known Satie's "Memoirs of an Amnesiac" or Duchamp's desire to live without memory), alternately having the text lose then regain meaning.

The trick in uncreative writing is airtight accountability. If you can defend your choices from every angle, then the writing is a success. On the other hand, if your methodology and justification is sloppy, the work is doomed to fail. You can no longer have a workshop where people worry about adjusting a comma here or a word there. You must insist that the procedure was well articulated and accurately executed.

Information Management

I am a word processor. I sympathize with the protagonist of a cartoon claiming to have transferred x amount of megabytes, physically exhausted after a day of downloading. The simple act of moving information from one place to another today constitutes a significant cultural act in and of itself. I think it's fair to say that most of us spend hours each day shifting content into different containers. Some of us call this writing.

In 1969, the conceptual artist Douglas Huebler wrote, "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more."[2] I've come to embrace Huebler's ideas, though it might be retooled as, "The world is full of texts, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more." It seems an appropriate response to a new condition in writing today: faced with an unprecedented amount of available text, the problem is not needing to write more of it; instead, we must learn to negotiate the vast quantity that exists.

Contemporary writing requires the expertise of a secretary crossed with the attitude of a pirate: replicating, organizing, mirroring, archiving, and reprinting, along with a more clandestine proclivity for bootlegging, plundering, hoarding, and file-sharing. We've needed to acquire a whole new skill set: we've become master typists, exacting cut-and-pasters, and OCR demons. There's nothing we love more than transcription; we find few things more satisfying than collation.

There is no museum or bookstore in the world better than our local Staples.

The writer's solitary lair is transformed into a networked alchemical laboratory, dedicated to the brute physicality of textual transference. The sensuality of copying gigabytes from one drive to another: the whirr of the drive, intellectual matter manifested as sound. The carnal excitement from supercomputing heat generated in the service of poetry.

The weight of holding a book's worth of language in the clipboard waiting to be dumped: the magic is in the suspension.

The grind of the scanner as it peels language off the page, thawing it, liberating it. The endless cycle of textual fluidity: from imprisonment to emancipation, back to imprisonment, then

freed once more. The balance between dormant text warehoused locally and active text in play on the Web. Language in play. Language out of play. Language frozen. Language melted.

The text of a newspaper is released from its paper prison of fonts and columns, its thousands of designs, corporate, political decisions, now flattened into a nonhierarchical expanse of sheer potentiality as a generic text document begging to be repurposed, dumped into a reconditioning machine and cast into a new form.

A radio broadcast is captured and materialized, rendered into text. The ephemeral made permanent; every utterance made by the broadcaster—every um and uh—goes onto the ever-increasing textual record. The gradual accumulation of words; a blizzard of the evanescent.

Cruising the Web for new language. The sexiness of the cursor as it sucks up words from anonymous Web pages, like a stealth encounter. The dumping of those words, sticky with residual junk, back into the local environment; scrubbed with text soap, returned to their virginal state, filed away, ready to be reemployed.

> Sculpting with text.
> Data mining.
> Sucking on words.
> Our task is to simply mind the machines.
>
> Andy Warhol: I think everybody should be a machine. I think everybody should like everybody.
> Interviewer: Is that what Pop Art is all about?
> Warhol: Yes. It's liking things.
> Interviewer: And liking things is like being a machine?
> Warhol: Yes, because you do the same thing every time. You do it over and over again.
> Interviewer: And you approve of that?
> Warhol: Yes, because it's all fantasy.

At a reading I gave recently, the other reader came up to me after my reading and said incredulously, "You didn't write a word of what you read." I thought for a moment and, sure, in one sense—the traditional sense—he was right; but in the expanded field of appropriation, uncreativity, sampling, and language management which we all inhabit today, he couldn't have been more wrong. Each and every word was "written" by me: sometimes mediated by a machine, sometimes transcribed, and sometimes copied; but without my intervention, slight as it may be, these works would never have found their way into the world. When retyping a book, I often stop and ask myself if what I am doing is really writing. As I sit there, in front of the computer screen, punching keys, the answer is invariably yes.

1 David Antin, *talking at the boundaries* (New York: New Directions, 1976).

2 Artist's statement, *January 5–31, 1969* (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969), n.p.

3 G. R. Swenson, "What is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters, Part I," *ARTnews* (November 1963).

Jeff Ferrell

Theft, Art, Crime . . . Revolution

Good art and good crime share a common trait: the edgy tension of transgression. Both play with the dangerous dialectic between the existing order of things and those moments when that order is breached, broken, and transcended. Because of this, both invoke a parallel tension among their viewers and victims: fearful concern on the one hand, yet on the other the enticing appeal of the different, the shadowy seduction of the strange. To encounter this sort of crime or art is to do a double take — to look away and to look back, despite yourself.

By these standards, good art can be defined by its ability to remain in contact with common assumptions, to anchor its reference in the everyday, all the while violating those very assumptions. Sampling from the stockpile of cars and crucifixes and occupations, mashing up our fears and desires, such art creates something startlingly new in the world. Ideally, the nature of this new creation remains not at all clear; it resists being made sense of. It might be a little trick of the imagination, or a moment of disorientation . . . or a monster sent back into the midst of middle class comfort.

Good crime creates the same sort of blessed uncertainty; it does violence not to people but to the unquestioned convergence of law and morality. Crime is, after all, a category created by law, law a system of control created by political rulers, and political rulers most often a creation of money and manipulation. Good crime declines to abide by the myth that, somehow, this sorry sequence produces a legal system of moral majesty. In fact, like good art, good crime forces a radical reconsideration — imagining, even, that moral imperatives reside not in the law but against it. This transgressive reconsideration can emerge from one of Martin Luther King's illegal civil rights marches, or from Gandhi's sojourn to the sea for the criminal collection of salt. But other times it can come from criminal trespass, or vandalism, or sodomy. Marching for civil rights or making love, crime can be made to confront conventional understandings, can be made to stand "against the law" and its assumed moral foundations. In such moments of criminal transgression, breaking the law can break open the world.[1]

Of course good art, good crime, and the connections between the two derive from another source as well: the legal and moral authorities who would extinguish them. Time and again the line between what is and what might be, between art and crime, between seduction and revulsion is drawn as much by legal and aesthetic authorities as it is by transgressors and their audiences. Caught up in a police raid, gallery art can be turned into evidence of illegality; in the course of a court trial, a skilled prosecutor can transform photography into pornography; with just the right campaign of moral panic, provocative music can be reinvented by its detractors as dangerous sedition.

In this sense, legal and moral authorities collude in the creation of art and crime — and collude in making or severing the connections between one and the other. Unintentional and generally ill-tempered co-conspirators in the construction of art and crime, the authorities nonetheless help raise some significant questions about the two. Where is the boundary between art and

crime, and how are we to know it? At what point do artistic violations of everyday assumptions cross over into illegality? Now let's be honest: sometimes the issue at hand is not so significant, in reality little more than some obscene prank or commercialized affront—and sometimes the "collusion" of the authorities puts artists in jail and galleries out of business. But even so, the authorities' stern responses can be taken as a positive sign of sorts, a signal of success in the creation of cultural discomfort, a confirmation of a certain transgressive potential. Good art makes for, or is often enough made into, good crime.

As Jean Genet and others have demonstrated, good crime can make for good art as well. Recounting in *The Thief's Journal* his wanderings as a petty thief, his subterranean sexuality, and his periods of imprisonment, Genet makes it clear that he intends to steal more than everyday objects of survival—he intends to steal the moral and aesthetic underpinnings on which everyday life rests. In fact, in his own daily degradations Genet finds *himself* embracing the "stateliness of abjection" and discovering a dark existential lucidity in which "the most sordid signs" of failure and depravity reemerge as "signs of grandeur." More than this, he discovers the same grandeur among other escapees from the constraints of conventional decency, seeing "in thieves, traitors, and murderers, in the ruthless and cunning, a deep beauty—a sunken beauty."[2]

Indeed, *theft* is the deep tissue connecting art and crime, connecting beauty and betrayal—and not just for Genet. By its own logic, theft emerges from an inequality of the haves and the have-nots, from the unbalanced tension linking those who possess an object or idea to those who would take it. Put into play, theft doesn't so much resolve this tension as explode it, transgressing the web of conventional boundaries that keeps people and objects in their place. As with Genet, then, the object thieved never constitutes the real problem, or the real potential, of theft; instead it is the power of theft to upset the order of things, to liquefy the stabilized arrangements that define what belongs to whom, and why. At its best, or worst, theft steals away the certainty by which everyday life operates. If, as William Blake suggested, the road to wisdom is paved with excess, the road to re-arrangement is paved with stolen cobblestones.

Forty years ago this very notion was played out in the streets of Paris. The Situationists—an outlaw aggregation of artists, writers, and subversives—had taken to the boulevards, and with sympathetic students and workers, were raining down stolen cobblestones on the riot police sent out to stop them. Their goal was revolution—in Raoul Vaneigem's words, a "revolution of everyday life"—and while the cobblestones made for temporary defense, the real means to their revolution was the *theft of everyday meaning*. Arguing that the artworld had collapsed in on itself and so lost its subversive potential—that now "Duchamp's drawing of a mustache on the *Mona Lisa* is no more interesting than the original version of that painting"—they sought instead engagement with daily life. The technique for this transformative engagement was *detournement*, "the theft of aesthetic artifacts from their contexts and their diversion into contexts of one's own devise," as Greil Marcus later put it. If they could steal away the taken-for-granted meaning and aesthetics of everyday life, the Situationists supposed, they could engineer situations in which the stultifying stability of modern existence could be shattered and transformed.[3]

"Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can be used to make new combinations," Guy Debord and Gil Wolman advised—and so the Situationists went about rewriting sacred texts as sacrilege, plundering and paraphrasing the *Communist Manifesto*, converting the banality of newspaper comics into commentary on everyday banality, and utilizing the ready visibility of public walls and corporate billboards for condemnations of public passivity and corporate domination. As with the approaches presented in this publication—as with good art and good crime—they worked to steal away the certainty of commonly accepted practices, and so to reveal and remake the insidious mechanisms by which such practical certainty was maintained. "Ultimately," Debord and Wolman concluded, "any sign or word is susceptible to being converted into something else, even into its opposite."[4] But if so…well, if so, then the next historical moment always resides in the present one, and the next revolution is always underway, if only we're willing to thieve them away from those who can't imagine such possibilities. There's so much more to steal than bread or cobblestones or paintings; the whole world awaits.

In that world, art, crime, and theft twist around one another like lovers lost to some desperate *ménage a trios*. Torn apart by legal authorities or gallery owners or entrepreneurs of morality, they entangle again. Herded together by these same forces into little ghettos of indecency or disapproval, they find a perverse pleasure in their forced proximity, and begin again the next disruption.

1 Take contemporary urban graffiti, for example—but as an example of what, good art or good crime? Well, yes. Graffiti writers turn the taken-for-granted urban environment—the city's alleys, walls, delivery trucks, and trains—into happenstance explosions of color and style. One day the train station wall is just the train station wall, and the next, inexplicably, it's swarmed with symbols and designs that don't quite make sense, at least not to the uninitiated. You look away and you look back—just how did those designs get there, anyway?

They got there illegally. Graffiti writers are addicts, junkies, not for drugs but for the adrenalin rush they get from executing their art on their own terms—that is, in terms of trespass, "destruction of private property," curfew violation, and other inevitable criminalities. Better yet are the political campaigns to stop graffiti, the mayor pontificating, the cops out in force with their surveillance squads and alley patrols—because that ups the risk, amps the adrenalin, and sharpens the artistic edge. Graffiti is good art precisely because it is good crime. Or is it the other way round?

No answer to this question can be found in Jeff Ferrell, *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality* (Boston: Northeastern University Press/University Press of New England, 1996).

2 Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal* (New York: Grove, 1964), 19, 111.

3 Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press, 2001); Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, "A User's Guide to Detournement," in *Les Lèvres Nues* #8 (May 1956); Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 168.

4 Debord and Wolman, "A User's Guide to Detournement."

Timm Ulrichs

Letter to *Artforum*, October, 1970

LETTERS

Sirs:

I have read the essay by Mel Bochner in the May, 1970 issue of your magazine. Perhaps you might be interested to know that on April 23, 1969, I sent a letter to Bochner telling him of my exhibitions of measurements, etc., since 1966. I enclosed the invitation card of my show at the Patio Gallery, Frankfurt, starting February 29, 1969 announcing an exhibition of "measurements" and the "four directions" found out with a compass. The photo enclosed was made then, and has been reproduced in the catalog of the exhibition "Konzeption—conception," at the Museum Schloss Morsbroich, Leverkusen, October, 1969. Bochner took part in that survey of conceptual art. For the same exhibition I had made another compass piece: an arrow pointing north, together with a compass. Bochner's first exhibition of measurements took place in May, 1969 at Gallery Friedrich, Munich, and Gallery Konrad Fischer, Dusseldorf. The papers he showed in "When Attitudes Become Form," at the Kunsthalle in Bern were exactly the same as those I distributed at the same place during "Aktionsabend II," February 27, 1968.

Timm Ulrichs
Hanover, Germany

Bullshit.

—Mel Bochner
New York City

Sirs:

A reversal of a Jerry Rubin quote to read: "I agree with your goals; I don't know about your tactics," capsulizes my reaction to Robert Pincus-Witten's article on Don Judd's recent gallery exhibition (June, 1970). While I agree that Judd (and Andre) "have created the most important work of the late '60s," I disagree with several of the points made in support of this conclusion and in reference to the new work in the exhibition.

Mr. Pincus-Witten writes of Judd (and Andre): "It is clearly a function of an unswerving commitment to difficulty" which makes their work "seem important." This statement attempts to make special and particular a characteristic which is general and expected in good and important art: difficulty. It is like saying Napoleon was a good general because he won major battles. The relationship is inherent, not explanatory; it does not distinguish Napoleon from other good generals or Judd from other important artists. The reasons for Judd's importance are much more specific.

Another point made about Judd (and Andre) is:

> They saw the period's hardest problem most clearly—how to deal with, in fact, how to protect, the solidity, the tangibility of the 'recognizable' formal vocabulary of Cubism and Constructivism while reforming and renewing the spectator's sense of relationship to this legacy.

The main thing is that a Judd *looks* radically different from most Cubist and Constructivist works; that says a lot. If I understand what Mr. Pincus-Witten means, I agree that there might be a "'recognizable' formal vocabulary" common to Cubism, Constructivism and Judd: that is simply to say, they all use primary geometric forms. But this similarity is quite minor to several major differences. Judd's geometry, order and space are rather different from the two earlier styles. With Judd, order always arises naturally out of the geometric elements, while in most Cubist and Constructivist works the order is usually a form of traditional composition left over from representational art and imposed upon the geometry. Because of Judd's particular order, the individual parts of his pieces remain clear and at the same time in unity with each other; the parts are not lost in the whole, nor do they detract from it, which is contrary to quite a bit of Cubist and Constructivist art. Judd's space, besides the obvious and great difference of being real, is neither fragmented nor shifting, but whole, clearly defined and usually quite static. The difference between things presented singly, equally, and for themselves, and things presented in ambiguous combinations with other things and references to other things is visually and philosophically great. I don't think that Judd was overly influenced by, much less that he consciously dealt with or protected, styles so basically opposed to his own. Any art that was important to his development was much more recent and American.

A third and major point of the article is that Judd is "fining it down." Since Judd began making three-dimensional objects in 1962, his development has been very tight and coherent, a thorough investigation of a few main ideas and schemes. Certain specific instances, such as the reissuing of the recessed-top box in brass, might be seen as "fining it down." But the use of this term in the article's title and the emphasis placed on the relationship between the brass box and the newest piece apply the idea of "fining it down" too generally to Judd's work and ignore important aspects of the newer work. These aspects amount to much more than refinement and indicate that there is still quite a bit of ground to be covered within those few main ideas.

The large galvanized-iron sheet piece is not as related to the brass box as it is to several pieces which supersede the brass box (dated mid-1968), are larger, and which, unlike it, are all explicitly involved with an interior volume. Judd has always made structures of recognizably thin materials which implied hollowness, but since 1968, all of the completely new pieces have been actually, physically open. They have become larger in size and simpler in structure. The main examples were all in this show: the single, open-ended rectangle of anodized aluminum (also seen in the 1968 Whitney Annual, and a slightly larger version in the big Met show), the three-tiered stack of long open galvanized-iron tubes and the galvanized-iron sheet running along, and 5 inches out from, three walls of a room. These last two pieces, largest and most recent, also indicate a new interest in the specific relationship between a work and a particular room or wall. The larger size

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Image © *Artforum*, October 1970 [page 24].

Timm Ulrichs

***Kunst-Diebstahl als Totalkunst-Demonstration* (*Art-Theft as a Total Art-Demonstration*), 1971**

Action with photographic and text documentation.

Kunst-Diebstahl als Totalkunst-Demonstration started as a manifesto to commit a crime of stealing a work of art. Following the involvement of a film company the manifesto was realized and a theft committed.

Atopia Projects: Did you originally intend that the work would just remain as an idea? Why did you decide to actually enact the manifesto?

Timm Ulrichs: Of course I knew the term "readymade" and "objet trouvé" the Dadaists and Surrealists had coined and used to describe their works. But why not enlarge the repertory of art still further? So I "invented" the "lost object," the "stolen object," the "forgotten object," and so on. I filled boxes with items I had stolen personally in department stores (1969–72), made exhibitions of lost and found offices transferred to museums (Wiesbaden 1971, Nuremberg 1974), and in December 1969 I announced the show *art theft as a demonstration of total art* in my studio that I had defined as a gallery of total art. I wrote and printed a manifesto on the theme, but the form had still to be filled in, a place and date had not been fixed. Some people from a television film company, who saw this paper in a catalogue of the art fair in Göttingen asked me if I intended to complete the work, and of course I did. So finally I stole a picture (artist: Gerhard Altenbourg) from the Brusberg Gallery in Hanover on August 11, 1971, exhibited it at my "total art gallery," and sent the manifesto around as an invitation paper to the public. After three days of showing the stolen artwork I gave it back to the owner. The film documented the theft (director: Dagmar Voss) and was broadcast on August 17, 1971 (ARD, *Nordschau-Magazin*).

Following is a translation of Ulrichs' manifesto (1969), orginally printed in German as a two-sided document:

[side 1:]
Art-Theft as a Total Art-Demonstration
timm ulrichs stole
on 11 AUGUST 1971 at 14:30
in HANNOVER
from the private collection / gallery / exhibition venue / museum
GALERIE BRUSBERG
the work of the artist GERHARD ALTENBOURG
entitled »GIRL WITH STAR«, 1949
(technique: hand drawing, format: 19.0 x 18.5, value: 1000.— dm).
the stolen work of art shall be exhibited for 3 days in timm ulrichs' total art-room gallery, 3 hannover 1, 12 friesen street, and then returned to the owner.
the entire action — the theft, the public presentation and its consequences — is documented with photos and texts.
promotion center for total art, timm ulrichs, 3 hannover 1, postbox 6043

[side 2:]
TOTAL ART aims for global 'world-art'; this, however, is based on the knowledge of and reflection on the contemporary 'art-world'. In particular IDEA-ART therefore examines the conditions of art itself, the entire (artificial) 'art' system, its premises, its identity, its (social) effects, in fact everything that deals with and in art. Indeed, this SYSTEM and THEORY ART analyses also the art PRACTICE of all PRACTICE-ART, but even more the ART-PRODUCT 'ART' itself, the THEORY OF ART-THEORY, and the old question: 'What is (was/will be) art — still, even now, already, already again?' Art-work, thus understood, begins with etymology and definitions of the 'ART'-TERM (every art-definition is already art!); it studies the rules of the game, of the writing of art history, of its science and critique; the understanding art-producers have of themselves; art education and support; art policy, tactics and strategy; art as product and investment; the art market activity at galleries and in auctions, price structures and price manipulations, market values and art market reports, purchases by collectors and museums; advertising for and through art; copyright, licensing-art and plagiarism-art; securing, conservation, consumption, wear and tear and destruction of art; art-forgery and art-theft, the research findings of this ART-RESEARCH itself are again contributions to a conceptual ART(OF)ART.
The 'ART-THEFT as total art-demonstration' (advertised in 'Belser Art-Quartal' No.4 / 1969 as an event in the room-gallery for December 1969) is not an act of confrontation over image-worship by anti-artistic iconoclasts; the themes are not iconoclasm and image burning (this is realised in my work 'URN with ashes of burned art works', 1969/70). Rather, a demonstration of NON-ART-ART is intended, which instead of static art-works, which block the world, wants attitudes, gestures, and manipulations, which point beyond the thing 'art' and can perhaps change the (art) world, for example in the manner of the (precursor of conceptual art) HEROSTRATOS, who in 356 BC set the Temple of Artemis in Ephesos on fire, not in fact, to destroy ('degenerate') art, but to immortalize his name through herostratic-pyromanic action. Likewise this art theft, the first based on 'purely artistic considerations', a pure ACT OF CONVICTION; the 'artistic motive' is not the theft of art, but the theft of art as art.
Thus I fall, and art-activity and art-committing fall, out of the usual frame-work of 'art' — but art has always been a capricious act. Here the dealings with art merely become radicalized for me and become an unfamiliar, adventurous experience, to outwit the security system, which protects art, and to make it visible as a latent, autonomous art-system. (Since everything that is present in art spaces has to be art, guards and alarm systems also form an — even if — 'APOCRYPHAL EXHIBITION.') This incidence/idea does not demonstrate spiritual, 'disinterested pleasure' in art (Kant), but direct, namely material appropriation of art and 'enrichment' through art. I seize and grasp — in a pointed, but exemplary manner — art in a palpably 'laying hands' on it (or 'helping myself to it') way: 'personal' ownership of art as a premise/condition for pleasure in art, this (often neurotic) basis of all art collecting, has always already been exemplary for a society, for which everything became a commodity, and therefore also each artistic statement (and even this art theft, which can be taken over and exploited journalistically and commercially).
(I am, incidentally, not at all interested in the appropriation of art works, I do not even collect and buy my own art products, even though I value them especially. I prefer the 'imaginary museum' (André Malraux) to the accumulation of material, this almost immaterial HEAD-ART-GALLERY and library, this handy store and safe of ideas.) My action (probably) has more of the characteristics of an indicator than of the object, which now verifies/documents/proves it, which is only an artistic device for a further purpose: the art object becomes paradoxically increasingly public by my abstracting it (from the public) and making it vanish. During the exhibition in the room gallery (as 'stolen artwork') its artistic value remains untouched, its commercial (market) value on the other hand is removed. (It is unlikely to find buyers). Thus, real art shows itself here for the first time having lost its commodity-character, as de-priviledged art without 'art'. Without material loss of art works, through the art theft I AS AN ARTIST and the general art-sector gain an artistic experience.

–Timm Ulrichs

Dennis Oppenheim

VIOLATIONS, 1971–1972

Evidence of 153 misdemeanors in violation of Section 484 of the California Penal Code (Petty Theft). Room installation with hubcaps and video monitor, video transferred to DVD (0:30 loop, b/w, audio), installation dimensions variable.

Right: Installation view, Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1972.

A monitor mounted high in the gallery plays a repeating sequence of a hand clasping a screwdriver, prying a hubcap from a car wheel. The hubcaps scattered across the gallery floor substantiate the work's subtitle: Evidence of 153 misdemeanors in violation of Section 484 of the California Penal Code (Petty Theft). In an accompanying text Oppenheim described the effect of this series of misdemeanors, "As they [the hubcaps] sprang loose from the wheel housing into my hands everything about them changed. I was creating objects that could turn against me, contaminate, spread my activity through the gallery-museum system, imbuing all with possible legal repercussions."

Atopia Projects: What is the history to the work, what was the impetus to indulge in such a misdemeanor and present it in this way?

Dennis Oppenheim: I was looking for ways of changing an object simply by touching it. This is about economy of gesture. By simply touching something you can change it.

Could you discuss the connections between this work and other work that you made in that period?

I did a work called *Identity Stretch* (1970–75) with distorted thumbprints belonging to me and my son. These were enlarged and plotted on a field to become an earthwork. This too was about economy of gesture. The simple act of leaving a print has the profound implication of identifying a person.

Have you made other works that challenge legal conventions, and was the illegality employed in *VIOLATIONS* integral to the work?

I have not done other works such as this. It was important that the activity include fracturing a legal code; otherwise I would not have been interested in making the work.

Were there any legal repercussions in creating this work?

No.

Does the work have a different relevance now compared to the time at which it was made?

The laws have not changed. Petty theft is still a misdemeanor.

In the statement that accompanied the work you discussed the potential for the objects to "contaminate the gallery-museum system." What interested you about that possibility?

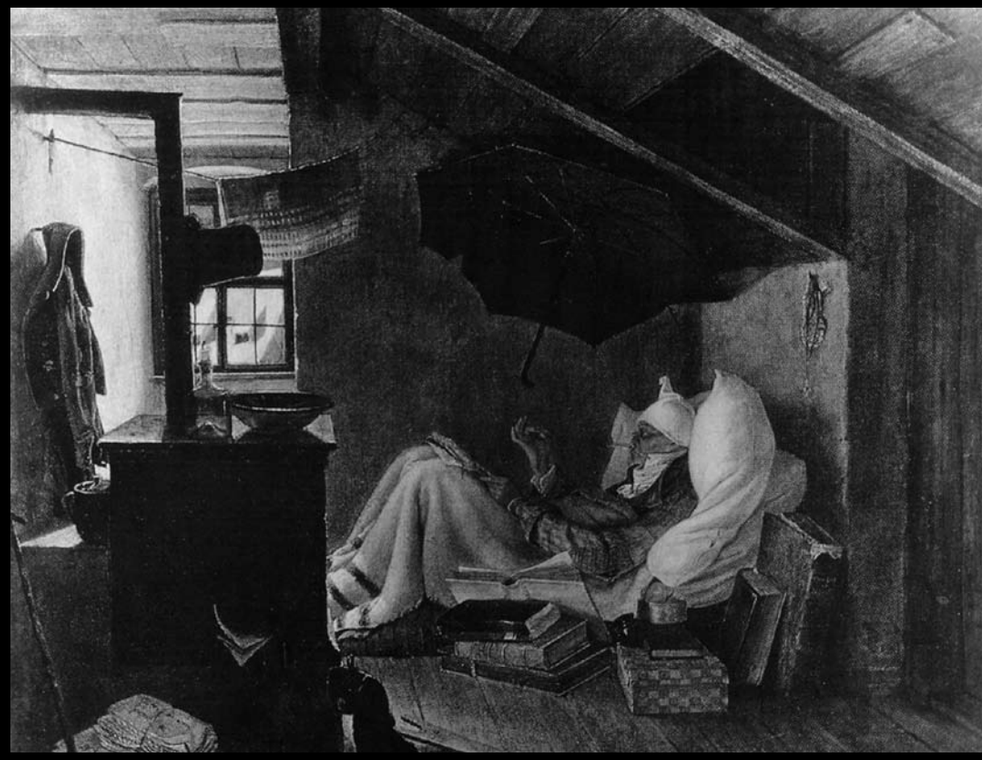
During this early period of conceptual art the word activation was used a lot, particular in regard to Land Art and particularly in treatments of horizontal space versus vertical space. Often this word implied spreading, or covering. In the case of this work, the word contaminate was simply another word for activating or spreading, and the gallery-museum system was often a subliminal target for much early conceptual work.

Also within this statement you talk of the potential of the objects "turning against" yourself and to almost have a viral-like capability, does this point to an interest within your work of creating autonomous systems of meaning?

Again, in this early period many projects included ramifications that affected the perpetrator or artist, some of which could have negative implications. The setting of this was primarily that of the real world, versus the artificial or illustionistic world that past art came from. The real world had far more capabilities for negative experience.

Ulay

Da ist eine kriminelle Berührung in der Kunst (*There is a Criminal Touch to Art*), 1976



Action in 14 predetermined sequences, 16mm film (30:00, b/w, audio).
Right: Carl Spitzweg, *Der Arme Poet* (*The Poor Poet*), 1839.

In 1976 the artist Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen) entered the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin. He proceeded to the painting, *Der Arme Poet* (*The Poor Poet*) by Carl Spitzweg. He briefly stands before this small painting, then clips the wires from which it hangs, he clasps it under his arm and proceeds to the exit, his pace increasing until he is running full speed as he leaves the building. Outside he narrowly evades the pursuing security guards to reach his car parked nearby. He drives through the city to an apartment building at Muskauerstrasse, there he enters the home of a Turkish immigrant family and hangs *Der Arme Poet* on their wall. He returns to the street outside and calls the Neue Nationalgalerie Director and invites him to come and view the painting at the Muskauerstrasse apartment.

Atopia Projects: What is the cultural background to this work? Why *Der Arme Poet*?

Ulay: The German Romantic-Biedermeier painter Carl Spitzweg was Adolf Hitler's favorite painter. Aside, this particular painting *Der arme Poet*, which Spitzweg painted three times, was for the German people a quasi "identity icon." It was so popular that it was the only color image reproduced in my first grade school book.

I found it astonishing to find this particular painting, amongst other paintings from the German Romantic period, in the Neue Nationalgalerie. It was a shock for me, I hated this painting mainly because I knew the admiration and emotions with which the German population looked upon it. This filled me with horror.

The contrast between this super romantic painting and the city of Berlin at the time couldn't have been greater. Berlin, the epicenter of the Cold War, was torn in two, separating one and the same people by a wall and "made enemies." One half of the city was West Germany, a Cold War, geo-political island isolated in enemy territory, East Germany. After WWII, Berlin became a whore in very dirty political dramas. The human suffering on both sides created such an unthinkable inhuman atmosphere and environment. In the midst of this humiliating environment operated the Red Army raction and the Baader Meinhof terrorist groups.

(Not to mention that I myself was born in a bomb-shelter during WWII.)

Why the immigrant Turkish family, etc.?

The Turks were the largest ethnic group in this isolated West Berlin and lived, but were much disliked, in the ghetto like district of Berlin-Kreuzberg. Imagine half a city fenced in by barbwire, a high wall, tanks, and military watchtowers, in which an ethnic group lives in a yet deeper ghetto. I simply couldn't bear this, and wanted to bring the situation to a more humane attention.

So I concluded that stealing the famous painting from the New National Gallery and dislocating it (not destroying it) into the living quarters of a Turkish foreign worker family might cause the effect I hoped for. As we know today, this action had an effect much like a socio-cultural bomb, so to speak.

(NB The painting *Der arme Poet* together with all other paintings from the German Romantic Biedermeier period were taken to Schloss Charlottenburg, an 18th century chateau in Berlin Charlottenburg. In 1989 *Der arme Poet* was stolen and never seen again.)

What was your reason for filming the event? Were you making reference to surveillance, and in what way is the film an integral or extended part of the meaning of the act?

The act was too good not to be captured and recorded, either by means of photography or film, although I had great difficulty finding a cameraman who wanted to take the risk. Joerg Schmitt-Reitwein, the former cameraman of Werner Herzog, ultimately agreed to film the act, with the condition that a car with driver would always be available and that he would shoot only from the car. However, for the last shots he followed me into the Turkish foreign workers' home.

I did not make any reference to "surveillance," because it wasn't an issue at the time. The filming was really an integral part of the act, and as such I see it as an extended part of the work.

You refer to the socio-political impact of the work, do you think that art always has this possibility for change, and has that potential changed since the work has been made?

Yes, let's say since Dada art has always had such potential for change, but few have the urge and guts to get into that.

Art in general is "harmless" and intended to "reveal," to "fulfill" other criteria and purposes. Although since the emergence and formation of post-modernism a shift has taken place towards more critical, cultural, and socio-political content. Intellectually there were, and are, good "critical intentions" but there are few artists who are blowing and surpassing the protectedness and justification of art.

The Berlin action made me disliked by many, which as an artist I had to bear for a long time, but I was aware of, and ready to accept, all the consequences. I threw a stone in a particular direction that caused an avalanche which is still rolling today. Perhaps my Berlin action has stimulated or inspired subsequent artists about art's potential for change … yet I see that happening less and less today.

Today's artists, such as Damien Hirst, can make shocking works; for most, such shockwaves become absorbed and legitimized within the protective field of art.

In making the work, what ways did you consider it within a discourse of art production and commerce (for instance, appropriation within art, the theft of paintings and artifacts by Nazis, museums holding works with questionable provenance, etc.)?

First, my Berlin action was work, hard work, but I never claimed it as a "work of art" nor as a means for art production for commerce. It was really the opposite: according to the law it was a criminal act. Besides, I left the protected zone once I left the museum and entered the domain of "public territory."

You see, at the time such thoughts like commerce, appropriation within art, theft by Nazis, or questionable works of art in museum collections were not part of what I was implementing. Of course I was aware of such matters but my very purpose was to set something in motion then and for the times to come. The particular issues the work could trigger, and perhaps still can, are of a great variety, such as the connections you make in this interview.
As much as I can say today, the documentary film, which has been shown widely, is much liked and for the most part makes the viewers laugh.

What were the repercussions of this work—personally, legally, and in relation to the work that you have subsequently made?

I was prepared to take all legal consequences and charges after the painting was displaced and had reached its final destination. After I announced, by phone, the location of the painting and myself to the director of the New National Gallery and the police, I was arrested and imprisoned for 24 hours. After the 24 hours I was to face a prosecutor and a judge. Though the charges by the prosecutor were alarming, the main problem was that I was not a German citizen and did not live in Germany. Yet I was set free till the court case in Berlin some three months later. I did not appear for the court, whose verdict was: 36 days imprisonment or DM 3.600 bail. A year later, traveling from Frankfurt to Agadir, Morocco, via Munich, I was arrested at the Munich airport, and friends bailed me out.

On a personal level, this action set much in motion and became the subject of ongoing discussions. I made enemies in the art world, and on a larger scale people divided into "pro and contra." The Berlin action brought a stigma with which I learned to live; but it also set criteria for my artistic intentions, with which I can still identify today.

Ann Messner

***stealing at the summer end sale*, 1978**

Super 8 film transferred to DVD (3:40, b/w, audio).

stealing at the summer end sale was made by Ann Messner in Cologne, Germany. The film shows the artist as she removes t-shirts from a rummage bin in a C&A department store and stuffs them into a plastic bag or puts them on repeatedly over her clothes. The film captures the oblique glances and bemusement of her fellow shoppers at her actions. *stealing at the summer end sale* relates to other short films Messner made at the time, such as the series *subway stories,* which document the artist making other similarly disruptive actions in the New York subway system.

Atopia Projects: Could you begin with background information about *stealing…* and other work you were doing at the time?

Ann Messner: I was living downtown in Tribeca, which was at the time, and still is, the economic center of Manhattan. There were lots of empty business spaces, and artists were moving into that area, so it had a double life. During the day there were people going to jobs and working, while at night it came alive with a different kind of person. I tended to work all night long, and I was shooting film of small fires that I was setting which were site specific, having to do with the buildings. I wasn't setting buildings on fire, they were small fires in different places: building tops, the sand dunes behind the World Trade Center. The point being, I had a nocturnal work-life outside on the street that was the mirror of the daily business activity, and I started to not appreciate the distinction between my work-life and theirs. I began a series of projects where I basically flipped into the other side, and began to work during the day. I did a series of actions in the subway system during rush-hour,[1] and was thinking about that kind of congested urban space and the activity of working, going to work, being among people doing that kind of thing, but as an artist. I was doing, at that time I thought "formal investigations of social space," very straightforwardly, analytically, thinking it out structurally. I know it has a humorous aspect to it, but I was actually very serious at the time.

stealing… involved taking economic space and entering it as the artist to do my work, and mirroring or responding to the activity that was going on around me. This actually wasn't in New York but in Cologne, in C&A (a big department store) at the summer end sale, which was particularly heavily trafficked and so was sort of synonymous with the subway during rush hour. I infiltrated the usual transaction—I'm talking about this academically—and filled bags, tried on shirts over and over and over, piling the shirts, stuffing them in bags, responding to the situation, again from a nocturnal perspective. My experience had always been the flip side—what you don't see, what you might be thinking about under the surface—and acting on that. I am sure we have all had impulses to varying degrees. It's impossible not to walk into a store and want something, and then to imagine various possible ways in which you could get the thing you want,

aside from the usual transaction of currency. It was C&A intentionally: I was always interested in the street level and a common place, I would never have gone into Bloomingdale's or Saks Fifth Avenue to do that project. I see myself as a worker, I wanted to be there with everyone working. I am interested in a lateral negotiation.

What I realize, is that now I have a distanced intellectual spin about this work, which is very separate from what was actually going on at the time when I was engaged in the process. At the time it wasn't all that clear cut or intellectualized, a lot of it was really a kind of instinctual reaction and I think it is important to acknowledge that, rather than put it in a neat historical niche where there is a kind of intellectual or structural analysis to the work, because that is not really how I, as an artist, engage in the process of a project.

Was it important that it was in Cologne?

I went to Cologne specifically to continue my fire project along the Maginot Line, the bunker line on the border between France and Germany. But I was also starting to do work that had to do with my physical body within a confined or given social space. I can see how the separate projects mesh, there is a different kind of provocation that parses out determining factors or separations, and I am still negotiating these separations or structural determinations right now.

What is the relationship between the act itself and the documentation?

They are two different things. The setup at C&A at that time — this was in the middle 70s — had archaic surveillance cameras that hung down from the ceiling and spun around, and monitors where you could see the images from those cameras. There is the idea that if people know they are being watched they won't act on their impulses. My project was set up so that the table where the t-shirts were, it was a table of very low-end t-shirts, was in direct view of a revolving camera. The monitors were next to an escalator, which provided a steady flow of viewers who were not focused for that brief moment on shopping. Similar to the subway, where people are sitting with nothing to do. There you come with a balloon and blow it up, they're sitting there watching you, it's a captive audience that might identify with the act because of the physical recognition.

The documentation is Super 8 film that simply recorded my activity and whatever response of the people who were in frame due to proximity. The documentation and the act are two different things: if you are looking at the film there is an agreement and understanding that you are looking at "art," whereas if you are in the shopping center you think that the person is actually a thief, doing something suspicious and overtly breaking the social code. Unless you see the camera — then you have a clue that something else may be going on.

The site sounds like a readymade Dan Graham.

And without the expense!

With *stealing…* did you edit the film, how did you determine the length?

All those films were one single roll of film shot real-time without any editing. We shot *stealing…* three times to get the best footage. I suppose it is edited, in that you only ever end up seeing one roll of film.

Why did you decide to end the film showing you still in the act of theft?

You are left with the idea that it never really ends, only the film ends. In terms of the narrative of the film, I go onto the next table. That is the thing about framing, it is not only framed in the picture but also through the duration—that is simply all you see. It is not as if the police came and carted me away and you knew the action ended.

In that the camera was handheld, the viewpoint seems to implicate the viewer and by extension issues of social responsibility.

Well you can see that one woman in the film was having a very difficult time. And I have to say, still, if I look at it now, I feel my stomach tightening, and laughing at the benign evilness of my thinking, it is a little deviant.

Did you ever feel like the act of recording impacted the performances?

It absolutely changed the event. The camera was always visible and that was important. It was being held by someone in proximity, and you can see at times in all the films an acknowledgement by the people of the camera, they are looking at you the viewer, which means they are looking at the camera and acknowledging the presence of the camera person which, I suppose, provides a sort of safety area since they know that it is for a film. And at the time in the middle 70s, there were a variety of artists working in a genre where all you ever saw was the documentation. I mean, how do you know that Acconci was actually following people to where they entered private space, from the one or two photos that represent that work? You must trust. (That work obviously had an impact upon me.)

With any of these kinds of acts, speculation becomes part of the work.

And then you become a little like Sherlock Holmes, is it real? Does it pass as evidence, and to whom does it matter? The artist? The historian? The collector?

At the time, with *stealing…* and *subway stories,* were you interested in the provocative nature of the acts, in terms of the "captive audience," were you wanting to provoke a response from the people around you?

One of the things that has been remarked upon, particularly in relation to the subway work, is that nobody is watching me. I appreciated that sort of acceptance into the fold, even though there was a sort of idiosyncrasy to my activity. But that is New York, here I am talking specifically about the subway and not C&A. C&A was very different, because that was a German audience and anything outside the norm is noticed. You can clearly see there are responses in the film, and it was causing people around me some consternation. Again, because I was coming from the experience of the subway, and it was the middle 70s, the cars were just filled with graffiti, New York City was officially bankrupt and people were leaving the city. I think there was a kind of usurpation of social space, on the one hand you could say a certain kind of freedom but I don't like that word these days, I don't think that is the right kind of word. But my intention wasn't to be confrontational, and perhaps that was my own narcissism as an artist. Certainly later on I became intentionally confrontational with my temporary public sculptures, but as I got older I had more of a developed social or political position that I was always working towards. I think this project from the early 70s was somewhat naïve, and I was able to be naïve in the type of social space because of the time it was. The social contract operative in public space is very different now, social space is tightly negotiated, it's dangerous.

Did you make any other work at that time relating specifically to theft?

I could spin that case on a number of different levels. Hitchhiking in a way is theft, because you are getting around without paying for it.[2] So I see those as parallel projects, it is the same attempt to invent a way of negotiating the things you need to do without the usual transaction. It is a very complicated discussion—what constitutes theft—especially as an artist. I am always stealing everything. For years in the 80s, all my sculptures were from materials that I found at scrap yards that took scrap from the defense industry. So I was using objects from the defense industry without the defense industry's permission, I just found a way of infiltrating. When I look back it is not as if I was doing my films and the performance work in public space and then erratically I was no longer doing that and instead was making objects. I was always operating in the gray zone of what's permissible in terms of material and how you get it, what you are allowed to work with, and questions of authorship within that. And that just fits into the whole tradition of what artists do—we steal from each other. If we could all get over that….

How do you consider this sort of action in relation to the art market, specifically in the way that the art market can accommodate socially provocative gestures?

The intentionality of conceptual art was as a gesture to operate outside that system of control, which is economically based and has the hierarchy of class structures so entrenched into it. On a certain level they were pure or the intentionality was sincere. But the market will figure out a way to commodify, but not just to commodify, it is also the impulse to disempower through commodification. You really have that now with art and fashion, I mean, what is that? This is a particular union that I have conflicts with, about the way they're co-mingled and parallel in their intention. For me it is not so, but I guess I am still operating under the utopian ideal of the artist as revolutionary, sorry, but I don't want to let that go, I can't let it go.

1 *subway stories* was a series of performative actions that took place in the New York subway system, always during rush hour. These short, at most 30 minute, activities commented on the physical phenomena of being in a highly compacted crowded space moving quickly underground. I used props attached to my body, as body extensions if you like, that required some form of physical engagement or activity. For example: blowing up a large flesh colored balloon in an overcrowded car, walking the full length of the subway train wearing a complete scuba diving suit, or using an exercise rowing machine in a tunnel space as a fast flowing crowd passes.

2 In Germany in 1978, I hitchhiked between three cities. I asked whoever picked me up if I could take a Polaroid of them, which because of the nature of the Polaroid looked a little like a mug shot. I asked them to sign the Polaroid and I photographed their license plate. The documentation of the work is the triangle on the map and the two photographs corresponding to each ride. I did it until I had enough rides to have enough documentary evidence.

Paul Groot

About a Beer Campaign, Glenn O'Brien, Andy Warhol, and Rob Scholte

The Dutch magazine *Mediamatic* published, in their Fall 1988 issue, an essay by Glenn O'Brien on the work of the painter Rob Scholte. However, things were not as they appeared. Paul Groot, an editor at *Mediamatic*, had constructed the essay from appropriated texts by O'Brien in other publications, including *Artforum*. Groot altered the names to make "his" text reference Scholte, whereas the originals were actually about Andy Warhol.

Yes, it was the eighties, so innocent and so easygoing. If you were Andy Warhol, you were still the living dead, if you were Rob Scholte you felt like you were better than Andy Warhol, and if you were the art critic Glenn O'Brien from New York you were at the top of the world, because you could write about these artists!

I read some articles by Glenn and really he was the greatest! I didn't invent that notion, he himself was so convinced about his own exclusivity, so I thought it could be a good opportunity to make a profile of another artist that thought himself the new Andy Warhol and have it written by Glenn himself!

Guess who? It was Rob Scholte, he lived in Amsterdam and thought himself the new king of art. He was so great! We knew how good he was, but Glenn O'Brien didn't know, so the world outside didn't know. If he could write on Scholte, the excellent qualities of Scholte could make him a world star. So I wrote this eulogy in what I thought then was the style of O'Brien. It was the early days of post-modernism, so i took the lines and words of O'Brien, mixed them with some of my own ironical phrases, and woops, voila, this was an article by Glenn who suggest that a campaign for Dommelsch beer was the biggest triumph of Rob Scholte….

It was all a lie. The campaign had nothing to do with Scholte. I myself was involved in this Dommelsch beer campaign. Who is the critic? Send your guess to paul@mediamatic.nl

Overleaf: Letters to Glenn O'Brien, published in *Mediamatic* (Vol 3 #3, Spring 1989).

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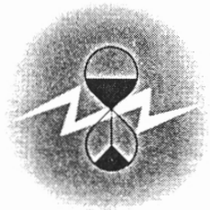

MEDIA-KUNST-ART

mr. Glenn O'Brien
197 Ashland Place
Brooklyn, NY 11217
fax 718-625.3757

february 8, 1989

Dear mr. O'Brien,

Alfred Birnbaum reminded me of a negligence of mine, concerning the use of your words & name in our magazine.

Mr. Paul Groot wrote an article in our december issue about a beer commercial in which the work of a succesful young Dutch painter - Rob Scholte- was to be used (but in the end wasn't) .

The second part of his article consisted of a collage/pastiche of your Art Forum column (quiet appropriate is Scholte's case because he paints according to comparable principles) I decided to run this second part as a separate article under your name, to add to the confusion.

Mr. Birnbaum got exited by the piece, and wrote sort of a reply to it (copy included). Although you told him that you know nothing about the whole thing, at this moment he still thinks you wrote it, and that we reprinted it, or something like that. I sent him a note too.

I hope you'll enjoy reading your text and apologise for not sending you a copy earlier.

We would be happy to print any reaction of yours (sign with any name, what about Paul Maenz?)

With kind regard,

Willem Velthoven

W. Velthoven, editor

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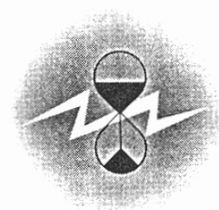

MEDIA-KUNST-ART

Glenn O'Brien
197 Ashland Place
Brooklyn, NY 11217

March 1, 1989

Dear Glenn O'Brien,

we apologise for any offence caused by the publication of the *Dommelsch is really gonna make it* article. For us it was indeed no more than a variant of the type of appropriation currently so fashionable in NYC, and at which you have hinted in many of your articles.

In fact you were not the only one to take offence. The advertising agency was a little surprised, as Rob Scholte probably was too, because Scholte didn't contribute to the commercial in question at all. The essay was a tentative attack on both the advertising agencies' attitude towards the fine art *milieu*, and Rob Scholte's position as an artist. Whilst sending up their strategies, we tried, following the proven Shakespearian recipe, to praise both of them right into the grave.

It was out of sheer enthusiasm and respect for your rhetorical skills that we appropriated your text on the artistic analogy of Gertrude Stein's *A rose is a rose is a rose...*

Maybe it was rash and overly experimental, but it simply constituted a part of our critical activities as writer and publisher in the field of contemporary art and media.

Given the above, we deem it highly unlikely that Scholte will donate one of his works, or is prepared to sell even if we *could* afford to buy. Concerning the mention of 'rembursment', we simply do not have the funds to pay our authors. All contributors write out of love or enthusiasm for the project and that's that.

We propose to print your letter along with this one in the next issue of Mediamatic, thereby preventing any possible misunderstanding amongst our readership.

We hope that you will be satisfied with this arrangement and once again, we offer our most sincere apologies.

Paul Groot, writer

Willem Velthoven

Willem Velthoven, editor

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The Art Guys

The Appropriations Project, 1991–94

Above: *Appropriation #3: Sonny Burt, Bob Butler, 6/16/91, 12:17 p.m.*; 1991. Meat tenderizer with engraved gold plaque in glass and maple vitrine, 14 x 14 x 11".

The Appropriations Project consists of 15 objects "appropriated" from individuals involved with the Houston art scene. Incorporating artists, curators, critics, collectors, and museum directors, the victims of The Art Guys' project are referred to through the kitsch and mundane objects that were taken from them.

You make a conscious decision to refer to these objects as appropriated rather than stolen, how do you see this distinction functioning in relation to this work?

Appropriated is a term that was used in describing how artists would "borrow" or "steal" each others ideas. It was used often in 1980's art-speak. It is a bit like political-speak in that there are half-truths, whitewash, hyperbole, misinformation, and such, constantly used to make a point for your side or your cause. Obviously stolen connotes illegality. Appropriation is a bit softer in tone as in "setting something aside for future use," like municipal funding. Much like the US congress do with tax dollars as they see fit.

The Art Guys would never steal anything. We appropriated those objects to use again. The "lenders" ("victims" if we were talking about theft) had every chance to buy back their objects. That transaction in effect would, and did, allow us to appropriate funding (cash sale) for our own use as we saw fit. The "lenders" of these objects should thank us for including them in an art transaction, elevating their objects, all the while making it very easy on them. We did not bother them with the mundane details of loan forms, we did the photography, we presented them in nice cases with good lighting. What else could someone expect?

We liken the objects in question from *The Appropriation Project* to the work of a sound artist who samples and reconfigures work of other sound artists. We think that it is more an issue of Fair Use than thievery.

There seems to be an attempt at parody, in the pairings of some of these objects and their cited source, was this a specific intention?

No. There was no intentional meaning whatsoever regarding the objects we selected. Generally speaking, we tried to select what would seem to us to be fairly meaningless objects, that is, objects that were of little value to their owners. However, this was purely speculative on our part and in at least one case the object selected was very special to its owner.

In much of our work, there is an attempt and concerted effort to inject non-meaning. We've found that regardless of how hard we try to make things meaningless, people almost always attach some meaning to things or compare the work to some other idea rather than considering the piece for what it is. It's a curious thing people do with art. For example, people rarely look at,

say, a tree and wonder, "What does that mean?" A tree has no meaning, per se. It just is. And it's the same with art, at least with a lot of art we do. But that doesn't imply that we don't gain a greater understanding of ideas or the world with art that has no meaning. Sometimes, there is an even greater awareness and understanding achieved through that which is meaningless.

In fact, the idea of meaning, whether there is such a thing, is paramount to this piece. Why does an ashtray take on sentimentality for its owner? Why do we attach meaning and feelings to things? And why do people give any extra meaning to the objects of *The Appropriations Project*? Is it because we did this overtly and consciously as "art"? Because of who was involved? Because of how the appropriated pieces are formatted and presented? Is it because we're discussing it here and now in this context?

As we asked ourselves these questions, and as time went on throughout the project, it got to be very strange.

Whether this is true or not, early Native Americans were said to have no concept of property with regards to land. No one owned the land. How could one own land? Europeans certainly thought one could own land. And therefore, take it too. In *The Appropriations Project*, we were just getting in touch with our native European heritage. We were exercising our aesthetic manifest destiny. (Speaking of which, if you believe any of this, we have an insurance policy we'd like you to look over.)

There is an old adage that says, "You can't take it with you." In *The Appropriations Project*, The Art Guys set out to prove we *could* take it with us.

Is it important that the "lenders" were friends of yours?

No. Some of the people we appropriated from were not friends, technically speaking. They were all a part of the so-called art world and this was important only insomuch as the project addressed an art world phenomenon or "movement" of appropriation that was popular at the time which included images (Richard Prince) or forms (Sherrie Levine), or music and sound (sampling). *The Appropriations Project* was our interpretation of this art world copy-cat-ism.

We were interested, however, in the reaction of people who we knew who would come to the opening of the show when these were first presented, and what their reaction would be to seeing their thing up for sale in a gallery. We thought this would be very funny. Some of the people who were friends of ours from whom we appropriated did not think it was so funny. It turned out to be a much more controversial piece than we predicted.

Including only "art world" people in the project fulfilled one of the parameters set forth before we began. In other words, we set out for ourselves a range of parameters under which we would operate within the confines of the project including who we appropriated from, relative worth of objects, etc.

As a comparison, in the *Borrowed Pens* project, wherein we "absentmindedly" acquired pens throughout our normal day for the period of a year, many of the pens we "borrowed" were from complete strangers. And another difference with *Borrowed Pens* was that we always asked if we could borrow the person's pen before "absentmindedly" tucking it behind our ear. So, technically speaking, we were granted permission to do what we did with that piece, which means those pens could still be thought of as belonging to their original owners since they were borrowed.

Special note: We would like to publicly announce for the first time, that the pieces we presented in *The Appropriations Project* may not necessarily have been actually appropriated. Some (or all?) of the items we just claimed to be appropriated. We thought that this would add another level of interest and confusion to the project. It turns the tables to have presented so-called appropriated objects and then sell them, but it turns the tables again when we reveal years later, as we are now, that they may not have been appropriated in the first place. Uh oh ….

Tom Friedman

Untitled (Hot Balls), 1992

Balls and marbles, 20⅛ x ø 36".

Right: Image © Tom Friedman. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York.

Untitled (Hot Balls) is a collection of several dozen balls and marbles, stolen from stores over a six-month period. Friedman's work typically involves the manipulation of everyday objects. In the case of *Untitled (Hot Balls)* no material change has been enacted but rather the transformation is ontologically based on the history of the objects. In this respect *Untitled (Hot Balls)* relates to other work by Friedman such as *1000 Hours of Staring* (1992–97), which is an unmarked sheet of paper that was stared at for 1000 hours.

Atopia Projects: Could you discuss the relationship between *Hot Balls* and the process and conceptual premise of other work you made at that period where the transformation of the object is not materially evidenced but is manifest through information that changes its status?

Tom Friedman: During this time I found that I was removing more and more information from the visual experience. This information became separated from the work and needed to be revealed somewhere else; like in a title or description. While thinking about this I had several experiences that crystallized this thought for me.

I was at a friend's apartment, and picked off his shelf two drum sticks. I started banging them on his sofas armrest. He frantically grabbed them from my hand and said don't do that! Those are Ringo Starr's drum sticks! The sentimental object; the fact that they are Ringo Starr's drum sticks is not ingrained in their wood fibers, it a hovering history its owner has in relation to the drum sticks. For those who know, the drum sticks are a catalyst to this history.

The other experience happened when I heard that the space shuttle was going to take on its journey a bunch of commemorative stamps to then be sold as collector items on their return. I thought; you would have two identical stamps all the way down to their subatomic particles, yet one would be more valuable than the other due to its attached history.

In what ways does theft figure in this work as a necessary strategy? Could you discuss the reason for incorporating theft in your art process, and the particular ways in which the work is made from an act that may be considered socially deviant and yet which also has been legitimized within art through the history of appropriation.

The fact that the balls in *Hot Balls* were stolen was a history that I attached to them in the same way the stamps' history were attached to them. The title *Hot Balls* both describes the balls' colors and is a clue to their history. Why steal them? I think it came from the ideas of concealing I had also been thinking about at this time. While working on this piece I had collected all the small balls and couldn't figure out how to resolve the piece, until I was in a store and saw a bin of large balls close to the entrance. I stole the large red ball, placed it on top of the arrangement of small balls. This resolved the piece for me. The large red ball served as the grand prize or culminating trophy.

Is this aspect of attributed history still key within your current work—how has it changed in the way in which it is manifest?

As my work has evolved, the use of isolating a phenomenon has become less interesting to me. My current work is an amalgam of the isolated vocabulary I discovered in my earlier work, such as the attributed history, fragility, and disparate relationship ….

We understand that the small ball of excrement in *Untitled* (1992) was stolen while on display. Presumably the excrement was easy to replace, but was it a problem for you to replace it given its accumulated history to that point (conceptually or even in terms of the works' value) or does such an event itself roll into the history of the work?

The piece wasn't about the specific ball of feces I originally presented. It was about the idea of the feces, so it can and has been replaced many times. When I exhibit this piece I include extra balls. I like that the feces gets lost and needs to be replaced all the time

Are you interested in your work/actions directly engaging with the real, not only through a symbolic, removed, exhibited gesture (the idea of theft, historical/factual attribution, etc.) but also in a performative gesture in the space of the everyday? How important is it for you to practice outside of the art world, and how would you characterize that engagement?

In my work I try to keep the questions it raises open ended so the viewer can personally engage them. For example, if I documented the stealing process and included it with the piece, or if I wrote a formal apology to the stores, it would have diffused the isolated experience of just looking at and thinking about the arrangement of brightly colored stolen balls.

Diana Stigter

Maurizio Cattelan, *Another Fucking Readymade*, 1996

In 1996, as part of the exhibition *Crap Shoot* at the De Appel in Amsterdam, the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan stole the entire contents of Bloom Gallery and exhibited them at De Appel. Diana Stigter, former co-owner of Bloom Gallery, describes the incident from her perspective.

Annet Gelink and I (the Bloom Gallery owners) arrived at the gallery around eleven that morning after a rather boring studio visit. When we opened the door on what was supposed to be a day like any other, we immediately saw that everything was different. We stared into an empty space. Not only had the exhibition completely disappeared, but also computers, documents, personal articles—everything was gone. We stood there in complete shock, trying to find a point to focus on.

We did not see any traces of an ordinary burglary: the door was not forced, the windows were not smashed. We just saw one empty space. It was scary. Who was so interested in taking our stuff, and besides, what was the point of stealing the heavy wooden sculptures we were exhibiting at that moment? They were not worth a lot of money and it must have taken hours to get everything out of the gallery. We were still looking at each other rather desperately when one of us saw a tiny sticker with the words "Crap Shoot" on one of the walls. Then everything became clear.

We realized that we were part of the subversive action of one of the participants of the show, of the same title as on the sticker, organized by the curatorial class at the De Appel. Maurizio Cattelan was one of the invited artists and it did not seem such a big step from taping your gallerist to the wall to emptying the space of another art dealer. Once we found out it was him, I secretly had to laugh and could see the fun of the project if I was not involved. Annet, on the contrary, was furious. To call this art was insane. She insisted on calling the police. When they arrived, the curators of the De Appel show, and I believe Maurizio himself, had also entered the gallery. They started to explain to us the history of radicalism in art and why this was such a great work in that tradition. At that point the police lost track and asked us if they could leave to attend to more important matters.

When we found out that the contents of the gallery, including our current show, were supposed to be on display at the De Appel on Friday and that we would get it back safely and undamaged later that week, Annet also lightened up. We spent the rest of the day on a terrace in the sun.

On Friday afternoon we went to the opening and we both had to admit that it was one of the better shows from the curatorial course. Later that night we all danced together at the after party and were friends for as long as it lasts.

The next morning Annet and I had to read in the newspaper how "duplicitous the behavior of the 'Bloom girls' was." The critic—who unfortunately is no longer with us—wondered why we made such a big fuss in the beginning only to end up doing a pirouette with Maurizio as if nothing had happened.

We never found out how Cattelan and the curators entered the gallery. We suspect that our neighbors or an assistant were part of the conspiracy, but some art is better left unexplained.

Miguel Calderón & Yoshua Okón

A Propósito… (*Incidentally…*), 1997

Installation consisting of 120 stolen car stereos obtained on the black market, and a looped video projection documenting the artists stealing a car stereo. Digital video transferred to DVD (00:52, color, audio), installation dimensions variable.
Above: installation view, La Panadería, Mexico City, 1997.

In 1997 Miguel Calderón and Yoshua Okón exhibited a stack of 120 stolen car stereos on the gallery floor of La Panadería (Mexico City, Mexico); upon the wall a looped video projection showed the artists smashing a car window and wrestling the stereo from the dashboard. *A Propósito…*, is now in La Colección Jumex, Mexico City, Mexico.

Atopia Projects: What is the background to *A Propósito…*?

Miguel Calderón: Our own car stereos had been stolen numerous times, this reflected the powerful supply and demand economy in Mexico City and how much theft is a part of it, to the point where I can remember thinking, as I was growing up, that stealing stuff from other people's cars was supposed to be cool. So we felt like it was something we wanted to try ourselves, to understand why people liked doing it so much.
Yoshua Okón: I met a guy who steals stereos for a living and asked him if I could follow him with a camera as he was working. My idea was to make an art piece with the video documentation of the robberies along with all the stolen stereos. He didn't want to appear in video so he said no. When I told Miguel about the project he offered to do it, so we decided to collaborate. After Miguel got a "crash course" on how to steal a stereo, we went out to shoot the video. I remember that the day before we did it somebody told us a story about a bodyguard killing a car stereo thief as he was trying to snap a stereo outside a home, so we were extremely nervous. Miguel then came up with the idea to stack up the stereos creating a wall. After that, I went to a market where I knew anyone could buy stolen car stereos and proceeded to purchase them (it took about two weeks of going back until I was able to get the 119 we needed).

How would you describe the understanding that you gained through performing this action, and does this method (understanding a situation through enacting a performance) extend into other work that you have made before or after *A Propósito…*?

MC: Through this piece I got a very wide insight into how much the black market sustains Mexico City, and how easy it is to take something you want—these are certainly things they do not teach at schools. The basic concept of learning through experience applies to all my work, I recently bumped into a friend who I hadn't seen since I was about 12, and he had seen *A Propósito*…. One of the first things he said was "you finally did it"; in this he meant that, since we were kids, stealing a car stereo was like a rite of passage and kids really thought it was a cool thing to do, of course things have now changed. I remember also at that age manipulating a street sign that read maximum 40km/hour: I added a perfect "1" before the 40, so it read 140km/hour.

Of course I did not see this as art, and when the neighbors told my parents I was grounded for a week. Being able to manipulate and question reality is something that has always interested me. Most of the pieces I make now are a test of how much that goes inside of my head can be put out as physical objects or film/videos, there is often a lot of risk involved, since at first most of these ideas seem almost impossible to make.

Were you collaborating on other projects at the time, and in what ways did they relate to this work?

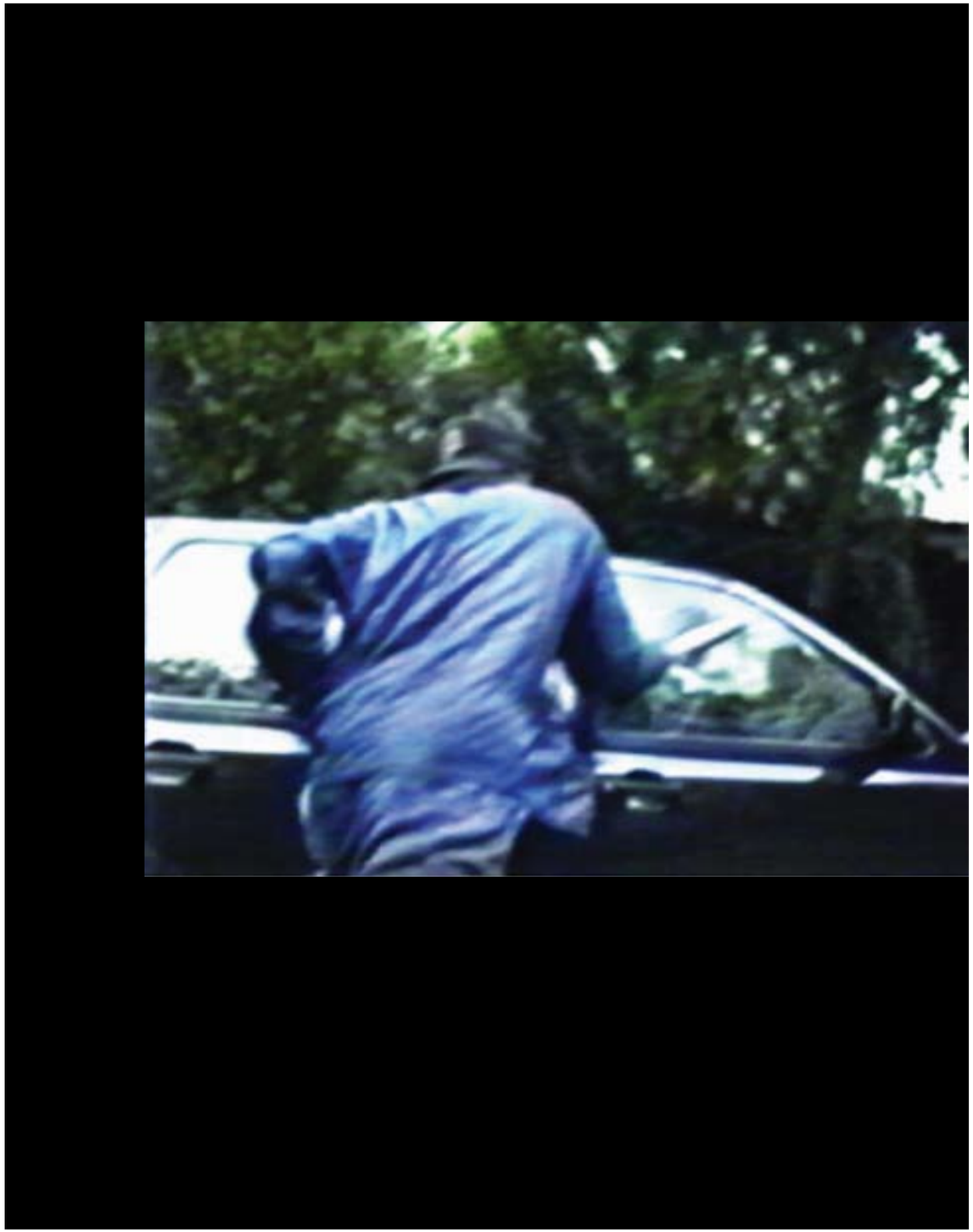
MC: We worked together directing La Panadería, and we had similar concerns and interests. We didn't like a lot of things that were happening around us, both in the art world and in this huge city, so we experimented with questioning these things through our work.
YO: We had already collaborated in a few art pieces before but mostly we had been collaborating in La Panadería for the previous three years. La Panadería relates to *A Propósito…* in that it emphasized the relation between art and the immediate environment of its creation. At the time, both Miguel and I felt that most of the art produced in the city was not addressing everyday life realities, and we were interested in both creating and promoting the kind of work that did.

What do you see as the cultural or historical precedents for this work?

MC: I think art reflects its times, I have always been a big fan of Goya and the way he portrayed people after war, to me this was simply a reflection of things we were living through at that moment. Painting and sculpture were dominant and we felt like doing work that involved more action.
YO: Aside from the anecdotes I just mentioned, I also remember being especially influenced by Chris Burden's early works in those days….

In Burden's work it often seems critical that an audience (at the time of the performance or even now) is viewing mediated documentation of the act—the implications of the documented performance become more potent given the mediation. Can you discuss the structure of *A Propósito…* (in terms of the choices in the video and installation, their relationship with one another, and the way in which an audience might engage with the work or its implications).

YO: Yes, without mediation there would be no art piece, and without an art context this piece would not be able to exist either. For instance, if we had decided to steal a stereo as a performance meant only to be experienced by whoever is passing by, the piece would have been



simply regarded as yet another act of delinquency by those few who saw it. Instead, by recording the action on video and presenting this video in a clearly mediated way (for instance the sound of the window crashing was played extremely loud) and in the context of an art space, all of a sudden an everyday action (at the time car stereos were being stolen, literally, daily) turns into a highly charged symbolic gesture.

The stereos were bought from the black market in Mexico City. Was the perception that they had been directly stolen by yourselves an important aspect of the work?

MC: The stack of stereos was shown next to a video projection of us actually stealing a stereo. After a failed attempt I managed to break the glass and get it, however I left the hammer in the car, and after doing it we both experienced a huge adrenalin rush, which in a way did make us understand why people did it again and again. A set of loud speakers played the audio and you could hear the glass breaking and the alarm going off. On the screen there was a 26 second gap with only timecode, which was the exact time it took me to take the stereo. The second phase of the project involved getting the other 119 car stereos, which we obtained in the black market—during which a gun was pointed in our faces by a nervous dealer, but in the end we got the stereos for a very good price. Stealing one stereo was enough to understand the whole thing and we never intended to make people believe that we had stolen the rest, otherwise we would have shown more videos of us doing it. The fact that we bought them in the black market was not something we hid from people, but they could interpret the work themselves.
YO: We never intended for people to believe that we had stolen all those stereos and we didn't start that rumor. I have no idea were this rumor comes from but I have heard it before. So the answer is no, I don't think that this is an important aspect of the work but it doesn't bother me either. I like the idea of rumors around artworks; word of mouth is a powerful medium.

Of the artists and projects you presented at La Panadería, which most successfully engaged this relationship between art and reality?

MC: There are two good examples for me. One from Mexico, Teresa Margolles, who for her first exhibition at La Panadería showed these amazing white sheets that you used to see at the sides of the road covering dead bodies after fatal crashes. When hanging on the wall, the sheets appeared to be abstract paintings but when you came closer you realized that what you thought to be paint was blood. The other example is from the Austrian artist group Gelatin[1] who showed a car that they had bought in L.A. and drove cross-country to Mexico City. The exhaust pipe was configured to inflate big plastic bags which went all the way up to the gallery ceiling. Both works reflected something about Mexico that was very precise, effective, and straightforward. I had to

duck a few times during Teresa's show because some people were too shocked and offended, and were throwing rocks at us through the windows.

YO: Some that come to mind are: *Qué Guapo* (1999) the show by the Viennese collective gelatin, for which they drove a car through the desert from Los Angeles to Mexico City and then exhibited the car as it had been transformed throughout the trip; *Dermis* (1996) by the Mexico City collective Semefo for which, among other works, they exhibited pieces of tattooed human skin recovered from the city's morgue; *Lora a través de la banda* (1996) for which the local artist Ferrus exhibited a selection of artwork from Alex Lora's (a Mexican rock star) collection made especially for him by jail inmates; *Pasage* (1998) by Philippe Hernández in which he exhibited a close circuit video with live shots of two rats he had caught outside his apartment in downtown Mexico City; and *Contaminación Cultural* (1995) an exhibition with five female artists from San Francisco who made artwork related to their experiences working in the sex industry.[2]

Was there a public response to or impact from La Panadería, or was the discussion contained within the art community?

MC: Without doubt, La Panadería transcended the boundaries of the art world, because to us it wasn't a gallery, it was more of a lifestyle. The neighbors thought we were some kind of satanic commune because the things we exhibited were incomprehensible to them. This goes to show that even they had their eyes on us, and sometimes worried that their kids came to all our events. It was a great feeling to be able to interact with all sorts of people. I remember going to art openings at the time and they felt exclusive and boring, whereas at La Panadería, the crowds mixed a lot—especially when we had bands playing—and you got to see all sorts of people who had no meeting point. This created a lot of interesting interactions amongst people who otherwise would probably never bump into each other.

YO: At the time we started the space, the general feeling in Mexico City was that in order to understand art you had to have "special knowledge." In a way, through the space, we were demonstrating that this is a false notion and that anyone interested can *understand* art. Our audience was incredibly varied: ranging from highly specialized art world people to neighbors passing by, kids from the marginal outskirts of the city, and rich ladies from the suburbs. Therefore, in La Panadería the line between the community at large and the art community was blurred and even though the space had a relatively big impact within the art community, the impact went beyond it, and I think it changed many people's understanding of what the role of contemporary art can be.

Do you consider *A Propósito…* culturally specific?

MC: It does come from a very specific and personal situation but I think anyone can relate to it. Ideas develop around the environment you interact with and at that moment living in Mexico it felt like something interesting to address.

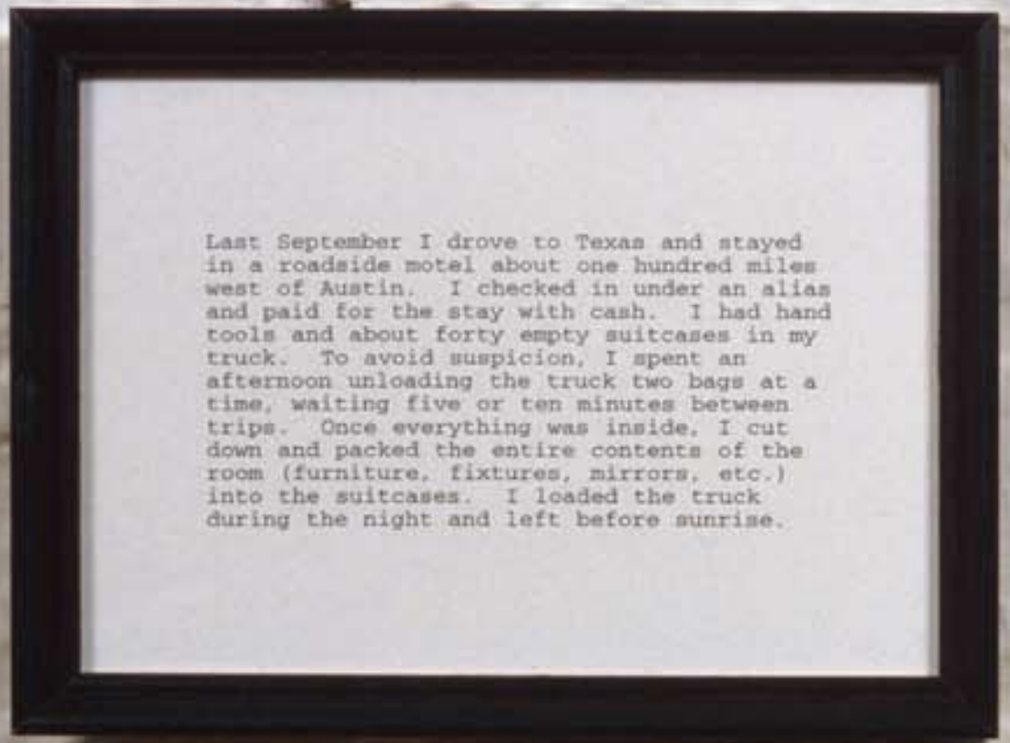
YO: To me *A Propósito…* is self-consciously pointing to what goes on behind the scenes in our institutions and our way of life, it asks the question of what it takes to build our cathedrals, sponsor our artists, and have our big museums. The piece is meant to address a much wider global economic context, so not only does it apply as much to any other capitalist urban center—be it in Latin America, Asia, Europe, or wherever—but it also points to the interconnectedness of these centers.

1 gelatin renamed themselves gelitin in 2005.

2 For more info on these exhibitions, see the book: *La Panadería 1994–2002* (Mexico: Turner, 2005).

Joel Ross

Room 28, 1997



Mixed media in suitcases, typewritten text on paper, and color photo in wood frames; piled suitcases 58 x 60 x 79", frames each 5 x 7".

Overleaf: Installation view, *Sculpture in Chicago*, Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1998.

Atopia Projects: What is the background to this action? In what ways are the specifics of the work important to you (could it be any motel room, were "vintage" suitcases important, why the cube-like form of the suitcases in the installation, etc.)?

Joel Ross: There are many things that led me to this project, but a thorough background check would certainly reveal a series of character-driven sculptures that involved dismantled furniture. For years, many of the projects I did were character-driven in one way or another. These were narratives that I wrote, and in this case as in many others, my part as the artist was first to create the story and then to act it out. The stories were driving the work (but they were rarely included officially, in full or even in part, as text in the final piece). I used the character to create the objects, and any formal decisions were channeled through the character's psychology. When there was a choice to make, I would try to make it based on what I thought the character would do. The story was always important to me, but I frequently struggled with how much of that narrative to reveal. This was especially true with *Room 28*. I didn't reveal the narrative behind this action until several years after it was first exhibited. In this case the protagonist is a heartbroken anti-hero who tries (in vain) to win back his lost love by giving her a motel room they once shared. I still occasionally make work using this hidden-character method, but not as often.

I didn't create this story with a specific motel in mind, but there was a type of establishment, room and town the story required. I scouted locations for several days before finding a good match. I chose the Texas location in part because of my personal history, but also because of its connection to the American West and all the mythology that comes with that, and the fact that West Texas is home to many long, lonely highways—an important narrative and conceptual element.

I didn't think of the suitcases as vintage at the time, but I like the fact that "vintage" coincides with the early days of highway travel and the optimism of the open road in post-war America—subjects that are still a big part of my work today. The character was compelled to acquire used suitcases because of his limited means. Suitcases were important to the success of the crime, but of course, I was thinking about other associations as well, such as making the room (and therefore, the memory) permanently portable.

Why did you include the photograph in the installation?

Because it's a completely unremarkable image of a structure whose function is immediately recognizable to anyone who has traveled on the U.S. interstate. Most people glance at the photo before they read the descriptive text. After reading about this action, they go back to the image with a different eye.

Is the photograph intended to authenticate the objects or action? How important is speculation on the part of the viewer as to the truth (or fiction) of the action?

I guess you can think of it as a type of authentication, but for me it's a detail. It's a document from a crime scene or a bland backdrop in a love story or, hopefully, both. Either way it's a vehicle for the imagination, something to help fill in a few of the blanks. I knew going into this project that the truth question would come up, just as it has with some of my other work. For me, the piece is interesting either way. I assume that everything offered to me by other humans is part fact, part fiction. It's usually a question of percentages and intent.

Room 28 seems to have interesting connections to Gordon Matta-Clark's architectural interventions, which simultaneously existed as aesthetic gestures within art and architecture while also aggressively engaging real-world ethical, legal, and socio-political concerns. What art or non-art precedents and considerations inform your work?

Well, I have enormous respect for Matta-Clark and I have certainly also tried with many of my projects to engage several different audiences simultaneously. Sometimes, as with _Room 28_, it's difficult to tell what is driving what. I've spent a lot of time thinking about the characters, the artist, the motel owner, the clerk working the motel desk that night, the housekeeper, the sheriff and all the people that go look at art on purpose. What's more important: the highway, the love story, the felony or the gallery? Regardless, most viewers assume an actual crime was committed and the ethical/moral wrangling that comes with this transgression hovers above all the players in this drama. Concerning other precedents and considerations, I would say this: I spent a lot of time studying criminal psychology and I have a great fondness for marginal social characters. Aside from Matta-Clark, a few other artists I can't seem to get away from even when I want to: Robert Smithson, Ed Ruscha, Stephen Shore, Richard Prince, and Sophie Calle.

Is there any correlation between your interest in marginal social characters and your interest in the mythology of America? (For example, writers such as Sam Shepard and several of the artists you mention engage the reality of the individual's lived narratives in a way that speaks to the potential and problematics of a larger system.) Where do personal narratives and actions meet larger societal or political issues?

Where, indeed? If they're meeting at all, I count that as a victory. There is a correlation for me, and I hope my work does at least occasionally illuminate these connections between an individual's motivations and social/political forces. I want that rush of chaos, back and forth between the big and small picture, tentative connections that are just tangible enough to believe in. It's like walking a tightrope sometimes. I want to tell people something about what I see going on in the world and in my own country (a mixture of stunning complexity, human cruelty and small moments of grace that somehow make it all seem worthwhile) but I certainly don't want to preach. This question, though, of where the personal and the social meet, haunts me all the time as an artist and as a citizen of a powerful empire. I've often tried to engage this issue more directly by mixing my audience, by making more public work or at least work that is engaged primarily by people who don't normally go look at art. I enjoy the speculation and posturing I can do with my friends in an art context but that's not enough to get me out of bed in the morning. I've got to believe it's at least possible that something else comes from all this activity.

Scott Myles

Untitled (newsagent intervention with flyer, March 14 1999–March 14 2000)

Newsagent intervention.

Beginning on the 14th March 1999, for a period of one year, Glasgow based artist Scott Myles enacted a discrete series of interventions whereby, when he traveled by rail or bus, he would steal magazines from shops at his point of departure and re-insert them into the racks of equivalent shops at his destination. The stolen magazines were unaltered except for a small printed flyer inserted in each magazine, which explained the action and stated his name.

Atopia Projects: In this work did you consider your act to be an instance of theft (or loan, exchange, transfer, etc.)?

Scott Myles: Yes, the piece was premised upon an action of shoplifting. The interest for me however was the notion of returning the items. Initially I thought I was taking from one competitor and giving to another. At that time newsagents in Scottish train stations were generally one franchise — John Menzies — whereas in England WH Smith was the dominant chain. As it turned out they were both in fact the same company. In effect I used this model of capitalism to my own ends; I used their branches as a UK-wide library service.

What was the relevance of choosing magazines, and were specific magazines chosen?

I stole magazines or newspapers that I wanted to read; the choice was not really premeditated. I was interested in a model of exchange and found a way to apply this in my everyday life. On one hand it was a dumb gesture operating from a base level within popular culture. On the other hand the piece raises certain ideas that I've explored on various levels throughout my practice. Specifically, the notion of gift exchange that Marcel Mauss famously wrote about in his essay "The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies." Ultimately I never stole anything physical, only information while the publications were (temporarily) my property. Around this time so called "style magazines" were picking up on art as something to feature. Many magazines also contained a mass of loose leaflets and advertisements. Generally I would insert my flyer along with all these other bits of paper, into the pages featuring art. I suppose I was somehow co-opting another artist's exposure for my own extremely limited audience of one.

What was the impetus for this work?

Shoplifting followed by guilt.

Were you ever caught shoplifting?

PSYCHIC TV

The work of Susan Hiller returns us to our deep fascination with subject matter that traditionally sends a shiver down our collective spine. From her experiments in automatic writing to simultaneous telepathic drawings with artists in other countries, reworked children's games to ghost voices and magic lantern shows, her wor

SUSAN HILLER

Newsagent
intervention with flyer
March 14 1999
on-going

Above: **Wild Talents** (installation detail), 1996-1997. Opposite: **Wild Talents**, installation with three video programmes, two large screens, four discs, one monitor, chair circle of devotional lights, 1996-1997

This flyer is being used in an on-going project. The publication in which you found this flyer was stolen from a 'newsagent chain' situated in a transit centre I have travelled through. The publication was then read en-route before being replaced onto a newsagent's shelf in a new location. Scott Myles.

"THERE IS ONLY ONE MODE
MEDIA. HOW ARTISTS, THE
THIS WAS FIRST THROUGH
THEORIES OF SUBVERSION,
DO WE REALLY BELIEVE TH

"MY WORK IS DIDACTIC IN THE SENSE THAT IT SUGGESTS ITSELF AS A SKETCH FOR A POSSIBLE ARTWORK: FOR THE WAY ART MUST BE."

Over the course of the year I moved or borrowed over 100 publications and nobody noticed. I accept that such displacement is quite negligible. Subtly however, on some occasions, I think the project would have become visible. One example would be when I'd displace a journal I'd bought in a larger newsagent, replacing it in a smaller outlet. This displacement might have become apparent when a stock check occurred, or when a member of the public tried to buy the publication and, presumably, the barcode reader wouldn't have recognized the product, as the title shouldn't have been available there. There would be a momentary breakdown of the mechanics of buying and selling.

What would you consider the most relevant precedents for this work?

To be honest I wasn't thinking about art when I began the piece. Talking about this artwork now, however, reminds me of a piece I heard about after my project was completed. I was told of an artist who once bought up all the newspapers from a train station newsagent early in the morning—leaving the racks empty for the duration of the day. I'm attracted to such artworks; their visibility or impact is near invisible, yet there is something that holds my attention.

We understand that following a magazine running an article about this work their publication encountered distribution difficulties because of John Menzies displeasure about their inclusion in the project. How do you see this relating to Mauss' critique of gift giving that it builds relationships, in as much as the magazine and book stores appear to almost tacitly assume theft will occur as a result of their open plan, consumer friendly environments? If this can be contorted into a form of gift giving what is the nature of the implied relationship between the magazine store and both the consumer and thief?

I don't agree that the seemingly open plan layout of shops reveals an expectation or tacit assumption that stealing will occur. Shops exist to sell things to consumers; that's their priority. The author Lewis Hyde wrote: "gifts are best described […] as anarchist property." My project utilized the newsagent chain parasitically to facilitate another system of distribution and exchange. On one occasion the manager of a newsagent branch took a little too much interest in my artists project pages printed in *Product Magazine*. He immediately pulled the title, although strangely only from Scottish bus and train station newsagents.

How does the work relate to your wider practice? In particular do you see a lineage through to your "treatment" of Felix Gonzalez-Torres free posters?

Much of my work is premised upon a reuse of an existing idea or object. The most obvious lineage from the magazine project through to the works I made with the Gonzalez-Torres posters is an exploration of reciprocity. With the newsagent intervention I found a way to engage in a new way with the shop's function as a stockist of commodities. I participated in Felix Gonzalez-Torres' work, as any viewer might, by taking a free poster. I replied using the blank reverse side of the poster to make something new, before re-exhibiting the poster in a Perspex display case on a metal stand. Visually the piece looks like a flag or screen. Conceptually the resulting artwork is somewhat problematic, which I find interesting.

Janice Kerbel

Suit, 1999–2002

Fabric, pin, paper, frame; 11¾ x 16½" (framed).

Over the course of three years, small fabric swatches were cut from the underside of men's suit-jacket lapels, unbeknownst to the wearers.

Atopia Projects: What is the origin of *Suit*?

Janice Kerbel: As a child I had a collection of small china cats. They were displayed all around my room: on my dresser, on the windowsill, etc. The irony of my collection not only was my allergy to cats, but I did not even like them. I somehow remained completely disinterested, despite my vague commitment to accumulation—it simply was something I did because my mom had once told me to start a collection. For a long time I wanted to collect something that was going to be a challenge, where the act of collecting would be more interesting than the thing collected. I wanted to collect something I couldn't have, but yet something that existed within the boundaries of my everyday life, something that was rarely seen.

Around the same time that I began *Suit*, I had a small beauty spot removed from my neck. The doctor put it in a jar and sent it off to the lab.

Could you talk about your choice for the way in which the fragments are presented?

The collected fragments are each individually framed. They range from 5mm across to almost 40mm (a result of the conditions of collecting); each are pinned through their centre onto a white board, which lists the full collection in numerical order, including the place and date of each fragment's retrieval and the make and fabric of the jacket from which each came. A red circle around the corresponding number identifies the piece on display.

I wanted the fragments together to form a collection, while at the same time I wanted them each to maintain their independence and become objects in themselves. I did not want to mimic the form of museological display (i.e. vitrines) but to find a middle ground somewhere between information and image.

How does the series relate to other work that you made at the time or since?

A lot of my work to date has been informed by the broad field of deception. Starting in 1999, about the same time that I stopped working on *Suit*, I spent a few years planning a bank robbery, which got realized as a wall-based work (*Bank Job*) and later as a book (*15 Lombard St*). I became increasingly interested in producing forms that held the potential for a secondary state—i.e. plans or studies—and which somehow embodied a form of deception rather than enacting one. Unseeable forms and their potentialities are things I still think a lot about, perhaps in less obvious ways now than before.

Was it important that it was men's clothing that the fragments were taken from, and whether or not you knew the individuals?

It wasn't important if I knew the individuals (usually I didn't), but it was important that the fragments came from men's suit jackets. I wanted there to be a coherency or particularity to my collection. Women's suit jackets seemed too much of a hybrid (and the construction of a woman's suit jacket often is quite different from a man's, with a much less stiff collar). If I had continued, perhaps I would have reconsidered adding one or two (more out of curiosity than anything else) but at the time I wanted to collect from men's suits alone.

How do you choose the types of situations/subjects with which you engage—are there specific types of deception that interest you more or less?

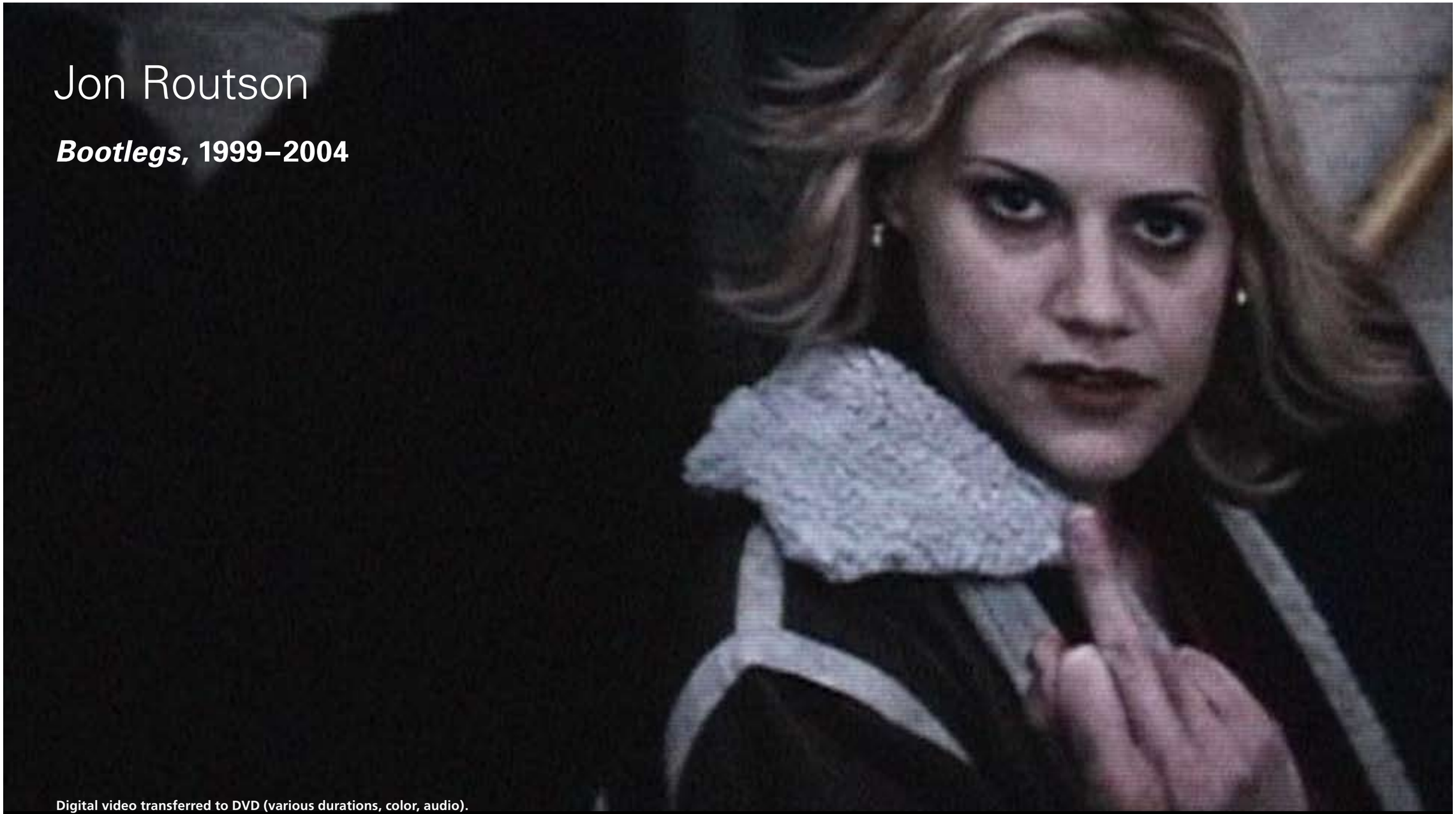
I am really interested in working with forms that somehow defy visibility. Perhaps that is my attraction to deception, because in order for deception to function properly, it needs to masquerade itself, or render itself invisible. I think there is a lot of room for aesthetic invention in these kinds of defiant forms. I seem to be attracted to working with recognizable codes, both formal and conceptual, which can be tested and transformed. Lately I've been thinking about forms where the act of deception is more deeply embedded in the act of expectation. I always seem to make work that is somehow incomplete or transitional—with the promise of a subsequent stage that is never realized/realizable.

On one level *Suit* and *Bank Job* seem to gently test the line of what behavior is permissible in society, and on another the work has obvious connections with more removed structures such as museology or filmic narratives. Are you interested in the relationship or tension between immediacy and a more speculative or coded reading?

I think it's a balance between the two that I am most interested in. I always want the work I make to get trapped in its own form for the sake of itself—i.e. the bank robbery stays a plan; the gardens remain as designs; the ballgame never gets played—so in the end you can return to the formal conditions of the work, which both offer and withhold. The promise inherent in proposals are often more compelling to me than the realities of enactment.

Jon Routson

***Bootlegs*, 1999–2004**



Digital video transferred to DVD (various durations, color, audio).

Above: still from *Bootleg (8 Mile)*.

Above: still from *Bootleg (Eurotrip)*.

Jon Routson first exhibited his bootleg films at the Brooklyn CRP Gallery in 1999. Earlier he had entered a cinema in his hometown of Baltimore with a handheld video camera and recorded the screen as it showed *Star Wars: Episode 1—The Phantom Menace*. The resulting video emphatically betrays its means of creation, with all the background noise, unsettled focusing, and silhouetted patrons moving around in the theater. From this beginning he has subsequently recorded numerous other films by these means.

Atopia Projects: Your series *Bootlegs* show the entirety of Hollywood films, yet the prospect of watching one in its entirety is unappealing given the added effects that arise from their means of production. In what ways do you relate your act of appropriation to such things as the bootleg traditions in music, contemporary practices of illegal downloads, etc.?

Jon Routson: I am all for sharing music and movies online. It's just like checking something out from a library. It's called sharing. It's really remarkable now with everyone sharing their personal archives through sites like youtube and torrents. There is so much idiosyncratic content that sometimes it feels like nothing will get lost to the dustbin of history.

What are your criteria for choosing the films that you bootleg?

Any movie I wanted to see and had my camera ready for. I didn't want the bootlegs to be about individual films, so I tried to be as uncritical as possible in my selections.

What are the conceptual parameters for the bootlegs? Will you keep making them indefinitely or can you conceive of a point where they will be "completed"?

Conceptually it was a very formal thing between video and film, or home video versus the Hollywood movie, as well as building a personal record. So it was about making the films very personal, and catching them in the act of projection, at the exact point of reception, that "matter into memory" thing and then their material accumulation. I was going to keep doing it until I was done doing it, but then it became a felony to get caught recording a film[1] during its projection in the theatre so I decided I was done then for the most part. Which was good because it was ruining the movie going experience for me.

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) is currently instigating more aggressive methods in pursuing individual "copyright infringements." What are your thoughts about ways in which distribution of audio and other materials is poised to develop and be policed, and the politics and implications of sharing/theft?

The RIAA is evil: anti-consumerist and anti-artist. I really can't believe how they are terrorizing consumers and that they are getting away with it. "Every consumer is a criminal" seems to be the future they want.

You mentioned your interest in sharing and this surfaces in your work in other instances, such as *Free Kittens* where cats were left in the gallery and offered to visitors for free. It seems that you wish to complicate your acts of generosity by implicating the viewer in other social structures. Is this a specific cultural commentary?

Adopting a cat is a real commitment. I'd hope it'd be a more fulfilling experience for those that got one than purchasing some paintings or something.

1 The Family Entertainment and Copyright Act of 2005

A-1 53167

El Préstamo (*The Loan*), 2000

Poster, 60 x 42¾".

Translation: On the 29th of September 2000, I performed an action, which consisted of assaulting a person who appeared to be middle class. It was done in the following way: carrying a gun, I went out to the street in zone 10 and stopped a man who was slightly overweight, approximately 44 or 45, with brown, thinning hair; I pointed the gun to his face saying, this is not a robbery, it is a loan, and I will return it to you in a visual language for your sons. This person gave me 874.35 quetzals. This piece is sponsored by the man who was assaulted, with whose money I funded the invitations, the installation, and the toasts for this exhibition.

EL PRESTAMO

El día 29 de septiembre del 2000 realice una acción, la cual consistió en asaltar a una persona con apariencia de clase media. Se realizó de la siguiente manera: armado con una pistola salí a una calle de la zona 10, paré a un hombre como de unos 44 o 45 años, pelo castaño y escaso, un poco pasado de peso, le apunté a la cara diciéndole, esto no es un asalto, es un préstamo, y se lo devolveré en lenguaje visual para sus hijos. Dicha persona me entregó Q874.35.

Esta obra está siendo patrocinada por el hombre que fue asaltado, con lo cual se ha financiado: las invitaciones, montaje y parte del brindis de esta muestra.

A-1 53167
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Your work often utilizes instances of social disruption. In the case of *El Préstamo,* is this action one of practical necessity or metaphoric significance?

I don't really understand all this about examples of social disintegration. I think my work's linked more to a search for real, consistent communication with a public that not only doesn't often go to galleries but also doesn't ask itself about the existence of a made thing, an object of change, an instrument of work, a subject of consumerism that consumes. My interest when I make a piece—whether it's in the street, in a gallery, etc.—is in making the public go through an experience, whether they want to or not: that they see themselves so wrapped up in the situation they cannot but react with a human being's basic tools, questioning themselves about what I've intentionally put in strategic places so that not the slightest reaction escapes. And of course it's more than a metaphor. It's about making those present at the exhibit into accomplices, victims, and victimizers.

Did the reported action actually take place?

Yes.

Your approach was aggressive and threatening within *El Préstamo*. Why did it need to be like this in order to engage with the public in the way you describe?

Generally speaking, the people who go to galleries, museums, etc., go in order to contemplate, to avoid realities. They regard art as something sublime with lofty undertones. They're committed to the social, avant-garde ideals. Then they go home feeling they've achieved something big for humanity, feeling happy about their contribution to society. They see themselves as intellectuals who understand more than the majority, and they congregate around others' ideas. They buy paintings for thousands of dollars and they're happy this way. And so everybody's happy: the artists for denouncing the ills of the world; the consumers for paying, for buying wonderful thoughts that serve no useful purpose.

For me, it's important that these people don't leave without becoming part of the action, without really becoming part of this "system." That they shoulder their share of the burden: the artist is as shit as his public or any other human being. They are made into accomplices, guilty, in some way. It's a question of ethics. It's a low and dirty act. I mean, if I as an artist can do this shit, it's because you allow me to, because we're all equal, because the human being is like this and not a nauseating divinity. It's better to be this way than a fuckin' hypocrite who makes a living by simulating the telling of truths. For me, it's important that my public grows, and lets go enough to think about itself as something alien.

Did the gallery audience believe that this was a real occurrence? Is the question of authenticity relevant for you?

Only I know whether the act was real or not. Nobody will ever be able to know something they didn't actually experience. That isn't the important thing. That's banal. The real thing is each person with his own consciousness, each of us as a positive entity. Sure, if the act weren't real, it'd be very easy to evade responsibility and we'd continue just like in galleries where they hang photos and paintings of empty denunciation and high prices. Because art is bought, and expensively so. Everything's done for the love of others but without lifting a finger. Please don't keep asking me if it's real or not. Ask yourself who you are with regard to this idea. Nobody's perfect, nobody's imperfect. The question is: am I honest with myself?

The title of the work translates into English as "The Loan." How do you see this loan functioning?

Yeah, it works for me. I don't even know what it is, but sure, yes. I trust you.

Were there any repercussions by the police/law enforcement following *El Préstamo*?

No, nothing. Everyone's an accomplice.

Could you talk about other related work?

Yes, everything I do comes from this idea of accomplices. In fact, the most unrestrained pieces depend on it. I also have pieces that are like philosophy, which are of a different nature. But I also understand that this piece is good because it awakens the morbid sense within us, those of us who live off human suffering. Ask yourself: what do you want from this? To make a good living or to allow people to grow? What do we come to this world for? To fuck around or what?

Can you describe a little bit further what was in the exhibition that *El Préstamo* funded? Was it only the poster or was there other work too? What was the nature of the venue where it was displayed?

It happened just as the text said. There is no other work. I devised the piece to speak about ethics in relation to the public and its real commitment to art, the obligation to go through the experience, the reciprocal commitment to thought and to action, not only to observation. That's why the text, because of its authenticity, wasn't for sale, although many people wanted to buy it. The

original text was in an exhibition in Spain, but it never came back. I think they destroyed it when they attached it to a support, so they returned another one that they printed as a replacement.

The thing is that the fetish died, but the piece remains alive. The exhibition was held in "Contexto," Belia de Vico's Gallery in Guatemala City. It was installed in a wide and totally empty space, just the text and a toast. The latter took place outside the exhibition space in what's certainly a very pretty courtyard. All galleries try to sell—this gallery's no exception. But it shows work by artists whose works is commercially difficult—including Regina José Galindo, Moisés Barrios, María Adela Díaz, Santiago Sierra, and Teresa Margolles, among others.

Do you believe that art has lost its ability to function as a socially radical arena or is it rather that this capability has always been only illusionary?

Let's be honest. Art is a luxury object, to decorate the walls or thoughts of people capable of understanding it and buying it. Art isn't an illusion. It's an act of faith and wisdom which some use to make money, others to make a living and others to understand. What is radical is so obvious that it doesn't matter, it loses meaning.

René Magritte made his piece negating art, but he affirmed it more. Anti-art is just a pseudo-rebellious art form. The efficacy of art doesn't exist except for those people who want to look inwards and not at surfaces. So I claim that presumptuous galleries are no more than businesses belonging to businesspeople with little understanding. But they're necessary, just as corruption is necessary to let us see the nobility in humanity. Personally, I believe the presumptuous depends on the simple for its grandeur. Art is for people who have the capacity to understand it, but in reality it's possessed by those who are able to acquire it as a consumer product. From the very beginning, this can be seen in cave paintings, which responded to their organization and way of life, so that people could consume in a functional world. Just like today, those systems hinged on the human being's basic needs: "to survive nature."

You have made other works that relate to alternate economies, such as the project you realized for the *6th Mercosur Biennial*, in Porto Alegre, Brazil (2007) which focused on the trade of contraband between countries. Do you think such systems offer an alternate model or are they equally flawed?

I grew up in a really poor, low-income family. But with lots of love. My mother and father endured hardship to give us this life. I learned something: the value of things isn't based on objects but on deeds. The informal economy is just a tool like any other. Carpentry or dressmaking, everything has value in this world. Like my father said, "As long as my kids have food on the table, everything's fine." Governments are no more than big parasites, unnecessary for society. They impose laws and taxes in order to live at the expense of real people, like gallerists, museums, and libraries do. I think it's more dignified to steal and not to beg.

I do have other pieces, for example, *Se Vende, Se Alquila, Se Presta, Se Regala* (*Sold, Rented, Lent, Given*). It consists of four identical paintings, acrylic on fabric, measuring 100 x 50cm. The first is sold and its value as a consumer product is speculated on; the second is mine but is rented out for a daily, monthly, or annual fee; the third is lent free of charge, but I expect it to be returned in the same state I gave it; the fourth is given away as a present without charge and I expect neither its return nor any remuneration. All four are worth the same but each gets what it wants and deserves.

Your work seems to be invested in making under-considered elements visible, with yourself as the conduit. Is it important that you are present in the work?

It's important that we're all present in what we do. We aren't schizophrenics. We don't have more than one body to be one. And being everybody would be like not being at all, or being falsely.

It seems that in several of your works, your audience may be provoked to relationally evaluate different economies, types of labor, and the product of labor. Do you consider yourself exposing preexisting relationships or are you proposing new links?

Everything we do is a product of nature and the economic system is no exception. We can see how other beings in nature also have economic and consumptive systems: birds with their perfect architecture; beavers; ants, which have more intelligent systems than our own. They don't alter the ecosystem but rather integrate themselves into it. And they don't cause harmful effects unless it's for their own survival, like animals of prey that hunt and bring together sophisticated strategies to get food each day. We believe that because we learn to read and write, we have the ability or a greater capacity to retain our important memories. For example: the First and Second World Wars are important because they took place in Europe, but wars in Latin America are "isolated cases." They may be equal to the cruelest, most transcendental wars, like ants versus wasps, or wars in Africa where millions die in a week. But no! Those are just "circumstantial" and the damage is "collateral"! Speaking of everyday life, etymologically, work is "punishment." It could also be called "prostitution of being": selling your labor or your ideas for profit—not for what we are and think, but for what we must and have to think. Real thoughts—nobody has the capacity or notion to buy them—they simply exist within those beings that have the capacity to assimilate them and analyze them as such. Every living being thinks, we just have different points of view depending on the context and way of life allotted to us.

Anonymous

Lifting: a sub-provenance of art

It was in the spring of 2000 that I began what I might call "unauthorized collecting." I went to New York for a seven-day stay right out of graduate school. The plan was to see as much art as possible. The trip was a write-off, so I made a habit of gathering evidence of each day's itinerary, usually press releases, cards for present and past shows, sometimes I'd even bug the attendant for artist bios. They were mostly happy to oblige. This was a serious fact finding mission. These pieces of paper served more than a fiscal purpose. I took them so I wouldn't forget what I had seen. I needed a reference point.

Most of the work that spring was pretty good, but it was the exhibition *Greater New York* at P.S.1 that I remember most. This time I wanted more than a press release. Every room, every hallway, stairwell, bathroom, and elevator had something for the senses. In one of the larger classrooms I came across a wall-to-floor installation. The artist, unfamiliar to me, was Diana Cooper. Her piece was a sort of architectural structure crafted in a very casual manner out of foamcore and other low materials. The surfaces were covered with striations in marker pen of various colors. I appreciated the mixture of 2D and 3D, drawing and painting. I loved the color schemes and use of drug store materials; it was all very sophisticated and deftly executed. Her piece also had the look of exposed internal computer parts, like a motherboard. Cascading down to the floor from the wall was a pile of pink pom-poms. There were too many of them for the exact number to matter. They existed as a group, not as singular objects. Who'd miss one? Or two? I rationalized that it was ok to take one. I crouched down carefully, appearing to desire a closer examination, in case a guard passed. I did this again and again. It was a weekday, so not many people in the galleries. No one was around. So I snagged a couple. It was easy. I felt no real guilt, pretty astounding for someone raised as a hardcore Catholic. I inadvertently set my first rule for lifting:

> Rule#1: Removing an item from the work cannot result in a noticeable change in the overall look of the piece; the lifted item cannot be individually accounted for.

I never intended for the "lifting" of art to become an art form itself. In retrospect, the most prominent reason for doing it was to try and fulfill some desire for a record of the work, especially of installation art. An installation, typically site-specific, never looks the same anywhere else. As a painter, I think that irks me. With a painting or sculpture, there's the potential to experience the work again in its original form. With installations, that potential doesn't exist. I wanted something to archive the experience as a viewer.

So lifting can be seen as an act carrying two meanings. First, it's an act that celebrates the work. As an audience member, my personal restraint was overcome by my personal desire to own the work or at least take a part of it with me. Second, it is also, undeniably, a subversive act, one which undermines the power structure officiating over the work's history and its

ownership. The standard art objects — drawings, paintings, sculptures — are always susceptible to commodification and fetishes. Though installation art may escape the identity as an art object, it has an even greater potential to carry a higher privilege of ownership than that associated with a drawing, painting or sculpture. The art collector has the added experience of overseeing the artist reinstall the piece in a context-specific way. They become a private audience to the artist at work and decisions on how the piece lives are often made jointly by the artist and buyer.

The relationships between artist and buyer, artist and audience, construct the provenance of the work, its history. The history certainly begins with the artist, but the extent to which the history is written by collectors (private and public), curators, and critics reveals these as privileged categories of audience. These privileged audiences aside, there remains a wider audience to the work comprised of people that don't fall into any of these art professional categories. They will always have a largely unrecorded, critical role in finding the work's place in the world and in history. The *Mona Lisa* wouldn't carry the aura it does without the pilgrimage of masses to the Louvre wishing to lay eyes upon the small painting. The sign, "do not touch the art" reminds those of us who cannot afford to collect, who do not have the privilege to curate works of art, or hold the savvy position of critic, that we have no active role in its recorded provenance.

The act of lifting items from chosen installations created, for me, a sort of sub-provenance of the work. Months after the fact, I told the story of my lifting to a select group of trusted artists. Many reciprocated with their own stories of secret snatchings. I never considered that this sub-provenance of the work would extend past the retelling of the act of lifting, but the story continued, unexpectedly, when I spent an evening with an artist I knew as an undergraduate. This was August, 2003 (several years after the lifting fact) and Karl was preparing for a show that opened the first week of September. I met him a block from the train stop in Williamsburg and we made our way to the building where he lived and worked. After an hour or so in his studio, we took the freight elevator down to his living space. Karl shared a loft with his girlfriend, who was also preparing for a show the same week. She was working in the living room, so he apologized for the mess beforehand.

A five to six foot freestanding structure stood near the coffee table. I was greeted by its backside when I walked in. The artist presented me with a smile and extended hand. She was pretty with long dark wavy hair. I asked her about her work while I slowly walked around her piece. It was a sort of oval octagon cut out of foamcore. Panic struck when I saw the snapshot attached to an adjacent wall — a close-up of pink pom-poms! Shit. I asked if she was in the exhibition *Greater New York* (I was blanking on the names of the artists from which I lifted in that exhibition). She said, "Yeah. Did you get to see it?" With hand over mouth and I'm sure a look of fear mixed with guilt on my face, I confessed. I was caught. I never anticipated facing any of the artists from whom I lifted.

Rule#2: Never lift from anyone I know.

I've only broken this rule once. Diana's first reaction, to my relief, was with a bit of excitement and surprise. "Really? That's so funny," I recall her saying. Was she restraining her anger? I looked into her eyes for sincerity.

She said, "Other friends have told me they took stuff, too. It's okay." I felt reassured. We went on to have a lovely overpriced dinner. Later, I thought about that moment and wished I hadn't confessed. I wished I'd instead, anonymously, returned the pom-poms, maybe with a letter of apology. Or maybe just told her what I'd done and why. I've recently taken out the CD-ROM from the *Greater New York* catalog and searched for the image of Diana Cooper's piece, *When did it happen?* (1999; mixed media on canvas, wall, and floor). I noticed there were no cascading pom-poms. She must have added them later. Or had they all been stolen? Was it the collective engaging in unauthorized collecting? I liked the thought of that.

LIFTED ITEMS (that I'm willing to admit now)

ARTIST	ARTWORK TITLE & DATE (IF KNOWN)	OBJECT LIFTED	EXHIBITION
Diana Cooper	*When did it happen?* 1999	Pink pom-poms	*Greater New York* P.S.1 Queens, NYC 2/27–5/14, 2000
Jill Henderson		Sculpey fried egg	*Greater New York*
Mick O'Shea	*Artworld* 1999	Small "Geraldine Lau" paper house	*Greater New York*
Pipilotti Rist		Small toy NASA white and orange cone & small toy astronaut	Luhring Augustine Gallery, NYC 4/8–5/27, 2000
Jason Rhoades		Small glass container of "Atlas" Natural Salmon Eggs	*PeaRoeFoam* David Zwirner Gallery, NYC 5/11–6/29, 2002

Rhys Southan

Sean Connery Golf Project, 2002

Digital video (17:00, color, audio).

In 2002, Sara Rimensnyder and Rhys Southan made a documentary film detailing their theft, rewriting, and returning of a film script from Sony Studios, Culver City, California. Their documentary, *Sean Connery Golf Project* (sharing the title of the borrowed script), first screened at *South by Southwest* film festival in Austin, Texas.

Atopia Projects: What are the circumstances behind this film?

Rhys Southan: I was living in Los Angeles for the summer, interning for *Reason* magazine. I'd brought my video camera and wanted to do something with it. One night, after being rejected from the focus group panel of an advanced screening, I explored the Sony lot and discovered the Story Department, where all the scripts are stored. At the time, I was fairly into "urban exploration," going places where you're not supposed to go, and since I am also a movie lover and want to make movies as a career, this was the ultimate experience for me. But when I told my co-worker Sara about my little jaunt she disapproved. Nevertheless, through this discussion, we came up with the idea of taking a script, re-writing it to make it better, and putting it back—while filming the whole process. This didn't seem objectionable, since we'd be doing a service to Sony (who would get a better script) and the screenwriter (who would get credit for the improvements we made). The script we chose had the tentative title of *Sean Connery Golf Project*, since it was a movie about a golfer, whom Sean Connery was allegedly going to play. The basic premise is this: Sean Connery's character is a golf hustler who gets out of jail at the beginning of the story, having made a promise to himself never to gamble again. Unfortunately, when he gets home, he finds he's lost his house and his wife has left him, along a few other disasters, so now he must get back into golf hustling. To do this, he needs a partner, so he finds a young naïve guy (recently married) who happens to have the perfect swing: except when he feels at all nervous, which gives him the worst swing in the world. Totally uninspired stuff. But, in retrospect, I can't say that our re-write exactly made the movie much more filmable, though I do believe the script was better after our input. Basically, the script was so bad that most of our changes served mainly to mock the script. Here's an example: One of the re-occurring jokes in the script is that while Sean Connery and his young partner and wife are on the road, the young guy and his wife have loud sex in the hotel room next to Sean Connery's. And this drives him crazy. In our version of the script, the young married couple are still virgins, but as a joke, they bang their headboard against the wall and pretend to have loud sex. So it wasn't exactly an overhaul of the script so much as adding absurdities in order to point out how silly the entire thing was.

In an early statement, you virtually challenged Sony to take legal action ("thus delivering us the subject of our next documentary"[1]). Did any legal action occur—has their been a

subsequent documentary?

We really wanted to see the movie get made with our changes but we got too impatient, and we edited the documentary and entered it into film festivals. This blew our cover and unfortunately led to Sara's arrest—the one who had disapproved in the first place—and perhaps the most miserable time in her life. I wasn't living in LA any more, so I was out of jurisdiction. What seemed to us like a fun, harmless (and hopefully useful) prank was taken very seriously by Sony, especially since this was all around the time of September 11. Sara's lawyer instructed us to minimize the publicity surrounding all this (turning down interviews and whatnot) and pull the film out of festivals to show that she was cooperating but, nevertheless, she got a huge fine and 400 hours of community service that took her years to complete. After all this, we had an offer of a documentary made about us, but that would have entailed me turning myself in to the Los Angeles police and going on trial, which I wasn't prepared to do at the time (and which I now would only do if I had to, which I don't think I do). Plus, the legal disaster so soured Sara on the movie that she understandably doesn't want to have anything to do with it anymore.

Have you worked in other projects that involve similar transgressive acts?

After *Sean Connery Golf Project*, I co-wrote a musical with my best friend Joe Weisenthal called *Who is Jim Holt?* and put it on in Austin. The musical itself, though seditious, didn't involve any kind of breaking or entering. We legitimately rented the theater in which we put it on, paid for all the props, and so on. But to get attention for the musical required an even more transgressive and dangerous act than anything I did in *Sean Connery Golf Project*. "Cat," one of the cast members of *Who is Jim Holt?*—who was voluntarily homeless at the time and living on the roof of a Chipotle—had the idea that we should use a blank billboard located at a prominent intersection near the University of Texas to our advantage. This cast member discovered how to climb onto the billboard by scaling onto the roof of the Jack Brown Cleaners next to it, placing a board between the roof and the billboard, leaning across the chasm between the roof and the billboard pole to grab onto the ladder that started midway up the pole, walking across the board, and then climbing up the ladder to the inner structure of the billboard. We practiced this a couple of times. When we were ready, we climbed onto the roof with brushes and black paint. We climbed to the top of the billboard, untied the canvas, and dropped it onto the roof (slowly, as police cars were driving by occasionally). Once we got it on the roof, we spread out the canvas, painted "Who is Jim Holt?" on it, and let the paint dry for a few hours. We rolled it back up, pulled it back onto the billboard, and re-attached it (the most grueling part of the job). We went to sleep, and when we woke up, we went to look at our work in the afternoon light. Our canvas was gone, replaced with a fresh white canvas, as if it had all been a dream. We were demoralized, but we did it again a few days later. And that time the billboard stayed up for two weeks.

In what ways does your experience in making *Sean Connery Golf Project*, or the content of the film, relate to or inform current projects?

Having gone this route and been disappointed (Sara got community service, I evaded the law but didn't get to suddenly work in the movie industry), I'm now attempting to approach the filmmaking world more traditionally: by writing a screenplay and trying to sell it. I admit, I do miss the days when I felt like sneaking into movie studios, onto billboards, roofs, and through the steam tunnel network under the University of Texas at Austin. I'm no longer so driven to entertain myself by going where I don't belong, which is what inspired me to do *Sean Connery Golf Project*. I'm writing this from Tokyo, where I'll be for a month helping someone make it onto Japanese TV, but I wonder what *Sean Connery Golf Project* era Rhys would have done if unleashed on this place. But to think about myself this way, I'd have to forget that while filming *Sean Connery Golf Project* I wrote a screenplay that I'd hoped to be able to sell (a part we don't explain in *Sean Connery Golf Project* is that one of the scripts I drop off is this script that I'd written). I've wanted to be a screenwriter since I was ten or eleven. After high school, I wanted to not go to college and just stay home and write screenplays, though my mom prevented that. I did go to college, and since then my life has mainly been about scraping by with semi-interesting jobs while I work on projects more important to me than any career I could get outside of movies. More than a rebellion, I guess *Sean Connery Golf Project* was a bid for attention. I thought I was good enough to be a writer for Hollywood, but I didn't know how to go about it, so I made a big scene. I didn't work. I mean, we did get some attention—we got on TV, played at film festivals, a producer wanted to create a Punk'd type show with us as the hosts, and HBO was interested in showing the movie until they discovered how short it was—but none of it amounted to anything. I guess the point is, you can't be handed the role of filmmaker just by causing a ruckus. Talent is the most important thing, and at that point I didn't have enough evidence of that. Now I have a screenplay I'm proud of, but I have the opposite problem in that I don't know how to get anyone's attention.

Back when Sara got arrested for *Sean Connery Golf Project*, the police told her there was a warrant for my arrest. If that's true, then the warrant still exists. I could go to LA, get pulled over for speeding, be charged for my studio-infiltrating past, and use the trial as a platform for marketing my script. Honestly, though, I'd prefer to mail it around.

1 Breaking into the movie business, By Sara Rimensnyder
<http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/movies/feature/2002/04/16/sean_connery/index.html>

Ivan Moudov

***Fragments*, 2002–2007**

Hand-made boxes, stolen fragments; 14 x 19½ x 6".
Right: *Fragments (box #2)*, 2004–2007; *52 Biennale di Venezia*, Bulgaria Pavilion, Venice, 2007.

Fragments is comprised of a series of small suitcases. Each opens and unfolds to display selected ephemera stolen over a period of years from various artists' works. These labeled artifacts, taken from a multitude of galleries and museums throughout Europe, constitute a small-scale portable museum. Moudov's approach with *Fragments* shares the dark humor that often infuses his work and accentuates the circumstances and failures of the structures of power within society. The collection stands as evidence of a pragmatic attempt to repackage exhibited work in a system that is outside the normal tour for that work, engaging the artworld systems and politics of access, commodification, and marketing.

Atopia Projects: What was the genesis of this work? And how does it relate to your other work particularly where you announced the opening of a non-existent Museum?

Ivan Moudov: Everything started when I noticed that no one really cared for the art pieces in museums and that it did not require much effort to take anything you desired. Living in Bulgaria, I usually need to travel at least one day by car in order to see a good exhibition. It is quite disturbing to live in a country without a museum for contemporary art, especially when you are trying to be an artist. It means we don't even get the chance to hate the museum. Some people think that it is quite chic not to have a museum, believing that the museum kills the present and its absence encourages a kind of underground behavior, but I don't share this opinion. In order to have an underground you have to have something above the ground. For a few years I was collecting fragments and each box was something like a portable museum. Now I've finished this, I already feel closer to the contemporary art world and now if I want to see an exhibition I use a cheap flight.

Was there a rationale for selecting the specific artworks that you sampled, and were the acts of theft premeditated or spontaneous?

In the beginning I took fragments that could be taken from the museums and galleries without a lot of risk, since I was really scared. From this way of working the collection was similar to a cabinet of curiosities. Then I started to be more precise and to look for certain artists and artworks. For example I was looking for Broodthaers for months. Related to this I appreciate the Native American belief that when they scalp their enemies they take their power. My situation is not exactly the same but I do think that I become stronger.

Why did you stop the process of collecting and "finish" the work?

It is important for this work to have a beginning and an end. The action is intended to make up for lost time without contemporary art museums in Bulgaria, but at the same time I am most interested in the aspect of the work that extends outside of the Bulgarian context. But when discussing the work, I prefer it when somebody asks me to start from the beginning because not a lot of people are aware of the Bulgarian context. I also believe that *Fragments* makes sense in both contexts, which means that the differences are not so significant.

There are many interesting paradoxes embedded in *Fragments*, for instance the same work in another context might be understood as critiquing the presence and limits of the institution, whereas yours critiques the lack of institution. Do any of your other works have a similar specificity of meaning in relationship to your location and art scene?

After *Fragments* I made *MUSIZ* which is a truly site specific work. It is an action I realized in 2005. It was a fake opening of a museum for contemporary art in Sofia. While being site specific, the project is connected with processes everywhere in the world—almost every month there is an opening of a new museum. China is planning to open an unprecedented number of new museums…well we opened just one fake museum but maybe some day it will be for real.

Fragments (box #1), 2002-2004

1. Annette Messager. *Hors-Jeu*. Fragment, bronze and stuffed bird.
2. Yoshua Okon. *Sony*. Fragment, piece of tie.
3. Eric Fonteneau. *La Biblioteque*. Fragment, print on paper.
4. Gary Hill. *And sat down beside her*. Fragment, magnifying glass.
5. Robert Barry. *Advocate*. Fragment, slide.
6. Douglas Gordon. *Self portrait (Kissing with Scopolamine)*. Fragment, slide.
7. Eva-Maria Bogaert. Fragment, slide.
8. Andrew Carnie. *Magic Forest*. Fragment, slide.
9. Jannis Kounellis. *Untitled*. Fragment, slack.
10. Sue de Beer. *Hans & Grete*. Fragment, red ribbon.
11. Manfred Pernice. *Achse of Contemplation*. Fragment, broken ashtray.
12. Nedko Solakov. *Black and White*. Fragment, paper sign.
13. Dora Garcia. *Screen System*. Fragment, piece from blinds.
14. Robert Filliou. *La Joconde*. Fragment, handwritten sign on cardboard.
15. Tracey Emin. *Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made*. Fragment, acrylic on postcard.
16. George Brecht. *Table et chaises*. Fragment, play card, 9 diamonds.
17. Francis Alÿs. *A Man Traces a Line as he Walks Through the City of Athens Shooting a Flare Every Thirty Steps*. Fragment, Sheet of paper with handwriting.
18. Krijn de Koning. *Platre*. Fragment, certificate on paper.
19. Christian Boltanski. *Réserve des Suisses morts*. Fragment, black and white photograph.
20. Atelier van Lieshout. *Dark Room*. Fragment, stopper from drum.
21. Josef Beuys. *A Monument to the Future*. Fragment, piece rust.
22. Guy Limone. Fragment, miniature yellow plastic figure.
23. Panamarenko. *Le Garage des Alpes*. Fragment, notebook with handwritten texts and drawings.
24. Robert Morris. Fragment, color threads.
25. Anselm Kiefer. *Volkszahlung*. Fragment, piece of lead.
26. Jan Fabre. *Zal hij voor altijd met aaneengesloten voeten staan*. Fragment, fake white hair.
27. Mac Adams. *Black Mail*. Fragment, metal ring.
28. Ryan Gander. *A Phantom of Appropriation*. Fragment, broken neon.
29. Aleksandra Mir. *Hello*. Fragment, black and white photograph.
30. Marcel Broothaers. *289 coquilles d'oeufs*. Fragment, piece of egg-shell.
31. Daniel Buren. *The Three Sails*. fragment, white thread.
32. Wolfgang Tillmans. *Tate Purple installation*. Fragment, color photograph.
33. Ozawa Tsuyoshi. *Vegetable weapon*. Fragment, picture.
34. Adrian Piper. *Vote*. Fragment, Sheet of paper with handwriting.
35. Jeremy Deller. Fragment, sticker Volcano.

Fragments (box #2), 2004-2005

1. Yayoi Kusama. Fragment, fake pearl.
2. Rodney Glick. *Still Life*. Fragments, slide.
3. Joëlle Tuerlinckx. *Image lumière*. Fragment, candle.
4. Mark Chevalier. *In touch with the real*. Fragment, dart mounted on male plug.
5. Carsten Nikolai. *Snow Noise*. Fragment, rubber stopper.
6. Richard Fauguet. *Table de ping-pong*. Fragment, ping-pong ball.
7. Fiorenza Menini. *Waiting Room/Salle d'attente*. Fragment, leaf.
8. Yinka Shonibare. *Dressing dawn*. Fragment, piece of dress material.
9. Mathew Barney. *Case bolus*. Fragment, piece of leather strap.
10. Nayland Blake. *Magic*. Fragment dry rose.
11. Dave Muller. Fragment, drawing on paper.
12. Angela Bulloch. *To the Power of 4*. Fragment, photography.
13. Franz Ackermann. *(Untitled) Mental map: incredible terrible beautiful*. Fragment, plumage.
14. Mike Kelly. *Brown star*. Fragment, piece of ribbon
15. Bjarne Melgaard. Fragment, syringes.
16. Peter Weibel. *Re: Wind & fast forward (des realen)*. Fragment, soil.
17. Tim Noble & Sue Webster. *Dirty white trash (with Gulls)*. Fragment, piece of paper.
18. Work-seth/tallentire. Fragment, metal detail.
19. Maurizio Cattelan. *Untitled (Gerard)*. Fragment, piece of shoe-laces.
20. Urs Fischer. *What If the Phone Rings*. Fragment, wax.
21. Gregor Schneider. *Totes Haus u r, Gute Mutter*. Fragment, fake hair.
22. Janine Antoni. *Saddle*. Fragment, hide.
23. Henrik Håkansson. *Through the woods to find the forest*. Fragment, pin.
24. Andreas Slominski. *Viktoria*. Fragment, key.
25. Conrad Shawcross. *Preretroscope (marine)*. Fragment, can.
26. Marisa Merz. Fragment, pottery sculpture.
27. Sarah Lucas. Fragment, meat, nail, piece of turn screw.
28. Boris Groys. *Die ausstellung eines gesprachs*. Fragment, sheet of paper with text.
29. Claes Oldenburg. *Ray Gun Wing* Fragment, photography.
30. Li Zhensheng. *Red-Color New Soldier*. Fragment, Mao book.
31. Andrea Bowers. *Production Still for Upcoming Project on the Storage of The AIDS Memorial Quilt*. Fragment, ribbon.

Fragments (box #3), 2005

1. Thomas Schütte. *Mohr's Life*. Fragment, can.
2. Nam June Paik. *Zen for Wind*. Fragment, black and red wooden object.
3. Pipilotti Rist. *The Room*. Fragment, remote control.
4. John Bock. *Zero Hero*. Fragment, printed banknote.
5. Mona Hatoum. *+ and -*. Fragment, sand.
6. Maria Teresa Hincapie. *Space Moves Slowly*. Fragment, dry leaf.
7. Pascale Marthine Tayou. *Plastic Bags*. Fragment, plastic bag.
8. Sergio Vega. *Waiting Room*. Fragment, Polaroid photography.
9. Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla, *Landmark*. Fragment, rubber.
10. Rivane Neuenschwander. *[...]*. Fragment, drawing made in type manner.
11. Yung Ho Chang. *Bamboo Shoots*. Fragment, bamboo sticks.
12. Hermann Nitsch. *Large Blood Picture*. Fragment, tie from apron.
13. Otto Muehl. *Untitled*. Fragment, razor-blade.
14. Rudolf Schwarzkogler. *Untitled (Sigmund Freud-Bild)*. Fragment, rope.
15. John Baldessari. *Sky/Sea/Sand*. Fragment, photography.
16. John Latham. *God is Great*. Fragment, piece of glass.
17. Dan Flavin. *Untitled*. Fragment, from luminescent lamp.
18. Ines Doujak. *Follow the Leader*. Fragment, whistle.
19. Alice Creischer/Andreas Siekmann. *The Seamstresses of Brukman*. Fragment, stripe.
20. Rainer Oldendorf *K/Röntgenstraße 3*. Fragment, slide.
21. Annelies Goedhart. *The Day Daddy Died*. Fragment, text on paper.
22. Sonia Abian/Carlos Piegari. *Aparatobarrio*. Fragment, tiger ass handle.
23. Jeff Koons. *New Shop-Vac Wet-Dry*. Fragment, vacuum cleaner.
24. Franz West. *Untitled*. Fragment, piece of carpet.
25. Matthieu Laurette. *Moneyback Life! Mobile Information for Moneyback. Products (Version 1)*. Fragment, chocolate box with receipt inside.
26. Stanley Brouwn. *1000 mm - 881 mm*. Fragment, paper.
27. Paul McCarthy. *Spagetti man*. Fragment, fur.
28. Dieter Roth/Bjorn Roth. *Gartenskulptur*. Fragment, wire.
29. Subodh Gupta. *Curry*. Fragment, ladle.
30. Walter Dahn. *If I Can Dream*. Fragment, picture from newspaper.
31. Carlos Amorales. *Broken Animals*. Fragment, black glass.

Fragments (box #4), 2005-2007

1. Luchezar Boyadjiev. *Schadenfreude Guided tours*. Fragment, piece of belt.
2. Erzen Shkololi. *Bed*. Fragment, button.
3. Anna Friedel. *My Heart Is My Better Brain*. Fragment, peace of paper.
4. Franziska Cordes. *Rambo Blueberry*. Fragment, candle.
5. Irena Lagator. *Wash Inside Out!* Fragment, tag from T-shirt.
6. Ilija Šoškić. Fragment, stone.
7. Sarkis. *Conversation avec le Son des Appeaux*. Fragment, tape.
8. Version. *The Map of the World*. Fragment, magnet.
9. Lamia Joreige. *Objects of War*. Fragment, play card, 6 heart.
10. Jusuf Hadzifejzovic. *Double Jack*. Fragment, piece of elastic.
11. Ebru Özseçen. *Dish washing Dreams*. Fragment, steel wool.
12. Driton Hajredini. *Who Killed the Painting?* Fragment, nylon.
13. Martin Glaser. *Jeanne d'art*. Fragment, condom.
14. Svetlana Racanović. *Lullay*. Fragment, rope.
15. Gojko Čelebić. *3000 Spoken Words*. Fragment, sheet from book.
16. Tanja Ostojic. *Way to Success*. Fragment, condom
17. Jan Kadlec. *MC Bed*. Fragment, piece from pyjamas.
18. Nedko Solakov. *Floor*. Fragment, pushpins.
19. Blue Noses. *Little Men*. Fragment, piece of cardboard box.
20. Irina Korina. *Modules*. Fragment, plywood.
21. Kamen Stoyanov. *Underground Butterflies*. Fragment, slide.
22. Jeff Koons. *Puppy*. Fragment, flower.
23. Uroš Djurić. *Self-portrait with Doug Aubrey*. Fragment, photography.
24. Olaf Nikolai. *Enjoy/Survive I + II*. Fragment, sticker.
25. Gelatin. *Gelatin Wet Garbage*. Fragment, fur.
26. Pravdoliub Ivanov. *Memory is a Muscle (Preparatory drawing)*. Pencil, silicone on paper.
27. Mrdjan Bajić. *Bomb*. Grenade.
28. son: DA. *Moderna Galerija Under Construction*. Fragments, gaffer tape and duck tape.
29. İrfan Önürmen. *Terror Factory*. Fragment, gun made of newspapers.
30. Dan Perjovschi. *A Piece for Ivan to Steal*. Drawing on paper.
31. Artur Barrio. *ideaSituation: SubjectiveObjective interRelationship*. Fragment, shellac.
32. Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige. *The Circle of Confusion*. Fragment, photography.
33. Stano Filko, Jan Mancuska, Boris Ondreička and Marek Pokorný. *Model of the World/ Quadrofonia*. Fragment, steel ball.

Allison Wiese

Untitled, 2002–ongoing

Handmade wooden doorstops, installation diameter approximately 18".

Allison Wiese began stealing wooden doorstops in 2002. The accumulation of these handmade, pragmatic, but inexpensive objects forms what is currently "a slow-growing pile, about 18 inches across."

Atopia Projects: Why doorstops, and why steal rather than make them?

Allison Wiese: The project started as an improvisation. There were doorstops spread throughout the building I was working in, and I took them all into my studio and made a pile out of them. I really like them as objects, but there was also a major effort in the building to keep doors routinely closed (however inconvenient) in order to pass an impending fire inspection. So I was able to see the first phase of the project as either a benevolent or a mischievous act, depending on how I looked at it.

The piece started with an act, and the sculpture was evidentiary. It never occurred to me to make the doorstops. While I suppose I could mimic the appearance of weathered/distressed wooden wedges, and create the illusion of a "collected" pile, it couldn't have happened that way, and it wouldn't serve my interests.

There's something about the theft that is as interesting to me as anything else about the work. The transgressive behavior is important. So are: gradual accretion; a concrete and compulsive "trophy" collection gathered from institutions; and the funny implications of this multiplication of an everyday object: there are a lot of closed doors around the country.

One part of me thinks this is the cranky, and possibly sick, behavior of an artist wrestling with the limits of art's actual power, influence, and place in the world—a sort of poltergeist reaction.

Also, each doorstop theft is a small nearly insignificant nuisance act. But like a door-wedge, it leverages something larger. The project irritates my ethical judgment repeatedly. After all, the thefts violate community spirit, and may inconvenience people I care about or share space with, albeit a little at a time. It's so wrong. And I know it. Lately I've been trying to find examples of ritual transgressions or clinical compulsions to relate it to. But I'm probably trying to let myself off the hook as much as situate the work. Is this some kind of secular antinomianism? Or just mild kleptomania?

What precedents are relevant to this work?

I haven't conducted a survey of sculpture created through serial theft. Tom Friedman's *Hot Balls* comes to mind, but that piece seems almost as much about the title pun to me as the method of creation. I also figure there's something different about stealing items of limited use (cheap toys) and stealing something handmade and regularly employed like a doorstop. I don't know if I'm

helping or hurting my own case as a good citizen or artist by pointing that out….

How does this work relate to your other projects (conceptually and in method…do you have other ongoing projects or are there other ways in which theft or appropriation connect in direct or oblique ways to your practice as a whole)?

I'm as interested in creating sort of dumb, literal relationships—a kind of concrete sculptural poetry with the ready-to-hand—in the world as I am in making images. I guess this may be a pretty fussy distinction for anyone looking at the piece who wasn't implicated in the theft somehow, or doesn't see the pile grow over time, but it's important to me.

Several recent projects of mine have depended on borrowing banal stuff and recontextualizing it. I've often employed a simple strategy of displacement—both of material through space, and ideas through time. In an untitled work from a couple years ago, for example, I had a palletload of Valencia oranges shipped to a Houston gallery, where they were displayed in a pile during a summer exhibition. I saw it as a reverse Steinbeckian narrative, where imagery from a utopian fruit-crate came east to rot out-of-season.

Micah Lexier

***Untitled Drawings*, 2003**

Framed restroom inspection sheets, foil-stamped matt board, pencil; 17 x 15" (framed).
Right and overleaf: *Untitled Drawing (Example No. 4).*

The *Untitled Drawings* series consists of an assortment of stolen restroom inspection sheets that are individually framed so that only the time-chart portion of each inspection sheet is visible. Any of the other information on the sheet that might have revealed the drawing's origins is concealed. The bottom right hand corner of each matt board is foil-stamped with the words "Example No." and numbered sequentially in pencil. This presentation method unifies the various styles of restroom inspection sheets and locates the resulting "drawings" within a numbered series.

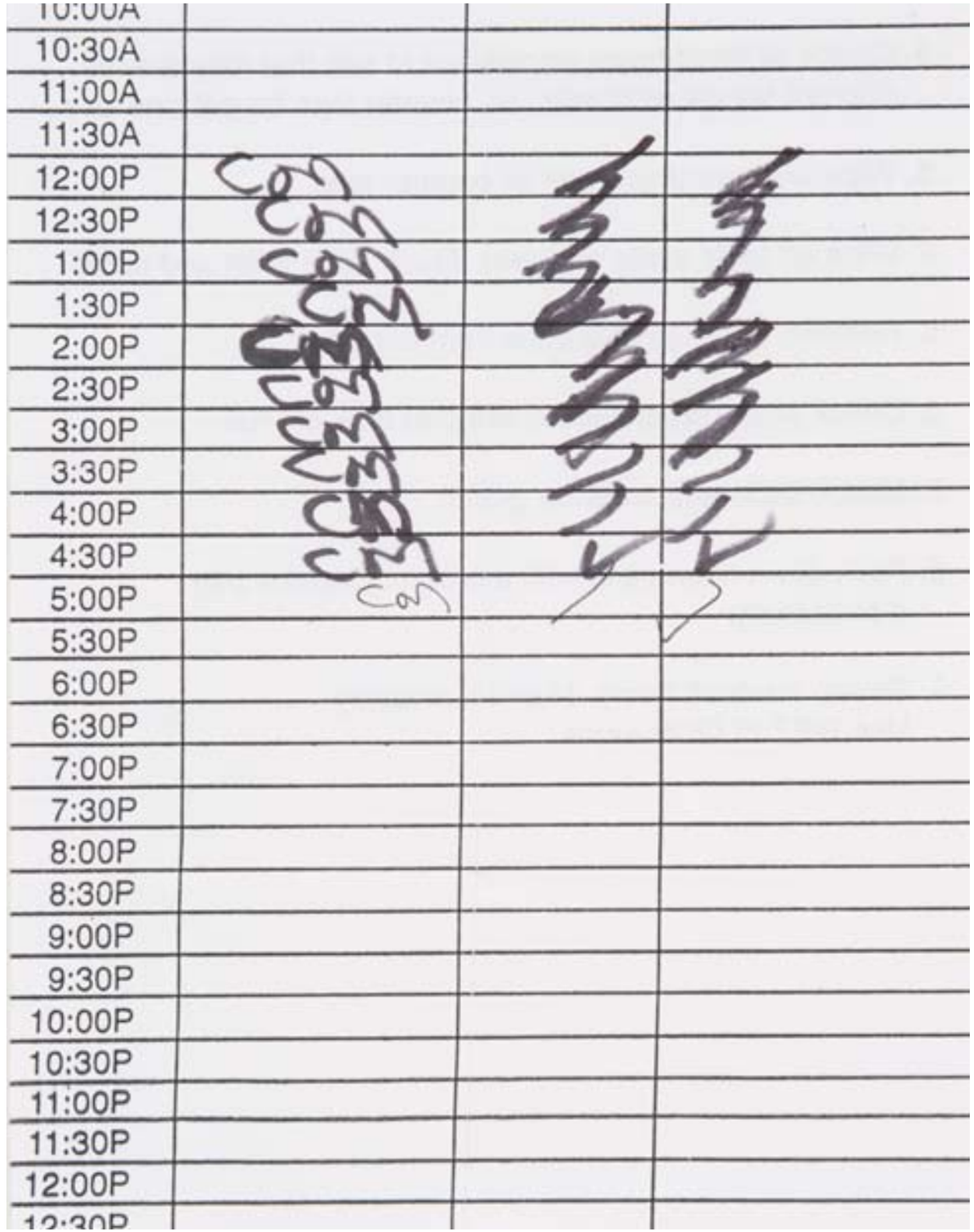
Atopia Projects: Can you give some background: How did the project arise? Why restroom inspection sheets? Did you consider your role as that of a collector, thief, artist?

Micah Lexier: I have always loved the "found drawing" quality of restroom inspection sheets. It is something about the combination of the grid and the repetition of the hand-drawn marks that attracted me. They are my image of what a collaborative drawing by Agnes Martin and Marcel Broodthaers would look like. But there is also something very basic and poignant about them. They inherently contain a comment about menial labor, about what it means to sell your time to someone else (and to prove it by signing in every hour), and thus about the struggle between employee and employer.

The inspection sheets are very rich both formally and conceptually, and whenever I saw a particularly good one in a restroom I was tempted to steal it. Finally one day I got up the nerve. I knew I wanted to make a project out of these drawings, which made it easy to rationalize the theft, but stealing them was the part of the project that I hated the most. I always worried that I was going to get caught and I didn't want the person who cleaned the restroom to get into any trouble because of me. Their job was bad enough as it was that they didn't need me making it any worse. I might have been able to get the charts through honest means, like asking for them, but I anticipated that it would turn into a bureaucratic nightmare and I didn't want to run the risk of being turned down. So the only practical solution I could think of—to guarantee that I could make this project happen—was to steal them. As much as I hated it, I knew it was my responsibility (as an artist) to do it. Once I had amassed a pretty large collection I stopped stealing them. I still love looking at the inspection sheets whenever I come across them in restrooms, but I am a bit relieved that the project is over.

Could you talk further about the issue of artistic responsibility, and how you consider your role as an artist in society.

When I used the word "responsibility" earlier what I meant is that there are times when I force



myself to do certain things as an artist because it is what has to be done at that moment to make a particular work. In this case it was stealing something. I clearly have lines I will not cross but I think it is important for me to go beyond what I am generally comfortable doing. In some ways that is what the role of the artist is, to be both a regular person responding to the world, but also someone who acts slightly outside of that world.

Have you sold these drawings? Do you see relevant meaning in these stolen items re-entering a market system at a radically different level, and the ways in which this further engages systems of economy?

I have sold these drawings but I don't see them as any different from other work that I sold. Over the past 20 years I have worked with a variety of found imagery including dictionary illustrations, quotes from books, traffic signs and notes found on the street, and this is just one more source. The imagery is always transformed even if it is only in a very minor way. In this particular case I have cropped the various restroom checks and presented them as part of a numbered series of drawings. I am not re-selling anyone else's labor, what I am doing is re-contextualizing an object that is a document of that labor. Other artists have taken up the question of authorship as the content of their work, but that is not what was of interest to me in this project.

I do see systems of economy at work in this piece but again that is not the content of the work for me. I almost always have my work fabricated, which involves taking someone else's labor and then "marking up" the price when I sell the work. So systems of economy are always in play when I "make" my work. Most artists who sell their work are operating at a "luxury goods" level. No artwork is ever really sold for its material value, it is always a question of some sort of value added. The higher you go up the art world ladder, the greater the ratio between material value and market value. The material cost of the object is a factor in the final price, but not nearly as much as your status as an artist.

In what ways does this series of drawings connect to your other projects?

This series connects to so many other works that I have made dealing with increments of time. I have made works about minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years, and I see *Untitled Drawings* series as part of that larger investigation. I started collecting the restroom checks long before I ever showed them and they were a big influence on my Gallery Hours project which I first exhibited in 2001. That project consisted of giving away one custom-minted coin each hour (for the duration of the exhibition) in exchange for the viewer signing their initials on a printed chart. The Gallery Hours charts look very much like the restroom inspection sheets, and at the conclusion of the exhibition I have a series of drawings that account for each hour's coin. I have long been interested in the kinds of marks we make with our hands, especially the kinds we make when carrying out ordinary or repetitive tasks. The restroom checks are a perfect example of this.

Dan Griffiths

Altered Signs, 2004

Enamel paint on metal sign, dimensions variable.

In his project *Altered Signs*, Dan Griffiths stole media corporation logos from a variety of billboards. He modified these signs in a way that retained the corporate identity but in an embellished or dramatic form. These signs were then replaced from where they were originally stolen.

Atopia Projects: How did this project come about?

Dan Griffiths: At the time I made these works I was thinking about the significance of contemporary forms of subversion, the impact they have in the public realm, and whether adding art to the equation could affect this dynamic. In a previous work I collected examples of adverts that had been defaced with graffiti of political intent. I used these exchanges, between advertisers and "subvertisers," to form one long text in stark lettering without punctuation so it resembled something akin to concrete poetry. On one level it was an exercise in reduction, aimed at disabling the opposing points of view. This piece took the form of a life-size billboard installed in a gallery, and in an effort to authenticate its appearance I stole the advertisers company sign from underneath a real billboard to put on mine. I then, somewhat impulsively, stole more of these signs. Unsure what to do with them, their very absence on the street was pleasing to me. I eventually I decided to re-paint them using the original text but in an altered font. I chose fonts which had an element of mocking such as "monster font," "circus font," or ransom note cut-out letters, to echo the mild illegality and guerrilla nature of my act. For me, replacing the signs is what activated the work. The longest surviving altered sign was there for six weeks before being replaced.

In what ways was the act of theft a conceptually necessary part of the work?

I was not interested in physically adding to an already too-busy streetscape, but I did want to interfere with, and distort the processes of recognition and expectation of passers by. Around that time I was seeking ways in which to avoid the standard art/viewer experience within the gallery system, and although the public realm was well used by artists, the quietness of my interventions was intended to make no demands on the viewer in terms of art knowledge. The theft and replacement of objects in public was necessary to fulfil my desire to not produce art objects (the inherent contradiction in this process interests me still) and to enable an informal encounter.

Savage

***Stolen White Goods*, 2005**

6 shops, 17 visits, 36 items; stolen in Bristol, England, 2005.
(Realized separately as photographs, poster, and publication.)

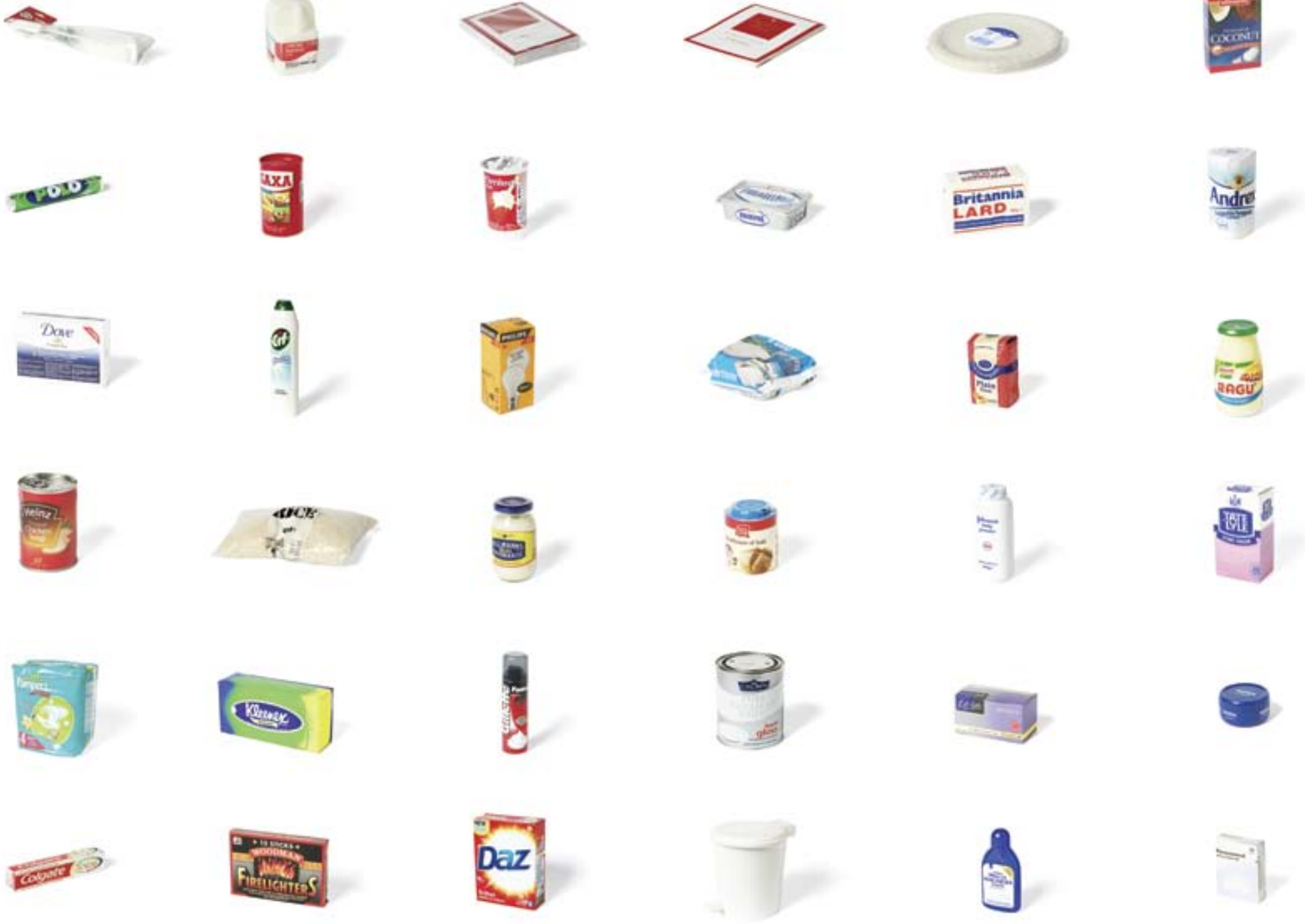
For *Stolen White Goods,* a project realized with The Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, UK, Savage stole 36 white items from six different shops. This project relates to past interventions, such as *The Gift (Theft Reversal),* for which Savage bought items from a store and then covertly returned them to the shelf, and *Keeping things just tickety-boo*, which involved cleaning and folding a blanket, and neatly returning to the same place it was found on the streets of Bristol.

Atopia Projects: The work *Stolen White Goods*, references Ceal Floyer's *Monochrome* (a receipt for purchases of only white products). Since you stole the articles listed on that receipt, what is your specific interest in Floyer's work and the wider relation between art and systems of commerce?

Savage: *Monochrome* was a work that cost Ceal money, a specific amount of money. *Stolen White Goods* was a simple gesture of offering a saving. Ceal spent £38.14. I saved £46.41. It would appear that we are all bound to value systems and constructed systems of market forces. This work is not confrontational activism but more a quiet and somehow poetic attempt at reversal, which in its essence provides little more than a statement of fact concerning economic value. Art is an economic system in its own right; I am however not sitting in judgement on such systems but more playing along with an overriding sense of futility.

Is it important that ambiguity is maintained to whether any crime has actually been committed in the making of the work? (It is only your assertion that the items in *Stolen White Goods* were acquired through theft.)

It is my intention that this kind of action goes beyond issues of legality, and offers, perhaps, a more poetic and romantic view: one that is not bound by the actualities of evidence but instead engages with the core ideas of the rites of exchange. In much of my work there is little actual evidence of the event, merely the remains—the objects themselves or an image depicting them post-intervention—forensics is not the issue, proving my case is not the issue. The event—the theft—has been and gone, the restoration is now a thing of the past: the actualities of the crime have been supplanted by the romance of their memory. It is therefore perhaps more to do with storytelling and myth-making than proof of crime. I tell a story. It is up to you to buy into the idea or not. Protesting my innocence or admitting my guilt does little to reinforce these ideas. Stories will continue to be told and I will continue to tell them. This story may, for a while at least, be talked about and surely the joy of stories is that they can be heard?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Could you talk further about your interest in exchange and reversal? Are these motivated by any particular philosophical or economic theories?

I am as much influenced by fiction as politics and philosophy. Holden Caulfield's[1] simple desire for the world to stand still to avoid the process of change is perhaps also identified in John Gray's *Straw Dogs*,[2] with its questioning of this thing we call progress. There is the idea that we are in control and are evolving, progressing as never before and we have ultimate purpose in life and by doing so we are driven to do, to make, to progress; for fear that if we stand still it would somehow be confirming our own futility. This terror that we have generates our excesses. In times of excess and what appears to be a society obsessed with little more than its own consumption, the excesses of pointlessness grow ever more attractive: futility having more value than commodity. It becomes an aspiration which is perhaps more excessive than the excesses of that which it protests against! The paradox that this presents is that the futility we abhor becomes the very thing we value as we strive to escape it.

You seem interested in using economies as structures for narratives. This undoubtedly imbues them with a social perspective yet, as you acknowledge, one that understands its futility. Do you think the results should be considered humorous, poetic, poignant…?

"The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely."[3] Wilde's concerns within *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and more so in *The Decay of Lying*,[4] strive to go beyond simple notions of politics and economics and the dull accuracy of truth to engage more so in the uncertainty of storytelling. These works set out to create opportunity for circumstance —humorous, poignant, or otherwise—however I seek more to be a passer-by, just walking through. I play, I cheat, I lie, and I steal, yet will always offer something back. It is down to the viewer as to what they want do with it. Perhaps there is an overarching sense of melancholy and romanticism in much that I engage with, however I am in complete accord with John Gray here: "Can we not think that the aim in life is simply to see?"[5]

It is interesting to note the ways in which the lexicon of commerce/exchange proliferates within very different contexts. You talk of "buying into an idea," is it mistaken to understand economies as only those instances involving selling/exchange or are they a more pervasive aspect of human existence?

It could be reasoned that human existence can be identified by the constructed value systems it defines itself by. Those systems are inherently linked to our culture and our identities. Our state of being is ostensibly fuelled by what we physically buy or what we buy "into." To divorce such language from all aspects of society is surely impossible. If the economy of truth is bound by reason, the economy of an idea is equally so bound. As such all exchange is reasoned, appertaining to its value, whether it be true or false. That's where the games begin.

1 Holden Caulfield is the protagonist in JD Salinger's *The Catcher in The Rye* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951).

2 John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on humans and other animals* (London: Granta, 2002).

3 From the preface of Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

4 "The Decay of Lying: An Observation," in *The Complete Writings of Oscar Wilde* (New York: The Nottingham Society, 1909).

5 Gray, op. cit.

Luis o Miguel

Aiki, 2005

Digital video transferred to DVD (01:15, color, silent).

Luis o Miguel's video recorded performance, *Aiki*, takes its name from the martial art practice of defending an attack by re-directing the force of an attacker's assault. Within this choreographed performance, which took place on public transport in Havana, two individuals alternately pickpocket one another.

Atopia Projects: In relation to this work you have stated, "The economy of survival in Cuba makes most of its citizens participate in an underground net of illegalities." What is the background to this work and in particular how does it relate to those ideas of the "social choreography" of everyday life in Cuba?

Luis o Miguel: In Cuba there is a verb that defines the act of day-by-day survival; this verb is "fight." The people who perform this verb "are in the fight." This daily combat involves illegality. The low wages, the product shortages, the high prices of articles and products, the existence of a strong currency that many people do not receive, and the strangling situation for small businesses, are some of the reasons why it has to be a "fight." This combat has a rhythmic appearance and a dialogical character.

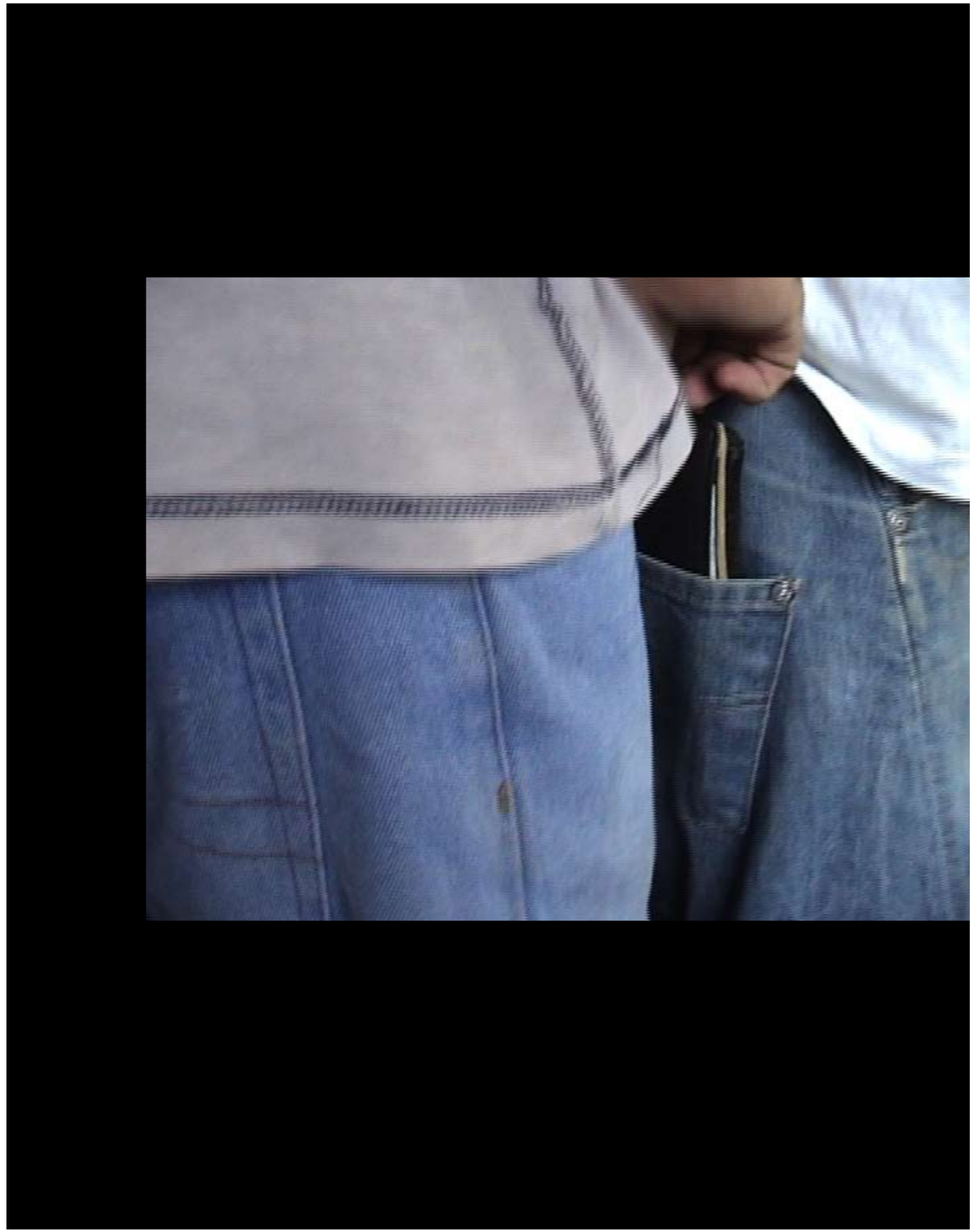
Although there is a constant possibility of being detected in this kind of act, a certain complicity and concealment exist, which is why this martial art uses masks and costumes. Because it is common practice and everyone knows what others do—all of them act as salesmen, buyers, and intermediaries of articles and various services—actions are ignored, and these thieves-fighters-dancers are allowed to fight in self-defense.

This fight is so embedded in everyone's understanding that it is considered an extenuating factor in moral judgments. For example, when a boss finds out that an employee has exceeded the allowed quota of "fight," instead of initiating legal proceedings or dismissing him, he invites him to leave voluntarily.

The average Cuban has problems with food, shelter and transportation, and these issues have to be resolved through non-official means. For example, having breakfast, preventing rain from soaking the interior of your home, or arriving at work on time without exhaustion, are a few examples where Cubans have to act outside of official channels. Such matters have to be resolved through "the fight."

Although products and services are available through official channels, they are offered at a very high price compared to income levels and in a currency that most people do not receive, the CUC. The products and services offered in the national currency, the CUP, are of deplorable quality or just nonexistent.

Beyond trying to find the real causes or to identify those responsible, we, many Cubans, form part of the movement of the underground economy, we dance to the forms of "productivity"



and the relationships of "production," where the laws of supply and demand are choreography. Sometimes this choreography is supported by the equilibrium of illegal activity, whereas at other times it collapses when those in power exert moral and legal judgment.

The existence of state property in every part of the Cuban economy causes the act of theft to feel blurry and not clearly defined. A grocery salesman works and sells in the state grocery, acting like he is the owner of part of the powdered milk that he has to distribute to kids under seven years of age, but his neighbors are in fact the ones who buy the milk. A worker obtains his breakfast in this way, but he obtains the money for it by selling cement to the villagers who live near a building under renovation or construction, but this material is state property. A few liters of gas are sold by a driver of the public bus to those individuals who cannot afford the price of gas from official gas stations, in order to use their private cars.

This apparent re-equilibrium, where the strength of "the contrary" is used, is exhausting, because there are not any intervals or "breaks" for relaxing. It is a dance apparently endless for the dancers, where harmony and contrast exist: the worker had breakfast, the grocery salesman waited for the public bus which did not appear because there was no gas in the gas station. Meanwhile, passing in his car is a guy who with much effort managed to get a "deal" from the driver of the public bus.

The interesting part of this dancing, of these movements, relationships, and socio-economical adaptations, is the pattern of the structure in a morphological sense: theft as an apparent and permanent solution. In daily Cuban life, this dance is like a geometric or floral pattern in oriental design, or the continuous piano in baroque music; theft (whether or not it is justified—if it is possible to justify it under certain conditions) is currently modeling the way of life.

However, there is a well-known phrase which asserts that the "thief who robs a thief has one hundred years of forgiveness." We can realize that behind every wallet that gets lost or has been stolen is an identity that appears, is modified, or disappears.

Bogomir Doringer

Illegal Chair, 2006

Mixed-media installation, dimensions variable.
Right: Installation view, Mobile Studios, Belgrade, Serbia.

While working at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Bogomir Doringer took the opportunity to reclaim Acconci Studio designed chairs from a dumpster following a retrospective exhibition of Vito Acconci's work. Bogomir exhibited the chairs and invited visitors to have their photograph taken in an "illegal" chair and to vote on the legality of the artwork.

How did this project come about?

When I moved to Holland from Yugoslavia (now Serbia) I came to be an art student. But my main "occupation" was that of being an immigrant. I was reminded of this status all the time, by people questioning my background and what it meant to be a young Serbian, and through the differences between the media images and the reality I had experienced.

Work for me was limited. Actually at the beginning I could only find jobs on the black market since I am not an EU citizen, and my first year was quite hard. Inspiring but hard. The first job that was comfortable and more relevant to my studies was a part-time job working at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Working at the museum was legal for me, but the Dutch agency did not want to bother with the paperwork so they asked me to give up the job. On that day, with very mixed feelings I went to the window of the museum. In my head I was thinking of issues of private/public, which I was studying at the Academy. My view from the Museum was of containers in which Acconci's chairs were being placed for further destruction. Ideas of "revenge" were spinning in my mind and the project came to me as the ideal solution.

Would you describe this work as political?

Media manipulation is something that was always an interest for me. I realize that the media image of Serbia in the 90s is actually what Serbia started becoming in the last few years. People act as they hear and see. They imitate. In the USA there is a culture of imitation of TV characters, pop stars, porn stars, etc. When I was recently in New York I was reaching, through reflex, for the remote control in my pocket to turn the people off or skip the channel.

There are many reasons for the specific relationship between Holland and Serbia. But significant amongst these is that The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is located in The Hague. So, on the day when *Illegal Chair* came to Serbia, Holland was delivering Milosevic's body. Just a few days before I was gluing wanted posters all over Belgrade, Holland was spreading wanted posters for the war criminals. In my project, I used tricks that the media also used. *Illegal Chair* is in a small and experimental way showing how easy it is to direct the crowd. *Illegal Chair* is telling a love story of Holland and Serbia and marking the importance of image and life values: of anti-hero and hero.

Mark Jeffrey

Mergers and Aquisitions, 2008

Mixed media, dimensions variable.

Right: Vitrine containing strand of carpet from the Jungle Room at Graceland.

Mergers and Aquisitions comprises a series of fragments taken from artworks and known cultural sites such as Elvis Presley's Graceland. The work may be read as homage, while also representing the erosion of the original objects and environments.

Atopia Projects: How did *Mergers and Acquisitions* begin?

Mark Jeffrey: My first "acquisition" was a small piece of green shag carpet from the Jungle Room at Graceland: my hand slipped off a hand rail while ascending a staircase from the Billiards Room to the Jungle Room, and fell upon a frayed section of carpet … a "loose thread" was found … a quick tug … and so it began.

How do you consider these artifacts in relation to the act of theft (for instance, are you interested in them being viewed as evidence of performances, as relics, or prompts of another kind for the viewer)?

Initially it was not theorized in any way. When the individual items were "acquired" there was no intention for them to be art. It was simply an act of possession by acquisition. An act of collecting things of significance … any source, any genre. Some of them were actually acquired and given to me by others who knew of my collection. Many items have sat in a shoebox for 15 years

What is the relationship between the items?

Before my involvement, the fragments were part of greater systems that imbued them with meaning. The systems were greater than the sum of their material parts, which were transformed from simple materials or supplies by people like Patterson Ewen or Charles Long and transformed into "art," or walked on by Elvis Presley. They had relevance because someone told us they did, or we believed in the importance of the people who assembled them.

By acquiring them, I have deconstructed them back to material parts which have little or no importance … they have reverted back to simple materials, relics, a by-product of my interaction with someone else's thing. It is simply an act of re-presenting the materials along with references to the original context.

The "merger" is what ultimately makes it art … all the components, both the deconstructed materials and my presentation of them, combine to form a new entity. The individual items are protected in clear acrylic cylinders and placed on decorative aluminum display shelves. The shelf functions to isolate and present the items for interpretation.

Are the items authentic? Only I truly know (they are), but why should people believe me? Just because I tell you they have relevance? Do they? Must you trust me? Why should anyone believe a "thief"?

BIOGRAPHIES

A-1 53167 (aka Aníbal López) was born in Guatemala City, Guatemala, where he still lives and works. He has exhibited at Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna, Austria, 2003), Museo Rufino Tamayo (Oaxaca, Mexico, 1997), and Fondazione Olivetti (Rome, Italy, 2003). A-1 53167 has also participated in a number of biennials, such as *Vii Bienal De La Habana* (Havana, Cuba, 2000); *Prague Biennale* (Prague, Czech Republic, 2003); and *49 Biennale di Venezia* (Venice, Italy, 2001), where he was awarded one of the Special Prizes for young artists.

Miguel Calderón was born in 1971, and lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico. He is represented by Kurimanzutto, Mexico City, Mexico and has had numerous group and solo exhibitions including: *In the Air: Projections of Mexico,* Guggenheim Museum (New York, USA, 2005); *Prometer no empobrece: arte contemporáneo mexicano*, Reina Sofía National Art Museum (Madrid, Spain); the *Yokohama Triennale* (Yokohama, Japan, 2005); the *Sharjah Biennale* (Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 2005); and *Bienal de São Paulo* (São Paulo, Brazil, 2004). In 1994, he and Yoshua Okón co-founded La Panadería, an independent gallery space in Mexico City, Mexico.

Kelly Baum is the Locks Curatorial Fellow for Contemporary Art at the Princeton University Art Museum. She received her PhD in art history from the University of Delaware in 2005. Baum has curated numerous exhibitions on contemporary art, including *The Sirens' Song*, *Transactions*, *Carol Bove: Setting for A. Pomodoro*, and *Jedediah Caesar: City of Industry*. "The Sex of the Situationist International," a chapter from her dissertation on the SI, appears in the fall 2008 issue of *October*.

Rosemary J. Coombe is a Tier One Canada Research Chair in Law, Communication and Cultural Studies at York University in Toronto, where she teaches in the Joint Graduate Programme in Communication & Culture, and is cross-appointed to the Osgoode Hall Faculty of Law Graduate Programme, and the Graduate Programme in Social and Political Thought. She holds a JSD from Stanford University with a Minor in Anthropology and publishes widely in anthropology and political and legal theory. Her work addresses the cultural, political, and social implications of intellectual property laws. Her book, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) is a legal ethnography of the ways in which intellectual property law shapes cultural politics in consumer societies.

Bogomir Doringer was born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1983, and currently lives and works in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. In his early teenage years he started working in fashion and experimenting with design, photography, video, and other art forms. After a few exhibitions and studying sociology at the University of Belgrade he moved to Amsterdam and started at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy. He graduated in 2008 from the Voorheen Audiovisueel Department.

Jeff Ferrell is Professor of Sociology at Texas Christian University and Visiting Professor of Criminology at the University of Kent, England. He is the founding and current editor of the New York University Press book series *Alternative Criminology*, and one of the founding and current editors of the journal *Crime, Media, Culture*. His books include *Crimes of Style* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), *Tearing Down the Streets* (New York: St Martins/Palgrave, 2001), *Empire of Scrounge* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), and with Keith Hayward and Jock Young, *Cultural Criminology: An Invitation* (London: Sage, 2008).

Tom Friedman was born in St. Louis, USA in 1965 and received his BFA at Washington University, St. Louis and his MFA at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has exhibited extensively in major museums throughout the world. His most recent exhibitions include *Tom Friedman*, South London Gallery (London, UK, 2004); Fondazione Prada (Milan, Itlay, 2002); *Tom Friedman*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (Chicago, USA, 2000), which traveled to Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco, USA, 2000), Aspen Art Museum, (Aspen, USA, 2001), and the New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York, USA, 2001). In October 2006, Friedman exhibited at Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills, his first solo exhibition in Los Angeles since 1997.

Kenneth Goldsmith lives and works in New York. An American poet, Goldsmith is the founding editor of UbuWeb, teaches Poetics and Poetic Practice at the University of Pennsylvania, and is Senior Editor of *PENNsound*. He hosts a weekly radio show at WFMU and has published ten books of poetry, notably *Fidget* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 2000), *Soliloquy* (New York: Granary Books, 2001), *Day* (Great Barrington: The Figures, 2003), and Goldsmith's American trilogy, *The Weather* (Los Angeles: Make Now Press, 2005), *Traffic* (Los Angeles: Make Now Press, 2007) and *Sports*, (Los Angeles: Make Now Press, 2008). He is editor of *I'll be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004).

Dan Griffiths has exhibited widely, including: The Whitechapel Gallery (London, UK, 2004), The ICA (London, UK, 2005), Transmission Gallery (Glasgow, UK, 2002), Collective Gallery (Edinburgh, UK, 2003), and Outpost Gallery (Norwich, UK, 2006). He gained a MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art, London in 2003.

Mark Jeffrey was born in 1968 in Chatham, Canada, and currently lives and works in Toronto, Canada. Jeffrey received a BFA from University of Windsor, and an MFA from Indiana State University. Jeffrey has exhibited at venues including Pekao Gallery (Toronto, Canada), Thames Art Gallery (Chatham, Canada), and Art Gallery of Mississauga (Mississauga, Canada).

Janice Kerbel was born in 1964 in Don Mills, Canada, and now lives and works in London, UK. She has had solo exhibitions at venues including Moderna Museet (Stockholm, Sweden, 2006), Arnolfini (Bristol, UK, 2000), and Artspeak (Vancouver, Canada, 2001). Her work has been included in exhibitions such as *Montreal Biennial* (Montreal, Canada, 2007); *Love Letter*, Herald St (London, UK, 2006); and *The Impossible Landscape*, University Gallery, University of Massachusetts in Amherst (Amherst, USA, 2006).

Micah Lexier was born in Winnipeg, Canada in 1960 and presently lives in Toronto, Canada. He has participated in numerous international group exhibitions including *The Time of Our Lives*, New Museum (New York, USA, 1999); *Speed*, Whitechapel Art Gallery (London, UK, 1998); and *Dumb*, Centre for Contemporary Photography (Melbourne, Australia, 1998). Lexier's work is in numerous public collections including The British Museum (London, UK), The Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney, Australia), The Jewish Museum (New York, USA), The National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa, Canada), and The Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto, Canada). Lexier has curated a number of exhibitions, is the co-editor of the anthology *Sound By Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropole/Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990), and has produced over a dozen public commissions. He is represented by Gitte Weise Galerie (Berlin, Germany), TrepanierBaer (Calgary, Canada), and Birch Libralato (Toronto, Canada).

Ann Messner was born in 1952 in New York, USA, and currently lives and works in New York. Messner received a BFA in Fine Art from Pratt Institute, and has been awarded various fellowships and awards including: Senior Fellow of the Council of the Humanities at Princeton University (2001–2002), Anonymous Was A Woman Award (1998), John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Award (1996), Henry Moore International Fellowship (1995), and a National Endowment for the Arts award (1987). She currently teaches at Pratt Institute, New York and has taught at other institutions in the USA including: MIT, Princeton University, Hunter College, Bennington College, and Maryland Institute of Art.

David M. Meurer is a new media interface developer and producer. He earned an MA in English from York University and is currently a PhD candidate in the Joint Graduate Programme in Communication & Culture at York and Ryerson Universities. His research analyses new media and narrative from the perspectives of authorship, intellectual property, and cultural production models. He is also a researcher with Artmob, an initiative to build online archives of Canadian art and foreground the issues raised for Canadian copyright and intellectual property laws.

Ivan Moudov was born in 1975 in Sofia, Bulgraria, where he currently lives and works. In 2002 he received an MA from The National Academy of Arts, Sofia. He has presented recent solo exhibitions at The Goethe-Institute Sofia (Sofia, Bulgaria, 2006), Jet (Berlin, Germany, 2006), and Institute of Contemporary Art (Sofia, Bulgaria, 2005). He has also exhibited in the *Moscow Biennale* (Moscow, Russia, 2005), *Manifesta 4* (Frankfurt, Germany, 2003), and *Superformances*, Musee d'art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg (Strasbourg, France, 2003).

Luis o Miguel (Luis Gárciga Romay, b. 1971 in Havana, Cuba; Miguel Moya, b. 1974 in Havana Cuba) work collaboratively in Cuba. They have participated in numerous international exhibitions including: B*ueno, bonito y barato*, Universidad de La Habana (Havana, Cuba, 2007), for which they won the Curatorial Award; *Close Up*, Pasagüero (Mexico City, Mexico, 2007); *Estrecho dudoso*, organized by TEOR/éTica (San José, Costa Rica, 2006); *Asalto al cielo*, *Loop Festival* (Barcelona, Spain, 2006); *IV Salón de Arte Cubano Contemporáneo*, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales (Havana, Cuba, 2005); *Sin embargo*, l'école supérieure d'art de Grenoble (Grenoble, France, 2004); *8 va Bienal de La Habana*, Consejo Nacional de La Cultura (Havana, Cuba, 2003); and *III Salón de Arte Cubano Contemporáneo*, Fototeca de Cuba (Havana, Cuba, 2001). Their work has been featured in: *Magazine Tablas* No.2 de 2003, Revista del Consejo Nacional de las Artes Escénicas, Cuba; *Revista La Gaceta de Cuba* No.4 de 2005; and *Parachute* No. 125. 2007.

Scott Myles was born in 1975 in Dundee, UK. Myles is currently based in Glasgow and is represented by The Modern Institute (Glasgow, UK), Galleria Sonia Rosso (Turin, Italy), The Breeder (Athens, Greece); and Jack Hanley Gallery (San Francisco, USA). He attended Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee and has since exhibited widely in Europe and the USA. Recent solo exhibitions include *Open Space*, *Art Cologne* (Cologne, Germany, 2007); *Grey Matter*, Galleria Sonia Rosso (Turin, Italy, 2006); Kunsthalle Zurich (Zurich, Switzerland, 2005); and *HUO, I want to know everything*, The Modern Institute (Glasgow, UK, 2004). In 2006 he exhibited within the group exhibition, *The Tate Triennial*, Tate Britain (London, UK). A monograph was published in 2007 by JRP Ringier, in conjunction with the Kunsthalle Zurich.

Yoshua Okón was born in 1970, and now lives and works in Los Angeles, USA and Mexico City, Mexico. His work has been shown widely, including at P.S.1 (New York, USA, 2005), the New Museum (New York, USA, 2004), and the *Istanbul Biennial* (Istanbul, Turkey, 2003). He is represented by Galeria Enrique Guerrero (Mexico City, Mexico); Galleria Francesca Kaufmann (Milan, Italy); and by The Project (New York, USA). In 1994, he and Miguel Calderón co-founded La Panadería, an independent gallery space in Mexico City, Mexico.

Dennis Oppenheim was born in Electric City, Washington, USA in 1938. He is now based in New York. He received his MFA from Stanford University, California in 1965. He has had major exhibitions throughout the world including: Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1974), Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto, Canada, 1978), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, USA, 1984), Musee D'Art Moderne de la Communaute Urbaine de Lille (Lille, France, 1994), Museo de Arte Alvar (Mexico City, Mexico, 1998), and the Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin, Ireland, 2001).

Joel Ross was born in Port Arthur, Texas in 1966. He was discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps in 1984. He received his BFA from Tufts University in 1990 and his MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1992. Recent solo exhibitions include *Tell Me Something I Don't Know*, Raw + Co. (Cleveland, USA, 2007) and *It's a Free Country*, Rare Gallery (New York, USA, 2006). His work was recently included in *(un)Building*, Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts (Boston, USA, 2007). Ross is represented by Monique Meloche Gallery (Chicago, USA), and currently teaches at the University of Illinois.

Jon Routson lives and works in Baltimore, USA. He gained his MFA from the University of Maryland in 2003. Routson is represented by Team Gallery (New York, USA) where he has had a number of solo exhibitions. He has also exhibited at MOCA DC (Washington, USA, 2002), White Columns (NYC, USA, 2003), and Galerie Lisa Ruyter (Vienna, Austria, 2004).

Savage (aka Andrew Savage) lives and works in Bristol, England. He received his MA Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, London. His 2005 exhibition at The Ikon Gallery (Birmingham, UK), *This Is Yours Now* presented a variety of interventions and projects related to the economics of exchange.

Rhys Southan was born in 1979 and grew up in the suburbs of Dallas, Texas and currently lives in New York. He studied film at The University of Texas at Austin. In 2001 he interned at *Reason* Magazine in LA and shot *Sean Connery Golf Project*. In 2002, Southan dropped out of college to focus on his musical, *Who is Jim Holt?* In 2003, he wrote the short *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle*, filmed by Michael Vaingauz, which won the Audience Award at the *D.C. Independent Film Festival* in 2005.

Diana Stigter is the owner of Galerie Diana Stigter in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Previously, she was a co-owner (with Annet Gelink) of Bloom Gallery, Amsterdam.

The Art Guys (Michael Galbreth, born 1956 in Philadelphia, USA; and Jack Massing, born 1960 in Buffalo, USA) are artists whose work is a mediumistic exercise in psychic expansiveness taking form through a multiplicity of voices. All of their works, artistic or theoretical, are "either" demonstrations of the irreducibility of the *other*, or else, they are examples of how sensible *worlds* are constructed based on distortion. This re-foundation of the psyche, made with infinitely codified fragments and assimilated images, constitutes a political critique of all the theories elucidated in the West that lead to the death of the subject, while at the same "time" it reaffirms the validity of cultures where memory *is* essential. Their archeological inventories point out how a symbolic creature dwells in the "other's" terrain as it builds its own emblematic world, its own monad.

Ulay was born in 1943 in Solingen, Germany, and now lives and works in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. His artistic background incorporated performance, photography, video, and film. From 1976 to 1988 he collaborated exclusively with Marina Abramovic on a significant body of performance works. *There is a Criminal Touch to Art* was the final solo work he made before commencing this partnership. From 1998 to 2004 he was a Professor for New Media at the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe, Germany. His work has been shown at venues such as: *Biennale di Venezia* (Venice, Italy, 1976 & 1984), Brooklyn Museum (New York, USA, 1978), *Bienal de São Paulo* (São Paulo, Brazil, 1981), The Tate Gallery (London, UK, 1982 & 1987), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, The Netherlands, on various occasions since 1977), *documenta 6* and *documenta 7* (Kassel, Germany, 1977 & 1982).

Timm Ulrichs was born in 1940 in Berlin, Germany. He studied architecture at the Technische Hochschule, Hanover, Germany 1959–66. In 1961 he founded the Werbezentrale für Totalkunst (Centre for the Promotion of Total Art). Since 1972 he has been a professor at the Kunstakademie Münster.

Frazer Ward was educated at the University of Sydney and Cornell University. He has written extensively about contemporary art and the history of the art of the 1960s and 1970s. His work has appeared in journals and magazines including *Art Journal*, *Art+Text*, *Documents*, *Frieze*, and *October*, as well as in various anthologies. He teaches the history of contemporary art and architecture at Smith College.

Allison Wiese was born in 1969 in Brooklyn, USA, and lives & works in San Diego. Wiese is an interdisciplinary artist who makes sculptures, installations, sound works, and architectural interventions. Wiese's work has been exhibited throughout the USA. She recently developed a site-specific solar audio work for the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (San Diego, USA), and her projects have also been presented by Machine Project (Los Angeles, USA, 2006), DiverseWorks (Houston, USA, 2005), Socrates Sculpture Park (Long Island City, USA, 2005) and apexart (New York, USA, 2006). She is a 2006 Creative Capital Grantee and was a Core Fellow at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston from 2001 to 2003.

Atopia Project #5.66
Lifting: Theft in Art

Editors: Gavin Morrison & Fraser Stables
Project developed in collaboration with: Patricia Hernadez
Contributing Editors: Betsy Coulter, Monika Vykoukal
Interview Assistant: Mayte Espinosa Saldivar
Production Assistants: Makana Hirose, Tiffany Wolf
Translators: Alejandra Rodriguez-Remedi, Johann Wolfgang Unger
Design: Fraser Stables (Atopia Projects)
Printing: Regal Press, Hong Kong

Special thanks to: Lindsay Gordon (Peacock Visual Arts), Dr. Ronald Watson (Fort Worth Contemporary Arts), Jessica Nicoll (Smith College Museum of Art), Nina Eggens (Peacock Visual Arts), Angela Lennon (Peacock Visual Arts), Monika Vykoukal (Peacock Visual Arts), Linda Muehlig (Smith College Museum of Art), Otto Berchem, Mai Blount, Julio Castro, Miriam Katzeff (Team Gallery, New York), Dana Leibsohn, Amy Plumb, Paul Ramirez Jonas, Antoinette de Stigter (Art Affairs, Amsterdam).

Atopia Projects
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Printed in an edition of 1000
2008

Published by
Atopia Projects
Peacock Visual Arts (Aberdeen, UK)
Fort Worth Contemporary Arts (Fort Worth, USA)
Smith College Museum of Art (Northampton, USA)

ISBN 978-0-9546156-4-2
ISBN 978-0-9555524-5-8
ISBN 978-0-9801617-1-7
ISBN 978-0-8739106-0-5