de Appel Amsterdam

MERCURY IN RETROGRADE


CORNELISSEN
POSTE RESTANTE
MACAPÁ
AMAPÁ

Mercury in Retrograde

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History Trouble

Mercury In Retrograde follows two paths which would appear to be going in different directions. The first path is a well-traveled one, which has been taken by those who hope to save histories, both large and small, from oblivion. Consider Michael Blum's careful excavation of the double life hidden within the history of de Appel's stately building: a former Jewish bank whose trusted name was used by the Nazis for a counterfeit branch which robbed Dutch Jews of their possessions under the guise of safeguarding them. The second path is somewhat less familiar, although its means of construction — Internet, mobile phones, digital cameras — have become an indispensable part of our lives. Over the last decade, these media technologies have created a reality that was once unimaginable: a surplus of history. Instead of a dearth of voices and tales to be rescued from the past, there are endless means of recording stories, space to store them, and means to share them with others. Instead of excavating a few surviving fragments, one chooses from a cornucopia of facts and ways of putting them together. Choosing from overabundant sources and resources calls for a conscious staging, if not a fictional orchestration of events. Compare Blum's archeology with David Maljkovic's science-fiction films about a group of Croatians making a pilgrimage to a Tito-era monument in 2045 and 2063. The story is as phony as the Nazi's Jewish bank branch, minus the nefarious ends and even the subterfuge. Indeed, Maljkovic indulges in an overtly fictional and spectacular portrayal of the past, not to lie, betray, or mislead, but to call attention to a disappearing era by making the period even more antiquated. Where Blum saves the past by uncovering a deception, Maljkovic willfully deceives to shed another light on history from the perspective of its future obsolescence. Both artists, taking divergent paths to the past, end up at the undeniable impact of the fictional.

Traveling down both paths at a fork in the road is a tricky balancing act. Managing the acrobatic logistics — along with the pleasures and perils of the trip — seems to require the winged feet of Mercury himself, aka Hermes. These two paths, while evoking the godly feats of ancient history, can be traced back to the expired century. The first path towards saving history became more urgent in the destructive wake of totalitarian regimes. While forging their own questionably heroic histories, the totalitarian states obliterated peoples along with their pasts, from the victims of the gulag to those murdered in the Nazi concentration camps. The year 1947 — which saw the publication of both Anne Frank's diary and Primo Levi's account of surviving in Auschwitz — remains exceptional: A single voice (in Frank's case, a premature ghost) came to bear witness for the silenced millions while challenging the ideal of a master narrative about a collective past in a nation-state, whether totalitarian or even democratic. In the 1960s, marginalized groups — under the banners of feminism, postcolonialism, civil rights, gay and lesbian rights, student rights — used the particular voice to challenge the would-be universal subject of History: white, male, bourgeois, Euro-American. This democratization opened up inexhaustible possibilities for salvaging the past, beyond the urgent claims of particular political movements. Take the pioneering work of the microhistorian Carlo Ginzburg *Il formaggio e i vermi* (1976), which reconstructs the cosmos of the Renaissance from nothing more than a miller's humble (and fatal) testimony to the Inquisition. As the "cheese" and the "worms" in his title suggest, no source was too negligible, no perspective too narrow, no witness too trivial. Under these conditions, history was endlessly expandable, holding always yet another story, another trace, to be saved from oblivion.

The second path, which might be called staging a surplus of history, owes something to the media technologies mentioned above, from the Internet to digital cameras. While offering boundless storage space and broader distribution opportunities, these media — liberated from place through their portability — served to circulate the wave

of histories unleashed by the end of the Cold War while abetting movements proper to globalization. It's hard to imagine Blum and Maljkovic exhibiting works together before 1989, despite the relative proximity of their respective home cities of Vienna and Zagreb. Not only political but also geographical distances that were once decisively restrictive have become secondary — a shift evidenced in the many origins of the exhibition's artists and curators, along with their moving destinations. While embracing mobility, the European Community is erecting more formidable borders than the East Bloc, with the Iron Curtain melting into the cemetery of the Mediterranean. But the sheer circulation of people, whether legal or illegal, has put every origin on the move while producing new tales of travel to be recorded and circulated. The desire to stage and perform these moving histories — with critique —might be traced back to yet another pioneering work: Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), which describes the performative fundament of gender distinctions along with their subversion. As sexual identity is an effect of gender, the past can be understood as an effect of historical discourses — from archiving to writing — although past events take place prior to their historical framing. Far from neutral, this frame is part and parcel, if not constitutive, of our perception of the past. Playing consciously with this frame is no longer deceptive but has the capacity to question historical norms that we have failed to recognize as performances, such as the division between the East and the West, the official history of a dictatorship, or the invisibility of a country's culture. In other words, the categories of history can be unsettled through performance, just like gender distinctions and sexual identities. Performing history is not about claiming authentic identities, nor distinguishing between truth and falsehood, but rather about contesting visibilities.

These two paths of history — a lack conscientiously saved, a surplus consciously staged — imply two different approaches to production and to reception. When one follows the first path of saving, then the found fragment from the past — however minuscule — defines the artwork and can give rise to an entire narrative, far more com-

plex than the fragment itself. The democratization of history gives rise to the democratization of the object and subject; again, the miller's worms and cheese can unlock the Renaissance as easily as Brunelleschi's Duomo or Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes. The navigational tools used by the Dutch explorers stranded on the arctic island Nova Zembla can evoke the age of exploration from the 16th century onwards. Moreover, the found fragment possesses an undeniable authority, despite its diminutive size and status, which makes any further intervention superfluous; the smaller the fragment, it would seem, the greater its power to evoke what has been lost, to confirm the gravity of the losses incurred around it. For example, there was the survivor Gerrit de Veer who lived to write his tale of being stranded on Nova Zembla, and the antique dealers from the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat explained the value of artifacts in Mariana Castillo Deball's audio guide. Who would doubt them? Once found, the fragment alone suffices to tell the tale; with its fragility and scarcity, the surviving fragment always decides how it will be revealed, namely, in a way that prevents any manipulation and any further deterioration. Anyone can become a witness to the original events simply by looking at the fragment, by listening to its pieces, by filling its gaps with the memory of a bygone era. By contrast, the second path of staging marks a shift from the found fragment to the staged performance, from the evoked narrative to one that can be created from a vast collection, as a female identity can be created by making the right selections from a wardrobe. Since there is a surplus of artifacts, footage, and material, one must choose what will be shown, how it will be put together, and the ways it will reach others and be seen by them. The surplus invites not only such choices but also manipulation, which is no longer disingenuous but simply necessary — especially in order to challenge the dominant forms of visibility circulated by the mass media. Not fully displayed but selectively performed, the surplus always raises the possibility that other stories have gone missing. The surplus can be broken down into several parts; unlike fragments, these parts do not give rise to an entire and more complete narrative but rather question the possibility of telling any tale. After Omer Fast's edits, the

character interpreters from Colonial Williamsburg time travel from the 18th century to the 20th while Khalil Rabah tulips points to a Palestinian museum of natural history that simply does not exist — but always could. Staged and performed, the surplus incites viewers to reimagine the present, as the fragment allows them to reconstruct the past. Ultimately, the surplus transforms the viewer from a witness into a potential creator, who imagines, not the missing past, but new ways of putting the same material together for the future, whether as a clip or as an email to a friend.

Mariana Castillo Deball

It rises or falls depending on whether you're coming or going. If you are leaving, it's uphill; but as you arrive it's downhill

A Sound Piece

For *Mercury in Retrograde,* Mariana Castillo Deball created a sound piece dealing with the shops lining Amsterdam's 'antique row' in Nieuwe Spiegelstraat near de Appel. A series of interviews with antique dealers develops into a journey throughout different attitudes towards history and its artifacts. The antique dealer is a peculiar character who can legitimate what is valuable, what should be kept, and how an object can become a status symbol. This narrative is mixed with an important object in Mexican archaeology: the colossal stone statue to Tlaloc, a rain divinity, which lay for centuries in a dry streambed in the village of Coatlinchan, 30 miles from Mexico City. On April 16, 1964, the statue was removed and transported on the back of a giant purpose-built trailer to its present location, the entrance to the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.

It rises or falls depending on
whether you're coming or going.
If you are leaving, it's uphill;
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It is raining in Mexico City. Tlaloc, the rain divinity is entering the capital. The storm is not comparable with the ones of the rainy season. This shower is a punishment from Tlaloc on the people who dared to move him from his original place.

Tlaloc, the gigantic monolith weighing 167 tons, stayed lying on his back for fifteen centuries in a dry streambed in the village of Coatlinchan, 30 miles from Mexico City. The sculpture, built between the 4th and 6th centuries A.D. — the biggest monolith in America — has always attracted the attention of curious people, tourists and foreign researchers. It was at the beginning of the 19th century that archaeologists defined him as Tlaloc, the god of rain.

"Can you send me that one in a fax, please? It's the same number as this… yes, ok… It's very difficult to get new pieces, but when you are in Amsterdam, come and visit my shop (…) So, there is a lot of talking about ancient cultures, but people are not thinking very well; they think that I first go to Egypt, to dig, to do the stuff, and then I go to Mexico with my shovel, and then I go to Peru, you know. And then you hear the stories from the museums, that all is illegal. They say that, but I want to know the real story about those things, because I don't know that and I am in the business. Something happens always, but it's not a lot; maybe here and there something is happening, but not as people believe. Because where is it, where is the stuff? I don't see it (…) That's not stealing, we were called amateur archaeologists, and we were digging, and we had a lot of fun with it—maybe that's why I became an antique dealer—but not for the money, because it was a lot of work, and we never found treasures, just pottery and this and that. And a lot of the things I found are now in the museums, go to the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen at the Archaeological department, half of the things you will see there, come from my hands."

On Thursday April 16, 1964, it was moved to the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. In exchange for allowing the statue to be taken, the local authority negotiated funding for a new school, a health center, a local museum, and a replica of the divinity. Four decades later, it's clear that almost all of those promises remain unfulfilled.

"The real feeling for art is, art can be very much on the street (…) not on the street, not on the street, if you are in the business for many years you know where to go, I buy from private people, at auctions, from colleagues (…) mainly through auctions, collections or people inheriting, and who have themselves nothing; occasionally through Africa, but there is not much left, already when I started you could find just third or fourth quality objects (…) There are always families who want to sell objects they have at home, and we see if they have any valuable items, and then we buy them and restore them."

There were several attempts by previous governments to move the monolith, but it was at the end of 1963 that the machinery started to arrive. This time the government came for the stone. After a lot of work, the sculpture was lifted, ready for the move.

At that point inhabitants of Coatlinchan resisted and tried three times to stop it being moved. They broke the metal structure holding the enormous

monolith so it fell back into its original place. They stopped the trailer and hit the drivers, but it was no good. They also damaged the wheels of the platform; the children lay down in the middle of the road to stop the vehicles.

The day after, the army took the town, staying until the end of the operation.

"My clients are getting old and they stopped buying, and young people are not interested, they buy fake furniture which looks nice, and they have a big apartment where they hang huge paintings from the wall, or prints or whatever with no value, but it looks nice; and they like to travel — that's how young people spend their money — they travel to faraway horrible countries (…) I know eight countries: Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Cameroon, Gabon (…) I travel not that much, the dealers send me the pictures and I say 'bring it to me', and if I don't like it I ask them to take it back, so the traveling is not that important as it was before. You can actually buy items through the Internet; if you buy a carcass it is possible, but if you want to buy a cupboard it's very hard because you need to see it, you need to stand in front of it. They make very nice, beautiful pictures, but reality is not always so beautiful."

When the resistance continued, the government agreed after a couple of days to build a school and a health center to pacify the locals.

The headlines read "Tlaloc raising a thunderstorm."

The testimony of one of the inhabitants reads, "It is possible that through the veins of many of us, there is still blood running from our ancestors, people who made the sculpture. I understand the importance of archaeology and all that, but Tlaloc belongs to us."

"The real interest, that's gone: 20, 30 years ago you had sons of doctors — for example — and the father collected Rotterdam silver, so they collected it as well, and they knew everything about it; but that's a little bit gone, now they want to have one piece, one decorative piece, and they don't really — they don't recognize it anyway because that takes a lot of time — but they can't imagine that the piece comes from the 18th century for example, and that it was on the Louis XVI or Louis XV period, and that it was used for something quite different than now. So that's gone, the history idea. But it can be helped! Because they don't even learn when Napoleon lived (…) I think life is influenced by so many different things that we need to force ourselves to stand still and look at things carefully. Everything seems to be fading out. I was already in my thirties when I recognized or understood what history is, so I am not sure if young people understand how short history is. Now we think that 2000 years is very much, but if you count, 2000 years is nothing but 30 times your father and his father and his father and his father. So if you speak about the 17th century, it's just eight grandfathers before you! History still gets burned every second (…) They don't learn anything at school in Holland anyway — they don't know anything about history — if you mention famous Dutch people from the 17th century they say "Who's that? Never heard from him." So they are not interested in the items either. Sometimes when they see it they say, "Oh, how is it possible that you can still buy these things, from the 17th century?" They don't realize what's going on in the world; they want just music and drugs.

At 6:00 am on April the 16th, 1964, the journey of the god began. Operation Tlaloc lasted close to 24 hours.

Under the custody of 100 soldiers led by an army of anthropologists, engineers and mechanics, the transportation of the gigantic monolith began. The experts responsible for moving the 167 tons sculpture lifted it on top of a powerful transporter with 72 wheels, with tires especially designed to bear the tremendous weight of this colossal mass.

Two powerful engineers and a bulldozer were needed to move the statue.

"The view has changed, many of the old collectors traveled for a special reason to Africa: as social workers, in the army, with the church, or whatever; but they had a personal relationship with Africa, and started like that to collect.

So there is no way to build up a relationship, I always say 'Good morning, sir', and the next time they come I say 'Good morning, sir.'

— What's your name?

— My name is Nick

— My name is Hank

…and then they go again. The relationship with my clients I always keep distance, the moment I get friendly with them, I am the one who is in the bad position, because then I need to give them everything very cheap. At an auction, they say, 'I want that, so don't beat on it', but then I am their slave and I don't want that. When I am at an auction and there is something I like and you like it too, I don't know you, at that auction I don't know you. But they get angry, 'I told you, I wanted it!' and I answer back 'I wanted it also.'

— How much is it?

— 300 euro

— Can you give me a better price?

— 350 euro.

And they look at me with a strange gaze, and I say 'why it should be always better for you, why it can't be better for me?' Then they smile and they are funny, and usually they buy it.

So, that's the relationship I have with my clients."

The inhabitants of Coatlinchan stood in the cold morning air and said farewell in silence to the god that had stayed with them for centuries.

There were no incidents, but a definite air of melancholy amongst the inhabitants of the region.

"If they can feed their family for one month, selling a piece of wood that they have somewhere in the corner, they will sell it, because they just believe half in the things anymore. They are not stupid, if 10 people want to buy something like this, they will make you things like this. This means the things that Europe has considered as beautiful or strong. It is maybe not how they perceived it, but Europe wants it, so let's make it.

There is a borderline —minimum 50 years— because already in the 1950's, everything started to become 'modern', that means that Europe had more influence.

In the cities already before, but in the villages it started around that time. So everything after the 50's, I call it a 'question mark'. Is it used, is it not used? Is it authentic?"

The journey along the 6 km road that had been built especially for the deity was a slow one.

It was night when Tlaloc arrived in Mexico City, yet 25,000 people awaited him in the main Zócalo square. The city was prepared as if for a fiesta; lights were on everywhere, traffic was stopped, and the streets were packed. Ironically, the

arrival of the rain god was greeted by the heaviest storm ever recorded for this ordinarily dry season.

Since the monolith is left, it has stopped raining in Coatlinchan; the clouds become heavy and grey, but that's all. On the contrary, in the capital the streets are often flooded.

"In education, they should tell people, to listen much more to their own taste, to be convinced about their own way of living, and not just follow what the rest is doing (…) Anything I like is my specialty, I am interested in the things I like, and the things I don't like, don't care for them (…) It is always when you really have achieved something, when you have done something, it gives you a good feeling, of self respect: I am someone, I can do something, but people, they feel bad, they feel they miss something, they don't know what, they are not capable to do anything, and they lose themselves in… shit, too much.

I think it is … it is generally a decline in behavior.

So, what you see is that people are always profilering*, (in Dutch), showing their profile. They are in a party, with a glass of wine and they say 'I have just been to the Van Gogh Museum, and I like it so much!' That's what they say, and when you come into their houses there is absolutely nothing! And that is what I hate so much (…) There is always a risk, you can't predict anything —it is also a luxury to buy things you like— so if the economy is bad, that's a risk too, but if things are going all right again? I can't look in the future; I can only do my best."*

There is a growing migration. Young men started to leave, one by one to "the other side". Nowadays, just women, children and old people remain in town. The locals affirm that there are people from "the outside" arriving. People who don't remember the times when everything was green and the landscape full of trees. People from "the outside," don't understand the importance of Tlaloc. Not only because it gave some money to the community, in the sense that plenty of tourists visited, but it also made them feel important, unique, with an identity.

"Officially, everything older than 50 years, that is brought to Europe after 1973, needs papers from the country where it comes from. But… who can say now that this has come in 1970 or in 1990? If somebody wants the shit, he will just put two names in between: collection this, collection that.

The law exists, but the law is not checked, not for us, not for them."

Stefan Rusu, Laura Schleussner

Navigating the Poetics of Failure

Navigation is the science of working out the position of a ship and charting a course for guiding the craft safely from one point to another. A navigator usually tries to find the shortest route between two points. The initial planning and the end results of navigation are plotted on flat surfaces called maps and charts. Until the twentieth century, the most sophisticated navigational tools and techniques available, dead reckoning using the magnetic compass, chronometer and sextant, were rather inaccurate. Many shipwrecks have occurred when the crew of the ship allowed the ship to collide with rocks, reefs, icebergs, or other ships. Accurate navigation is made more difficult by poor visibility in bad weather.

- Navigation Manual

Frozen Histories

In 1596 Willem Barents set out from the Netherlands with his crew on a third expedition to find a Northeast Passage to Asia. Various compasses, a sextant, an astrolabe, a navigation manual from 1580, and a 16th-century volume on China served as the cartographical and cultural guides to unexplored territory. Although a navigational achievement, Barents' final expedition to Nova Zembla, the third of its kind, was an utter failure in terms of its initial goals. No Northeast Passage to China was discovered, the ship ran aground on an iceberg, the crew was stranded for a winter on the ice, and Barents lost his life. In 1597 the remaining crew landed in Amsterdam, still dressed in bearskins, after rowing back part of the way in open boats.

The displacement of items from the Nova Zembla collection of the History Department of Rijksmuseum and their relocation in a contemporary art context through the Curatorial Training Program (CTP) exhibition project at de Appel was guided by the principle of re-contextualization: a process of cultural value exchange between two major cultural institutions. In this sense, the aim of including the Nova Zembla collection in a contemporary art context was to offer a new reading on the collection, in which a reexamination of the story served as a metaphor for questioning the linearity and authorship of complexly layered historical 'sites.' One of these is the former socialist landscape of Central and Southeastern Europe, which has been engaged in a process of renegotiating its historical heritage for over fifteen years. With the EU enlargement, this whole area has become more accessible to the western consumer. Opening to the East has been almost a random process, in which the West takes a quick look to see 'who' is ringing at its door, indifferently inspects 'the visitor' through the peephole, and then decides whether to engage or simply register the given identity as 'other.' One navigational path through the exhibition *Mercury in Retrograde* — through the works of Sven Johne, Dimitry Gutov, IRWIN, David Maljkovic, and Fernando Sanchez Castillo — represents a process of engagement in discussions of hidden histories that were long trapped in ice, due to a frozen political environment — societies where the politics, cultural, moral and ethical values were fixed. The moment when the ice breaks is the notorious 'zero point' in history, a starting point for renewal and revisionism. Here, the point of departure is Nova Zembla, a site where artifacts were trapped in the ice for over 300 years, and a Dutch historical narrative played out on the distant island, Novaya Zemlya, now on Russian territory. Only through the thawing of the Cold War and the effects of *glasnost* and *perestroika* were the Dutch able to successfully set foot once again on the site of Barents' winter camp, 400 years later, to search for material remnants of a distant past in a changed landscape.

"So (we) were sent (out) from (Burgomaste)rs of Am(ster)dam An(no) I (596) in order to sai(l) by the (N)orth to the countries of China/ so th(at) we after great trouble and no (small) danger are come round the West of Nov(a Zembla) intending yet also to sail (along) by the coast of Tarter(y) to the aforesaid countries / (and are fin)ally come on this plac(e) on the 26 August(t in the year) above men(tioned) where our (ship/after we had) so bravely exerted ourselves (at last) became fast in (the) ice/ And we have (moreover in) this emergency been compelled to build a h(ous)e (to) preserve our lives therein through the winter if possible from cold. Lived in the house from the — 12 — October anno — 1596 — all the whole winter through till — 13 (Jun)e of the following year — 97 —in great cold. Are on the same 13 Jun(e) when our ship still lay pinched all fast in (the ice) with our boat and yawl sa(iled) from here in order that we might come home again/ Our God will grant us safe voyage / and bring us with good health in our fatherland / Amen.

English translation of a note signed by Barents and Heemskerk and stuck into a powderhorn hidden inside the chimney of the Behouden Huis on Nova Zembla, June 13, 1596. Discovered in 1876 by Charles Gardiner.

***The Barents Relics; Report to The Dutch Minister of Marine J.K.J. de Jonge* (translated by Samuel Richard van Campen), London, 1877, p.43**

In considering an installation of 16th-century artifacts, the curatorial strategy of the team was driven by the premise that the initial displays of the Nova Zembla collection in the Netherlands were forged by the myth-making ideals and nation-building desires of a burgeoning national state. Recovered, or as Dutch archeologists might say, 'plundered,' in 1871 and 1876 respectively by Danish and English seafarers from the site of Barents' wintering on the ice, the artifacts were obtained by the Dutch and displayed as national trophies at the opening of the Rijksmuseum in 1885 in Amsterdam.**1** According to Lucian Boia, the Romanian writer and historian, "*the definition of what we could refer to as myth is the following: an imaginary construction (keeping in mind once more that it does not signify 'real' or 'unreal,' but can be ordered according to the rules and logic of the imaginary) designated to reveal universal and social phenomena—in accordance with fundamental values and with the aim of strengthening their cohesiveness. History's myths essentially are, indeed, a reuse of the past in the real sense of the above-mentioned sentence.*" **2**

The main concern of *Mercury in Retrograde* overall was to start a negotiation process and debate around current constructs of history within society. How artists decide to re-use the past in the face of persistent nationalism and a merging global community reveals the fault lines between these two historical forces. In this context, the growing neo-liberal environment in Eastern Europe has aggressively gained influence and followers who are in the process of establishing the towers of a new legacy. Nothing new in this respect, as the East merges into the whiteness of history repeating itself. Resistance can take the form of harvesting a long or recently forgotten past. The question is whether in moments of rupture or revision this past represents dangerous entrenchment in a 'retrograde' history or a guiding vision for the challenges of the future. Considered by the curatorial team as metaphors for finding a way between these poles of historical perspectives, the 16th-century navigation tools selected for exhibition were used to control the direction of the ship; some were even manufactured by Barents' technical crew to calculate their position and map new territories during their explorative journey. Heralded as 'Barents' Relics'in the first Dutch publication on the finds, the artifacts serve as a starting point for a route through numerous historical 'icebergs' that is guided by the agendas of artists' research methodologies.

Problems of Navigation

Within *Mercury in Retrograde*, problems of navigation are noticeable from the start. In the room with the Nova Zembla artifacts hangs a large icescape, apparently a work by a 19th-century history painter. However, *The Death of Barents* by the Russian realist painter Georgy Kitchigin was actually a commissioned by a Dutch-

1. Soon after the Dutch attempted an expedition to the Behouden Huis on Nova Zembla, which was not successful.

2. Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*. Translated by James Christian Brown. Budapest: Central European University Press, (2001) p. 56. Lucian Boia is Professor of History at the University of Bucharest. He is the author of *Great Historians of the Modern Age* (1991) and *La Fin du Monde: une Histoire sans Fin* (1989).

Russian Nova Zembla expedition team in the mid 1990s, kindly loaned for the exhibition. Unsuccessful in their search for the burial site of Barents, the expedition members sponsored this illustration of the moment of Barents' death on the ice, which commemorates a hero's 'final sacrifice' in a theatre of gestures and naturalistic drama. Interestingly, this scene is not included among the many illustrations of the expedition published in the early 17th-century. In a combined style of retro-romanticism and Russian realism, the work embodies multiple eras in an attempt to reinsert a missing image into the visual narration of events.

On another wall in the room, the series *Vinta*, by the young German artist Sven Johne, chronicles various micro-histories of human mistakes and failures associated with the Baltic island of Vinta. With black and white portraits of the individuals concerned and pithy but telling stories of their adventures, Vinta functions as a timeline of failed expeditions to an island so tiny it almost represents an abstract notion — a miniature utopia of personal ambition and hope that was poised on the border between East and West in the era of the Cold War. From Fritz Lang's failures surrounding *The Woman in the Moon* (1929), shot on Vinta, to the escaping East German doctor who mistook the uncharted GDR island for Denmark, the work speaks to the individual fates impacted by failed attempts and heroic ambitions gone awry.

Resistance on the Ice

While continuing the navigation of the exhibition through the constructed and mediated space of Dmitry Gutov's Lifshitz Institute, it becomes apparent that not only is his work an efficient tool in re-reading the Marxist esthetic, but it is also a form of collective survival in the Russian neoliberal and nationalistic winter. Perhaps it is a utopian ideal to mention here the notion recalled by Gutov's initiative in his attempt to recontextualize Mikhail Lifshitz's writings and his statement: the ideal of the human race is to be in complete agreement. Who else besides Gutov presents Lifshitz's legacy as a crystallized opposition to figures of liberal capitalism. This is particularly apparent in Gutov's documentary presented in *Mercury in Retrograde*, in which Russian artists discuss the snobbery of pop art — as they describe it, a movement that is completely based on commerce and its affections. The collective initiative that appeared in the early 1990s under the most hostile environment, a rapidly developing neoliberal system in Russia, is associated with a political 'winter' that seems to coincide with our imaginary exploration itinerary. This is not by geographic accident, but rather it is the result of a significant physical and mental experience that resembles the sort of drama of the state parallel to the resistance of Barents' explorers trapped in the ice.

In this classic method, used most commonly in the open sea, the navigator uses celestial bodies that have been identified and grouped into constellations since ancient times. Celestial navigation makes possible voyages across thousands of miles of unmarked water. However, clouds, fog, rain, snow, mist, or haze may prevent the essential sightings of celestial bodies.

For celestial navigation the navigator uses a sextant and a chronometer. The astrolabe is an instrument used for measuring the positions of heavenly bodies. It consists of a circle or section of a circle, marked off in degrees, with a movable arm pivoted at the center of the circle. Until the sextant was invented during the 18th century, smaller types of astrolabes were the main instruments used by navigators.

- Navigation Manual

Visually charted as a constellation of white orbs on a black background, the East Art Map is a longstanding initiative of the Slovenian artist collective IRWIN, a project presented by IRWIN member Miran Mohar at the *Mercury in Retrograde* symposium 'What Mean These Stones.' Like the multiple expeditions to Nova Zembla by Dutch and Russian teams in the 1990s — 'recovery operations' in search of new artifacts and information — IRWIN's initiative aimed to build up a complex system of orientation through freshly recovered coordinates of art history. "History is not given," write the EAM editors and project authors, "it has to be constructed." The statement follows the principle of a guidebook through the visual culture of totalitarian and post-totalitarian societies. The project and recent publication *East Art Map* is the largest contemporary art documentation project ever undertaken in the East. It guides us through the recent reconstruction of history from a collectively authored approach. This is an attempt to balance out the history-making process itself by working precisely with the mechanisms of constructing and mediating realities from a historical perspective. IRWIN deals with what has been 'lost' by post-WWII historiography, a strategy associated with the curators' approach to dealing with the Lippmann & Rosenthal affair.

History Revisited

In David Maljkovic's *Scene for a New Heritage 1 and 2,* visitors from several decades in the future make a trip to a mysterious silver structure, a monument at Petrova Gora to victims of World War II, which was built in Croatia under the communist regime and was designed by Vojin Bakic. What was once a site visited by Croatian schoolchildren is now a gleaming shell that was almost destroyed in the conflicts that raged in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. In the video works, the knowledge about the structure has been lost. In part 1 a group returns to explore its exterior and attempts to decipher this artifact of a lost heritage, while in part 2 a solitary young man returns from even farther into the future and seems to be guided through its cavernous, peeling interior by a magical golden ball. The work speaks to a ruptured, broken history that can no longer be accessed, and a structure from a modernist heritage becomes an alien artifact. As in the recent Dutch expeditions to Nova Zembla, in *Scene for a New Heritage* the protagonists return to a destroyed site to reassemble the past. A sense of loss and fragmentation is paired with images of gleaming futuristic fragments, upon which a new history may be constructed.

King Carol I equestrian statue. Bucharest. (destroyed in 1947)

Although the central area of the city was destroyed during the WWII bombardments, the equestrian statue of King Carol survived till 1948, when it was dismantled by the communists and melted down. From the resulting bronze a statue of Lenin was cast in the late 1940s and installed in front of the 'Scanteia' building. After a judgment passed by the Hague Tribunal in the late 1950s the Romanian state was forced to pay reparations to the Mestrovici family for the destruction of two monuments: the statue of King Carol and one of King Ferdinand, which was situated near the Mavrogheni church.

- Excerpt from an article by Gabriela Lupu in the Romanian newspaper *Cultura* December, 2006.

Placing Fernando Sanchez Castillo's monumental video *Rich Fat Cat Dies in Chicago* at the very end, on the top floor of *Mercury in Retrograde,* brought the cycle of navigation through the labyrinthine exhibition to an archetypal, post-climax downfall — a Hegelian moment of collapse and rage in an eternal historical dynamic. In his film the artist choreographs a range of displays and games that take place around the abuse of a bronze head: a *coup d'état* restaged in a riding ring, in the desert, in the street. Drawn into the operatic the ritual of political revision, the viewer becomes part of the actions and movements. Consequently, it becomes painfully apparent that the symbols of one deposed regime are removed, only to soon be replaced by others. As Fernando Sanchez Castillo states: "Spanish recent history is trying to eliminate from the streets the excess of signs and symbols that characterized Franco's period. I wonder where they are being stored, and I would like to attempt to see if art can use them as the remnants, the building blocks, of our

current art history. Sometimes one needs to reconstruct the memory of events. Art can speak metaphorically to relocate us in the structures of history in a way that other disciplines cannot."

Such an idea finds its antipode in the recent post-socialist reality of Eastern Europe. Here a striking parallel is the current recasting of the statue of the Romanian King Carol I (1839-1914), an equestrian statue that had been destroyed and melted down in 1948 when the Communists seized power. In keeping with an ancient ritual, the victors created a statue of Lenin from the bronze. In a reversal of regime and fortune, the Romanian government is considering reusing the broken remains of the statue of Lenin that was toppled in 1989 to recast and reinstall the former statue of Carol.

Novaya Zemlya,
Nova Zembla,
New Land

Now on the island of Novaya Zemlya, only a few polar bears remain lurking around the meagre, exposed remains of the Behouden Huis (Safe House). Today, the landscape is dotted with other abandoned structures, the heavy lead containers used as protective shelters for humans during the nuclear tests carried out in the 1950s by the Russians. On the other side of Nova Zembla the glacial climate preserves the remains of concentration camps dating from Stalin's regime, which are situated near isolated and abandoned Eskimo settlements. As we near the end of our journey, it would be an appropriate time to mention the vision of the Russian artist Yuri Lederman, who presented a proposal for the installation of *Barents' Relics* that we rejected, both because of its excessively critical statement and how this would reflect on prized cultural artifacts of Dutch history. His idea was to surround artifacts from Nova Zembla with images of Soviet gulags as a metaphor for the present and a reflection on the current state of world historiography/museology, in which the past is used to reaffirm the will and needs of exisiting power structures.

Ultimately, we the navigators — the artists and curators — are indeed the prisoners of time. Currently the History Department of the Rijksmuseum is reconstructing the display of the Nova Zembla collection, and we can only guess about the new look of the updated Dutch historiography. What we know for sure is that the former Dutch symbol of patriotism — invoked as a model of endurance during World War II — will experience a shift in representational accents, and we might discover a new face of the myth in accordance with new contemporary realities. And in the future, as the ice continues to melt, the Northeast Passage may become a shipping route with access rights contested among its bordering countries. Here, it is worth recalling to another thought of Boia, who said "that it must be understood: there is no objective history, so although we speak about objectivity, in principle we are also talking about its non-existence. In other words, our era marks the end of the illusion, entertained and amplified by the scientism of the past century. The so-called 'Critical School' was completely trusting and aware of the historian's capacity to squeeze everything from the document, what Ranke called 'history as the way it really was' — a chronicle signifying the apogee of a so-called 'perfect' and objective history." **4**

4. Ibid., p.54.

In the context of *Mercury in Retrograde*, the Nova Zembla collection reflects on an expedition to the past where the outcome is uncertain. Overall, as cultural producers and mediators we see our aim in parallel with members of Barents' expedition. Carrying prints and books on their journey, the explorers were bringing items of their culture to an unknown land in a mission of enlightenment and cultural exchange. Clearly, a group of foreign curators entering into the unknown waters of the Dutch political, historical and cultural context represents a potential for failure in an attempt to research a complexity of history within a contemporary ('western') society. Although this process cannot solve contemporary historical dilemmas, nevertheless it represents an attempt to build negotiation platforms between the individuals for the future achievements. Here, the roles assumed by curators engaged critically in exploration could be best described with a paraphrase of Lucien Febvre's words: "The historian is not the one who knows but the one who searches for…"

Laura Schleussner

Conversation with Kees Zandvliet

Director of the Rijksmuseum, Department of History

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, August 11, 2006

Laura Schleussner The co-commissioned installation at de Appel was the first time that the Rijksmuseum loaned the Nova Zembla collection to a contemporary art institution.

Kees Zandvliet That's correct.

L.S. What appealed to the museum or to you about that kind of cooperation?

K.Z. In a way, our business is to breathe life into the past, and it is something we do as historians and art historians, but it is also inspiring to see contemporary artists breathing life into history. That's why we are interested in these kinds of projects. Just like we now have Peter Greenaway doing a project with Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*. This is something we wouldn't do as historians. That would be treating the *The Night Watch* inappropriately, but if an artist does it, it's another story. It's like breathing life into something from the past from a different angle. It can also offer a new perspective for the audience to look at or experience.

L.S. When the Rijksmuseum opened in 1885, was the Nova Zembla collection an important display? If so, how was it exhibited?

K.Z. Yes, it was an important display because the Nova Zembla artifacts had been found only a few years before the opening. It was shown as a complete collection. Everything those days was shown as a complete collection, sort of in an archival way, you might say. At the time, Nova Zembla also had important heroic significance in terms of

boosting Dutch nationalism.

L.S. Could you talk about that more?

K.Z. The nineteenth century was a period of state-building. For instance, in the Netherlands, as in other countries, there was an effort to create a uniform Dutch language through education. There was an attempt to build one nation from a country with different dialects, religions and geographies. Building a national museum was very important, and then in that national museum you needed national stories that could gather people around a common history. For example, what was important in the Dutch Protestant memory was the defeat of the Catholic Spanish, but that couldn't be overplayed, because a lot of people in Holland were and are Catholic. So you had to be careful not to step on the toes of Dutch Catholics and vice versa. So Nova Zembla represented a more harmless memory. Nova Zembla represented trying to find a route to Asia, wintering and also a war thing. War in the sense that the Dutch had to find an alternative route to Asia to stay out of the waters controlled by the Spanish and the Portuguese. But this wasn't so important in the 19th century. For the 19th century memory, the heroism of wintering on the ice was more important — along with the adventure those people had experienced 300 years ago.

L.S. Compared to that first exhibition, how did the significance of the collection as a display change over the decades?

K.Z. I would say that the significance remained the same in the museum until the early 1960s. In the 1970s, the curators tried to get away from political history, a history of heroes. It was considered 'elite' history, so to speak, and they started to look more into social history, and Nova Zembla came to be treated more like a collection showing everyday life in the 16th century, so the archeological finds were interpreted as archaeology.

L.S. How did that display look?

K.Z. One of the things done at the time was to change the display from what one could call an installation 'going up in space,' like a monument. This display style of the 19th and early 20th centuries was arranged as if it were a monument with different ascending layers, so you saw a pretty big display, while the display you saw in the 1970s was a flat display — a flat glass case with different groups of objects arranged according to their function. The drama wasn't there anymore, because you simply didn't see Nova Zembla. You looked over it and saw paintings in the distance.

L.S. How are you planning to reinstall the collection after the renovation of the Rijksmuseum?

K.Z. The new display will be sort of in between. Our problem with the new display is that because of the integration of an art exhibition and history exhibition, we have to create stories, and we have to create open spaces, because we expect a lot of visitors. So in the late 16th-century room we cannot obstruct the view of the paintings with the Nova Zembla collection where people enter, because then everything gets to be a bit of a blur. So what we are doing now is creating an extra exhibition space that has to do with the war of the late 16th

century and the paintings of this period. Before you enter into the next room we plan to construct two walls. The first wall has a big painting showing a company of guardsmen, a painting by Cornelis Ketel, similar to *The Night Watch* by Rembrandt, but 60 years older. Then there will be a cave-like entrance that will lead to the display of Nova Zembla. So we are designing the space a bit like a ghost house, you might say. If you pass it as a visitor, it will pique your curiosity: "Hey, what's in here?" It will be a bit dark. We imagine that people will get lured into this cave and experience the Nova Zembla collection, and then behind that wall you will enter into the second part of the room, which is dedicated to late 16th-century art, especially large-scale paintings.

L.S. What are going to be the highlighted objects of the display?

K.Z. A highlight will be the cow horn with the goodbye note of the people who wintered in the hut just before they left Nova Zembla to try to make their way back to the Netherlands. Another highlight will be the prints — in some cases loose sheets and in others a single clump of paper — that were found in the late nineteenth century. I believe with these kinds of exhibits people are most triggered by historical sensation, the feeling of having close contact with people who died a long time ago. It's like the Anne Frank sensation. A goodbye letter: imagine someone is transported from Amsterdam to Westerbork, one of the half-way camps for holding Jewish Dutch people before they were moved on to Dachau, for example. A few of those postcards have been preserved. Someone traveling on that train writes a good-bye note to her lover and throws it out of the train in the hope that someone picks it up and sends it to him. That kind of a goodbye note. This kind of goodbye note has the same power, and it's 400 years old. Kind of like a message in a bottle. We don't know if we are going to survive, but we wintered here, and now we are going to try to make it home.

L.S. Do you think that is the main fascination of the story today? Since the 19th century, authors have continued to republish and retell the story in novels, children's books — continuing into the post — WW II era. Do you think the story has nationalistic relevance today or is this sensational aspect more important?

K.Z. I wouldn't call it sensational in a cheap way, more in the human sense. In the national sense... not anymore. But why it is worthwhile to breathe life into history is that history shows how efforts have been made by people to go overseas or go into war. A lot of that striving and suffering is what makes history fascinating. Nova Zembla still has that fascination of people experimenting with new techniques: they didn't know if they could sail through those waters; they didn't know what to take with them to sell in China. They were just trying to find out if it would work, yes or no. So it's a lot about having the guts to do something.

L.S. Have there been critical readings of the myth from a post-colonial discourse or a closer examination of the different backgrounds of the people on the expedition? Have there been reassessments of the story from a critical perspective?

K.Z. Let's say the myth of Nova Zembla as a nation — building myth is something that has been added on to the Nova Zembla story — why it was so popular in children's books. I don't think that in any school in Holland the Nova Zembla story comes across as the big nation building myth anymore. That kind of story is long past, outdated. So there has been a critical reassessment. Some people might be afraid that in rethinking national culture that these kind of stories would come back and be treated like a myth. I think that chance is very small. I don't think there is a very big chance that we turn back to a 19th-century style of nationalism.

L.S. How do you see the story from a multicultural perspective in education today? Is the human aspect underscored more?

K.Z. I think so. Also, for the Rijksmuseum our business is to offer a national history, but not a nationalistic history. Our general agenda is to show that Dutch history has its validity. The Netherlands still exists and existed in the past, so a national perspective is a realistic perspective, but you can see that for the past hundreds of years that the Netherlands is not a closed nation. For the Middle Ages, the multicultural perspective did not exist, but the national state also did not exist in the 16th or 17th centuries. We only believed in a closed national state between 1850 and 1940. That's the main period of the national state, but at the same time it's a construction. A construction created in order to make your state function. You make believe that there is a closed Dutch culture and a closed Dutch history, but this entails a great deal of fiction.

L.S. It wasn't until the 1990s that the Dutch could get back to Nova Zembla. What do you think was the main urgency in getting back to the original site of the wintering in the Behouden Huis?

K.Z. That is still a continuation of what started in the 1970s. In the 1970s there was this interest in social history and with it an interest in ordinary people and ordinary life. So the same people who recreated the exhibition also got interested in archaeology as such. They felt a need to excavate sunken ships of the Dutch East India Company, and also Nova Zembla. A Rijksmuseum curator like Bas Kist, who had worked on the exhibition in the 1970s, also felt the need to go to Nova Zembla and see what could be found there. For him it was then not a problem to find very small details, because although those small details might not offer much drama, they could teach about real life on the spot. What they ate, etc., for instance.

L.S. What kinds of question does the story of Nova Zembla raise in the larger context of the Netherlands or Europe today?

K.Z. We still have a tendency to think of the Western frame of mind as superior or scholarly more advanced than, for instance, the Islamic state of mind. We still go down these tracks, and that doesn't really help us understand how the world ticks and it doesn't really help us understand the past. This tendency to talk about a multicultural society now can take away from accepting that the world was multicultural also to a large extent in the past. We've created constructions, like the idea of a multicultural society, as if it's

something totally new. What we have to try to do with history and displaying history is to try to be a little easier with perspectives. If we show a one-dimensional story in the Rijksmuseum from a western perspective, and one perspective is a Dutch perspective, then you fail. It's OK to use this Dutch perspective as a starting point, but you have to realize that this perspective changes over time, and it means something different if you use that perspective in 1850 in Indonesia or you use it in 1650 in Indonesia or 1650 in the Mediterranean. The players are constantly changing. We have to question here about how we deal with the Islamic world. Our perspective now about how we deal with the Islamic world is different from the perspective in 1920 and different from 1600. Otherwise, you make very cardboard stories. If you are not willing to accept that the perspective in 1600 is different from nowadays you don't get very far.

Defne Ayas

Interview with Michael Blum

A Jewish bank by the name of Lippmann, Rosenthal & Co. was based at 6–8 Nieuwe Spiegelstraat from 1859 until 1968, now the current de Appel building. Artist Michael Blum unfolded some of the hidden layers of this potent history in his installation for *Mercury in Retrograde*. Michael Blum and Defne Ayas exchanged e-mails on LiRo, his research process, and his practice in general.

Defne Ayas We initially approached you to get your response to the Dutch polar expedition led by Willem Barents at the end of 16th century — which later assumed the proportions of national myth — because we had found out about your earlier work *400 years without a grave is a long time to shut up*. What was the catalyst for this first work that tackled early Dutch history? Why did you decide to dedicate a tombstone to Cornelis De Houtman, the Dutch discoverer of Indonesia, much less well-known than Barents?

Michael Blum A conjunction of events. I was invited to produce something in the framework of a commemoration (not celebration, commemoration!) of 400 years VOC in 2002. The Dutch East-India Company (VOC) was created in 1602, thanks to the 'discovery' of Indonesia by Houtman a few years before. It was the first example of a joint-stock company, what we today call a 'corporation.' In other words and with a slight shortcut (wich an artist, unlike an academic, can allow himself), Houtman invented modern capitalism and propelled the Netherlands into an era of wealth. Oddly enough, the country hardly recognized this fact and did not honor Houtman, aside from the Houtmankade in Amsterdam, poor tribute if any. Houtman, who died after being

stabbed by a Sumatran sultan upon his return 2 years later, doesn't even have a grave in the Netherlands or in Sumatra. So I decided to provide the man with a grave, the grave he'd been waiting for since 400 years ago. Symbolically, this gesture should have allowed the Netherlands to finally deal with their colonial history — which was not possible as long as the founding father had not been buried, and then mourned. As in some other works, it was a way to critically tackle the myth of origin — or lack thereof...

D.A. The story of the Jewish bank Lippmann, Rosenthal & Co. practically fell into our hands, almost a bit too serendipitously, through one of the former owners of the building. It seemed to me a bit like the ghosts of the building were at play. And surprisingly, there was not a single project in the past of de Appel that had dealt with this potent subject of recent Dutch history. What were your thoughts when taking on this project when we extended an invitation to you, considering that a) you were not Dutch, b) you were not based in Amsterdam, and c) half of the entire building was to be devoted to your project?

M.B. I knew we had bumped into something quite special. Originally, when I got (some parts of) the story from you, I couldn't even understand it. It was so enormous, so cynical, so unbelievable. I had never looked into this part of history in the Netherlands, didn't know the story, and could hardly grasp why a Nazi bank would have such a Jewish name. I was familiar with some other forms of extreme Nazi cynicism, but not this one.

The fact that I'm not Dutch does not matter; I'm always working in the position of the outsider. And I say: even better, since you usually have a much clearer view of things and no inhibitions when you're unrelated to the surroundings. As a Dutch artist, I would have been too involved to even dare think about this dark part of recent Dutch history. It takes guts to do this from the inside, against the stream, like journalist Joeri Boom or historian Gerard Aalders did. As for the question of space, why would you want to devote less than half the building to a project that, for the first time, is dealing with the building's history?

D.A. What were the territories you wanted to address/avoid/link?

M.B. I felt that the project was highly ambitious — we might have failed in its realization, but the project itself was very challenging. It was an incredible situation: I'm invited to work on the history of the contemporary art center, which used to be a Jewish bank, which served as a model for a counterfeit Nazi bank of the same name that was set up to loot Jewish property! While digging into this and discovering connections with Jewish art dealer Goudstikker along the way (who lived on Herengracht around the corner) and writer Harry Mulisch (his father was a top manager of the Nazi bank)—who both represent two versions of Dutchness—it became clear that this was a very hot topic which dramatically challenged the traditional self-representation of the Dutch as tolerant, open, and good. The moment in time was also crucial: the Goudstikker restitution affair was just coming to a conclusion (with 202 paintings returned to his heirs), and, as

a whole, the Netherlands were (and still are) going through a major identity crisis, recognizing the failure of the Dutch model. It was a perfect moment.

D.A. Can you tell me more about how you went about researching and installing the whole story back to its original building?

M.B. Originally, my intention was to develop a dual structure, which would echo the dialectics of original and copy, that is, in our case, the Jewish bank in the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat and the Nazi institution in the Sarphatistraat. Yet when you conduct research, you rarely find exactly what you're looking for. Here, there were very few items documenting the original bank, and no pictures at all. So this, for instance, led me to not include any images at all, rather than use the few available. And that's why I developed the project along both lines of documentation and speculation. I had to tell the story, which was hardly known in Amsterdam, and imagine (and lead the visitor to imagine) what I didn't know. And there were other constraints as well—like finding a playful way to catch the visitor. In the end, the exhibition became a path through the building, along which you make various encounters: on the façade next to the entrance door you have a plaque that says 'Lippmann, Rosenthal & Co. Since 1859.' The original idea was to have the entrance of de Appel as the front office of the bank, but this proved to be impossible. Then you walk up the stairs to the first floor, and there are three doors along the corridor with sanded glass and a light coming from inside, but they are locked; you cannot enter. You make your way to the other end of the corridor, climb up the stairs. The hallway on the 2nd floor, which serves as a hub, has several texts printed on the walls, telling the story as factually and simply as possible (from Gerard Aalders' research). Then on the left, there are two rooms in a row. The first one is the 'white room,' the archive room. The second one was a video black-box with the projection of the 20-minute session with Sally Degener-Porter, the psychic who came to 'read' the building. To the right, there is the director's office, staged in a Madame Tussaud style, with mannequins representing the two directors, Fuld and May. The whole space was unified with pale yellow walls (except the 'white room' and the black-box of course) and red carpet.

D.A. What were your criteria for selecting the archival correspondence and letters for the 'white room?' What kind of resources did you find to be most critical to you in this process?

M.B. It took a long time to locate the available material, which is mostly at the Nationaal Archief in The Hague and NIOD in Amsterdam. Documents are basically of two kinds: correspondences of both banking houses (with lots of material on Sarphatistraat but little on Nieuwe Spiegelstraat, and hardly anything on the connection of the two — which was deliberate) and bookkeeping of the loot. I was disappointed not to find anything relating to Fuld and May, who were then in the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat office. Instead, I found some amazing correspondence between Flesche, Blaschke, Mulisch, and Witscher, who was becoming paranoid and very agitated as the Allied troops were approaching. So I used both perspectives to tell the story, and picked

documents that were either representative of many more, or that had something specific, like documents written in Dutch on stationery bearing a swastika, which are not common items in the Netherlands. I included some of the letters between Mulisch and Witscher, some administrative documents, a number of LiRo cards — the index cards on which the items looted were neatly registered.

For privacy reasons, the names had to be concealed. Yet, I felt that treating everyone with the same respect was not fair, as there were still victims and perpetrators. So I ended up concealing most names, but left the names of public figures, mostly Sarphatistraat top management, visible. This is necessary for a fair writing of history.

Instead of going for a maze-like display, which would have been maybe more appropriate, I opted for a much simpler and more legible structure, namely a linear one. Along the walls, documents were merely lined up in a chronological order, starting in 1940, following the years through the loot. Then I included Mulisch's interrogation by the US Army (where he tells the whole story from his perspective) and ended with Joeri Boom's article in the *Groene Amsterdammer* in 1998 [1], when Boom publicized the case from the LiRo cards he'd found in an anti-squat building which used to belong to the Interior Ministry—in an attempt to include the historicization of the issue in the display. And in the center stood a display case containing the two LiRo *Verordnungen*, which organized the loot...

1. See p. 37

D.A. Why do you think the famous Dutch writer Harry Mulisch rejected a meeting with us on this story?

M.B. His father was the Number Two of Sarphatistraat and he had already dealt with that in his work. But things are never settled forever. A few weeks before our exhibition, a journalist had written a critical pamphlet against Harry Mulisch, claiming that he had been in the Dutch Nazi youth organization. Whether it's true or not, it got him in a bad mood I suppose. It was just very unfortunate for our project.

D.A. I feel that at the end, even though the installation was a relatively closed system, it managed to turn into a work in progress in which the idea of culture, as something that exists in and through dialogue, could be fully actualized. Do you think we were able to get de Appel to represent a larger, more diverse vision of culture, asking 'What can it be? Where does it fit in the Netherlands? How is it constituted?'?

M.B. I think it's a step but it would take more... And it's difficult to operate in a context where national identity is being redefined in a restrictive way. Reevaluating culture is a constant necessity, but it's not easy to be the messenger carrying bad news. Critically considering one's ultra-local history after decades of looking at other horizons is the art world's translation of what is happening in society as a whole.

I believe that art should annoy a bit, itch, question, keep things in motion. It can't please everyone, and doesn't have to.

D.A. Contemporary critical writing often offers too limited a trajectory for practices such as yours. Why are you interested in trying to complicate definitions of both art and history-making? Can you talk more about your motivations to create work with historical content? What keeps you inspired?

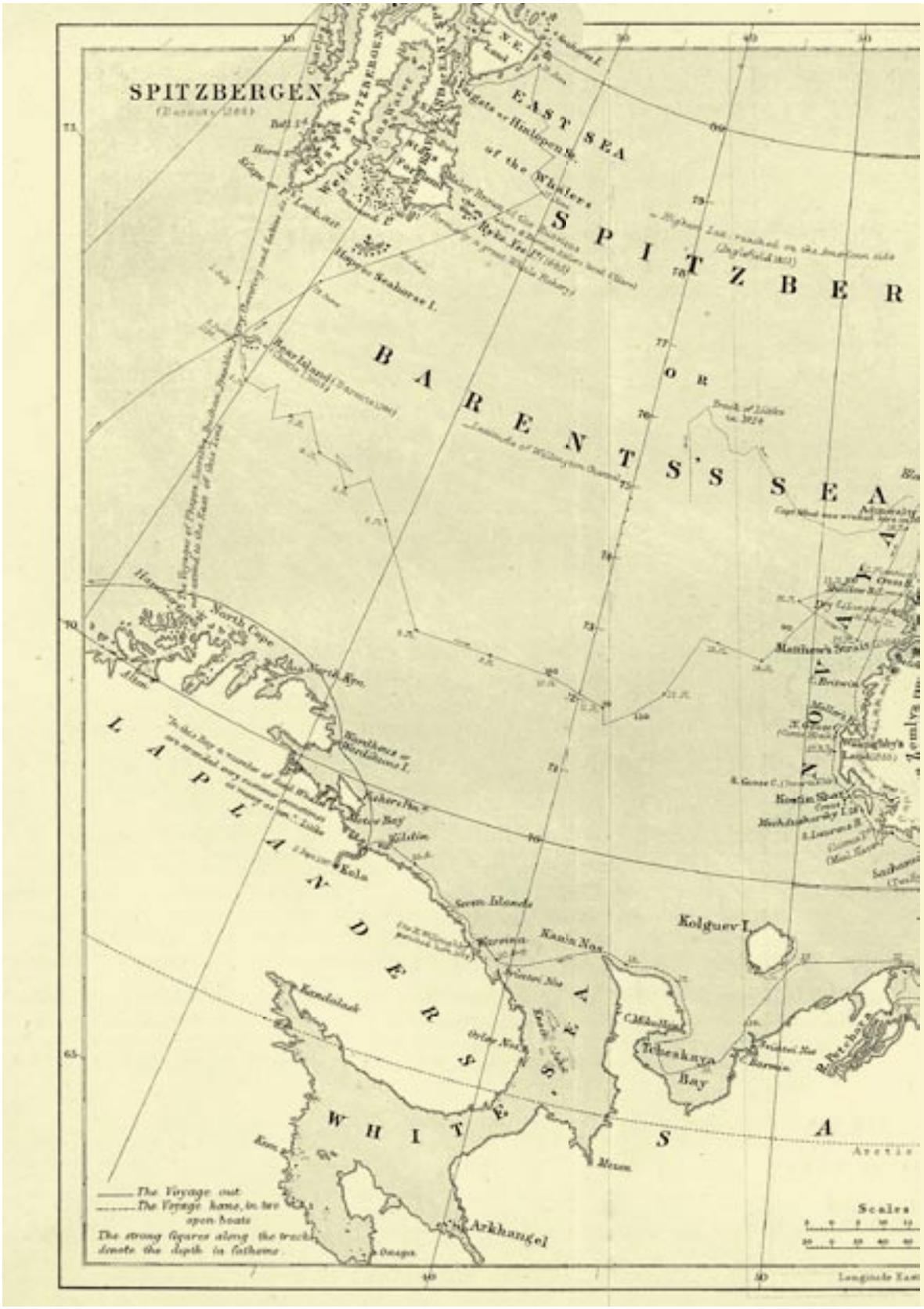
M.B. I'm not trying to complicate anything, but things should sometimes appear in their complexity. I'm not so interested in defining the borders of art and history. Art is the only field that allows this type of practice, so I embrace it. But this said, I'm no historian, really an artist. Beyond belonging to an obvious visual culture, the difference lies in the gap between the poet and the scientist. One is dealing with facts, the other one also deals with facts, but with speculation as well.

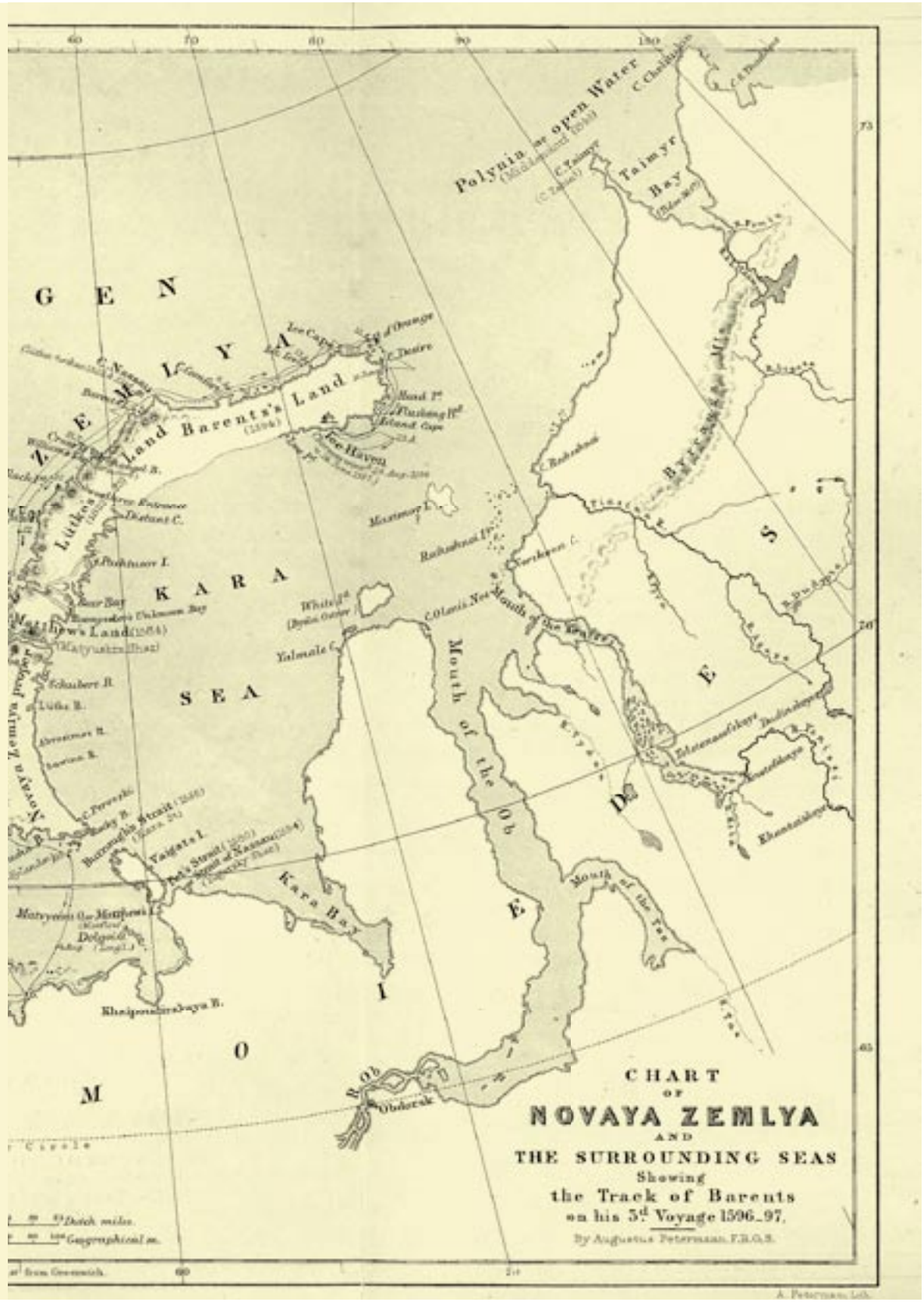
When you look specifically at a given situation, there's often a gap between the existing, written, admitted history (which unfortunately most people take for granted as something that actually took place as it is told) and other versions that have been erased because they didn't fit. History is always written with a purpose—whether direct and obvious, like with Atatürk and the necessity to write the myth of the modern nation's birth, or just in an ideological framework. There's always a point to make, either to deconstruct an existing myth, or build up a non-existing narrative. In fact, most of my work is about experimentations with story-telling. Fiction and documents are often intertwined and indebted to the narrative to be told—and that's a fascinating field to navigate...

NOVA ZEMBLA

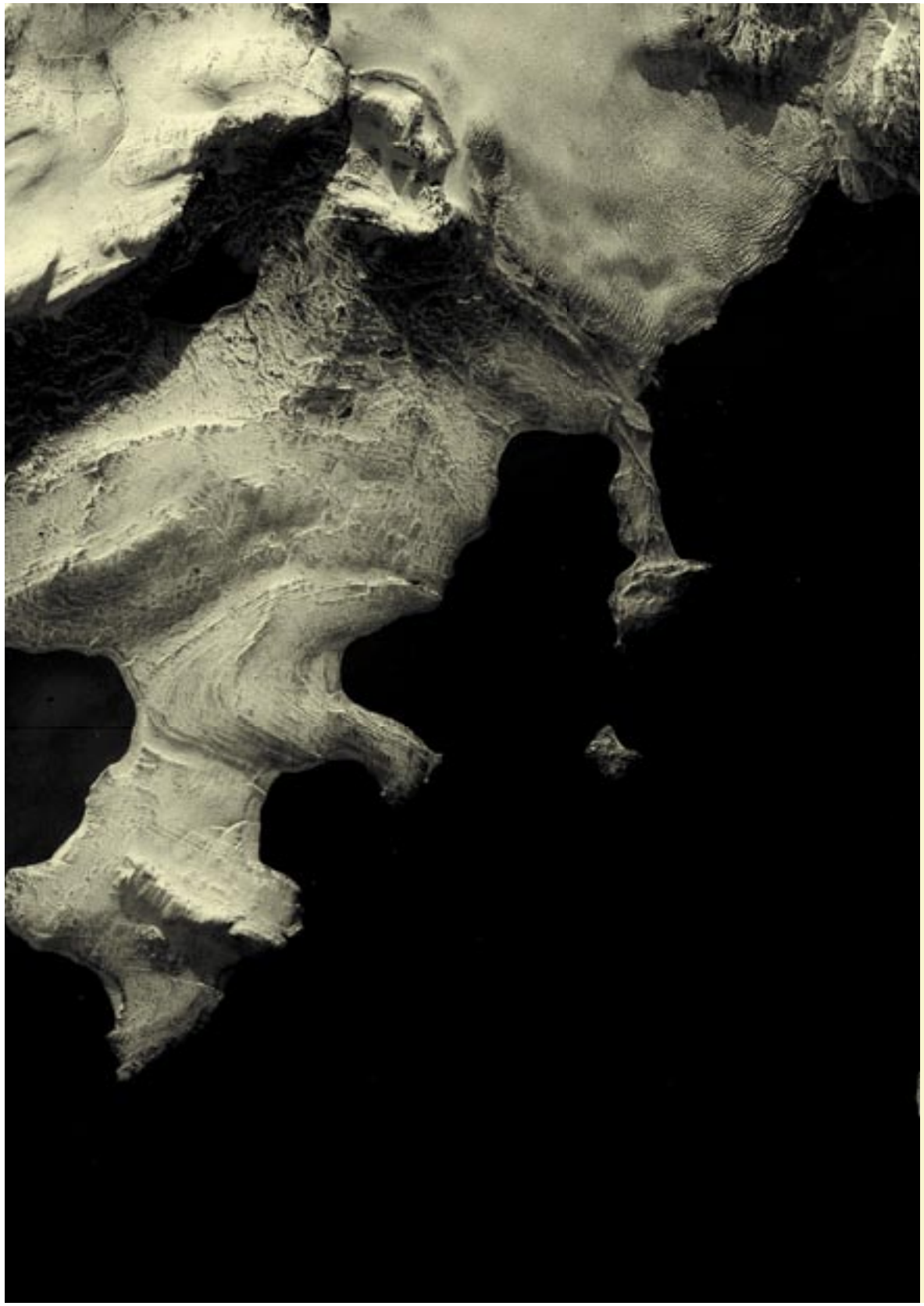

NOVA
SEMBLA.

Mercury in Retrograde *





Mercury in Retrograde



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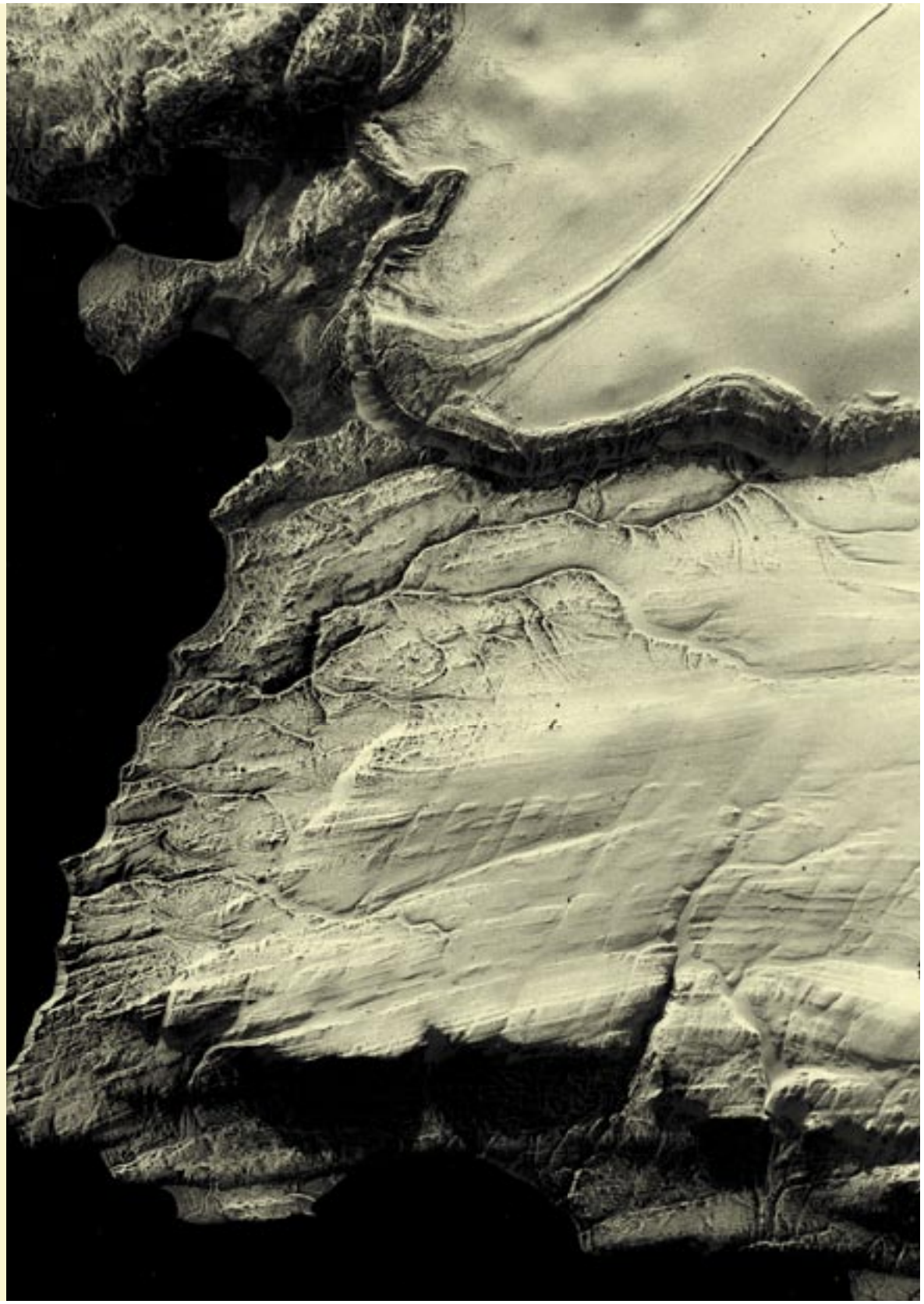

Journalist Joeri Boom

An Email Correspondence

At 14:27 22-2-2006 +0100, Defne Ayas wrote:

Dear Joeri Boom,

This is Defne Ayas from de Appel Curatorial Program. Maria Barnas told us to get in touch with you.

As participants of de Appel Curatorial Program in Amsterdam, we are currently organizing an exhibition, which will be presented at the de Appel in Amsterdam from April 6 through May 7, 2006 [correction: June 4]. de Appel is a renowned institute for the presentation of contemporary art and provides space to artists for projects, installations and research. (more information can be found at www.deappel.nl)

As part of our exhibition, we have invited artist Michael Blum to create a new work that will focus on the history of the current de Appel building. Blum's project intends to look into a particular aspect of the de Appel building, located Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 10 in Amsterdam: from 1859 to 1968, the building was the headquarters of Amsterdam-based Jewish bank Lippman & Rosenthal & Co, which at one point served as a cover for the Nazi looting enterprise. Even though no traces of Lippmann & Rosenthal remain in de Appel, some reminders are still to be seen in the two other lots next door. Blum's project will attempt to unfold some of these stories related to the building.

We found out that you were one of the two journalists who worked on the LiRo archive. Blum is planning to visit Amsterdam the week of March 6-12, 2006 for a prior research trip required for his installation. We would like to inquire if you would be interested in meeting with us to share your research about LiRo and its archives.

Please let us know how we can arrange a time to meet you for the period of March 6-12, 2006, and please do not hesitate to call us at 020 6255651 or email me at defne.ayas@gmail.com with any questions or for additional information. We also would be to meet you prior Blum's trip.

Thank you in advance, and we look forward to hearing from you!

Kind regards,

Defne

From: Joeri Boom
Date: February 23, 2006 12:10:41 AM CTT
To: Defne Ayas
Subject: Re: regarding Lippmann Rosenthal

Dear Defne,

Maria told me about Blum's project.

I am willing to meet him and share what I know and remember. It has been a while ago that I dived into the shady world of Lipmann-Rosenthal & Co Sarphatistraat. This was the name of a new division, set up in 1941 on nazi-orders, of the formerly completely trustworthy bank Lippman-Rosenthal & Co at the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat.

The two (Nwe Spiegelstr. and Sarphatistr.) offices have been connected during the war. Some personel of the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat was forced to start working for the 'robber-bank' office at the Sarphatistraat. Dutch Jews were forced to bring all their money and bonds to the robber-bank from august 1941 till the end of the war in our country (may 1945).

Maybe it would be of interest for Blum to find out about the absolutely shameful way in which the Dutch government treated "their" jews before, during and after the war. We found out that at the end of the '60's jewelry that was left in the safes of the bank was given and/or sold (for almost nothing) to civil servants of the Ministry of Finance. This jewelry belonged to murdered jews, and to jews who survived but did not know that some of their stuff was still in the Netherlands.

For me this investigation was like a living nightmare. Somehow you tend to believe in the trustworthyness and moral correctness of your government. Somehow even I believed that many Dutch tried to protect their jewish fellow countryman agains the murderers. But instead we either robbed them, or gave the nazi's full co-operation in doing so.

It has been a long time ago, as I allready mentoned, our investigaton: we started december 1997. I will attach three articles about Lipmann-Rosenthal ("Liro", in brief). They are in Dutch. But probably you could find someone to help you translate. The article "was mijn vader fout" is of interest. I reconstructed part of the life of a high employee of the robber-bank. I did this together with his in 1998 already aged son (78y.old). Before 1941 this high employee worked at the 'clean'-Liro-bank at the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat. He was forced to work at the robber-office. At the end of the war, he finally did something to try to diminish the financial damage to the jews. But before that, he was loyal to the robbers. My gut feeling told me that this man was one of too many cowards in occupied Holland. But his son happily concluded that his father "had not been at the wrong side" during the war.

Maybe this human side of an 'institutional crime' could be interesting to Blum.

I am not sure whether I will be in the Netherlands during Blum's visit. I travel to war zones regularly and currently I am planning a trip to Afghanistan.

At the moment I am very busy, but when I am not travelling when Blum is here, I will try to find some time to mee him.

So let's stay in touch,

Regards

Joeri Boom

To: Joeri Boom
From: Defne Ayas
Re: to joeri: Re: regarding Lippmann Rosenthal

Dear Joeri,

Greetings from Shanghai! I managed to move away from Amsterdam, and think i finally settled in the city of Shanghai, which is lovely and full of promise. But the world is going crazy more than ever, i think the nail of the world has been unscrewed by Bush, and now who knows, where it will tilt too! We are watching Lebanon with awe here, even though we have no access to BBC News, Google news/video, Wikipedia etc. Also, just watched the Guantanamo documentary (a bootleg of course), which reminds me much what I have been reading about the tools and methodologies used to extract information during the Cultural Revolution here. Will the world ever get any better?

In the meantime, we are all working on the catalogue for the de Appel exhibition, and I have one question for you.

Below is the email I had received from you in response to our inquiry on LiRo in Februrary. Would you be kind to allow this correspondence between us to be published as a document of research-in-progress for the show in the magazine? We think this would be a good addition to the LIRO documentation, and also bring in your personal view, and would appreciate it if you gave us the permission. Feel free to tweak some parts of it if you feel it expresses too much on your part. Let me know.

Best wishes to Amsterdam!

Defne

From: Joeri Boom
Subject: Re: to joeri: Re: regarding Lippmann Rosenthal
Date: July 31, 2006 12:00:42 AM CTT
To: Defne Ayas

Dear Defne,

Good to hear from you!

I am just returning from Lebanon. I have been in the southern city Tyre for two weeks. Saw a lot of shit. Survived a double missile attack less than 200 metres away. A building of six floors completely collapsed. There were 12 appartments in that building. And one tiny Hezbollah office, were journalists could ask information. So the building had to vanish. Since the people of the South know what kind of terror Israel in this war brings over anything related to Hezbollah, and the civilians living next door, they all fled their appartments a few days earlier. The building was empty, but the missiles wounded 12 people living in neignouring appartments. I saw a girl of about six years young being carried away by a screaming man. Here pants were drowned in blood. She stared with dead eyes, but I heard she survived.

And that's just one story, I will spare you the rest.

So how is Shanghay? Booming as ever, I guess.

Yes off course you can use the mail I sent you earlier. Maybe you should correct my poor English somewhat.

If you want to use the mail you are reading now, that's okay as well.

All the best, hope to meet you again,

Joeri.

Joeri Boom
25-03-1998 published in *De Groene*

Was My Dad on the Wrong Side?

In the midst of all the brouhaha surrounding the LiRo Archives, the 73-year-old John Aufenacker pays a visit to the editors of *De Groene Amsterdammer*. He tells a strange tale about a chest full of Jewish stocks that is supposedly buried near Oosterbeek. And apparently Aufenacker's father had something to do with it. He wonders whether *De Groene* wouldn't like to 'find out what this is all about'? Later Aufenacker reveals that his father was the deputy manager of the LiRo 'robber bank.'

The story of the chest goes something like this. In September 1944, Aufenacker senior, travels from Amsterdam to Brussels, and from there he returns to the Netherlands with a chest full of Jewish stocks and bonds. The wartime situation forces him to take a long detour. He reaches the Netherlands after following a circuitous route through Germany. The last leg of his journey runs via Arnhem. In nearby Oosterbeek Aufenacker's wife owns a boarding house, where he spends the night. He hides the chest in the cellar of the house.

The next morning British paratroopers land in the area of the village. It's the beginning of Operation Market Garden. Aufenacker finds himself in the heart of the battle for the Rhine bridges. Oosterbeek is destroyed and the British are pounded to bits. Once the Germans regain control over the area the village is evacuated. The inhabitants aren't allowed to return until all the pockets of resistance are smoked out. The chest full of papers is left behind in the cellar. This will be the last time that Aufenacker will see the vast fortune, amounting to millions.

'That's all I remember of the story,' says his son John Aufenacker. 'But now, with all this commotion about the LiRo Archives, what I'd really like to know is...' — and here comes the real reason for his

visit — '... whether my father was a traitor in the war.'

'He was never convicted,' says Aufenacker. 'There were no grounds for a conviction.' Even so – the deputy manager of the robber bank? How much of an accessory to the robbery of Jewish property would someone like that have been? We decide to investigate together.

There are many questions. And on top of everything else, says John Aufenacker, 'Alzheimer taps me on the shoulder every now and then.' Under constant threat of Allied air attacks and acts of war, why did his father set out with such a fortune? What was he doing in Brussels? And where is it now, that chest full of stocks and bonds? Did it fall into German hands? Was it stolen by a villager? Or did the deputy manager squirrel it away for himself?

Accompanied by John Aufenacker, I go to the National Institute for War Documentation. He, too, is surprised at how much there is about his father on file there. We go through one archive box after another. The story we're able to piece together boils down to this. In 1920, Aufenacker senior — given name Johannes Herman Louis, born in 1898, non-Jewish – was employed by Lippmann-Rosenthal & Co., still a respected banking house at that time with many Jewish customers and located at 6–8 Nieuwe Spiegelstraat in Amsterdam. Aufenacker holds jobs in a number of departments but assumes no managerial responsibilities. During the war a German administrator takes charge of the bank. Aufenacker continues to work there, as do almost all the other personnel.

In July 1941, under German orders, the 'robber' branch of the bank is opened on Sarphatistraat. The bank's director, Fuld, appoints 25 staff members to constitute the core of the new department. At first Aufenacker refuses to make the switch. Finally he agrees to go, however, after a bit of pressure from Fuld, who says there'll be trouble from the German administrator, Flesche, if he insists on refusing.

After a year the securities department is in disarray due to mismanagement, and Aufenacker is asked to get everything back in shape. He soon learns that an order has been given by the powers that be to sell all originally Jewish stocks as quickly as possible. The shares in Koninklijke Olie (Royal Oil) in particular are dumped at knockdown prices. This 'insane selling' at 'nominal rates' cuts the banker Aufenacker to the quick; the Jewish customers have a right to a decent price. After a bit of resistance the directorate yields to his objections. The selling is halted. Aufenacker recommends that the selling be resumed, but at a slower tempo and at better prices.

This is done, as testified by a letter to Broekman's Commission Bank, engaged by LiRo (nickname for Lippman-Rosenthal) for the sale of unlisted securities. No mention must be made of the fact that the stocks are from Jewish customers. As the letter states: 'As to your question concerning whether, in your offering of such securities, mention should be made of the fact that they were originally Jewish property, the answer obviously must be negative. Indeed, there is absolutely no rule requiring that this be done.' To make sure the Commission Bank does not make any unexpected moves, the father of writer Harry Mulisch — who, as personnel manager, is more of an accessory to the mammoth fencing operation than one would suspect — makes a harshly worded telephone call. He warns that the sale of stocks must not be sabotaged in any way.

While continuing his work in the securities department, Aufenacker is asked to take on the job of deputy manager — on the condition that he become a member

of the NSB, the Dutch Nazi party. He refuses. Once the securities department is running smoothly again, Aufenacker is thrust into the position of deputy manager, without party membership. He accepts the appointment.

We find nothing about the journey itself. What does become clear is that the securities department of the LiRo Bank regularly hauls off hefty portions of stocks. This began as early as March 1942. At that time Aufenacker senior noticed that all the stocks had disappeared from the securities safe. They were sent to Berlin, as it turned out, and no one had consulted him. He protested fiercely. How could Lippmann-Rosenthal keep selling the securities without having them at their disposal?

As the war progressed and the German currency supply diminished, the securities were moved around more and more. Usually the stocks were sent by the postal service, but if they were so valuable that the risk of seizure could no longer be covered, the transports were carried in person. The Amsterdam banker Rebholz, for example, was sent to France to sell securities. The proceeds were used by the Germans to stock up on Portuguese iron ore.

It appears that Lippman-Rosenthal had substantial quantities of Belgian stocks that had been taken from their Jewish owners. These were sold via the Continental Bank in Brussels because it was thought they would bring in a better price on the Belgian market than in the Netherlands. At first the Belgian stocks were sent by post as well, but as the war became more intense and the Allied air attacks increased, the transports were carried by LiRo employees. These people had to know enough to go to foreign countries and hand over the stocks or to purchase securities that could best be traded on the Amsterdam stock exchange. With his years of experience, Aufenacker was the right person to take this on. He traveled to Brussels several times. His last journey, in September 1944, is no longer documented.

We're just about ready to give up when John Aufenacker remembers one more thing. His father was arrested after liberation and released shortly thereafter, so he probably was interrogated. If he was, there must be a report of the interrogation. We travel together to The Hague, to the judicial archives.

Because Aufenacker is an 'interested party' we are given permission to examine the material. From those archives we learn that just about everyone in the LiRo top management was thoroughly interrogated, starting in May 1946. And so was deputy manager J.H.L. Aufenacker. We find a detailed deposition, drawn up by a detective from the Amsterdam Political Detective Department, Bureau for Collaboration. It seems that Aufenacker had already been interrogated twice before: in July 1945 by detectives from the Political Service in Oosterbeek and in October by a policeman from the Political Criminal Investigation Service in Amsterdam. The investigation did not result in criminal proceedings. The same was true for the entire LiRo top management, by the way. Only the German administrator, Alfred Flesche, was sentenced in default of appearance – for espionage, not for the robbery of Jewish property.

In the judicial material we do find information about the last journey to Brussels. In early September 1944, Aufenacker and his companion arrive in Brussels. That must have been before 3 September, since the city was not yet in Allied hands. Aufenacker is carrying securities that are to be sold through the Continental Bank in Belgium. He is told to bring back to Amsterdam a shipment of LiRo securities worth 296,000 guilders that

has proved unmarketable in Belgium.

Panic breaks out in the offices of the Continental Bank in Brussels. The director burns the securities that can no longer be transported to Germany on time. Aufenacker is told that there are many more Jewish securities in the safes of the Continental Bank and two other Brussels banks. The plan is to destroy them, too, before the Allies enter the city.

From one of the interrogations: 'I told Mr Gurts (director of the Continental Bank) that he should release the securities into my care so I could try to take them with me to Amsterdam. (...) After an initial refusal, and with much difficulty, I was given a chest in which I packed the securities. (...) After much difficulty and wandering about I succeeded in reaching Holland via Germany, where I arrived in Arnhem on around September 8 or 9. Because of the railway strike that was underway I could not reach Amsterdam, so I stored the consignment in my house in Oosterbeek.'

From his wife's boarding house in Oosterbeek Aufenacker tries to make contact with the bank in Amsterdam by telephone, but to no avail. Otherwise he expends little effort and stays where he is. His companion manages to reach Amsterdam and reports the fact that Aufenacker is marooned. That takes place on September 13.

Four days later the British paratroopers drop from the sky and the battle for the Rhine bridges erupts. It lasts until the 24th. Then all the inhabitants of Oosterbeek are evacuated. Only on October 16 is Aufenacker able to take a look in the cellar of the boarding house. The stocks are gone.

On October 19, the Feldgendarmerie are informed of the missing stocks, and a few days later a Feldwirtschaftskommando is put on the case. Aufenacker did not know exactly how much the property was worth that he carried with him through the war zone. The Lippman-Rosenthal Bank, which had to report the stocks as missing to the Generalkommissar für Finanz und Wirtschaft, made a cautious estimate of 720,000 guilders. But internal circulars talked about a 'million-guilder shipment'. The investigation is fruitless. The Germans are not able to track down the Reichseigentum before the capitulation.

And then, suddenly, the stocks resurface. In an interrogation recorded on 3 October 1945 Aufenacker declares 'that the securities were found and deposited with Lippmann-Rosenthal in Amsterdam and thus can be made available to the Jewish customers.'

What really happened? It seems that a certain O.H. Blauw, who was a permanent guest at the boarding house owned by Aufenacker's wife, stole the treasure. In a brief note Aufenacker's wife reported that Blauw knew about the presence of the stocks. He worked for the resistance, which both she and her husband knew. After the battle he took the shipment out of the cellar and buried it somewhere. Detectives went to him to recover the stocks, which did not make Blauw particularly happy. After the war he did not report the treasure himself, and during an earlier visit from the detectives he denied knowing anything about it. Only five months after liberation did he hand them over.

Was Blauw acting on his own initiative? Or did Aufenacker tip him off? Blauw had underground connections who could make sure that the stocks disappeared until the war was over. They'd still be marketable after liberation since they hadn't been made out to anyone by name.

The detectives' interrogations of

Aufenacker are steeped in distrust. But as the deputy manager pointed out, he never had any animosity towards the Jews. On the contrary, he even helped them retain some of their property, as he explained in the last interrogation. Aufenacker mentions the names of only six Jews and there wasn't much he could do for them.

John Aufenacker knows enough. 'My father kept the Jewish securities out of German hands, so he wasn't a traitor. In economic terms he was pro-German. He saw how dependent our economy was. But as far as politics were concerned he wouldn't have anything to do with the krauts. He always refused to become a member of the NSB. And he helped the Jews! Really, how can you be an enemy of the Jews if you've worked for a Jewish bank for more than twenty years?'

(Translation Nancy Forest-Flier)

Defne Ayas

Short Interview with Gerard Aalders

Senior Researcher at the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) in Amsterdam

Gerard Aalders is a senior researcher at the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD). He has published a trilogy on looting and restitution in the Netherlands: *Roof* (1999), *Berooid* (2001), and *Eksters* (2002) and numerous other articles. He is also the author of an extensive report (1998) on looting and restitution for the Netherlands government. Aalders answered our questions, noting that he likes to give short answers. This is a man with a no-nonsense approach.

Defne Ayas You have done extensive research, and also published a book on the looting during the Second World War in the Netherlands. Do you think this potent history is finally resolved/settled in this country?

Gerard Aalders Yes I do, but only for the time being. Future historians might ask different questions. But the fundamental history about looting is known by now.

D.A. You have given artist Michael Blum permission to use quotes from your book as wall text as part of his installation. What are your thoughts on the actual story of Lippmann, Rosenthal & Co. as part of an exhibition at a contemporary art center, whose mandate is only to show artworks within the visual art context?

G.A. Getting to know history with the help of art. It was a good idea to do this and it worked out well, as I have seen with my own eyes. In this case they completed each other.

D.A. This exhibition was a bit ambitious in its intent and effort; not only have we unearthed the history of the de Appel building, but we have also initiated a first-time collaboration between the War Documentation Center, Nationaal Archief, and de Appel. The goal was to re-evaluate histories previously untouched by the Dutch artists within the visual art context and to reach out to broader audiences for de Appel itself. Considering your position as a Dutch historian/researcher, do you think it is problematic that both the artist and curators engaged in the project were not from the Netherlands?

G.A. No, on the contrary. Foreigners look at us and our history with other eyes than we—the locals—do. Blum was an outsider when he started the project and knew very little about the subject. Then he learned how it all happened, but from a different perspective than a Dutchman would have: A matter of education abroad.

D.A. Michael Blum likened the difference between the historian and the artist to the relationship between the scientist and poet. What are the boundaries of speculation for a historian?

G.A. A (good) historian does not speculate. We have our sources and we refer to those sources in footnotes so that everybody who wants to can find out how we reached a certain interpretation. Of course it remains an interpretation, and another historian may come to a different view on the basis of the same sources.

D.A. What do you do when you need to navigate through some missing links?

G.A. You don't speculate in that case. You mention the missing material and propose one or more possible solutions or views. In such cases, one gets through with many 'if's, 'it is not impossible that', 'one could assume' or 'it might have happened as follows' etc.

Ohad Meromi

The Random Element

Radio Play

In considering different notions of futurism, Ohad Meromi took the transcript of a *Star Trek* episode, and developed it into a radio play, *The Random Element*. In this adventure, McCoy is swept into the past, and Kirk and Spock must take the risk of going back in time to find him. As the mission unfolds, it becomes clear that they must prevent him from intervening in a traumatic past event in a way that would threaten the future and annihilate the present of the starship *Enterprise*. Segments of the radio play were installed in different locations throughout *Mercury in Retrograde.*

The Past, the ultimate mold. The template. Is change possible?
Can we find a way to a different future — or are we bound by history?
With only a slight chance of success, we will go back in time, still not knowing what it is that we have to do.

Characters:
Kirk
Spock
McCoy
Edith Keeler
Scotty
Lieutenant Uhura
Sulu
Rodent
Guardian of Forever
Voiceover

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Act 1

Scene 1.
Music.
Curtain.
Alarm sound, a ship's bridge. An elevated ramp surrounds the stage.
On the left side of the stage a sliding door, closed. Seated in front of a big frame are Kirk, Scotty, McCoy, Uhura, Sulu and Spock.

1.	Kirk	Stay on top of it, Mr. Sulu (Pause)	Alarm sound, lights are shaking in the room	Dramatic music
2.	Sulu	We're holding orbit, sir. (Pause)		
3.	Kirk	The helm is sluggish. (Pause)	A big shake follows, everybody moves in their seats.	
4.	Sulu	Control circuits threatening to overload, Captain.		
5.	Kirk	Understood, Engineer.		
6.		Mr. Spock. Can't we avoid these areas of turbulence?	Another big shake	
7.	Spock	I believe we'll have them plotted in a few more orbits.		
8.	Sulu	Aooch!	Another big shake followed by an electronic sound and a circuit burning. Sulu falls off his seat	
9.	Uhura	Sulu!		

10. McCoy	Some heart flutter... mmm... Better risk a few drops of cordrazine.	Medical instruments beep	
11. Kirk	Tricky stuff. Are you sure you want to risk--		
12.	[Hiss] (injection)		
13. Sulu	(Dramatic pause) (Sulu clears his throat)		
14. McCoy	You were about to make a medical comment, Jim?		
15. Kirk	Who, me, Doctor?		
16. Scotty	Switching to manual, Captain. Do we maintain this orbit?		
17. Kirk	Mr. Spock?		
18. Spock	(fascinated) This is of great scientific importance... We're actually passing through ripples in time...		
19. Kirk	Maintain orbit! Broadcast to Starfleet Command: unusual readings on the instruments. Something... or someone down on this planet... can effect changes in time, causing turbulent waves of space displacement.		
20. Spock	All plotted but one. Coming up on it now. Seems to be fairly heavy displacement.		
21.	(McCoy falls over, injects the full syringe into his stomach.)	A big shake, rumble, A body falls to the ground, running sounds	Dramatic music
22.	[Hiss]		
23. Uhura	Dr McCoy! The hypo injection!		
24. Kirk	McCoy!		
25. Spock	The hypo, Captain, It was set for cordrazine. Empty.		
26. McCoy	Aahhh! (wakes up, sweating, eyes popping out like a madman)	Threatening music	
27.	Killers! Assassins! (theatrically) I won't let you! I'll kill you first! I won't let you! You won't get me! Murderers! Killers!	Sounds of struggle	
28. Kirk	Security alert!	Rumble, followed by Sounds of escape, the elevator door shuts.	Musical intermission

30. Voice1	Bridge, Security. Alert, alert! (through radio)		
31. Kirk	Bridge here. Go ahead.		
32. Voice1	Security 054, sir. We just found the transport chief injured. Captain, Dr. McCoy has beamed himself down to the planet. The transporter at that time, Captain, was focused on the time disturbance.		
33. Kirk	So whatever's down there, McCoy's in the heart of it. Set up a landing party. Let's go get him. Kirk out.		
34. Voiceover			Curtain
35. Kirk	Two drops of cordrazine can save a man's life. A hundred times that amount has just accidentally been pumped into Dr. McCoy's body. In a strange, wild frenzy, he has fled the ship's bridge. All connecting decks have been placed on alert. We have no way of knowing if the madness is permanent or temporary, or in what direction it will drive McCoy.		

Scene 2.

Surface of planet. Solar wind. Curtain up. Backdrop of Greek ruins. On the left and right of the stage more ruins and broken columns. In the center of the stage a giant pulsing pretzel-like object.
Curtain. Transporter swoosh, light goes up on Kirk, Spock, Uhura, Scotty

1. Uhura	Landing party to Enterprise. No sign of Dr. McCoy. Search progressing.	Solar wind	
2. Spock	Interesting.		
3. Uhura	These ruins extend to the horizon.		
4. Kirk	Begin recording.		
5. Uhura	Recording, sir.		
6. McCoy		Heavy breathing, a little rumbling sound	Dramatic music
7. Spock	Incredible power. It can't be a machine as we understand mechanics.		
8. Kirk	Then what is it?		

9. Guardian	A question. Since before your sun burned hot in space and before your race was born, I have awaited a question.	Musical exclamation	
10. Kirk	What are you?		
11. Guardian	I am the Guardian of Forever.		
12. Kirk	Are you machine or being?		
13. Guardian	I am both and neither. I am my own beginning, my own ending.		
14. Spock	I see no reason for answers to be couched in riddles.		
15. Guardian	I answer as simply as your level of understanding makes possible.	Again the breathing	
16. Spock	A time portal, Captain a gateway to other times and dimensions, if I'm correct.		
17. Guardian	As correct as possible for you. Your science knowledge is obviously primitive.		
18. Spock	Really?		
19. Kirk	Annoyed, Spock?		
20. Guardian	Behold.	The pretzel projects old movies	Exotic music
21.	A gateway to your own past, if you wish.		
22. McCoy	Killers! (far away)		
23.	(Closer) Killers! I won't let you get me! I'll kill you first! I won't let you get me! Assassins! Murderers!	Running, fight	
24. Scotty	Dr. McCoy! Don't go in there! (McCoy jumps into the pretzel and vanishes)		
25. Guardian	oooooooo	A swoosh followed by solar wind sound	
26. Kirk	Where is he?		
27. Guardian	He has passed into... what was. (Pause)		
28. Kirk	(heard off a speaker) No stardate. For us, time does not exist. McCoy, back somewhere in the past, has		

	effected a change in the course of time. All Earth history has been changed. There is no starship Enterprise. We have only one chance. We have asked the guardian to show us Earth's history again. Spock and I will go back into time and attempt to set right whatever it was that McCoy changed.		
29. Uhura	Captain, it seems impossible. Even if you were able to find the right date...		
30. Scotty	Then even finding McCoy would be a miracle.		
31. Spock	There is no alternative now.		
32. Kirk	Scotty... (dramatic pause) when you think you've waited long enough, each of you will have to try it. Even if you fail, at least you'll be alive (whispers) in some past world somewhere.		
33. Scotty	Aye.		
34. Spock	Seconds now, sir. Stand by.		
35. Scotty	Good luck, gentlemen.		
36. Uhura	Happiness at least, sir.		Dramatic music
37. Spock	And... now.		
38. Guardian	ooooooo	Swoosh, then silence, solar wind. Curtain down	

End of Act 1

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Act 2

Scene 1.

(Street ambient)

Guardian: The Past!

Curtain

Basement. Spock and Kirk are taking off their uniforms and putting on clothes better suited to blending in... Spock covers his pointed ears with a hat.

1. Kirk	You know Spock, 3at times, you seem quite human.	
2. Spock	Captain, I hardly believe that insults are within your prerogative as my commanding officer.	
3. Kirk	Sorry. Time we faced the unpleasant facts.	Undressing. Sounds of zippers, fabrics.
4. Spock	First, I believe we have about a week before McCoy arrives, but we can't be certain.	

5. Kirk	Arrives where? Honolulu, Boise, San Diego? Why not Outer Mongolia, for that matter?		
6. Spock	There is a theory. There could be some logic to the belief that time is fluid, like a river -- with currents, eddies, backwash.		
7. Kirk	And the same currents that swept McCoy to a certain time and place might sweep us there, too.		
8. Spock	Unless that is true, Captain, we have no hope. Frustrating -- locked in here is the place and moment of his arrival, even the images of what he did. If only I could tie this tricorder in with the ship's computers for a few moments.		
9. Kirk	Couldn't you build some form of computer aid here?		
10. Spock	In this zinc-plated vacuum-tubed culture?		
11. Kirk	(teasing) Yes, well, it would pose an extremely complex problem in logic, Mr. Spock. Excuse me. I sometimes expect too much of you.		Comic music
12. Edith	Who's there?	Footsteps, door opens	
13. Kirk	Excuse us, miss. We didn't mean to trespass. It's cold outside.		
14. Edith	A lie is a poor way to say hello. It isn't that cold.		
15. Kirk	No. We were being chased by a policeman.		Romantic music
16. Edith	Why?		
17. Kirk	For these clothes. We stole them. We didn't have any money.		
18. Edith	(Pause) Well, I could do with some help around here -- doing dishes, sweeping, general cleaning.		Romantic music again
19. Spock	At what rate of payment? I need radio tubes and so forth. My hobby.		Music stops
20. Edith	15 cents an hour for 10 hours a day. What are your names?		
21. Kirk	Mine is Jim Kirk. His is...Spock.		Romantic music again
22. Edith	I'm Edith Keeler. You can start by cleaning up down here.	Footsteps, door	
23. Kirk	Excuse me, miss. Where are we?		

24. Edith	You're in the 21st Street Mission.	
25. Kirk	Do you run this place?	
26. Edith	Indeed I do, Mr. Kirk. [door shut]	Romantic music
27. Kirk	(after a pause) Radio tubes... and so on. I do approve of hobbies, Mr. Spock...	Comic music

Change of setting
Mission dining room. Edith stands on a podium. Enter Spock, Kirk and Rodent.

1. Rodent	Not that she's bad-looking, but if she really wanted to help out a fella in need --	
2. Kirk	Shut up.	
3. Rodent	Ah -	
4. Kirk	Shut up! I want to hear what she has to say. (to Spock)	
5. Spock	Yes, of course, Captain.	
6. Edith	If you're a bum, if you can't break off of the booze or whatever it is that makes you a bad risk, then get out. I don't pretend to tell you how to find happiness and love when every day is a struggle to survive, but I do insist that you do survive because the days and the years ahead are worth living for. One day soon... man is going to be able to harness incredible energies, atomic energies... Energies that could ultimately hurl us to other worlds. And the men that reach out into space will be able to find ways to feed the hungry millions of the world and to cure their diseases. Those are the days worth living for.	
7. Kirk	I find her most uncommon, Mr. Spock.	Change of setting
8. Edith	Mr. Kirk! You are uncommon workmen. That basement looks like it's been scrubbed and polished.	
9. Kirk	Then we can do other work?	
10. Edith	Yes. 7:00 in the morning. Do you have a flop for the night?	
11. Kirk	A what?	
12. Edith	You really are new at this, aren't you? That's a place to sleep.	
13. Kirk	Oh.	

14. Edith	There's a vacant room where I live for $2.00 a week. I could take you there.	
15. Kirk	Thank you.	Romantic music
16. Edith	Good.	Romantic music
17. Kirk	We have a flop.	Comic music
18. Spock	We have a what, Captain?	
19. Kirk	A place to sleep.	
20. Spock	One might have said so in the first place.	
21. Edith	I still have a few questions I'd like to ask about you two.	
22. Spock	Interesting. Where would you estimate we belong, Miss Keeler?	
23. Edith	You? At his side, as if you've always been there and always will. And you... (dreamy) you belong... in another place.	Romantic music

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Scene 2.

A small room. On the left side a door, closed. On the right a double bed.
In the center a table with an improvised laboratory: wires, tin cans, light bulbs, fluids bubbling etc. Spock is working at the table. Kirk enters.

1. Kirk	Let's see what you have.	
2.	(Funny noises)	
3. Spock	This is how history went after McCoy changed it. The late 1930s -- a growing pacifist movement whose influence delayed the United States' entry into the Second World War. While peace negotiations dragged on, Germany had time to complete its heavy-water experiments.	
4. Kirk	Germany -- fascism, Hitler.	
5. Tape	Sieg... Heil! Sieg Heil!	Voice of Hitler and crowd
6. Kirk	You must be mistaken.	
7. Spock	Edith Keeler is the focal point in time we've been looking for, the point that both we and Dr. McCoy have been drawn to.	

8. Kirk	She has two possible futures then, and, depending on whether she lives or dies, all of history will be changed. And McCoy...	
9. Spock	Is the random element.	
10. Kirk	What does he do? Does he kill her?	
11. Spock	Or perhaps he prevents her from being killed. We don't know which.	
12. Kirk	Get this thing fixed. We must find out before McCoy arrives.	
13. Spock	Captain... suppose we discover that, in order to set things straight again, Edith Keeler must die.	Violins, drums

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Scene 3.

Street at night. On the backdrop a façade of an apartment building, a dark doorway, on the floor above it a dim window, and above it another one.
Quiet music playing. Sounds of a horse and a wagon passing. A church bell.
Rodent is picking in a trash can near the doorway. A swoosh sound and a light flashes. McCoy appears at the left of the stage, walks to the front. The right side of the stage is dark.

1. McCoy	(from afar) Assassins! Murderers! (close by) Murderers! Assassins!	
2.	You! What planet is this?	Glass falls to the ground and breaks
3.	No! Don't run! I won't kill you! Running sound	
4.	It's they who do the killing! Don't run!	
5. Rodent	Look, you take too much of that old wood alky, and... then almost anything seems like...	
6. McCoy	Where... Where are we? Earth? The constellations seem right, but -- Explain! Explain this trick.	
7. Rodent	I -- I...	
8. McCoy	(madly to himself) Oh, I'd give a lot to see the hospital. (his voice cracks) Probably... needles and... sutures. All the pain. They used to hand-cut and sew people like garments. Needles and sutures... all the terrible pain!	Falling to the ground Footsteps getting away Dog barks

Light goes down on the left. A window lights up above the center.

9. Kirk (whisper) How long before we get a full answer?
10. Spock I'll need two more days before I dare make another attempt.
11. Kirk McCoy could have been in the city a week now for all we know.

Light goes down in the window, heavy breathing. Light goes up on the left side. Edith walks into the lit area. McCoy appears.

12. McCoy Oh, miss...
13. Edith You look terrible! You better sit down. Come on.
14. McCoy I can't. I got to keep moving. I can't let them find me.
15. Edith There's a cot in the back room. They won't find you there. Come on.

Light goes down, the window lights up.

16. Spock I'm sorry.
17. Kirk Spock... I believe... I'm in love with Edith Keeler.
18. Spock Jim, Edith Keeler must die.

Window darkens. Another window lights up below it.

19. Edith Hey, now, come on. You're not ready to take on any tigers just yet. Lie down. — Fabrics, breathing
20. McCoy The most common question to ask would be, where am I? I don't think I'll ask it.
21. Edith Why not?
22. McCoy The only possible answer would conclusively prove that I'm... either unconscious or demented. (Pause)
23. McCoy This looks like old Earth around 1920 or '25.
24. Edith Would you care to try for '30?
25. McCoy I am unconscious... or demented.

26. Edith I have a friend that talks about Earth like you do. Would you like to meet him?
27. McCoy I'm a surgeon, not a psychiatrist.
28. Edith We can talk about that later. I have to go.
29. Edith My young man is taking me to a Clark Gable movie.
30. McCoy A who movie?
31. Edith A Clark Gab-- Don't you know?
32. McCoy Well, I know what a movie is, but...
33. Edith That's very strange. You get some rest. I'll see you later.

Light goes up at street level. Passing car engines, and headlights cross the stage. Kirk is standing alone waiting. Edith appears at the door, and comes down towards him.

34. Edith If we hurry, maybe we can catch the Clark Gable movie at the Orpheum. — [Horn honks] [Honk honk]
35. Kirk What?
36. Edith Dr. McCoy said the same thing.
37. Kirk McCoy! Leonard McCoy? — Dramatic music
38. Edith Well ...yes. He's in the mission. He's --
39. Kirk Stay right here. (shouts) Spock! (Shouts from afar) Stay right there!
40. Spock What is it?
41. Kirk McCoy! He's --
42. McCoy & Kirk - Jim! - Bones! — Car engine approaching
43. Spock No, Jim!
44. [Tires screech]
45. Edith Aahhhh! — Body falling Then very meaningful music, then silence
46. (Pause)
47. McCoy You deliberately stopped me, Jim. I could have saved her. Do you know what you just did?
48. Spock He knows, Doctor. He knows.

Scene 4.
Lights go up, surface of the planet. Solar wind ambient. Kirk is sitting holding his head, at the edge of the pretzel. Spock and McCoy stand next to him. In front of them Uhura and Scotty.

1.	Guardian	ooooo	
2.	Scotty	What happened, sir?	
		You only left a moment ago.	
3.	Spock	We were successful.	
4.	Guardian	Time has resumed its shape.	
		All is as it was before.	
		Many such journeys are possible.	
		Let me be your gateway.	
5.	Uhura	Captain, the Enterprise is asking	
		if we want to beam up.	
6.	Kirk	Let's get the hell out of here.	Curtain

- -

End.

Stefan Rusu

Interview with Dmitry Gutov of the Lifshitz Institute in Moscow

Dmitry Gutov is one of the founders of the Lifshitz Institute, a collective initiative dedicated to the study of the work of Mikhail Lifshitz (1905–1983), the predominant Russian art theorist of the Soviet era. For *Mercury in Retrograde* Gutov presented Lifshitz institute archive materials.

Stefan Rusu: Your project at de Appel takes into consideration the fact that the local audience is not familiar with the developmental dynamics of the socialist society in which Mikhail Lifshitz lived and worked. Therefore, it would be appropriate to give a historical introduction about how the Lifshitz Institute came into being in the political and economical context of contemporary Russia. Can you briefly define the issues surrounding the beginning of your initiative?

Dmitry Gutov: The initiative, later named the Lifshitz Institute, was born in the late 1980s in Moscow. It was the time of Gorbachev reforms and *perestroika*. A full revaluation was under way. Anticommunist declarations, hesitant at first, were getting louder. Anything related in any way to the tradition of Russian revolutionary democracy was publicly scorned.

Money, which played a very modest role during Soviet times, was becoming more and more important by the second. Obtaining it was regarded as the main aim in life and the amount of money in someone's pocket was considered the only criterion that mattered. What was the main allure of that time? In his texts Mikhail Lifshitz has an important notion-concept called 'Luft' (which in German means 'air'). It was used to define the space between two overwhelming forces in an interchanging process. The late 1980s were a space

of *Luft*. The pseudo-Soviet power has lost its repressive force, and the tendency of imposing ideological 'order' and power based on money had not yet emerged. These fast-changing times offered an extraordinary opportunity to read old Marxist texts published in the USSR from a new perspective. While these texts were distributed throughout educational and other institutions, they were unpleasant to read. Almost impossible to read, actually.

But in the late 1980s, new, completely opposing ideas started to spread. In general, what was called Soviet Marxism was a nonsensical, fastidious phenomenon — pure ideology in terms of Marx. However, it entailed a few exceptions, the most brilliant of which is Lifshitz. In Soviet times, he was known as the most obscurantist Soviet philosopher, a proponent of hardcore orthodoxy who hated modern art and dedicated his life to the hopeless fight against modernism. A more careful reading has shown, however, that public opinion was far from the truth. In Lifshitz's texts we have discovered a unique aesthetic concept, in which the world is subject to ruthless criticism— through the lens of contemporary art criticism.

S.R. What were the premises for the creation of the Lifshitz Institute and your personal role in the process?

D.G. As a graduate student at the Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) Faculty of History and Theory of Art at the Beaux Arts Academy, I took part in contemporary art exhibitions. So Lifshitz was the subject of my theoretical and practical interests. I generated the initiative in order to reevaluate his reputation in the context of art.

S.R. How does the Institute work? What is the role of public lectures and discussions and what about the Institute's principle of 'collective work'?

D.G. Over the years, the Institute has had two work regimens. First, we gather in a small circle of 7–9 people and discuss over a friendly meal — usually talking about previously selected texts. Since we have a real conviction that we need to restore the axioms of scholarship in our time, we choose corresponding authors: Hegel, Marx, and Lenin.

The fundamental principle of these practices is the building of human relationships, which, as Hegel said, 'feel like home.' Since the birth of the Lifshitz Institute we have been searching for and building an environment that could 'feel like home.' Every personal obsession will find its place here — if there is consensus in the main aim, i.e. to find something that has been unjustly forgotten in the silent world of the Soviet past.

The second work regimen consists of actions in public spaces where everyone is invited. For example, there was the discussion of Lifshitz's article 'The Phenomenology of the Tin Can' featuring the emblematic image of the Campbell's soup can at the Andy Warhol exhibition in the Stella Gallery. We also organized a presentation of the Russian edition of Lukacs' book *History and Class Consciousness* and many other events. In terms of going deeper into the object of study, these kinds of actions tend to be more like holidays and have less consistency, but they are oriented towards popularizing ideas.

Exhibitions are another distinct activity. For example, the Klyasma exhibition from the autumn of 2003

was dedicated to the 20th anniversary of Lifshitz's death. It was preceded by intense correspondence (partly published) between participants. It was a free exchange of ideas and proposals and also an analysis of the art situation in Moscow at that time.

S.R. How did the initiative of creating the Institute become an artistic project?

D.G. From the very beginning, all of the Institute's activity took place in an art space. If someone calls our public discussions performances, no problem. If a film about Lifshitz is called video art and if exhibitions dedicated to Lifshitz are called installations, very good. We are researching and spreading our precious intellectual heritage in forms accessible to us as artists.

S.R. How do the initiating group and close followers of the Lifshitz Institute interact?

D.G. In answering the question about 'how the Institute functions' I have explained its essence. I'd prefer not to talk about its leader.

S.R. I would like to talk about criticisms of the Lifshitz Institute's activities. In his recent article 'The Other and The Different' Viktor Miziano talked about the Lifshitz Institute's reduced efficiency as a consequence of its lack of methodology. Do you have a program for developing Lifshitz's ideas and attracting more followers to his position on aesthetics?

D.G. I'll be honest: criticism of the Institute does not interest me. But I would be grateful to hear an efficient proposal on improving the work. However, I doubt I'll hear that. Those who are interested in the development of this kind of research will start researching and will not just 'make proposals.' Our situation is not formalized and is totally open for any initiative.

S.R. How would you explain the little or no interest in the 'left' in the West in the 1990s but the increased interest in Marxism after 2000? Could you explain what is going on?

D.G. I'm used to acting in the frame of my own competence. You had better ask a sociologist these kinds of questions.

S.R. But from your experience does it make any sense to spread Lifshitz's ideas and heritage abroad? How are they attractive to a researcher from the West?

D.G. Anybody interested in Marxist aesthetics simply can't ignore Lifshitz's heritage, it is absolutely necessary to have an understanding of it. He addresses the same problems as Adorno, Benjamin, Lukacs, and Brecht. Moreover, Lifshitz's ideas are original and distinct. They are enriched by the uniqueness of his life experiences during the time of the victory of the proletarian revolution and the downfall of its ideals in the 1930s. Also, this includes his involvement in the avant-garde movement of the 1920s and his later rupture with this movement.

To Lifshitz, Marxist aesthetics (his book on this subject, translated into many languages including English, remains his best) led to a better understanding of Marx's philosophy of history. This could be interesting for those not fully convinced by Popper. Depending on the specific time, Lifshitz does not always men-

tion names. However, he does sharply define problems. Someone who knows the subject will find a consistent criticism of Western Marxism in his texts, especially of the Frankfurt school—all from the point of view of what can be called the doctrine of the Absolute in Marxism.

S.R. How do you and the rest of the staff see a place of Marxist-Leninist ideas in international context? Could you describe the circle of companions who sympathize and collaborate with the Institute in Europe or elsewhere? What is the nature of these interactions?

D.G. I only know a few people in the world who are familiar with and highly appreciate Lifshitz's values. Positioning his ideas somehow is not a problem. There is only a problem of spreading information. Among his extensive legacy of works, the only work (except for a few magazine articles) that has been translated into English was his first. It is about Marxist aesthetics and was written when he was 28. It deals with the fate of Marxism in the modern world from a broad perspective. From an even broader point of view, it is also about the fate of the modern world. As long as people are happy that they are a part of the market system, of the buy-sell relationship, Lifshitz's texts and the ideas behind them do not have a serious chance. We have to preserve this legacy for better times.

S.R. I may be repeating myself, but I was referring to your concrete relationship with the artistic context in Croatia or Slovenia, for example, with whom you have some work experience.

D.G. It is hard to talk in terms of serious collaboration, though it is a fact that there certainly is an interest in Lifshitz. I will mention, for example, an article dedicated to him in the January issue of the Austrian magazine *Springerin*. There is also research conducted by Professor Stanley Mitchell in London. Also, some art institutions have showed interest in my film about Lifshitz.

S.R. Considering the criticism of modernism that is the fundamental element of Lifshitz's theory, is it possible to apply this approach to the whole logic of the development of Western society and to the world outlook of Western individuals?

D.G. I dealt with this subject in the previous question.

S.R. What is the essence of Lifshitz's critique of modernism? How is this seen from today's perspective and could you briefly explain its main threads and ideas?

D.G. There is nothing more uncompromising and radical in the criticism of twentieth-century art than Lifshitz's texts. If we would dare to summarize his main ideas on this topic, we'd have to say that Lifshitz has projected Marxist ideas about anarchy and religion onto modern art. From this point of view, avant-garde movements are regarded as excessive riots, which through their radicalism become the opposite of what they initially intended. As Lenin said, it's a 'bourgeoisie turned inside out.' At the same time, this art is the 'opium' of intellectuals, the oppressed creature's sigh, a form of reconciliation with reality. From the mid 1920s on, Lifshitz examines modernism from the communist perspective, i.e. as an expression of the monstrous contradictions of the late civilization of class society. As long as the golden autumn of capitalism continues to reign, Lifshitz's ideas will look marginal and obscure and the world will continue to worship the *pissoir*.

S.R. According to Lifshitz, the ideal of a total unity of thinking is the ideal of humankind. If we take into consideration that the internal and the external politics of the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia were and are based on the politics of force, then where and when will Lifshitz's ideas be implemented?

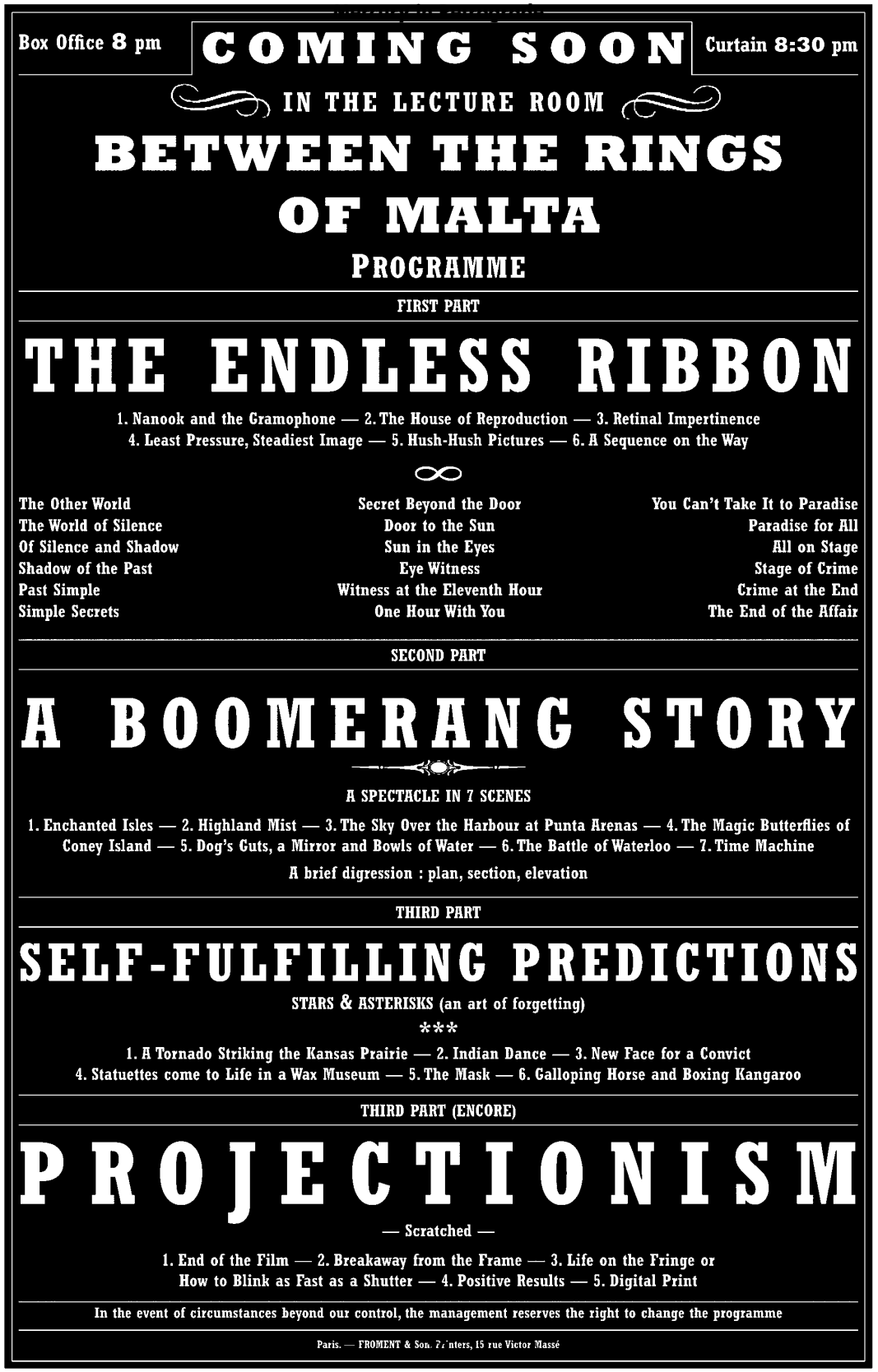
D.G. I can only repeat what I said earlier. Ideas, as Marx said, get real power only when they take possession of the masses. What is needed for this to happen? First, we need the ideas. In this sense, Lifshitz did what he could and what he should have done given the specific conditions of his life. Fortunately, it is impossible to impose these or any other ideas onto the course of real events. But we can talk about understanding the present. Today we are presented with a set of rules for existence, where the hunt for success and the fight for a place under the sun are the reigning codes. We can view this situation as normal or, at least to a certain extent, as pathological. The fate of the ideas researched by the Lifshitz Institute depends on the percentage and quantity of people who follow vs. those who have an opposite understanding of events. My friends would criticize this formula as totally idealistic. It can be understood that real material facts lie beneath perceptions of reality. If we have committed errors in the process of our analysis, then our activities will simply vanish.

S.R. What are the perspectives of the Lifshitz Institute in a society dominated by capital? What are your aims?

D.G. I am not interested in perspectives for development. We have a fascinating occupation, in which no external factors can outweigh our interests. When public attention to this project was almost non-existent, we pursued our activities with the same intensity as in better days.

S.R. If you are not interested in future perspectives for the Lifshitz Institute, doesn't this mean that you and your colleagues are becoming a hermetic circle, trying to preserve the heritage of Lifshitz for better times? In this case, is there any possibility of the Institute transforming into a kind of sect as a consequence of its isolation?

D.G. Talking about perspectives for development makes me think of a managerial strategy for the promotion of a new, fantastically efficient detergent. I really appreciate our efforts to preserve the merit of the work for better days. The process is something like active anabiosis. I'm not afraid of the word 'sect.' A sect of Judaism once changed the entire intellectual landscape of humanity. We don't make any pretensions of operating similarly, and we also do not have isolationist tendencies.



Aurélien Froment

Something About Stolen Film Stills

Something About Stolen Film Stills was presented at the opening of *Mercury in Retrograde* at de Appel on April 8, 2006, by actor Pieter Verhees.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Let's imagine, for the duration of this lecture, that we have all got together in the dark. Imagine — a rectangular room, averagely sized, neither too big nor too small, with nothing on the wall except a white screen on one of its walls. I am going to make use of this screen to project a few stories. Opposite the screen there are about one hundred seats in which we are all comfortably settled.

From the 28th of October 1892 up until recent times, it seems these times have offered the best conditions for projection.

We're told that everything began on the walls of a cave, which is certainly the stuff of myth.

But there are other mythical and real places where things may have begun — other places for other versions of this history.

Filmmaker Raoul Ruiz mentions the sky above the port of Punta Arenas in Chile, where you can find inverted images of life reflected as it was half a century earlier. James Hoog, in his book *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, describes the fog in the Scottish Highlands, which makes passers-by appear larger than life. The art of memory itself appears as a preview of the organization in the sequences and correspondences which are at the origin of montage.

In a parallel 19th century, Professor Maigrelot discovered a chemical procedure which allowed the silhouette of whatever had been exposed to a canvas, soaked in a special emulsion, to be fixed onto it.

Following the scientific discovery of his uncle, the nephew of Professor Maigrelot invented the *Silhouettograph*, which had been used during that century to capture great historic events and allow spectators to discover far-off lands.

A few years later, Darriand — a hypnotist who inspired Raymond Roussel for his famous novel *Impressions of Africa* — invented a machine with an electric light, powered by invisible motors. By using the combined efforts of a lens and a reflector, Darriand was able to project a bright, large square of light onto a wall. With the help of a small piece of thin colored transparent film placed in front of the light, an image was shown on the white screen. By turning a crank, Darriand was able to set off a system of rollers so 'the diaphanous tape led to a series of views which were displayed in front of the luminous lens.'

Here's something that I found in a Herman Melville book written in 1856: "…when I happened to go to several candlelit suppers in an old-fashioned manor house, at the hour when the shadows projected onto the nooks of an angular and spacious room give it the feel of a haunted wood, my fixed stare and my sudden change of expression caught the attention of my fellows, since it appeared to me that the ghost of a giant tortoise was slowly emerging from these imaginary solitudes and crawling heavily across the floor, the word 'Memento' stamped upon its back in fiery letters."

If you accelerate this scene and replace the tortoise with a train or a galloping horse, then you realize that the hallucination this 1856 narrator suffers from predicts not only the projection device of a cinema auditorium forty years later — an angular and spacious room — but might also foreshadow the primitive dread that the first audience experienced when watching the figures that Professor Maigrelot projected onto the screen of his optical theatre.

Hollis Frampton, the great meta-historian, described, an archaeological Indian site where scientists found rolls of dog's intestines during a dig two centuries ago. They were supposed to date back to the 8th or 9th century AD. He explained that they had been dried and then flattened and divided into even pieces with etched designs traced on them. Historians worked out later that a system of multiple refractions onto mirrors and basins full of water had been used to project these designs.

Of course, this reminds me of Darriand's machine I have just mentioned. From each of these things, not only we do realize that the art of projection is more than a thousand years old, but also in the case of cinema, that its history has nothing to do with chronology.

To quickly resume, it seems that the combination of Maigrelot's discovery about shadows projected through the transparency of a dog's intestines, put together with the machine of an unknown hypnotist and played in an angular and spacious room, "at the hour when the shadows projected give it the feel of a haunted wood," are at the origin of what used to be called the art of film.

The art of film, in turn, influenced our experience of history. It might be a coincidence, but can't we see traces of what cinema might have been in the immobile time machine of Herbert George Wells? And can't we understand the successive blinking of days and nights, which we can admire on board Wells' machine, as a metaphor for the mechanism of the projector itself?

A child sometimes imagines the world like

a blockbuster, as I once did. He explains his own sense of *déja-vu* by the fact that some sort of producers often use a set which has already been used in earlier scenes of his life. From the child's perspective, some producers make up new places from the remnants and refuse of the other scenes. It might be the rooms in a school, a garden, a road seen from a car window, or sometimes even an entire panoramic shot of a town. Even if our child notices this loose approach, he pretends that nothing is going on. He doesn't want to make them angry. So in order to save the producers from having to develop new and more complex strategies which he'd have trouble deciphering, he decides not to say anything about it. He concludes that the world certainly is a blockbuster, but a blockbuster with a limited budget. Apparently the whole world was in on it, but nobody mentioned it.

In return, the producers allowed him and his contemporaries a share of their power. By concentrating on the image being shown on a screen in a cinema auditorium, viewers were able to make everything else disappear: walls, furniture, their neighbors, and even the perforated screen. In fact, they didn't look at the screen itself but at a plane situated just a little in front of it. This way they were able to take in the totality of the image. This sort of spectator was a connoisseur. He recognized the projected shapes because he had already spent time with them and understood them.

The spectator could also anticipate what was going to happen in the story. Sometimes he felt he had metamorphosized into another person. He could identify with the characters and would happily let himself be taken along on the journey, even if he had to surrender his will to that of the protagonist.

Often he knew the stories' endings, but that didn't stop him from going back. Sometimes, in the middle of a screening, it reminded him of something and he realized he was watching the same film for a second time. And leaving the room, he might have the feeling that the universe of the film had leaked beyond its showing.

While preparing for this lecture, I remembered the existence of a small notebook in which I'd noted, over the course of a number of years, each film that I'd been to see. Its cover was black with white spots, or perhaps the other way round. It was also quite thick and I dipped into it frequently.

I'd noted down alongside each title the number of stars or asterisks which corresponded to my degree of pleasure or interest in the film. My father had given me the idea. He'd filled up a number of notebooks himself. It might have been possible, for example, to present this afternoon a selection or choice of these starred or asterisked films, but when I think about it, separating one film out from all the ones I've seen seems contradictory to the nature of a movie; to its relationships, connections, repetitions, metamorphoses. I didn't start the project until I was twelve years old, and so an entire part of my cinematic history had already been forgotten.

It is a history to which I myself was intimately linked. There was the incomparable first film (childhood), the cult film (adolescence), my favorite film (the one I'd have taken with me to the desert island), and also the ideal film, the one I had not yet seen but still hope to one day. When I was 19, I decided to stop keeping notes when I noticed that writing the list had become more important to me than watching the films. Still, from my regular consultation of the book, I had managed to build up a visual memory of its contents and could mentally flick through the pages. I just had to open the book in my imagination and slowly turn its pages. I would

happen upon a title, which would lead me to another, and so on and so on, until I found what I was looking for.

Another World
The World of Silence
Of Silence and Shadows
The Shadow of the Past
Past Tense
Tense Secrets
The Secret behind the Door
The Door of the Sun
Sun in the Eyes
The Eye of a Witness
The Witness of the Last Hours
One Hour with You
You Won't Bring it to Paradise
Paradise for All
All on Stage
Stage of Crime
The Crime comes at the End
The End of a Story
Story of a New World

On the 11th of June 1922, the Capitol Theatre in New York premiered *Nanook of the North* by Robert Flaherty. On the screen, people watched Nanook the Eskimo discovering a gramophone. A biscuit and lard seller attempts to explain to him how the apparatus works and how the white man has "put his voice in a box." Nanook is incredulous and finds it all hilarious; he brings the record to his mouth and bites into it as if it were a chocolate bar. Today, if you were to get out your old records and offer them to some children, there's a high chance they would do the same. As tangible proof of the myth of eternal return, there's no better example. The invention of the gramophone preceded its use just as its rediscovery was followed by its disappearance. We are again becoming Nanooks when faced with technological development.

In his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy,* Marshall McLuhan notes that "without prior training, illiterates are incapable of 'seeing' filmic images." He quotes an interview with Professor John Wilson from the University of London, who described what happened during the projection of a film to an illiterate society. Wilson tells that "they rapidly scanned each part of the image, like the cathode beam in a television camera does. It seems that any eye not accustomed to moving pictures does this — it scans each image. And these people, even though the film was showed at a slowed rate, didn't have time to sweep away one image before the next one had arrived."

Celluloid film was constituted by a succession of printed photograms, which literally put us into *contact* with the world. A photogram is a small, transparent rectangle of celluloid, which is 35 millimeters wide and 19 millimeters high. Photograms were separated from each other by a black interval, "during which we have time to think about what we have just seen." I owe this nice expression to Hollis Frampton, which illustrates what was called the phenomenon of *retinal persistence*.

During this interval of time, the luminous beam of the projector was hidden by a shutter. The film tape ran along the projection corridor until an immobilized photogram was projected onto the screen. Then the shutter shot off the projector's beam once again, and the film moved on by one image, which was in turn immobilized to be projected and so on.

If the eye didn't perceive these black intervals between two photograms it was because the duration of each brief intermission was so timed—according to specialist calculations, the fruit of laborious research—that each preceding image was still present on the spectator's retina when the subsequent one appeared. In other terms, this corresponded to the time

it took for the light to cross the distance from the projector to the screen and from the screen to the spectator.

So, if the people from this illiterate society had been able to blink at the same speed as the projector, technically, they could have been able to separate an image from the ones before and after it.

The problem comes from the huge amount of stills which a film contained. There were twenty-four images per second in a film to give the illusion of movement, so a two-hour film contained approximately one hundred and seventy two thousand images. Someone who watched one film per week for the whole of his life would have seen five hundred and thirty-nine million, one hundred and thirty six thousand separate images.

The viewers couldn't remember each image separately and yet their memory was made up of them. As paradoxical as it might sound, cinema was therefore an art of forgetting.

In the prologue to his novel *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub*, published in 1961, sci-fi writer Stanislaw Lem imagined that in a near future, an illness from outer space could brutally destroy all of the paper stocks on our planet. He called it the 'Big Collapse': a general breakdown of civilization. All that was left behind of books were 'piles of grey dust, as fine as ashes.' Stanislaw Lem wrote at a time when computers were still in their infancy, it was a time when 'the first memory machines had already appeared, but they were enormous machines, fiddly to use, and could only be used for a small number of specialized tasks.' Stanislaw Lem imagined the transition from book to everything digital by way of a catastrophe (a brutal destruction of paper which would lead to chaos and collapse within a society).

Reality hasn't exactly concurred with this novelist's vision. Nevertheless, the digitalization of printed works launched at the beginning of this century by an American company, whose name I can't remember just now, has now reached fruition. It has completely changed our relationship to knowledge and has rendered the status of books like that of parchment.

The cultural and democratic promise of the digital revolution has led to printed works coming to the reader without him having to move from his armchair.

Now this possibility of receiving knowledge from the outside at a fixed point — a cinema seat, for example — has invaded the world of text by the use of screens. What happened to books, could, a few years later, happen to films: its infinite tape could end up disintegrating into nothing more than a 'few piles of grey dust, as fine as ashes', leaving just empty machines turning, and us, when faced with the history of film, becoming like Nanook the Eskimo with the gramophone.

June 1999 marked the date of the first public projection of a work saved on a digital file. It is the official date of birth of digital cinema and the beginning of the end of reels. Even that famous firm Kodak has abandoned the mass production of tape. They now produce only a few meters of film per year, destined for the show reels of the Museums of Arts, Crafts and Patrimony. Even though film was an important development in the history of cinema, it is also an anecdote taken from a larger history. This anecdote, without neglecting its integral value, has today become rumor.

I recently rediscovered a collection of photograms. They are anonymous fragments from the history of film. In the old days, the films used to arrive at the cinema in

different parts. As a projectionist, I had to fit them all together in order to re-constitute the complete work. I had to cut one image from the end of each section. This is how I began to collect pictures.
They were clandestine images, the kind of images you wouldn't have noticed during a screening, different in every way from the kind of promotional images you would have found in display windows to promote what was on. I found myself with a series of images which all suggested, however unlikely, the promise of a logical succession. I had in my hands a series of open doors, parts of moving bodies leaving the shot, silhouettes of backs and several empty rooms.

There was a man in a suit, hanging on the big hand of a clock on the outside of a building.
A schoolgirl wearing a red suit against the shelves in a library, gazing towards a point outside of the frame.
A mountainous landscape burned by the heat of the projector lamp.
A woman hiding behind her hands.
An indeterminate finger drawing signs on a misted window.
A teenager lying on his bed holding a book with both hands.
The neck of a blond woman reading, caressed by a man's hand.
Curios and antiques on a shelf in a living room.
A man closing a door between two apparently identical rooms.
A dark-haired woman asleep.
An animal skeleton.
Three people in a room full of mirrors: a woman seen from behind, sitting in a chair, another one sewing and a man dressed as a doctor looking out from behind a folding screen.
Three men opening a door.
A young child in her mother's arms sitting on a sofa.
A boxing kangaroo in a dark room.
A Red Indian dance and galloping horses.

I was careful not to leave any finger prints and to neatly cut each section of film that I had handled, but for some reason, I did not caption the images: so what I have now is a series of floating images which make me realize that I had interrupted what is called today the chain of traceability.

The lack of a caption paradoxically rendered these transparent images completely *opaque*. At least I had my feet on the ground — I could tell where the top was, and the bottom, but I still couldn't tell which side of the image I should be on. The transparent nature of photograms meant that I couldn't tell the back from the front of an image or determine the order they should come in. Unwittingly I had doubled my resources: I had two series composed of exactly the same number of images.

I decided to use a scanner on my two identical series and put them, via my computer screen, onto a picture search engine. The parameters for visual recognition are now fairly precise. A search engine works by association, and you can determine its degree of preciseness. It notes the resemblances between the patterns or motifs you want to analyze and the ones which have already been indexed by previous users.

Here is the first image I scanned. A rectangular asphalt area. On first sight, the white lines on the ground make you think of a sports ground. But if you look closer you'll see that the painted lines mark out a parking lot. The scene is probably taken in the 1950s, let's say in America. There are no clouds, the sky is blue, the sun is at its highest point. It must be around midday. Shoulders are bared, the shadows are clear and precise, you can see all the details. It's

not far from the sea. There is a flowerbed, and close to the entrance barrier a beach bike is leaning against it.

We are looking down from a scaffold, or perhaps from the terrace of a neighboring building, or perhaps from the platform of a telescopic crane on a camera truck. Around sixty children and teenagers are playing with hula-hoops. There's an atmosphere of excitement. The parents, leaning against the improvised guardrails, are admiring their children's skills.

I can stop on this image and take time to observe all the different postures, all the gestures made by these bodies moving to the hula game. And at a certain moment they progressively fade until they become transparent. Then, all you see is just a chaos of circles, elliptical paths of planets in orbit.

Let's look at what that search engine came up with. It wasn't a big surprise that there were many images showing hula-hoop amateurs in different periods and different countries. But there was nothing about the possible origin of this photogram. What I did discover was something even more astonishing: each hula-hooper represented in these images had an exact double in my photogram.

I thought that these images were enlargements of my photogram until closer observation showed that some details had been added. The photogram, even under the lens of a microscope, did not reveal a facial expression or the details of an article of clothing, and these things could be clearly seen on the images in the collection I had just made up from the search. Instinctively, I picked out an image at random and put it, in turn, into the search engine. What it came back with were details of the details which were even more precise.

There were such a large number of correlations that following them all up was out of the question: each motif was multiplied so it became impossible to follow the trail all the way. The search engine acted as a tracer on the pictures. There came a moment when the tiniest of details no longer added anything to my knowledge of the photogram: the motifs became details, and the details became, in turn, details of the details, and so on and so on, until the moment I found myself with the mathematical formulas of the chemical elements we are all made of. The film had moved on, or to be more accurate, it had gone back to where it came from. I couldn't say exactly when I lost it.

What remains then? I have a list of film titles left which reminds me what this was all composed of. I have a collection of photograms, a little notebook and a few stories shaped like boomerangs. I have compiled these bits and pieces from a random memory and from some personal experiences including readings and also a few discussions I had with a group of friends during the last two years. Some of the events mentioned here may have happened and others may happen one of these days. We will see anyway.

I might hope that this lecture you hear through the voice of actor Pieter Verhees would be the projection session I've just presented. I hope that listening to these stories lived up to your expectations, and that at the end of the talk, the film will begin. Here we are once again reunited. Don't forget to turn the light back on.

Thank you.

Stefan Rusu

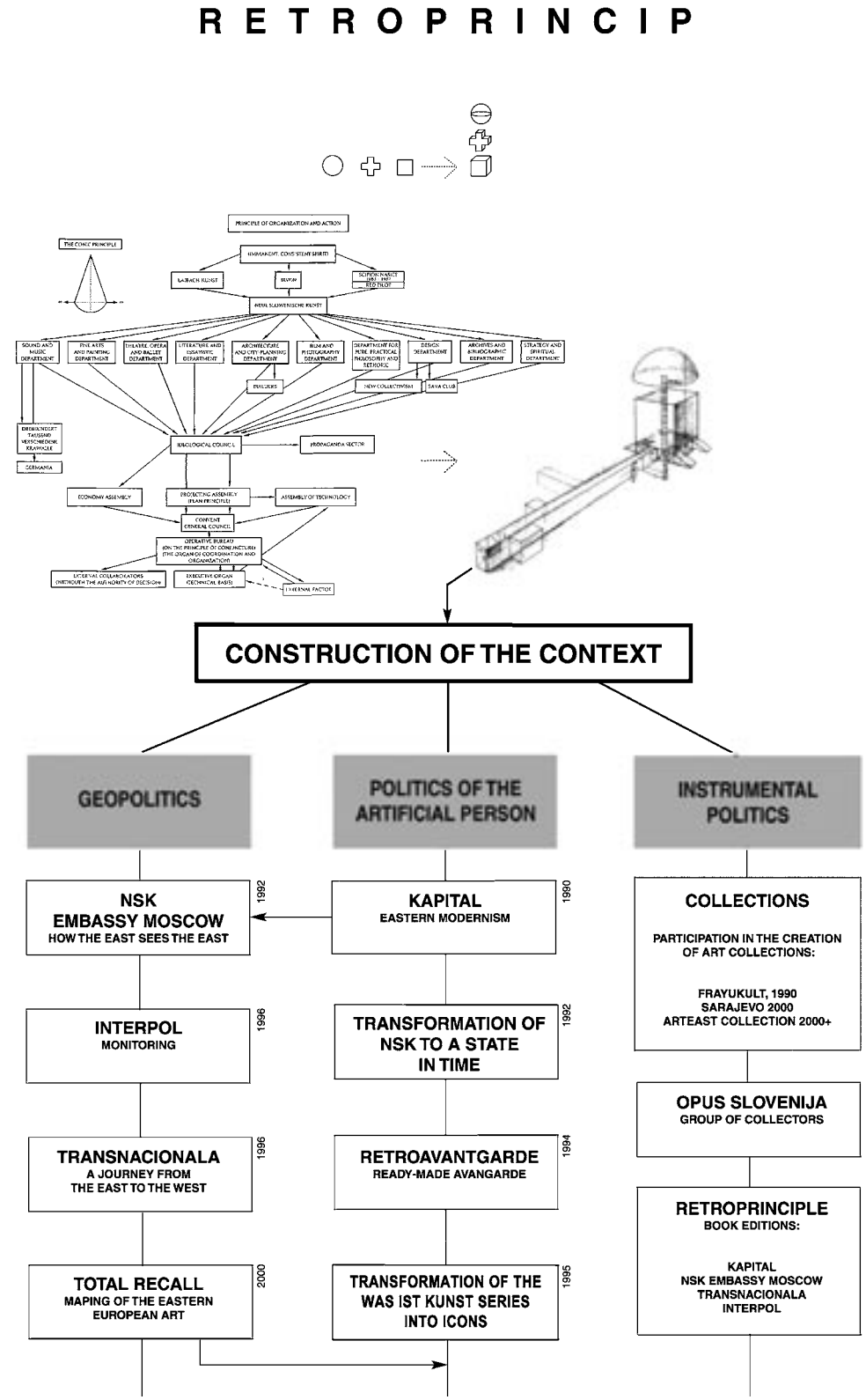
Interview with IRWIN

The East Art Map project (EAM) presents an extended selection of Eastern artists' positions within a specific geo-political framework from the standpoint of art history as a construct. The presentation of the recent publication *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (2006) was part of the public program titled 'What mean these stones?' in conjunction with the *Mercury in Retrograde* exhibition. Stefan Rusu posed questions to the members of IRWIN group Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski, and Borut Vogelnik:

Stefan Rusu: Why was it so important for you as a collective body to deal with the mapping of art history and create such a complex system of orientation, or navigation, through the recovered coordinates of Eastern Art History?

IRWIN: Over the last fifteen years, our work has been oriented towards the construction of context, IRWIN's context. In the scheme of our activities from 1990 onwards, the East Art Map is listed under its original name *Total Recall*.

Borut Vogelnik: East Art Map (EAM), a project that was started in 2000, is a synthesis of the experiences and realizations accumulated over the course of previous projects. EAM deals with the most basic level of organizing information, the drafting of a simple chart of the most important artworks and artists from the area of Europe's East in the period from 1945 to 2000. In Eastern Europe there are, as a rule, no transparent structures in which those events, artworks, and artists that are significant to the history of art might be organized into a referential system that is accepted and respected outside the borders of a single given country.



Instead, we encounter systems that are closed within national boundaries, most often based on a rationale adapted to local needs, and sometimes even doubled, so that alongside official art histories there are a whole series of stories and legends about art and artists who opposed the official art world. But written records about such artists are few and fragmented. Comparisons with contemporary Western art and artists are also extremely rare.

A system that is so fragmented prevents, in the first place, any serious possibility of comprehending the art created during socialist times as a whole. Second, it represents a huge problem for artists who not only lack any solid support for their activities, but who are also, therefore, compelled to navigate between local and international art systems. And third, such a system impedes communication among artists, critics, and theoreticians from these countries. Eastern European art requires an in-depth study that will trace its developments, elucidate its complexities, and place it in a wider context. But it seems that the very immensity of such a project makes it very difficult to realize, so that any insistence on a complex, unsimplified presentation inadvertently results in there being no presentation at all.

S.R. Can you describe the structure and phases of the East Art Map project and its future development?

Miran Mohar: The EAM project started in 2000 and consists of several phases: In the first phase (until 2002), IRWIN, in collaboration with *New Moment* (Ljubljana), invited a group of art critics, curators, and artists from different ex-socialist Eastern European countries to select and present up to ten crucial artifacts, events, and projects from their countries created over the last 50 years. In this way, basic information on approximately 220 artifacts and projects was collected and presented on a CD-ROM (2002) and in a special issue of the *New Moment* magazine in the same year.

The next step was to put the EAM selection onto the Internet and open it up for contributions by its users, who could propose missing artifacts, events, and projects. The international EAM committee chose additional works from these proposals.

The EAM book published by Afterall is derived from these two processes, including all the reproductions of the artifacts selected in this way, as well as additional texts on each artifact and artist. The second part of the book consists of 17 comparative essays by writers from Europe and the USA.

The EAM site will continue to be active and open to suggestions about which artifacts or projects are still missing in the existing EAM selection. From these proposals, the same commission will once again select art works to be included in the EAM.

S.R. How would you explain artists' constant preoccupation with the subject of restaging, reappropriating, and generally dealing with history? Could you briefly state your position and practice in dealing with the concept of returning to history in the context of IRWIN's principle of *Retroavantgarde*?

Borut Vogelnik: Are you so sure that dealing with history in contemporary art production is so dominant? I'm not so convinced. In fact, it is possible to

claim that exactly the opposite was more common for art production over the last 15 years, if the peculiarities of the art production of the 1980s, which dealt with this notion, are not taken into the account. It was not uncommon that artists working in the framework of so-called neo-conceptualism would explicitly deny the importance of a historical perspective on their work. In fact, it seems that exactly this denial of history opened up possibilities to so many works that, knowingly or not, appropriated works from the 1960s and 1970s. It is not unimportant that one of the most influential theses during this period dealt with the end of art (H. Belting and A. Danto)—the thesis that later on found its confirmation in Fukuyama's end of history in general.

IRWIN has been dealing with history (of art in particular) as one of the crucial elements of our activities since its beginnings in the early 1980s. As our regulative matrix, the 'retro principle' is based on the perspective shifts caused by time, distance, and, more precisely, the possibility to retroactively select the causal line of events that enabled the present. This decision is grounded in the asymmetrical position occupied by the narrative of Slovenian art history compared to the so-called international art system.

In short, to be an artist in a highly developed art system where each 'move' is analyzed and simultaneously incorporated into the art-historical narrative differs substantially from being an artist in a system where vast time-space entities are completely uncovered. In the East, it is still possible to intervene in the field of articulation as a 'private individual' on levels that are elsewhere in the exclusive domain of institutions; such interventions are, thanks to already familiar models, so much like painting from nature that we were prepared to see them, in their uniqueness and beauty, as artifacts.

S.R. Is the idea of revolution handed down from the historical avant-garde still a powerful device for creating new knowledge and perpetuating cultural values after the failure of the socialist system in Europe?

Miran Mohar: The historical avant-gardes operated under conditions that were totally different from those of today and, in my view and with all due respect to many artists of that period, the ideas and methods of that time are not directly applicable and repeatable today. We are told how the revolution at the time 'ate' its children, and it's important to learn something from these stories. In our interview with Jürgen Harten from 1989, we said: "the avant-garde in its utopia wanted to change the world like an architect, but cooperated in this change more like a victim." In my view, art is a system with a limited power of action and at best still has extremely positive social effects. But I have a feeling that at the moment it has greater difficulties giving sense to its existence than in the past.

S.R. Is it possible to talk about amnesia in relation to 'Western' culture, and would you trace a link within this paradigm that is related to the EAM project?

Miran Mohar: I would start with sweeping in front of our own door. About 50% of the artifacts chosen by the selectors for the EAM project were unknown to the members of IRWIN who worked on it. And we have been moving quite a lot around the territory of Eastern Europe

over the last 15 years. This shows that contemporary Eastern European art is also largely unknown to those of us who live and work here. If we ourselves don't know it well enough, we can't speak of amnesia. We became aware of the fact that if we didn't organize ourselves someone else would (un)organize us according to his wishes and needs. We realized that we ourselves have to co-create the conditions for the operation of the art system in our own space and to this, in addition to other projects, we have devoted more than 15 years of our activity. Without developing one's own art system (organized publication of theory, education system, art collections, galleries, museums …), one is left to the free play of interests of more developed systems, and thus amnesia is inevitable in the long run.

It's also true that in the period after World War II art from Eastern Europe had a relatively small presence in Western art collections, theory, and art-history surveys. But the situation has been changing for the better over the past few years, and artists of the younger generation are already much more integrated in the international art system. There are several reasons for this synergistic effect, including political ones. It's very encouraging that a publishing house like MIT Press has been filling this gap systematically for more than 10 years now, and that there is a growing number of museums and collections which have been including art from this part of the world more and more systematically. But I wish the development of new art infrastructures in Eastern European countries would be faster than it is at the moment.

S.R. Given the idea of IRWIN's collective production process as a principle of creativity oriented towards recovering nodes of hidden history, dealing with collective amnesia, and encouraging the democratization of the history-making process, how would you distinguish between the curatorial approach and the artist-driven potential of your projects?

Borut Vogelnik: Our projects do differ in themselves between a more curatorial approach and a purely artist-driven one. In the end, they find their proper place and function and are unified within the framework of the contextual scheme. We have been practicing this mode of production from the very beginning. Actually, we started off with selecting. IRWIN's first important presentation from 1984, titled *Back to the USA*, was, in fact, a "remake" of a contemporary American art exhibition with the same name that was at the time making the rounds in major European cities. For us, the two approaches were intrinsically connected from the beginning, being two sides of the same coin, so to speak.

The word 'art,' etymologically speaking, means to make, simply to make. Now what is making? Making something is choosing a tube of blue, a tube of red, putting some of it on the plate … So in order to choose, you can use tubes of paint, you can use brushes, but you can also use a ready-made thing, either mechanically or by the hand of another man even, if you want, and appropriate it, since it is you who chose it. Choice is the main thing, even in normal painting. (Marcel Duchamp)

Ten or more years ago, when we presented the work of Gorgona, a Zagreb-based art group active in the 1950s

and 1960s, to a well-known curator, he said: "If this were true, I would know about it." In other words, his statement should be understood as: "If this artist group really existed, I would know about it. You are just provoking me." Under his presumption that he knew everything worth knowing, the work of Gorgona was transformed into fiction. Such presumptions are not so rare. Reality itself thus takes on qualities of the virtual. The project Retroavantgarde from the second half of the 1990s functions as if it were a work of art. This double inscription — as an act of mapping and artifact as well as, in this particular case, the shift in perception it produces — is precisely what interests us.

EAM is conceived differently, although one can draw substantial parallels.

On several occasions, different people have asked us in relation to EAM: "This is an art project, isn't it?" As if it were necessary to exclude the possibility that it is not an art project, that it is for real.

S.R. How would you describe East-West differences towards the EU integration process, and does it make sense to promote and deal with differences in the context of the history of art, given the new circumstances of EU enlargement?

Borut Vogelnik: It is necessary to stress that EAM is not dealing with difference at all, but it is entirely dedicated to the art of the East. Your question suggests that it made sense to discuss these differences when Europe was divided into two blocks, but that with the integration of Eastern countries into the EU it no longer makes sense. At the time when it did make sense, there was no interest in discussing the difference, neither on the Eastern nor on the Western side. The same could be true now, when the signification of the difference is becoming questionable. A possible answer to your question would be that EAM is in fact dealing with the past, with the period when the difference made sense.

Promoting and dealing with this difference as applied to the history of art under the circumstances of EU enlargement? The answer is yes; it makes sense, probably more than ever. Instead of stubbornly insisting on closed art systems, it seems that only through self-articulation and comparison is it possible to open a space for serious communication with others. Are not communication and collaboration between different community members on more or less an equal basis an explicit interest of the EU?

But even if it were politically opportune not to promote the difference, the question would still remain what to do with it. Do you suggest we simply forget it? Are not difference and differentiation very important when art is in question? Piles of books have been written to differentiate between sometimes very similar works. How do you think that a suggestion not to bother about the difference between, for instance, conceptualism and neo-conceptualism would be accepted?

Fifty years of divided Europe. With all due respect for numerous personal tragedies, let's try to see this division as an experiment. Why not take advantage of this fantastic experiment? At the beginning of the 1990s, both Eastern and Western Europe were interested in bypassing this difference as a political aim, and the baby of potential differentiation was thrown out with the bath water. What a waste!

S.R. How would you argue in response to Stephan Dillemuth's critique, which he voiced at the public discussion in Amsterdam? He disagrees with applying 'Western' market strategies and insists that 'Eastern' artists must be capable of finding 'other' artistic strategies to navigate between the capitalist and socialist dilemma. Is there a so-called third way?

Miran Mohar: This question contains in itself a presumption that we artists who operate in the art system and the institutions of this system in Eastern Europe have the possibility to choose the best from different political and economic systems — like in a kind of warehouse — and produce something new. Similar advice has been given a number of times by Western colleagues: "Don't wish for an art market, since you have no idea how good it is in your country that it doesn't exist." Good for whom and what kind of market should be absent? Why is the "Eastern" artist supposed to find a better synthesis, and what is then expected for the 'Western' artist in his space? I would repeat that Eastern Europe lacks or has poorly developed — with some honorable exceptions — elements of the art system on almost all levels, although the production of contemporary art is extremely intensive. Of course, there are our wishes and ideas about what would be best for contemporary art, but it's clear that in art, as in other fields, a system develops from many tendencies and different interests, together with all its antagonisms.

S.R. Has your EAM project had an impact on the art market? Did it entail a strategy of making visible and integrating the missing 'Eastern' art history into the established art market?

Andrej Savski: It was not our intention to enter into this field, and we don't want this project to be viewed as some marketing strategy. We of course expect that at some point there will be some resonance also within the market reality, but it will certainly not happen immediately. One can presume this will go hand in hand with the economic growth of the Eastern European countries. Local spaces will define the value of their art.

S.R. When we were developing the concept for *Mercury in Retrograde*, we looked into the notion of constructed history with the desire to destabilize the viewer — in a way that might create an escape passage from the 'Bermuda Triangle' created by the constellation of the state, politics, and history. Given that IRWIN's practice focuses on the space between culture and ideology, do you think contemporary art is a useful device for navigating through the fields of established neoliberal power structures: official history, official culture, and official rituals?

Andrej Savski: This is an extremely difficult question and there is no simple answer to it. On the one hand, we have to be honest and admit that contemporary art is THE device for navigating through the fields of established social power structures. It serves these fields very well — and as such it is paid by them and consecrated through them; this is the case especially in the first world, where contemporary art has already achieved the status of a mainstream art form and where the state/system has managed to commodify it

or pacify it. As such, it is an important industrial branch of society.

Art probably has a different role in the second and third world, where it battles with other art forms that have a more mainstream or official status, and/or where it is perceived by the state/system as an obstacle.

But you were referring to the critical potential of contemporary art as a means to oppose the established power structure. Ideally, the medium of art can be used as a tool to confer messages. It can be critical, and it can influence outer reality—it just rarely does so. The way the art system is structured today, it is obvious that it has an agenda that is very well integrated with the neoliberal power structures you're speaking about.

S.R. Does it make sense to apply a contemporary art approach in dealing with such complex social issues today?

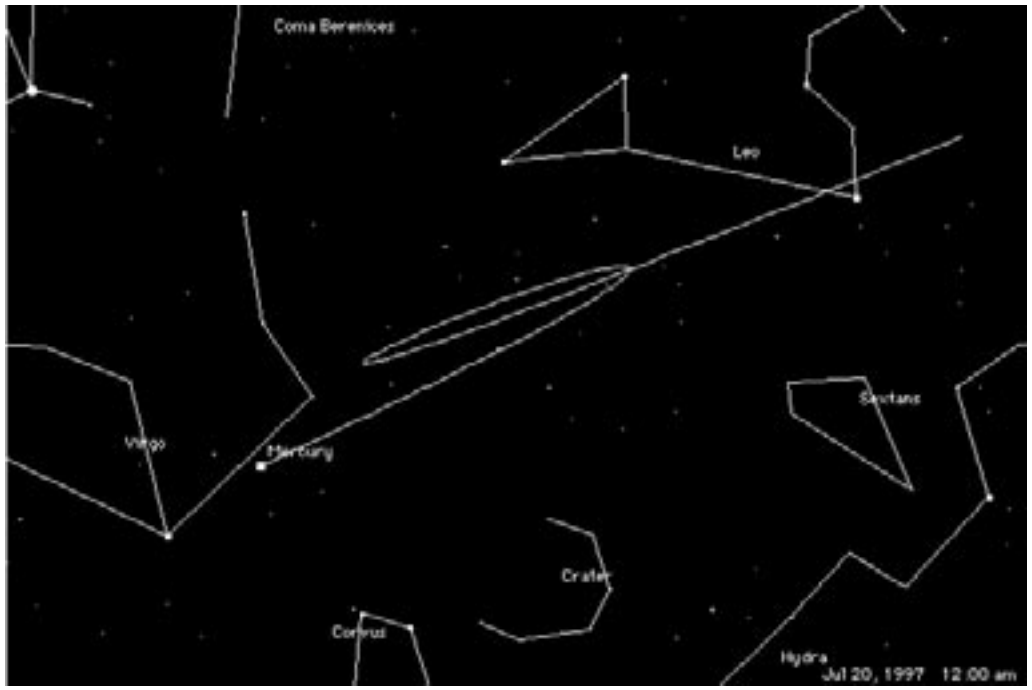
Andrej Savski: Of course, but one has to be aware of the limitations art and the art system have. This is a given that can also be turned into an advantage.

Tessa Giblin

Disambiguation

Disambiguation in Wikipedia is the process of resolving ambiguity—the conflict that occurs when a term is closely associated with two or more different topics… Disambiguations are paths leading to different topics that share the same term or a similar term: …put brackets around Mercury (like this: [[Mercury]]) and you'll have a link. But were you intending to link to Mercury the element, the planet, the automobile brand, the record label, the NASA manned-spaceflight project, the plant, or the Roman god?

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Disambiguation



I recently told a friend that the point he was making was hypocritical and he replied, 'no my dear, it is contradictory'. What a contradiction can provide in terms of information, direction and position, what it implies and whether it is necessary to have fixed boundaries is very much reflective of the oscillating iconography of *Mercury in Retrograde*.[1] Whether we are thinking about looping timelines, vector-intelligent trajectories or linear roads, comprehension in these terms exits between established polarities — between the contradictory terms, truths or co-ordinates. They become both concretely and abstractly points of reference — points sometimes absurd when thought about in isolation, but as a partner in a relationship they become the nodes within a more elaborate discussion. What my friend and I were discovering was that neither of his points were remarkably interesting — but that together they were co-dependently defining an adversity which would enable independent thought, a framework of reference where the spectrum of reality within became a matter of individual opinion, if only for the duration of our discussion.

The dualities within a post-colonial way of thinking are built around varying, repetitive partnerships. The colonised and coloniser, the oppressed and empowered, the original and imported. The violence and application of justice during the establishment of state has been revisited with the payments of economic and political reparations, reinstating the legality of contemporary application of justice, and also mirrored in an equally violent de-colonisation, tattooing dark lines on the flesh of history. Whether these dramas are played out in the former colonies or whether the essential conflict emerges in the suburbs of the metropolises from which the ambition to conquer emerged, communities are polarised by their approach to cultural and social integration. If the 'other' of the last 200 years has taken the form of ethnic objectification, we are undoubtedly shifting back to a religious framework of 'otherness', creating fundamentalist positions based on contradictions within democracy.

Thinking within contradiction, binaries and fundamentalism, *MiR* was constructed to engender an open reading — the building of de Appel was split in two — part historical museum, part gallery; the guidebook contained only facts which related to the artists' projects without any analysis; and the works were of course engaged in this way.

Omer Fast's characters in *Godville* splice back and forth between the past and present, characterisations and personal positions, pressing at the cracks between narratives and building references within the manipulation of language which branches well beyond *Godville*'s immediate setting. Mariana Castillo Deball constructs a dialogue between the relationships of

1. The exhibition *Mercury in Retrograde* has a website built with the functioning system of Wikipedia: an online, editable encyclopaedia where knowledge is collected, disseminated and debated by the public at large (subject to Wikipedia guidelines and editors). A graphic illustration of the movement seen to be made by Mercury when the planets are in a certain alignment is seen on first entry to www.mercuryinretrograde.org, which mirrors the Wiki interface and will be maintained for a year, before being archived, as a fully editable autonomous website — a live model of knowledge collection and vulnerable vessel of authority.

two peoples to their artefacts — from Tlaloc in Mexico to the Antique Street of Amsterdam where the diverse attitudes are compiled together in the spoken excerpts and drawings. The circular library of Aurélien Froment, *De L'île à hélice à Ellis Island* circulates through the possibility of a purpose, arriving back where it started and confirming a suspected dependence on a beginning and an end, while in *The Apse, the Bell and the Antelope* Roger Tomalty guides us through the utopic building project of Arcosanti, a character full of conviction for a reality which barely seems to exist, set in the gallery against a hand-made trompe-l'oeil. What it is to comprehend in these in-between or non-places also emerges in David Maljkovic's films, whose ambiguous scenes which quote the future as well as the past are set in a distinctly real time and place — for all of the sci-fi and modernist textures his characters are simple and direct — communicating something abstract and hopefully illusive within a directly referential set of icons and signifiers.

The process of resolving ambiguity in Wikipedia — disambiguation — is quite curious as it provides the option of clarification, while at the same time celebrating collective and contentious knowledge bases. Being self-reflexive, it also explains the use of the term 'ambiguity':

> Ambiguity refers to the property of words, terms, and concepts, as being undefined, indefinable, or otherwise vague, and thus having an unclear meaning. Ambiguity is distinct from vagueness, which arises when the boundaries of meaning are indistinct. Ambiguity is in contrast with definition, and typically refers to an unclear choice between standard definitions, as given by a dictionary, or else understood as common knowledge. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disambiguation)

Ambiguity as a space created for conscious thinking.

And in answer to the first question on everybody's lips — what is Mercury in Retrograde?

It is an optical illusion.

*

A Rejection Letter

Diana Wiegersma

Story of an Aborted Project

Fernando Sánchez Castillo plays with history and the mechanics of power; he reappropriates, he distorts, he dismantles and diverts history from it official reading. With irony and seriousness, Sánchez Castillo's work expands the territories of aesthetic resistance.

Talking with him upon his invitation to participate in *Mercury in Retrograde*, he expressed the desire to take on a project that he had in mind for long but that he was never able to realize despite various attempts.

The idea was to manage to obtain the death mask of el Generalissimo Franco, a bronze cast of his hands and palm on loan from the Museo del Ejercito (Military Museum), still in Madrid. Fernando Sánchez Castillo project was to contract different palm readers to read and unveil the secrets of a man that had ruled Spain and dominated its history for thirty-six years. Unfortunately, this highly symbolic and meaningful project of recreating and reimaginating the past was once again aborted. The last materials to touch the mythic dictator's skin became taboo and sacred. Although put on exhibition a few months before in a room that looked like an commemoratory monument to El Caudillo in the former Military Museum, our loan requests in early 2006 were inevitably dismissed.

Here, we are enclosing the brief correspondence we had with General Director Don Luís Fernando Nuñez, the person responsible for these items of the collection and our contact person at the Museum. Receiving no answer to my last letter of January 31st and after further unfruitful attempts, I decided to call him because of the urgency of the request. Unfortunately, I didn't and couldn't record the surreal discussion we had on the phone, where he definitely confirmed the refusal and, embarrassed by my questions, assured me that it wasn't for political reasons. Given that the document of this exchange is missing, here is another reading of the story…

(A) **A Rejection Letter** **Diana Wiegersma**

Ámsterdam, 20 de enero, 2006.

Estimado General Director Don Luís Fernando Núñez,

Le escribimos desde la fundación De Appel con la intención de solicitar su colaboración para un proyecto de exposición que estamos preparando para principios de este mes de abril. Dicho evento tiene una gran repercusión anual en la vida cultural de nuestra ciudad, Ámsterdam y en Holanda.

El proyecto trata sobre historia y desaparición. Entre otras instituciones han confirmado su participación museos como el muy prestigioso Rijksmuseum de Ámsterdam..

Estamos interesados en solicitar su colaboración en el préstamo de algunas piezas de su colección que serían parte crucial de la muestra.

Nuestra institución correría con todos los gastos y requerimientos que ustedes estimaran oportunos.

Les rogamos que contacten con nosotros lo antes posible dado el poco tiempo disponible para organizar este evento. Me podéis contactar al ctp@deappel.nl o llamarme por telefono al + 31. 20. 62. 55. 651 y pedir por Diana Wiegersma (hablo español).

Muchas gracias, quedo a vuestra entera disposición.

Un cordial saludo,

Diana Wiegersma.

STICHTING DE APPEL FOUNDATION
NIEUWE SPIEGELSTRAAT 10 1017 DE AMSTERDAM TEL +31 20 6235651 FAX +31 20 6225215 E-MAIL info@deappel.nl

(B) **A Rejection Letter** **Diana Wiegersma**

Amsterdam, 23 de Enero 2006.

Estimado General Director Don Luís Fernando Núñez,

Las piezas que nos interesan para nuestra exposición son las siguientes:

-Las tres (·3) manos de bronce del General Franco (los dos puños y la palma)
-La mascara funeraria del General Franco.

Entiendo que estamos muy justo con el tiempo, pero no pierdo la illusion de poder tener estas piezas para nuestra muestra dado el valor que tienen para la coherencía de la exposicion.

Muchas gracias para la rapidez en contestarme.

Un cordial saludo,

Diana Wiegersma.

STICHTING DE APPEL FOUNDATION
NIEUWE SPIEGELSTRAAT 10 1017 DE AMSTERDAM TEL +31 20 6235651 FAX +31 20 6225215 E-MAIL info@deappel.nl

(C) **A Rejection Letter** **Diana Wiegersma**

MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA

EJÉRCITO DE TIERRA

INSTITUTO DE HISTORIA Y CULTURA MILITAR

MUSEO DEL EJÉRCITO

MUSEO DEL EJÉRCITO - REG. ARCH.
SALIDA
Nº 57 FECHA 24 ENE. 20

F A X

DE: EXCMO. SR. D. LUIS FERNANDO NUÑEZ MARTINEZ - GENERAL DIRECTOR DEL MUSEO DEL EJERCITO	
A: Dª DIANA WIEGERSMA – STICHTING DE APPEL – FOUNDATION DE APPEL FAX- 00 31 206 22 52 15	
ASUNTO: CONTACTO URGENTEMENTE	
S/REF	N/REF 504/MUE/UPC-8
FECHA : 24 de enero de 2006	
Nº DE PAGS. INCLUYENDO PORTADA :	PRECEDENCIA

En relación a la relación de fondos de este Museo del Ejército, como préstamo temporal para una exposición, que se ha de celebrar en Ámsterdam, a principios de abril del año en curso, tengo que comunicarle, que por tratarse de unas piezas que están en proceso de limpieza y restauración en los talleres técnicos, motivado por su próximo traslado para la nueva sede del Museo del Ejército en el Alcázar de Toledo, es materialmente imposible acceder a su solicitud ya que para esas fechas todavía no se habrá finalizado la restauración.

EL GENERAL DIRECTOR

Luis Fernando Núñez Martínez.

C/ Méndez Núñez, 1
28014 – Madrid
TEL.: 91.522.89.77
FAX.: 91.5314624

* EN CASO DE PROBLEMAS EN LA RECEPCIÓN, POR FAVOR LLAME A NUESTRAS OFICINAS.

(D) **A Rejection Letter** **Diana Wiegersma**

STICHTING DE APPEL
FOUNDATION DE APPEL
NIEUWE SPIEGELSTRAAT 10 1017 DE AMSTERDAM TEL +31 20 6225215 FAX +31 20 6225215 E-MAIL info@deappel.nl

Amsterdam, 31 de Enero, 2006

Estimado General Director Don Luís Fernando Nuñez,

He recibido su carta y entiendo que el museo no tiene la posibilidad de prestar las piezas siguientes:
La mascara funeraria, los dos puños y la palma del General Franco, para la exposicion organizada por el CTP De Appel.
Non obstante, permiteme de llamarle la atención sobre la relevancia de estas piezas en nuestra exposicion.
La muestra "Traveling to Retrograde" examina la relación entre historia y desaparición, entre memoria y olvido. Como unos artefacts, documentos, archivos, permiten de resistir al olvido. Los museos y las colecciones están en el centro de la temática.
Las piezas que le habia pedido tán significativa como la mascara funeraria de Napoleon (cuál copia conseguimos por las Invalides, París) son de primera importancia para la coherancia de nuestra exposición.
Por este motivo permiteme de pedirle un último favor que podria salvar la situación. En breve, le pido la permisión de poder sacar una buena fotografía (fotografía profesional) de la mascara y la palma del General Franco con la finalidad de revelarlas a escala real y exponerlas.
Espero que este último favor saldra positivo y sín molestias por su parte.

Muchas gracias.
Un cordial saludo,

Diana Wiegersma.

*

A Rejection Letter Diana Wiegersma

Translation of the letters

(A)

Amsterdam, January 20th, 2006

Dear General Director Don Luís Fernando Núñez,

We are writing you from the De Appel Foundation with the intention to solicitate your collaboration for an exhibition project that we are currently organizing for the beginning of April 2006. This annual event has an important impact in the cultural life of our city of Amsterdam and the Netherlands.

The project is deals with history and disappearance. Among other institutions, museums such as the prestigious Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam have already confirmed their participation.

We are interested in requesting your collaboration for the loan of some artifacts from your collection that would be crucial for our show.

Our institution would cover all the costs and organizational matters that you would deem opportune.

We would appreciate your reply as soon as possible, given the short time remaining before the exhibition opens.

With kind regards,

Diana Wiegersma.

(B)

Amsterdam, January 23rd, 2006

Dear General Director Don Luís Fernando Núñez,

The items we are interested in borrowing for our exhibition are the followings:

- The three (3) bronze hands of the General Franco (the two fists and the palm).
- The funeral mask of General Franco.

I understand we are really short in time, but I keep the wish and the great excitement of having the items for our exhibition given the significance that they have for the coherence of the show.

Thank you very much for your quick answer.

(C)

Ministry of Defense Land Army
Institute of Military History and Culture.

N° 97 January 20th, 2006

Concerning the collection of the Military Museum and the temporary loan for an exhibition which is to be opened in Amsterdam at the beginning of April of this year, I have to inform you that the cleaning and restoration of the concerned items are currently underway in our technical studios. This procedure is necessitated by the transfer of the Military Museum to new headquarters in the Alcázar of Toledo. It is therefore materially impossible to fulfill your request, since the restoration of these items will not yet be finalized by the date you indicated.

General Director

Don Luís Fernando Nuñez.

(D)

Amsterdam, January 31st, 2006

Dear General Director Don Luís Fernando Núñez,

I well received your letter and I understand that the museum doesn't have the possibility to borrow the following items; The funeral mask, the two fists and the palm of the General Franco for the exhibition organized by the CTP De Appel.
Nevertheless, let me raise your attention on the relevance of these items for our display. The show "Traveling to Retrograde" examines the relation between History and disappearance, between memory and oblivion, on how some artifacts, documents, archives allow to resist against the oblivion. Museums and collection are in the center of our theme.
The items we required, are as relevant as the funeral mask of Napoleon (copy we got from the Invalides, Paris) are of primer importance for the coherence of our show.
For this reason, please allow me to ask you an ultimate favor that could save the situation. In short, I ask you to allow us to take a good photograph (a professional photograph) of the funeral mask and palm of the General Franco in order to develop them and blow them up to real scale and put them in display.

I hope you will agree to this last inquiry and that it won't cause any inconvenience on your part.

Thank you very much.
With kind regards,

Diana Wiegersma.

Defne Ayas

WIKI and the future of knowledge

The CTP-team asked colleagues about history-making, authorship, and the role of wiki in exhibition archiving. Respondents were Julieta Aranda, an artist and a co-founder of e-flux video rental, Michele Thursz, an independent curator, Mark Tribe, founder of Rhizome.org, Naeem Mohaiemen, a filmmaker/activist, and Claire Bishop, an art historian. A selection of their responses can be seen here. For complete interviews, please visit www.mercuryinretrograde.org, which we will continue to add to with discussions based on the exhibition.

JULIETA ARANDA is a Mexico-born, New York based artist, whose work has been exhibited internationally. Together with Anton Vidokle, Aranda founded e-flux video rental.

NAEEM MOHAIEMEN is a filmmaker and tactical media artist. He is the founder of Visible Collective (disappearedinamerica.org), which creates art interventions on hyphenated identities and security panic.

MARK TRIBE founded Rhizome.org, an online resource for new media artists. He is a Professor of Modern Culture and Media Studies at Brown University. Tribe is the co-author, with Reena Jana, of *New Media Art* (Taschen, 2006).

MICHELE THURSZ is an independent curator based in NYC. Thursz has dedicated her curatorial practice to the investigation of technology's effect on contemporary art and culture at large.

CLAIRE BISHOP is a Leverhulme Research Fellow in the Curating Contemporary Art department at the Royal College of Art. Her current research addresses the politics of spectatorship in socially engaged and participatory art.

1.

Art and history are inherently individualistic fields. The singly authored work is the standard for both professions. Art has recently opened up through a variety of rhizomic connections and collective activities. Historical scholarship, though, is still characterized by possessive individualism — a historical or historically significant work by multiple or anonymous authors is almost unimaginable. Do you think there will ever be a more interesting future to the past? Can history ever function as open source?

Julieta Aranda

The question 'Will there ever be a more interesting future to the past?' raises a problem that I find very compelling: At the present moment, it seems very difficult to articulate the idea of future. Does this mean that we have reached the end of history, and the only possibility available to us is to reformulate all the possible combinations of the past? Does this mean that the future was? To think of the future as an organization of the past takes away the sense of hope that came into being with the articulation of Marxism, and subsequently with Modernism. In order to answer your question, I need to extend it in two other possible directions, will there ever be a more interesting future to the present, will there ever be a more interesting future to the future?

Regarding the second part of your question: History has been structured as a direct consequence of reason: a linear construct that divides up moments and arranges them in time. For me, to think about the function of history would be to think about its meaning; and, according to Henri Lefebvre, "The meaning of history is therefore to end: not to give way to metaphysics or religion: to immobilism or eternity. Its meaning is to overcome itself. […] The meaning of history is to allow us to move from the discourse of history (Hegel) to the discourse *on* history, which reveals it and goes further. The meaning of history was to unite meaning and truth to their dissociation. After which, meaning continues with the search for meaning, but it is no longer truth — the same, old truth — that seeks itself; and it is no longer history." (From Henri Lefebvre, *La fin de l'histoire* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1970, pp.215-216)

I don't know if the 'open source' model of a myriad anonymous authors would be the best way to update history; what I do know is that I would like to see history operating as a collection of subjectivities, where the historical objects/events are expanded to contain all of their possible readings. This proposition is much less hierarchical than the current model in operation, where the subjectivities and narratives contained in a historical object or event are always collapsed into a reading that conforms to the current cultural imperative.

Naeem Mohaiemen

Any historical text can eventually go through a collaborative process, often in the form of an *ex post facto* deconstruction. If you look at recent debated works of history, there has been copious dissection in letters, critiques and alternate versions published since the original publication. One recent example is Patrick Tierney's *Darkness in El Dorado*, which worked as an indictment of the field of Anthropology and its self-aggrandizing narratives. Tierney alleged that a measles vaccine distributed by University of Michigan researchers killed hundreds of primitive Amazon Indians by triggering a measles outbreak in 1968. The book ignited controversy within the discipline and

precipitated dissections and analyses in *National Geographic*, *Scientific American*, *The New York Times* and finally a 300-page task force report from the American Anthropological Association (they were careful to highlight that this was an 'inquiry,' not an 'investigation'). All of this work sought to supplement, amplify or contradict Tierney's central thesis. For me, this is open source historiography — of course not one designed or intended by the original authors, but still definitely modifying and opening up history-writing to a more collaborative and/or argumentative process.

Similar debates swirled around Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*, Edward Said's *Out Of Place*, Martin Amis' *Koba The Dread*, Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial*, etc., all of which served to amplify or challenge those narratives. Peters' central assumption that there was no significant Arab demographic position and claim on historic Palestine has been pretty comprehensively debunked by now. History is always in flux, and the representation of historical facts is embedded within this, filtered through the audience and critic's ideological framework and self-imposed certainties. As Lukacs wrote, "The concrete totality of the historical world, the concrete and total historical process, is the only point of view from which understanding becomes possible."

Mark Tribe
We are seeing an increase in collaborative research and scholarship across the sciences and humanities. I think it is all but inevitable that research and scholarship in the fields of history and art history will also become more collaborative. When I collaborated with Reena Jana, an arts journalist, on my recent book (*New Media Art*, Taschen 2006), we actually used a wiki to write the book, which we found incredibly helpful. It enabled us to work on the manuscript simultaneously, and to keep track of changes. It would be cool to put the book online as a wiki so that artists could update their entries, add new works as they complete them, correct errors, etc. It would also enable artists whom we didn't include (often due to the length limitations of the series). Another possibility would be to limit participation in such a wiki to art historians and critics, or to set up some kind of wiki-based peer review system. Such open-source approaches to the writing of history would have certain advantages over the more traditional single-author method, but I don't think they would render the monograph obsolete or unnecessary, particularly in areas like art history and criticism, in which subjective opinion and matters of taste are not only unavoidable but also valuable.

Michele Thursz
I think the present is always more interesting than the past, on every level. I actually believe that history is open source, meaning the culmination of many perspectives and documents of actions make history and serve as markers to continue the designated conversation. The retelling, readdressing or manipulating of historic actions and documentations enable a continued investigation of our perspectives on interpersonal situations, social structures and art making.

2.

The *Mercury in Retrograde* exhibition website is designed as a wikisite, which makes it available to anyone to read/copy/paste/print, but also — more remarkably — it offers the freedom to use and manipulate it. You can take the curatorial entry on an artist or topic, edit and tweak it, add more links to its content, or copy/paste and publish it in a book. In a way, this argues for taking away authorship from curators in any conventional sense. Do you think this is too ambitious to imagine?

Naeem Mohaiemen
I don't think it's too ambitious, rather it's eminently feasible and even necessary in the near future. Not every project can be without author, but for certain projects, group collaboration and either an anonymous central identity or a collective identity can be quite liberating. I'm thinking now of early experiments on the Internet. Before there were all these GUI interfaces and browsers, there were simple, ASCII Usenet bulletin boards. In 1989, students started using these Usenet boards to launch country or culture-specific debates. Hotly debated histories, e.g. the Armenian genocide, would inspire thousands of posts — all heavily concentrated on college campuses that had access to Usenet. It was my first experience of using a 'handle' to anonymize myself. It liberated all of us to be much more precocious and pugnacious. People's interests and scope of writing became broad, as no one felt constrained by thoughts such as "Oh, XXX usually writes about this." I'm all for that sort of decentralized and empowered authorship.

Mark Tribe
Yes, wikis can enable anyone (or a select few, depending on how one sets the wiki up) to edit text easily and quickly. But open source licensing schemes (such as Creative Commons) are equally important to your notion of free distribution and publishing of appropriated material. There is no copyright or copyleft notice of any kind on the *Mercury in Retrograde* wiki, which would mean that, if I wanted to copy material from the site and use it on my website, I would be in violation of various national and international copyright laws. I also noticed that some of the pages on the exhibition site are locked for editing. Adding a Creative Commons license to the site would go a long way toward the goal of making the site truly open source. Another challenge to such open source projects is getting people to participate. As I have discovered myself, you can put up a wiki, but that doesn't mean people will come and edit it! In addition to starting with a project that is compelling to others, one usually needs to put significant energy into outreach.

Julieta Aranda
This reminds me of the project *East Art Map - A (Re) Construction of the History of Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe* which was initiated in 2001 by the Slovenian artist group IRWIN. The concept reads: "Every single move by an artist in Western European civilization is documented. Did you know there is no such thing in Eastern Europe? [...] This was so for decades, but it doesn't have to be like this anymore. We are planning to transform the legends and stories of the underground into a legal art history. [...] History is not given. It has to be constructed." Like *Mercury in Retrograde*, the *East Art Map* (EAM) project is open to anyone, although for EAM,

the contributions submitted are subjected to editorial process to decide on their inclusion.

I can't pass a qualitative judgment on the ambition of your project, since I am extremely sympathetic to the idea of using this kind of methodology for the construction of open-ended archives. I merely would like to say that while these kind of initiatives are extremely important as tools to broaden the ways in which information is gathered, this effort is only one part of the process, and their success can only be measured further down the line: How can this information be circulated if at all? We also need to think about affecting the channels of distribution, and the creation of new models should go beyond the idea of denying authorship and towards the creation of subjectivities.

Michele Thursz

I think it's interesting to reduce definitions: curator, makers, communication, production platforms, and public. If we look at the structure of a web-log, you can make comparisons in relationship to addressing a certain issue, situation or object and creating a dialogue with a designated public; the threads of the specific topic are other perspectives or even experiences. This is what naturally happens in an exhibition, but then what happens to the information when the viewer engages with it? And how does it get translated? Either way, in the conversation, whether it be a blog or an exhibition, a topic was explored…where it starts and ends, nobody really knows.

Here, the concept of the exhibition was integral to the structure of the wiki. This way of navigating information is a starting point, a conceptual underpinning of a way to create personal opinion / perspectives inside or under the umbrella of an exhibition. Basically, the structure exposes a process through the navigation. The ability to edit and add is similar to the artistic and curatorial practice. It will be interesting to see the edited, printed versions, though the intentions of the curators are still there, maintaining the mission of the .org, the artists, and designers.

3.

Wikipedia is written by probably millions of people — many of whom who have chosen not to attach their names to it. The action takes place collaboratively. Do you think by bringing this wiki feature back to a more conservative world, namely the visual art world, and locking it to a domain name at www.mercuryinretrograde.org, we actually were dishonest, and this experiment is born to fail?

Naeem Mohaiemen

I didn't realize the experiment had "failed"! By what criteria? If so, should we draw the conclusion that the art space is less collaborative? Especially in an anonymous environment? If no credit is given (name on the gallery label, catalogue essay, etc.), do people just opt out? I don't think this sort of experiment is doomed to fail at all, but you need some shock therapy interventions to popularize the idea. It doesn't fit naturally with the prevailing order of work, but that order needs to be wrecked. Perhaps as a first step, these interview answers (I presume others are being asked these same questions) should be published anonymously?

Julieta Aranda

This makes me think of the process of archeology, which allows for a collective truth to be constantly actualized and rewritten. I think it is very important to intervene in the linear narrative of art history with a collaborative model; the only thing is that by their very nature collaborative models defy ownership.

Michele Thursz

We should not assume that the general public knows what this type of communication or generative information platform is. I suppose that to be PC one should have explained to / educated the public about the protocols of this platform: the viewer can be passive or active and it is a platform to archive and publish. I think that education is key. I suppose I would have enabled / empowered the users (by a statement or directions of what wiki is), with a tutorial that would allow the public to feel free to edit, use, distribute.

On the other hand, by using the platform you innately educate — because of people's literacy with the web and the interface, the platform incites the viewer to explore. I think that it all comes with your curatorial intent. I think it is very interesting on many levels to have an active editor, to have hyperlinks, to have so many points of perspective, to not know exactly who the author is —the way museums are doing it in integrating collections by periods and medium or relevant issues in regards to medium or even style—SO if the institutions do it, then why not push it up a notch and really delve in? I mean, we have the ability to go all the way with certain technology tools allowing our concepts to blossom through inclusion. We must consider the exhibition as a tool for education or cultural awareness, and the exhibition as a popular contest. The success of an exhibition comes from clarity, not from ratings and sales—exposing the effect and power of art and culture on the individual and society.

4.

In the age of too many personal blogs and RSS feeders, what do you think is the potential for the future of the art world? Will the rhizomic dreams survive?

Naeem Mohaiemen

RSS feeds are, for me, just a tool of lazy surfing — a small incremental improvement, not a paradigm shift. Blogs, by contrast, are a seismic shift in the mental environment and mediascape. Especially because you can't easily tell how much traffic each blog gets, so they can all be centrally influential, based on our collective delusion or approval. My favorite blogs are all over the map — the obnoxious bitchfest *GoFugYourself*, the navel-gazing technorati jabber *Valleywag*, the Asian film obsession *Kaijushakedown*, the slogan collecting *PicturesOfWalls*, etc. Sometimes they are without a defined purpose or goal, but they are always windows into cultural practices. Transplanting this model to the art world offers the tantalizing possibility of a great flattening.

Interventions with little/no official patronage are of particular interest to me, especially in urban spaces like sidewalks, laundromats, phone booths, video game parlors, etc. In England, Yara el-Sherbini is doing these interesting experiments where she takes the venerable (and crusty) British ritual of the "Pub Quiz" and puts a nail bomb in its heart by supplanting traditional questions with seemingly innocuous puzzles that burrow into the heart of questions of religion, belonging and nothingness. In New York, Emily Jacir took personal emails, written to her by various friends living under siege in Lebanon and Gaza, and distributed them to students in a workshop and told them to react to them. Among the various responses were "Lost Dog" posters, quiet readings while sitting on the sidewalk, chalk graffiti, etc. These forms of work provoke more democratically dispersed conversations than any of the Biennial extravaganzas (what Julieta Aranda calls "Miss Universe Contests"). That is a space I look forward to and work towards.

Julieta Aranda

I may come off surprisingly antiquated here: I am really enamored of physical publications. There is something extremely important for me in the physicality and tactile value of a publication… and as much as I like the Internet, I am reluctant to depend solely on electricity.

Michele Thursz

I think that the more conversation about practice and experience, the better. When speaking of the art world, this is the art market, the art market will only thrive on the outcome of this type of communication. During this time of flux when all information is equal in terms of reuse, it is a difficult situation because we are not all educated in the same way. Here a lot of wanderers have a chance to just happen by, but why not... It's just a moment during which we all start to understand the effect of technology on culture at large. I suppose, as usual, that the issue lies in education and literacy. It's very important, I think, to understand history and to understand that the rules are changing—not fundamentally just in terms of position and public, because if we just start with I — the point where we understand things as an individual — loops occur, in which it seems as if something desperate is happening, like the collapse of the art world. But I don't think this is the case.

These types of platforms allow for a more diverse and inclusive conversation and quite possibly could allow for progressive actions that push the set boundaries of history and the recent past, especially in art making and exhibitions. The root lies in a history / philosophy that allows for a grounding place for engagement / communication, for personal opinion and expression to begin. Here, we have a very interesting place to segue — where heritages, cultures, and social structures collide, where new protocols are made and art continues to be made as a reflection on the perspective of the maker/s. Yet, these concepts can be realized on many platforms, and many social and personal issues can be addressed with rules of site specificity.

Mark Tribe

I don't agree that there are too many blogs and RSS feeds. There is indeed an abundance, but they are also great tools for finding what's relevant. New participatory publishing tools (like wikis) and social networking systems (like MySpace) will probably have an impact on the art world, but the globalization of the art world and its markets is having a far greater impact, in my opinion. Due primarily to globalization, the art world has become far vaster and more diverse than ever before. This affects the ways in which art movements form and grow, the ways in which artists find audiences and support for their work, the ways in which institutions and their staff function, the ways in which discourses are produced and disseminated, etc.

When we approached Claire Bishop, a well-regarded art historian, she said we should use the following paragraph:

Claire Bishop

I have serious reservations about the fast email interview / Q&A format for contemporary exhibition catalogues. So many (especially young) curators opt for this solution, which is the antithesis of independent thinking and research. The impression given is always one of frantic networking, and the production of words for the sake of filling a page. Rather than a thoughtful engagement with a specific subject or problem, the fast Q&A — not unlike Top-10 lists in magazines — is about easily digestible soundbites, cool names instead of content, and a deferral of finding your own argument.

Laura Schleussner

Wormholes in the Curator Boom

An Interview with Stephan Dillemuth

Stephan Dillemuth I would like to take this opportunity to talk about curatorial concerns in orbit around *Mercury in Retrograde*. For me, one of the reasons to participate in the exhibition was to get a sense of what these curator courses are all about, given that we were experiencing a proliferation of curatorial courses. Why do young people attend these curator courses and how do you, as young curators, cope with a situation that I would describe as a curatorial 'boom'?

Laura Schleussner First of all I would like to respond to the notion of the 'young' curator. In our group at de Appel, ages ranged from 26 to 41. I think one element of the increase in the number of people that call themselves 'curators' is that this relatively young professional field has opened up for people from different disciplines and non-academic backgrounds, so some people come to curating later. For example, there is an increased acceptance for the notion of the artist-curator, which I view as positive on a creative level. Although the field has professionalized immensely over the last few years, also through courses like de Appel, it is still a hands-on learning process. Also incredibly important for the job market/art market: each individual has to develop a strategy for creating their own international network. That, I think, is where curating schools, in contrast to degree programs, come into play.

Before I answer the second question, I would be interested to hear how you see this curator "boom."

S.D. I always make the joke that the symposium *A New Spirit in Curating* (which was put together by Ute Meta Bauer at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart

in 1992) inaugurated the curator boom of the 1990s, just like *A New Spirit in Painting* seemed to inaugurate the painting hype of the 1980s. Naturally, this is not necessarily true in either case, since both projects tended to be 'old school' events that were situated at a certain point of rupture. But still, the gallerist Colin Deland participated in *A New Spirit in Curating*. Through his talk (and the way he presented it) it became apparent how he continued to develop a way of staging exhibitions and events that had its roots in New York's East Village in the 1980s. He saw his work as a gallerist as a kind of theatrical activity and his gallery American Fine Arts was the stage — his stage — amongst other stages in NYC. This was naturally more exciting than Hans Ulrich Obrist, who showed the first 'exhibition' he created inside a kitchen cabinet, which wasn't much more than a joke. At that time, he was still Kaspar König's assistant, but since then more and more people have misunderstood curating as a cooler kind of art practice. Often only the name of the curator was printed on posters, and the artists were relegated to footnotes or content providers for the story that the curator wanted to tell.

L.S. I've seen that even in recent shows where the artists weren't even listed on the invitation card! But it works both ways in this 'branding' system. Curators can boost artists' careers, but artists can also boost curators' careers. The whole system has become an immense flux of shifting representations and reputations — sometimes a bit like the old American hobby of baseball-card trading.

Coping with the curator boom? I think as there are more and more people who call themselves curators, there is also an increased pressure for curators to market themselves with a certain idea or position, so one could say there is a certain specialization happening in the field. Strategies developed in response to the 'boom' include collective curating, which I think in part came out of Institutional Critique and the collective artist practices of the 1990s. Finding a few artists and colleagues for reciprocal, ongoing discussions is a good navigation point, as is being really clear about the audience you want to reach. On an economic level, coping with the curator boom also means entering the intense competition for institutional jobs or battling it out as a freelancer. A curator-turned-gallerist recently said to me that to really make money in art, one either has to be a successful artist or a successful gallerist. While that might be true, I think this sentiment also corresponds to the incredible high of the art market that we are currently experiencing.

S.D. In the early 1990s the situation was completely different. The art market was crashing, and no one wanted the show-off art of the 1980s anymore. I experienced this as an absolute release, that as an artist I could throw out this rotting image of 'the artist' — still without becoming a curator. Since we had a space, a storefront (Cologne, Friesenwall 120), it was possible to do things no one else would have done within an institutional framework. We started playing with self-definition and experimenting with different materials, references, and contexts. This seemed to make more sense than merely producing (art-)objects for a saturized market. The lucky situation was that we found a way to escape definitions

for a while, and we were able to sidestep whatever projections were targeted at us from the outside. This was a very unique freedom that we experienced, and since it all happened in a three-dimensional space you could see this as a practice of exhibition-making as well. But that still didn't make us curators.

The 'curator boom' was the opposite of this practice, or rather, a misunderstanding. But this happened a few years later, when the ideas and practices that originated from a base-structure of artists and many different contexts, was to be captured, applied, and defined within a larger institutional framework.

Up until this point, no one had really noticed that most institutions lacked just as much content as the galleries did, and now this new way of exhibition-making entered the stage, and it PROMISED a new and more discursive relationship to the public. Initially, Institutional Critique had opened the doors of institutions to this way of working, but then it was said that Institutional Critique was unfaithful to its origins because it had institutionalized itself. And now that these new curators have arrived, Institutional Critique has been quickly discarded. By the mid 1990s, almost all institutions were under new leadership; it was amazing how fast a generational shift can take place. The fact that these mediators, who had experienced these reactions to the 1980s only as passive bystanders, treated their institutions almost as if they were self-organized contexts meant a great disempowerment for the development of self-organized networks.

How do you see the difference between a self-organized and an institutional practice, since you were/are an artist as well and also worked within self-organized projects?

L.S. Ambition is the root of all institutionalization. From my experience, it doesn't really work now to try to bring a truly experimental, artist-driven, open format into an institution. Institutions are still 'conservative' in the sense that they are driven by profile, quality, status, funders... etc. But so are project spaces. It's just a matter of the level you want to take it to. What I did at Rocket Shop I supported mostly with my day job, so the project was free of pressure from sponsors and funders, but the artists and I were essentially all donating our time and materials. But most project spaces only last 3 to 5 years on this model, even with some outside funding. Wanting more ambitious or international projects or some degree of financial stability means going commercial or institutionalizing. A self-organized realm has a large degree of instability and always relies on a few individuals who will hold the self-organization together. There is no way to truly bring this into an institution, because audience participation is a lot less engaged than the close-knit, do-it-yourself communities of self-organization. This problem is the basis of a lot of the current backlash against the 1990s.

Yes, Institutional Critique became an identifiable movement/trend and went through the rise-and-fall cycle of art that captures a certain *Zeitgeist*. But I think what you said with PROMISING participation is true. It's like the difference between surfing the web and being an active member of an online community. To continue the Internet parallel, now sites like MySpace are

in the hands of corporate structures (Murdoch). Artists that once were at the center of lively collectives in 1990s Berlin are now art stars with galleries. Artists of Institutional Critique didn't turn down opportunities to show in institutions or galleries, and you have to admit there is a difficult paradox inherent in Institutional Critique (despite the integrity and intelligence of many, many works): you have to be part of the system to critique it—unless you choose an activist position outside the realm of art.

So to be fair about the rise of the 'new curators,' I think that had a lot to do with the way artists were working in the 1990s. Not only was it necessary to mediate traditionally non-institutional formats to institutions, but also since then curators have continued to function as the production managers of extremely complex, performance or installation-based artist projects. Because of the 1990s, there is also a greater cross-pollination of artistic and curatorial practices. I really don't have a problem with that.

S.D. I see things differently. The fact that artistic production took on greater and greater proportions in the mid 1990s was due to a neoliberal interest in representation. We witnessed, for example, an endless proliferation of biennials as a result of a competition between sites of investment. The utilization of the aforementioned PROMISES of participation and interaction made art into an entertaining tool for the purposes of city marketing and advertising. Exhibitions became a camouflage for the privatization of public space and culture in general. Here artists and curators were accomplices in the act of a neoliberal sham — sometimes even with a 'critical' agenda.

The point being that they are not only servicing those neoliberal desires for representation, competition, and profitability, but they are also coining a notion of what art is and what it could do. We can see how this new way of curating was creating a new kind of art. That's Corporate Rococo, as I have described it. Art under these conditions is stripped bare of any critical and analytical possibilities.

And here I ask: what is the curator's relationship towards the structures that constitute his/her power? What does it mean that you can play an important role in the process of definition of art and its context?

L.S. Ideally, the most exciting job of a curator can be having a voice in a definition process (which is basically a systemic process unless one has reached the "designer" brand of curators) in addition to the commercial market. And then there is the role of the curator in opening a discussion about what art is now. The question 'Is it art?' I don't find very interesting at all. The questions 'Why is it art?' or 'Why do we need this to be art now?' are much more nuanced and context-based. There are many people I encountered our de Appel course who I think are doing exciting work. We had extended discussions with Jan Debbaut (Tate) and Charles Esche (Van Abbe Museum) about global collecting policies and the strategies/ethics of managing a collection. Our talk with Maria Hlavajova raised issues about the responsibility of the curator as an artist/intellectual in addressing the needs of the present, i.e. the question 'What is to be done?'

And our course leader Annie Fletcher talked in depth about re-addressing issues of feminism and performance from a contemporary perspective. Then in our own process or conceptualizing our show we were very much concerned with how to connect with the site of Amsterdam and the culture where we had landed like aliens. All these conversations basically raised the question: "What is the urgency of art now?" Trying to answer that question becomes for me one of the most inspiring ways to engage with the world, but I think the biggest responsibility is staying informed and continually educating oneself on lots of levels. That's the real challenge.

S.D. Are these people still discussed as role models of the 'good curator'? That's weird — maybe it's just the wrong people asking the wrong questions. I mean, urgency and art, all of them want to run critical institutions — but what are they critical about? What difference can they make to neoliberal lingo? Certainly we are all looking for a place where one can develop critique without stabilizing what we are criticizing. Maybe that only works with a failed career... But with these new institutions it's pretty obvious how smoothly they fit into the broader picture.

L.S. Now I am curious whom you would consider a good curator who is asking the right questions! I don't know if there are any absolute model curators... there are so many alliances and 'schools.' I do think these people are asking relevant questions: about what is a fair global collection policy, about what art can do, and about how to reinvigorate a discussion of feminism (especially when the general attitude is that the movement's work is done... ha!). What you say about a failed career has some truth... In art school a professor said, "When I was your age, no one expected to have an art career." The increasing professionalization of the art world, even over the last 10 years, has radically changed assumptions about what it is to be an art practitioner. Things are moving incredibly fast, and I think it is practically impossible to step out of the system without falling off the map. I have great respect for artists who have stepped out on their own terms and then returned, Hans Peter Feldmann, for example. As a curator, one is essentially a mediator, so it means being a politician, to a certain extent, staying in constant contact. Given realities of funding, the increasing power of collectors/gallerists, and the insular nature of the art world... how to find a space for in-depth questioning without getting sucked back into the machine? One response is, much like an artist, to develop a few lines of inquiry over time and an independent curatorial 'voice.' Sometimes I feel like this is just like the pursuit of philosophy: only with a certain maturity and a great deal of time does it become meaningful and rich. Basically, from my experience I think there is a lot more genuineness among curators than they are given credit for. Protecting artists from getting chewed up in the system? Stay loyal.

But now a question for you. If you talk about a certain pessimism now in terms of Institutional Critique, I think one thing that the 1990s did show is how quickly critique is subsumed into the system. For this reason I am often incredibly skeptical of shows organized by curators that critique the gallery

system, because critique quickly becomes a hot commodity. The world of art can be so demanding and absorbing that I question to what extent we cultural producers are active citizens in a larger context. If it is hard to effectively challenge the neoliberal wave through art, I wonder: why be an activist within the art system and not in some other field? How does research and the academy play a role in your position?

S.D. Through the changes to the public sphere and the even greater diversification in our field, many different notions of art coexist—anything seems to be possible. For the market this means an inexhaustible enrichment of the range of goods. One only has to establish trends and seasonal changes, and as long as there is money, the wares will be bought, regardless of what they are.

But despite all the brouhaha of the market and institutions, art remains an epistemological tool with an entertainment value — and I like that.

In terms of contemporary research, a main objective is an investigation into the changes of the public sphere and how this impacts on art and the roles of the artist. The main tool in this research is art, and its artificiality comes as a big advantage. Art is, just like philosophy, a construction that allows us to reflect on other constructs — which we accept as a given reality. But art has, for the same reason, to look at its own constructedness, at its complicity in making reality. And here lies a big potential for change.

As said before, institutions are far from analyzing their own role within a fragmented and neoliberal public sphere. They are caught up in the aforementioned shift, still justifying themselves via the cultural missions of a democratically organized, civic society. At the same time, they are participating (voluntarily or not) in its neoliberal abolition. Please note that I am not saying this to reinstate any kind of bourgeois public. And anyway, it's the bourgeois who try to rescue their assets while transitioning into the neoliberal realm.

I think this can describe the situation of institutions today and the result: the differentiated contexts that constitute our art today have been ironed flat. Only in a few institutions does one encounter people with the courage to take a more research-directed approach or specialize. What was the situation in your curatorial team? You certainly took on a research-based topic, the Dutch expedition to Nova Zembla, and then invited artists who showed an interest in history in their work...

L.S. As I mentioned already, we were very concerned with how to engage with our surroundings in Amsterdam in a meaningful way. Exploring history is a very layered, detailed pursuit, and given the time we had, I think it was an incredibly ambitious undertaking. The final result aside, it did really get us out of the de Appel institution in our talks with authors, archivists, journalists, and historians, and we explored many museums beyond the contemporary art sphere. So without speaking much Dutch, we still were able to lock into certain nodes of defining or repressed historical experience in the Netherlands — through the work of the artists we had invited. For me, Nova Zembla represented a point of departure, an expedition into explor-

ing how collective historical experience has been defined within the modern era and an expedition into unfamiliar, more distant histories. What we did not do is define or try to debunk a specific historical position, except perhaps the notion of a singular, authored history. This was not the aim. Instead we gathered together what we felt were outstanding individual works and approaches and then created a kind of non-linear labyrinth through the building, where visitors could encounter each work in its own niche, so to speak.

How did you view the exhibition? Was there a sense of the research time we had invested, or did it merely disappear (for someone from outside) into the production process?

S.D. I found it interesting that you selected artists who dealt with the idea of history. In a time when utopian, materialist, and positivist tenets have become the products of nostalgia, I find it the only path that can move us forward. But what makes research good research and how do you hone the past into a new, sharp-edged tool? Here, I expected from you more of a framework or critical approach. Instead, it seemed to me that you were consumed by the installation stress of the exhibition. I wonder if the exhibition wasn't a bit overproduced, with all the fittings and fixtures and darkened spaces etc. But I really liked what you did with the rooms and how you created a convoluted labyrinth. The navigation weaves its way like worms inside an apple — and I think it is a really nice image — how the apple (or Appel) of knowledge is eaten up by the labyrinthine meanderings of worms...

Would you like to talk a little bit about how you experienced this collective production method in terms of the teaching and learning process? What were the possibilities of concentrated curatorial research within the de Appel educational apparatus, also in the context of your future practice, for example, in directing an institution?

L.S. First about the production and the production of a framework. Some of the group had a very clear critical standpoint and others explicitly rejected the idea of creating an exhibition around a specific theoretical framework. In retrospect, I think we could have emphasized the travel/expedition element more clearly and really used Nova Zembla as a point of departure, perhaps including towards the end a work that dealt with issues of colonialism, which would have brought the initial expedition 'full circle.' Hopefully through the catalogue these positions will become clear, and the publication can be a document of the kind of different voices that come together in this kind of collective process. But yes, the critical statement of the show itself was indeed open-ended. The production did preoccupy us. Some people on the team also had seen *Voyage Interieur* in Paris, which was a very theatrically staged exhibition (the curators had worked with a set designer), and there was another interest in taking the museological feeling of the Nova Zembla room throughout the show. These two elements drove the nature of the installation of the works. Then there was also our idea of splitting the building into two halves, the Lippmann and Rosenthal bank and the rest of the exhibition, and this required new doors and walls.

Concentrated research can be one of the biggest challenges of the profession, which is so multi-tasking driven. In the educational process I would have liked, however, to somehow have had time to pursue an individual line of research. Once you are back out in the job world, there is less time for this kind of study, and I think a curatorial school could/should plant a seed for a continuing line of inquiry. Also, the collective process consumed a lot of time, as it always does. All of us experienced our frustrations around it, and despite the personal growth that comes out of this experience, the sheer diversity of our positions could not be represented as a clear, cohesive statement. How could it?

How do you view curatorial vs. artistic research? Have you been part of artist/curator collective processes in developing exhibitions? Do you think there are points when curators can get 'too creative' in developing an exhibition? What have been some positive curator working relationships that you have experienced?

S.D. When we do research either as artists or as curators, an important factor is the integration of the framing parameters in which the research is localized (i.e. critical examination and production). In the curatorial field, these are the basic parameters inherent to institutions, including power structures, ideologies, and economic dependencies. I myself have experienced how easily one allows conditions to be dictated instead of critically questioning them and even aggressively changing them — or simply refraining from producing under these conditions. Otherwise, we stay where we are.

We know that art is always a mirror of prevailing circumstances, but research can never be satisfied with this; it has to antagonize them, 'expose' them, as one used to say. That goes along with a good degree of self-interrogation and with alliances, but also with destruction. Curators become 'too creative' when they have obviously disengaged from their research contexts, starting to dominate them with their persona.

Especially in the so-called 'artistic provinces' it seems that curators have to have a lot more ideas, have to work harder, and usually have less money than these international star curators. How do you view your professional future...?

L.S. The next step for me that would make sense is to curate / direct a non-commercial space or institution. In Berlin there are a lot of interesting artists but not so many strong institutions, which may mean resorting to another do-it-yourself situation combined with freelance work. Despite all the challenges of group work, I find I am now more interested in a collective-based do-it-yourself framework which could pursue specific lines of inquiry. Although it's not very stable, this kind of working model can be incredibly dynamic and inspiring. Those are the rewards and pitfalls of choosing this line of work.

Interviews by the CTP

Thinking History

Zdenka Badovinac

Tobi Maier

Nato Thompson

Lise Nellemann

In 2005–2006 a number of exhibitions were mounted that addressed notions of history, time travel, and history-making. Out of the process of preparing *Mercury in Retrograde*, the CTP decided to ask other curators to explain their sense of urgency in taking on the questions currently posed by history in an exhibition format. The answers suggest a general uncertainty about how to deal with specific histories in a globalized context and the need for resistance — beyond the idea of the 'end' of history — in negotiating the dictates of capital and imposed identity.

Zdenka Badovinac

Zdenka Badovinac has held the position of Director of Moderna Galerija (MG), Ljubljana since 1993. She recently curated Interrupted Histories *(14 March — 28 May 2006) at the Moderna Galerija. Other recent projects include* 7Sins :Moscow Ljubljana*, MG (2004);* Democracies/the Tirana Biennnale*, Tirana (2005);* Arteast Collection 2000+23*, MG (2006).*

CTP What made you decide to address the theme of history in an exhibition/in your work? What ideas, artists or shows were sources of inspiration?

Z.B. Since 1998, I have curated or co-curated a number of exhibitions relating to the historicization of Eastern European art: *Body and the East* (1998), *Arteast Collection 2000+* (2000), and the Arteast Exhibitions series: *Form Specific* (2003), *7 Sins / Moscow — Ljubljana* (2004), *Interrupted Histories* (2006), and *Arteast Collection 2000+23* (2006). All of these projects have been connected to the basic question of how to link the art of Eastern Europe into a collective narrative and at the same time avoid an exclusive regionalism reminiscent of a kind of new nationalism. From the beginning the question has been how to construct the history of spaces that are not connected in a uniform system comparable to other spaces, and whether this is in fact possible, without a radical change to the canon.

In the last two projects, the issue of self-historicizing has been a key question. The fact is that the absence of a suitable collective history means that many Eastern European artists have been (and in some places still are) compelled to find their own historical and interpretational context. In the absence of domestic institutions to systematize neo-avant-garde art and its tradition, or in the face of their ignorance, artists have been (and in some places continue to be) their own art historians and archivists. My decision to create the *Interrupted Histories* exhibition was inspired in particular by artists who for years, if not decades, have been involved in the archiving of their own local histories. These are, above all, the Artpool Archive of Hungarian Art (György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay), the Romanian artist Lia Perjovschi, the Polish artist Zofia Kulik, the Russian artist Vadim Zahrov and the IRWIN group with their project *East Art Map*.

CTP What kinds of questions were you interested in raising about specific histories or history in general?

Z.B. In the first place, I was interested in the relationship between interrupted histories and canonical history. The interrupted histories of Eastern European and most other non-Western areas, as I define them in this exhibition, are actually individual stories that live at odds with each other and are incapable of connecting themselves on

the basis of uniform norms into larger logical wholes. These are fragmented smaller systems that file official national histories outside wider international connections, or the small histories of the individuals or groups who shape the unofficial mythologies of specific areas. Our exhibition reveals that historicization that merely wishes to incorporate interrupted histories into the existing system of history is inadequate. It is not then merely a question of incorporation, but of a more radical change to the existing system of historicization. One of the fundamental questions today is how to construct a system that would enable a comparison of individual histories outside merely aesthetic categories and highlight the difference between these areas, which are frequently characterized by a difference in historical time. This is a particular challenge for museums: how to show this difference through the medium of an exhibition.

CTP How did you and/or the artists in your exhibition investigate subjective, personal experiences vs. collectively authored histories?

Z.B. Many of the artists in the exhibition have dealt with the relationship between small and large histories, personal and collective histories, but always in a manner that places no emphasis on a hierarchy among them. An example of this was the work of Mladen Stilinovi. In 1975 he photodocumented the decorations in Zagreb shop windows for the collective First of May celebrations and added to this a photograph of a cloth sign on a tree proclaiming his love for his girlfriend. In his work *Broken Histories*, Hüseyin Alptekin places two video projections next to each other: one shows the famous steps in Odessa that are inscribed on the collective memory thanks to Eisenstein's film; the other shows everyday life around a rubbish bin on an anonymous street corner below the window of the artist's flat in Istanbul. Amit Goren's video installation *Infiltration* shows the rich history of Rothschild Boulevard, today the business and cultural center of Tel Aviv, and interweaves it with his personal experience of this part of the city, where he himself lives with his family.

CTP Over the last year there has been a concentration of exhibitions dealing with the theme of history. What do you think is the current urgency for artists, curators, and institutions in addressing this topic?

Z.B. The concentration of exhibitions of this type reflects a new global situation, which has no adequate global history, but the universal construct that has existed up to now is no longer sufficient. Which at the same time means that formal history is no longer adequate and that art has decided to take a step forward in the search for new definitions, new methodologies, and systems capable of connecting various histories.

CTP In a recent discussion both Okwui Enwezor and Robert Storr described biennials as a means of 'thinking historically in the present' and as a medium for teaching history. First, what do you think it means to 'think historically' today? Second, how do you think group exhibitions of contemporary art mediate history in comparison to the historical and art historical approach of museums?

Z.B. Unfortunately I have to admit that personally I haven't learnt much about history through the biennials. Even if historical works appear in these contexts, and some historical relations, this is still not enough. It is impossible to make relevant historical comparisons through big international exhibitions — which are usually put together quickly and fairly superficially — before the specific traditions of the spaces, which are still unhistoricized in the sense of modern systems, have been defined and their symbolic capital evaluated. Big international exhibitions endeavor to differ in their standards from museum exhibitions as much as possible. Their orientation to the here and now apparently links them to the new locality, to the hybridity of contents and forms from the local and global spaces, and also from different histories. What museum exhibitions should be in comparison to biennial exhibitions, or even exhibitions combining the two models, is something we are trying to realize at the Moderna Galerija /Museum of Modern Art through the Arteast Exhibitions series. This series systematically researches the artistic traditions and specificities of Eastern Europe, which makes its close ties with the museum's *Arteast Collection 2000+* so important. *Arteast Collection 2000+* is one of the few collections of Eastern European art and, as such, a rare opportunity for contemporary Eastern European art to establish direct links with its neo-avant-garde traditions. All our exhibitions in the Arteast series focus on contemporary art, but they also try to define the symbolic capital accumulated over the course of time. This approach problematizes the absoluteness of the present moment, something that most international exhibitions of contemporary art try to conjure up.

CTP Is it possible to talk about a creative or imaginative element of constructing historical narrative or projecting into the past? What is your view of the notion of the fact?

Z.B. My last two exhibitions — *Interrupted Histories* and *Arteast Collection 2000+23* — talk precisely about the fact that through their imagination artists are taking the initiative in the new process of constructing historical narrative. Their methods are not formal, but they often use authentic historical documents. The curators who work on exhibitions with these artists acknowledge the importance of informal methods of historicization, which in my opinion are the result either of the absence of formal methods in some areas, particularly non-Western areas, or the fact that formal methods are simply no longer capable of keeping pace with art that increasingly eludes standardized aesthetic classifications.

CTP Finally, how can art function as a source of inspiration for alternative conceptions of history or as an intervention in (art-) historical processes?

Z.B. Art at this moment, just as many times before in history, is announcing new methods of production, among them the production of knowledge. When artists construct history it is not merely about the construction of a fairer world that takes into account the differences between histories in a non-hierarchical manner, it is actually about seeing certain new possibilities to which formal methods are unable to adapt so quickly.

Tobi Maier

Tobi Maier was co-founder of dosensos, London (2002–2005) and during this time organised several exhibition and public art projects as well as radio programs for art radio station Resonance FM. After graduating from the MA Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art in London, he worked as a curatorial intern at the 27th Biennial of São Paulo. He is now a curator at the Frankfurter Kunstverein and also writes for art magazines such as Exit Express*, Madrid and* Untitled*, London.*

CTP What made you decide to address the theme of history in an exhibition/in your work? What ideas, artists or shows were sources of inspiration?

T.M. As a group in the second year of the RCA Curating course, we had been discussing many ideas for our graduating exhibition. Personally, I was interested in working on a project that would debate art education from within the college. This would have meant also including students and staff and make a discursive project happen, similar to ideas that were circulating at that moment, such as *Academy Remix* at Portikus or the concepts for *Manifesta 6*, but with the inclusion of an exhibition display in our galleries.

Again for Tomorrow was the outcome of a year-long discussion that grew out of a process of negotiation and was strongly influenced by research trips undertaken by the group. While one part traveled to Argentina and Chile, the other part left for a journey through Eastern Europe from the Istanbul Biennial via Sofia, Skopje, Tirana (Biennial), Zagreb, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Timisoara to Budapest. Important encounters for us in finding common ground back in London were the meetings with Lia Perjovschi in Bucharest and Graciela Carnevale in Rosario. The presence of their archives (Lia's *CAA* Centre for Art Analysis and Graciela's *Tucuman Arde*) within the space, together with an Argentinian network of artists called Trama, built an axis around which we started to develop the exhibition. In the end and with the help of Basque artist Gorka Eizagirre's 'events arena' wich had a central position in the space, the education idea became relevant in the show through a series of screenings, performances and talks. Finally, the title for the show was borrowed from a cycle of works by David Maljkovic.

CTP What kinds of questions were you interested in raising about specific histories or history in general?

T.M. I am interested in the way contemporary artists bring to the surface matters and ideas, concepts and idiosyncrasies from the past. By this I mean the ways nostalgia resurfaces with the potential to create new meaning. In that respect we were perhaps looking more

into the niches of societies and events surrounding a particular community (Tucuman Arde) or a schismatic figure (Wilhelm Reich) to name only two examples. I have personally developed a tendency to work with pieces that operate from a documentary basis, but we did try to give fiction a chance by including the narratives pertinent in Mai-Thu Perret's work. David Maljkovic perhaps combines the documentary with the fictional in a very clever way.

CTP How did you and/or the artists in your exhibition investigate subjective, personal experiences vs. collectively authored histories?

T.M. I don't think that as curators we set out to investigate histories. But rather most of the works in *Again for Tomorrow* represented an individual experience, which the artists engage with through a topic or protagonist. Thus, when David Maljkovic speaks about Petrova Gora, his own visits to the site at different stages in his life resonate throughout the works. At the same time I am convinced many fellow Croatians of a similar age can perfectly identify with the kind of meaning the artist attributes to the memorial. I believe that individual histories often do amplify the conditions of a larger context.

CTP Over the last year there has been a concentration of exhibitions dealing with the theme of history. What do you think is the current urgency for artists, curators and institutions in addressing this topic?

T.M. I am not sure. While we were installing *Again for Tomorrow*, SparwasserHQ in Berlin contacted me to ask whether we could collaborate with the second step of their project *A complete guide to rewriting your history*. I was puzzled and because it was too late to speak with the rest of the group about a collaboration, I suggested *O fim do sem fim* by three Brazilian artists from our events program for their exhibition, while at the same time continuing a conversation with the group at de Appel in Amsterdam about a live streaming exchange during the opening of *Mercury in Retrograde*.

I guess that most artists, like curators and everybody else around us do sense uncertainty about what is going to happen — on a global scale with technological advance and the American hegemony, for example, and on a local scale with the end of the *Sozialstaat* in Germany or the threats posed by PCC (Primeiro Comando da Cidade) in the state of São Paulo. And things will get worse. When you start to render these uncertainties and look at the world since 1945, I guess there is ample history and space for projection at the same time. The exhibitions we can make are fragile attempts to construct future scenarios or possibilities, based on ideas from people like artists or architects but also on experiences and the lessons we have learnt from the past.

CTP In a recent discussion both Okwui Enwezor and Robert Storr described biennials as a means of 'thinking historically in the present' and as a medium for teaching history. First, what do you think it means to 'think historically' today? Second, how do you think group exhibitions of contemporary art mediate history in comparison to the historical and art historical approach of museums?

T.M. How can we create better conditions for lives if we don't take the chance to learn from the past? In an ever faster paced world we need to take the time for reflection. This is perhaps what Okwui and Rob mean when they talk about 'thinking historically in the present.' On the other hand I would like to counter with a recent work by Spanish artist Dora García that reads in golden lettering: *It is not the past, but the future, that determines the present. (Golden Sentences series 2004–2006)*. Perhaps my science-fiction-addicted flatmate would agree and it's an encouraging vision full of potential, while for others it might be a rather threatening and unnerving thought.

To answer your second question, I think contemporary art is more direct, of course, than the art-historical approach; it can react more quickly than the museum collection. Most of the time it means a less filtered move towards exhibition-making. Secondly, and in that I can only speak from my own experience, contemporary art often opens the viewer's reception for a certain topic, then to be followed up by personal research or related reading to complement the understanding of the proposed 'history.' Most importantly, however, I think group exhibitions give voice to those moments and people in history that are negated — a platform in the censored and streamlined media world we experience — and make them converse with each other. I don't want to get into a discourse about biennials here because I believe a biennial can do the job as well or as badly as any other exhibition.

CTP Is it possible to talk about a creative or imaginative element of constructing historical narrative or projecting into the past? What is your view of the notion of the fact?

T.M. We were talking about this in the discussions running up to the show and I think *This much is certain,* an exhibition curated by students on the 2003/2004 course, played very well with the idea of factual ambiguity, so we decided consciously to work in another direction. Perhaps it is also a question of collective amnesia and the desire to retrospectively construct and connect potential histories and build a platform for artists to elaborate on their interpretations of the past. Artists like Martin Boyce, who also was in the show, depart from an art-historical perspective by looking at Modernism. And if someone like Wilhelm Reich was ignored by his peers then you might want to examine why and what his influence could have been, and Christoph Keller is doing exactly that in his work. Thus what could have been perceived as a fact by previous generations can form the basis for creative imagination today. That's when things taken for granted get questioned and turn into a seedbed for new meanings.

CTP Finally, how can art function as a source of inspiration for alternate conceptions of history or as an intervention in (art-) historical processes?

T.M. Do you mean conception or perception? I think art can affect the daily life of individuals in a variety of ways. It can kill you like a Serra sculpture or it can take you out of unemployment and give you a job in a museum. To conceive history, artists would have to have the aspiration to change life; few do. And then again how would you measure their success?

Nato Thompson

Nato Thompson is Curator at MASS MoCA and organizer of Ahistoric Occasion *(MASS MoCa May 26, 2006 — April 22, 2007).*

CTP In your exhibition *Ahistoric Occasion* at Mass MoCa you addressed history and its relationship with art discourse by focusing on artistic 'reenactments' of historical events. Why reenactment?

N.T. A large part of this project was inspired by an interest in historic reenactment in contemporary art by artists who I think are particularly insightful (such as Jeremy Deller and Allison Smith). Often I start with a gut instinct of why things are currently compelling and then move toward understanding them more completely. In large part, I think the reenactment concept is invested in performativity and experience, which produce a different type of cultural memory than text or images. I can't help but think this form of cultural production is a result of spectacle and its deleterious effect on historic meaning.

I actually do not think of the exhibition as focusing on art discourse. I have never been an enthusiast of art for art's sake nor encouraging the hermetic nature of contemporary art that is already so painfully problematic. I hope the work in the show produces an open-ended discourse for our general visiting audience on the role of historic forces that produce themselves in everyday life.

CTP You describe the projects in the exhibition as (among other things) projects which 'challenge the dominant narrative.' This is an expression that we have used as well to describe the invited projects of *Mercury in Retrograde*. Could you give an example of a work or artist practice in the exhibition you curated, that has been succesful in this way, perhaps surprisingly so?

N.T. Challenging the dominant narrative may feel like Post-modernism and not particularly anything new, but I often feel that the lessons of post-modernism have not culturally sunk in as fast as its rhetoric. In general, many of the artists in the show use the aesthetics of the dominant narrative to seduce a viewer into a point of criticality. In Allison Smith's work, she uses iconography from the American Civil War (rifles, textiles, daggers, uniforms) to insert a queer narrative. Questions of craft, gender confusion, and the history of gay rights find themselves subtly inserted into the story. For a country particularly divided along ideological lines (fueled in large part by notions of subjectivity and national identity) the redefinition of the Civil War has contemporary ramifications.

CTP You start your text in the exhibition catalogue with the title 'Blown into the Future' (referring to Walter Benjamin

and his view of history). Can you comment more on how you see the relationships between past, present, and future? And how do these three temporal dimensions generate meaning today?

N.T. The definition of what constitutes 'history' is not at all set in stone. Whose past matters? Who is the subject of history? What is the point of understanding history? These questions are not merely theoretic but socially powerful. As the modern legacy (with history as its bedfellow) disappears under the stranglehold of right-wing post-modernism, the end of history feels like an insidious victory for conservative forces. Producing a narrative of resistance is a long-held tool in the battle for social justice. Benjamin wrote on history as a tool for understanding the forces at work on human subjectivity. These projects add to a long list of counternarratives that are useful for viewers to place themselves and add to.

CTP 'Ahistoric present' is a recurrent term in your text (it's even part of the exhibition title). Why do you think that we live in 'ahistoric' times? Are you suggesting the phenomena of a short collective memory, or are you mainly referring to the loss of a unifying vision and unique historical ideology?

N.T. Spectacle produces a form of immediate desire and immediate memory. Capital (particularly in its cultural production form) deterritorializes and destroys context. History is simply fuel for the fire of consumption and its meaning is swallowed quickly. This leads to an amnesiac historic form that not only affects consumers, but also the entire global perspective. Historic amnesia can be a powerful condition of vulnerability for the oppressed. When we move from the war on terror to Abu Ghraib to domestic wire-tapping to the war in Lebanon, we are being bombarded by a series of specific events, each wiping out the last. The constant bombardment of the new shoves out the old. This state of perpetual vertigo is a condition of spectacle that can only be challenged by a strategic historic perspective. One cannot act strategically, without acting historically. History can be both a narrative of dominance (we can call this uppercase History) and a sub-category of narrative of resistance (we can call this lower case history). *Ahistoric Occasion* attempts to undermine dominance and produce civic space for the narratives of resistance.

CTP Over the last year there has been a concentration of exhibitions dealing with the theme of history. What do you think is the current urgency for artists, curators, and institutions in addressing this topic? What was your urgency?

N.T. I believe I answered this in some part at the beginning. In discussing history, we are also discussing a large subject, which affects each visitor to the galleries. To be straightforward, it is a tactic to get the discussion of art heading toward something more socially pertinent than itself. It also forces a look back at the past with a critical lens. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many conservative theorists declared the end of history. Looking back 16 years later, it is clear that this motivation was in large part a strategy to use post-modernity as a conservative tool for destroying narratives of resistance. It is clear that the productive part of the

modernist project needs to be included in the resistance to capital.

Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* has been one of my favorite art projects for some time. It was a reenactment of a miners' strike in England from 1984, remade in 2001. His project produced a counternarrative to the Thatcher government from the voices of those who were beaten down by the police. The situation reminds me of the town where my museum is (an extremely working-class community devastated by the shift to neo-liberalism) and it resonated.

CTP In a recent discussion both Okwui Enwezor and Robert Storr described biennials as a means of 'thinking historically in the present' and as a medium for teaching history. First, what do you think it means to 'think historically' today? Second, how do you think group exhibitions of contemporary art mediate history in comparison to the historical and art historical approach of museums?

N.T. Okwui Enwezor and Robert Storr think of history quite differently from each other and yet they use the same words to describe their projects. Don't you find that interesting? If anything, it indicates that many agendas can ask a viewer to think historically and many can feel that their projects teach. I suspect they are both sincere, but it does force us to ask more specific questions. What is the function of history and what are we teaching? What is the point of teaching?

I often think of teaching in terms of the pedagogy described by Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed or the theater of Brecht. Teaching should awaken subjectivity in the viewer and contextualize their experience by the forces that produce them. This moment is a critical moment that alerts a person to their plight in the grand scheme of power that surrounds them. It should not be an alienating moment that furthers their sense of despair.

The project of history has many countervailing tendencies. One can be to indoctrinate someone in a history of domination. They can be led to believe that the art on the walls is further evidence of their own irrelevance. Or, they can see their situation reflected in the work on display and be emboldened by a new insight into their condition. I suspect that these lines of analysis can flesh out what it is that Okwui Enwezor and Robert Storr are saying and how their positions are different.

Lise Nellemann

Lise Nellemann has a practice as an artist which also includes curating, researching and writing about artistic and cultural projects. She lives in Berlin and works internationally.

She is the co-founder (2000) and co-director of the project space Sparwasser HQ, Offensive für Zeitgenössische Kunst und Kommunikation, Berlin. She is also a co-organizer of the networkproject Old Habits Die Hard *(with Heman Chong). As an artist-curator she often gives talks and participates in conferences on self-organization, autonomy, and collective action. She has given seminars, tutorials, and workshops in international graduate and postgraduate courses.*

CTP So far there have been two exhibitions at Sparwasser titled *A Complete Guide to Rewriting Your History*, 2004 and 2006. Is it an ongoing, biennial exhibition series?

L.N. No, in fact, I was a little embarrassed to use the same name again, because I couldn't find anything else. At the same time, it is a very interesting field, and it has less to do with the title than the way I do shows. Although it says 'curated by,' I ask many people to suggest works to me. Many things come together quite fast. In terms of this process, it is very important to have these dialogues and discussions with my community about rewriting history.

CTP Did the idea of 'rewriting history' come from a discussion?

L.N. Probably the idea behind 'rewriting history' comes from thoughts on how art history is rewritten every decade. Museums reinstall their collections. New discourses are introduced by art historians in the same way that artists are replaced by new ones. And the whole world acts like things have always been this way.

Another aspect is emancipation. Every person and especially every artist — every artist showing at Sparwasser — should write their own statement and not what we write about them. There should not be any kind of interpretation put upon them. The only translation of the artwork should be in the combination for the artists. The press release of the exhibition reflected this: "*A Complete Guide to Rewriting Your History* is an ironically inflated, idealistic aspiration to produce a comprehensive guide to the rewriting of history. The exhibition seeks to make visible this desire (and its resulting action) to create an all-encompassing narrative by which one's life is explained."

In terms of emancipation maybe the idea also comes from different postcolonial situations where countries are trying to find their own identity, where people are trying to formulate a new cultural identity — after their experience with the colonizers. There are hard-nosed attempts to define identity according to the traditions of dominant culture, which is not only impossible but also sort of disgusting for a young person to experience. And then there is the issue of globalization and globalized cultures.

CTP So 'Rewriting History' refers to countries dealing with their historical/colonial past?

L.N. If you Google 'rewriting history' you come across countries trying to write their history, and it is apparent how they highlight some things and avoid talking about other things. Of course, they are not rewriting history. They rewrite a new history where they evaluate things differently. That's what the colonizers did of course.

Some do it in a more aggressive way. Singapore, for example, is just using whatever it finds good, as they say themselves. In whatever European culture there might be, they try to pick the best thing. And of course, the society is very different to European society, because it is a dictatorship.

With the show, I was trying to talk about individual possibility and reevaluate and redefine this idea. For example, because you are labeled a woman, it does not mean that you will feel the expectations of a woman. Or if you are in a school and getting a certain kind of education, it does not necessarily mean that you will turn into a certain kind of person. You have a nationality, but the fact that I am Danish does not mean that I am like all other Danish people, or that I have exactly the same story, or that I am not influenced by other cultures.

CTP From how you are talking about it, 'rewriting' sounds like it can be both a revisionist and a projecting, forward-looking process.

L.N. Sure. When I invited Hito Steyerl to the first exhibition at least she reacted against the title and said she would not participate in an exhibition that focuses on history as something you do yourself and suggests the idea that history is invented by an individual. Because it is the state that really rewrites or reinvents history, and it does so in order to hide things. They are the liars, and then there is something outside of this so-called fact. So we represent facts, and they represent the rewriting.

Of course, her response originated from the fact that we were going to show her video *November*, which was about her friend from her youth, a woman with whom she made a film about wild girls when she was younger. That is the footage that she uses in the beginning of the video, which then shows how she chose to be an activist, to be a guerilla in Kurdistan. Then, she was executed by the Turkish government, which is — along with the German government — refusing to acknowledge that she was murdered by the Turkish government. The authorities tell another story. That is the point of the video: how do people deal with facts?

So initially I was reflecting on independent thinking and the possibility for autonomous action. That was my first thought, but then in the exhibition artists very often addressed this abuse of power and who controls history.

CTP When you talk about the exhibition, the word 'your' refers to a personal approach, but then the works seem to deal

with History, with a capital H. How would you say in certain works that artists dealt with these two things or how did that come together in the questions behind the exhibition? Or did it?

L.N. I think where it came together was the interest in developing a critical audience, which I also talk about in the press release from the first exhibition of *A Complete Guide to Rewriting your History*. This includes highlighting things that were done wrong by the authorities, showing secret files, or revealing how people get information that the mainstream media doesn't convey. Of course, this develops a critical consciousness among people that can change things. It has the potential for emancipation through knowledge. And on the other hand, I have this wish that people reevaluate and develop a critical thinking, so that they decide for themselves how things are being formulated, how things are being written in history, what discourse is important for artists. What does it all mean?

CTP The second show seemed to deal with meta-issues of history. How would you, for example, compare Hito Steyerl's work with that of Francois Bucher's piece (in the second show) about Catherine Gun?

L.N. In fact, the two were quite similar, because it was about gender. Of course now in all action films you have a female hero. Women can be the bad guys as well. In both films there is a female hero. Not really with a revolutionary potential but making very individual choices, and one sees what consequences come out of it. When you morally make the right choices, which clash with the authorities but not with the law, what happens? Do you get killed? Even as a woman? So that was very much the same as Gun, who was the main figure of interest for Francois Bucher. As a translator, she leaked information about the British and the US government in their attempt to gain UN support for invading Iraq. First the British government wanted to put her on trial. Then they pulled back, because it would have been very bad for them, and it would have revealed their paltry legal basis for going into Iraq and going to war.

CTP In a recent discussion both Okwui Enwezor and Robert Storr described biennials as a means of 'thinking historically in the present' and as a medium for teaching history. What does 'thinking historically' mean to you? Secondly, how do you think group exhibitions or museums mediate history?

L.N. I am sure you have a very precise idea about 'thinking historically.' If you have a problem with the cultural paradigm in which you are living, if you are a female, for example, or an immigrant, you are stuck analyzing your identity and your role and how it can be redefined, if it is unbearable to live with. Redefining your own roles, your projections, your own imagination of how your life should be for you. But that's on a personal level...

For me, *rewriting* history suggests 'another way' of telling history. Not only forcing this feeling of writing history according to your choices and actions, but also being aware of other people's projections of expectations and how their choices, actions, interpretations, and translations can influence history, and vice versa.

I think that *documenta 11* did rewrite history; it not only changed the discourse and trends within art, but included works which "leaked information" that never reached the public at the time of the tragedy, or works which questioned the attitude in the art world as to what is universally considered 'art quality' and what is not. The mega-exhibition questioned how to evaluate art and artists who present works from another cultural understanding. *documenta 11* was a serious attempt to rewrite the (art-) world.

Speaking of museums, I thought your show was very close to a museum's representation of history. I would like to ask you a question: why?

CTP There were two main departure points. One was dealing with the site. The artist whom we invited to deal with the history of the site was Michael Blum, who addressed it in a very museological way. So in a sense we turned the front half of the building into a museum of what the building had been, a kind of missing museum that revealed an unsavory chapter in the history of the building and the Netherlands, i.e. the persecution of Jews during the Second World War.

The second point of departure was a collection from the Rijksmuseum, items from a Nordic expedition, in which a group of Dutchmen, led by Wilem Barents, had tried to find the Northeast passage to China through the Arctic. They failed to find the passage, but many of them survived, and the story is an important cultural reference point in the Netherlands. Within this institutional exchange we were interested in looking at the aesthetics of museum displays but in a way that would reveal the multiple, contemporary layers of the story, and not just the linear, nationalistic narrative it had formerly represented.

L.N. But you repeat their ideas.

CTP In a way, but with an ironic twist. The idea was to take this kind of representation and turn it on its head with things like a fake, stuffed polar bear and a historical painting of Barents' death on the ice by a modern Russian history painter (a painting rejected by the Rijksmuseum when offered on loan).

L.N. Upstairs were the pre-civilization imagery of Stephan Dillemuth and a sci-fi, lo-fi installation with modernist references by Ohad Meromi in a small room. It could also have been a kind of 'experimentarium' where school kids go from one way of writing history to another. I think it was a very nice show, very nicely made. But to compare, mine are very non-visual and emphasize concept. They are probably very badly curated because there is no entertainment element with gadgets or anything, but it is really about trying to think and represent individual thinking in writing history in one way or another. And I don't think you questioned this so much.

Mercury in Retrograde

April 6 — June 5, 2006 de Appel, Amsterdam

Mer·cu·ry in Ret·ro·grade
a capitalised: a God of commerce, prince of eloquence, travel, cunning, and thieves, messenger to the other gods - conductor of travelers
b illusory planetary motion, when Mercury appears to be moving backwards across the night sky. This presages a period of revisions, full of opportune moments for insertions and folds in the historical web.
c an exhibition that oscillates between a and b.

Introduction

Mercury in Retrograde is an exhibition of twisted timelines, hallucinated futures, and historical chain reactions. It is an experiment from which to launch expeditions into vanished histories - a momentary repository for new thoughts gleaned from sedimentary deposits in time. *Mercury in Retrograde* cracks open the notion of authorized collective histories, with examples that explode and decipher the codes of our constructed and mediated reality.

Curated by
Defne Ayas Istanbul
Tessa Giblin Auckland
Stefan Rusu Bucharest - Chişinău
Angela Serino Amsterdam
Laura Schleussner Berlin
Diana Wiegersma Barcelona
Participants of ctp 05/06

www.mercuryinretrograde.org

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Photo Documentation of *Mercury in Retrograde* in de Appel, 2006

Johan Cornelissen

Nova Zembla

- II -

Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Sven Johne

- III -

Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Aurélien Froment

- IV -

Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Mariana Castillo Deball

- V -

Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Missing Books

- VI -

Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Omer Fast

- VII -

Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Michael Blum

- VIII -

Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Michael Blum

- IX -

Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Ohad Meromi

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Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
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Ohad Meromi

Ohad Meromi

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Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Dmitry Gutov

Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
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Stephan Dillemuth

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Photo Documentation of
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in de Appel, 2006

David Maljkovic

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Photo Documentation of
Mercury in Retrograde
in de Appel, 2006

Fernando Sánchez Castillo

Khalil Rabah

Photo Documentation of *Mercury in Retrograde* in de Appel, 2006

Tilmann Meyer-Faje

Michael Blum
Lives and works in Vienna

Lippmann, Rosenthal & Co., 2006

A Jewish bank by the name of Lippmann, Rosenthal & Co. was based at 6–8 Nieuwe Spiegelstraat from 1859 until 1968, now the current de Appel building. The Nazis used the name of the well-established bank when setting up a counterfeit branch in Sarphatistraat, in order to convince people that their possessions were safe in the vaults. In 1941 and 1942 Dutch Jewish citizens were forced to hand over their securities, cash, bank holdings, art objects, precious metals and jewels to Lippmann, Rosenthal & Co. Sarphatistraat. Apart from the name, the two banks had almost nothing in common and were administered quite separately. Michael Blum unfolded some of the layers of the haunted building by means of both documentation and speculation.

> insert page VII and VIII

Urban Project

Mariana Castillo Deball
Lives and works in Berlin and Amsterdam

It rises or falls depending on whether you're coming or going. If you are leaving, it's uphill; but as you arrive it's downhill, 2006

History is the subject of a structure in which time is not homogeneous, but filled by the presence of the now. Embodying an image of the past, the historical object is read and articulated in the present.

A series of interviews with antique dealers on Nieuwe Spiegelstraat in Amsterdam developed into an audio piece, a journey throughout different periods of time and place. The antique dealer is a peculiar character who can legitimate what is valuable, what should be kept and how an object can become a status symbol. This narrative was mixed with a particular event in Mexican archaeology: the colossal stone statue to Tlaloc, a rain divinity, which lay for centuries in a dry streambed in the village of Coatlinchan, 30 miles from Mexico City. On April 16th 1964, it was removed and transported on the back of a giant purpose-built trailer to its present location, the entrance to the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.

After a journey of 24 hours, it was night when Tlaloc arrived in Mexico City, yet 25,000 people awaited him in Zócalo Square, traffic was stopped and the streets were packed. Ironically, the arrival of the rain god was greeted by the heaviest storm ever recorded for this ordinarily dry season.

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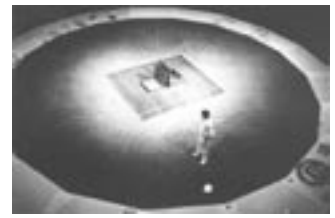
Johan Cornelissen
Lives and works in Utrecht

Journey along the Equator, 1982–83

On May 15th 1982 Johan Cornelissen left for São Tomé, the startingpoint of his journey along the equator — a trip that lasted 14 months. Beyond retracing the imaginary line of the equator, his primary aim was to follow an abstract itinerary and chronicle encounters and states of mind experienced on the way. de Appel accompanied the artist in absentia with an ongoing series of exhibitions and radio shows that presented maps, slides, journal entries and sounds from different stages of the journey.

During his travels, Cornelissen sent himself a series of envelopes, which remain unopened to this day. They are still sealed and are now re-exhibited within *Mercury in Retrograde.*

> insert page I



***Reis langs de evenaar,* Johan Cornelissen, 1983**

Stephan Dillemuth
Lives and works in Munich

Wie is het mensch van deze twee, 2006

p. 173 — On progress
'Science and knowledge are now binding all humankind together by invincible power, the advantages of mutual aid and equity are becoming daily more manifest. The tremendous transition from political state to commonwealth goes on, steadily and irresistibly, like a great stream obeying gravitation.' (*Happy Humanity*, Frederik van Eeden)

The term Lebensreform (Life Reform) originated in the mid 1890's for attempts to renew the whole conduct of life, especially in the spheres of nutrition, clothing, dwelling and health. These included movements that were anti-alcohol, anti-inoculation, antivivisection - in general, any kind of attitude against established constrictions of society. In view of the development of 'multitudes' of parallel conceptions of life, the Life Reform movements were certainly predecessors of today's 'escapist' constructions of identity, formed via lifestyle conceptions. Like Stephan Dillemuth's artistic practice in general, his ongoing series of Lebensreform installations examine the process of historification of real events; in this case, by drawing on the archives of the early 20th Century Dutch reformer, psychiatrist and writer, Frederik van Eeden.

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Omer Fast
Lives and works in Berlin

Godville, 2004

Godville is a 50'00", two-channel video edited from interviews with 18th-century character interpreters in Colonial Williamsburg, a living-history museum in Virginia, U.S.A. The interviews begin in the past and in character, but deliberately jump to the present and back. By further cutting and pasting interview segments, often splicing together new phrases and words, the two biographies of each speaker are blended into a seemingly fluent if rambling whole. It tells the story of a town whose residents are unmoored and floating somewhere in America, between the past and the present, between re-enactment, fiction and life.

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Aurélien Froment
Lives and works in Paris

The Apse, the Bell and the Antelope, 2005
Our Hero Came from Nowhere, 2005
De L'île à hélice à Ellis Island, 2005
Something About Stolen Film Stills, 2006

The Apse, the Bell and the Antelope
Arcosanti is 'the lifelong work of architect Paolo Soleri,' says Roger Tomalty, our guide through the film. The Apse is a dome structure which collects energy in the winter and shades itself during the hot season. The Bells are manufactured on the site and sold to provide income for construction. The Antelope takes advantage of the new grasses that are emerging after a fire. *The Apse, the Bell and the Antelope* is a film of 30'00" duration.

Our Hero Came from Nowhere, De L'île à hélice à Ellis Island
Ellis Island, the title of a novel by Georges Perec, was also the first experience of the US for many post-war Italian immigrants, including Paolo Soleri.

L'île à hélice (Propeller Island) is a book by Jules Verne, set aboard a steamship island as it sails into the South Pacific.

Departing from Islands of Silence (Martin Booth), the circular library, *De L'île à hélice à Ellis Island* completes its revolution with *De l'autre côté de l'île* (Anne Rivers-Siddons). *Our Hero Came from Nowhere* is an iceberg diorama.

Something About Stolen Film Stills
Lecture: Saturday 8 April, 2006
Aurélien Froment introduces a program for a film society whose film, paradoxically, has vanished. Set in a close future, Froment's lecture roams over photographs, books, films, that are no longer in circulation, completed by a part of his collection of stills.

> insert page III

Dmitry Gutov
Lives and works in Moscow

Lifshitz Institute, 2004–06

Russian art theorist Mikhail Lifshitz (1905–1983) stated that complete agreement is the ideal and most basic principle of the human race. He said this in 1970, when dissident culture was at its apex in the Soviet Union.

The Lifshitz Institute is a collective initiative that was founded in the early 1990s in Moscow. Spearheaded by Dmitry Gutov, the Lifshitz Institute actively recalls Marxist-Leninist aesthetics through a re-reading of the theoretical legacy of Mikhail Lifshitz. The Institute sees his engagement in the critique of Modernism as important and valuable, since it is not only limited to the investigation of movements within the history of art, but also includes a broad analysis of the value system of an evolving modern society. The poetic criticism implied with Gutov's Lifshitz Institute is a reflection on the daily realities of Russia. With an attempt to map an island of critical engagement, the Institute questions the potential for sharing collective values in the hostile climate of rampant neo-liberalism.

> insert page XI

Sven Johne
Lives and works in Leipzig

Vinta, 2004

Vinta, the most easterly of the German islands, lies in the Baltic Sea, thirteen sea miles from the coastal town of Peenemünde. Between the years of 1923 and 1992, the island, which is only around 900m long and 250m across, was a point of destination for a number of different people who undertook various endeavors on the island. Sven Johne's black-and-white images with accompanying texts chronicle how each of their missions somehow ran aground. Today, Vinta is uninhabited.

> insert page II

David Maljkovic
Lives and works in Zagreb

Scene for a New Heritage, 2004
Scene for a New Heritage II, 2006

In Croatia, 2045, a group of young travelers made a journey to a silver monument which had been erected under the communist government of Yugoslavia to commemorate the Second World War. It was the 25th of May, the anniversary of Tito's birth, and they were on a quest to recollect the monument's fading promise. Nearly two decades later, in 2063, Petrova Gora Memorial Park is visited for a second time. In *Scene for a New Heritage*, a film of 6'06" duration, and *Scene for a New Heritage II*, a film of 4'33" duration, the monument-museum — once idealised as an abiding testament to ideology — is now perceived as at first a moment embedded with avant-garde ciphers, and ultimately an abstraction. Designed by modernist sculptor Vojin Bakiç, the site had been a compulsory stop for elementary schools during the communist regime.

> insert page XIV

Ohad Meromi
Lives and works in New York

Moon Colony, 2003
The Random Element, 2006

Moon Colony
An international consortium consisting of over 50 partners, including industries such as the Japanese Shimizu Corporation and Orbitech, a US NASA-contractor, and cademic institutions such as Ecole des Mines, France and Cranfield University, England, has achieved what was once deemed the impossible, a self-sufficient settlement on the lunar surface. Music, theatre and fiction have also played an important role in the realisation of this dream, which is fast becoming the centre of architectural and urban planning discourse. *Moon Colony* is an audio-visual installation, of 5'20" duration.

The Random Element
The Guardian: 'The Past, the ultimate mold. The template. Is change possible? Can we find a way to a different future - or are we bound by history? With only a slight chance of success we will go back in time, still not knowing what it is that we have to do.' *The Random Element* is a radio play of 16'00" duration, with segments repeating throughout exhibition spaces.

> insert pages IX, X, XI

Tilmann Meyer-Faje
Lives and works in Utrecht

Rembrandthuis, 2006

In 2006 the Netherlands celebrated the 400th anniversary of the birth of Rembrandt van Rijn.

How many paintings attributed to Rembrandt were actually made by the famous Dutch painter? What is the distinct quality and flavour of *Rembrandt's Wine*? Where can you see the *Night Watch* from behind?

These are the details and absurdities that have become the subject of Tilmann Meyer-Faje's research into Rembrandt van Rijn. *Rembrandt*huis is a publication created in collaboration with Rotterdam-based artist and graphic designer Steffen Maas, which combines an eclectic array of facts, objects and events that have developed around the myth of the legendary painter over the centuries.

Rembrandthuis was distributed throughout Amsterdam during the exhibition, with a special performance on Rembrandtsplein on April 14, 2006.

> insert page XVI

Missing Books
Maria Barnas, Maxine Kopsa and Germaine Kruip live and work in Amsterdam

Un oscuro día de justicia
(A Dark Day of Justice), 2005

Argentinian writer and activist Rodolfo Walsh was shot in Buenos Aires on 25 March 1977, after criticising the state of terror of Videla and his junta in an open letter. There are several accounts of how Rodolfo Walsh was killed. The newspapers wrote that he was taken from his home by men dressed as civilians, without mentioning his death. The unofficial story, told by friends, relatives and colleagues is that he was shot on the street by a military death squad. The explanations for how he was tracked down vary. *Un oscuro día de justicia* (A Dark Day of Justice), was published between the two dictatorships in 1973, was subsequently censored, and has now been reprinted by the publisher Missingbooks.

Ricardo Piglia interviews Rodolfo Walsh, *'Today it is impossible to create literature disconnected from politics'*
Hosted by Missingbooks at the library of the Rijksmuseum, with thanks to *Het Nieuwe Rijksmuseum*
Thursday 13 April, 2006

Events are what matter these days, but rather than write about them we should make them happen.

> insert page V

Nova Zembla
Het Nieuwe Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

The Barents Relics, 1596–2006

The emergency wintering of Dutch explorers in 1596/97 on the Arctic island of Nova Zembla is a historic event of legendary significance in Dutch history. Searching for the Northeast Passage to China, Willem Barents, Jakob Heemskerck and their crew were forced to construct their 'Behouden Huis' (safe house), after their ship stranded on ice. Captured in detail by surviving crew member Gerrit de Veer's engaging best-seller of 1598, the event has been revisited by poets, historians, and explorers of the modern era. Accessed again by the Dutch only after *glasnost* had opened the military zone and former nuclear testing area to the West, Nova Zembla had long existed as a frozen time capsule.

Cracked open by plunderers and archaeologists, the site reveals its complex layers. Nova Zembla has provided an ideology for nationalist ambitions in the 19th century and a symbol of resistance and endurance in a war-torn era. As recently as 1995 archaeological expeditions have helped unearth information about daily life in the Behouden Huis, while also chronicling the perils of the Arctic in the post-Soviet era. Select navigation tools and books loaned from the Rijksmuseum collection served as a point of departure for *Mercury in Retrograde*. The aim was to offer a new reading of the collection, which is juxtaposed with contemporary works of art. Here reconstruction and speculation became a metaphor for imagination and the needs of the present.

> insert page II

Khalil Rabah
Lives and works in Ramallah

Tulips in Palestine, 2006

The tulip has been used over the years to symbolize perfection, eternity, and enduring love, according to Persian legend. It has also become an object of intense financial speculation in the 'tulip fever' that took hold in the Golden Age of the Netherlands.

In April 2006, the Botanical Section of the *Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind* launched through its newsletter the campaign *Tulips in Palestine*, together with de Appel. The campaign is based on studies of the orange-red tulips that grow wild throughout the landscape in Palestine. Collaborating with a range of Dutch institutions, the Museum will study and collect hybrid tulips in order to plant them in Palestine and contribute to the local flora and fauna. At the invitation of the Museum, RIWAQ Centre for Architectural Heritage in Ramallah will participate in the exploration of the Dutch social and institutional landscape, providing sources of information, support, and exchange.

The Museum continues, through its activities of researching, publishing and collecting, to 'inspire wonder, discovery and creations which provoke curiosity and deepen understanding of our natural and cultural worlds.' (The Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind)

> insert page XVI

Fernando Sánchez Castillo
Lives and works in Amsterdam and Madrid

Rich Cat Dies of Heart Attack in Chicago, 2006

Brazil, 13th December 1968. The Fifth Institutional Act was passed conferring full dictatorial powers on President Costa e Silva. The dissolution of the Congress followed. The constitution was suspended, civil rights were cancelled, mass arrests took place and, of course, the media were strictly censored. In short, this was a 'legal' way of engineering a coup d'état. No media body was able to provide information on the events that had taken place, or even offer an opinion regarding what had occurred. The newspaper *Correio da Manhã* hit the streets with the following headline: 'Gato rico morreu en Chicago' (Rich cat dies in Chicago).

This same absurd title serves as a departure point for the video, in wich the lead character is the head of a monument to an archetypal ruler.

Rich Cat Dies of Heart Attack in Chicago is a fim of 22'00" duration.

> insert page XV

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