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Sean Snyder

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Lessard, Victoria. «Filtering the truth», *The McGill Daily*, September 21, 2015.
http://www.mcgilldaily.com/2015/09/filtering-the-truth/

Culture | September 21, 2015

Filtering the truth

Sean Snyder explores consumerism, propaganda, and the image
Written by Victoria Lessard | Visual by Marie Labrosse

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Artist Sean Snyder sits, microphone clutched in one hand, listening to an audience member ask him about hacking in relation to his art installation, Aleatoric Collision (Sony Hacking Scandal) (2015) which addresses the data breach preceding the release of The Interview, a movie depicting the assassination of Kim Jong Un, the supreme leader of North Korea. He is frowning in concentration, and when the audience member finishes, he pauses before answering the question and plunging the room into a discussion surrounding different forms of hacking and the moral codes surround such an activity. Snyder is participating in the gallery talk, along with artists Anne Goldenberg and Matt Pagett, after the opening of his new solo exhibition, "Algorithmic Archaeology," at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery in Montreal. The exhibition runs in collaboration with the 14th edition of Le Mois de la Photo à Montrèal (MPM), titled "The Post-Photographic Condition."

"I didn't intend to create an art project – it was my own interest, in a way. […] Initially I just started tracing what transpired around Christmas time," Snyder said, when talking about his installation Aleatoric Collision (Sony Hacking Scandal) (2015). The Sony Hacking Scandal is one of the central pieces of the show, comprising a mixture of objects, prints, and video, including a framed quote by U.S. President Barack Obama answering a question regarding the Sony hack and a copy of the DVD on its own pedestal, elevating it to an object of high art. Though the piece has a sense of humour, the collection of artwork has a more serious tone, and examines the relationships between the image, propaganda, and the consumer.

Lessard, Victoria. «Filtering the truth», *The McGill Daily*, September 21, 2015.
http://www.mcgilldaily.com/2015/09/filtering-the-truth/

The prevalence of the image in social media andits dominant role in society are also key themes within Snyder's work, as well as topics of discussion during the artist talk. Fellow panelist and artist Pagett said, "One of the things that we see in social media now is the power of filters, so instead of something being censored directly, it is filtered. Facebook has filters that control what you see on your newsfeed, Twitter has filters, Google has filters; so, I think any time we talk about social media now, that is the new development – to talk about how these filters work, and [Snyder's] process is the work of examining that filter."

The prevalence of the image in social media and its dominant role in society are also key themes within Snyder's work, as well as topics of discussion during the artist talk.

The idea of the filter, or how something can be framed to suit the needs of its producer, is prominent in Snyder's Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars (2004-05), a video that combines different clips of media coverage surrounding a single conflict. The most compelling part of the video arises from Snyder's comparison of media coverages of the abandoned home of a former leader of a 'terrorist' organization. The specific person is not named, leaving the viewer to draw their own conclusions about context. The manipulation of the narrative using the detritus of someone's deserted residence is highlighted through the items each news organization focuses on: rotten bananas; a Mars bar; random kitchen items; books.

After a visit to "Algorithmic Archaeology," each choice on social media becomes a reflexive act – how much am I filtering my life to craft a specific narrative about myself? How much of what I consume is filtered for me to suit the ideals of the producer? Snyder's work demands that the viewer contemplate what is happening just outside the frame of the image, in both local and global contexts.

Sebastian Gladstone. «Top Picks: Paramount Ranch 3, CA», *Eyes Towards the Dove*, January 31, 2016.
http://eyes-towards-the-dove.com/2016/01/top-picks-paramount-ranch-3-ca/

EYESTOWARDS*the*DOVE
contemporary art & culture

Top Picks: Paramount Ranch 3, CA

Jan 31, 2016
Sebastian Gladstone

Hope you've got your checkbook out and your spurs ready because with fifty-seven exhibitors, Paramount Ranch 3, is rocking Agoura Hills, located about an hour Northwest of LA. A alternative project by Liz Craft, Robbie Fitzpatrick, Alex Freedman, and Pentti Monkkonen, it is open to the public January 30-31 from 11am-5pm and is held at, you guessed it, Paramount Ranch. The land was originally purchased in 1927 by the movie studio Paramount Pictures, before passing through a few hands and eventually becoming property of the National Parks Service in 1980. Having been utilized as a film set, the ranch still has a 'homestead' feel with sets that were used in Little House on the Prairie and Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman amongst the more recent, although from 2003-2005, Carnivale which was broadcast on HBO. In its third edition the fair is working with an impressive international roster of galleries including The Breeder, Athens, Jannis Varelas, Balice Hertling, Paris, showing Jonathan Binet and Camille Blatrix, Koenig Galerie, Berlin, with works by Annette Kelm, Camille Henrot, Michaela Meise, and Mendes Wood, São Paulo, showing Paulo Monteiro. Domestic based galleries worth noting include Shoot the Lobster, NY, exhibiting Claire Barrow & Reba Maybury, Jenny, LA with Chuck Nanney, and The Box, LA with works by California-based Paul McCarthy. Not the traditional white box art fair being held in a large convention center, Paramount Ranch takes visitors off the beaten path, literally.

In his first ever contribution for Eyes Towards the Dove, artist Sebastian Gladstone is currently in LA working on an upcoming show of his own at Club Pro in LA, opening April 2016. He is also Editor-in-chief of the magazine FOUNDATIONS, which can be found in print and online. These are his top picks from Paramount Ranch 3. Yeehaw! ~KATY DIAMOND HAMER

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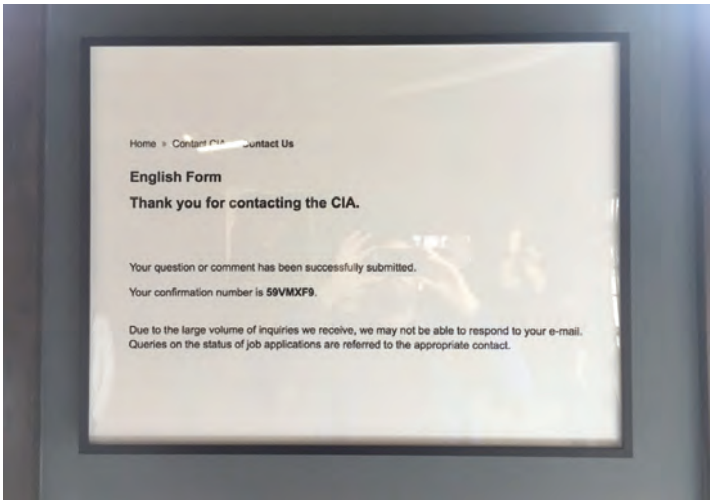

Sean Snyder at Chantal Crousel, Paramount Ranch 3, 2016
Photograph by Sebastian Gladstone

Decter, Joshua. " Sean Snyder, Artist Space". *ArtForum*, March 2011.

ARTFORUM

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albeit surely self-aware in its overt gothic romanticism, does nothing to fend off such persistent ghosts). The artist himself posits such scenes as warnings against evoking the unrecoverable past or unknowable future at the expense of the here and now, but though his idea is sound, its communication here is itself buried under layers of tangential and perhaps distracting reference.

Avoiding this trap by eliding context and hewing closer to the abstract, Pomaski's series "Waves in Isolation," 2010–, renders oceanic breakers as swaths of light and dark (though, as always, the density of the latter is limited by the delicacy of the artist's application). Here, the works' associations—the flicker of animated meteorological radar, the variegated bars of a DNA profile—feel at once less culturally predetermined and closer to the exploration of data and its interpretation that was reportedly uppermost in the artist's own mind. The more Pomaski collapses perspective by directing our eye toward evidence of facture, the more clearly we also sense his process's conceptual implications. Taking this to a logical extreme are four drawings titled *Untitled Static Field*, each a block of stacked lines, that evoke Agnes Martin in their quiet, handmade take on Minimalist paring-back.

Rounding out the exhibition were three variations on the latter series, each made in collaboration with one of the artist's friends. Aaron Houser adds an abstracted skyline to one small work, while Nathan Dilworth cuts up and reassembles another. Finally, Tyler Page Berrier pulls a William Burroughs, blasting a third example with buckshot and leaving it peppered with holes. Though presented as afterthoughts, these playfully destructive experiments suggest that Pomaski boasts a healthy awareness of the limitations of his practice, and seems likely to expand beyond them.

—*Michael Wilson*

E'wao Kagoshima
ALGUS GREENSPON GALLERY

There's nothing like a giant phallus poking out of a fruit bowl to complicate a dinner party. E'wao Kagoshima's work taps into the anxieties—the social missteps and gaucheries—that haunt the nightmares of the overly refined among us. An untitled series from 1976 presents détourned *House Beautiful* tableaux rife with priapic forms sprouting from the tastefully arranged chintz. Joining this fauna are a cast of polymorphous cartoon figures, rendered in thin washes of pastel-colored oils, who simulate fellatio or otherwise erotically commingle with the erect penises. Lounging in negligees or sometimes tucked awkwardly into the furniture, Kagoshima's little goblins spring like a dose of raw id from the conflicted psyche of interior design. Scanning the prissy Louis Quatorze sideboards and fussy damasks, one may question at what spiritual cost such compulsive perfection was achieved. Indeed, the immaculately staged layouts possess a distinct artificiality—a strangeness—that's as uncanny as the phantasms themselves.

E'wao Kagoshima, *Libidoll No. 1*, 1985, oil on shaped canvas, 48 x 42 x 2½".

Kagoshima came to New York from Japan in the late 1970s, acting as a satellite figure to the budding East Village art scene. Though he exhibited sporadically throughout the 1980s, this show marks the first presentation of material from the New York phase of his career in one venue, featuring more than fifty collages, drawings, and paintings from 1976 to the present. As the diversity of work on view demonstrates, Kagoshima's talent for animating the everyday with preternatural sexual energy reaches its clearest articulation in his paintings, which recall those of British artist Richard Hamilton before him. What if your sleek new toaster was infinitely sexier than your wife, as Hamilton's classic *She*, 1958–61, suggests? Or, what if, as Kagoshima's 2008 work *Overtime (Black Fate)* overtly shows, the train engine barreling toward you assumed a leering smiley face and from its turbulent steam emerged a luscious, disembodied, lipstick-besmirched mouth? While Hamilton foregrounds the erotics of the commodity in modernity, Kagoshima's more absurdist subjects highlight the sometimes ambiguous zone between pornography and buffoonery.

Kagoshima's work operates in the precarious space of the psychedelic experience—psychotropic drugs are a reference point for his practice—and in his brand of pop surrealism, consciousness expansion is poised at the knife-edge of druggy stupefaction and childlike wonder. The volatility of this dynamic frequently devolves into a gruesome bad trip of paranoia and self-destruction. In his *Libidoll No. 1*, 1985, a shaped canvas delineates the silhouette of a broad-shouldered, breast-baring, wildly grinning woman with a lime-green bob. Her oddly diminutive hands wield a carving knife as she cleaves her head and upper torso into a twinned couple; the painting arrests her movement as she slices her sternum, paring her breasts like fruit. The grisliness of this gesture is exacerbated by the shallow relief of the canvas, which presents her halved skull schizophrenically, in both frontal and three-quarter perspectives. The single woman becomes a pair as her cycloptic heads stare at the viewer in unblinking mania. The trope of the cheerily demented doll is a common one, from Rod Serling's Talky Tina to Chucky. Kagoshima's amps up the hallucinatory horror of his sci-fi gorgon with touches of ersatz naturalism—this is perhaps the first and only (anti)heroine clad in an iridescent tweed jacket equipped with orange elbow patches. The theme of splitting and doubling can be less frightful, however. Ask the wide-eyed blond monkey smoking two cigarettes (*Monkey Smoking*, 2007): If hypnosis doesn't work, he's going on the patch. Or, as a clown-faced figure wearing a red bowler implies (he's floating through the work in which the penis appears in the fruit bowl), the nearly identical small figure emerging from his loins may be the birth of a mirror clone, red cap and all—or merely his fetchingly attired "little friend."

—*Eva Díaz*

Sean Snyder
ARTISTS SPACE

What does the classic Warner Brothers cartoon "Road Runner and Coyote" have to do with the urban condition? Sean Snyder's 1996–98 *Urban Planning Documentation (Road Runner & Coyote)*—the earliest of the eight works in this modest, twelve-year survey—proffers tentative answers. Beside a monitor playing clips of Wile E. Coyote's elaborate, doomed-to-fail schemes, Snyder presents two groups of black-and-white photos, all depicting seemingly innocuous elements from the urban landscape. In the first set, each image is accompanied by an ambiguously descriptive sentence: A FAILED LANDSCAPING ATTEMPT ON A MEDIAN, for instance, captions a photo of what appears to be sod and road infrastructure combined in an incongruously informal manner. In the second, ten images are collectively labeled with the single phrase AS A TERRORIST PRECAUTION EVERY PUBLIC TRASH CAN IN THE CITY WAS COVERED WITH A THIN METAL LID AND RENDERED USELESS.

Decter, Joshua. " Sean Snyder, Artist Space". *ArtForum*, March 2011.

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Sean Snyder, *Dallas Southfork in Hermes Land, Slobozia, Romania* (detail), 2001, photographs, color videos, architectural models, digital prints, photocopied documents, newspaper articles. Dimensions variable.

Apparently, Snyder appropriated these images from urban planning manuals and vandalism protection documents, and his reframing of the materials may be an attempt to lampoon the underlying ideologies of urban space—as well as to note the intrinsic interpenetrations of representation, image, information, and ideology.

Snyder's concern with tracking the ways in which ideologies shape the representational language of mass media (primarily television) is evident in *Dallas Southfork in Hermes Land, Slobozia, Romania*, 2001, which centers on a Romanian amusement park that features a meticulous reconstruction of the ranch from the infamous 1980s US television series *Dallas*. Presenting video, newspaper articles, digital photos, and architectural models, Snyder details the park's history, displaying ephemera documenting, for instance, a visit by *Dallas* actor Larry Hagman, as well as the nefarious financial and political collateral matters directly and indirectly related to this perverse episode of transcultural identification run amok. These elements seem to analyze the way in which this American television show (itself a kind of postmodern morality tale regarding the dynastic legacies of US oil wealth and corporate greed) was reframed by another society in transition, evidencing a range of cultural-ideological contradictions. E.g., Ceaucescu broadcast the show as anticapitalist propaganda; the show became popular, and remained so in post-communist Romania; and Hagman appeared in advertisements for a Russian petroleum company with ties to the Romanian developer of the *Dallas Southfork* park. Yet once we put the disparate pieces together, what results? A sense of irony that what was demonized by a Communist dictator as emblematic of America's evil capitalism would be reappropriated by a Romanian capitalist for entrepreneurial ends? In other words, a cautionary tale of the global contagion of neoliberalism?

The Site, 2004–2005, is a collection of photographs and texts pertaining to Saddam Hussein's hideout, or "spider hole," at the time of his capture by US troops. Snyder includes a self-redacted e-mail exchange with a woman from the Associated Press regarding the purchase of the photos, thereby self-reflexively foregrounding the use of the media apparatus to obtain his source materials: Process is at once embedded and dismantled as subject. The tendency toward self-reflexivity spills over into "Disobedience in Byelorussia: Self-Interrogation on 'Research-Based Art,'" an entertaining text published in *e-flux journal* no. 4, in which the artist claims that "artistic experimentation, whether presented as research or not, precludes an outcome—a conclusion or a statement." By this he means, I assume, that we should not expect that an *effect* will result from a given artistic endeavor, and, by extension, that his dismantling and reframing of the representational systems of mass media acknowledges that the artist and artmaking can never be exempt from the nebula of globalized media. An ethics of uncertainty mobilizes Snyder's antiaesthetic, and his metapositionality—at once analytical and complicit—deploys a documentary language for postdocumentary ends.

—*Joshua Decter*

Taryn Simon
LEVER HOUSE ART COLLECTION

To shoot the 1,075 images that constitute her project "Contraband," 2010, Taryn Simon erected makeshift photo studios at the US Customs and Border Protection Federal Inspection Site and the US Postal Service International Mail Facility at John F. Kennedy International Airport. Then, she and her team meticulously documented items confiscated by customs agents over the course of five days: heroin, envelopes with unknown medication, counterfeit BlackBerry batteries, shark fins, South Korean dog treats made with unidentified meats, Russian diet pills, a Haitian goatskin drum, Pakistani steroids, Ukrainian lard.

Simon groups the images according to the identifications used by the agency, such as "animal corpses," "unidentified biohazard," "money orders," "nuts," "miscellaneous pharmaceuticals." And in this regard, the project can be situated within photography's long classificatory tradition, from Victorian ethnography up through the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, who, with their typologies of obsolete sites of industrial production, seem especially salient here. After all, Simon's images, too, distill the essence of contemporary production regimes—in her case, the global circulation of goods in postindustrial capitalism, here arrested midflow. Photographed under uniform light, positioned against a neutral background, and surrounded by substantial white space, the pictures look like high-end advertisements. This visual style applies particularly well to the abundance of counterfeit or pirated goods in the collection: the Louis Vuitton ties, BMW hood ornaments, and copies of Season 4 of *Lost*.

Taryn Simon, *Cigarettes, Shuangxi, China (prohibited)*, 2010, color photograph, 6¾ x 6¾". From the series "Contraband," 2010.

But you don't learn much about the black market for knockoff luxury items from Simon's work (or, for that matter, the black market for deer tongues, zolpidem, or soil). Again like the Bechers, her aim is not to instruct; she supplies her audience only the limited information provided to her by the border agents (this might include the identity of the object, its country of origin or destination, and the reason it was seized—"Injectable *Diazepam*, Georgia [illegal]," for instance), which tells us little about the sociohistorical or economic significance of these items. But that is not to say that the images, considered individually, do not suggest stories. Indeed, some of the items are quite poignant: The foreign food products seem most overtly like nostalgic tokens of culture, smuggled across borders for a taste of home. A confiscated Burger King hamburger is probably the remnant of a preflight meal, stuffed in the luggage for later. If fast food is America's most notorious export, it's contraband when it returns.

But it's the accretive effect of the images' illicit subject matter that seems to be the real point. In its quantity and diversity, this collection

Lack, Jessica. «Exhibitions preview: Sean Snyder, London.», *The Guardian*, February 7, 2009.
http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/07/sean-snyder-exhibition

theguardian

Exhibitions preview: Sean Snyder, London

ICA, SW1, Thu to 19 Apr

Jessica Lack

Saturday 7 February 2009 00.01 GMT
Last modified on Friday 8 January 2016 07.11 GMT

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Sean Snyder had been largely interested in transitory spaces - the drive-through, the airport lounge, the chain motel - with virtually no real human interaction. Since 9/11 and its repercussions, Snyder has continued to ruminate on this depersonalised experience, but switched his focus to the Iraq war. In early pieces, like The Site, he spliced conflicting accounts of Saddam Hussein's capture from the media and their surreal focus on the consumer items found in his possession. Snyder searches for truth behind the visual cliches we have come to accept from the media, and the results reveal a less certain world where black and white becomes as grainy as the footage in his camera.

Snyder, Sean. «Disobedience in Byelorussia Byelorussia: Self-Interrogation on "Research-Based Art"», *E-flux Journal*, May 20, 2009.

e-flux

Sean Snyder

Disobedience in Byelorussia: Self-Interrogation on "Research-Based Art"

Good evening, I'm in charge of security for El Al, do you speak Hebrew?

In the art world, people don't entirely know what they are talking about. They ask a lot of questions. It's not that people don't know what they already know, but rather that they want to know something more in order to do the next thing—and somehow get it right. That's enough of a reminder that you might have something to say, and that at some point it might make sense. It is in fact those who ask questions who make the entire mechanism function.

The single most interesting discussion I have had about art was not with an artist, curator, critic, or the like, but with an El Al security officer a few years ago when I was detained and subsequently escorted onto a flight to Tel Aviv. I really messed up when I mentioned that I never intended to be an artist. As it turned out, the interrogator was himself an artist, or, more precisely, a cartoonist.

During the flight, I was separated from my laptop. When asked, I didn't think to mention that it contained a folder of al-Qaeda videos clearly marked as such. Only later did I consider the possible consequences of my curiosities, which would have been more than difficult to justify as "artistic research."

Are these your only bags? Do you have any weapons or sharp items in your luggage? Is this laptop yours? If I were to look at your laptop, what would I find on it?

I know what I said because I immediately transcribed what I remembered from the series of interrogations as soon as I arrived at my hotel. I have since tried to figure out why I said what I said, which I will try to clarify here in the present tense by returning to the original questions in the form of self-interrogation. Although I was familiar with El Al's procedures—another red flag for the interrogator—I suppose that what struck me most was that I became annoyed at having the same ritualistic conversations you end up having when participating in art exhibitions.

Where do you live? What sort of art do you make? What are you trying to say?

I have often placed myself in precarious situations in order to access information and images for my work. I have been thrown out of places, been arrested, had cameras confiscated, have faked journalist credentials, paid bribes, and so on. A compulsion? A "research-based art practice"? Well, more the former, supported by the notion of the latter.

Art is facilitated by responsible practitioners that frame art. And artists are often bound to their own caricature. The stereotypes are well known: savant, creative, hysteric, convoluted, contradictory, and so on. However, the *institution* also has its connotations: mental facility, the state, government, social order, and so forth.

As I write, I will not assume the role of the artist, but more that of a cartoonist. I will enter a state of psychosis for a few days in an attempt to explicate in the form of satire and caricature the notion of "context" and its relation to art, occasionally fluctuating between scientific and clinical terminology (applied arbitrarily).

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Snyder, Sean. «Disobedience in Byelorussia Byelorussia: Self-Interrogation on "Research-Based Art"», *E-flux Journal*, May 20, 2009.

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▲ Disobedience in Byelorussia, *Soviet Life Magazine*, November 1988.

What do you mean you've been invited to participate in a conference? I thought you said you're an artist.

As an artist, I generally don't like to involve myself in discussions about art. More often than not, they exemplify what not to do rather than what to do. They often reveal the way art is instrumentalized. However, in this case I will make an exception and write something.

As I understand it, the format of *e-flux journal* is intended to generate a new form of discourse. I am always optimistic when I read these sorts of formulations. e-flux itself is a reflection of the art world in which the entire spectrum of production is laid bare. Its organizational structure is based on the simple necessity of disseminating information and is interestingly not bound to contextual framing—conflicts of interest, party affiliations, art magazines, et cetera—and, unlike most of the art junk mail that somehow ends up in my inbox, I don't automatically delete it. I read some of it.

As *e-flux journal* has begun to establish some general parameters, broadly concerned with issues surrounding the institution, I would like to mention the immediately relevant questions posed by Tom Holert in regard to the production of knowledge in art that correspond to the growing discussion about "research-based" art practice and its institutionalization.[1] I also agree with Irit Rogoff's comments on the occasional circular patterns in regard to "context."[2]

I have recently produced two works that reflexively, if obliquely, address issues related to how I see current art practice, works that unexpectedly border on some oblique form of "institutional critique." It's certainly not a category or designation I would want to end with, but something that simply happened, and I would like to attempt to identify the short circuit.

Concrete thinking has led me to believe that the recently applied designation "research-based" artist is possibly appropriate. The next in a series of terms applied to my practice. Of course, such terms are necessary to

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rationalize art; typically, however, when such terms are applied I try and circumvent them and do something else.

I recently conducted a form of research on "research-based practice"—my own—and would like to explain the hypothesis and outline some subsequent results so they can be held up as a specimen for analysis. I will try and explain in plain language, not the language that gets confused in the real world, the sort of words automatically corrected by Microsoft Word. The word I got tangled up in was "context." I will explain how it happened.

What I will attempt to underline should serve as something of a potential warning to designations such as "research-based practice."

I am curious myself. Does it give ammunition to the notion that research-based practice should be institutionalized? That I should be institutionalized? Or re-institutionalized? After all, isn't the artist as incoherent psychotic generally the most acceptable practice? More seriously, the practice of art is not confined to finality. It is centered on questioning rather than illustrating, self-reflexive without guarantee, and, as any material practice, open to the possible consequences.

▲ Mass Wedding Ceremony, Unification Church, South Korea, 2000.

Why do you do it? What are you trying to say?

I was late sending the signed documents to the institution. The art institution. But I did have an excuse this time. The Fed Ex plane crashed at Narita this morning.[3] That is an unfortunate fact. It was very windy last night. I was not expecting anything. But other people were expecting something from me. And it will be delayed. Because plane accidents are more important than discussions about art. Than anything I do. And I can talk about plane accidents. I can talk about the different models and types of planes, which airlines, the dates. But it's up to journalists to check facts.

Then there are art journalists. And they understand what they understand. And that's good. But sometimes they try and explain things they don't really understand because sometimes they speak about politics. And they confuse other journalists.

While I am writing this text, I am listening to conservative American talk radio online. Not because I like it, but because it is annoying. People talk. And talk and talk. And it presents itself for what it is. But sometimes the host has something funny to say. For example, "Even a blind squirrel can occasionally find a nut."

As art has an increasing interest in other disciplines, it seems to attract people who have little more to say than to insist on their imaginary roles in the institution. They just talk, telling us who said this about what, and so on. And they have increasingly more to say. Based on what others have to say. And will keep talking. Until you

remember. Demanding more discipline or the Bologna Process. Because anyone can get away with anything in art, if one is insistent enough. And it's precisely this sort of "discourse" that often leads me to question the discourse itself.

Here in admission of my own gullibility, I'll diffuse some of my comments.

As a kid I spent hours a day listening to short-wave radio. Particularly the English-language broadcasts from socialist countries. One host named Vladimir Posner, who spoke with a perfect American accent, was particularly convincing. I also had a subscription to a magazine called *Soviet Life*. I found everything very impressive, so much so that when I was thirteen I went to the Soviet Union in a student exchange. I remember being in Leningrad, sitting in two groups, drinking bottled lemonade and discussing politics with well-versed Soviet students who were intent on convincing us that their system was better than ours. After explaining the capitalist system to us, they invited themselves to visit us in the United States. It was a bit unexpected. When we left the building where the conference was held they threw a dead pigeon out the window at us.

Much the same confusion predominates in the art world, whose idealism wouldn't exist without a basis.

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▲ "News of the World," North Korean State Television, January 2009.

I thought you said your work includes photography. Why don't you have camera equipment with you? There are many interesting things to photograph in Israel.

"All works of art are objects and should be treated as such, but these objects are not ends in themselves: They are tools with which to influence spectators" (Asger Jorn).

Topicality creates the expectation that theory and politics can be enforced through art. But art is not propaganda.

Let me give an example of the arbitrary nature of what might be misconstrued as politics. Imagine that you are watching television. And you are following the capture of Saddam Hussein. Not actually following Saddam Hussein, but watching it on television and reading about it on the Internet. You are curious. Incidentally, you notice near the television a book with the title *The Dictatorship of the Viewer*. And you, the "irrational" artist, invert it. Viewer of the Dictatorship. Knowing you exhibit in the art world. And it will be inverted again. Viewer of the Artist viewing the Dictatorship. And you the artist are aware of the implications.

A few years later it finally happens. You cause the media to speak to itself. Nonsense. Feedback. And it tells you what not to do next.

I recognized the journalist. He was from CNN. He had a lot of makeup on. More than I realized he had to wear on television. He was in my exhibition in the institution. He wants to talk about my exhibition. I tell him I want to talk about the show. I mean his show. I tell him I watch his show. But he is talking about my exhibition. I tell him I can talk about the subject of what's in the exhibition but it will take a while. But I would rather talk about the subject of his show. But he wants to talk about journalism. Then I tell him, so let's talk about his show. But he still wants to talk about my exhibition.

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While preparing for the camera he asked: what is the purpose of your work, again?

I had to come clean and explain my intent. The exhibition is an attempt to collapse all meaning of the subject, it is about the futility of representation. To make you think about the subject you see. About what you already know. To look again in the real world. Nothing more.

The consequences were productive. I'm not exactly talking about ethics, but I realized everything had come full circle. For a moment I was able to use art to cause distortion in the media. To occupied space. But I also knew there was something wrong.

▲ Evening News, North Korean State Television, February 2009.

So where can I see your work? In international media, do you mean like magazines? Do you have examples of your work with you?

Dictated by new formats, there is amnesia that art exists in a particular time and space. The often archaic processes of the art world are unable to articulate the practice. Unable to keep up with cutting and pasting itself into the present, the Internet is a quick reference tool for art professionals, giving the illusion art that can be comprehended without seeing it.

I can talk about "dematerialized" art because I have seen it in books. But I never experienced it. Conceptual art was communicated by means of postcards, faxes, and magazines before I was born, and I read about it years after it was made.

The mechanisms and conventions on which the art system relies are in fact real. There are institutions, galleries, critics, publications, and so on. A lot of wasted paper and thought goes into the mechanization of cultural production, providing evidence that ideas were exchanged, and often the illusion that they were communicated.

What do you mean? What is the myth of Bauhaus in Tel Aviv about? Why is it a myth?

How can art negotiate its own means of mediation? How does the physical art space relate to the quick dissemination of information? How much of that discourse is nonsense? You can hope that at least the facts of the subject of research are checked.

Not an accusation, but an admittance of operating on the wrong frequency. Which can go nearly undetected. The slight incisions into the cultural fabric are more evidence of what not to do. My temporary conclusion has been not to update information about production. Ignore it and let it reside in a system that generates itself. Let meaning disintegrate until it collapses and can be made into a subject of its own.

To let information operate parallel to art in order to let me know something about the subject. Something I don't already know.

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▲ Harvest Festival, Korea Monthly Magazine, DPRK, 1986.

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Where did you study? What did you study?

The art world sometimes seems more like school than school itself. So it's logical that the discussion about education arises. I have basically gone from one institution to another, that is, from art school to institutionalized professional art practice. I have long taken exhibition thematics as serious propositions with potential. And when the subject is based on a secondary or non-existent notion, I make it into the subject itself. In some cases I have produced work simply to see what happens, then I determine its function and go from there. When I can't detect what the intent of the exhibition is, it's an opportunity to try something, to experiment.

Have you ever visited a synagogue?

The rituals of participation can be pretty grotesque. They can be worse than school ever was. You don't want to go to the art bar. You want to go to a real bar. You have to go to the same fucking Italian restaurant the second night in a row because one artist is vegetarian, and a bad artist. A slobbering artist can't concentrate anymore on your conversation because an important curator walks in the door of the exhibition. You get introduced to someone you've known for ten years because the person wants them to know that they know you.

More artists stealing the banners, slogans, and balloons from protesters until there is no longer protest. And disciplinarians speak about protest, because art allows them to. And artists do it, because they were told to do it. Another whining artist waiting for a crate with his art to arrive. He opens it and it's another neon. It looks like the neon in the last exhibition but it says something slightly different. Another slogan about non-conformity. He's talking about how he got the idea from Deleuze while eating a cone of pistachio ice cream. Another moron does some "social design" that everyone is forced to sit in. Otherwise you have to stand all night and look at it.

An artist from a country where you went to do a project asks you to give an interview for his magazine. You say sure, but you tell him to first read a text. Where you got the idea to start the project. The text was written by an architect. A theorist. The artist doesn't write back. He publishes the article with the photograph you took to illustrate the text. Uncredited. The same artist goes to the same place you did the project. And does the same thing, in a different way. His version. There's a monument to the country he immigrated to in his own country. So he makes a video of the monument of the country he immigrated to in his own country. It's a better project.

A curator shoving a card in another curator's face interrupts your discussion. Talking about her plans to do an exhibition of Hungarian artists in Turkey. You ask if the title of the show will be Hungary Turkey. You are serious. She thinks you're a lunatic. Why not? Her card is from an American-supported foundation. Because you read it and know who taught her to shove cards in people's faces. And you somehow feel responsible, but not really.

You should exploit your background. Scandalize and provoke. Politely.

Recently an art historian proposed that Van Gogh did not cut off his own ear, that it was likely the result of a fight with Gauguin, who threw a glass at him. This came from a researcher looking carefully through existing criminal documents. They have been there for more than a hundred years, while the fictions have been made.[4]

Where did you meet? How long have you known each other?

But experience goes along with it. There are interesting people in between, so it's worthwhile. Like school. And then you get institutionalized, in art institutions. So you have different responsibilities. You have to talk. A lot. About yourself. And they send you a press package with what they have to say, and you read it because your work is about media and you're curious about what the media writes about your work. "Is interested in this . . ." "Examines that . . ." You read it and you think, what the hell? That's not what you were thinking—at least not what you thought you were thinking. And the facts are all wrong.

Do you have any Jewish relations or has anyone in your family immigrated to Israel?

I'd rather speak Japanese to someone who might understand the second or third time I repeat what I'm saying, than with someone who simply will never understand what the hell I'm talking about with art. But if they are not involved in the art world, I try to explain.

Last year I went through the process of Japanese immigration. Japanese immigration is very strict. There are twenty-seven classifications for visas. I gave them too many documents and they were confused. They were unsure whether I was applying for cultural purposes, humanities, or what. It was kind of a surprise when the immigration officer said, "But your last visa was from an institution. It says you are an artist. Can you prove that? " On a technicality I qualify for permanent residency.[5] I suddenly was reminded I'm an artist.

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Say you decide to start a center in Ukraine together with some academics in the university. There was a Soros center, but now they complain about funding for art and that's understandable. But when they get it they don't always use it for art. And that's understandable too. You don't want to start another art scene, you just want to do something with what you know because there is no contemporary art, at least as you understand it. There is a new private museum, with animals behind glass. I mean the art. It's part of a shopping mall. It's decadent and amusing. At least people get more interested in art.

Then you talk with someone you know in the art world who is also interested. He is the editor of a magazine. A real magazine you read in art school. He had a similar idea and you realize you might be able to do something together. A lot of people get interested in the idea. Suppose the University has a film archive with more than 5000 16mm films and they belong to the center you started. They would have been thrown out if you hadn't organized them and put them on shelves so they can be screened and edited. You know you can't watch them all. You don't want to do an art project with the films. You just want to watch them. And invite other artists to make art projects.

You know that all the formatting problems of the art world you've encountered for years can be solved with one cheap media player that is made in China that you can get on the market for seventy dollars. It plays everything. You're in Ukraine and there is no formatting, as you know it. You can get new pirated software as soon as it's on the market, the black market, where there's no formatting.

You end up speaking with people about "context" and they don't know what you're talking about. So you have to explain and explain, and in the process it starts to make sense, maybe not to you, but to them. It sounds convincing, and then maybe you can make some meaning out of that for yourself. So you try and do something with what you have learned—what you always understood as "context." It might fail, but so what?

▲ *Unsung Heroes*, North Korean Film Series, DPRK, 1981.

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How long have you had it? Has it been in your possession all the time?

Back to the art world. I have had interesting discussions with other artists who have also worked with the same subject and I have spoken with art journalists who don't know the difference between North and South Korea. But the journalists like the idea of North Korea.

I could use North Korea as a sort of metaphor for the art world. Not the politics and horrific conditions that exist in the country. They are real. Not to bring "awareness" to the art world. These things I can't change. I am not delusional. Let me be clear here, not to sound irresponsible. I am referring to the circulation of information. I am thinking of the insularity of the country. This is a metaphor. Or concrete thinking.

For example, you can take someone's statement, de-contextualize and reframe it so that it might sound as if it applies to the Bologna Process:

It has trained a large number of revolutionary talents in the crucible of the arduous revolutionary struggle, thus successfully playing a pivotal role in carrying out the policy of training native cadres and the policy of intellectualizing all members of the society, and actively conducted scientific researches, making a great contribution to the development of the nation's science and technology.

But it's not. It's from the other day. Kim Jong-Il visiting a new swimming pool at a University.[6]

A short anecdote, related to Liam Gillick's research on the experimental factory.[7] I am reminded of an incident that speaks to the fate of all good intentions: in the 1970s, Sweden's Social Democratic government sent a few thousand Volvos to North Korea on the trust of the Swedes. The North Koreans just ripped them off and never paid for the cars. They are still on the streets in Pyongyang.[8] An important consideration here is where the production ends up. Who accumulates the knowledge? Who is producing what for whom? Will you get back what you give?

Snyder, Sean. «Disobedience in Byelorussia Byelorussia: Self-Interrogation on "Research-Based Art"», *E-flux Journal*, May 20, 2009.

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▴ Detail from DPRK publication, Volvo 144s, 1989.

Once again, my interest is nothing new. When I was a teenager I listened to Radio Pyongyang. It was again the interestingly contorted language. Propaganda. North Korean State Television edits the outside world into a surrealistic and alien spectacle with consistent themes: war, accidents, natural disasters, intimidating technology, worldwide protest, extreme physical activity and endurance, and so on. Appearing once a week towards the end of the news report, following the perfunctory fifteen to twenty minutes of praise of Kim Jong-Il and reports on his daily activities, the program is called "News of The World."

Without realizing that you have nearly become a thematically programmed production zombie, you start to listen to yourself repeating yourself. Cynically. You realize this when you are talking to students about how to do the same. You sound convincing because it's what students expect. Because you have experience. And then you have to catch yourself and tell them what you are thinking. Because that's more useful.

In another city for yet another reason, I ran into Stephan Dillemuth by coincidence, in yet another academy with yet more students. But these students were different. The same fantasy I had in school of the art world. I felt like I was finally back in the real art world. The art world of the *Akademie* that I read about in art school. The illusionary, bohemian, delusional, real art world of art. Where everyone reads faked scripts, wears costumes, and talks incoherently. I have recently found myself wandering around the art supply store looking at paint materials.

At the end of the night I had to leave and go back to the institution. The art institution.

Anyway, here is where I would start to identify the short circuit. I often found that the notion of "context" doesn't necessarily translate. The further off and more "peripheral" the places I exhibited, the less knowledge there was about "context." But I could still discuss the subject of the research. And then I might attempt to explain "context" and its considerations.

Or maybe it's simply a disorder. I am, in fact, a savant. I have Asperger's syndrome. And I can remember a lot of information. I can archive. And it can be a fucking intricate mess. And I can present it as art.

Not that the subject of archiving is not interesting. I just can't read another concept based on another concept for yet another exhibition about archiving. It gives me a headache. And the idea of more curators archiving concepts

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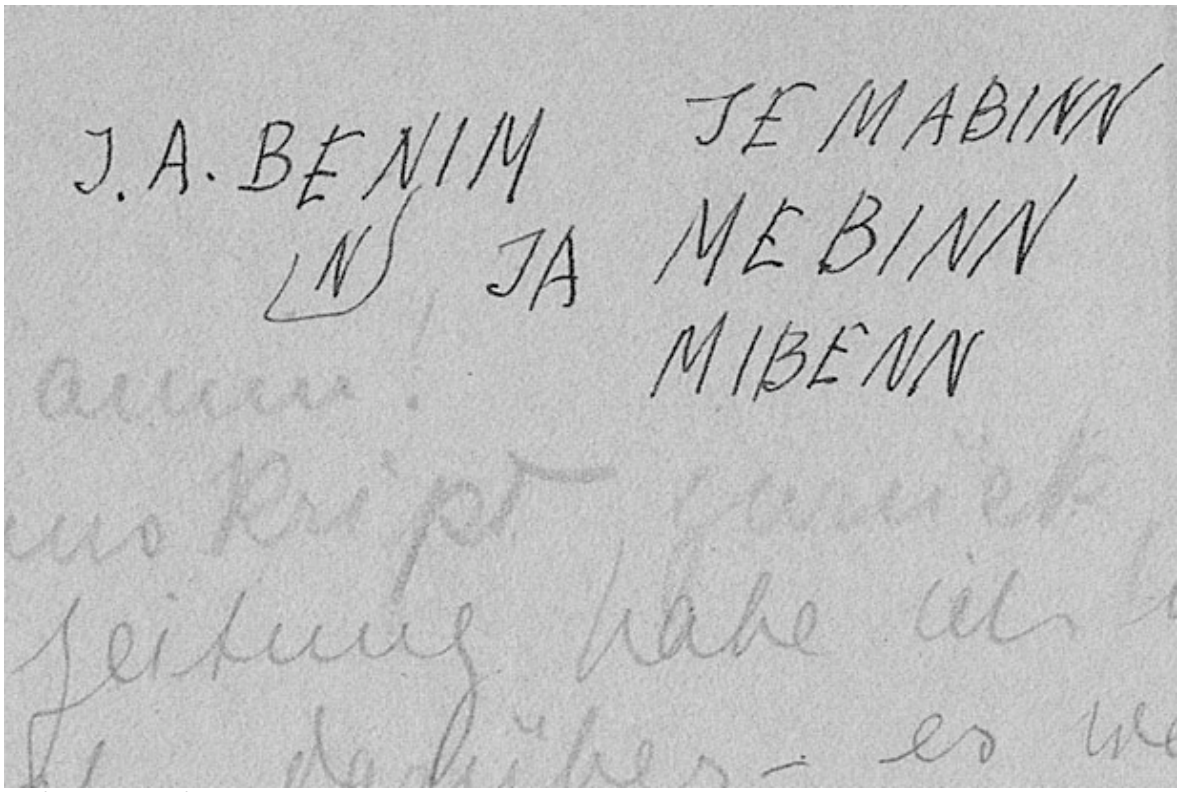
of other curators archiving artists to archive the notion of the archive is annoying. So is the idea of more and more artists digging through more and more archives as another pretext for another exhibition.



▲ Walter Benajamin Archive.

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To try and understand what the hell I am doing I look at Walter Benjamin. Not in his archive, but in a book. By someone who researched his archive, and edited it. His list of seemingly meaningless pictures and notes is justification. The mistakes, what is crossed out, misspellings, diagrams, notes in the margin. Constant revisions. Editing. Something more idiotic than the last thing I have archived for whatever reason.

"The knowledge of truth does not exist. For truth is the death of invention" (Walter Benjamin).

Architecture is not politics. A photograph of a building is not politics, but it can generate readings. I have never attempted to make political art. I have made art informed by politics in terms of the narratives and visual surfaces ideology produces. I have never inferred the notion of truth. In fact, I have worked with distortion, played with presentation implying truth. I passed through a matrix of contradictory forms that imitate authority, and alluded to the problems and failures of representation.

Artistic experimentation, whether presented as research or not, precludes an outcome—a conclusion or a statement. It is entirely reliant on the dismantling and framing of a given subject matter.

This situation of self-correction reminded me of the regime I was once seduced by. I caught myself going all the way back to when I was about sixteen. On the premise of producing an art project, I bought the issues of *Soviet Life* that I had received with my subscription at that time. When the magazines arrived, I realized I actually just wanted to re-read them and see what I could remember. One article in particular has an interesting series of images. They contradict the current situation in Byelorussia. It is even optimistic in a twisted way. And I remember the photo from when I was sixteen years old.

Concrete thinking makes me consider the art world though metaphors in order to make it seem rational so I don't have to spend all my time in the institution. I mean the art institution. So I can exist in the real world. I learned in school that you can always walk out of class when you don't like it.

So is it your main profession? Who sells your artwork? Who buys the artwork?

There is not one instance in which I have been turned away from approaching another discipline for source material. Occasionally I have been altogether stopped, and probably for good reason. Yes, much of the language of "context" remains largely untranslatable for a broader society (depending on where you are), but people do know what art is. First there is skepticism, as most people have preconceptions. Followed by explanation. At the end, when they see what you have done with what they entrusted you with, it often comes as a surprise. The result informs their discipline. In these cases it is successful. But that's the point where it's often useless in the art context.

What is often forgotten in discussions about "research-based" art practice is that it cannot simply be reduced to research. To do so is to forget what art can do and what research can't. Art makes the form the site of knowledge. Without rejecting the content. It is art itself that delineates its own borders.

Here again, I see possibilities for the notion of hijacking art. If you can convince someone that art is intangible, it can act as stand-in for something else. And then maybe you can get something done with it, inside or outside any discipline if that is in fact what you want.

I first learned this a few years ago from two El Al interrogators and a curator. Who works in an institution. An art institution. One of the interrogators was skeptical about whether I was an artist when he called the curator on the telephone. The curator later told me that the interrogator was also a cartoonist.

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colophon

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[1] "I am particularly interested in how issues concerning the actual situations and meanings of art, artistic practice, and art production relate to questions touching on the particular kind of *knowledge* that can be produced within the artistic realm (or the artistic *field*, as Pierre Bourdieu prefers it) by the practitioners or actors who operate in its various places and spaces. The multifarious combinations of artists, teachers, students, critics, curators, editors, educators, funders, policymakers, technicians, historians, dealers, auctioneers, caterers, gallery assistants, and so on, embody specific skills and competences, highly unique ways and styles of knowing and operating in the flexibilized, networked sphere of production and consumption. This variety and diversity has to be taken into account in order for these epistemes to be *recognized* as such and to obtain at least a slim notion of what is at stake when one speaks of *knowledge* in relation to art—an idea that is, in the best of cases, more nuanced and differentiated than the usual accounts of this relation." Tom Holert, "Art in the Knowledge-based Polis," *e-flux journal*, no. 3 (February 2009), →.

[2] "And so the art world became the site of extensive talking—talking emerged as a practice, as a mode of gathering, as a way of getting access to some knowledge and to some questions, as networking and organizing and articulating some necessary questions. But did we put any value on what was actually being said? Or, did we privilege the coming-together of people in space and trust that formats and substances would emerge from these?" Irit Rogoff, "Turning," *e-flux journal*, no. 0 (November 2008), →.

[3] See "Deadly plane crash at Tokyo airport," CNN.com, March 23, 2009, →.

[4] See Bärbel Küster, "Wir müssen einen Schnitt machen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 24, 2009, →.

[5] See "Guidelines for Contribution to Japan," Immigration Bureau of Japan, →.

[6] See "Kim Jong Il Provides On-the-Spot Guidance to Newly Built Swimming Complex at Kim Il Sung University," Korea News Services, March 19, 2009, →.

[7] Liam Gillick, "Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three? Part 2 of 2: The Experimental Factory," *e-flux journal*, no. 3 (February 2009), →.

[8] See Volvo Car Corporation, "75 Years of Volvo Taxis," press release, 11 March 2005, →.

Sean Snyder is an artist who lives in Kyiv and Tokyo. He is represented by Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Lisson Gallery, London; and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

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Prince, Mark. «Exhibition Reviews. International. London. Sean Snyder. ICA.», *Art In America*, June/July, 2009.

Art in America

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Galerie Chantal Crousel

Sean Snyder: *Exhibition*, 2008, DVD projection, 7 minutes; at the ICA.

INTERNATIONAL

LONDON

SEAN SNYDER

ICA

The centerpiece of *The Parallax View*, Alan J. Pakula's classic 1974 conspiracy thriller, is a montage of photographic stills shown to Warren Beatty's character to measure his emotional responses, and his aptitude for being an assassin. As the sequence accelerates and the content grows more violent and disturbing, the images come to be absorbed before there is time—for Beatty or for us—to consciously process them. The implication is that we, as viewers, are also being tested. American artist Sean Snyder's exquisitely edited sequences of found film footage are similarly poised between informing us of past events and forcing us, moment to moment, to question our own automatic reactions. Investigating the ways that images operate on us, he explores a paranoid mindset that can be dated to the time of Pakula's Watergate-era film.

One component of Snyder's recent show was *Index* (2009), a putative archive of photographic and textual material he compiled for various projects over the last 10 years. Ultimately, he intends to whittle it down to fit on a single 1-gigabyte memory stick. At the ICA, cheap black-and-white computer printouts—the residue of information damaged or destroyed in the archiving process—were densely tiled and pinned to plain white bulletin boards. The format owes something to Tom Burr's cross-referencing of archival photography on blackboards, although Snyder's presentation was resolutely statistical and anti-esthetic. His dry functionality becomes, of course, its own esthetic. And there is a moral element to his focus on the material properties of the digital media that are the vehicles for his narratives, and to his efforts to disabuse us of any illusion of those media's transparency.

But the archive that gave the show its title was merely a scene-setter for three separate single-channel videos that all use appropriated footage. *Afghanistan, circa 1985* (2008-09) is a 10-minute black-and-white loop made with film shot during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. In a desert landscape, uniformed Soviet soldiers carrying assault rifles watch a group of Afghans, in local dress, dancing and laughing. The assumption that they are performing under duress gradually unravels as the soldiers are drawn into the celebration. Who is in a position of power here, and who is being manipulated? Lacking an explanatory voiceover, the film compels us to reflect on our preconceptions and how they have been shaped.

Snyder's concern with the politics of world events is a corollary of his primary preoccupation with the politics of images. In *Exhibition* (2008), which is drawn from a Soviet propaganda documentary, copies of famous paintings have been hung on the walls of a Ukrainian farmhouse for a lecture on art history given to a gathering of local peasants in the '60s. The footage is a partly humorous relic made mysterious by its isolation from the ideological apparatus of its source.

At best, Snyder's films leave us with a sense not of political machinations, but of how little images tell us about the world they purport to reveal. *Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars* (2004-05) consists of a 20-minute didactic disquisition on corporate branding during the US-led invasion of Iraq. The ironies thrown up by Snyder's litany of facts—for example, that Casio is the terrorist's wristwatch of choice—enliven the pervading air of conspiracy and paranoia. Finally, the artist's deadpan narrative voice fades out, and we are left with a panoramic night view of bombs exploding intermittently over Baghdad. In the darkened gallery, the gulf between the distant muted flares and what they signify resonates more deeply than all the foregoing explication.

—*Mark Prince*

LONDON

THE OTOLITH GROUP

GASWORKS

Otolith (2003), the first film by the London-based Otolith Group (comprising Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun, both born in London), starts in 2103. No longer able to cope with earth's gravity, humans live on the International Space Station. One of them, Dr. Usha Adebaran Sagar, a descendant of Otolith Group member Sagar, digs into Anjalika's archive and discovers her

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Text and Other Tools

Interview with Sean Snyder

The model of the artist as a producer of discourse instead of, or as well as, art objects was a critical reaction to the romantic / modernist conception of the artist, who in essence created works for esthetic contemplation. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, artists like Buren, Broodthaers, Smithson and also Sekula emphasized - in varying degrees and in different ways - the discursive element of their practice in order to criticize the ideology of contemplation, and focus on art's entanglement with ideology and power. What is the status of this model now that artists are required to produce quasi-theoretical sound bites in order to be players in the scene of international curators and biennials? If 'having something interesting to say', 'having an interesting approach' that can be put into a few words is now de rigeur, where does this apparent perversion of a model that was once critical leave us? How do you perceive, and deal with, this state of affairs?

I think a lot artists' and curators' intentions and engagement with issues gets reduced in the mechanisms of making something topical and in this way intelligible for an audience. It's more a practical matter. You have a press release with a two or three line description of the works and this inevitably makes things reductive. On the other hand, a quite simply conceived artwork with all the right signifiers becomes a projection space or 'interesting'. In my case people sometimes seem to expect very clear-cut, reductive statements of intent - and they become exasperated if I do not provide them – because I engage in a practice that involves a critique of what we are fed though the media. If I abstained from dealing with certain issues, then there would be no questions asked. If I was making formal paintings or sculptures or 'creating' something everything would be evaluated on much different terms. However, I work a lot on structuring material by formally using references to art history. Maybe I overestimate the art-contextual reading of my work; perhaps people look more for 'information' or 'critique' and regard the art context simply as a convenient medium for this.

One could argue that there has often been a mimetic element to the way in which artists write 'critical' or 'theoretical texts'. From Smithson and Graham to Stan Douglas, journalistic, essayistic and academic discourse is imitated, used for different ends, sometimes consciously mocked. There has also been a tendency to use language in a descriptive or mock-descriptive, objective, deadpan way, focusing on 'information'. Your work seems to be linked to the latter tendency. Is emphasis on 'information' an alternative to the prettification of artists' writings, of treating them as special because they were created by this unique being, our last symbol of freedom, the artist?

If I write something it is a part of an art project and should be understood as such. The texts are simply an amalgamation of information that I use to formulate a project and another device to get the point across. Exhibitions are often understood in what you referred to as sound bites. I might try to get the general sphere of what the project encompasses across and hopefully build layers of interpretation both specific to the subject matter I am dealing with as well as art contextual. I resort to text when visual means are insubstantial to get a point across.

I use text assuming that it is a given tool from the history of conceptual art as a means to dealing with existing structures of information, and can be used as any other medium or formal element. I guess what we're talking about is representation, whether with text or by visual means. What you are told or see is not always what you get. If I use a quote from say a corporate report or from a government agency, I see it as a sort of possibility to tactically respond to a given structure with an inherent commentary. The question is: how can you reconfigure information to make it interesting and prevent it from ending up as bad

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journalism, redundant, and make the traces extend beyond the reference sources utilized? Any text that ends up in a project is a filtered, pointed interpretation of the material I am working with that takes up where an existing body of knowledge leaves off. I offer the viewer to make his or her judgments. My work should be understood as speculative, not authoritative or academic.

But surely preventing the work from ending up as bad journalism must involve more than justletting the viewer make his or her own judgments? When you emphasize art history and the art-contextual reading of your work, I am reminded of Shanghai Links, which I see as a kindof Chinese remake of Dan Graham's Homes for America in the age of gated communities. Your photographs of the Shanghai Links settlement strike me as being among your most Grahamesque. You combined a projection of these photographs of the (abandoned) American suburb-style colony for western managers in China with old pictures of the former western concessions in Shanghai, and textual fragments that are mainly quotes and paraphrases from various sources. What are apparently quotes from brochures from Shangai links ("To make your time in Shanghai as comfortable as in North America"; 'Expatriate Community at its finest") are juxtaposed with the observation that "Mao Tse Tung once warned that 'revolution is not a dinner party." Your work often relies on visual and / or conceptual montage. What do you think such textual montages (rather than more linear, discursive texts) achieve, in combination with the visual montage of your pictures and the old photographs? What are their specific qualities?

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First off, there's a personal dimension in that particular project more than homage to Dan Graham's Homes for America. I grew up in an identical neighborhood in the US with a golf course and lived in the same sort of house. I do remember seeing one of Graham's photos on the cover of a Sonic Youth CD when I was in high school (and lived in such a neighborhood) totally unaware of the original context, but I thought that particular image really represented boredom and mediocrity. I later figured out it was art. I see these sorts of houses more as a typology of American housing that still exists and has migrated. (By the way, I was originally planning to do a project about a similar gated community in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia called Seder Village that was actually later attacked by Al Queda) Anyway, the photos might seem so oblique because the compound was heavily guarded and I had to be careful and use a zoom lens to make them. What I found interesting in the promotional advertising material for the development was the marketing of what seemed to be aspirations to Shanghai's colonial past. They attempted to revive and a romantic notion of an exclusive foreign community with no apparent consideration to past failures. Though extracting details from a subsumed history I was trying to set up a speculative comparison. My use of text and image is meant to oscillate between apparent facts and various connotations and subtexts, and though this question representations. The text might be in the form of a descriptive title, a brief text (a caption), or a juxtaposition of information. Hopefully that's also where the irony, humor, absurdity come in.

To take a close look at another of your works: in Dallas Southfork in Hermes Land, Slobozia, Romania, you use photography, video footage, texts, press clippings, and architectural models to reveal a rather bizarre constellation of connections: the popularity of Dallas in communist Romania, post-communist Romanian millionaire building a copy (different in scale) from the Southfork Ranch in Slobozia, the connections of the Bush Clan with this shady entrepreneur, Larry Hagman's ads for Lukoil in Romania, Hagman's visit to the copy of Southfork Ranch… The work revealings certain connections or relations that may fall outside the traditional realm of visual art: they may be social, political, economical. You take a starting-point that is visual - the ranch - and then work with that to make the invisible links

that tie these structures together explicit. Does your work stem, in part, from skepticism visà-vis the possibility to make sense of the contemporary world in a visual form? Do you think that 'purely' visual art is pure spectacle, unable to go behind appearances or media simulations, unable to provide insight into contemporary capitalism? Is this why the use of text, however sparse, is a necessity? Do you think that photography – say, the work of Thomas Struth - is limited in this regard?You said that you use text 'when visual means are insubstantial to get the point across'.

Actually, with the Dallas/Slobozia project the photos of the area where the ranch is located came nearly last in conceiving the project. The first time I went to Bucharest it was obviously very interesting, but the social reality pointed to something I felt was not so easily approachable. I became interested in Ceausescu's projects, but the futility of standing in front of the Palace of the People taking photographs, given their scale, history, and so on made everything seem quite impossible. I could better identify with large-scale advertisements of Larry Hagman on the streets of Bucharest even though I never had actually seen the television series and things went from there. The project sort of established itself around the knowledge that a copy of the ranch exists and accumulation of any evidence related to the ranch and Larry Hagman's career as an actor. I could not find any images of the ranch so I went there and took some.

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I do think that purely visual art is fully capable of going beyond the surface, but sometimes it is not possible to make or obtain the right images; and even apparently 'purely' visual art often stills needs titles or some background information to function, to bring out certain aspects of the image that might otherwise not be apparent. Unfortunately, I think that there's a tendency in visual art to pick up a seemingly relevant subject and reduce the critique to the level of a single image. In the case the approach of a photographer like Thomas Struth, whose work I respect a lot, I generally don't trust typifying a situation through one image. For me it's through the seriality as well as the technical precision that Struth's work becomes interesting. He is extending and reinterpreting historical cannons of photography, which doesn't play so much of a role in my work. I am more interested in issues of representation and its limitations, for example in the case of the two long-term project dealing with North Korean architecture and US military bases abroad - which material is difficult to access and represent. And I don't always see the formalization of a project as a terminal point.

Your image/text montages always deal with certain sites (cites, places in cities, compounds such as army bases and gates communities…) yet it is hardly site-specific in the traditional sense. You use photography, video and text to represent, to un-site the site and reflect on it.

If I outline two projects, one old work and one in development, maybe I can explain something about how I develop work and how I have shifted in approach. With my project in the Manifesta 2 in Luxembourg, which was basically the first exhibition I participated in, I tried in a very direct way to deal with the local context and what I assumed would be an international art audience dislocated from the local context. On one hand I had a very intelligible work about passengers arriving at Frankfurt airport which had a sort of non-space in an airport with long duration, a very unintentionally formulaic artwork references and ideas of mobility and duration and so on. The other work was made for the exhibition was a sort of structural comparison between Luxembourg and Gibraltar (Luxembourg is referred to as the Gibraltar of the North). I was intending that everyone in a local context could get a part of my contribution, while the general art audience would get the other part. I was in a sense curious to understand something about the reception of artwork. Basically one work was something digestible and the other very context specific. I was curious to test the water

as to what degree artwork can communicate an idea.

To explain my change in approach a bit more clearly: rather than producing work for a certain context and engage in a kind of contractual site-specificity in which you are must react to the concrete context (in which the exhibition takes place), I try to work with an issue that might in part be site-specific, but also points to a general circumstance and expand its meanings when shown in different locations. The project I am currently working on began as a commissioned work from the NAi and SKOR dealing with the Dutch Sternet system, an obsolete network of post-sorting buildings next to railway stations (including the building that now houses the temporary exhibition space of the Stedelijk Museum). The commission was looking for ideas for reinterpreting the space and assessing their value for architectural preservation. I found the buildings quite uninteresting so I looked for something that would relate to the premise of the project and function in a more metaphoric sense. What is the impulse to preserve partially dysfunctional buildings of questionable architectural significance? I decided to approach this issue not directly though Sternet, but though the planning for Skopje after a major earthquake in 1963. There was a UN competition (including an entry from Van den Broek en Bakema in Rotterdam) for the reconstruction of the city, whose winner was the Japanese architect and urban planner Kenzo Tange. The scheme was an adaptation of Tange's Plan for Tokyo from 1960. The UN resolution included donations from more than 60 countries in the form of prefabricated structures and technological support, and it became a sort of testing ground for a number of interdisciplinary experiments initiated by the UN and locally , for example sociologists working together with urban planners Despite inevitable revisions and compromises, Tange's basic plan remained intact and constitutes the structure for Skopje today. So I made a link that I dislocated, un-sites the Sternet commission; not in order to sabotage it but in order to do something else that prevents art from becoming an exercise in problem-solving.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

"The Artists' Artists. Best of 2007", *ArtForum*, December, 2007, p.125.

ARTFORUM

The Artists' Artists BEST OF 2007

Galerie Chantal Crousel

From left: **Pierre Klossowski, *Les barres parallèles III* (The Parallel Bars III), 1975,** colored pencil on paper, 79½ x 49⅝". © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. **Richard Prince, *Untitled (Girlfriend)*, 1993,** color photograph, 40 x 60". **Max Ernst, *Untitled*, 1942**, pencil and white chalk on pink paper, 24¼ x 18⅞". © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

LOTHAR HEMPEL
Pierre Klossowski (Museum Ludwig, Cologne) This is how I've always wanted to see these pictures—in a dusty light, on walls covered with dark brown fabric, in a space that feels like a musty library. Here it became clear that Klossowski's pictures are better suited to passionate reading than to detached observation. And what do we read? Tales of a concentrated libido that transforms itself into outrageous forms of reason.

RIVANE NEUENSCHWANDER
"*Arte como Questão—Anos 70*" (Art as Question—The '70s) (Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo) Curator Glória Ferreira's survey of Brazilian art from 1967 to 1981 was thoughtfully curated and very much needed. Alongside well-known works by Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark were pieces by lesser-known peers such as Artur Barrio, Antonio Dias, Lygia Pape, Carlos Zílio, and others. The show reminded us of the importance of artistic resistance during the years of dictatorship.

KELLY NIPPER
The Surrealism Galleries (Menil Collection, Houston) and the Adolpho Leirner Collection of Brazilian Constructive Art (Museum of Fine Arts Houston) This fall I was reminded why I do what I do after seeing two inspiring, supersensual, and visionary collections of work in Houston. Two gems were a 1942 drawing on pink paper of a pair of fantastical aquatic bird people by Max Ernst, and *Metaesquema, Vermêlho cortando o branco* (Red Going Through White), 1958, a red and white painting of irregularly shaped rectangles by Hélio Oiticica.

KEITH TYSON
"Matthew Barney: Drawing Restraint" (Serpentine Gallery, London) Bizarre props, tales of athletic endurance, and esoteric mythologies filled the building in Hyde Park to bursting. Like some nineteenth-century explorer returning from his adventures in exotic lands, the biomythical Barney is living his dream—that of an interdisciplinary systems analyst with an expanded sense of potential for drawing, sculpture, and human identity.

NATE LOWMAN
"Richard Prince: Spiritual America" (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York) Richard Prince is a boring fuck and so are all of his boring fuck head friends and stupid shit for brains fans and I'm glad he did this show.

THOMAS BAYRLE
Sean Snyder, *Schema (Television)* (Kitakyushu Biennial, Japan) This brilliant DVD collage draws your eyes beyond the surface and into the very structure of the image itself. Instead of showing us a nose, Snyder shows us the dots of a nose. You find yourself swimming in the deep blue abstract sea of billions of dots. . . . Snyder takes us back to the center of good art. Goethe said the how is important, but more important is the what; Cézanne flipped it around to say the what is important, but more important is the how!

MIRIAM BÄCKSTRÖM
Isa Genzken, *Oil* (German Pavilion, Venice Biennale) An overwhelming demonstration of what the concept of "deep texture" might mean if it existed. An uncannily precise and rhythmic arrangement of things (carry-on bags, stuffed owls, Venetian masks, astronaut suits) that transformed the objects into particles of thought. And the installation was fun too!

LECIA DOLE-RECIO
Richard Hawkins (Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles) Through a window in *Bordello on rue St. Lazare*, 2007, one could see a miniature reproduction of Whistler's portrait of Count Montesquieu. Tucked away within this stunning show of model houses, collages, and monoprints, the count serves as an appropriate witness to Hawkins's discovery of the kinds of grays that never existed before.

MICHAEL KREBBER
Sergej Jensen, "*La Chambre de la peinture*" (White Cube, London) This exhibition showed a clear awareness of established codes and limits, but it was far faster, riskier, and more elegant than most. It was rock 'n' roll.

«At The Same Time Somewhere Else...» *The Skinny*, February, 2006.

THE SKINNY
INDEPENDENT CULTURAL JOURNALISM

THE SKINNY FEBRUARY 2006 ISSUE FIVE

At the Same Time Somewhere Else...

This Fruitmarket exhibition brings together three seemingly disparate artists who, in the words of the curator, share 'this urge to examine something, a curiosity.' Melik Ohanian, Pia Rönicke and Sean Snyder's individual works range across the two floors in a variety of media and tackle a variety of issues.

The work on the ground floor - two films and some series of photographs - deals mainly with the theme of war, specifically or by implication with the current conflict in Iraq. Snyder's photo series collates images taken on digital cameras by contractors, soldiers, the 'participants, bystanders, spectators' of war, rather than the photojournalists whose 'iconic' images Snyder seems to regard as manipulations, fabrications on the international consciousness. The amateur images, rather than portraying a war-torn, shattered nation, depict the ephemera of daily life - funny cats, chandeliers, chicks dyed in fluorescent colours, smiling children, street signs and, admittedly, weapons.

The series presents a more rounded view of a country commonly revealed to a news-watching audience only through its desolation. Snyder is highlighting the deficiencies and prejudices inherent in international news coverage, the media shorthand which reduces a country to a danger zone of explosions and suicide bombers thereby dehumanising the site and consequences of the violence, essentially legitimising the action by alienating the international viewer. Snyders' images repopulate the country with quirky moments, little breaks of humanity which survive the chaos. In the same room he has displayed images taken from Saddam Hussein's hiding place alongside the descriptions written in different newspapers, highlighting the discrepancies between the reports, and between the words and the pictures.

Upstairs, the most memorable work is Ohanian's vast light piece Slowmotion; five panels upon which the viewer can write five-letter words in light by flicking numbered switches. Once the word is written the artist asks that the writer records the switch pattern in the notebook provided so that he can later recreate and record the series of word-images created by the Edinburgh public. Worryingly, he describes this as 'taking the temperature of the place' and will be judging our national character according to what has been written. A brief glance through the notebook reveals that Edinburgh's temperature is defined by a variety of names, peace, love, the word 'Help!' written, for some reason, many times, and of course numerous swearwords. An imaginative group of men had managed to draw a giant penis penetrating a vagina. I myself wrote the word ARSE, but only because the person before me had written ART? and I felt this to be vaguely pretentious. It was hugely satisfying.

Pia Rönicke's work deals with architecture, urban planning and the dialogue between the designer and the inhabitants. She has made a film, Zonen, which shows three architects discussing their plan for a new development on the undeveloped site. Unfortunately Rönicke drew

Melik Ohanian Selected Recording #27

cinematic inspiration from Tarkovsky's 'Stalker', my personal most-hated cinematic experience, and therefore the piece was met, on a purely personal level, with extreme prejudice. It's probably very good if you don't hate 'Stalker'. Generally the show was interesting, absorbing, and the accompanying literature available within the space could, as always in the Fruitmarket, keep you occupied for hours. The works combine a light heart with a serious didactic purpose, while maintaining a rare visual spark.

FRUITMARKET GALLERY UNTIL FEB 19. FREE.

Kennedy, Alexander. «In-Between art.», *The List (Glasgow and Edinburgh Events Guide)*, January 5-9, 2006.

THE LIST

Galerie
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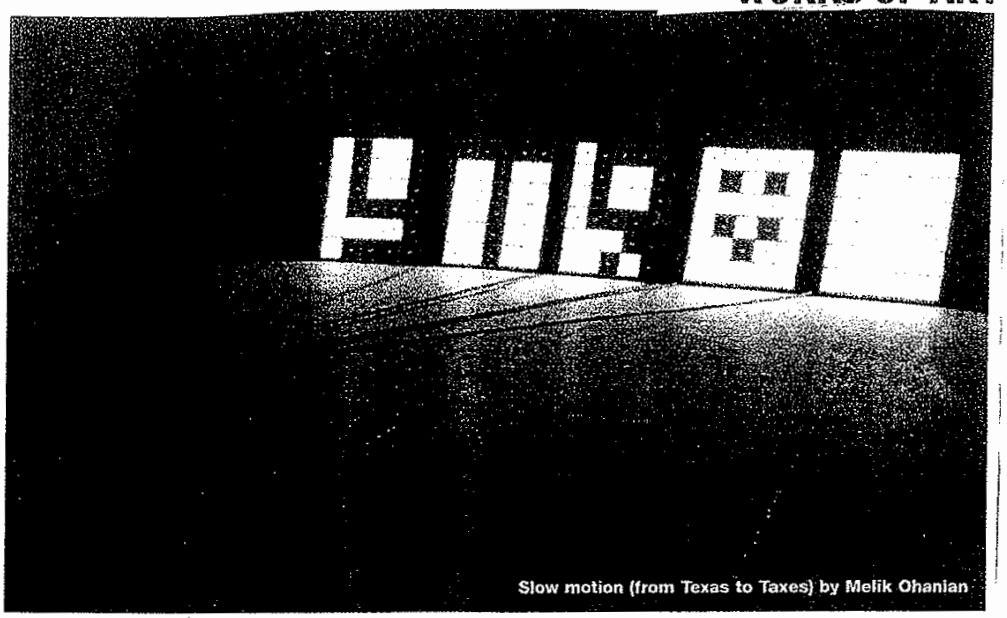
'THE WORK OF THOUGHT BECOMES WORKS OF ART'



Slow motion (from Texas to Taxes) by Melik Ohanian

In-between art

Alexander Kennedy looks at the poetry and politics behind relational forms at the Fruitmarket Gallery.

Hot topics among pseudo-intellectuals these days are 'relational aesthetics' and 'project art' – two 'theories' loosely associated with institutional and social critique, environmentalism, and neo-contextualism.

At the same time somewhere else . . . at the Fruitmarket Gallery champions these concerns. Webs of spiralling correspondences link praxis to context, aesthetics to social concerns, and unite the work shown by Melik Ohanian (Paris), Pia Rönicke (Copenhagen) and Sean Snyder (Berlin). The artists marry elements of conceptual art to film and photography, examining the rhetoric of these media in order to unravel and exploit their connotative and poetic aspects. This approach celebrates the 'post-medium condition', were everything is up for grabs and can be pulled into the artist's creative maelstrom. Political positions are adopted, but as rallying points for differing, diffuse ideas, not as foundational soapboxes.

Snyder, for example, creates works that reverberate with the war in Iraq. He gathers together reports, information, press releases, photographs from media agencies (such as Associated Press) and other sources from amateurs 'in the field', recording events as they happen. 'Untitled (Iraq) Ongoing' is glib and leaves no room for subjective, expansive thought. Each position is bracketed and underlined, trapping interpretation. Some of the photos are interesting (presented as large groups of diptychs), presenting stilted insights into personal narratives under Sadam's waning rule. Evidence is everywhere, but you've seen it all before.

Rönicke's practice comprises animations, collages, sculptural installations and drawings. The film 'Zonen' is interesting in its seductive banality, and reiterates Jeremy Deller's position that serious takes on reality are farcical. 'The Zone' is shot outside the Danish city of Aarhus, where a team of architects who recently won a planning competition play at being themselves for the camera. 'Self' and performing self separate and unite; the artifice of art and life successfully overlap.

Ohanian also shows a new film, 'Invisible Film', attempting to poetically underline the political elements of Peter Watkin's film *Punishment Park* from 1971. By reappropriating the original and projecting it over sand dunes at night, Ohanian hopes to unpack the themes of Watkin's film: characters considered a threat to national security are stripped of their human rites and humanity, becoming abstract propositions in an abstract landscape. This is an unnecessary tautological intervention, and is Ohanian's weakest piece (second only to Snyder's video 'Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars'). His 'Slow Motion (from Texas to Taxes)' installation (pictured), and large photographs titled 'Selected Recordings' demonstrate a confident and fully formed aesthetic – personal interpretations are courted and the work is generous. There is a clear style, which is occasionally lacking in much work examining relational forms. This is art that 'looks good on paper', proposal art based on brain storming sessions. It 'show's it's working' – art becomes long division.

The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, until Sun 19 Feb. ●●●●

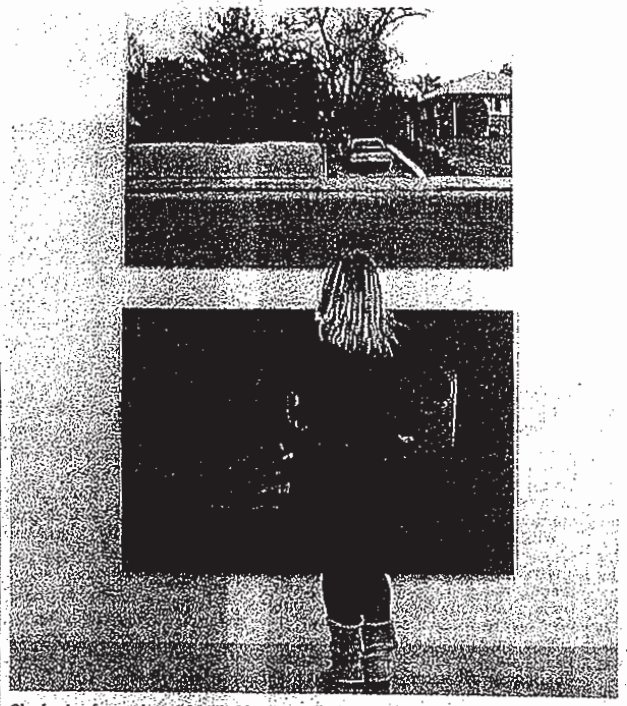
Black, Catrion. «Taking aim at the truth.», *Sunday Herald*, January 1, 2006.

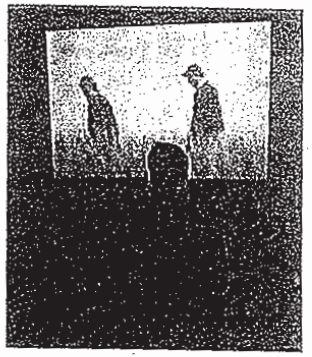
sundayherald

Taking aim at the truth

AT THE SAME TIME SOMEWHERE ELSE
FRUITMARKET GALLERY, EDINBURGH
UNTIL FEBRUARY 19
★★★

VISUAL ART
By Catriona Black





Clockwise from above: Melik Ohanian's photography, Pia Rönicke's Zonen and Sean Snyder's film Photographs: Steve Cox

SINCE Simon Starling won the Turner Prize in December last year, everybody's heard of research-based art. It's a slippery term, just like conceptual art. Even the Impressionists could be described as conceptual, if you consider their interest in capturing the instant, optical impression as revealed to them by new photographic technologies. As for research-based art, you could easily include Leonardo Da Vinci's anatomical studies, or Paul Klee's systematic investigations of colour.

The fact that all of the above resulted in pretty pictures is what sets them apart from today's conceptual and research-based art. Starling did have a pretty watercolour of a cactus in his Turner Prize show, but it's the Shed-boatshed that people remember. The fickle wooden structure was not a presentation of data or the result of some scientifically controlled research. It was the remnant of an experiment whose meaning lay not in the results, but in the absurdist thesis on which it was based.

The new work on show at the Fruitmarket Gallery, although not billed as research-based art, occupies similar territory. Three young continental artists are brought together in a stylish show which combines elements of documentary, journalism and research, challenging topical issues on a new front.

The balance of media is refreshing, allowing you to move from film to photography, and from text to interactive installation. You're given a chance to study each work in its own generous space, the uncrowded gallery looking whiter than ever. While the works are comparable in many ways, there is enough variety to keep things interesting.

French artist Melik Ohanian is represented by a strangely disconnected series of works. Two are frustratingly devoid of context. The third, Invisible Film, offers a certain lingering poetry, echoing the Quixotic allure of Simon Starling's journeys. Ohanian has projected a 1970s film, Punishment Park, on to the same Californian desert in which it was originally made, filming the result.

The result, however, is nothing but a whirring projector in an empty landscape. Although we can hear the soundtrack, we don't see the fictional peace activists struggling in a fictional US detention camp, where their rights are ignored in the name of homeland security. In all this nothingness, the terrible invisibility of Guantanamo Bay becomes tangibly present.

Sean Snyder's three projects about the Iraq war are the ongoing results of fairly straightforward research. The artist scours the internet for online photo albums belonging to soldiers and contractors in war-torn Iraq, mounting them in a glossy display. A cat sits behind barbed wire. Bundles of cash are heaped against a wall. There are street signs, curious kids, chandeliers and golden elevators. Several cityscapes are viewed down the barrel of a mounted gun.

These are the personal mementos of soldiers whose mindset lurks somewhere between tourism and ownership. But while the results of this and Snyders's other investigations are worthy of an interesting magazine feature, they do little more than nip at the heels of a deadly important theme.

The strongest work in the show is that of Danish artist Pia Rönicke. Her nine-part storyboard, Urban Fiction, draws attention to the scripting impulse of urban theorists such as Le Corbusier, who wanted to literally shape the lives of individuals and communities.

Her handsome documentary, Zonen, places three amiable young architects in lush fields and meadows, as they discuss the intricacies of urban planning. Whether it's the youthful exuberance of the architects, the occasional comedy sound effect, or the strange disjunction between subject and setting, you're left wondering if this can be genuine. If there's one theme which runs through the whole show, it's this niggling awareness that truth is stranger than fiction.

Gale, Iain. «Images to give peace a chance» *Scotland on Sunday*, January 1, 2006.

SCOTLAND on SUNDAY

Images to give peace a chance

Randomly assembled photographs from the Gulf give a compelling festive message about the tragedy of conflict

Iain Gale

At the same time, somewhere else

Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh

EVER since John Lennon sang 'War is Over', Christmas has been linked in the popular imagination with the peace movement. Of course, as any Tommy in the trenches in December 1914 would have told you, calling a halt to war has long been implicit in the festive message. And it is this which gives the Fruitmarket's new show its timely purpose.

Walking into the gallery, you are met with a barrage of images of war. Not war photographs in the genre of Capa and Miller, but snapshots of almost domestic events during and after the recent war for Iraq. There are 112 of them, arranged along an entire wall as a grid, in apparently random order. Shots of US and British troops rub shoulders with images of urban devastation, former torture chambers, Saddam's bed, and the less remarkable: dogs, children and street traders. This is an ongoing work by American Sean Snyder, who over the past two years has [illegible] war with a simple objectivity. At first they might seem like holiday snapshots. And that is the point. It is precisely the fact that Snyder has deliberately suppressed the artistic process and distanced himself that gives his work its edge.

The images are lifted from secondhand sources, ranging from the military to the internet. Whatever their origin, they are private images which, brought together in this way, produce one of the most immediate evocations of war and its aftermath you might ever experience.

Wander on and you pass another of Snyder's photo-walls. 'The Site' employs similarly plundered images from western news agencies to create another view of the conflict. This time, though, his specific focus is the location where Saddam was found in hiding.

> 'We are all, Snyder suggests, victims in some way of the manipulation of the truth'

Zeroing in on small areas of the images, Snyder is able to convey the detail of an event which reached most of us only in the very broadest terms. Here is the door of the ordinary house where he hid; the hole into which Saddam crawled for safety and, most fascinating of all, the simple room in which he existed, with the frugal [illegible] style. Snyder notes with a discreet black humour how western reporters emphasised that a can of meat and a jar of Nescafé were the only luxuries left to the great dictator. We are all, he suggests, victims in some way of the manipulation of the truth.

The thought is amplified in the final part of Snyder's tripartite installation. The short video 'Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars' is a brilliant piece of war art which deserves a permanent place in the Imperial War Museum. Initially you sit in silence, your brain taking in the bare violence of a night attack on Baghdad. It is a quite different experience to watch this footage, so familiar from the television, on a larger screen in a confined space. To feel the camera rock as a shell explodes. To witness the horror as bombs rain down to create a sea of flame. It may not be sensaround, but it's real enough.

The scene changes to the morning after in the smoking city, and although no corpses or maimed figures meet our gaze, the message is clear. The underlying theme of the work is not carnage, but something more telling. Snyder's target is the power of consumerism, and mixed with the footage of the raids are clips showing the apparent enemies of 'the civilised world' using products made in America and Japan. Fighters who could be Iraqis, Taliban or Mnjahedin, bursting with Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, crowd into a Toyota. On the wrist of a spokesperson for Saddam we see a Seiko watch. The Baghdad Sheraton becomes the focus for a [illegible] perately disassociating itself from Saddam's regime. Most ironic perhaps is a Toyota slogan offering 'freedom' with its very different meanings for the two audiences of middle American family and mountain fighter.

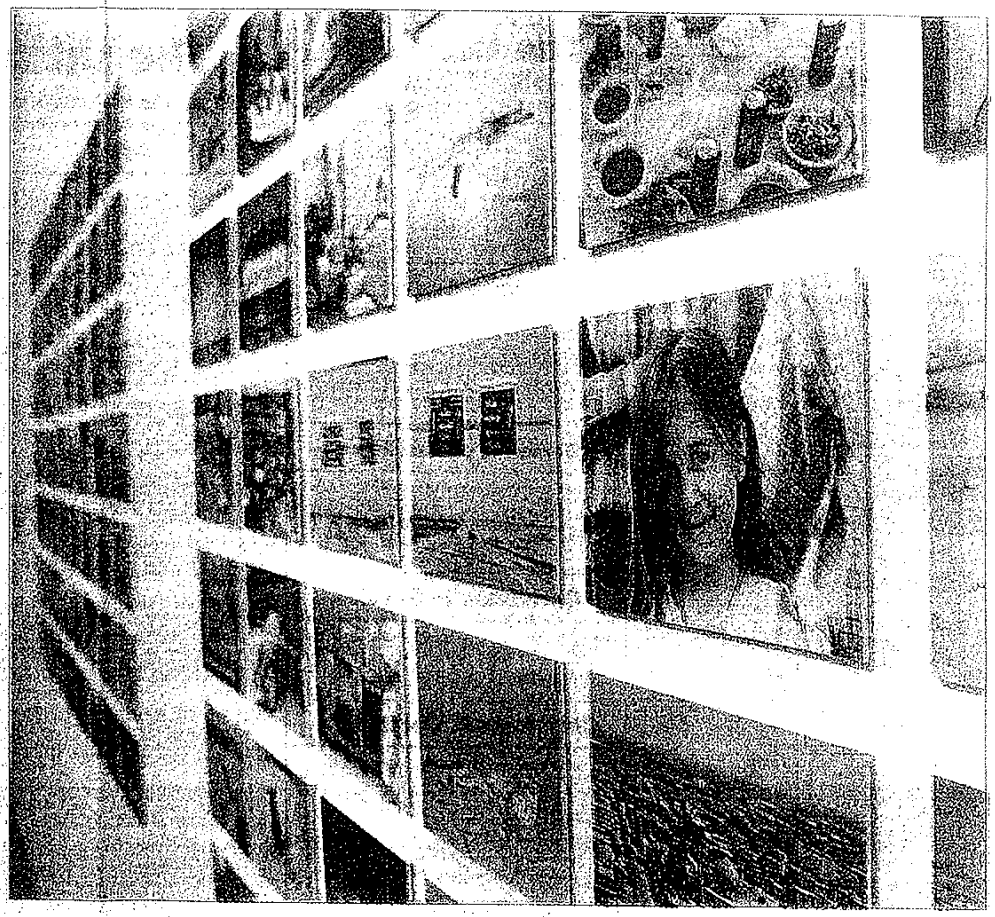
The cumulative effect of Snyder's works is not only to create one of the most significant and telling takes on the Gulf conflict, but also to offer a fundamental message about war in all its absurdity, tragedy, irony and inglorious banality.

SADLY, THOUGH, the exhibition is not Snyder's alone. He shares it [illegible] French artist Melik Ohanian's video 'Invisible Film' as you enter the gallery, and it's probably worth finishing with Snyder before going in. It deals apparently with Peter Watkins' 1971 film, *Punishment Park*, set in a US detention camp, although to me it looked simply like a film projection taking place in the desert. It wasn't sufficiently compelling to suggest I persevere. Upstairs the same artist has installed more slice-of-life photographs, but after Snyder's work, these seem somewhat lame. There is also a sort of electronic parlour-game in which we are invited to switch on and off [illegible] the ensuing matrix in a book. This apparently enables Ohanian to gauge the mood in the gallery. I wondered if it told him what I was thinking?

The third artist, Denmark's Pia Rönicke, presents storyboards for a film about urban life which will be shown on Saturdays at 2pm and a dire video of three architects in a building site. She is concerned with urban planning and 'multiple ways of living', but after the war images, she hasn't a chance of engaging our sympathy.

The show, the work of curator Judith Schwarzbart, is the culmination of a year's residency at the [illegible] the gloriously esoteric rubric of the exhibition guide, quite what unites the three artists in her mind, save their use of existing art to create works which apparently blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. It would have been better had she simply stuck to Snyder, whose poignant plea for sanity would alone have made this show the perfect way to grasp the real message of the festive season.

Until February 19



Snapshots: with seemingly random pictures, Snyder immediately engages our sympathy and compassion.
Photograph: Phil Wilkinson

Eichler, Dominic. «Stranger Than Fiction», *Frieze.com*, May 6, 2006.
http://www.frieze.com/article/stranger-fiction

FRIEZE.COM

FEATURE - 06 MAY 2006

Stranger than Fiction

Sean Snyder's videos and photographs explore the often bizarre world of urban planning, architecture and the news media

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

What do the skylines of Pyongyang and Bucharest have in common? How Japanese is Skopje? Why did Dallas get big in Romania? Investigating these kinds of questions is the basis of Sean Snyder's artistic process, which results in Conceptual works that don't try to provide answers but rather display the overlooked frontiers of the plausible, the preposterous and the sad but true. His appropriated-footage mockumentary videos and installations, which take the form of displayed dossiers and exposés, are intentionally ambivalent and politically quixotic. His research projects, sometimes lasting years and presented in multiple versions, are revealing but never neatly sewn up, authoritative or conclusive. They suggest the David-versus-Goliath stance of a tireless self-appointed freelance critic of political, military and corporate power, usually looking into that power's most patently perverse, maniacal expressions in urban planning, architecture and the news media.

Snyder's silent video Analepsis (2003–4), for instance shows our planet's hot spots as filled to the brim with smog-veiled urban sprawl, oil refineries, military bases, high-security areas, choked airports and motorways. The work consists entirely of jump-cut edited 'set-up' shots excerpted from news coverage, which Snyder systematically captured for hours on end. Analepsis – a cinematic term for a rupture in narrative continuity – becomes a state of affairs in which unfolding news events fade from collective memory, and cities and populations become a series of merged backdrops. Adopting presentation methods borrowed from a tradition of politicized Conceptual art, Snyder's works have a serious purpose but are delivered with a straight face; like a deadpan comic with a penchant for black humour. If you are used to uncritically consuming your knowledge in pre-digested form, his work may possibly leave you

dumbfounded, shocked, bemused or even laughing nervously about the cruel, absurd constructed reality of the world.

Since the 1990s Snyder has been globetrotting, occasionally with a digital camera and laptop in tow, examining and documenting architecture and urban planning as if they are both endemic and symptomatic evidence of an ideological underbelly and power-broking machinations. These days his information-hunting safaris are enough to make him the subject of suspicion and hostile scrutiny – as the artist recently discovered at an airport on his way to a conference in the Palestinian Territories, when, among other things, a new catalogue of his work made him a target for El Al's security officers. Equally dodgy was shooting infra-red footage of the perimeter of Kadena Air Base, a US military facility, as well as the surrounding infamous red-light district late at night in Okinawa, Japan, which led to the prints and video work Temporary Occupation (2003–5). Generally his field trips are less risky, although their subjects are exemplary developments in which regimes, the military, multinationals and business magnates conspire to leave tell-tale marks of occupation, imposition and exploitation. Their edifices reach dizzy – as in, sickening – heights. Their need for tangible physical signs of self-aggrandizement seems to know no bounds. Bricks and mortar, façades, massive avenues all manifest control, power and paranoia.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Take, for instance, the two versions of the installations Bucharest/Pyongyang (2000–4). The background to the piece is the story of how between 1977 and 1987 Nicolae Ceausescu, spurred on by his wife, ordered a monumental transformation of Bucharest. One source suggested that, using an earthquake as an alibi, 'entire areas of the historic centre were demolished to make way for his hallucinatory concept […] distaste for the steel and glass of Western capitalist architecture and the concrete of socialist building led [Ceausescu] to find an alternative in the capital city of his megalomaniac North Korean friend Kim Il Sung'.1 This hypothesis became the subject of Snyder's installation, which also included photographs of Bucharest's monstrous white elephant the 'Palace of the People' (now renamed the 'Palace of the Parliament'), arguably one of the largest buildings in the world after a Dutch flower market and the Pentagon. It combines 'pastiches of classical, Baroque, Modernist and traditional Romanian as well as North Korean architectural elements'.2 One million cubic metres of Transylvanian marble were used in its construction. Making the comparison with Pyongyang proved difficult because of the isolationism of North Korea, but Snyder did eventually obtain some footage and photographs of Pyongyang for the installation. These include satellite photographs of the gargantuan 105-storey Ryugyong Hotel, which was intended to be the tallest hotel in the world and remains unfinished owing to structural problems and lack of funding. The colossal building's retro-Futuristic pyramid shape testifies to North Korea's attempt in the late 1980s and '90s to compete with other emerging economies in the region by building grandiose symbols of prosperity. Outwardly there is no comparison between Bucharest and Pyongyang, except perhaps as dubious architectural testimonies to their political masters.

New leads, among them from a Berlin bus driver who is a short-wave radio enthusiast and fan of music on a North Korean radio station, provided sources for a sequel work, the two channel video Two Oblique Representations of a Given Place (Pyongyang) (2001–4), projected onto opposing sides of a hanging screen. One side shows official footage taken from a North Korean documentary with shots of tens of thousands of people taking part in spectacular 10 October celebrations, whose choreography has more than a passing resemblance to Germany in the 1930s and Leni Riefenstahl's aggrandizing angles. The other side shows tourist video footage shot by an American nuclear scientist who visited the city, looking at an almost car-free city centre in which 'it is rumoured that the high-rise apartments complexes of Kwangbok Street are in fact a Potemkin village where no one actually lives'.3 Both videos are in a sense documentary but neither can lay a claim to objectivity, the juxtaposition of the images underscores their

contradictions.

Another bizarre Cold War exchange is the subject of Dallas Southfork in Hermes Land, Slobozia, Romania (2001), an installation consisting of temporary walls, video photographs, architectural models and documents that explores the rather curious history of the impact in Romania of the TV series Dallas (still syndicated seemingly everywhere). The show was apparently one of the few American TV programmes broadcast under the Ceausescu regime. Perhaps originally intended as anti-capitalist propaganda, the plan definitely backfired. One of Snyder's catalogue's reports actor Larry 'JR' Hagman commenting in an interview about Dallas' Cold War role: 'I think we were directly or indirectly responsible for the fall of the Russian empire […] You know, it's on cable TV three times a day […] We've got whole new generations of people watching it for the first time. I get a lot of mail from Bulgaria, Romania, Nigeria.' In the mid-1990s the later imprisoned soy bean magnate Ilie Alexandru, presumably a devoted fan, created a Balkan version of the Southfork ranch on his estate in Slobozia, on the main road between Bucharest and the Black Sea. The Slobozia Southfork simulation is bigger than the original, as it was based on the wide-angle shots of the house in the TV series' trailer. Two architectural models in the installation allow for a comparison of the size and floor-plans, although the interior of Southfork in the series was just a studio set, entirely fictitious and spatially impossible. Other attractions on the estate include a miniature Eiffel Tower, gypsy pagodas and castles. Snyder had to bribe locals to let him in to photograph. Other information in the installation documents Hagman and his wife, Maj, visiting the ranch in its heyday together with Prince Paul, the pretender to the Romanian throne, and a local newspaper clipping reported that George W. Bush was also once a guest.

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The global distribution and odd translation of plans and models across national, cultural and ideological boundaries are also implicit in a number of the works, including A Revisionist Model of Solidarity (2004–5). This project draws on, among other things, material in the 1970 United Nations publication Skopje Resurgent: The Story of a United Nations Special Fund Town Planning Project. The report documents the international effort to rebuild Skopje after the massive earthquake in 1963. A team of international experts in various disciplines and political credos collaborated on a 'master plan' for the city using then new and well-meaning methods of interdisciplinary urban planning and sociological experiments.

Ultimately, many of progressive Japanese architect Kenzo Tange's proposals, in part an adaptation of his 1960 plan for Tokyo, were selected by the UN, although Tange later quit the massive project. His preliminary models and ink sketches were subsequently mistranslated on the ground in Skopje. It seems to be on the periphery that things are most likely to unravel, where entropy often is accelerated by the centrifugal force emanating from power centres. Earlier photographic series of the outskirts of East Berlin and Paris – 'Marzahn' (1995–6) and 'Paris/Paris Banlieue' (1995–7) respectively – look ambivalent and strangely unlocatable. These photographs equally allow for a nostalgic reading based on Utopian socialist ideals applied on an enormous scale, as well as sending a shiver down the spine because of their imposed conformity and planning from above. Snyder, a lover of detail, unearthed the footnote: in 1961 Charles de Gaulle had flown over the area of suburban Paris by helicopter and demanded that someone 'put a little order into all that'.4 Socialist Marzahn doesn't look that different, with its regimented buildings placed like toy blocks on empty fields.

Counter to these suburban housing projects, the relentless crawl of fast food chains that is the subject of Fast Food Project (1999), a series of photographs presented as two video slide shows documenting McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Burger King outlets around the globe, has a lot to do with adding local touches and the inclusion of regional vernacular elements in the various

franchises' restaurants. In addition, short texts on a video monitor mix corporate policy statements with alternative snippets collected by the artist, such as 'think globally act locally', or 'In Saudi Arabia seating is organized by sex and marital status,' or the unverifiable 'McDonald's is rumoured to be the largest commercial consumer of satellite imagery, to analyse prospective restaurant locations and conduct yearly comparisons'.
A group of photographs documenting a failed property development – Shanghai Links, Hua Xia Trip (2002) – reveals another form of architectural neo-colonialism in a global guise. The gated community 'Shanghai Links' – which is actually extremely unlinked and conceptually unhinged – was targeted for North American executives stationed in China. To make the photographs Snyder had to say he wanted to use their golf course. Advertising for the development included statements such as 'When this development is finished, you'll never know you are in China'. The installation also incorporates other text, such as the wry description 'the compound is fenced in with watchtowers and guards, completely isolating it from its surroundings. The expatriate villa community relates to the indigenous environment of Shanghai only in so far as the size of the American-built lawns equals the size of the local farms.' As a counterpoint, on a monitor is historic footage of Shanghai and its colonial past, with commentary about US influence on Shanghai's new freaked-out Luna Park skyline.

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Considering the process, the great lengths Snyder goes to in order to obtain material is a necessary precursor to appreciating how extremely understated his works end up appearing. An obsessive researcher and private investigator, he uses every possible means – including news agencies, picture archives, cold-calling, faxing, his 1400-channel TV satellite dish and, of course, the Internet – to gather information. One of the main subtexts to his practice is a consideration of the way information is displaced and distributed, and the slippage and distortion of 'objective fact' that this involves: imploding the illusion that information is per se good or can be harnessed and controlled. Information is de-contextualized. It is always the product of predetermined formats and an ongoing international game of 'Chinese Whispers'.

Critiquing bad news through parody as well as highlighting inconsistencies and blind spots by zooming in on revealing details is a central tenet of Snyder's works. The Site (2004–5) consists of a photo-text assemblage of conflicting media reports about Saddam Hussein's shanty hideout and spider hole. Here information becomes synonymous with misinformation. What is disturbing about the various reports is that they also seem to involve some kind of brazen product placement. Snyder collected descriptions and photographs of the hideout, focusing on details about the contents of Saddam's fridge and two Mars bars on the floor. The fact that this kind of detail is not as innocuous as it seems is explored in the video Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars (2004–5). This chilling work functions something like a mix of television exposé, Michael Moore documentary and Michelangelo Antonioni's film Blow-up (1966). The video focuses on the brands and products that have appeared in news and photojournalism in Afghanistan and Iraq since the mid-1980s, including Osama Bin Laden's various models of Casio wristwatches, M&Ms in aid convoys, the Sheraton Hotel in Baghdad, and the Taliban's preference for Toyota utility vehicles. It also relates how increasingly soldiers are replacing journalists as the source of images. The work culminates with harrowing close-up footage of the bombing of Baghdad, in which the clicking camera shutters are often louder than the sound of the exploding bombs. A related work shown at the last Istanbul Biennial, Untitled (Iraq) (2003–5), is a grid of amateur postcard-size images shot by soldiers and contractors in Iraq that the artist downloaded from file-sharing websites.

In many of Snyder's works conceptually reframed documents, texts and pictures blend together to provide hints of unsettling meta-narratives. His artistic method variously recalls seminal works such as Dan Graham's investigation into serial suburban housing 'Homes for America' (1965), Martha Rosler's anti-

Vietnam war collages 'Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful' (1967–72) or Hans Haacke's A Breed Apart (1978), in which the artist criticized the state-owned firm British Leyland for exporting vehicles for police and military use to South Africa under apartheid. Snyder's own work reads like lines from a global plot so riddled with obscenely telling coincidences and underhand dealings that it would immediately be rejected as too improbable for any work of fiction.

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1 Text from the artist's catalogue Bucharest Slobozia Dallas Pyongyang–Sean Snyder DZ Bank Kunststipendium, Künstlerhaus Bethanien and Vice Versa Verlag, Berlin, 2002, p.18; based on Gheorghe Leahu's book Bucurestiul Disparut, Editura Arta Grafica, Bucharest, 1995. Leahu is an architect and watercolourist who covertly documented the destruction of the historic city centre of Bucharest.
2 Ibid. p.23
3 Ibid. p.33
4 Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme de la Région Ile-de-France. 'Interview with Paul Delouvrier', Cahiers, Paris, 1995 as quoted in the catalogue Sean Snyder, De Appel, Amsterdam; Neue Kunst Halle, St Gallen; Portikus, Frankfurt am Main; and Secession, Vienna; 2005, p.17

Herbert, Martin. «At the Same Time Somewhere Else », *Art Monthly*, *No. 293*, February, 2006.
https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-159863646/at-the-same-time-somewhere-else

At the Same Time Somewhere Else

By Herbert, Martin

At the same time somewhere else Fruitmarket Gallery Edinburgh December 17 to February 19

Mention this three-person show's thematic lasso--'art as research'--to someone who works in an art school, append the fact that curator Judith Schwartzbart has spent the last year as curator/researcher at the Fruitmarket Gallery and Edinburgh College of Art, and you'll most likely get a weary shake of the head. When funding for initiatives within art education and, to an extent, public spaces increasingly hangs on a top-down desire that the project in question benefit a nebulous 'wider community', how better to present artists than as empirical data-gatherers? Even with the proviso that, in this case, Sean Snyder, Melik Ohanian and Pia Ronicke practise 'a kind of research which is free from academic conventions and methods', it feels like an impoverished model for art. Which is why, at a roundtable that took place during this show's run, it was interesting to hear these artists gently inform Schwartzbart that, actually, research is not what they do. Then again, any intelligent artist is going to fight shy of pigeonholing. So, who is right?

Snyder's work is the most taxonomical here, but nevertheless it does not build meaning from its employed material facts so much as locate a blurry negative space between their divergent slants on reality. Presented in a grid on the wall, Untitled (Iraq), 2003-05, an archive of photographs lifted from file-sharing websites put up by soldiers and contractors in Iraq, tours the war zone's peripheries: a 7-11 store selling paintings featuring Christian iconography, a bird on barbed wire caught in crosshairs, a car boot full of rifles, carpets strewn with broken glass and crockery. Allowing meaning to filter haphazardly through, this is photography that was not made according to the textbook mentioned in Snyder's classically deconstructive video montage Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars, 2004-05, which lists 'five kinds of picture' that a photojournalist should aim to get. And yet, as The Site, 2004-05, demonstrates, such uninscribed imagery is less abyssal than the juxtaposed products of embedded journalists. Quotations from newspaper reports about the capture of Saddam Hussein surround pixelated video shots of his bunker, from which it is possible to infer the fictitious nature of some of the journalists' texts. The latter, in any case, confidently contradict each other so much that reportage comes to appear equivalent to a game of Chinese Whispers.

Snyder's territory, then, is standard-issue cultural theory--the relationship between truth and representation, whether visual or linguistic--snapped back into topical focus by events; ideas from three decades ago filtered through the documentary turn of the 90s. Ronicke shares with Snyder an interest in the gulf between language and the real, and in the instrumentalising of information. In her case, the focus is on how ideals of architects and theorists are played out within urban spaces. Urban Fiction, 2003, is a set of sketched storyboards for a film (itself a model of potential) organised around a dialogue between the words of Le Corbusier--advocating skyscrapers and formal rigour--and the Situationist artist and architectural theorist Constant, who favoured urban landscapes predicated on mobility and circulation. …

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Schwarzbart, Judith. «Populism», *MAP Magazine*, *MAP#2*, September 20, 2006.
http://mapmagazine.co.uk/9840/populism-vilnius/

Populism

CAC (Contemporary Art Centre), Vilnius Populism

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Although the exhibition title catches a term topical in contemporary politics, it neither criticises nor celebrates populist politics, at least not directly. Instead, the point of departure is claimed to be the idea 'that the effects and desires that characterise populist politics are not necessarily separate from the ones that find expression in the sphere of art'. Referring not only to artists' consciousness of style and aesthetics, but also to utopian dreams of direct democracy and collaborative effort, this exhibition of more than 40 contributors multiplies into a myriad of artistic approaches and issues, and in doing so plays with the notion that traditional dichotomies like realism vs popular entertainment, avantgarde vs triviality and honesty vs irony, have collapsed and so provide a critique of the media and its populist campaigns.

The link between popular and populist is addressed at once, in the entrance hall of the art centre. 'Number of Visitors' by Jens Haaning and Superflex, a large digital counter, displays the current visit count, and so directly points to the quantitative criteria of success and failure, which is increasingly applied to art institutions. The piece asks, 'Is this urge for large visitor numbers affecting art institutions negatively?'

Inside, some works focus on popular festival culture—Otto Snoek's photographs snap crowds at various festivals, parades and beach clubs. Others examine the culture industry. Mattheu Laurette's iconic 'Déjà vu' series makes up lookalike conventions organised by the artist. A more sinister side to contemporary media culture is also explored. Susanne Jerkuff's 'Shortly before the riots started' draws on photo shoots from international newspapers and journals, juxtaposing them with quotes from urban theory and American advertising. These images promote a sense of insecurity and illustrate an unmanageable conflict between race and class, leading eventually to a desire for gated communities.

Sean Snyder looks at representation from another angle. In 'Two Oblique Representations of a Given Space (Pyongyang)', a double-sided video projection places a North Korean propaganda film (reworked by the artist) against amateur footage taken by an American tourist. Hanging suspended in space, this 'oversized postcard' projection offers two sides to the story, but keeps them separate, leaving their differences unresolved.

Adopting a populist strategy itself, this ambitious exhibition has a guide which mimics a tabloid newspaper. However,adopting a streetwise stance does not necessarily guarantee challenging art.

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Demos, T.J.. "9th international Istanbul Biennal. Various Venues". *ArtForum*, November 10, 2005, pp. 245-246.

ARTFORUM

9TH INTERNATIONAL ISTANBUL BIENNIAL

VARIOUS VENUES

T. J. DEMOS

In the face of the remarkable glut of biennials that attends the current evolution of globalization in art, a number of questions still remain unanswered: To what degree does the biennial act as a force of transnational gentrification, creating a market of elite consumer goods and rarified experience in far-flung places (often playing on earlier avant-garde tropes of exoticism) in order to tender the ground for the subsequent onslaught of corporate imperialism? How might the biennial function as a vehicle for a city's self-promotion—as a quick fix to generate marketable uniqueness through cultural capital and thereby attract tourist dollars and foreign investment? Conversely, how might these exhibitions operate positively as engines of diversification, placing disparate cultures in contact in order not to *level* differences but to increase our sensitivity to them, facilitating substantive exchange and forms of international solidarity? Of course, such exhibitions are constructed through complex and contradictory motives and created by a limitless range of actors and institutions. But these are the pressing issues that must frame a critical response to the 9th International Istanbul Biennial, set within a border country whose standing as a crucial pressure point of geopolitical interest is dramatically underscored by its ongoing bid for membership in the European Union. Not that the biennial provided clear-cut answers; but, at the very least, it posed its own skeptical queries and successfully avoided the worst traps. Its greatest provocation was that it recast the biennial's paradigm of globalization as a problem to be addressed rather than a cause to be mindlessly advanced.

Taking its own city as subject, this biennial was distinct for *not* relating arbitrarily to its geographical setting, as do many others that only happen to be in, say, Venice, Berlin, or São Paulo. Its goal, carefully articulated by cocurators Charles Esche, director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, and Vasif Kortun, director of Istanbul's Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, was to commission and select artworks, many by artists from Turkey or

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Opposite page, top: **Sean Snyder, *The Site*, 2004–2005,** one of a series of photographs. Bottom: **Sean Snyder, *Untitled (Iraq)*, 2003–2005,** one of a series of photographs. This page, clockwise from top left: **Solmaz Shahbazi, *Tam Size Göre* (Perfectly Suited for You), 2005,** two stills from a channel color video installation. **Michael Blum, *A Tribute to Safiye Behar*, 2005.** Installation view, Denis Palace Apartments, Istanbul. **Halil Altindere, *Miss Turkey*, 2005,** still from a color video, 6 minutes 30 seconds.

surrounding areas, that would reflect on the city of Istanbul, understood provocatively as being split between real urban location and discursive entity. To this end, the show was held at seven venues in the city's modern regions of Beyoglu and Galata, where one would find old industrial warehouses and crumbling nineteenth-century apartment blocks, instead of the Sultanahmet district of awe-inspiring—and all-too-easily overwhelming—historical sites. Visitors were meant to confront the everyday conditions of Istanbul as a postindustrial city composed of contradictions: between Western secular state and Eastern Islamic empire, spaces of ostentatious wealth and the grit of abject poverty, emerging democratic institutions and authoritarian undercurrents. And they did. This was no celebratory PR campaign fabricating a whitewashed Turkey or exploiting the seductive romanticism of the city's orientalist flavor. Istanbul, thanks to this biennial, emerged in a new light.

On the curatorial level, this site-sensitive directive was advanced by offering roughly half the participants residencies lasting anywhere from one to six months—an initiative that led to many documentary works addressing the inner-city reality of Istanbul, both its history and future. The results, whether offering critical accounts of Istanbul's urban planning or recovering suppressed information on its former radical inhabitants, were mixed. But among the standouts was Solmaz Shahbazi's video *Tam Size Göre* (Perfectly Suited for You), 2005, which documents the growth of gated communities, areas of elegant comfort and security for an upwardly mobile class that emerged in the '90s. The video depicts new multistory complexes fitted with private gyms and gourmet grocery stores, with the young and fashionable traipsing around carefully landscaped parks and golf courses, while a voice-over offers biting analysis by the artist and her academic interviewees who question the meaning of citizenship and community in a place where the poor are rendered increasingly invisible. Less successful was Michael Blum's blunt memorial *A Tribute to Safiye Behar*, 2005, in which the artist reconstructed the flat—down to her original diaries, photographs, and furniture—of a remarkable Jewish Marxist and feminist who had an enlightening but underappreciated impact on the father of modern secular Turkey, Kemal Atatürk. Here, the work was saturated with fascinating history but undeveloped as artistic representation, revealing the short-term residencies' risk of eliciting formulaic responses to Istanbul. In fact, such responses were not uncommon and account for the biennial's extreme unevenness. Among other pieces determined to showcase Istanbul's urban life was *Miss Turkey*, 2005, Halil Altindere's video of humorous street interventions—a beauty queen wandering down a busy thoroughfare, or a group of young athletes playing volleyball at a stoplight—that read as superficial gimmicks. Alternately, there were aesthetic approaches to the city, such as the watercolor-and-gouache easel paintings of Silke Otto-Knapp, which captured a tinselly artifice through shimmering gold-and-silver surfaces that rhymed with cheap design but also flirted with vapid decorativeness.

Visitors were meant to confront the everyday conditions of Istanbul as a postindustrial city composed of contradictions.

Yet overall the biennial managed to avoid the potential dangers of geographical essentialism or limited parochialism by diversifying its conception of its site—and this was a sign of the exhibition's complex ambitions: The organizers posited Istanbul as a relay between locality and globality, where globalization was encountered as a lived process mediating between a real

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Left: **Sean Snyder, *Untitled (Iraq)*, 2003–2005,** one of a series of photographs, dimensions variable.

place and the forces that move through it, between one's actual location and the discourses that determine or are inflected by it. Numerous selections advanced this modeling of site, and the biennial's sophistication coalesced particularly well when artwork engaged contexts outside Istanbul, such as Iraq, Jakarta, or Israel/Palestine, inevitably drawing attention back to the city through implicit comparison and contrast. Exemplary was *Urban Conditions (Berlin)*, 2005, Axel John Wieder and Jesko Fezer's sprawling installation that maps the transformations of public and private spaces and the fluctuating paths of migration in the German capital since the country's reunification. Videos document critics contemplating the mostly negative effects of Berlin's explosive development, which is variously celebrated in a spread of recent design and architecture magazines laid out on the floor, while several different three-dimensional models, schematic and sometimes zany, trace the city's oscillating existence according to a range of socioeconomic modulations. The piece offers an amazing, if necessarily incomplete, attempt to conceptualize a city's shifting contours as capital, power, and people flow through it, relating the lived experience of urban space to more abstract forces that define it.

Another favorite was Sean Snyder's photo-text assemblies, including *The Site*, 2004–2005, which investigates media representations of Iraq by focusing on the sensationalized discovery of Saddam Hussein's final hiding place. Presenting a series of grainy blown-up photographs that document the famous spider hole, the piece counterposes written excerpts of news descriptions, culled from CNN, the BBC, Fox, and other mainstream sources. The language, neutrally represented, humorously oscillates between variation and repetition, inevitably mischaracterizing Saddam's last possessions—the obsessive identification of which dramatizes a commercial transformation of banal objects into newsworthy events, as geopolitics descends into personal-interest story. Recalling Martha Rosler's historic conceptual examinations of how photographic and linguistic description join in the production of stereotypes, Snyder's project, expanding the analog domain to the internet, updates the analysis to the transnational dimension, where territory and discourse intersect at a site defined by unilateral acts of military power and media dominance.

The convergence of military and media perception, each instrumentalized in the total control of its object, is brilliantly captured in Snyder's *Untitled (Iraq)*, 2003–2005, and in his video *Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars*, 2005. The first presents a grid of amateur, postcard-size photographs from the war zone, each snapped by a soldier or contractor and downloaded by the artist from file-sharing websites. The scenes are prosaic—still lifes of confiscated weapons, desolate landscapes seen through the crosshairs of a rifle scope, clichéd portraits of locals—but damning insofar as they catalogue how the US mission perceives Iraq. The second, a video of appropriated commercial and war footage mixed with Snyder's analytical sound track, explores the application of photojournalistic conventions in the theater of war. While the voice-over

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Right: **Istanbul Biennial posters pasted up by Superflex and Jens Haaning Copenhagen, 2005.** Photo: Superflex.

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predicts ominously that the military will soon subsume journalistic functions, recording and editing its own images for direct mass consumption, the video shows a US soldier as the new cyber-warrior who, with digital video camera strapped to machine gun, even now battles on a territorial-informational field. That Snyder’s work was hung in a room whose window overlooks the distant mosque of the famous Islamic conqueror—the sixteenth-century sultan Süleyman the Magnificent—was fortuitous: It recalls the tremendous price a neighboring country paid (involuntarily, of course) for entrance into the global order, thereby implicating the Muslim-majority Turkey, an eager aspirant, in a potential clash of civilizations. How this will end, no one knows.

Where the curatorial strategy ran into trouble was in its dependence on the legibility of the disjunctions set up between exhibition venues and the spaces of everyday life. Exiting the venues, one encountered a culture shock—which was not unintended, as one of the curators informed me. But while making the visitor experience the sometimes-gaping cultural divisions between genteel art-viewing and the drudgery of manual labor in a developing city, which hopefully prompts introspection and self-estrangement, the curious lack of mediation between the two irreconcilable zones highlighted the rather conventional object-based appearance of the majority of artworks, nearly all of which were safely contained behind walls. The public art projects were only four in number—among the work of fifty-three included artists—and mostly pathetic, hard-to-find distractions. The spectacularly worst was Serkan Özkaya’s thirty-foot-tall golden replica of Michelangelo’s *David*, which fell over upon installation and broke into pieces. This decision to cloister artwork was inconsistent with the biennial’s otherwise-provocative exploration of the relationality of its site. Still, one project did succeed in addressing public space without following the examples of the biennial’s uninterestingly theatrical and excessive so-called “en route” works—but it was not even located in the city. This was Superflex and Jens Haaning’s display of one thousand official biennial posters placed throughout the streets of Copenhagen, aiming to elevate the value of Turkey’s image in the eyes of its emigrants who have taken up residence in Denmark and to counter Danish xenophobia and racism by proclaiming Turkey’s admirable participation in the world of international art. Challenging those who conceive of national identity as rooted to a particular geography, this work, in an intriguing metonymic act, projected Istanbul beyond Turkey’s borders. By appropriating the biennial’s advertising campaign, the artists critically acknowledged the show as a commercial venture and diverted its promotion to catalyze a sense of belonging within an exile community through the public recognition of Turkish culture. The work incisively positioned globalization as an ongoing struggle between the forces of commercial exchange and cultural differentiation, making one all too aware of the simultaneous potential benefits and risks. □

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Lütticken, Sven. "Reviews: Sean Snyder. De Appel". *ArtForum*, December 16, 2004, p. 104.

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AMSTERDAM

SEAN SNYDER

DE APPEL

Because his works often deal with globalization and contemporary urbanism, Sean Snyder is sometimes expected to come up with clear-cut statements and slogans. His latest solo exhibition demonstrated his determination to frustrate such hopes. *Analepsis*, 2004, is a silent montage of re-establishing shots and sequence shots from TV news programs; static takes, pans, zooms, and aerial shots pass in a strange parade, with no clues as to the stories the footage was meant to illustrate. The triumph of visibility creates blankness, a database of visual clichés lacking the semblance of meaning usually added to such footage in the form of verbal rhetoric.

Some of the works shown at De Appel were fragments of larger projects, such as the two-sided video projection that is part of the series "Bucharest—Pyongyang," 2001–. On one side of the screen, images taken from official North Korean films about Pyongyang are projected, while the other side presents amateur footage shot in 1995 by an American hydroengineer who was working, curiously enough, on a North Korean nuclear plant. Whereas Snyder has turned the official material into a series of still images that fade into each other à la Fischli and Weiss, turning Pyongyang into a series of picture-perfect views of a modern capital, the engineer's footage was clearly shot with a handheld video camera and comes with a sound track, including commentary. Ironically (but, given the close track North Korea keeps of foreign visitors, not surprisingly) his footage largely has a certain "official" aura as well: For much of the time we see images of enormous parades and rallies that look as if Griffith, Riefenstahl, and Disney had teamed up to celebrate Stalin's birthday. Showing little of the country's underside, Snyder's juxtaposition of two controlled forms of image production—detached panoramas and hysterically moving mass ornaments—is nevertheless more instructive and more fascinating than a journalistic exposé made with clandestine footage might have been.

Another project that has preoccupied Snyder for some time involves American military installations abroad, especially in Japan; here, a series of photographs shows the seedy nightspots outside the Marine base in Okinawa, while the video *Gate 2 Street (Kadena Air Base), Okinawa City, Japan 2004* shows similar establishments catering to the air base there. Shot in infrared mode, this video turns the area into a strangely light, black-and-white ghost town largely devoid of people. One is oddly reminded of Doug Aitken's McLuhanesque celebration of electricity and light—illuminated billboards become white blanks, a streetlight blinks, the city noise buzzes in the background. However, in using the language of techno-romanticism, Snyder raises the question of who is behind the camera gaze—if anyone. The nonnarrative succession of shots suggests surveillance, but by whom and for what purpose remains unclear.

Sean Snyder, *Urban Planning Documentation*, 1998, black-and-white photocopy, 8¼ x 11¾".

Snyder's work is political in a more fundamental sense than that of a mere representation of politics. Rather, he investigates the uses and limitations of representation. Some of his work provides a glimpse of a kind of universal, all-seeing surveillance that results in a meaningless database, an image library of Babel, which has to be activated and manipulated in order to make some sense. Repeatedly focusing on areas that are to a greater or lesser degree inaccessible to the camera eye, Snyder reinforces the suggestion that in the era of embedded journalism, techniques of visibility may above all be employed to keep things hidden.

—*Sven Lütticken*

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Woznicki, Krystian. «Embedded Pyongyang. American artist Sean Snyder's reconnaissance of North Korea.»,
Springerin Hefte 1, 2004.
http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1445&lang=en

Embedded Pyongyang

American artist Sean Snyder's reconaissance of North Korea

Krystian Woznicki

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January 19, 2003, Potsdam Square, Berlin. The Sony Center is glowing in the midday light, the air is cool. In the Film Museum, where an internet-TV studio has been set up on the fourth floor, the US artist Sean Snyder is standing at a video mixing desk. In front of him are tapes from North Korea, which he looks through, winds to the place he wants and then plays. At first, one can see blurred video pictures of a US tourist in the North Korean capital, then long sequences from the DPRK1 documentary film »Changes in Pyongyang Forever in My Memory«, in which rich red, bright yellow, deep blue and shimmering green enliven spacious backdrops: radiant flower beds in front of imposing socialist buildings, happy groups of people going for a walk in the inner city, etc.. Pictures that show the North Korean capital as a gleaming metropolis. Of course, these are official pictures from North Korea that were taken at the start of the 1990s and, curiously enough, already seem anachronistic. Images that stand in precarious contrast to the pictures of North Korea that are at present circulating all over the world via the channels of mass media: while the communist nation is revealing itself as an aggressive nuclear power, the »North Korea Special« on Remote-TV shows Kim Jong-Il's kingdom as a desirable place to be.

Ambivalent signs in ambivalent times. For, in January 2003, it is not only North Korea that is seen as a place of terror. There are numerous locations in the world that are being treated as »hot spots«. First of all, there is Iraq, which is about to face an invasion by the United States of America. In addition, there are less »famous« countries in which wars have been smouldering for several years, and less »popular« places against which terrorist attacks have been directed, as well as peripheral regions in which the war on terror is being waged with an enormous deployment of troops. Places that are distributed all over the globe and whose increasing relevance does not so much impose a caesura on the economy of attention, as represent the symptoms of a new image of the world. An image of the world that has put aside rough divisions and fallen apart into countless zones where a state of emergency has been declared.3 Visual depictions of this situation make geopolitical units seem like fluid masses of mercury that have been arbitrarily assembled on the digital drawing board, or like rotating continents sliding into one another, involved in a tectonic spectacle of shifts and fusions, such as one perhaps sees on weather maps.5 In brief: an image of the world circulating in the cycle of mass media, one that suggests a new beginning: on a global scale and at the speed of light – in keeping with this, it is said that George W. Bush has accelerated the course of history many times over with his aggressive foreign policies.6

This dynamic image of the world is constituted via a system-immanent exterior: static building blocks in the geopolitical sandpit that seem to oppose the omnipresent changes. A good example of this is North Korea, which has carefully cultivated the myth of isolation. Nothing leaks out, not even the size of clothing worn by its leader, Kim Jong-Il, as could be read in a press release from the World Economic

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Forum.7 Even those who have fought their way to North Korea cannot penetrate this impermeable info-barrier. In a recent account of a trip there, for instance, one could read how the attentive presence of the hosts and the choreography of the visitors' programme took on the aspect of a kind of straitjacket for the senses: »In front of the lobby wait not only the Mercedes limousines with a pre-defined route, but also the friendly officials who prefer to see their guests in the hotel or in the car. Pyongyang seen through a curtain.«8 But the myth of the closed nation is maintained just as effectively by the West.

As Sean Snyder observes, this characteristic is exploited by global players for the creation of their brand identity: »As the 2002 World Championship drew closer, the >Financial Times« carried advertisements from a charity campaign that, with slogans like >Let the North Korean children play soccer as well!<, promised 200,000 soccer balls. This offer was sponsored by a group of multinational companies.«9 While the multis polish up their image by means of such actions, this sometimes colonially coded image of the deprived child is used to mysticize North Korea as an eccentric place. For example, in his recent book on North Korea10, Pierre Rigoulot, who is considered one of the leading European experts on the Far East, brings the orientalistic term »stone-age communism« to bear, while his accounts of a »monster« that even tolerates cannibalism reinforce the image of North Korea as a place that is not of this world and not of our time.

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In Snyder's work , this picture of North Korea is gradually dusted off. As in the info-intervention on Remote TV described at the start of this article, it appears as extremely accessible, beyond the circulating stereotypes. As a post-touristic destination, it can be reached at any time without having to leave one's home: »Television, Videos, CD-ROM, the Internet and virtual reality allow people to ›gaze‹ on [such] tourist sites.«11 So this is a »journey in one's head« that is not intended solely to help prepare for a real, physical encounter with the actual place12, but is the real purpose of the endeavour.

As well as the official representations of the country and the images that have been put into circulation by mass media to keep alive the myth of isolation, Snyder has discovered other sources of information to let him start out on his trip: accounts of journeys, amateur videos and web sites about the country in English. Documents that allow direct views behind the curtain. In addition, the artist collected satellite images, which enabled him to reconnoitre the country from this seemingly omnipotent point of view. He worked in this way for a long time, even doing research in South Korea as well as the United States. Finally, he met a professor of Korean Studies at the Humboldt University who drew his attention to an exhibition that two radio enthusiasts had organized in the Düsseldorf library about »Korean Culture and Books« (1997). This exhibition had even received some notice from the official North Korean press. Snyder notes: »We arranged a meeting with one of the organizers in Neukölln. At the door I met a very friendly, calm former bus driver with the BVG [Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe = Berlin transport authority], about 42 years old. His appartment looked like that of a North Korean. Portraits of Kim Jong-Il and Kim Il-Sung hung above the television set. He had already been visiting North Korea twice a year for 15 years, and claimed to have the largest archive of books, CDs and videos outside of North Korea.«13

The material accumulated in the course of Synder's research was finally subjected to a structural analysis: he looked for patterns, common typological characteristics and semiotic relationships. Then he organized and arranged it. This gave rise to several montages, which Snyder has presented in very different contexts and which stand out primarily for the way they show connections between seemingly disparate points: a technique that could also be called »jump cut« and creates an effect that Jan Verwoert describes as follows: »In many of his photo series, publications and installations, Sean Synder assembles pictures of

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different urban landscapes. By connecting up distant places, he creates topologies that are characterized by surprising continuities.«14 One of the most amazing continuities is certainly the connection between Pyongyang and Bucharest, which Synder's work suggests by pointing out architectonic relationships. The buildings in both cities seem to possess the same hereditary structure: pompous architecture built in the socialist style without regard to the human scale and social needs. And didn't the Romanian dictator Ceausescu talk enthusiastically somewhere about his visit to Pyongyang and identify North Korean urban development as a model for the reconstruction of Bucharest in the 1980s? But Snyder's artistic theory does not need confirmation from a historian. The déja-vu experience, this confusing moment of mixing up the two cities, has its effect even without mentioning any sources: the myth of an isolationist North Korea, which is based not least on its imagined or ascribed uniqueness, crumbles.

The fact that Snyder's Pyongyang/Bucharest construction is indeed based on a cultural transfer is at most a footnote in this context, like the fact that North Korea – as opposed to the widely held assumption that it is the least globalized country in the world – is perhaps even the one most strongly connected to its surroundings, because it, more than any other country in the world, relies on the support of other countries and aid organizations and has known for a long time how to play a prominent role on the global black market – channels that are not mentioned in the myth of the closed society. These facts are at the most footnotes for Snyder's artistic theory of »embedded Pyongyang« because his North Korea project is not to be understood via a factual relationship, but via a structural relationship to the global semiotic sphere: while the myth of isolation fades in people's heads – in other words, not only the place where the prejudices have their abode, but also where the journey takes place -, the conception of the world also undergoes an adjustment. The dynamic chaos of permanent change is suddenly given a structure. There are patterns and thus also a certain order.

Translation: Timothy Jones

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1 Abbreviation for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; in short, North Korea.
2 http://www.remote-tv.de
3 Benjamin R. Barber, Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy in an Age of Interdependence, Norton, W.W. & Company, Inc., September 2003
4 See my essay »Das globale Übungsdorf« in: Virtuelle Welten – reale Gewalt, ed. Florian Rötzer, Munich 2003.
5 See my essay »Die Welt steht auf dem Spiel«, in: Bauhaus Brasilia Auschwitz Hiroshima, ed. Walter Prigge, Berlin 2003.
6. Charles A. Kupchan, The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-first Century, Knopf 2003
7 »North Korea: Good Prospects for End to Clash«, Davos, 25 January 2003, (http://www.weforum.org): »The Mongolian Prime Minister said that when he was Head of Parliament he was invited to North Korea and was told he might meet the President in Pyongyang. He asked what would be an appropriate gift and was told, perhaps a leather coat. ›What size?‹ he asked. ›That's classified information,‹ he was told. Since then the President had been photographed receiving a number of emissaries. ›We now know

what size he is,‹ he pointed out.«
8 Anne Schneppen, Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, 1 February 2004.
9 Sean Snyder, Berliner Gazette, 5 June 2002.
10 Pierre Rigoulot, Nordkorea, Cologne
2003.
11 »›McDisneyization‹ and ›Post-Tourism‹. Complementary Perspectives on Contemporary Tourism«, George Ritzer and Allan Liska, in: Touring Cultures, eds. Chris Rojek and John Urry, London, New York 1997, p. 96-109.
12 See Werner A. Meier/Michael Schanne, Medien-Landschaft-Schweiz, Pro Helvetia, Schweizer Kulturstiftung, 1994.
13 Sean Snyder, Berliner Gazette, 5 June 2002.
14 Jan Verwoert, »Jump Cut Cities«, in: Afterall, No. 7, October 2002.

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Dagen, Philippe. «Vrais et faux paysages», *Le Monde*, December 12, 2001.

Le Monde

Vrais et faux paysages

Galeries à Paris. Deux photographes et un peintre, trois conceptions antithétiques du paysage, du documentaire jusqu'à la poésie

DAGEN PHILIPPE

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Bustamante continue son inventaire du monde. Après avoir rôdé en Espagne, en Israël, en Suisse, il s'est rendu au Japon. Sa manière de procéder n'y a pas changé : il découpe un rectangle dans un paysage ni pittoresque ni vraiment séduisant. Même quand le Fuji Yama ou une baie sont dans le champ, on ne les voit qu'entre les immeubles, les poteaux électriques, les échafaudages. Une pelleteuse se fait admirer, ainsi que des tombeaux. Les images, en couleurs, sont tirées en très grand format - 240 cm de haut, 160 de large -, de sorte qu'il est facile de les étudier dans leurs moindres détails. Justement, ceux-ci sont essentiels. Par leur hétérogénéité, ils font l'intérêt du paysage. Là où un photographe du genre touristique s'épuiserait à éliminer tout élément trivial et actuel pour donner dans le genre « Japon éternel », Bustamante agit à l'inverse, cultivant la contradiction, magnifiant la banalité.

Un tel exercice exige une composition tranchante, une intensité de lumière et de contrastes qui attirent l'attention. Faute de quoi on tombe vite dans le documentaire. Les photos de Raymond Depardon dans Errance sont la banalité transcendée par le noir et blanc, une abstraction figurative inoubliable. Jean-Marc Bustamante cherche lui du côté de la couleur et du monumental. L'effet est garanti. Peut-être trop : le gigantisme ne serait-il pas une solution de facilité ?

Sean Snyder, Américain établi à Berlin qui expose pour la première fois à Paris, préfère opérer par séries : les enseignes McDonalds, les tours des cités, les échangeurs d'autoroute. Récemment, il a découvert un sujet parfait dans le genre accablant. Nicolae Ceaucescu avait autorisé la télévision roumaine à diffuser le feuilleton Dallas, qui obtint un succès prodigieux auprès de téléspectateurs qui pensaient découvrir soudain la vraie vie capitaliste. Après la mort de Ceausescu, un milliardaire roumain douteux particulièrement épris de JR s'est fait bâtir à Slobodzia, dans la plaine danubienne, un ranch d'après celui qu'il avait vu à la télévision. N'étant jamais allé visiter l'original au Texas, il s'est trompé dans les dimensions : non seulement son ranch est une copie, mais une copie ratée. N'empêche : l'acteur Larry Hagman - JR - l'a visité en compagnie du prince Paul de Roumanie et de son propriétaire - lequel a depuis été emprisonné pour banqueroute et emprunts frauduleux.

INDIQUER SANS DÉCRIRE

Snyder a photographié ce chef-d'oeuvre de simulacre, que d'autres entourent, dont une tour Eiffel réduite de 40 mètres de haut et un château fort. Il présente ses images flanquées de coupures de presse, de vidéos et de deux maquettes. Ces éléments complémentaires sont utiles. Mais l'image d'une tour Eiffel dont le premier étage est au niveau des arbres est en elle-même allégorique du triomphe du faux.

Le Monde

De cette conception du paysage à celle que développe Pierre Buraglio, la distance est immense. D'un côté des échantillons représentatifs du triste monde actuel, de l'autre une poétique du fragment et de l'ellipse. Il construit des paysages avec un ou deux tableautins, trois côtés d'un cadre qui devrait en compter quatre, de la sérigraphie, de la peinture à l'huile ; il y ajoute des souvenirs de Seurat ou de Cézanne ainsi que des allusions à l'histoire de l'abstraction ; et cependant, marque caractéristique de leur auteur, ces assemblages demeurent légers. Ils ont l'élégance de suggérer sans nommer, d'indiquer sans décrire.

Buraglio possède au plus haut degré l'art du point de suspension. A celui qui regarde ses oeuvres d'y introduire ce qu'il veut, ses propres souvenirs, ses références personnelles, ses fantaisies. Ce sont des pièges à sensations, largement ouverts, très efficaces bien qu'ils semblent bricolés avec trois fois rien. Un souffle d'air marin, une odeur de jardin ou de rivière, voilà ce qu'ils capturent : des impressions presque imperceptibles et néanmoins tenaces.

Woznicki, Krystian. «Une planète climatisée. Entretien de Sean Snyder avec Krystian Woznicki», *NU, The Lars Issue*, January, 2000.

Une planète climatisée

Entretien de Sean Snyder avec Krystian Woznicki

Sean Snyder est un artiste américain établi à Berlin. L'architecture nourrit son travail de plasticien, et c'est une thématique que l'on retrouve aussi ses études et recherches sur les phénomènes urbains. Lors de notre premier rendez-vous dans un Burger King d'Alexanderplatz à Berlin, cet hiver [1999-2000], j'ai découvert son attirance pour les villes asiatiques, qui rejoignait mon expérience personnelle : pendant mon séjour prolongé à Tokyo, c'est la ville, son organisation dynamique et spatiale, qui a surtout retenu mon attention. On a continué à se rencontrer dans des fast-foods. En parlant avec Sean Snyder, je me suis aperçu que sa réflexion sur les utilisations de l'espace touchait aux fondements mêmes de ce que l'on pourrait appeler la sphérologie de la culture populaire. La sphérologie ? C'est sans doute le meilleur mot pour désigner la convergence entre les domaines écologique, planétaire et spatial. Imaginez une planète climatisée, une atmosphère artificielle systématiquement conditionnée, des projets écologiques à la place des débats géopolitiques... le tout se répercutant dans une nouvelle culture populaire indiscutablement mondiale. Pourtant, certaines choses dans notre environnement quotidien immédiat semblent indiquer que ce scénario ne relève pas de la science-fiction.

Krystian Woznicki : Vous avez beaucoup travaillé sur les fast-foods.
Sean Snyder : Je me suis intéressé aux archétypes de l'architecture commerciale, aux lieux de passage qui font partie des habitudes et ne varient pas forcément en fonction de la situation géographique (aéroports, fast-foods, hôtels des grandes chaînes, galeries marchandes, etc.), aux espaces bâtis qui reflètent leur environnement ou (la plupart du temps) ne le reflètent pas du tout. Dans les fast-foods, le milieu artificiel bâti peut représenter, soit une schématisation lisible de l'environnement régional urbain ou rural, soit une norme universelle. Le site Web de McDonald souligne ses préoccupations culturelles et son ancrage local. Au Portugal, McDonald fait restaurer des bâtiments historiques, des chandeliers, des vitraux et des mosaïques. En Arabie Saoudite, la disposition des tables permet de séparer hommes et femmes, mariés et célibataires, etc. L'analyse des particularités de l'aménagement intérieur et des variantes architecturales révèle la complexité des paramètres mis en jeu dans les implantations locales.

K.V. : Le fast-food signale quand même sa dimension planétaire dans la logique de son agencement.

S.S. : La logique de l'agencement d'un fast-food vise à la fonctionnalité et au gain de temps. Il semblerait que McDonald soit l'entreprise qui consomme le plus de technologie satellitaire. Ces informations lui servent pour les bilans comparatifs annuels et pour les études de faisabilité. Son site fournit un calculateur d'itinéraire pour aller d'un restaurant à l'autre, avec un zoom qui permet de passer de l'échelle mondiale à quelques kilomètres autour du fast-food. Un fléchage avec indicateur de distances indique les directions à suivre dans la ville, à l'aéroport ou sur l'autoroute pour rejoindre le McDonald le plus proche. Le symbole des arches jaunes identifie l'établissement pour pousser le client à entrer. Ronald McDonald l'accueille à la porte (en ambassadeur). Les repas se prennent dans un cadre relativement confortable. Le napperon en papier reproduit parfois un plan de la ville, ou même du pays, avec l'emplacement de tous les autres restaurants de la chaîne. Les villes qui ne possèdent

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pas de McDonald sont trop négligeables pour être indiquées. Des rampes métalliques guident le consommateur vers la sortie, puis des panneaux fléchés lui indiquent la prochaine halte.

K.W. : C'est un aspect que vous avez étudié à Paris, il n'y a pas longtemps ?

S.S. : Là, j'ai décidé d'être attentif à l'emplacement géographique. Contrairement aux lieux repérés par l'Internationale situationniste pour leurs effets psychoaffectifs, les emplacements des fast-foods aujourd'hui correspondent à des zones importantes du point de vue historique, touristique et économique. J'ai comparé les napperons de McDonald, ainsi qu'une publicité d'un Kentucky Fried Chicken montrant toutes les succursales parisiennes, avec les cartes que les services secrets avaient dressées dans les années 1950. Cela donne une sorte d'image en miroir. Ce genre de cartographie commerciale fait basculer le régional dans l'universel.

K.W. : Est-ce que vos études d'environnements servent simplement de point de départ pour vos photographies et vidéos, ou doivent-elles constituer un registre à part ?

S.S. : Je dirais que tous mes projets sont plus ou moins liés entre eux. La technique est indifférente. Recueillir des informations écrites, des documents sous forme de photos ou vidéos, ce n'est jamais qu'un aspect d'une méthode de travail.

K.W. : Je me demande d'où vient votre intérêt pour l'Asie de l'Est.

S.S. : J'ai pris des exemples asiatiques accessoirement, comme référence chaque fois que la modernisation, l'urbanisation et les applications technologiques passent au premier plan.

K.W. : L'Asie est devenue aussi un espace de projection. Vous ne craignez pas de voir votre travail rangé sous la rubrique du fétichisme exotique ?

S.S. : Il faut être prudent quand on aborde des choses qui sont en dehors de notre sphère personnelle, mais cette position extérieure autorise aussi une certaine acuité de perception. Je ne pense pas que mon travail autour du voyage en Asie obéisse aux stéréotypes. Je m'en tiens aux archétypes commerciaux de mon passé américain et à la façon dont ils ont intégré des caractéristiques régionales ou vernaculaires. Les magasins de proximité, les galeries marchandes, les pavillons de banlieue, les fastfoods, etc.

K.W. : Donc, vous avez évité d'aller trop loin dans ce que l'on appellerait le cas particulier régional ?

S.S. : Quelquefois, j'ai utilisé des cas particuliers régionaux. En france, par exemple, j'ai photographié certains prototypes de banlieues utopiques construits autour de Paris dans les années 1950-1970. La plupart des immeubles sont dus à des architectes de second ordre qui avaient une conception globale du mode d'organisation des noyaux de peuplement. Il ne reste plus que des façades futuristes défraîchies et une infrastructure déglinguée. Je dirais que ce travail était une sorte d'archivage non objectif de documents sur une architecture obscure dont personne ne se serait occupé autrement.

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K.W. : Pour Terry Eagleton, la postmodernité appartient aux centres commerciaux, aux discothèques et à certains pans de la culture populaire, autant de phénomènes que l'on a vu se développer en Asie. Le risque, selon lui, c'est que cette esthétique spécifiquement « occidentale » s'avère incapable de proposer des modèles (identités) que les Asiatiques pourraient transposer ou utiliser dans leur vie quotidienne.

S.S. : Dans une publicité américaine pour Coca-Cola, on peut lancer un frisbee à un chien, mais dans un pays musulman où il n'est pas question d'avoir un chien pour un animal de compagnie, ce sera exclu. C'est très compliqué de concevoir une campagne de marketing à valeur universelle. Quand on arrive à faire cadrer une formule donnée avec tous les critères en vigueur à l'échelon mondial, elle est tellement édulcorée qu'elle perd son intérêt. La synthèse d'influence occidentale et de culture locale peut aussi déboucher sur une sensibilité accrue à la langue et aux coutumes de la région.

K.W. : Le cinéaste japonais Takeshi Kitano compare Tokyo à une énorme boîte noire qui transforme (assimile) selon les modalités locales tout ce qu'elle absorbe (importe).

S.S. : À Tokyo, si on parle d'appropriation culturelle, je n'ai pas perçu le désir de posséder l'original, mais plutôt l'imitation pratiquée comme une forme d'amusement. Un château-fort français, un ranch américain, un village hollandais vont s'insérer allégrement dans le décor. Les groupes bancaires récupèrent des personnages de dessin animé ou de manga dans leurs publicités : Woody Woodpecker pour Visa, Hello Kitty pour Citibank, etc. Ces éléments arrivent dans leur nouvel environnement comme des intrus, mais à mesure que leurs origines s'effacent et que l'identification se généralise, ils se fondent dans l'anonymat du quotidien.

(traduit de l'anglais par Jeanne Bouniort)

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