

Galerie

Chantal Crousel

Sean Snyder

Selected Press

REVIEWS

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 fracture, 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.

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

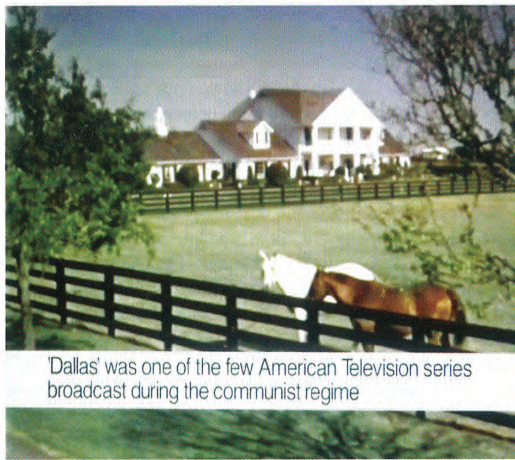
What does the classic Warner Brothers cartoon "Road Runner and Coyote" have to do with the urban condition? Sean Snyder's 1996–98 *Urban Planning Documentation (Road Runner & Coyote)*—the earliest of the eight works in this modest, twelve-year survey—proffers tentative answers. Beside a monitor playing 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.

E'wao Kagoshima, *Libidoll No. 1*, 1985, oil on shaped canvas, 48 x 42 x 2 1/2".



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



"Dallas" was one of the few American television series broadcast during the communist regime

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

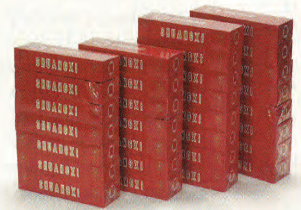
To shoot the 1,075 images that constitute her project "Contraband," 2010, Taryn Simon erected makeshift photo studios at the US Customs and Border Protection Federal Inspection Site and the US Postal Service International Mail Facility at John F. Kennedy International Airport. Then, she and her team 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*.

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

Taryn Simon,  
*Cigarettes, Shuangxi,  
China (prohibited)*,  
2010, color photo-  
graph, 6¼ x 6¼".  
From the series  
"Contraband," 2010.



Sean Snyder

## Disobedience in Tokyo

About five years ago I got an e-mail from a gallery in Paris. A friend of mine was walking down the street in Amsterdam. We hadn't spoken in years. He saw my name on a poster outside an institution—I had an exhibition together with Monika Sosnowska an artist from Poland. My friend had no idea I was an artist and went inside to see the exhibition—he said that he knew immediately it was my work mentioned he particularly liked the work about North Korea.

Earlier this year when a professor in Kyiv was planning a conference on Anti-Semitism I suggested to screen a video that I had seen by Yael Bartana. And the professor who suggested the conference knew who the actor was. In real life. Slawomir Sierakowski went to Kyiv and suggested to produce a guidebook for Ukraine.

Last week I asked my friend in Amsterdam to Fed Ex the guidebook we read in school and mentioned I am working on something in Kyiv with some professors and students.



The editor of the journal sent a link to an art magazine.

Professionalism. Nonsense. Not to sound like that drunk bitch in the Fassbinder film always yelling at her brother

with the denim jacket, but I wasn't in Tel Aviv. I wrote I was detained on the way to Tel Aviv. Nothing unprofessional—it's just a link on online. In fact, the author found a good image of an El Al plane. A Boeing 747 and think I'll take it—I mean the image. And asked a gallery assistant in London to please not have any work up during the art fair in London this fall since I stole the image—just to be fair. I think they still advertise on the back cover of the magazine but I'm not sure.

The article gave me an idea about professionalism. I realized I was being unprofessional. Incompetent as an artist. I assumed these sorts of texts go unread and good to know. Journalists write what they know isn't true, in the hope that if they keep on saying it will be true.

And it's always easy to criticize. I only do that after dinner and if I didn't like the food. But would never want to sound like a fisherman speaking about shepherds to sheep or hunters rearing cattle. That would be incompetent.

Art discourse. Nonsense. Instructional entertainment. Pedagogy. Useless.

More ventriloquists repeating the same lines from yet another French philosopher. More parrots. More nonsense.

Another subsided art critic shoving hors d'oeuvres in their mouth. Nouvelle cuisine. Half-drunk after a glass of wine—jumbling more words together—more nonsense about post-modernism and yet more trash about art and other artists. Everything they know how to do. Nonsense.

In Belarus everything looks different, or more of the same in a different way. I recently read this 'Lenin statue collapses, kills man in Belarus.' And the spelling has changed from Byelorussia to Belarus. This guy must have been thinking it was still the Soviet Union—like Lukashenko does. Maybe he should have been drinking Pepsi. As a kid I couldn't quite figure this one out. Capitalism under communism. Nonsense.

The practice of art is not confined to finality centered on questioning rather than illustrating, self-reflexive without guarantee, and, as any material practice, open to the possible consequences. And when a Ukranian PhD cultural studies candidate was talking about translating a book by Régis Debray I realized it was time to stop making art and re-read what I read in art school. I'd never want to leave anyone waiting in the hotel because a bad theory was translated—another a mouthpiece for a politician. I e-mailed the student a text about Aby Warburg to explain a bit about the idea David Burliuk had about Japanese Futurism and the Exhibition he organized .

An Exhibition can only amount to propaganda—and topicality creates the expectation politics can be propagated through art—but art is not propaganda.



Self-Interrogation on Research-Based Art—in real life I was confused how to explain being an artist with two El Al security guards. I was referring to the notion of interdisciplinarity after unintentionally answering the series of questions somewhat differently and they noticed—about art and architecture. I suppose not convincing enough as an artist. In the airport after giving the names and telephone numbers of two Israelis the head of El Al security he went to another room and supposedly called an architect and the curator Galit Eilat to verify I was an artist. On the flight, the El Al security guard sat in the row in front and upon landing we briefly discussed art. He had a good sense of humor.

In real life I am sometimes confused how to explain being an artist. Like that story with two El Al security guards. I was referring to the notion of interdisciplinarity after unintentionally answering a series of questions somewhat differently and they noticed—about art and architecture. I suppose not convincing enough as an artist. In the airport after giving the names and telephone numbers of two Israelis the head of El Al security he went to another room and supposedly called an architect and the curator Galit Eilat to verify I was an artist. On the flight, the El Al security guard sat in the row in front and upon landing we briefly discussed art. He had a good sense of humor. Sort of reminded me of the old joke 'Why do you tell me you are going to Cracow so I'll believe you are going to Lvov, when you are really going to Cracow.'

Hijacking—nonsense. As a result of writing the text I rebooked my flight. Austrian Airlines was printed on the e-ticket. I ended up on Ukrainian Airlines. The ticket for the following day had ANA written on it and I got on Austrian Airlines. I was just trying to get home to Tokyo from Kyiv but flew to Vienna to give a lecture. A number of associations came to mind—Academy, Asperger, Esperanto, Freud, and the Secession.

Following a lecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, after being invited by Tom Holert based on the text *Disobedience in Byelorussia: Self-Interrogation on "Research-Based Art"* in the journal, I considered the series of questions posed in an open letter criticizing the way education and knowledge are commodified, industrialized, economized and subjected to free trade mentioned in his proposal for Art in the Knowledge-based Polis and the relation between knowledge production linked to the ideologies and practices of neoliberal educational policies.

The points of interpellation were unclear. Similar to an artwork I produced using a Soviet image manipulation technique I found in the archive of a cinema magazine, re-photographed, cropped, digitally printed, and framed.

As it turned out, the same week of the lecture had I considered going to Luxemburg for the opening of an Austrian artist and researcher from Vienna and was trying to figure out which institution to visit—the school or the museum. But decided to go back to school.

After the lecture in art school I went to see Pawel Althammer's exhibition at the Secession. I thought it was the best exhibition I've ever seen. But there really was no exhibition—just a passage right through the building. And thought what the hell am I thinking? Which gave me something think about.

A PhD program in art is not propaganda, but analysis involving trial, error, and the occasional failure. Moreover involves collaborations and exchanges with other disciplines and art can be seen as a frame. A methodology could only be another fraudulent prescription—another symptom. In this case, I didn't know whether I should have been giving a lecture or enroll in the program. I had to re-read Althusser to try and figure this one out and nearly ripped up the pages, but just put the book on the shelf and looked at the screen.



The reason I mentioned art school is like the art world is because of one video—a video filmed in Frankfurt Airport while in art school that I showed in Luxemburg. I set up a camera on a tripod and filmed whoever walked through the door. For 6 hours straight and would just change the cassette every hour. At the end I selected the most consistent flow of passengers and just had to watch for one hour to decide and never looked at the video again. No editing. Today this sort of activity wouldn't be allowed—at least not without special permission. Airport security might think you were plotting a terrorist attack. At the time one security guard asked if I had permission—I hesitated and said yes. He didn't ask for any documents and just kept walking.

In the exhibition I also left behind a document. With a text in Luxembourgish for the public to take away. With a stop sign in Arabic.





Today in Belarus Lukashenko is not mourning the death of the same zombie as others have been recently. The inventor of the moonwalk that once caught his hair on fire making a TV commercial for Pepsi died. Again. I thought he was dead already—as a kid—on MTV. Worst of it is now you have to see his parents on TV. And they even look a bit like that Austrian pervert that locked his daughter in the basement. Josef Fritzl.

In 1986 I was listening to Radio Moscow. But also bought Psycho Candy. Feedback. The Jesus and Mary Chain. And know the difference.





The headlines linked to the news of an art magazine, September 11, 2009

Austrian Family Seeks Return of Vermeer Sold to Hitler

Sweden Temporarily Removes Swastika Paintings from Stockholm Museum

Tel Aviv Gallery Removes 'Terrorist Madonnas'

World War II and the Middle Ages

In another art school last year I researched in the physical archives of an online archive assisted by a German student from a curatorial studies program and found a series of publications with the shredded documents left behind after the takeover of the American Embassy during the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The 'revolutionaries' put the documents back together and just printed the books to expose what was going on inside. Even the Israelis were annoyed with what they were up to in there.

One of the 'revolutionaries' apparently involved hasn't kept up his blog recently. It said before that he would spend 15 minutes a day writing to his friends. Seems he was lying and simple yo busy.

The second university I attended I went to the Unification Church after reading an ad in a newspaper. A free trip to Russia—it was 1991 and no longer the Soviet Union. I went to the Church not because I was insane, but bored. But it almost made me insane—I had to sit in a room and watch a video about what they do and then

afterwards talk to some girl that who devotedly mentioned she graduated from the same university. So I left the church. And the university. And the country. But kept the book.

Even attracts artist. I was asked by an 'artist collective' that invited me to a conference. Because they thought they were

I got a lecture from the priest about 1968 which was stamped on her bride. Disgusting. First time I ever wanted to spill some coconut milk on another artist. 'Institutional critique' Coconuts. Mental hospital. Poison.

Qaddafi. Gaddafi. Colonel Qaddafi. Whatever. Seems he just set up a tent in New York the other day. I could never figure out the spelling and always translated differently. A demented mimetician. In reality. This tyrant sometimes even dresses up like the zombie that invented the moonwalk. Real appropriation. He even wrote this ridiculous book—or at least says he did on the cover. 'Fun with dictatorship.' A real comedian. He even ordered to have an airplane blown up in the 1980s. But now he's making friends with everyone again—and this year he even received a visitor from Ukraine.



While preparing the talk for Vienna I thought about two projects I presented in Luxemburg in a garage while in art school and one publication I produced with the Secession. Because there was one joke I couldn't quite explain to the Austrian artist last time we met. I couldn't explain the logic. It had to do with research on Japanese architecture and how I was able to convince a government agency in Japan that I am an expert in architecture based on a project published with the Secession—an artist organization. The research project was a plan for the reconstruction of Skopje following an earthquake in 1963 involving a collaborative effort between architects. Organized by the United Nations the competition was won by a group of Japanese architects and engineers based on an unrealized plan for Tokyo Bay. I considered the project a metaphor for 9-11. The World Trade Center was designed by a Japanese architect. The project initially started as a commission by the Netherlands Architecture Institute to document the post facilities of train stations in Holland. After researching in the archives at the NAI I located a publication with the blueprints of a rail station in Macedonia and went to research.



In Japan Heisei 24. In North Korea it's Juche 98. It's 2009 on my computer screen.



I recently digitized some photocopies of the first book I ever found about North Korea in the Bibliothèque Publique d'information in the Centre Pompidou I was reading while in art school. The first time I had ever seen images of North Korea. But could only make photocopies. I recently started listening to shortwave radio again. The station used to be called Radio Pyongyang. They recently changed the name to the Voice of Korea.

The logo for e-flux, featuring the text "e-flux" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. A thick vertical black bar is positioned to the left of the text.

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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).



• 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.<sup>1</sup> I also agree with Irit Rogoff's comments on the occasional circular patterns in regard to "context."<sup>2</sup>

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

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.



▲ "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.



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.



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

*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.<sup>4</sup>

*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.<sup>5</sup> I suddenly was reminded I'm an artist.

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.

*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.<sup>6</sup>

A short anecdote, related to Liam Gillick's research on the experimental factory.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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?



▲ 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 Dilleuth 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.

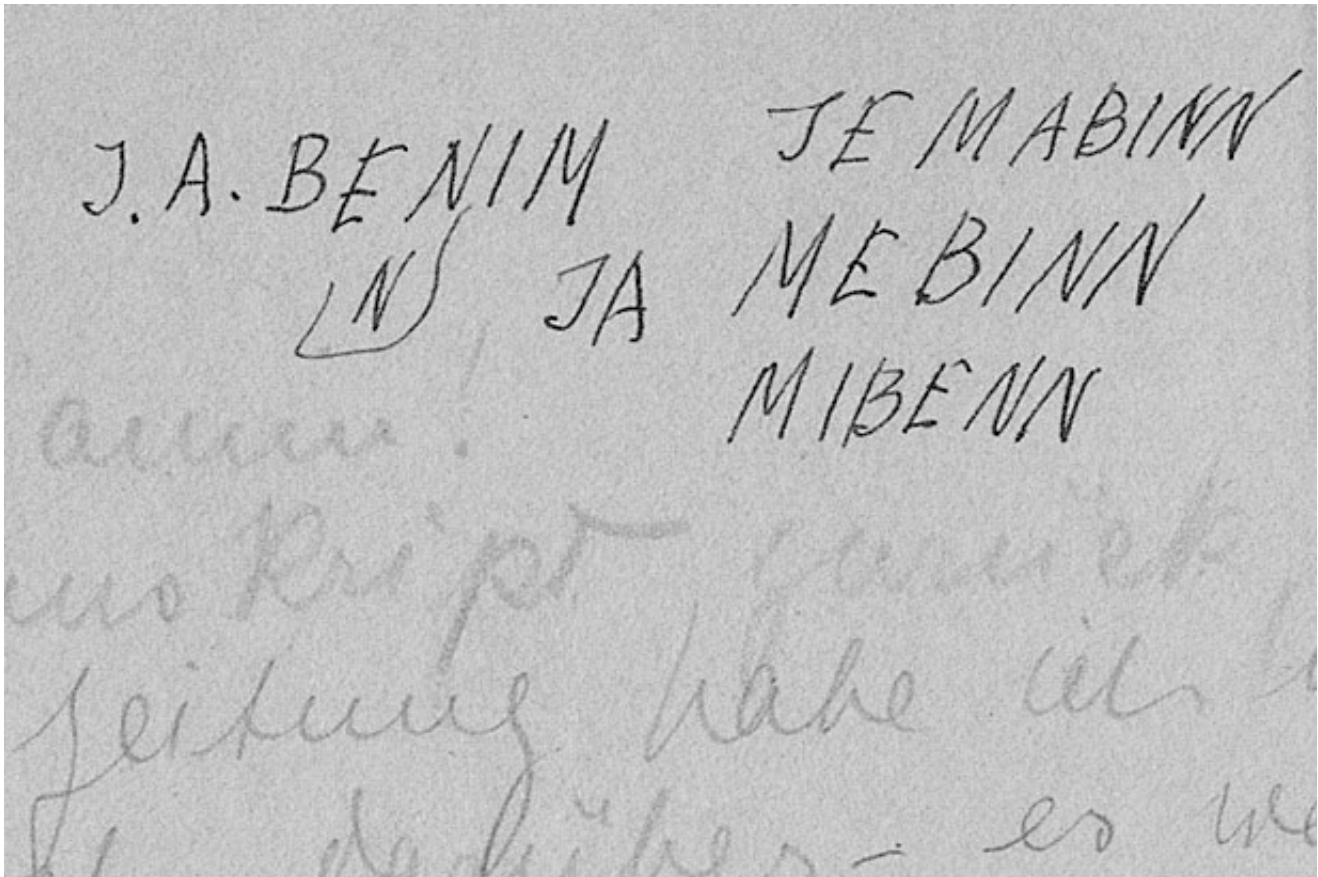
At the end of the night I had to leave and go back to the institution. The art institution.

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

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 Benjamin Archive.

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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<sup>1</sup> "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), [→](#).

<sup>2</sup> "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), [→](#).

<sup>3</sup> See "Deadly plane crash at Tokyo airport," CNN.com, March 23, 2009, [→](#).

<sup>4</sup> See Bärbel Küster, "Wir müssen einen Schnitt machen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 24, 2009, [→](#).

<sup>5</sup> See "Guidelines for Contribution to Japan," Immigration Bureau of Japan, [→](#).

<sup>6</sup> 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, [→](#).

[Z](#) 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, [→](#).

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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 rigueur, 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 through 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

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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 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 just letting 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 kind of 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 Shanghai 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?*

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 Qaeda) 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*

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*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 vis-à-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.

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

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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 Sernet 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 Sernet, but through 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 Sernet commission; not in order to sabotage it but in order to do something else that prevents art from becoming an exercise in problem-solving.

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### **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

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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 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 fast-foods, etc.

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

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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.

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)

Entretien publié à Stockholm dans le bimensuel *Nu*, numéro spécial « The Lars Issue », janvier 2000.