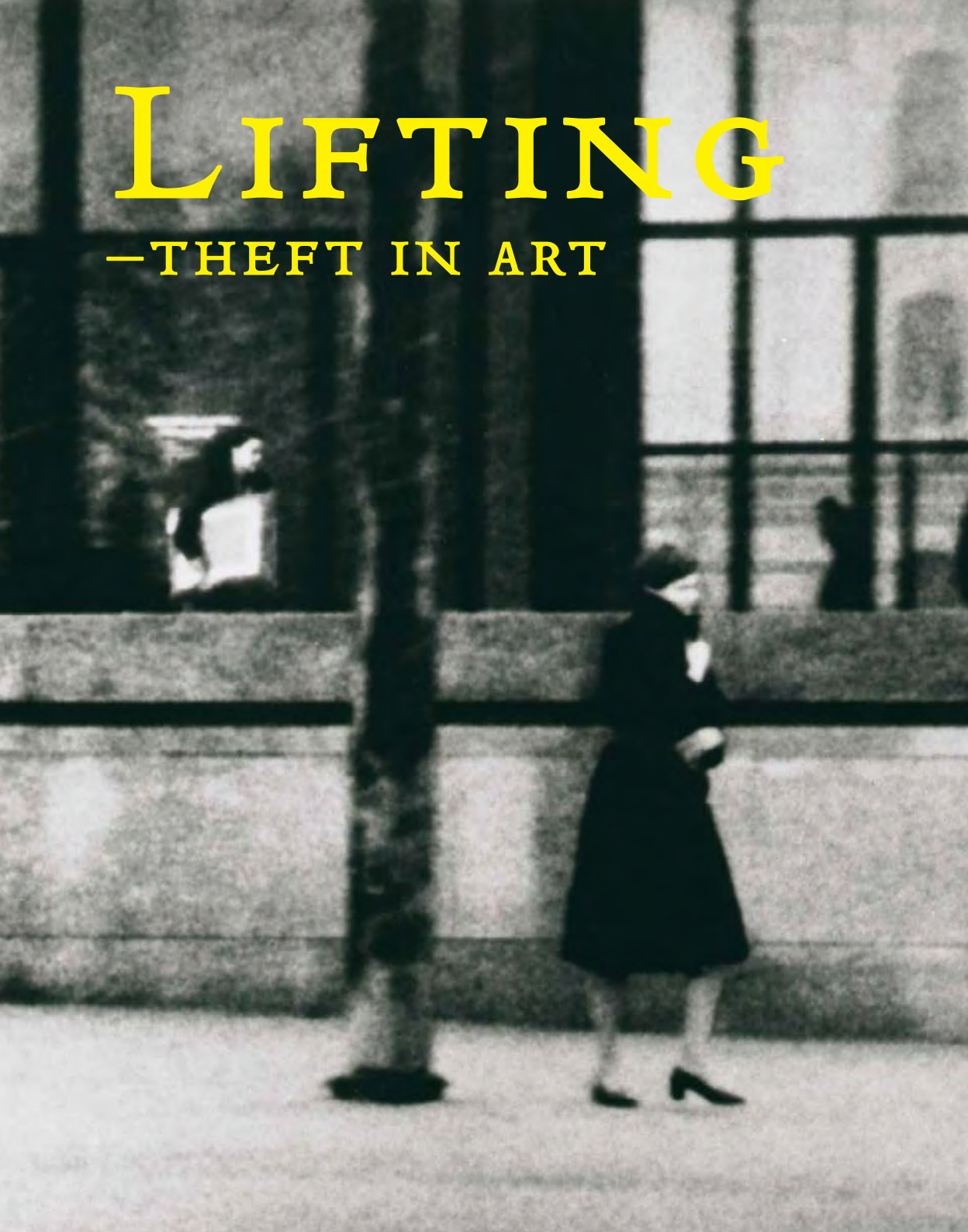

Lifting
—theft in art

Cover: Ulay, film still from *There is a Criminal Touch to Art*, 1976

Contents

Introduction

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

Theft expands the discourse of appropriation to incorporate issues of material ownership, and codes the terrain with a sense of violation that is arguably more visceral (theft has a commonplace familiarity that renders it more immediate than intellectual theft). In this respect, lifting is rooted in individual experience—that of both the artist and viewer—and given the typical absence of an absolute marker of ownership upon stolen items, the details of lifting survive primarily through rumor and faith. In the resulting immediacy, theft in art has the potential to provoke an empathetic relationship with issues of ownership, exchange, attribution, and the cultural significance of both the act and artefact of theft.

The artists in *Lifting* do not share a common rationale for stealing. Yet a unifying factor is that the notion of theft does not necessitate that a crime has been committed. Particular artworks utilise the disruptive nature of theft to enact a form of institutional critique, questioning socio-cultural issues as well as the authority and social role of the institutions that confer cultural worth (for example, Ulay's "Action in 14 predetermined sequences," *There is a Criminal Touch to Art*, 1976, in which Ulay entered the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, stole the Carl Spitzweg painting *Der Arme Poet*, and subsequently placed it in the home of a Turkish worker). Many works suggest an alternate moral coding, expressing an attitude of *lex injusta non est lex*, or "an unjust law is not a law."

With works such as Allison Wiese's collection of wooden doorstops (*Untitled*, 2002–ongoing) the theft is of such a whimsical nature that it arguably operates below the interests of the law. A strategy evident in several works is the exaggeration or mimicking of "normal" behavior in order to reorient the original act, critiquing and displacing it on its own terms (for example, Ann Messner's film, *stealing at the summer end sale* (1978), in which Messner is shown in a department store, piling on layers of t-shirts and stuffing them into plastic shopping bags). While in other instances the theft is a conscious negotiation of a legal boundary and takes advantage of ambiguities to subtly remain beyond legal reach.

Yet, there is always a moral dimension, even in those situations where the descriptions of the theft cause doubt as to whether any crime actually occurred; this exacerbates the possibility of evaluating these works only in terms of legal indiscretion. In the artworks where "evidence" is inconclusive, the attendant legal questions function to energize a speculative narrative that operates in relation to the viewer's cultural experience and expectations.

Consideration of the action and history of theft within art, in relation to appropriation, provides a means to reflect upon the structures of economy and exchange, the boundaries of the law, and the ways in which legal and cultural significance are attributed to property.

This online publication contains interviews with the artists included in the exhibition *Lifting* as it was realized at Peacock Visual Arts, 25 Aug–29 September 2007. Also included is an essay by art historian Frazer Ward and a selection of interviews with other artists who have engaged theft in their practice. An expanded print version of this publication, which will include further essays and interviews, will be released in 2008.

Atopia Projects would like to thank Lindsay Gordon, Director of Peacock Visual Arts, for the invitation to generate this project, and especially Monika Vykoukal for her generative input throughout the project. Furthermore, we would like to thank Angela Lennon, Nina Eggens, and all the staff who were involved in the project, for their professionalism, support, and engagement with all aspects of its realization. We would also like to thank Patricia Hernadez, with whom we developed the ideas for this project, as well as all the participating artists and writers.

–Gavin Morrison & Fraser Stables

Frazer Ward

Episodes from a History of Lifting

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

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

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

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

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

Anyway, shouldn't honest work produce something useful? If *With Hidden Noise* exists only to keep its secret (or to announce that there is a secret), *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* merely confesses: secrecy and confession are sides of the same coin. As an aesthetic strategy, lifting, in its light-fingered variety, has its roots in Duchamp's readymades. The readymades, consumer objects lifted from non-art contexts and repositioned in art contexts, may by now customarily be understood to represent the most thoroughgoing epistemological challenge to the status of the work of art in the twentieth century, insofar as they reject specialized skill, and making, altogether. And, theoretically at least, the bottlerack could go back to the kitchen,

the coat rack could be put back on the wall.[6] That won't happen, of course, because in their very uselessness, the readymades have accrued particular kinds of value, as embodiments of intellectual-aesthetic propositions, as pillars of institutional savvy, and, deeply ironically (as Duchamp effectively predicted[7]), as luxury commodity goods.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It follows, perhaps, that the complex character of *lifting* should emerge so clearly: there is the physical explosion of theft itself, the hammer, the shattering of glass, the danger, there is the drearier labor of lifting and stacking the units (which is also a form of the administrative labor of organizing information); and there is also the aesthetic aspect, the ordering of the grid of objects, the art-historical evocations due both to street performance and video and to stacks of industrial units, and the sleight-of-hand of the repositioning of the hot objects in the cool shade of art, which, like a brute economic exigency, but with a lighter hand, renders questions of legality naïve.

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

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

2 Ibid., 60.

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

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

5 Ibid.

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

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

8 Chris Burden, "Chris Burden: Original Texts 1971-1995," in *Chris Burden* (Paris: Blocnotes, 1995), np.

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

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

11 Steinberg, op. cit., 83-4.

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

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

14 Burden, op. cit.

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

Rosemary J. Coombe

Excerpts from:

Rosemary J. Coombe *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law* (Duke University Press, 1998). Page numbers in this volume are indicated.

Excerpts are provided for the critique and commentary invited by *Lifting*, an online anthology created by Atopia Projects (2007) in conjunction with their curated exhibition of art *Lifting: Theft in Art*, Peacock Visual Arts, Aberdeen, UK. 25 August – 29 September, 2007.

The rights bestowed by intellectual property regimes (copyright, trademark, publicity rights, design patents, and associated merchandising rights in particular) play a constitutive role in the creation of contemporary cultures and in the social life of interpretive practice. (6)

In consumer cultures, most pictures, text, motifs, labels, logos, trade names, designs, tunes, and even some colors and scents are governed, if not controlled, by regimes of intellectual property. These legal frameworks enable the reproduction and repetition of cultural forms as ever the same marks of authorial proprietorship, while paradoxically prohibiting and inviting their interpretive appropriation in the service of other interests and alternative agendas. The law's recognition and protection of some activities of meaning-making under the guise of authorship … and its delegitimation of other signifying practices as forms of piracy … create particular cartographies for cultural agency. This dialectical relationship between authorship and alterity is a significant, if overlooked, dimensions of contemporary cultural politics. (6)

[T]he texts protected by intellectual property laws *signify*: they are cultural forms that assume local meanings in the lifeworlds of those who incorporate them into their daily lives. Circulating widely in contemporary public spheres, they provide symbolic resources for the construction of identity and community, subaltern appropriations, parodic interventions, and counterhegemonic narratives. (7)

Scholars have reflected upon intellectual property protections in terms of incentives to produce abstract goods, without considering *what* is "owned" or *how* rights of possession are exercised for far too long. There has been too little consideration of the *cultural* nature of the actual forms that intellectual property laws protect, the social and historical contexts in which cultural proprietorship is (or is not) exercised and enforced to intervene in everyday struggles over meaning. (7)

The law freezes the play of signification by legitimating authorship, deeming meaning to be value properly redounding to those who "own" the signature or proper name, without regard to the contributions or interests of those others in whose lives it figures. This enables and legitimates practices of cultural authority that attempt to freeze the play of difference and (différance) in the public sphere. Emergent social differences are often expressed through the medium of commodified texts— texts that are legally defined as properties. (8)

Hegemonic power is operative when threats of legal action are made as well as when they are actually acted upon. People's imagination of what "the law says" may be a shaping force in those expressive activities that potentially violate it and in those practices that might be considered protected acts of "speech," constitutionally defined. (9)

Practices of authorial power and appropriation, authorized meanings and alternative renderings, owners' interests and others' needs cannot be addressed simply in terms of dichotomies like domination and resistance, however. Romantic celebrations of insurrectionary alterity, long popular in cultural studies, cannot capture the dangerous nuances of cultural appropriation in circumstances where the very resources with which people express difference are the properties of others. (10)

The law creates spaces in which hegemonic struggles are enacted as well as signs and symbols whose connotations are always at risk. Legal strategies and legal institutions may lend authority to certain interpretations while denying status to others. (11)

… This textually saturated, hypersignificant world needs to be reintegrated with the regimes of law and regulation that govern and shape it if we are to understand the relationship between the word and the world as a dialectical space of governance and praxis as well as one of authorship and readership. Intellectual property protections are central cultural conditions of production, circulation, and reception, providing incentives to produce and disseminate texts, regulating modes of circulation for cultural forms while enabling, recognizing, and enjoining alternative forms of reception and interpretation. (18)

[D]erivative practices of making culture in commercial landscapes … are practices in which the signifying properties of authors are reappropriated by others, who simultaneously inscribe their *own* authorship of those works the law deems to be *owned* by their corporate disseminators. Culture is contested and created in precisely such instances in which identity is asserted and difference claimed through expressive activities that deploy meaningful forms. (23)

Legal regimes shape the social meanings assumed by signifying properties in public spheres. Such meanings are socially produced in fields characterized by inequalities of discursive and material resources, symbolic capital, and access to channels of communication: "if culture is our nature, whatever threatens to shut down, repress, or distort representation through the assertion of some absolute 'presence' threatens also to put an end to both culture and history."[1] Intellectual property rights, as they are currently interpreted and enforced, imagined and asserted, pose precisely such a threat to contemporary signifying practice, freezing forms, deeming denotation, and containing connotation [.] (26)

We need to consider people's active engagement with commodified cultural forms—consumption—as a type of production: a mode of cultural politics contingent upon and necessary to the conditions of postmodernity … For subjects in contemporary consumer societies … political action must involve a critical engagement with commodified cultural forms. In the current climate, intellectual property laws often operate to stifle dialogic practice in the public sphere, preventing us from using the most powerful, prevalent, and accessible cultural forms to express alternative visions of social worlds. (42)

[I]t is imperative that we acknowledge the politics of making meaning and the conflictual nature of struggles to fix and transform meanings in a world where access to means and media of communication is limited. We need to consider, concretely, what the "optimal material and cultural conditions for participatory dialogue"[2] might be in a world as media saturated as the one in which most North Americans live. (50)

Goods are increasingly sold by harnessing symbols, and the proliferation of mass-media imagery means that we increasingly occupy a "cultural" world of signs and signifiers that have no traditional meanings within geographically contiguous communities or organic traditions.[3] (52)

The quintessential self-referential sign or postmodern cultural good… is the product brand name or corporate trademark, as indicated by the slogans that propel them into the public sphere[.] (55–56)

If society is characterized by pervasive media imagery, and commodified cultural forms permeate all dimensions of our experience, then we must ask what people *do* with these representations. For "one of postmodernism's most provocative lessons is that terms are by no means guaranteed their meanings."[4] Regimes of signification are used in numerous and unexpected ways; people don't use products only as advertised, and they don't necessarily use advertising as it was intended. (57)

Brand names have become so ubiquitous that they provide an idiom of expression and resources for metaphor… In practices of appropriation we may discern "indexes of the creativity that flourishes at the very point where practice ceases to have its own language."[5] … Cultural activity increasingly involves the recoding of commodified cultural forms. (57–58)

The law constitutes and enforces rights and limitations that govern the relationship between those who claim a proprietary interest in the sign and those who seek to appropriate it, to create other meanings and alternative identities (to turn it into their own ends). We see this process at work in all areas of intellectual property. (68)

By controlling the sign, trademark holders are enabled to control its connotations and potentially curtail many forms of social commentary. (73)

Social actors obviously have diverse capacities and means to fix and to challenge meaning; intellectual property protections are only one form of power in a larger field. We are always engaged in making meaning and attempting to make our meanings mean something. A democratization of access to this practice would give all peoples more equal opportunities to engage in expressive activity, rather than granting already powerful actors even further resources and capacities to dominate cultural arenas than they already possess. (77)

Bakhtin saw the relation between individual and society not as a binary opposition, but as a continuum, because the contents of the psyche and of culture were the same: signifying forms that simultaneously demand and elude closure as fixed signs with certain meanings. As one commentator has noted: "the nature of the linguistic sign is synergistic, a constant struggle and co-operation between the necessity to be static and repeatable and the opposed but no less imperative necessity of the same material to be open to constantly new and changing circumstances."[6] Meaning must be understood as something always in the process of creation, never completed, for the world itself "is a vast congeries of contested meanings."[7] Communicative acts have meanings only in particular situations or contexts. In their *utterance* meanings are continually "enriched, contested, or annexed."[8] Utterances travel between contingent and historically specific contexts and become "caught up in the complexities and inequities of social life"[9] in different historical periods. (83)

The sign's "multiaccentuality" suggests that it bears within it "different accents, emphases and therefore meanings with different inflections and in different contexts."[10] These differences reflect the different social positionings, interests, values, and attitudes of those who engage the sign in everyday life. Thus, no trademark should be seen to have any singular meaning (secondary or otherwise), nor any singular relationship to either its source of origin or to the product with which it is associated, nor any necessary teleology of evolution in meaning. So long as the sign is part of a living language, it is continuously caught up in generative processes of struggle. (84)

Attempts to fix the meaning of signifiers or to disarticulate and rearticulate the meaning of texts are the essence of hegemonic struggle, a struggle in which certain social groups periodically *do* manage to fix the meaning of the sign and evoke closure. Because such closure is secured only through discursive practice, however, it is temporary and always open to future disarticulations. The struggles that take place on the terrain of the sign to define its symbolic boundaries are historically specific contentions in which those with divergent social interests strive to establish legitimate meanings for the sign and/or delegitimate the meanings established by others. The sign is dynamic; it maintains the capacity for development—a vitality and social life—to the extent that it is open to reconfiguration. (85–86)

Culture is not embedded in abstract concepts that we internalize, but in the materiality of signs and texts over which we struggle and the imprint of those struggles in consciousness.[11] This ongoing negotiation and struggle over meaning is the essence of dialogic practice. Many interpretations of intellectual property laws quash dialogue by affirming the power of corporate actors to monologically control meaning by appealing to an abstract concept of property. (86)

It would be reductionist, however, to see the power of intellectual property in purely prohibitory terms. The law is always simultaneously prohibitive and productive: it creates realities and constitutes possibilities. (86–87)

The reactivation of media-activated textuality may be the substance of cultural reproduction and transformation. Lifeworlds are produced through the construction and contestation of meaning. The social and political work such practices of interpreting commodified textuality accomplish cannot be reduced to information transfer. Use of commercial media to make meaning is often a constitutive and transformative activity, not merely a referential or descriptive one. It may create alternative worlds as well as name existing ones. We value freedom of expression not as a means of spreading verifiable information about a world of brute fact, but as the activity with which we culturally construct worlds, create social knowledges, forge ethics, and negotiate intersubjective moral truths whose credence is never established by a measurable correspondence to an objective reality. Self, society and identity are realized only through the expressive cultural activity that reworks those cultural forms that occupy the space of the social imaginary.[12] (270)

Articulations of identity, challenges to social positivities, and transformative identifications are possible only in conditions of polysemy and symbolic ambiguity where cultural resources for contesting meaning and asserting identity are open to transformation. In conditions of postmodernity, however, our cultural resources are increasingly the properties of others, and many meanings are monopolized by elites who control the commodified texts that pervade our social lives. These are the cultural images with which politically salient forms of difference may increasingly be shaped. Whose identities will be authorized and whose authorship will be recognized? As the cultural cosmos in which we live becomes increasingly commodified, we will need to define and defend the cultural practices of articulation with which we author the social world and construct the identities we occupy within it. (296)

Notes

1 Brantlinger, 66.

2 Cornell, 365.

3 Every day, according to the Association of American Advertising Agencies, the average person is exposed to 1,600 advertisements. Heiferman and Phillips, 18.

4 Ross, *xx*.

5 Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, *xi-xii*.

6 Holquist, 175.

7 Ibid., 23-24; see also Todorov, *supra* note 178, 175.

8 S. Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reade*r, 3.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 23.

11 But if legal theorists concerned with "culture" have a tendency toward idealism, those concerned with free speech tend toward an undue materialism in their considerations of dialogism.

12 The concept of the social imaginary is developed in C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987).

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Miguel Calderón & Yoshua Okón

A Propósito…, 1997

Installation consisting of 120 stolen car stereos obtained on the black market, and a looped video projection documenting the artists stealing a car stereo
Digital video transferred to DVD (00:52, color, audio); Installation dimensions variable

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

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

Miguel Calderón: Our own car stereos had been stolen numerous times, this reflected the powerful supply and demand economy in Mexico City and how much theft is a part of it, to the point where I can remember thinking, as I was growing up, that stealing stuff from other people's cars was supposed to be cool. So we felt like it was something we wanted to try ourselves, to understand why people liked doing it so much.

Yoshua Okón: I met a guy who steals stereos for a living and asked him if I could follow him with a camera as he was working. My idea was to make an art piece with the video documentation of the robberies along with all the stolen stereos. He didn't want to appear in video so he said no. When I told Miguel about the project he offered to do it, so we decided to collaborate. After Miguel got a "crash course" on how to steal a stereo, we went out to shoot the video. I remember that the day before we did it somebody told us a story about a bodyguard killing a car stereo thief as he was trying to snap a stereo outside a home, so we were extremely nervous. Miguel then came up with the idea to stack up the stereos creating a wall. After that, I went to a market where I knew anyone could buy stolen car stereos and proceeded to purchase them (it took about two weeks of going back until I was able to get the 119 we needed).

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

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

that has always interested me. Most of the pieces I make now are a test of how much that goes inside of my head can be put out as physical objects or film/videos, there is often a lot of risk involved, since at first most of these ideas seem almost impossible to make.

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

MC: We worked together directing La Panadería, and we had similar concerns and interests. We didn't like a lot of things that were happening around us, both in the art world and in this huge city, so we experimented with questioning these things through our work.

YO: We had already collaborated in a few art pieces before but mostly we had been collaborating in La Panadería for the previous three years. La Panadería relates to *A Proposito…* in that it emphasized the relation between art and the immediate environment of its creation. At the time, both Miguel and I felt that most of the art produced in the city was not addressing everyday life realities, and we were interested in both creating and promoting the kind of work that did.

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

MC: I think art reflects its times, I have always been a big fan of Goya and the way he portrayed people after war, to me this was simply a reflection of things we were living through at that moment. Painting and sculpture were dominant and we felt like doing work that involved more action.

YO: Aside from the anecdotes I just mentioned, I also remember being especially influenced by Chris Burden's early works in those days….

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

YO: Yes, without mediation there would be no art piece, and without an art context this piece would not be able to exist either. For instance, if we had decided to steal a stereo as a performance meant only to be experienced by whoever is passing by, the piece would have been simply regarded as yet another act of delinquency by those few who saw it. Instead, by recording the action on video and presenting this video in a clearly mediated way (for instance the sound of the window crashing was played extremely loud) and in the context of an art space, all of a sudden an everyday action (at the time car stereos were being stolen, literally, daily) turns into a highly charged symbolic gesture.

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

MC: The stack of stereos was shown next to a video projection of us actually stealing a stereo. After a failed attempt I managed to break the glass and get it, however I left the hammer in the car, and after doing it we both experienced a huge adrenalin rush, which in a way did make us understand why people did it again and again. A set of loud speakers played the audio and you could hear the glass breaking and the alarm going off. On the screen there was a 26 second gap with only timecode, which was the exact time it took me to take the stereo. The second phase of the project involved getting the other 119 car stereos, which we obtained in the black market—during which a gun was pointed in our faces by a nervous dealer, but in the end we got the stereos for a very good price. Stealing one stereo was enough to understand the whole thing and we never intended to make people believe that we had stolen the rest, otherwise we would have shown more videos of us doing it. The fact that we bought them in the black market was not something we hid from people, but they could interpret the work themselves.

YO: We never intended for people to believe that we had stolen all those stereos and we didn't start that rumor. I have no idea were this rumor comes from but I have heard it before. So the answer is no, I don't think that this is an important aspect of the work but it doesn't bother me either. I like the idea of rumors around artworks; word of mouth is a powerful medium.

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

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

YO: Some that come to mind are: *Qué Guapo* (1999) the show by the Viennese collective gelatin,[1] for which they drove a car through the desert from Los Angeles to Mexico City and then exhibited the car as it had been transformed throughout the trip; *Dermis* (1996) by the Mexico City collective Semefo for which, among other works, they exhibited pieces of tattooed human skin recovered from the city's morgue; *Lora a través de la banda* (1996) for which the local artist Ferrus exhibited a selection of artwork from Alex Lora's (a Mexican rock star) collection made especially for him by jail inmates; *Pasage* (1998) by Philippe Hernández in which he exhibited a close circuit video with live shots of two rats he had caught outside his apartment in downtown Mexico City; and *Contaminación Cultural* (1995) an exhibition with five female artists from San Francisco who made artwork related to their experiences working in the sex industry.[2]

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

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

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

Do you consider *A Proposito…* culturally specific?

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

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

1 gelatin renamed themselves gelitin in 2005.

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

Ann Messner

stealing at the summer end sale, 1978

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

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

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

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

stealing… involved taking economic space and entering it as the artist to do my work, and mirroring or responding to the activity that was going on around me. This actually wasn't in New York but in Cologne, in C&A (a big department store) at the summer end sale, which was particularly heavily trafficked and so was sort of synonymous with the subway during rush hour. I infiltrated the usual transaction—I'm talking about this academically—and filled bags, tried on shirts over and over and over, piling the shirts, stuffing them in bags, responding to the situation, again from a nocturnal perspective. My experience had always been the flip side—what you don't see, what you might be thinking about under the surface—and acting on that. I am sure we have all had impulses to varying degrees. It's impossible not to walk into a store and want something, and then to imagine various possible ways in which you could get the thing you want, aside from the usual transaction of currency. It was C&A intentionally: I was always interested in the street level and a common place, I would never have gone into

Bloomingdale's or Saks Fifth Avenue to do that project. I see myself as a worker, I wanted to be there with everyone working. I am interested in a lateral negotiation.

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

Was it important that it was in Cologne?

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

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

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

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

The site sounds almost like a version of a Dan Graham work but in the real.

And without the expense!

Like a readymade Dan Graham. With *stealing...* did you edit the film, how did you determine the length?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One of the things that has been remarked upon, particularly in relation to the subway work, is that nobody is watching me. I appreciated that sort of acceptance into the fold, even though there was a sort of idiosyncrasy to my activity. But that is New York City, here I am talking specifically about the subway and not C&A. C&A was very different, because that was a German audience and anything outside the norm is noticed. You can clearly see there are responses in the film, and it was causing people around me some consternation.

Again, because I was coming from the experience of the subway, and it was the middle 70s, the cars were just filled with graffiti, New York City was officially bankrupt and people were leaving the city. I think there was a kind of usurpation of social space, on the one hand you could say a certain kind of freedom but I don't like that word these days, I don't think that is the right kind of word. But my intention wasn't to be confrontational, and perhaps that was my own narcissism as an artist. Certainly later on I became intentionally confrontational with my temporary public sculptures, but as I got older I had more of a developed social or political position that I was always working towards. I think this project from the early 70s was somewhat naïve, and I was able to be naïve in the type of social space because of the time it was. The social contract operative in public space is very different now, social space is tightly negotiated, it's dangerous.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ivan Moudov

Fragments, 2002–2007

Hand-made boxes, stolen fragments; 36 x 49.5 x 15cm
Right: *Fragments (box #2)*, 2004–2005

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

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

Ivan Moudov: Everything started when I noticed that no one really cared for the art pieces in museums and that it did not require much effort to take anything you desired.

Living in Bulgaria, I usually need to travel at least one day by car in order to see a good exhibition. It is quite disturbing to live in a country without a museum for contemporary art, especially when you are trying to be an artist. It means we don't even get the chance to hate the museum. Some people think that it is quite chic not to have a museum, believing that the museum kills the present and its absence encourages a kind of underground behavior, but I don't share this opinion. In order to have an underground you have to have something above the ground.

For a few years I was collecting fragments and each box was something like a portable museum. Now I've finished this, I already feel closer to the contemporary art world and now if I want to see an exhibition I use a cheap flight.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fragments (box #1), 2002-2004

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

Fragments (box #2), 2004-2005

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

Fragments (box #3), 2005

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

Fragments (box #4), 2005-2007

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

Scott Myles

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

Newsagent intervention

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

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

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

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

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

What was the impetus for this work?

Shoplifting followed by guilt.

Were you ever caught shoplifting?

Over the course of the year I moved or borrowed over 100 publications and nobody noticed. I accept that such displacement is quite negligible. Subtly however, on some occasions, I think the project would have become visible. One example would be when I'd displace a journal I'd bought in a larger newsagent, replacing it in a smaller outlet. This displacement might have become apparent when a stock check occurred, or when a member of the public tried to buy

PSYCHIC TV

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

SUSAN HILLER

Newsagent
intervention with flyer
March 14 1999
on-going

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

She Sees In Herself A New Woman Everyday, photographic and audio floor installation, 1993. Existing 'in conversation' with the minimalist floor planes of Carl Andre which were popular at the time, a young woman addresses her absent mother, recounting 'memories of seeing and wearing shoes, communicating the mix of trauma and desire that went into the early formation of her own identity and self-image.

are often the mothers of a tradition, but have difficulty recognizing our children. What I mean is, the politics may be there, but we cannot recognise them.

D&C: **The problem is, such an ingratiating style panders to the gallery system's hatred of politics while at the same time reinforcing suspicions on the part of the left's towards art. What's your experience of negotiating between these equally antagonistic positions?**

MR: The left - particularly the bureaucratic left - despite its long history of support on the part of artists and intellectuals, is suspicious of people who may appear to value their own freedom of expression above an easily grasped left-friendly message. In other words, the left prefers the very instrumentalisation that artists by and large really must avoid. The gallery system, which pretty much replicates the advanced taste of its bourgeois collectors, naturally seeks universalism so that no uncomfortable questions of power and responsibility are raised. In the art world as represented by the gallery 'long ago and far away' make political statements acceptable. In some instances, so-called identity politics are also acceptable, as long as the more pointed elements of difference are not aimed at anyone in direct sight. What I've called 'critique in general', a kind of abstract critique, is also generally all right. In other words, the left fears and rejects 'individualism' in art while the gallery fetishises it - as long as all threats remain only virtual.

D&C: **You've always held dearly to this idea of Pop as critique. Could you help unravel the threads of complicity that link Pop art to image culture and the culture of celebrity?**

MR: Well, this is 'postmodernism Left and Right'. Is there a left postmodernism? Which people are now basically saying, "No." Of course not - stop referring to yourself as a postmodernist. Well, tough. I am not a Pop artist, but what made Andy Warhol so interesting to me is that he made it impossible to do art the way it was done before because of his, not prescriptive and not prescient, but diagnostic powers in relation to American culture. His practice was in a sense the ultimate teaching practice. The diagnosis was the work. In other words, there is no sense of movement in Pop art, no utopian moment, no sense of resistance, except through memory. Fetishistic, mis-echoes of the dominant culture. But Pop's complicity is

Rights Of Passage, panoramic photos, 1994. Approaching the [illegible] deliver the everyday dreamscapes that give shape to our world.

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

Below, left to right: **Garter**, 1975 and **Untitled**, 1977. Taken from the

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

mirroring. Without some sort of [illegible] you can only copy. But I am a woman, you [illegible] there was no place for that in the art [illegible] We had to think of something else.

[illegible] embraced the culture of resistance and [illegible] both from outside and from within the [illegible] system. What do you have to say about the [illegible] efficacies of critique and the [illegible] of complicity?

[illegible] the art world because there are only tiny ice [illegible] might otherwise stand in the United [illegible] difference it has made to my visibility, [illegible] The entire system of publicity has [illegible] with the cash nexus. This is really central [illegible] dealing with here. Who subsumes [illegible] we assumed that working on the [illegible] suspect. But that was when there [illegible] outside', a so-called alternative system, [illegible], and so on. Then by the late '70s [illegible] there is no outside. Which I felt was [illegible] an outside means. If we are talking [illegible] institutions, of course there is [illegible] institution. No one is saying there is [illegible] society as a whole. It's a difficult one [illegible] thinking about actual strategies.

[illegible] what of the culture of celebrity?

[illegible] anyone could do to stop that [illegible] one model of culture now - the [illegible] of the media. How artists, the poor [illegible] celebrities have handled this [illegible] issue, then through appropriation [illegible] subversion, and finally, it seems, [illegible]. But do we really believe that

[illegible] artists are perhaps foremost [illegible], the questions must really be: [illegible] to consumption?

[illegible] it as a sign of the current *fin-de-* [illegible] young artists, hardly have the [illegible] between the shopping mall and [illegible] factory of sort, but each institution [illegible] conditions. I don't consider a [illegible] to be particularly effective, that [illegible] a sense of powerlessness. But I [illegible] was the very description of life in [illegible] growing up - consumerist, quietistic, [illegible] politically disengaged. And yet [illegible] movements of the 1960s were [illegible] and I believe they are still waiting to [illegible]. History continues to evade and [illegible] its end.

[illegible]tha Rosler's work travels to Le [illegible]nnie, Lyons, February-April, 1999; [illegible]enna, May-August, 1999; MACBA, [illegible]uary 9 2000, and The New Museum, [illegible] 2000. A comprehensive study [illegible]s in the life world produced in [illegible] exhibition is available through MIT

[illegible] Martha Rosler wish to thank [illegible] for assistance with the digital

[illegible]rport Series, photographic, textual and [illegible] 1994. An on-going exploration of the [illegible] associated spaces, these being the [illegible] postmodern life - with its surveillance, [illegible]nal bureaucratic control laced with the [illegible]

Untitled (Playboy), collage on paper, 1991.

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

the publication and, presumably, the barcode reader wouldn't have recognized the product, as the title shouldn't have been available there. There would be a momentary breakdown of the mechanics of buying and selling.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dennis Oppenheim

VIOLATIONS, 1971–1972

Evidence of 153 misdemeanors in violation of Section 484 of the California Penal Code (Petty Theft).
Room installation with hubcaps and video monitor
Video transferred to DVD (0:30 loop, b/w, audio); installation dimensions variable
Left: Sonnabend Gallery installation, 1972

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Were there any legal repercussions in creating this work?

No.

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

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

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

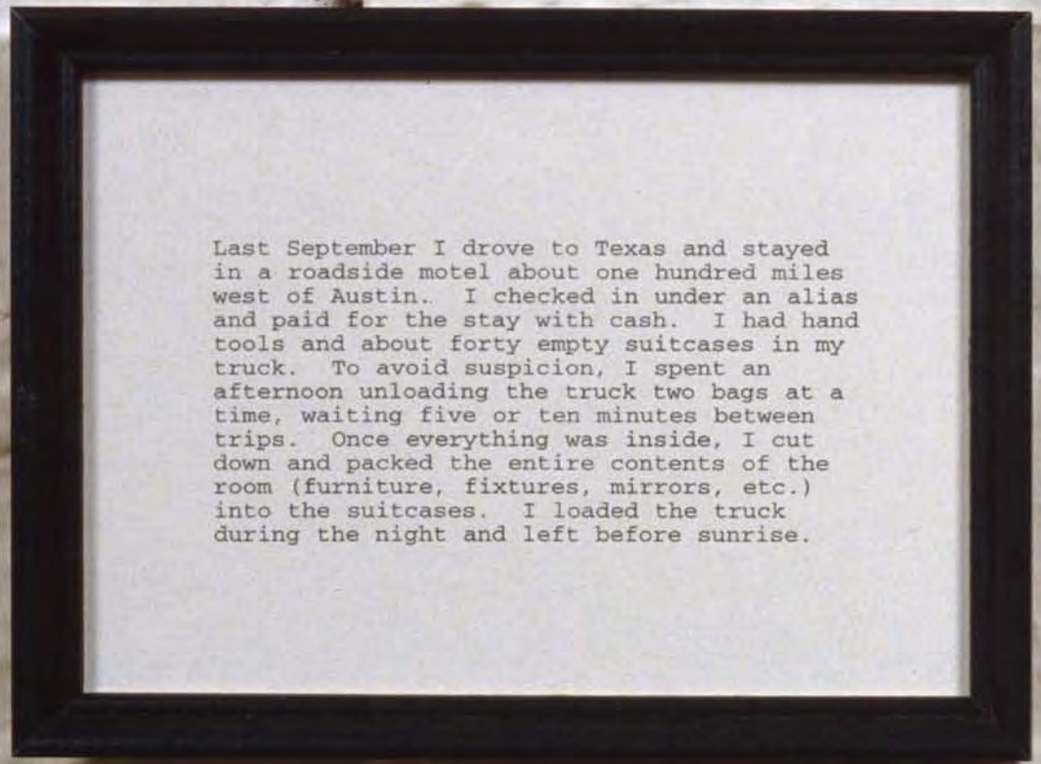
During this early period of conceptual art the word activation was used a lot, particular in regard to Land Art and particularly in treatments of horizontal space versus vertical space. Often this word implied spreading, or covering. In the case of this work, the word contaminate was simply another word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

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

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

Joel Ross

Room 28, 1997



Mixed media in suitcases, typewritten text on paper, and color photo in wood frames
Piled suitcases: 58 x 60 x 79 in; frames: each 5x7 in

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

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

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

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

Why did you include the photograph in the installation?

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

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

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

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

Well, I have enormous respect for Matta-Clark and I have certainly also tried with many of my projects to engage several different audiences simultaneously. Sometimes, as with *Room 28,* it's difficult to tell what is driving what. I've spent a lot of time thinking about the characters, the artist, the motel owner, the clerk working the motel desk that night, the housekeeper, the sheriff and all the people that go look at art on purpose. What's more important: the highway, the love story, the felony or the gallery? Regardless, most viewers assume an actual crime was committed and the ethical/moral wrangling that comes with this transgression hovers above all the players in this drama. Concerning other precedents and considerations, I would say this: I spent a lot of time studying criminal psychology and I have a great fondness for marginal social characters.

Aside from Matta-Clark, a few other artists I can't seem to get away from even when I want to: Robert Smithson, Ed Ruscha, Stephen Shore, Richard Prince and Sophie Calle.

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

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

Jon Routson

Bootlegs, 1999–2004

Bootleg (8 Mile), 1999–2004; digital video transferred to DVD

Bootleg (Eurotrip), 1999–2004; digital video transferred to DVD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 The Family Entertainment and Copyright Act of 2005

Savage

Stolen White Goods, 2005

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

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

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

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

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

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

Could you talk further about your interest in exchange and reversal? Are these motivated by any particular philosophical or economic theories?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 Gray, op. cit.







whitworths
COCONUT


POLO

SAXA

Simlee

PHILADELPHIA
PHILADELPHIA

Britannia
LARD

Andrex


Dove

Cif

PHILIPS

Sultanas
Sultanas

Plain

RAGU


Heinz
Chicken
Soup


HELLMANN'S
REAL
MAYONNAISE

Bicarbonate of Soda

Johnson's
baby
powder

TASTE
LYLE
ICING SUGAR


Pampers

Kleenex

Cuticura
Foam

CROWN
Quick
gloss

Cil lets

NIVEA


Colgate

15 STICKS
WOODMAN
FIRELIGHTERS

NEW
Daz


MILK OF MAGNESIA

Paracetamol

Rhys Southan

Sean Connery Golf Project, 2002

Digital video (17:00, color, audio)

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

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

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

We really wanted to see the movie get made with our changes but we got too impatient,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ulay

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

Action in 14 predetermined sequences
16mm film (30:00, b/w, audio)

In 1976 the artist Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen) entered the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin. He proceeded to the painting, *Der Arme Poet* (*The Poor Poet*) by Carl Spitzweg (1836). He briefly stands before this small painting, then clips the wires from which it hangs, he clasps it under his arm and proceeds to the exit, his pace increasing until he is running full speed as he leaves the building. Outside he narrowly evades the pursuing security guards to reach his car parked nearby. He drives through the city to an apartment building at Muskauerstrasse, there he enters the home of a Turkish immigrant family and hangs *Der Arme Poet* above their mantelpiece. He returns to the street outside and calls the Neue Nationalgalerie Director and invites him to come and view the painting at the Muskauerstrasse apartment.

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

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

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

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

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

Why the immigrant Turkish family, etc?

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

So I concluded that stealing the famous painting from the New National Gallery and dislocating it (not destroying it) into the living quarters of a Turkish foreign worker family might cause the

effect I hoped for. As we know today, this action had an effect much like a socio-cultural bomb, so to speak.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Your act represents a specific socio-political action. In making the work, what ways did you consider it within a discourse of art production and commerce (for instance,

appropriation within art, the theft of paintings and artifacts by Nazis, museums holding works with questionable provenance, etc.)?

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

You see, at the time such thoughts like commerce, appropriation within art, theft by Nazis, or questionable works of art in museum collections were not part of what I was implementing. Of course I was aware of such matters but my very purpose was to set something in motion then and for the times to come. The particular issues the work could trigger, and perhaps still can, are of a great variety, such as the connections you make in this interview.

As much as I can say today, the documentary film, which has been shown widely, is much liked and for the most part makes the viewers laugh.

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

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

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

Timm Ulrichs

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

Action with photographic and text documentation

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

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

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



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

side 1: **Art-Theft as a Total Art-Demonstration**

timm ulrichs stole

on 11 AUGUST 1971 at 14:30

in HANNOVER

from the private collection / gallery / exhibition venue / museum

GALERIE BRUSBERG

the work of the artist GERHARD ALTENBOURG

entitled »GIRL WITH STAR«, 1949

(technique: hand drawing, format: 19.0 x 18.5, value: 1000.— dm).

the stolen work of art shall be exhibited for 3 days in timm ulrichs' total art-room gallery, 3 hannover 1, 12 friesen street, and then returned to the owner.

the entire action — the theft, the public presentation and its consequences — is documented with photos and texts.

promotion center for total art, timm ulrichs, 3 hannover 1, postbox 6043

side 2: TOTAL ART aims for global 'world-art'; this, however, is based on the knowledge of and reflection on the contemporary 'art-world'. In particular IDEA-ART therefore examines the conditions of art itself, the entire (artificial) 'art' system, its premises, its identity, its (social) effects, in fact everything that deals with and in art. Indeed, this SYSTEM and THEORY ART analyses also the art PRACTICE of all PRACTICE-ART, but even more the ART-PRODUCT 'ART' itself, the THEORY OF ART-THEORY, and the old question: 'What is (was/will be) art — still, even now, already, already again?' Art-work, thus understood, begins with etymology and definitions of the 'ART'-TERM (every art-definition is already art!); it studies the rules of the game, of the writing of art history, of its science and critique; the understanding art-producers have of themselves; art education and support; art policy, tactics and strategy; art as product and investment; the art market activity at galleries and in auctions, price structures and price manipulations, market values and art market reports, purchases by collectors and museums; advertising for and through art; copyright, licensing-art and plagiarism-art; securing, conservation, consumption, wear and tear and destruction of art; art-forgery and art-theft, the research findings of this ART-RESEARCH itself are again contributions to a conceptual ART(OF)ART.

The 'ART-THEFT as total art-demonstration' (advertised in 'Belser Art-Quartal' No.4 / 1969 as an event in the room-gallery for December 1969) is not an act of confrontation over image-worship by anti-artistic iconoclasts; the themes are not iconoclasm and image burning (this is realised in my work 'URN with ashes of burned art works', 1969/70). Rather, a demonstration of NON-ART-ART is intended, which instead of static art-works, which block the world, wants attitudes, gestures, and manipulations, which point beyond the thing 'art' and can perhaps change the (art)world, for example in the manner of the (precursor of conceptual art) HEROSTRATOS, who in 356 BC set the Temple of Artemis in Ephesos on fire, not in fact, to destroy ('degenerate') art, but to immortalize his name through herostratic-pyromanic action. Likewise this art theft, the first based on 'purely artistic considerations', a pure ACT OF CONVICTION; the 'artistic motive' is not the theft of art, but the theft of art as art.

Thus I fall, and art-activity and art-committing fall, out of the usual frame-work of 'art' — but art has always been a capricious act. Here the dealings with art merely become radicalized for me and become an unfamiliar, adventurous experience, to outwit the security system, which protects art, and to make it visible as a latent, autonomous art-system. (Since everything that is present in art spaces has to be art, guards and alarm systems also form an — even if — 'APOCRYPHAL EXHIBITION.') This incidence/idea does not demonstrate spiritual, 'disinterested pleasure' in art (Kant), but direct, namely material appropriation of art and 'enrichment' through art. I seize and grasp — in a pointed, but exemplary manner — art in a palpably 'laying hands' on it (or 'helping myself to it') way: 'personal' ownership of art as a premise/condition for pleasure in art, this (often neurotic) basis of all art collecting, has always already been exemplary for a society, for which everything became a commodity, and therefore also each artistic statement (and even this art theft, which can be taken over and exploited journalistically and commercially).

(I am, incidentally, not at all interested in the appropriation of art works, I do not even collect and buy my own art products, even though I value them especially. I prefer the 'imaginary museum' (André Malraux) to the accumulation of material, this almost immaterial HEAD-ART-GALLERY and library, this handy store and safe of ideas.) My action (probably) has more of the characteristics of an indicator than of the object, which now verifies/documents/proves it, which is only an artistic device for a further purpose: the art object becomes paradoxically increasingly public by my abstracting it (from the public) and making it vanish. During the exhibition in the room gallery (as 'stolen artwork') its artistic value remains untouched, its commercial (market) value on the other hand is removed. (It is unlikely to find buyers). Thus, real art shows itself here for the first time having lost its commodity-character, as de-priviledged art without 'art'. Without material loss of art works, through the art theft I AS AN ARTIST and the general art-sector gain an artistic experience.

–Timm Ulrichs

Allison Wiese

Untitled, 2002–ongoing

Handmade wooden doorstops; Installation diameter approx 45cm

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What precedents are relevant to this work?

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

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

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

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

BIOGRAPHIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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