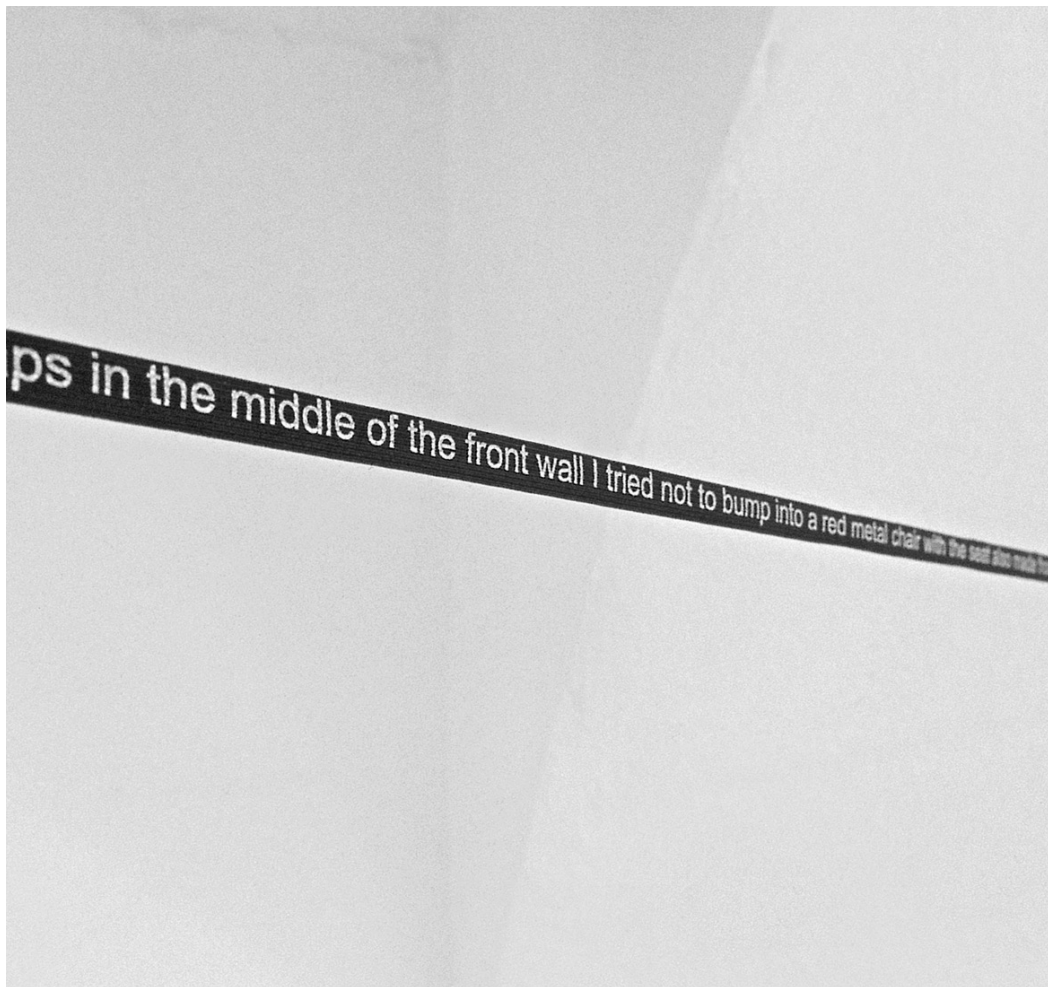


VERY CONCRETE OPTIONS



Jan Mancuska, *While I walked in my studio in ISCP, 323 W 39th Street #811, New York, 2003*
Textile rubberband, silkscreen, dimensions variable



BRUSSELS, 22 AUG - On September the 21st, the gallery starts the new season with a group show entitled *Wall Pieces* including 3 works from 3 different artists: Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, David Lamelas and Jan Mancuska. Mancuska (1972), who shows for the first time in Brussels, is a Czech artist who lives in Prague. He participated a.o. in *Manifesta 4* (Frankfurt 2002) and in the current Venice Biennial (Czech Pavilion). Vít Havránek, project leader of the initiative tranzit (Czech Republic), wrote the following text on his work.

The first thing that occurred to me in connection with this text on Jan Mancuska's work was to write an e-mail to Judith Schwartzbart, whom I have met once in my life, over a pleasant dinner about two months ago. I'd start as follows: "I have an image of you in my mind—I remember you, even though I don't know exactly what you look like. I would like to ..." and wait to see how she would react.

The reason for this is that Jan's recent works have been so strongly personal. Not in the sense of some sort of confession, but in the way he interacts with the public—he addresses his public as individuals, as discrete entities. It is interesting that we would find it hard to associate his work with any adjective other than "individual." They are not engaged—political, feminist, anti-colonialist or documentary—in any immediate way; nor are they related to any specific social-scientific issue. They refer to the grounding of the individual in the universal sense. They do not analyse what contexts this individual is anchored in, but rather presuppose some stratum anchored in the everyday life of a particular person—an individual, who is universal.

What goes on, how we make our living and how we ourselves live are presented in Jan's works in terms of possibilities. In the context of Czech culture, it would be possible to point to two different perspectives on whether individuals live or "are lived." Kundera, in his discussions of the art of the novel, speaks of the "monster of history," of Kafka, of Broch, Hašek and the state in which individuals in the twentieth century have lost the capability to determine their own destiny and have become victims of that "monster of history" which creates unsurpassable limits to their possibilities. In contrast, Czech philosopher Jan Patočka formulated a vision of the lives of individuals as projects in which they form themselves by recognising and reacting to the challenges life poses. The recognition and fulfilment of such challenges represents

authentic life and, at the same time, the fulfilment of a vision of the ego itself.

Numerous film and literary narratives are fascinated by the moment of possibility—what might happen if at some point I reacted otherwise than in the past, and, ostensibly, life might have taken a different course. Mathematics and physics would have the moment of potentiality cast into a fractal chaos; the theory of the butterfly effect illustrates how the fluttering of a butterfly's wings in Japan can cause coastal storms in the Caribbean. In the case at hand, we are not interested in the parameters of potentiality, because they are impersonal. "Only if I am not constantly and exclusively in action, but am rather left to some sort of possibility and potentiality; only as long as my experiences and intentions are, each and every time, a matter of living itself and understanding—and thus involve, in this sense, thinking—only then can the form of life become a life-form in its own fractalness and eternity, in which it is never possible to isolate anything like bare life," says Agamben in *Life-form*. In this text, Agamben formulates life—life-form in his words—as a project in which every individual act, action and decision are perceived as potentiality—something non-committal. Of course there are innumerable rules, deep-rooted codes, traditions and genetic predeterminations at play here, but Agamben's view is liberating precisely in that it makes it possible to see them as possibilities—noncommittally.

Jan's works show that potentiality is made real in concreteness. He works with stories that have really happened. They evolve narratively and poetically along the coordinates of individual lives. Only concrete events have their possibilities represented along the coordinates of an individual life. Human perception and memory are selective, and what is characteristic of such impressions and memories is the very fact that people often notice things that are beside, behind, or before the "events" that are actually at issue—those that someone is inquiring about, or are under discussion. It would seem that it is film which is able to present lived possibilities most naturally, due to the attractiveness of visual narration and the telling of a story, even though it is a temporal—and thus linear—medium. It is interesting that Jan's works, which might be described formally as installations of texts in concrete three-dimensional spaces, often touch upon film—not only with regard to method, but immediately, in their narrative content. "To the Cinema" and "First Minute of the Rest of a Movie" take place in a screening room. The question is to what extent his textual installations might be perceived as or might even serve as film scripts.

43

(advertentie)

Exhibition 22/9-29/10
Opening 21/9
18-21 h

WALL PIECES

**DOMINIQUE
GONZALEZ-
FOERSTER**

DAVID LAMELAS

JAN MANCUSKA

Jan Mot
Rue Antoine Dansaertstraat 190
B-1000 Brussels



LAZY CLAIRVOYANTS AND FUTURE AUDIENCES

Joachim Koester in conversation with Anders Kreuger

The conversation took place in Copenhagen on 19 March 2005. The recording was transcribed by Raluca Voinea and edited by Anders Kreuger and Joachim Koester.

Anders Kreuger Among the topics we have discussed in the course of our collaboration, which started a couple of years ago, is 'the future'. We have talked about the importance of the future in photography, which is part of your practice, part of what you do. Could you elaborate on the idea of the future in relation to your work in general and in relation to your involvement with photographic images in particular?

Joachim Koester All images, but particularly photographic images, have a time dimension. Photographs tend to become more interesting as time passes. Everything around us is designed to appear in a certain way. This 'index' of things is almost invisible, since we don't notice it. But as time passes after a photograph is taken we are suddenly able to see how all these shapes really look, how cars and houses and everything else have been created.

AK An image, say a photograph, film image or video, is conditioned by so many

of these things around us that we are unable to see now...

JK ...and as time passes these things become apparent. They become very visible signs of how reality was once constructed.

AK And therefore people in the future will want to look back at images that to them represent a past?

JK Yes. Something that has interested me a lot is how ideas and narratives take on a physical form, how stories and history materialise. I believe most human activities leave traces in space. In one way or another, spaces are transformed by human action, and in my work I am, if you like, ghost-hunting spaces. I look for these storylines, which may not always be very apparent but are still present.

AK Is this your take on visibility, that it is to do with traces of activity? Finding the traces of things that could be narrated, and showing these traces?

JK I think this has been my approach to photography from the beginning. I started photographing in Christiania, a former military base in Copenhagen that in 1971 was transformed into a 'free state', a space that allowed its inhabitants a maximum of per-

sonal freedom. What interested me was how this site, which was obviously originally about control, could be transformed to accommodate new and different ideas. Would it be possible to see this? Had this intention been visualised as something that could be documented?

AK The tension in all your work is, I suppose, a tension between your interest in and research into a specific subject and what can be seen, read and understood from the images you present of that subject?

JK I approach different images in different ways. There are works where the subject-matter is very much in the images. *Pit Music* is one example. You can watch the whole video sequence, with the string quartet playing in the gallery, without knowing anything about my underlying intentions. But in all my works there is a tension between the apparent narrative, which the viewer immediately sees, and what remains invisible or illegible.

AK Do we need to know what you know, or do you allow the images to tell the stories they tell themselves?

JK It is all to do with settings. The settings I bring into my work make my images dif-



ferent from other people's images. I approach my subject matter with a certain knowledge of what has happened in a specific place and then I take photographs there. Of course I am not sure how they will turn out and whether it will be possible to read the narrative or not. My intention is not to just take a photograph, nor to illustrate a story. I want the photograph, my documentation, to exist in a field of tension between what is depicted and the narrative content.

AK So you count on the viewer to share your interest in the subject-matter?

JK Of course I hope the viewer's interest will mirror my own, at least to some extent. What is so great about contemporary art is that it allows you to try out different settings in your relation with your audience. Who is the audience, how does this audience look, what are its interests? Perhaps that is the obscure thing about my work, that I'm looking for an audience. An audience that I don't necessarily have.

AK But it would be too easy to say that your subject matter is obscure, don't you think? Sometimes it is not, sometimes you choose a subject matter that many people have already been interested in, written about and worked with, such as the Swedish explorer Salomon August Andrée for example, or Christiania in Copenhagen, or Immanuel Kant, or Dracula. These themes are by no means obscure in the sense that they are unknown. There is a certain obscurity involved, however, perhaps partly because of what we talked about: the relation between the image and a narrative.

JK Perhaps this is best illustrated by the work I did from Resolute, in the far north of Canada. Only 200 people live there, but it has witnessed significant events. The explorer Franklin disappeared in this area, the architect Ralph Erskine planned a model Arctic town, there are traces of the cold war and the horrible relocation of Inuits to Resolute in the 50s which continues to sour relations between Canada and the new autonomous state of Nunavut. These things are hardly something discussed in the news pages of the mainstream media. But it is curious that Resolute, the ship that named the place, was made into a desk that the British then gave to the Americans for their help with trying to locate Franklin. That desk is now in the White House, in the Oval Office. It is called the Resolute Desk. There is a famous photograph of President Kennedy sitting at the desk and his children playing under it. That is the kind of obscurity that interests me: things that take place at the fringe but thrive secretly at the heart of mainstream culture.

AK You are interested in visualisations of history and one of the most commonly employed ways of achieving them is to use documentation. But you still don't let go of your fascination with the potential for the future, which can also be sensed in this documentation. There is kind of a double take on time in your work...

JK When you document something what is at stake is the past, the present and the future. A series of photographs can be viewed as a small archive. A scene for potential narratives to unfold. In the Andrée project that I am preparing for Venice, I'm trying to achieve precisely this: maintaining some of the integrity of a material from the past and releasing that potential for us today, i.e. for the future.

AK Just to clarify: what exactly is this project, *Message from Andrée*?

JK I think this work is probably where I'm most explicitly trying to tackle the problem of postponing a message for the future. The title is somewhat opportune, a play or reference to all the unanswered questions that seems resonate with the history of the Andrée expedition.

AK You have made a film based on the photographs by Nils Strindberg, one of the explorers who tried to reach the North Pole by balloon in the late summer of 1897...

JK ...and his films were lying in the Arctic ice for 33 years after he and his two colleagues perished. Most historians who have worked with this material have looked straight through the layer of visual noise, of stains and blots, that covered the photographs. They have looked into the narrative in the pictures. But I stayed mostly on this surface layer, trying to squeeze something out of it that would be both part of the narrative and a cover-up of the narrative. We could say that the narrative is embedded or enmeshed in all those blots...

AK...which are the result of what happened to the films as they were lying frozen for so long.

JK So I'm trying to release a certain potential in terms of a narrative, of the documentary. I'm very deliberately going to the edge of what a document and a documentary implies.

AK Are you concerned with the 'operational' question whether people will get the message, your message? This work is called *Message from Andrée*, but will people get it? Will they see this as more, or less, or nothing but a sequence of flickering grey dots on a screen?

JK What I do is to create a setting for working in the borderline between language and non-language, between narrative and non-narrative. I want to work on the edge of what could be called the unknown, because

if language is what we can grasp with language, the unknown is at the boundary of language. It is what separates this time and some other time, it is between now and what happens in Venice, in the future. That is the unknown. Will people get it? Well, as I said I'm looking for an audience...

AK Your work, I think, illustrates the idea of art not as communication, not as conveying a message, but as conversation. The real message is what can be said about the images or the film. I don't see this as a deficiency in your work. I don't see your work as images that can't stand on their own, that no one will get it if they just look at the pictures or the films. I understand that you go into each project as if it were a conversational venture. You converse with the visual material, with the underlying narratives, and the work becomes one statement in an ongoing conversation.

JK I think that is very precise. I find myself very much engaged, even when I'm 'only' photographing, in a conversation with the place and the narrative behind it. I think visual art has never stood alone. It has always used words. Especially within the genre of allegory, where words have always been used to ensure that the viewers are properly directed, that the audience stays on message.

AK So you would also argue that it is not a deficiency if your work needs explaining?

JK I don't know if my work needs explaining in the strict sense, but it needs a context. All artworks do. I think the only artworks that don't need explaining are those that rely on a parameter that is very well known. If, for instance, you went to an exhibition in 1950 you would be quite sure about the premises for most of the works. They would be, basically: abstract/non-abstract, composed/spontaneous. And the categories: painting, sculpture, drawing. But if you go to a show now you will have to adjust to the work each time. You need to find the manual for the show, and sometimes it does need a manual and I don't see anything bad about that. I think it is refreshing that it is still possible in today's world, which in many ways is getting smaller, to make work that distinguishes itself on so many levels.

AK Your strategy is to produce work that would be intriguing to your prospective audience, to the people you want to have a conversation with. That is perhaps how your message could be summarised: you are interested in intriguing the people with whom you want this conversation.

JK I think the questions and the answers are all in the work. That, anyway, is what I hope. I don't think the texts that I write are explanatory, really. Usually my work is

ON QUOTE

The Etablissement d'en face Projects, an artists' initiative that started in Brussels in 1991, organises two shows by Belgian artist Richard Venlet (°1964). The first part, entitled *CIT.CIT.1 IMAGE BANK* takes place at Jan Mot (till 17/9); the second part *CIT.CIT.2 PLATFORM & TREASURY*, at the Etablissement itself (2/9-8/10).

By
Moritz Küng

BRUSSELS, 20 AUG. – With the double-exhibition at the Jan Mot Gallery and at Etablissement d'en face Projects, Richard Venlet not only refers to the work of other artists through this particular presentation, but also to his own oeuvre. Since the beginning of his practice in the 1990's, the establishing of partition elements, the construction of open and closed volumes, white, grey or black painted surfaces, the instigation of borders and the filling in of spaces have all been aspects of his repertoire. These site-specific interventions with their Spartan minimalist visual language are often subtle in dialogue with the existing environment. The projection surface – the place of potential presence but not necessarily visual – fulfils in this as the central role. While Venlet's earlier works had a rather introverted and hermetical character, the more recent works are more open, playful and activated.

The first intensified works in his overview catalogue '00*' which was presented in conjunction with his participation in the Biennial in Sao Paulo in 2002, lays the basis for the recent and increasingly complex becoming interpretations. In this he still defines his work as a projection surface and as a potential place from the work itself. For example, with the context of the exhibition series *Box* (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1995) Venlet realised an exhibition module in the area of an empty shop located nearby. This was a space within a space with one large opening in the front glass façade. On the one hand it was a horizontal projection surface in the form of a stage, while on the other hand it was an accessible volume that could also be activated and filled in by third parties. It is with this that he lays down the basis for many of his later works: where the facilitative can be used.

Aside from the projection surface and the facilitative, a third theme emerged in the 1990's as well: the archiving. It was in 2002 with his exhibition at the Biennial of Sao

Paulo that Richard Venlet granted the archive of his own frame of references a more pronounced status. A mobile room, bedecked on the outside with mirrored walls, and with the proportions of Venlet's own small workspace, functioned as an exhibition platform. Painted on the inside in a neutral white colour with a grey-carpeted floor, he placed a set of 35 cardboard boxes with an unlimited number of photocopies. Located above this and to the side of short contemplative texts by four authors (Anonymous H.D., Wouter Davidts, Moritz Küng, Hans Theys) referential imagery was shown (a door in the house of Wittgenstein, an annex chamber from the tomb of Tutankhamen, a 1:1 scale model of Mies van der Rohe), details of his own work as well as works of other artists (cardboard model from *étant données* by Marcel Duchamp, *Flash* by Joëlle Tuerlinckx, a painting by René Daniels etc.). It was a relative nonchalant and unpretentious use of the space, whose artistic concept was intended to be an 'area for on-going presentations'. In the following exhibition *Paramount Basics* (MuHKA, Antwerp, 2002) a dozen curators were invited to present a series of weekly exhibitions within this volume, from which the filing in was no longer in the hands of Richard Venlet. Today this room is a part of the *Curating the Library* project (deSingel, Antwerp, since 2003) and serves as the location for an ever-growing library.

The so-called angles of the projection surface, the platform and archive found in the project *CIT.CIT.1* and *CIT.CIT.2* have a parallel existence. The two installations define an abstract index of information. This is comparable to the short story by the British author J.G. Ballard (*Index*, 1977), that states an existence based strictly upon an alphabetical term register comprised with the most divergent historical personalities and events while allowing the reader to make a reconstruction of an alleged world plot where the protagonist stands in the centre.

Also the *Lexikon der Kunst 1992* by artist Heimo Zobernig serves as a comparison. In that Lexikon the personal biography of the artist is linked to persons, locations and places or beliefs that are inter-connected. *CIT.CIT.1* and *CIT.CIT.2* thereby bring references to each other and become the location of the quote self: the place as quote, respectively the quote as a place.

CIT.CIT.1 IMAGE BANK at the Jan Mot Gallery takes the form of a monumental

décor, laid in grey carpet, where a small room the size of a passport photo booth is integrated. During the entire period of the exhibition, a different film will be presented each week on a monitor inside the booth. *CIT.CIT.2* in Etablissement d'en face Projects consists of a raised floor (PLATFORM) on the ground floor that shall serve as a stage and display for diverse readings, film projections and presentations by artists, architects and theorists such as: Tacita Dean, Marguerite Duras, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Juliaan Lampens, Bart Verschaffel, Rudy Vrooman... The stage is comprised of a trap door that provides access to a lower laid room (TREASURY). In this space, covered in grey carpet as well, a selection of paintings, photographs, prints and books by, among others, Richard Artschwager, Marcel Broodthaers, René Daniels, Jef Geys, Ann-Veronica Janssens and Piranesi will be displayed.

With these two exhibitions Richard Venlet constructs a complex and associative frame of reference that refers to both the part of the whole, the whole part and the divisible whole and where the exhibition space, the works and the viewer are an integral component.

* Richard Venlet, '00'; publisher: MuHKA, Antwerp, 2002; ISBN: 90-72828-27-5
Translation: Alice Evermore
For lecture and film program see:
www.etalissementdenfaceprojects.org



The opening of Richard Venlet's show took place on Saturday 20th of August.

In brief

The gallery participates for the first time in the Frieze Art Fair which will take place in London from 21 till 24 of October. The work of three artists will be shown: **Manon de Boer**, **Mario Garcia Torres** and **Ian Wilson**. Polly Staple, the curator of the Frieze projects, invited Ian Wilson for a discussion during the fair. See agenda.

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Manon de Boer's new film work, Resonating

surfaces, will have it's première during the Frieze Art Fair. The first Belgian public presentation will be at Flagey in Brussels on the 3rd of November. It will subsequently be on view at the gallery (4/11 – 17/12). For the production of her new film, De Boer received support from the VAF (Vlaams audio-visueel fonds) and Le Fresnoy (Tourcoing, F).

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Raimundas Malasauskas, who curated the show of Jonathan Monk at the gallery in 2003 and who contributes regularly to the

gallery's newspaper, is one of the three curators of the Baltic Triennial which starts in Vilnius on September 23. **Mario Garcia Torres**, **Joachim Koester**, **Jonathan Monk** and **Deimantas Narkevicius** take part in the show. See agenda.

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The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam acquired **Tino Sehgal's** earliest work, *Instead of allowing some thing to rise up to your face, dancing bruce and dan and other things* (2000). The work was last shown at the ICA in London, beginning of this year.

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