





• Tris Vonna-Michell, *Auto-Tracking-Auto-Tracking*, 2009 Installation view Kunsthalle Zürich, 2009 © Stefan Altenburger Photography

point and including all the images he had taken of his family, friends, and journeys. He also slated for destruction much of the memorabilia he had collected on journeys taken over the course of his life, but not before he photographed each one of them first, using up a full roll of 35mm film for each object. The shredded and disappeared remnants were never exhibited, and instead became what the artist calls a “translation and material compression act” and catalyst for the production of narrative. Thus for all the seeming concern with materiality that the project implied (even a negative materiality, if one can call it that), the ephemeral story resulting from the act of transubstantiation from object to process to narrative is more the artwork than the evidence of an entire (photographed) history subject to being cut and spliced, or the existence of so many apparently “documentary” photographs of his memorabilia, none of which will ever manage to *be* the now-destroyed originals.

In the years since, the artist has expanded and shifted that practice, often composing an image that he then rephotographs, showing that he is holding the image in his hands. Or, he will place, say, a tiny scrap of paper, a used napkin, or a mini plastic magician’s wand on top of one of his photographed im-

ages, creating a *mise-en-abime* of memory and meaning. He might then take a photograph of the photograph with the stuff on it and then rephotograph it again, this time with him holding it in his hand and revealing an indiscernible landscape in the background. This layering of place and time is another version of the repetition and recycling that he uses for the objects in his installations. But it also more profoundly functions as a mirror to his storytelling, in which collage, pasting, and the repeated return of disparate elements is central to his way of creating new histories.

“A narrative of form” is how the artist describes what he makes. Indeed, maybe that is the only way to speak about what he does. For precisely that conjunction of words tell you that it is a *narrative* that he constructs, above all, and it *is* concerned with form (even if we typically think of form/the formal being connected to material things), but the result often thwarts becoming a definable object. Does that make sense? This is getting contradictory, I know. His projects are, at times, undeniably material. Indeed, you have already been told, they are often scattered with stuff: every narrative is accompanied by images and objects, scraps of detritus or snapshots of memorabilia that somehow stand in for the artist’s own ex-

perience in a particular place and time. Not props or relics (he hates it when they get referred to that way), they sit parallel to his aural collages of fact and fiction, as if serving as reminders for the artist and ambiguous evidence to his listeners for the meaning or origins of a story. These images and the arrangement of objects in a space are even, I insist, carefully constructed, precise, and rigorous in their formalism. Yet *no one* thing—not a toothpick, not a quail egg, not even an apparently composed photograph or slide image in a slide projector—stands alone. None is meant to represent any single project, subject, or narrative. And given that the installations the artist has made so far have never taken a fixed, permanent form but instead allow their constituent parts to be constantly recycled into other narratives, performances, and more temporary installations, Vonna-Michell’s art ends up disavowing whatever materiality it might seem to have. The only elements that have a fixed shape, *that last as they are*, you could say, are his performances. And they, precisely, don’t last at all.

Walter Benjamin is speaking of remembrance when he cites a phrase from a novel (as opposed to a storyteller’s tale) and, no sooner than citing it, comments about it: “Nothing is more dubious than this sen-

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Secret was no royalist, not a chocolate man.

tence". He then dissects the citation, revealing its utterly questionable claims. Dubiousness, it would seem for Benjamin, is at the core of the novel (not of the story), in part, because the story is grounded in experience. Yet it is hard to write about Vonna-Michell's work without relying on a vocabulary of doubt. One can hardly believe his tales convey facts and truth. Still, relayed in Vonna-Michell's soft-spoken but intensely persuasive way, they seem to become so. And this even as everything about the artist's spoken performances advances at such a pace so as to make total comprehension impossible, not to mention being filled with information as convoluted as the network of tunnels that he speaks about in *hanh/huhn* (2003-ongoing), one of his stories. But then, even if and especially when one becomes entangled in his tale, which is to say, begins to believe it, there comes a moment when one cannot escape the sheer tenuousness of it all, the seeming impossibility of the chain of coincidences and actual historical facts that drive his narratives forward. Suddenly, even the true and verifiable come into question. Were there really secret underground tunnels traversing East and West Berlin used as Nazi headquarters and bombed since to hide that fact? Do shredded Stasi files contain the answers? Could Reinhold Hahn,

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86

Art Fair  
15-18/10

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87

Art Fair  
22-25/10

**JAN MOT  
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Grand Palais  
Paris

Reinhold Hahn and Otto Hahn be connected? Were such apparently inconsequential objects as scraps of paper, an orange pen, many Ferrero Rocher chocolate wrappers and the plastic wrapper for quail eggs belonging to Vonna-Michell and attesting to his research actually stolen from the artist's first solo show in Brussels? Was Henri Chopin really the neighbour to the young future storyteller-artist? Did Vonna-Michell truly wait more than a year for a certain Krzysztof, living in Cromer, to transport the artist's gift of quail eggs stored in a Ferrero Rocher chocolate box to Chopin? And when Krzysztof didn't deliver on his promise, did the artist imagine he himself might, in fact, serendipitously encounter Chopin by simply walking around Paris with quail eggs in his hands?

This cultivation of dubiousness has a purpose. It exposes as much as it conceals. "Paradoxically, it is the misinterpretation of these pieces of information and the confusion that they generated that set it all off", the artist offers by way of explanation for much his practice. It is thus that Vonna-Michell combines fact and fiction, the carefully controlled and the merely coincidental, the concrete and the imagined, the contradictory and the plausible. Yet whatever the explicit subjects to which his voice turns (a

crumbling post-industrial Detroit, a forgotten 1980s film, a defunct music scene, secret German tunnels, three similarly named men, buildings ruined by aerial bombings, the artist's family's move to Southend), his actual subject is, perhaps always and inescapably, History. And the ways History—of necessity and by definition—tells and hides, constructs and, ultimately, lies.

For Proust, the recollection of memory and history was as easy as eating cake. For Vonna-Michell, memory and history might not exist at all as a solidly retrievable past, but can instead perhaps only be conjured up through speech, to then be overturned and reconstituted again, and then again, except slightly differently each time.

~

[This text is an excerpt of a longer essay which is part of a forthcoming monographic publication (éditions Jeu de Paume, 2009) to accompany Tris Vonna-Michell's first solo exhibition in France at the Jeu de Paume, Paris from October 20, 2009-17 January 2010 as part of the 2009-2011 Satellite programme, curated by Elena Filipovic. A performance by Tris Vonna-Michell will take place at the Jeu de Paume on October 22 at 6PM.]





BRUSSELS, AUG. 13 – We would like to announce that from now on, and until further notice, the above telephone number has been added to the ones already working in the gallery. It will be in use during normal gallery business hours. The phone number that Marcel Broodthaers used for all matters related to his *Musée d'Art Moderne* project had been in disuse for years. The number itself and its operation constitute a work by Mario Garcia Torres titled *Département de Distribution du Musée d'Art Moderne, Section Téléphonique*, 2009. What follows is two texts related to the piece, one by the artist and another by curator Hans Ulrich Obrist who was introduced to the piece a couple of months ago.

# Ever Marcel; Ever Mario: The Brussels Miracle

By  
**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

LONDON, AUG. 10 – In March 2009, at the invitation of Madeleine Santandrea, I visited Brussels to take part in the Passa Porta literary festival. It was here that I was fortunate enough to meet the legendary writer, philosopher, situationist, and author of *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Raoul Vaneigem. There we discussed the legacy of that radical artistic and political movement, of Vaneigem's continued commitment to an 'art of living' that transcends the historical recuperation of situationism as such, and to a civil disobedience that might foster 'communities where desire for life overwhelms the tyranny of money and power'.

While in the city, I also met another hero of mine, Marcel Broodthaers. Like Vaneigem, Broodthaers was a veteran of May 1968, but if – as Vaneigem states – the événements precipitated the unravelling of

the situationist project into 'self-parody', Broodthaers was shortly to turn parody itself into a virtue. As self-appointed director of his own *Musée d'Art moderne*, Broodthaers constructed an aesthetic of administration that identified the institutional mechanisms of art as the determining site of meaning, while his *Département des Aigles* made plain the truth of Vaneigem's suggestion that the 'museum suffers from being a closed space in which works waste away'.

Lucky, then, that the young Mexican artist, Mario Garcia Torres, whom I also met in Brussels, works to reanimate so much of the conceptualist legacy. Indeed, it was Garcia Torres that put me in touch with the Belgian provocateur at Galerie Jan Mot, in his solo show, *All That Color Is Making Me Blind*. Having enjoyed the eponymous centrepiece of this show, a ten-channel video installation, I was alerted to an invisible piece that occupied the gallery office, consisting simply of the invitation to dial Broodthaers's

number on the office telephone. This was a marvellous encounter with an artwork that – like a good deal of Garcia Torres's work – replays episodes in the history of conceptual art in terms of repetition and difference, in this case wittily inscribing itself within a lineage of 'telephone works' that extends from Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Telephone Pictures* of 1922, for which the artist telephoned his instructions for the production of three steel and enamel paintings to the foreman of a Berlin sign factory, to Walter De Maria's contribution to the 1969 show, *When Attitudes Become Form*, in Bern, entitled *Art by Telephone*. There, a simple notice, placed on the floor next to a telephone, read: 'If this telephone rings, you may answer it. Walter De Maria is on the line and would like to talk to you.' Now, here we are, in Brussels in 2009, where Marcel meets Mario, and though he won't answer, we'd all like to talk to Marcel.

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Belgacom SA  
Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 27  
1030 Brussels  
Belgium

February 23, 2009

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to you in regards to the following telephone number: +32 2 512 09 54. If this number is available I would like to have it re-activated for a period of time at Jan Mot, an art gallery located at Rue Antoine Dansaert 190, 1000, Brussels. The phone number is in itself a significant cultural legacy, which I will further explain in this letter.

Let me first introduce myself. My name is Mario Garcia Torres and I am an artist. I am interested in the way history and art function, and, in general terms, that is why I would like to re-activate this number: to put it back into circulation with the idea that it could trigger certain thoughts relative to art and museums.

See, you might not know but, that number was used by Marcel Broodthaers as the telephone for his Musée d'Art Moderne installation that started in 1968 out of his house in Brussels. It is the number printed in all official communication from a museum that ironically played the role of a caretaker for cultural objects. During the years that followed this project took on several reincarnations utilizing a variety of formats and locations.

When Broodthaers was alive the installation had taken on a life of its own, while after his demise it became a static group of objects. By re-activating this telephone number I want to make people imagine Broodthaers' museum as being alive in some way again. To try to think about the way artistic activities have a larger life span, the way they are documented and, eventually, collected.

Broodthaers wrote: "The definition of artistic activity occurs, first of all, in the field of distribution". The telephone number not only identified the museum along with several plaques, letterhead papers, etc, but was also the point of contact for all business related to Broodthaers' initiative. This number became an essential part of the project, operating as the medium of distribution for Broodthaers' activity to be seen as art.

I also thought you might like to know about a list of works made in relation to the telephone in recent art history. The use of a telephone in conceptually related art has been largely associated with instructional work and not necessarily with what a number implies.

It is said, for example, that Laszlo Moholy-Nagy was the first artist who used a telephone to produce a work of art. He would order porcelain enamel paintings from a factory by giving someone instructions over the phone. This was in 1922. The Telephone Pictures as they have come to be known are specific objects that were imagined, instructed, and then explained through the phone.

In the late 1960's Jan van der Marck, then director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, wrote a letter to the artists in his Art by Telephone show where he asked them to send instructions by telephone for works to be made in the museum on their behalf. Most artists in the show indeed spoke instructions for their works to be made via the telephone (to heighten the challenge of a wholly verbal exchange, drawings, blueprints or written descriptions were avoided). One work included in this exhibition is pertinent to recall here as not only was it 'ordered' by phone, it used the actual device to transmit the work's message. Titled Chicago Project, the artist Walter De Maria called the local phone company to order a phone line to be installed in the center of a room in the museum. He would be the only person who knew the number and for the duration of the show De Maria would call and talk to whoever picked up.

If we think of Marcel Broodthaers' Musée d'Art Moderne, not as a collection of objects but as a live institution, all calls related to the project where an extension of the piece. It is in that sense that the phone number +32 2 512 09 54 represents a complicated relationship to the original project. Maybe in the same way that, for example, adjacent and far away pieces of terrain are to specific land art projects.

As I understand, and correct me if I am wrong, telephone numbers are property of the company. But as long as someone keeps the number in use he or she has the right of ownership. It is in the acknowledgment of this simple legal structure that I would like to re-activate the above mentioned phone number, to make it properly work again.

I would really appreciate your comments.

Yours truly,

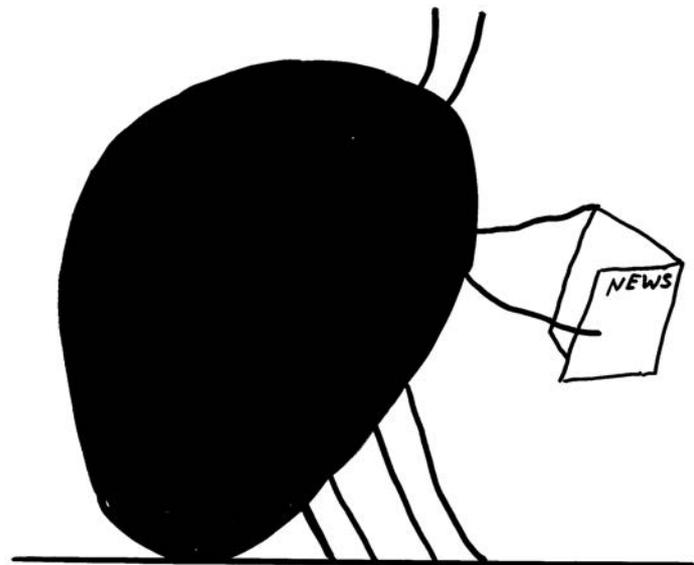
Mario Garcia Torres

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 together from these cinematic re-creations of Society and those who address the points, the glasshouse, for it was indeed a nice thing





• BRUSSELS, AUG. 18 – *Into the Unknown* is the title of the new film by Deimantas Narkevičius that will premiere at the British Film Institute in London on the 1st of October. The film is edited from footage of films produced by the DEFA in the former DDR, documenting the everyday life of East Berliners mostly in the 1970s and 1980s. Through the process of re-editing Narkevičius brings back a certain “existential weight” to those cinematic representations of archetypal socialist protagonists. *On view at the BFI until November 29th.*



• David Shrigley, *Untitled*, 2009

## In Brief

This season, the British artist **David Shrigley** will contribute an unpublished drawing to each edition of the newspaper. The first one appears in this issue (bottom, left).

In July **Sharon Lockhart** received honourable mention at the FID Film Festival in Marseille for her recent film *Lunch Break* (2008, 35mm, 83min.) The film, shot at a massive shipyard in Maine (USA), will be screened in Brussels at the Cinéma Arenberg on October 15th.

This autumn the gallery participates in two art fairs: Frieze and FIAC. On both occasions the gallery will share a booth with: Johann Koenig (Berlin) in London and both Koenig and Kamel Menour (Paris) in Paris. We will present new and old works by **Manon de Boer** (Frieze) and **Pierre Bismuth, Mario Garcia Torres, David Lamelas** and **Ian Wilson** (FIAC).

MACBA in Barcelona acquired the following two works: **Deimantas Narkevičius'** film *The Role of a Lifetime* (2003) and an early installation by **David Lamelas** entitled *Situacion de Tiempo* (1969). Both works were part of the exhibition *Time As Matter* that closed at the end of August. FRAC Lorraine bought the work *Time (Spoken)* (1982) of **Ian Wilson**.

During the second weekend of September the **Brussels Art Days** will take place: almost 30 galleries in Brussels will open their doors to the public on Saturday 12th, from 12h to 20h, and on Sunday 13th from 14h till 18h. On Saturday there will be a free shuttle service between the different locations.

There has been a mistake in the numbering of the activities as announced in the gallery's newspaper: the number 79 has been used for two different activities. Therefore, we skipped one number between 83 (Art Basel) and the upcoming exhibition of Tris Vonna-Michell, which is numbered 85. The gallery started in January 2002 to give a number to each activity (exhibitions, performances, participations in fairs etc.) that it organises.

# Agenda

## Sven Augustijnen

*A Story of the Image*, National Museum, Singapore, 13/8-4/10

## Pierre Bismuth

*Höhenrausch - Art on the Rooftops of Linz*, OK Center for Contemporary Art, Linz (AT), 29/5-31/10; *Jonathan Monk On Richard Prince*, ProjecteSD, Barcelona (ES), 25/6-15/9; *Mise à l'échelle*, Musée des arts contemporains, Hornu (BE), 19/7-11/10; *Faux Jumeaux by Rainier Lericolais*, SMAK, Ghent (BE), 4/9-25/9; *Art is only a feeling*, KOVOS, Eindhoven (NL), 5/9-27/9; *I am by Birth a Genovese*, Forde, Geneva (CH), 10/9-3/10; *Portugal Arte 09*, Lisbon, 19/9-31/10; *Pete and Repeat*, 176, London, 17/9-13/12

## Manon de Boer

*A Story of the Image*, National Museum Singapore, 13/8-4/10; *See This Sound*, Lentos Museum, Linz (AT), 28/8-10/1; Jan Mot, Frieze Art Fair, London, 15/10-18/10

## Rineke Dijkstra

*elles@centrepompidou*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 27/5-24/5/10; *Dutch Seen: New York Rediscovered*, Museum of the City of New York, New York, 10/6-1/9; *Seeing Songs*, Contemporary Art Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (US), 1/7-21/2; *The Portrait. Photography as a Stage*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 2/7-18/10; *Mise à l'échelle*, Musée des arts contemporains, Hornu (BE), 19/7-11/10; *ICA Collection: In the Making*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (US), 29/7-18/7/10; *Darkside II - Photographic Power and Photographed Violence, Disease and Death*, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Winterthur (CH), 5/9-15/11; *Tears of Eros*, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, from 20/10

## Mario Garcia Torres

*Asking Not Telling. Video Art: Replay*, ICA University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (US), 11/9-13/12; *Sculpture of the Space Age*, David Roberts Foundation, London, 2/10-19/12; *Pittoresk - Neue Perspektiven auf das Landschaftsbild*, Museum Marta, Herford (DE), 2/10-10/1; Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, from 14/11 (solo)

## Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster

*elles@centrepompidou*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 27/5-24/5/10; *Making Worlds*, The 53rd International Art Exhibition, Venice (IT), 7/6-22/11; *chronotopes & dioramas*, Dia at the Hispanic Society, New York, 23/9-18/4 (solo)

## Douglas Gordon

*Inspired*, The Mitchell Library, Glasgow, 4/4-20/9; *Blood, Sweat and Tears*, DOX, Prague, 4/6-27/9 (solo); *See This Sound*, Lentos Museum, Linz (AT), 28/8-10/1; *Douglas Gordon*, Eva Presenhuber Gallery, Zürich (CH), 29/8-31/10 (solo); *The World Is Yours*, Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek (DK) 4/9-10/10; *Douglas Gordon*, DVIR Gallery, Jaffa (IL), 8/9-24/10 (solo); *Entre-temps. L'artiste narrateur*, Espaco Cultural Oi Futuro, Rio de Janeiro, 22/9-1/11

## Joachim Koester

*Heaven*, The 2nd Athens Biennale, Athens, 15/6-4/10; *Mise à l'échelle*, Musée des arts contemporains, Hornu (BE), 19/7-11/10; *Joachim Koester, Poison Protocols and Other Histories*, Stills Centre for Photography, Edinburgh (UK), 6/8-25/10 (solo); *Dance with Camera*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (US), 11/9-21/3; *Morality*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (NL), 8/10-8/2; *Esthétique des pôles. Le testament des glaces*, Frac Lorraine, Metz (FR), 16/10-7/2

## David Lamelas

*The Quick and the Dead*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (US), 24/4-27/9; *The Death of the Audience*, Secession, Vienna, 3/7-6/9; *Time As Activity*, Netwerk, Aalst (BE), 12/9-7/11; Berlin 89/09 - *Kunst zwischen Spurensuche und Utopie (in 36 days)*, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, 18/9-31/1

## Sharon Lockhart

*Dance with Camera*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (US), 11/9-21/3; *Lunch Break/Exit*, *Timestage: The Cinema of Sharon Lockhart*, Harvard Film Archive, Harvard University, Cambridge (US), 18/9 (screening); *Screening Real: Conner Lockhart Warhol*, Kunsthau, Graz (AT), 25/9-10/11/10; *Anabasis. On Rituals of Homecoming*, Ludwik Grohman Villa, Lodz (PL), 5/9-4/10; *Lunch Break*, Cinema of Diversity, 6th Avant Garde Film Festival, Greek Film Archive, Athens, 5/10-12/10 (screening); *Lunch Break/Exit*, Ghent International Film Festival, Ghent (BE), 6/10-17/10 (screening); *Lunch Break/Exit*, Argos Ecran d'Art, Cinéma Arenberg, Brussels, 15/10 (screening); *Sharon Lockhart*, Blum & Poe Gallery, Los Angeles (US), from 7/11 (solo)

## Deimantas Narkevičius

*XVI. Rohkunstbau: ATLANTIS I, Hidden Histories - New Identities*, Schloss Marquardt, Potsdam (DE), 12/7-13/9; *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*, The 11th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, 12/9-8/11; *Urban Stories*, The X

Baltic Triennial, CAC, Vilnius, 25/9-22/11; *Deimantas Narkevičius*, British Film Institute, Southbank Gallery, London, 1/10-29/11 (solo); *The Unanimous Life*, Kunsthalle Bern, Bern, 24/10-6/12 (solo); *Deimantas Narkevičius, Deux sur trois*, MAMCO, Geneva (CH), 28/10-17/1 (solo); *T-Tris*, BPS22, Charleroi (BE), 12/9-29/11

## Tino Sehgal

Wattis Institute, San Francisco (US) (permanent installation)

## Tris Vonna-Michell

*Ars Viva 08/09: Inszenierung/Mise en Scène*, Augarten Contemporary, Vienna, 6/6-27/9; *Tris Vonna-Michell*, X-Initiative, New York, 9/7-30/9 (solo); *Auto-Tracking: Ongoing Configurations*, Jan Mot, Brussels, 12/9-24/10 (solo); Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, from 10/10 (solo); *Satellite 3: Tris Vonna-Michell*, Jeu de Paume, Paris, 20/10-17/1 (solo); Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg (DE), from 6/11 (solo); *Photography Is My Punishment*, The Theatre Project, Artissima, Turin (IT), 8/11 (performance)

## Ian Wilson

*Dans l'abîme du Temps, Oeuvres des collections du Frac Lorraine*, Musée départemental d'art ancien et contemporain, Epinal (FR), 4/7-2/11; *Ian Wilson*, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, 9/10-9/11 (solo) *An Evening Of Performances*, David Roberts Foundation, London, 15/10

## Colophon

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