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Jaargang 19 No. 97

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(advertisement)

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Exhibition
13/06–25/07

Opening
12/06
6–8 pm

**MANON
DE BOER
JOACHIM
KOESTER
IAN WILSON**

Jan Mot
Rue de la Régence /
Regentschapsstraat 67
1000 Brussels, Belgium

(advertisement)

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Art Fair
18/06–21/06

**JAN MOT
AT
ART BASEL**

Hall 2.1, Booth K10
Messe Basel, Messeplatz
4058 Basel, Switzerland

Picture Story. For Sven Augustijnen

By
Sophie Berrebi

AMSTERDAM, APR. 28 - A year or two ago, you trusted me with one of your own texts, a letter to Manon de Boer, which you asked me to read to an audience. In that letter, printed in a book on Manon's work, you wove together evocations of her films *Sylvia Kristel – Paris and Resonating Surfaces*, with Ryszard Kapuściński's account of an episode of the decolonisation of Angola and your own memories of Portugal.¹ It was a beautiful text to rehearse and to read aloud, and many of its sentences have stayed with me. In "*L'histoire est simple et édifiante*", *Une sélection d'articles parus dans Paris Match, première partie 1960-1972*, the exhibition that you presented over Christmas at Jan Mot's gallery in Brussels, I felt you reprised – although you might disagree with this – aspects of that piece of writing. Specifically, what struck me was the similar way in which you intertwined different storylines. In the exhibition this was done through presenting double spreads of issues of the French weekly *Paris Match*, which you displayed on long tables that stretched across the length of the gallery. By placing the magazines side by side, you created a narrative (the idea of a frieze, came to my mind - I will get back to that in a moment) that mixed 'la grande et la petite histoire' to use a hackneyed French journalistic expression. Although minimal, the display was persuasive. Looking at the pictures and reading the headlines and captions we could follow, spread after spread, fragments of stories of anonymous and famous individuals caught in moments of political turmoil in Congo, Vietnam, Cuba, Aden, Northern Ireland, Israel, Lebanon, and other points of contact between East and West and North and South, during a period dominated by both the Cold War and decolonization. The interlacing of anecdotes and historical moments recalled the format you adopted in your letter to Manon, yet, here the procedure emphasises not your voice but the one articulated strategically by the team of *Paris Match* between 1960 and 1972, that is for the most part, under the directorship of Roger Théron. Théron, who had a reputation of ruthlessness when it came to getting exclusive rights for the best press photographs, is routinely

described as the man who 'made' *Paris Match*, who was responsible for putting stars on the covers and sensational titles under his pictures. He is less known for having been a keen collector of nineteenth century photography.

The gallery display was also a way for you to present another story, one that you have been researching for a while. It concerns the production and use of a Belgian rifle called the FAL (Fusil Automatique Léger), which you patiently described to me. Produced in Belgium, from 1953 to 1988, you explained that it was nicknamed 'the right arm of the free world' (a phrase that I found again on the web), because it was used, in particular, by the armed forces of many NATO countries. Yet by a twist of history, it often ended up in the hands of revolutionaries from all sides of the political spectrum including communist-inspired. Even though it was never the subject of an article in *Paris Match*, the FAL frequently appeared throughout its pages. You showed me how to recognize it, and when I visited the exhibition we tried to identify it on pictures taken in all corners of the world, seemingly inoffensive like a newspaper tucked underneath an arm, pointed menacingly or dangling from a shoulder of a non-uniformed combatant.

Differently from the personal memories you evoke in your letter to Manon, the events described and illustrated in *Paris Match* seem to have little connection to your own life. Was the magazine even popular in the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium where you grew up? Of course we know about most of the events it recounts: decolonisation wars and episodes of the Cold War. Yet I discovered many conflicts I barely knew about, conflicts in which the FAL was used, conflicts that had slipped in between the pages of history books and that we were too young to remember (well, not yet born, to be exact). A weekly such as this one, when rediscovered as it you told me you did, while walking around flea markets in Brussels, is a perfect tool to question our need for narrative, our relationship to history, memory and visual representation. It is also a mirror to the chaos of the world we live in today.

I only ever saw *Paris Match* at the home of my grandparents. They called it *Match*, and I can still hear their voices ask-

ing each other if they had remembered to pick it up from the newspaper kiosk around the corner from their Parisian apartment. I didn't know at the time that this was not an affectionate diminutive but the name of the magazine before the war. I read somewhere that in the years following the end of the Second World War, people were suspicious of picture magazines. They reminded them of magazines such as *Signal* and *Il Tempo* published in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, that were printed at hundred thousands of copies in different languages and circulated as propaganda across occupied Europe. In its format and use of images, *Paris Match* is the heir of those magazines; although I also read that when the newly named *Paris Match* appeared in 1949, it was careful to adopt a light political touch (pro-West, of course) in order to reach the broadest audience possible.

Rather than accessible mildness, what strikes me today looking at those issues you compiled, is the crassness of those captions and the populist vulgarity of the images that invoke in turn shock and phony proximity. We see the horrors of massacres and fighting, and revolutionaries resting: "la révolution c'est fatigant" (revolution is exhausting) reads a headline set next to a laughing Fidel Castro posing in front of the sea. No words, however, are put in the mouth of the always-impeccable British royalty. Its members are portrayed repeatedly, in all points of the globe, their stiff posture suggesting remnants of imperialism in the new Commonwealth. Images of Northern Ireland bring terror closer to home. Home, that is clearly for *Paris Match*, France. Brightly coloured maps that look as if they were drawn for children repeatedly tell how large a country is compared to France: 'this country is large like X times France' captions claim, as if it was necessary to reiterate amazement at the greatness of France despite its diminutive size. However much its political and economic power slowly declines, France remains the measure of the world of *Paris Match*.

Unfolding like a ribbon through the gallery, your display evokes the idea of an enlarged filmstrip: horizontally, the issues touch one another creating a continuous narrative (mostly there are several copies per issue, so that we can see the full article that you selected). Vertically, the narrow

History Can Wait (Part 1)

By
Antony Hudek

LONDON, MAY 15 - Roughly a quarter century has passed since what could be considered a turning point of the AIDS crisis, when new drugs (AZT, later protease inhibitors) increased the chances of survival of those suffering from AIDS-related illnesses.¹ (In 1996, the number of AIDS cases in the US began to decline for the first time since the pandemic appeared in the early 1980s.)² A whole generation has now come of age that may not have witnessed friends, family and colleagues dying from AIDS, and for whom being HIV positive is no longer a death penalty.

For this first in a series of contributions to *Newspaper Jan Mot*, I would like to think through what, in its broadest and patchy outlines, a contemporary queer art history might be. There is certainly no need for another history hinging on well known gay landmarks – the founding of The Mattachine Society (one of the first US gay rights associations) in 1950, or the Stonewall uprising in 1969, to name only two American examples – nor of ‘gay’ art (whatever that may be). Rather, this queer history would consider what may be at stake in remembering, today, some of the lives and art that crossed the long 1980s. This first text is an introduction, to be followed, in the next several issues of this *Newspaper*, by studies of artists – Scott Burton, Larry Johnson, Sturtevant, Tim Stüttingen, Megan Sullivan and Philippe Thomas – whose work, I argue, provides valuable coordinates with which to redraw the map of contemporary queer art history through and since the 1980s.

These historiographical thoughts were prompted by Douglas Crimp’s recent *From the Library of...* project at Jan Mot Brussels, where the American art historian was invited to select books significant to him, as well as give a lecture in the gallery. To coincide with his presentation of books, Crimp contributed a text entitled ‘Agon’ to the previous issue of this *Newspaper* (No. 96). In a foreword, Crimp explained that ‘Agon’ is in fact the penultimate chapter of a forthcoming memoir entitled *Before Pictures*, in which ‘anecdote, research, and analysis’ are woven together ‘in an attempt to bring the two most significant aspects of my life during that decade [1967–77] into dialogue:

the experiments taking place in the art world and the culture of gay liberation’.³ The bracketed decade begins with the young writer’s move to New York, and ends with the famed *Pictures* exhibition that he curated at Artists Space, which not only launched the careers of some of the artists he included (Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo), but more importantly defined a late 1970s/early 1980s aesthetic prone to the recuperation of cultural imagery. 1977 also marks Crimp’s appointment as managing editor of *October* by one of the journal’s co-founders, Rosalind Krauss, who was teaching him in the PhD programme of the CUNY Graduate Center.

Given the significant influence *October* and *Pictures* has exerted on art history during the 1980s and 1990s, one is tempted to ask: Why yet more historical excavation of such an extensively studied period (the 1960s and 1970s) and place (Lower Manhattan)? Despite his break with *October* in 1990,⁴ and his important and early contributions to AIDS activism from 1987 onwards,⁵ Crimp’s art historical work departs little from the general focus of *October*, namely American and European art and theory from the 1960s to the 1980s. His *Pictures* exhibition, meanwhile, has spanned a veritable memory industry, with reconstructions (*Pictures at an Exhibition*, Artists Space, 2001) and contextual displays (*The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009; *Pictures, Before and After: An Exhibition for Douglas Crimp*, Galerie Buchholz, 2014).

This last exhibition was accompanied by a two-day symposium, where Crimp gave a paper in which he reportedly stated that the show ‘is about me and the first ten years of my life in New York, but it is also really about New York’.⁶ The jarring coupling of ‘also’ and ‘really’ suggests that Crimp’s efforts to interweave his personal experiences in New York from 1967 to 1977 and larger histories of art and ‘gay liberation’ are not fully realised. At the same time, the disjuncture between subjective ‘I’ and historical ‘we’ allows Crimp’s memoirs to successfully elude the twin traps of solipsism and speaking for others – a narrative amphibiousness that makes Crimp a seemingly ideal historical subject, both credible in his eye-witness testimonies and authoritative in his analyses.

Crimp’s ‘also really’ position reflects, I believe, a wider shift in queer historiography. What one might term first-wave AIDS memoirs centred squarely on the writing subject, as a counterweight to biased political and medical discourse and the horrific mass media representations of AIDS ‘victims’. The work of some of the most poignant chroniclers of the decimation wrought by AIDS in the 1980s – writers like Guillaume Dustan, Hervé Guibert and Guy Hocquenghem – depended both formally and conceptually on the inevitability of their author’s demise. With time in diminishing supply, chronologies would often be erratic, or reversed: stories would start in the present – between hospital stays, debilitating AZT side-effects, bouts of extreme fatigue – and flash backwards, as in Hocquenghem’s *L’amphithéâtre des morts* (1988) and Guibert’s *Fou de Vincent* (1989). About the ‘temporal utopia’ of the former, the philosopher René Schérer wrote that it enacted a ‘uchronia of an imaginary present-future’, ‘distending the time that normally acts as a criterion of reality’.⁷

As mentioned at the outset, for those infected with HIV at the turn of the 1990s the chances of survival increased to the point of long-term deferral (but not yet, of course, cure). Didier Lestrade, a prominent gay activist and historian, was infected in 1986; Simon Watney, author of the groundbreaking study *Policing Desire* (1987) and a contributor to Crimp’s *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (1987), in 1997; and Crimp, by his own account, in the second half of the 1990s or early 2000s.⁸ Their narratives could afford more traditional historical structures, relating not only to a present and past, but also to a future – a future from which many of those infected in the 1980s would forever be absent. This return to temporal order, with a beginning, middle and end, seems indifferent to the arguments of queer theorists such as Lee Edelman and Judith Halberstam, for whom queerness is an effective buffer against the linear temporalities based on the nuclear family, and the fantasmatic futurity embodied by the child.⁹

The absence of a large group of readers and interlocutors who experienced the 1980s first-hand, along with the temporal distension made possible by HIV treatments, may be what has enabled the recent

rediscovery of queer histories before AIDS, a period long overshadowed by the 1980s. ‘Memories centred on gay sexual culture in the 1970s’, write Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed, ‘challenge the moral certainties of both the homophobic right and the rights-seeking left. Both groups, in demanding that rights be conferred on or withheld from gays, claim to know who gays “are”... In opposition to such certainties, memory simultaneously considers modes of being and nonbeing (imagined communities lost to the past) in ways that are ethical rather than moral, open to multiple trajectories that are neither utopian (displaced to an imagined future) nor nostalgic (conceived as simply retrievable from the past).’¹⁰

If queer memories are now reaching further into the recent past, and imagining ethical futures that resist both utopia and nostalgia, straight remembrance is confronting the AIDS crisis of the 1980s anew, as its own traumatic past. Mainstream films like *Precious* [2009] and *Dallas Buyers Club* [2013] focussed on the impact of AIDS on heterosexual subjects, while the novel *La meilleure part des hommes* [2008] depicted the AIDS crisis within the gay French community – the work of an author, Tristan Garcia, too young to have lived through it. Garcia specifically intended the book as a corrective to the 1980s autobiographical writings of Dustan and Guibert, even if his novel’s characters are modelled, perversely, on these same authors.¹¹

Between, on the one hand, the historicisation of queer memory after the memorialising of the late 1980s and 1990s – as evidenced in Crimp’s memoirs – and the straight appropriations of queer trauma to their own narrative ends, I would argue that there subsists a need for temporal queerness that denies longitudinal histories, and upends any sense of validation or vindication, including of the ethical. The danger in Castiglia’s and Reed’s optimistic memory – which they term ‘ideality’, ‘poised between individuality and collectivity, presumed factuality and pure invention, past and future, lost and expectation’ – is precisely that it is poised. This balancing act is the guarantor of history, and of narrative; it is also the resolution of the very contradictions and tensions that make certain artistic practices exciting, and liable to upset any complacent queer art history. In the second part of this series I take a closer look at these practices, which position the queer at an oblique angle to the historical, in an attempt to keep the latter at bay as long as possible, and the agnostic ‘also really’ alive.

1 I am aware of the pitfalls of referring to AIDS as if a literal medical and historical condition, without immediately acknowledging ‘the way in which the literal is recurrently and tendentially produced as a figure whose figurality remains strategically occluded – and thus as a figure that can be used to effect the most repressive political ends’ (Lee Edelman, ‘The Plague of Discourse: Politics, Literary Theory and “AIDS”’, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*, New York, London: Routledge, 1994, 80).

2 See <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline> (accessed May 2015).

3 Douglas Crimp, ‘Agon’, *Newspaper Jan Mot* 163–165, Vol. 19, No. 96 (March 2015), 3.

4 *October* 53 (Summer 1990), 110–12.

5 See the special issue of *October* (43, Winter 1987), edited by Crimp, and the book to which it gave rise: *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, Cambridge, Mass., London: The MIT Press, 1988; and Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, *AIDS demo graphics*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1990.

6 Karen Archey, ‘Pictures Before and After’, *frieze* 166 (October 2014), <http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/pictures-before-and-after/> (accessed May 2015).

7 René Schérer, ‘D’une vie à l’autre: un sujet dissipé’, in Guy Hocquenghem, *L’Amphithéâtre des morts: mémoires anticipées*, Paris: Gallimard, 1994, 119–20.

8 In his foreword to Gregg Bordowitz’s *The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986–2003*, Crimp writes that ‘between the time that Gregg made *Fast Trip* [the *Fast Trip*, *Long Drop*, 1994] and *Habit* [2002], I too became infected with HIV’ (xix).

9 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2004, 2–3; and Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York, London: New York University Press, 2005, 5.

10 Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed, *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012, 28.

11 ‘Tristan Garcia by Sandra Laugier’, *Bomb – Artists in Conversation* 114 (Winter 2011), <http://bombmagazine.org/article/4714/tristan-garcia> (accessed May 2015).

Antony Hudek was until recently curator and deputy director of Raven Row (London) but will soon take over the position of director of Objectif Exhibitions in Antwerp (BE). Together with Sara De Bondt he runs the publishing house Occasional Papers. Hudek was invited to contribute a series of 5 texts for the gallery’s newspaper.

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