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An Archival Impulse

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Consider a temporary display cobbled together out of workday materials like cardboard, aluminum foil, and packing tape, and filled, like a homemade study-shrine, with a chaotic array of images, texts, and testimonials devoted to a radical artist, writer, or philosopher. Or a funky installation that juxtaposes a model of a lost earthwork with slogans from the civil rights movement and/or recordings from the legendary rock concerts of the time. Or, in a more pristine register, a short filmic meditation on the huge acoustic receivers that were built on the Kentish coast between the World Wars, but soon abandoned as outmoded pieces of military technology. However disparate in subject, appearance, and affect, these works—by the Swiss Thomas Hirschhorn, the American Sam Durant, and the Englishwoman Tacita Dean—share a notion of artistic practice as an idiosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects, and events in modern art, philosophy, and history.

The examples could be multiplied many times (a list of other practitioners might begin with the Scotsman Douglas Gordon, the Englishman Liam Gillick, the Irishman Gerard Byrne, the Canadian Stan Douglas, the Frenchmen Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno, the Americans Mark Dion and Renée Green . . .), but these three alone point to an archival impulse at work internationally in contemporary art. This general impulse is hardly new: it was variously active in the prewar period when the repertoire of sources was extended both politically and technologically (e.g., in the photofiles of Alexander Rodchenko and the photomontages of John Heartfield), and it was even more variously active in the postwar period, especially as appropriated images and serial formats became common idioms (e.g., in the pin-board aesthetic of the Independent Group, remediated representations from Robert Rauschenberg through Richard Prince, and the informational structures of Conceptual art, institutional critique, and feminist art). Yet an archival impulse with a distinctive character of its own is again pervasive—enough so to be considered a tendency in its own right, and that much alone is welcome.[1]

1. At least it is to my way of thinking at a time when—artistically as much as politically—almost anything goes and almost nothing sticks. (For example, one would hardly know from the recent Whitney Biennial that there was an outrageous war abroad and a political debacle at home.) But this relative

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In the first instance archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present. To this end they elaborate on the found image, object, and text, and favor the installation format as they do so. (Frequently they use its nonhierarchical spatiality to advantage—which is rather rare in contemporary art.) Some practitioners, such as Douglas Gordon, gravitate toward "time readymades," that is, visual narratives that are sampled in image-projections, as in his extreme versions of films by Alfred Hitchcock, Martin Scorsese, and others.[2] These sources are familiar, drawn from the archives of mass culture, to ensure a legibility that can then be disturbed or *detourné*; but they can also be obscure, retrieved in a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory. Such work will be my focus here.

Sometimes archival samplings push the postmodernist complications of originality and authorship to an extreme. Consider a collaborative project like *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999–2002), led by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno: when a Japanese animation company offered to sell some of its minor *manga* characters, they bought one such person-sign, a girl named "AnnLee," elaborated this glyph in various pieces, and invited other artists to do the same. Here the project became a "chain" of projects, "a dynamic structure that produce[d] forms that are part of it"; it also became "the story of a community that finds itself in an image"—in an image archive in the making.[3] French critic Nicolas Bourriaud has championed such art under the rubric of "post-production," which underscores the secondary manipulations often constitutive of it. Yet the term also suggests a changed status in the work of art in an age of digital information, which is said to follow those of industrial production and mass consumption.[4] That such a new age exists as such is an ideological assumption; today, however, information does often appear as a virtual readymade, as so much data to be reprocessed and sent on, and many artists do "inventory," "sample," and "share" as ways of working.

This last point might imply that the ideal medium of archival art is the mega-archive of the Internet, and over the last decade terms that evoke the electronic network, such as "platforms" and "stations," have appeared in art parlance, as has the Internet rhetoric of "interactivity." But in most archival art the actual means applied to these "relational" ends are far more tactile and face-to-face than any Web inter-

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disconnection from the present might be a distinctive mode of connection to it: a "whatever" artistic culture in keeping with a "whatever" political culture.

My title echoes Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Notes toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 and 13 (Spring and Summer 1980), as well as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive," *October* 88 (Spring 1999). Yet the archival impulse here is not quite allegorical à la Owens or anomic à la Buchloh; in some respects it assumes both conditions (more on which below). I want to thank the research group on archives convened by the Getty and the Clark Institutes in 2003–04, as well as audiences in Mexico City, Stanford, Berkeley, and London.

2. Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews*, vol. 1 (Milan: Charta, 2003), p. 322.

3. Philippe Parreno in Obrist, *Interviews*, p. 701. See the discussion of this project by Tom McDonough, as well as the interview with Huyghe by George Baker, in this volume.

4. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002).

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face.[5] The archives at issue here are not databases in this sense; they are recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and as such they call out for human interpretation, not machinic reprocessing.[6] Although the contents of this art are hardly indiscriminant, they remain indeterminant like the contents of any archive, and often they are presented in this fashion—as so many promissory notes for further elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios.[7] In this regard archival art is as much preproduction as it is postproduction: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces (perhaps "anarchival impulse" is the more appropriate phrase), these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects—in art and in history alike—that might offer points of departure again.

If archival art differs from database art, it is also distinct from art focused on the museum. Certainly the figure of the artist-as-archivist follows that of the artist-as-curator, and some archival artists continue to play on the category of the collection. Yet they are not as concerned with critiques of representational totality and institutional integrity: that the museum has been ruined as a coherent system in a public sphere is generally assumed, not triumphally proclaimed or melancholically pondered, and some of these artists suggest other kinds of ordering—within the museum and without. In this respect the orientation of archival art is often more "institutive" than "destructive," more "legislative" than "transgressive."[8]

Finally, the work in question is archival since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private. Further, it often arranges these materials according to a quasi-archival logic, a matrix of citation and juxtaposition, and presents them in a quasi-archival architecture, a complex of texts and objects (again, platforms, stations, kiosks . . .). Thus Dean speaks of her method as "collection," Durant of his as "combination," Hirschhorn of his as "ramification"—and much archival art does appear to ramify like a weed or a

5. To take two prominent examples: the 2002 *Documenta*, directed by Okwui Enwezor, was conceived in terms of "platforms" of discussion, scattered around the world (the exhibition in Kassel was only the final such platform). And the 2003 Venice Biennale, directed by Francesco Bonami, featured such sections as "Utopia Station," which exemplified the archival discursivity of much recent art. "Interactivity" is an aim of "relational aesthetics" as propounded by Bourriaud in his 1998 text of that title. See my "Arty Party," *London Review of Books*, December 4, 2003, as well as Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," in this volume.

6. Lev Manovich discusses the tension between database and narrative in *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 233–36.

7. I owe the notion of "promissory notes" to Malcolm Bull. Liam Gillick describes his work as "scenario-based"; positioned in "the gap between presentation and narration," it might also be called archival. See Gillick, *The Woodway* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2002).

8. Jacques Derrida uses the first pair of terms to describe opposed drives at work in the concept of the archive in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), and Jeff Wall uses the second pair to describe opposed imperatives at work in the history of the avant-garde, in *Jeff Wall* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996). How does the archival impulse relate to "archive fever"? Perhaps, like the Library of Alexandria, any archive is founded on disaster (or its threat), pledged against a ruin that it cannot forestall. Yet for Derrida archive fever is more profound, bound up with repetition-compulsion and a death drive. And sometimes this paradoxical energy of destruction can also be sensed in the work at issue here.

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"rhizome" (a Deleuzean trope that others employ as well).[9] Perhaps all archives develop in this way, through mutations of connection and disconnection, a process that this art also serves to disclose. "Laboratory, storage, studio space, yes," Hirschhorn remarks, "I want to use these forms in my work to make spaces for the movement and endlessness of thinking. . . ."[10] Such is artistic practice in an archival field.

Archive as Capitalist Garbage Bucket

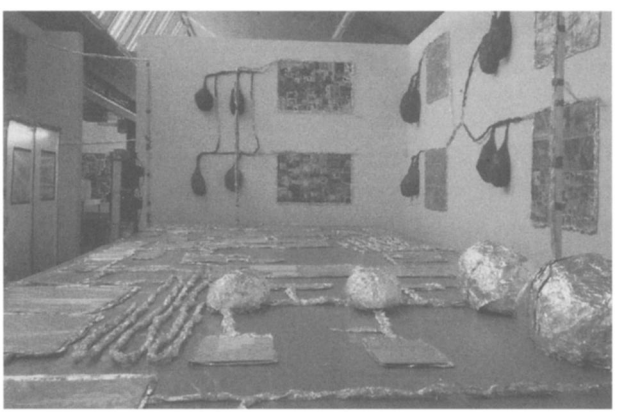
Sometimes strained in effect, archival art is rarely cynical in intent (another welcome change); on the contrary, these artists often aim to fashion distracted viewers into engaged discussants (here there is nothing passive about the word "archival").[11] In this regard Hirschhorn, who once worked in a Communist collective of graphic designers, sees his makeshift dedications to artists, writers, and philosophers—which partake equally of the obsessive-compulsive Merzbau of Kurt Schwitters and the agitprop kiosks of Gustav Klucis—as a species of passionate pedagogy in which the lessons on offer concern love as much as knowledge.[12] Hirschhorn

9. Dean discusses "collection" in *Tacita Dean* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2001), and "bad combination" is the title of a 1995 work by Durant. The classic text on "the rhizome" is, of course, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), where they underscore its "principles of connection and heterogeneity": "Any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order" (p. 7).

10. Thomas Hirschhorn, "Interview with Okwui Enwezor," in James Rondeau and Suzanne Ghez, eds., *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), p. 32. Again, many other artists could be considered here as well, and the archival is only one aspect of the work that I do discuss.

11. Indeed, its lively motivation of sources contrasts with the morbid citationality of much postmodern pastiche. See Mario Perniola, *Enigmas: The Egyptian Moment in Society and Art*, trans. Christopher Woodall (London: Verso, 1995).

12. "I can say that I love them and their work unconditionally," Hirschhorn says of his commemorated figures (*Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake*, p. 30). Benjamin Buchloh provides an incisive genealogy of his work in "Cargo and Cult: The Displays of Thomas Hirschhorn," *Artforum* (November 2001). Bice Curinger, *Short Guide: Into the Work of Thomas Hirschhorn* (New York: Barbara Gladstone Gallery, 2002), is also helpful.



Thomas Hirschhorn. Tränetisch. *Kunstmuseum, Luzern, 1996. Courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.*

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seeks to "distribute ideas," "liberate activity," and "radiate energy" all at once: he wants to expose different audiences to alternative archives of public culture, and to charge this relationship with affect.[13] In this way his work is not only institutive but also libidinal; at the same time the subject-object relations of advanced capitalism have transformed whatever counts as libido today, and Hirschhorn works to register this transformation too and where possible to reimagine these relations as well.

Hirschhorn produces interventions in "public space" that question how this category might still function today. Most of his projects play on vernacular forms of marginal barter and incidental exchange, such as the street display, the market stall, and the information booth—arrangements that typically feature homemade offerings, refashioned products, improvised pamphlets, and so on.[14] As is well known, he has divided much of his practice into four categories—"direct sculptures," "altars," "kiosks," and "monuments"—all of which manifest an eccentric yet exoteric engagement with archival materials.

The direct sculptures tend to be models placed in interiors, frequently in exhibitions. The first piece was inspired by the spontaneous shrine produced at the spot in Paris where Princess Diana died: as her mourners recoded the monument to liberty already at the site, they transformed an official structure into a "just monument," according to Hirschhorn, precisely because it "issue[d] from below." His direct sculptures aim for a related effect: designed for "messages that have nothing to do with the original purpose of the actual support," they are offered as provisional mediums of *détournement*, for acts of reinscription "signed by the community" (this is one meaning of "direct" here).[15]

The altars seem to stem from the direct sculptures. At once modest and outlandish, these motley displays of images and texts commemorate cultural figures of special importance to Hirschhorn; he has dedicated four such pieces—to artists Otto

13. Hirschhorn in Obrist, *Interviews*, pp. 396–99.
14. Of course Hirschhorn is not the only artist to work with these formats: David Hammons, Jimmie Durham, Gabriel Orozco, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, among others, do so as well.
15. Hirschhorn in *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake*, p. 31.

Hirschhorn. Otto Freundlich altar. *Berlin Biennale, 1998. Courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.*

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Freundlich and Piet Mondrian, and writers Ingeborg Bachmann and Raymond Carver. Often dotted with kitschy mementoes, votive candles, and other emotive signs of the fan, the altars are placed "in locations where [the honorees] could have died by accident, by chance: on a sidewalk, in the street, in a corner."[16] Passersby, often accidental in another sense, are invited to witness these homely but heartfelt acts of commemoration—and to be moved by them (or not).

As befits the name, the kiosks are more informational than devotional. Here Hirschhorn was commissioned by the University of Zurich to erect eight works over a four-year period, with each one installed for six months within the Institute of Brain Research and Molecular Biology. Once more the kiosks are concerned with artists and writers, all quite removed from the activities of the Institute: the artists Freundlich (again), Fernand Léger, Emil Nolde, Meret Oppenheim, and Liubov Popova, as well as writers Bachmann (again), Emmanuel Bove, and Robert Walser. Less open to "planned vandalism" than the direct sculptures and the altars, the kiosks are also more archival in appearance.[17] Made of plywood and cardboard nailed and taped together, these structures typically include images, texts, cassettes, and televisions, as well as furniture and other everyday objects—a hybrid of the seminar room and the clubhouse that solicits both discursivity and sociability.

Finally, the monuments, dedicated to philosophers also embraced by Hirschhorn, effectively combine the devotional aspect of the altars and the informational aspect of the kiosks. Three monuments have appeared to date, for Spinoza, Bataille, and Deleuze, and a fourth, for Gramsci, is planned. With the exception of Bataille, each monument was erected in the home country of the philosopher yet placed at a remove from "official" sites. Thus the Spinoza monument

16. Ibid., p. 30.
17. Buchloh, "Cargo and Cult," p. 114.

Hirschhorn. Ingeborg Bachmann kiosk. *University of Zurich-Irchal, Zurich, 1999. Courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.*

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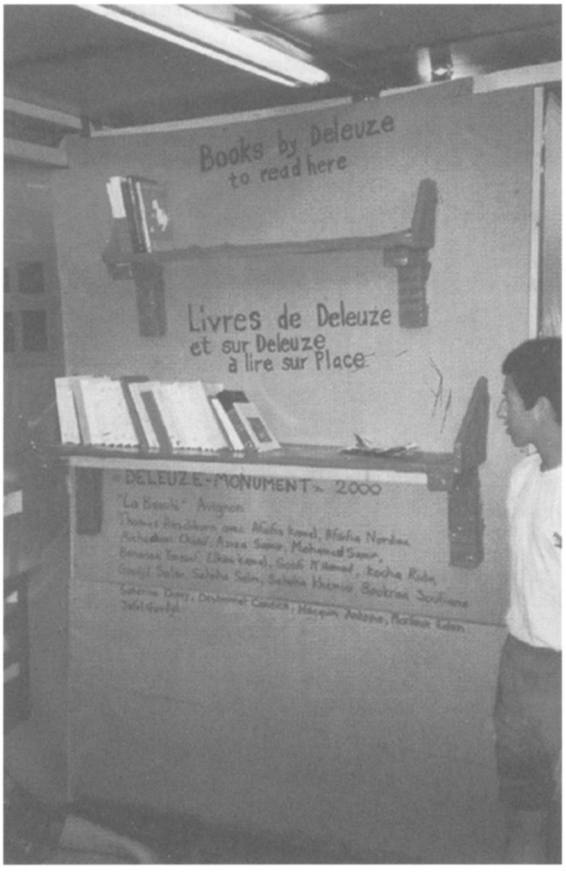

Hirschhorn. Deleuze Monument. *2000. Courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.*

appeared in Amsterdam, but in the red-light district; the Deleuze monument in Avignon, but in a mostly North African quarter; and the Bataille monument in Kassel (during *Documenta XI*), but in a largely Turkish neighborhood. These (dis)placements are fitting: the radical status of the guest philosopher is matched by the minor status of the host community, and the encounter suggests a temporary refunctioning of the monument from a univocal structure that obscures antagonisms (philosophical and political, social and economic) to a counter-hegemonic archive that might be used to articulate such differences.[18]

The consistency of these artists, writers, and philosophers is not obvious: although most are modern Europeans, they vary from obscure to canonical and from esoteric to engagé. Among the artists of the altars, the reflexive abstractions

18. I mean "minor" in the sense given the term by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). The minor is an intensive, often vernacular use of a language or form, which disrupts its official or institutional functions. Opposed to the major but not content with the marginal, it invites "collective arrangements of utterance."

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of Mondrian and the emotive representations of Freundlich are near antipodal, while the positions represented in the kiosks range from a French Purist who was a Communist (Léger) to a German Expressionist who belonged to the Nazi party (Nolde). However, all the figures propose aesthetic models with political ramifications, and the same is true of the monument philosophers, who encompass such disparate concepts as hegemony (Gramsci) and transgression (Bataille). The consistency of the subjects, then, lies in the very diversity of their transformative commitments: so many visions, however contradictory, to change the world, all connected—indeed cathected—by "the attachment" that Hirschhorn feels for each one. This attachment is both his motive and his method: "To connect what cannot be connected, this is exactly what my work as an artist is."[19]

Hirschhorn announces his signal mix of information and devotion in the terms "kiosk" and "altar": again, he aims to deploy both the publicity of agitprop à la Klucis and the passion of assemblage à la Schwitters.[20] Rather than an academic resolution of an old avant-garde opposition, his purpose is pragmatic: Hirschhorn applies these mixed means to incite his audience to (re)invest in radical practices of art, literature, and philosophy—to produce a cultural cathexis based not on official taste, vanguard literacy, or critical correctness, but on political use-value driven by artistic love-value.[21] In some ways his project recalls the transformative commitment imagined by Peter Weiss in *Die Aesthetik des Widerstands* (1975–78). Set in Berlin in 1937, the novel tells of a group of engaged workers who coach each other in a skeptical history of European art; in one instance they deconstruct the classical rhetoric of the Pergamon altarpiece in the Altes Museum, whose "chips of stone . . . they gather together and reassemble in their own milieu."[22] Of course Hirschhorn is concerned with an avant-garde past threatened with oblivion, not the classical tradition abused by the Nazis, and his collaborators consist not of motivated members of a political movement, but rather distracted viewers who might range from international art cognoscenti to local merchants, soccer fans, and children. Yet such a shift in address is necessary if an "aesthetics of resistance" is to be made relevant to an amnesiac society dominated by culture industries and sports spectacles. This is why his work, with its throwaway structures, kitschy materials, jumbled references, and fan testimonials, often suggests a grotesquerie of our immersive commodity-media-entertainment

19. Hirschhorn in *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake*, p. 32, and in Obrist, *Interviews*, p. 399. His chosen writers—the Swiss Walser, the French Bove, the Austrian Bachmann, and the American Carver—also vary widely, though not as widely as the artists: each has elements of "dirty realism" and desperate fantasy, and each met a premature death or (in the case of Walser) madness. Here again are incomplete projects, unfulfilled beginnings.

20. Perhaps of all precedents *The Cathedral of Erotic Misery* of Schwitters is the most telling, for it too was a kind of archive of public debris and private fetishes (that blurred this very distinction). In effect, if Schwitters interiorized the monument (as Leah Dickerman has suggested in an unpublished paper), Hirschhorn exteriorizes it, thus transformed, once again. In another register one might recall the pavilions produced by the Independent Group for such exhibitions as *This Is Tomorrow* (1956), another archival practice in another capitalist moment.

21. Buchloh alludes to "a new type of cultural value" in "Cult and Cargo," p. 110.

22. This is how Jürgen Habermas glosses the story in "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), p. 13.

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environment: such are the elements and the energies that exist to be reworked and rechanneled.[23]

Sometimes Hirschhorn lines his extroverted archives with runaway growths, often fashioned in foil. Neither human nor natural in appearance, these forms point (again in a grotesque register) to a world in which old distinctions between organic life and inorganic matter, production and waste, and even desire and death no longer apply—a world at once roiled and arrested by information flow and product glut. Hirschhorn calls this sensorium of Junkspace "the capitalist garbage bucket."[24] Yet he insists that, even within this prison pail, radical figures might be recovered and libidinal charges rewired—that this "phenomenology of advanced reification" might still yield an intimation of utopian possibility, or at least a desire for systematic transformation, however damaged or distorted it might be.[25] Certainly this move to (re)cathect cultural remnants comes with its own risks: it is also open to reactionary, even atavistic, deployments, most catastrophically with the Nazis. In fact, in the Nazi period evoked by Weiss, Ernst Bloch warned against such Rightist remotivations; at the same time he argued that the Left opts out of this libidinal arena of cultural politics at its own great cost.[26] Hirschhorn suggests the same is true today.

Archive as Failed Futuristic Vision

If Hirschhorn recovers radical figures in his archival work, Tacita Dean recalls lost souls in hers, and she does so in a variety of mediums—photographs,

23. Rather than pretend that a clear medium of communicative reason exists today, Hirschhorn works with the clotted nature of mass-cultural languages. (For example, *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake,* displayed in Chicago in 2000, pays equal homage to Rosa Luxemburg and the Chicago Bulls.) In effect Hirschhorn works to detourn the "celebrity-industrial complex" of advanced capitalism, which he replays in a preposterous key: e.g., Ingeborg Bachmann in lieu of Princess Di, Liubov Popova instead of American Idol. His is a contemporary version of the Dadaist strategy of mimetic exacerbation à la Marx: "petrified social conditions must be made to dance by singing them their own song" (*Early Writings,* ed. T. B. Bottomore [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964], p. 47; trans. modified). On this strategy see my "Dada Mime," *October* 105 (Summer 2003).

24. See Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace," *October* 100 (Spring 2002). *Der kapitalistische Abfallkübel* is the title of a 2000 work by Hirschhorn that consists of a huge wastebasket stuffed with glossy magazines. *Kübel* is also the word for the toilet in a prison cell (thanks to Michael Jennings for this apposite point). In a world of finance-flow and information-capital, reification is hardly opposed to liquefaction. "The sickness that the world manifests today differs from that manifested during the 1920s," André Breton already remarked over fifty years ago. "The spirit was then threatened by coagulation [*figement*]; today it is threatened by dissolution" (*Entretiens* [Paris, 1952], p. 218). In his manic displays Hirschhorn evokes this paradoxical state of continual de- and re-territorialization.

25. Buchloh, "Cargo and Cult," p. 109. On the dialectic of "reification and utopia in mass culture," see the classic text of this title by Fredric Jameson in *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979); for his recent reflections on the subject see "Politics of Utopia," *New Left Review* (January/February 2004). In a well-known statement Theodor Adorno once remarked of modernism and mass culture: "Both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change. . . . Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up. It would be romantic to sacrifice one to the other . . . " (Letter of March 18, 1936, to Walter Benjamin, in *Aesthetics and Politics* [London: New Left Books, 1977], p. 123). Hirschhorn offers one version of what these maimed halves look like today.

26. See Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times,* trans. Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley:

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blackboard drawings, sound pieces, and short films and videos often accompanied by narrative "asides." Often drawn to people, things, and places that are stranded, outmoded, or otherwise sidelined, Dean traces one such case as it ramifies into an archive as if of its own aleatory accord. Consider *Girl Stowaway* (1994), an eight-minute 16mm film in both color and black and white with a narrative aside. In this instance Dean happened on a photograph of an Australian girl named Jean Jeinnie who in 1928 stowed away on a ship named *Herzogin Cecilie* bound for England; the ship later wrecked at Starehole Bay on the Cornish coast. From this single document the archive of *Girl Stowaway* forms as a tenuous tissue of coincidences. First Dean loses the photograph when her bag is mishandled at Heathrow (it later turns up in Dublin). Then, as she researches Jean Jeinnie, she hears echoes of her name everywhere—in a conversation about Jean Genet, in the pop song "Jean Genie," and so on. Finally, when she travels to Starehole Bay to investigate the shipwreck, a girl is murdered on the harbor cliffs on the very night that Dean also spends there.

In an artistic equivalent of the uncertainty principle in scientific experiment, *Girl Stowaway* is an archive that implicates the artist-as-archivist within it. "Her voyage was from Port Lincoln to Falmouth," Dean writes:

> It had a beginning and an end, and exists as a recorded passage of time. My own journey follows no such linear narrative. It started at the moment I found the photograph but has meandered ever since, through unchartered research and to no obvious destination. It has become a passage into history along the line that divides fact from fiction, and is more like a journey through an underworld of chance intervention and epic encounter than any place I recognize. My story is about coincidence, and about what is invited and what is not.[27]

In a sense her archival work is an allegory of archival work—as sometimes melancholic, often vertiginous, always incomplete. So, too, it suggests an allegory in the strict sense of the literary genre that often features a subject astray in an "underworld" of enigmatic signs that test her. Yet here the subject has nothing but invited

University of California Press, 1991). Bloch might also be an instructive reference here for his concepts of the nonsynchronous and the utopian.

27. *Tacita Dean*, p. 12.

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coincidence as a guide: no God or Virgil, no revealed history or stable culture. Even the conventions of her reading have to be made up as she moves along.

In another film-and-text piece Dean tells another lost-and-found story, and it too involves "unchartered research" for protagonist and archivist alike. Donald Crowhurst was a failed businessman from Teignmouth, a coastal town hungry for tourist attention. In 1968 he entered the Golden Globe Race, driven by the desire to be the first sailor to complete a nonstop solo voyage around the world. Yet neither sailor nor boat, a trimaran christened *Teignmouth Electron*, was prepared, and Crowhurst quickly faltered: he faked his log entries (for a time race officials positioned him in the lead), and then broke off radio contact. Soon he "began to suffer from 'time-madness'": his incoherent log entries amounted to a "private discourse on God and the Universe." Eventually, Dean speculates,

Tacita Dean. Facing page: Girl Stowaway. *1994. (Postcard showing the* Herzogin Cecilie *wrecked in Starehole Bay, May 1936.) Left:* Teignmouth Electron. *1999. Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris.*

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Crowhurst "jumped overboard with his chronometer, just a few hundred miles from the coast of Britain."[28]

Dean treats the Crowhurst archive obliquely in three short films. The first two, *Disappearance at Sea I* and *II* (1996 and 1997), were shot at different lighthouses in Berwick and Northumberland. In the first film, blinding images of the lights alternate with blank views onto the horizon; in the second, the camera rotates with the apparatus and so provides a continuous panorama of the sea. In the first film, darkness slowly descends; in the second, there is only void to begin with. In the third film, *Teignmouth Electron* (2000), Dean travels to Cayman Brac in the Caribbean to document the remains of the trimaran. It has "the look of a tank or the carcass of an animal or an exoskeleton left by an arrant creature now extinct," she writes. "Whichever way, it is at odds with its function, forgotten by its generation and abandoned by its time."[29] In this extended meditation, then, "Crowhurst" is a term that draws others into an archive that points to an ambitious town, a misbegotten race, a metaphysical seasickness, and an enigmatic remnant. And Dean lets this text of traces ramify further. While on Cayman Brac she happens on another derelict structure dubbed the "Bubble House" by locals, and documents this "perfect companion" of the *Teignmouth Electron* in another short film with text (1999). Designed by a Frenchman jailed for embezzlement, the Bubble House is "a vision for perfect hurricane housing, egg-shaped and resistant to wind, extravagant and daring, with its Cinemascope-proportioned windows that look out onto the sea." Never completed and long deserted, it now sits in ruin "like a statement from another age."[30]

Consider, as a final example of a "failed futuristic vision" that Dean recovers archivally, the immense "sound mirrors" built in concrete at Denge by Dungeness in Kent between 1928 and 1930. Conceived as a warning system of air attack from the Continent, these acoustic receivers were doomed from the start: they did not discriminate enough among sounds, and "soon they were abandoned in favour of the radar." Stranded between World Wars and technological modes, "the mirrors have begun to erode and subside into the mud: their demise now inevitable."[31] (In some

28. Ibid., p. 39.
29. Ibid., p. 50.
30. Ibid., p. 52. Her archives recall those probed by Foucault under the rubric "The Life of Infamous Men" (1977), a collection of "archives of confinement, police, petitions to the king and *letters de cachet*" concerning unfamous subjects who became infamous only due to "an encounter with power" during the years 1660–1760. His description is suggestive here: "This is an anthology of existences. Lives of a few lines or of a few pages, countless misfortunes and adventures, gathered together in a handful of words. Brief lives, chanced upon in books and documents. *Exempla*, but—contrary to those that the sages gleaned in the course of their readings—these are examples which furnish not so much lessons to contemplate as brief effects whose force fades almost all at once. The term *nouvelle* would suit me enough to designate them, through the double reference that it indicates: to the rapidity of the narrative and to the reality of the events related; for such is the contraction of things said in these texts that one does not know whether the intensity which traverses them is due more to the vividness of the words or to the violence of the facts which jostle about in them. Singular lives, those which have become, through I know not what accidents, strange poems: that is what I wanted to gather together in a sort of herbarium" (in Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton, eds., *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy* [Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979], pp. 76–91).
31. Ibid., p. 54.

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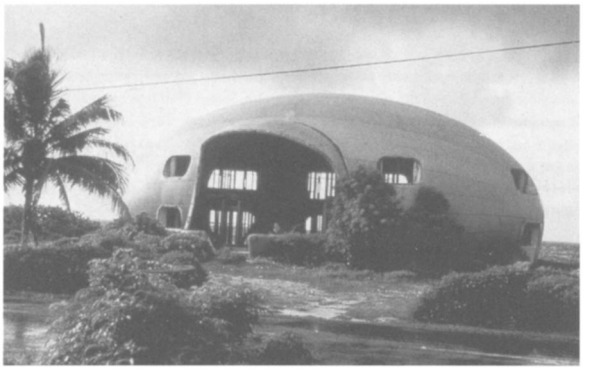

Dean. Top: Bubble House. *1999. Bottom:* Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah. *1997. (Slide projection.)*

photographs the concrete hulks resemble old earthworks, the now-stranded status of which also intrigues Dean: she has made two pieces based on works by Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) and *Spiral Jetty* (1970)—a fascination shared by Durant and others.)[32] "I like these strange monoliths that sit in this no place," Dean writes of the sound mirrors, aware that "no place" is the literal meaning of "utopia." They exist in a "no time" for her too—though here "no place" and "no time" also mean a multiplicity of both: "The land around Dungeness always feels old to me: a feeling impossible to explain, other than it is just 'unmodern' . . . To me it feels 1970s and Dickensian, prehistoric and Elizabethan, Second World War and futuristic. It just doesn't function in the now."[33]

In a sense all these archival objects—the *Teignmouth Electron*, the Bubble House, the sound mirrors (and there are more)—serve as found arks of lost moments in which the here-and-now of the work functions as a possible portal between an unfinished past and a reopened future.[34] The possibility of precise interventions in surpassed times

32. Renée Green has also produced a video on *Partially Buried Woodshed*; see "Partially Buried," *October* 80 (Spring 1997). Like some of the figures commemorated by Hirschhorn, Smithson represents another unfulfilled beginning for these artists. "His work allows me a conceptual space where I can often reside," Dean comments. "It's like an incredible excitement and attraction across time; a personal repartee with another's thinking and energy communicated through their work" (ibid., p. 61). She has also cited other artists from this same general archive: Marcel Broodthaers, Bas Jan Ader, Mario Merz.

33. Ibid., p. 54.

34. Perhaps they are arks in analogy with *The Russian Ark* (2002) of filmmaker Andrei Sokurov; yet Dean does not totalize her histories as Sokurov does Russian history with his Hermitage ark—quite the contrary. In a suggestive text Michael Newman discusses her work as an archive of various mediums and concomitant senses; see his "Medium and Event in the Work of Tacita Dean," in *Tacita Dean* (London: Tate Britain, 2001). Also helpful are the texts included in *Tacita Dean: Seven Books* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 2003). "Failed futuristic visions" provide a principle of dis/connection in Hirschhorn too: "I opened possible doorways between them," he remarks of the disparate subjects honored in *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake.* "The links are the failures, the failures of

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also captivated Walter Benjamin, yet Dean lacks his intimation of messianic redemption; although her outmoded objects can offer some "profane illumination" into historical change, they do not possess "the revolutionary energies" that he hoped to find there.[35] In this regard her work is affined less with Benjamin than with W. G. Sebald, about whom Dean has written incisively.[36] Sebald surveys a modern world so devastated by history as to appear "after nature": many of its inhabitants are "ghosts of repetition" (including the author) who seem at once "utterly liberated and deeply despondent."[37] These remnants are enigmatic, but they are enigmas without resolution, let alone redemption. Sebald even questions the humanist commonplace about the restorative power of memory; the ambiguous epigraph of the first section of *The Emigrants* reads: "and the last remnants memory destroys."[38] Dean also looks out on a forlorn world (often literally so in her films, videos, and photographs), yet for the most part she avoids the melancholic fixation that is the price that Sebald pays for his courageous refusal of redemptive illusion. The risk in her work is different: a romantic fascination with "human failing."[39] But, within the "failed futuristic visions" that she recovers archivally, there is also an intimation of the utopian—not as the other of reification (as in Hirschhorn) but as a concomitant of her archival presentation of the past as fundamentally heterogeneous and always incomplete.[40]

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utopias. . . . [A] utopia never works. It is not supposed to. When it works, it is a utopia no longer" (*Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake*, p. 35).

35. See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940) and "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1928), in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) and Peter Demetz, ed., *Reflections* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978). "Balzac was the first to speak of the ruins of the bourgeoisie," Benjamin wrote in "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (exposé of 1935). "But only Surrealism exposed them to view. The development of the forces of production reduced the wish symbols of the previous century to rubble even before the monuments representing them had crumbled" (*Reflections*, p. 161). The "wish symbols" in question here were the capitalist wonders of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie at the height of its confidence, such as "the arcades and interiors, the exhibitions and panoramas." These structures fascinated the Surrealists nearly a century later—when further capitalist development had turned them into "residues of a dream world" or, again, "rubble even before the monuments which represented them had crumbled." For the Surrealists to intervene in these outmoded spaces, according to Benjamin, was to tap "the revolutionary energies" trapped there. As noted above, the outmoded for archival artists today does not possess this same force; in fact some (like Durant) are conflicted about the pasts they unearth. The deployment of the outmoded might be a weak critique, but at least it can still query the totalistic assumptions of capitalist culture, never more grandiose than today; it can also remind this culture of its own wish symbols, its own forfeited dreams.

36. See Tacita Dean, "W. G. Sebald," *October* 106 (Fall 2003).

37. W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1998), pp. 237, 187, 234. Dean seems closest to the Sebald of this book.

38. W. G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*, trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1996), p. 1. On this point see Mark M. Anderson, "The Edge of Darkness: On W. G. Sebald," *October* 106 (Fall 2003).

39. *Tacita Dean: Location* (Basel: Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 2000), p. 25. Also romantic is the implication of a partial doubling of her failed figures with the figure of the artist.

40. At the very least her archival tales hold out the possibility of errance in an otherwise plotted world. Dean suggests one aspect of the temporality of her work in the subtitle of a 2001 "aside" concerning the old East Berlin Fernsehturm: "Backwards into the Future." This movement suggests "the crabwalk" performed by Günter Grass in his 2002 novel of that title regarding the symptomatic persistence

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Archive as Partially Buried Woodshed

Like Dean, Durant employs a great variety of means—drawings, photographs, Xerox collages, sculptures, installations, sound, video—but where Dean is precise about her mediums, Durant exploits the "theatrical" space between his forms. Moreover, where Dean is meticulous in her collection of sources, Durant is eclectic in his sampling of "rock-and-roll history, minimalist/postminimalist art, 1960s social activism, modern dance, Japanese garden design, mid-century modern design, self-help literature, and do-it-yourself home improvements."[41]

Durant stages his archive as a spatial unconscious where repressed contents return disruptively and different practices mix entropically. Of course the return of the repressed is not easily reconciled with the slide into the entropic, but Durant intimates a third model that comprehends these other two: the framing of a historical period as a discursive episteme almost in the sense of Michel Foucault, with "interrelated elements [placed] together in a field."[42] Durant is drawn to two moments within the archive of postwar American culture in particular: late modernist design of the 1940s and '50s (e.g., Charles and Ray Eames) and early postmodernist art of the 1960s and '70s (e.g., Robert Smithson). Today the first moment appears distant, but as such it has become subject to various recyclings, and Durant offers a critical perspective on both the original and its repetitions.[43] The second moment is far from closed: it includes "discourses that have just ceased to be ours," and so might indicate "gaps" in contemporary practice—gaps that might be converted to beginnings (again, this is the attraction of this threshold for some young artists).[44] Like Hirschhorn and Dean, then, Durant presents his archival materials as active, even unstable—open to eruptive returns and entropic collapses, stylistic repackagings and critical revisions.

Durant evokes his first moment through signature specimens of midcentury design associated with southern California (he lives in Los Angeles), and acts out an aggressive response to the repressive formalism and functionalism that he sees there.[45] A onetime carpenter, Durant stages a class struggle between the refinements

of the Nazi past: "Do I have to sneak up on time in a crabwalk, seeming to go backward but actually scuttling sideways, and thereby working my way forward fairly rapidly?"

41. Michael Darling, "Sam Durant's Riddling Zones," in Darling, ed., *Sam Durant* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), p. 11. Darling notes the adjacency of this universe to the subcultural worlds explored by Mike Kelley and John Miller.

42. Durant in Rita Gersting, "Interview with Sam Durant," in ibid., p. 62. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), esp. pp. 126–31. As with the models of repression and entropy, Durant borders on parody here; in any case his archives are hardly as systematic (or high-cultural) as the ones discussed by Foucault.

43. For example, rather than a suave melding of retro design and contemporary installation à la Jorge Pardo, Durant suggests a classed confrontation.

44. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 130–31. "So often I am attracted to things conceived in the decade of my own birth," Dean (born in 1965) has commented; the same often holds for Durant and others of this generation.

45. This accusation has precedents (e.g., Tristan Tzara and Salvador Dalí), and its political valence is often problematic; here again Durant borders on parody.

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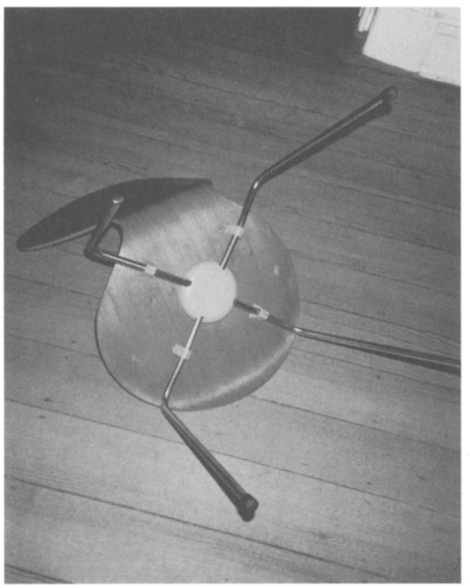
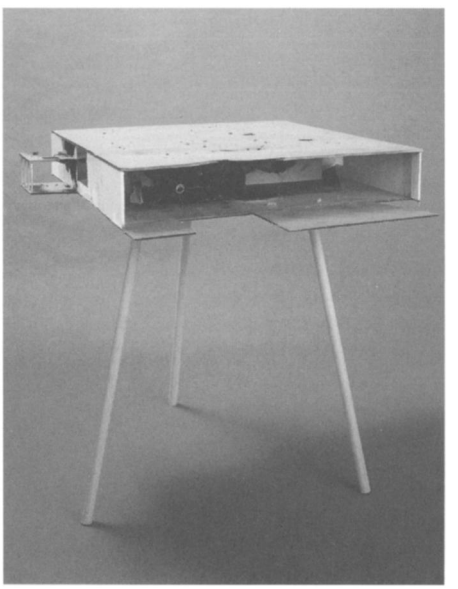
of late modernist design (at the moment when it became corporate and suburban) and the resentments of the lumpen working class (whose exclusion from this period style was one of its preconditions). Thus he has produced color photographs that show such prized pieces as the Eames shell chair upset on the floor, "primed for humiliation," in a literal turning of the tables.[46] He has also shown sculptures and collages that abuse effigies of the Case Study Houses designed by Richard Neutra, Pierre Koenig, Craig Ellwood, and others from 1945 to 1966. Rough models of the houses made of foam core, cardboard, plywood, and Plexiglas, the sculptures are burned, gouged, and graffitied (in a further outrage some are wired with miniature televisions tuned to trashy soap operas and talk shows).[47] The collages also picture nasty eruptions of class spite: in one image, two beer-guzzlers appear in a classic Julius Shulman photograph of the Koenig House in a way that ruins its transcendental effect of good taste; in another image, a party girl is exposed in a way that undoes any pretense of a world sublimated beyond sex as well as class.[48] In further pieces Durant has juxtaposed miniature toilets and plumbing diagrams with Eames chairs, IKEA shelves, and Minimalist boxes: again in near literal fashion, he plumbs "good design," reconnects its clean

46. Darling in *Sam Durant*, p. 14.
47. Durant: "My models are poorly built, vandalized, and fucked up. This is meant as an allegory for the damage done to architecture simply by occupying it" (ibid., p. 57).
48. These collages recall the early photomontages by Martha Rosler titled *Bringing the War Home* (1967–72).





Sam Durant. Left: Chair #4. *1995. Right:* Abandoned House #3. *1995.*
Courtesy the artist, Blum and Poe, and Galleria Emi Fontana.

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avatars with the unruly body as if to unplug its cultural blockages. The very aggression of his revisions also returns unconscious drives to our machines-for-living, both old and new.[49]

His second archival moment, more expansive than his first, encompasses advanced art, rock culture, and civil-rights struggles of the late 1960s and early '70s, signs of which Durant combines in other works. In this archival probe Smithson becomes a privileged cipher: like Dean, Durant regards him as both an early exemplar of the artist-as-archivist and a key term in this particular archive. In several pieces Durant cites *Partially Buried Woodshed*, installed by Smithson at Kent State in January 1970: here a model of a radical art work mixes with a memory of an oppressive police force—the killing of four students by National Guardsmen on the same campus just a few months later. Allusions to "utopian" and "dystopian" events in rock culture also collide as recordings from Woodstock and Altamont play through speakers buried in dirt mounds.[50] These conflicting signs erupt together in this archival space, yet they also appear entropic there: different terms converge and opposite positions blur in a devolution of vanguard art, countercultural music, and state power. In this way Durant not only sketches a cultural-political archive of the Vietnam era, but also points to its entropic slide into semiotic mélange, into media myth.

Durant comes to entropy via Smithson, who offered this famous exposé of its basic principles in "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967):

> Picture in your mind's eye [a] sand box [divided] in half with black sand on one side and white sand on the other. We take a child and have him run hundreds of times clockwise in the box until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn gray; after that we have him run anticlockwise, but the result will not be a restoration of the original division but a greater degree of grayness and an increase of entropy.[51]

Among other roles, entropy served Smithson as a final rebuttal to formalist distinctions in art and metaphysical oppositions in philosophy. For his part Durant extends its erosive action to the historical field of cultural practices that includes Smithson. In a sense, what the sandbox was for Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed* becomes for Durant: it not only thematizes entropy but also instantiates it, and does so both in a micrological sense—partially buried in 1970, the woodshed was partially burned in 1975 and removed in 1984—and in a macrological sense—the woodshed becomes an allegorical archive of recent art and politics as precisely

49. This is a troubling of both modernist design and Minimalist logic on the model of Smithson and Matta-Clark as well as feminist artists from Eva Hesse to Cornelia Parker. Such a move of counter-repression, which is programmatic in such titles as *What's Underneath Must Be Released* and *Examined to Be Understood* (1998), is also indebted to Kelley.

50. See James Meyer, "Impure Thoughts: The Art of Sam Durant," *Artforum* (April 2000). In related pieces Durant features the Rolling Stones, Neil Young, and Nirvana.

51. Robert Smithson, *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 56–57.

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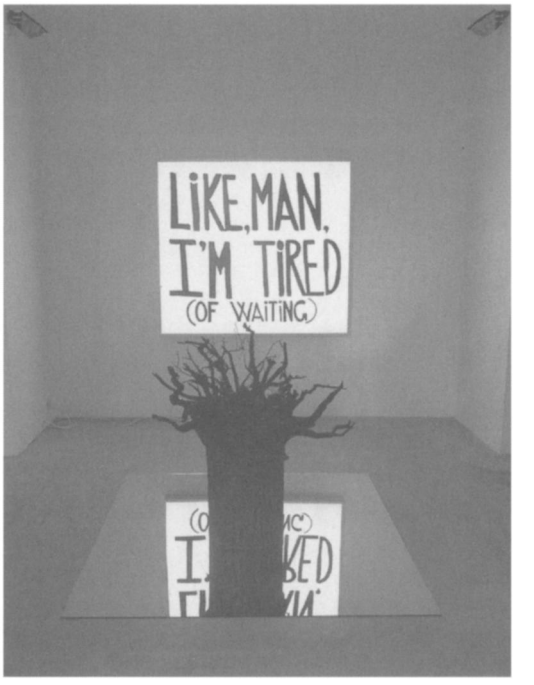

Durant. Like, Man, I'm Tired of Waiting. *2002. Courtesy the artist, Blum and Poe, and Galleria Emi Fontana.*

"partially buried." "I read it as a grave site," Durant says of *Partially Buried Woodshed,* but it is a fertile one for him.[52]

Often in his work Durant "sets up a false dialectic [that] doesn't work or [that] negates itself."[53] In one piece, for example, he revises the structuralist map of "sculpture in the expanded field" proposed by Rosalind Krauss over twenty-five years ago, in which he substitutes, for her disciplinary categories like "landscape" and "architecture," pop-cultural markers like "song lyric" and "pop star."[54] The parody comes with a point: the gradual devolution of a structured space of postmodernist art. (His diagram might be called "installation in the imploded field" or "practice in the age of cultural studies.") Perhaps Durant implies that the dialectic at large—not only in advanced art but in cultural history—has faltered since this moment of high postmodernism, and that today we are mired in a stalled relativism (perhaps he relishes this predicament). Yet this is not the only implication of his archival art: his "bad combinations" also serve "to offer space for associative interpretation," and they suggest that, even in an apparent condition of entropic collapse, new connections can be made.[55]

52. Durant in *Sam Durant,* p. 58. Smithson also alludes to his sandbox as a grave.
53. Ibid.
54. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979).
55. Durant in an unpublished statement of 1995, cited in *Sam Durant,* p. 14. The purpose of any "archaeology" is to ascertain what one can of the difference of the present and the potential of the past.

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A final comment on the will "to connect what cannot be connected" in archival art.[56] Again, this is not a will to totalize so much as a will to relate—to probe a misplaced past, to collate its different signs (sometimes pragmatically, sometimes parodistically), to ascertain what might remain for the present. Yet this will to connect is enough alone to distinguish the archival impulse from the allegorical impulse attributed to postmodernist art by Craig Owens: for these artists a subversive allegorical fragmentation can no longer be confidently posed against an authoritative symbolic totality (whether associated with aesthetic autonomy, formalist hegemony, modernist canonicity, or masculinist domination). By the same token this impulse is not anomic in the manner disclosed in the work of Gerhard Richter and others by Benjamin Buchloh: the art at issue here does not project a lack of logic or affect.[57] On the contrary, it assumes anomic fragmentation as a condition not only to represent but to work through, and proposes new orders of affective association, however partial and provisional, to this end, even as it also registers the difficulty, at times the absurdity, of doing so.

This is why such work often appears tendentious, even preposterous. Indeed its will to connect can betray a hint of paranoia—for what is paranoia if not a practice of forced connections and bad combinations, of my own private archive, of my own notes from the underground, put on display?[58] On the one hand, these private archives do question public ones: they can be seen as perverse orders that aim to disturb the symbolic order at large. On the other hand, they might also point to a general crisis in this social law—or to an important change in its workings whereby the symbolic order no longer operates through apparent totalities. For Freud the paranoiac projects meaning onto a world ominously drained of the same (systematic philosophers, he liked to imply, are closet paranoiacs).[59] Might archival art emerge out of a similar sense of a failure in cultural memory, of a

56. This will is active in my text too. In the test cases here it varies in subject and strategy: Hirschhorn and Durant stress crossings of avant-garde and kitsch, for example, while Dean tends to figures who fall outside these realms; the connections in Hirschhorn and Durant are tendentious, in Dean tentative; and so on.

57. See n. 1.

58. This work does invite psychoanalytical projections. It can also appear manic—not unlike much archival fiction today (e.g., David Foster Wallace, Dave Eggers)—as well as childish. Sometimes Hirschhorn and Durant evoke the figure of the adolescent as "dysfunctional adult" (I borrow the term from Mike Kelley), who, maimed by capitalist culture, strikes out against it. They entertain infantilist gestures too: with its nonhierarchical spatiality installation art often suggests a scatological universe, and sometimes they thematize it as such. For Freud the anal stage is one of symbolic slippage in which creative definitions and entropic indifferences struggle with one another. So it is sometimes in this art as well.

59. Here "anomie," which stems from the Greek *anomia*, "without law," is again apposite as a condition to react against. In *A Short Guide*, Curinger speaks of "an insane effort to put everything right" in Hirschhorn, who has indeed adopted a mad persona ("Cavemanman" in a 2002 show at Barbara Gladstone Gallery). On paranoia vis-à-vis the symbolic order, see Eric Santner, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and my *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004).

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default in productive traditions? For why else connect so feverishly if things did not appear so frightfully disconnected in the first place?[60]

Perhaps the paranoid dimension of archival art is the other side of its utopian ambition—its desire to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations, to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia. This partial recovery of the utopian demand is unexpected: not so long ago this was the most despised aspect of the modern(ist) project, condemned as totalitarian gulag on the Right and capitalist *tabula rasa* on the Left. This move to turn "excavation sites" into "construction sites" is welcome in another way too: it suggests a shift away from a melancholic culture that views the historical as little more than the traumatic.[61]

60. Two further speculations: 1. Even as archival art cannot be separated from "the memory industry" that pervades contemporary culture (state funerals, memorials, monuments . . .), it suggests that this industry is amnesiac in its own way ("and the last remnants memory destroys"), and so calls out for a practice of counter-memory. 2. Archival art might also be bound up, ambiguously, even deconstructively, with an "archive reason" at large, that is, with a "society of control" in which our past actions are archived (medical records, border crossings, political involvement . . .) so that our present activities can be surveilled and our future behaviors predicted. This networked world does appear both disconnected and connected—a paradoxical appearance that archival art sometimes seems to mimic (Hirschhorn displays can resemble mock World Wide Webs of information), which might also bear on its paranoia vis-à-vis an order that seems both incoherent and systemic in its power. For different accounts of different stages of such "archive reason," see Allan Sekula, "The Body as Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986), and Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992).

61. Hirschhorn in Obrist, *Interviews*, p. 394. Or, worse, a culture (to focus on the United States after 9/11) that tropes trauma as the grounds—the Ground Zero, as it were—for so much imperial triumphalism.

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