

# TWO BLIND MEN DESCRIBE “BLOODY GOOD ELEPHANT”

PORT AUTHORITY — Yesterday's Berlin-based weblog *inmoms.livejournal.com* ran a piece about this paper headed “Newspaper stalked and serendip by a ghost of its true self.” In an ensuing exchange with (Anonymous), iMoms concluded “we're basically two blind men describing an elephant here. The only difference is that I think it's probably a bloody good elephant.”

A few days beforehand one of *TF/LN's* regular correspondents pitched the idea of an interview with renowned sound engineer and polymath Walter Murch, making a case for his inclusion with reference to the following quotation:

“At the basic level, a transition is simply the process of changing from some state A to another state, B. What we should examine carefully is the degree of change, and our awareness of it. Change is happening all the time, though we are not always conscious of it. But without change there is no perception. This is somewhat of a paradox. If you are staring constantly at a static object you would think that nothing is changing, but it turns out your eyeballs are constantly moving, though the movements are so tiny you are unaware of it. You might be stationary, the object you are staring at might be stationary, but your eyeballs are rapidly scanning the image in what are called microscades, at the rate of around sixty per second. It is this slight vibration — the eyeballs are moving about 1/180th of a degree — that is keeping your perception alive, scrubbing the image across a slightly different set of rods and cones at the back of your eye. In a way it is kind of like the scanning electron gun in a video monitor. Fascinating experiments have been performed, neutralizing these microscades, and the result is that the vision of the subject quickly dims and then disappears entirely, even though his eyes are open and he is in a lighted room. At a very basic perceptual level, then, there has to be some kind of a transition, a change, for us to perceive the world at all.”

This statement describes both the point and point-of-view of *TF/LN* with such alarming economy, that we urged our correspondent to follow the lead. As it turned out, she wasn't scheduled to meet Murch, only invited to a dinner that he would also attend.

“If I could ask Murch only one question,” she wondered, “what would that be —?”

“One designed to extract an exact replica of that quotation,” we replied.

The after-dinner conversation reportedly lasted four hours. (DS)

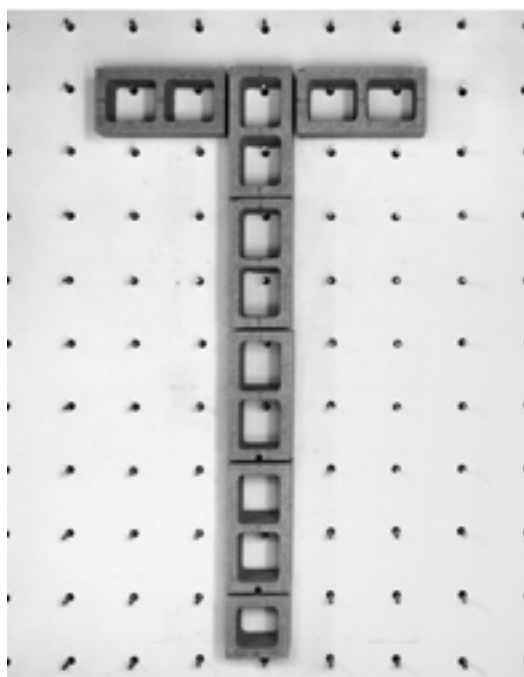
# TIME CAPTCHA'D FOR GLOBAL GOOD?

PALO ALTO — In 2002, Stanford University launched a “community reading project” called *Discovering Dickens*, making Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* available in its original part-issue format and asking its alumni and other members of the Stanford community to read along, exactly as Victorians first did, with the serial version that appeared from December 1860 to August 1861. In 2004, as *Discovering Dickens* readers followed *A Tale of Two Cities*, Stanford joined the newly-formed Google Print Library Project, along with the University of Michigan, Harvard, Oxford, and the New York Public Library.

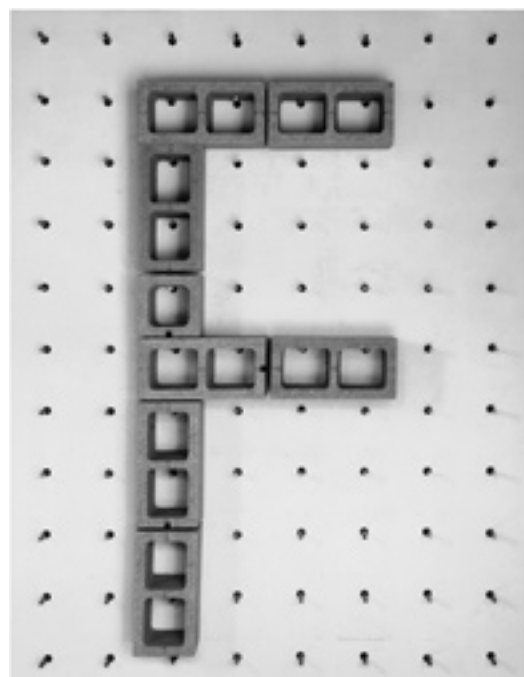
A year later, the program would become known as the Google Books Partner Program, or, more simply, Google Books. At the launch of Google Books, Google's intent was to scan and make available 15 million books within ten years. By 2008, just four years into the project, 7 million books had already been scanned. When books are scanned, words are automatically converted by Google's Optical Character Recognition software into searchable text. Occasionally there's a problem with the conversion, and Google's OCR software either can't recognize some text or it isn't checked against its conversion, having confirmed the results against standard grammar rules. The only way to convert these wayward words and phrases is to introduce human eyes into the system.

This September, Google did just that with the purchase of reCAPTCHA.

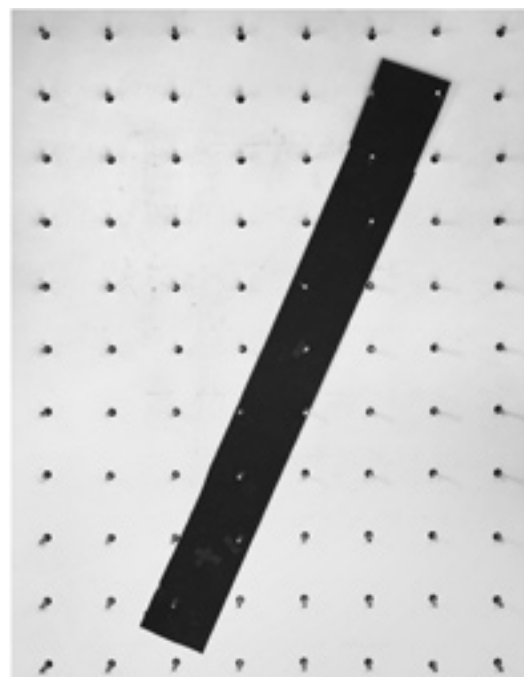
reCAPTCHA was invented by Luis Von Ahn, who also invented the CAPTCHA, a test that can tell if a user is a human or a computer. CAPTCHAs are effective at blocking spam, verifying accounts, and a variety of other online tasks. Von Ahn's original CAPTCHA presented a randomized set of letters warped in such a way that a computer could not read them, though humans easily could. A few years ago, Von Ahn began thinking of the time people were wasting filling out CAPTCHAs. It bothered him. About 200 million CAPTCHAs are solved everyday. Each one takes about ten seconds of time to solve; collectively people spend more than 150,000 hours a day solving the tests. What if this time could be harnessed for the global good? Von Ahn found a way: instead of random letters, his new system, reCAPTCHA, presents users with two English words, one known and the other unknown. The unknown words are pulled randomly from a pool of scanned words that



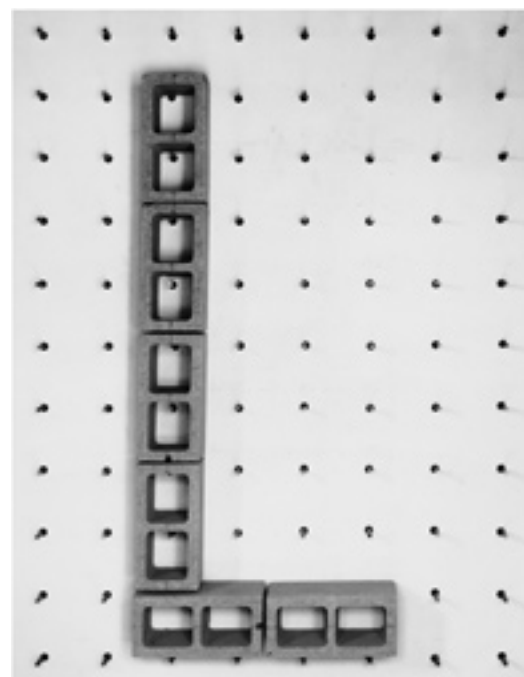
THE FIRST/LAST NEWSPAPER



PORT AUTHORITY, 641 8th Avenue, New York City, NY 10036



7 NOVEMBER 2009



DEXTER SINISTER

OCR cannot convert. Users solving the new reCAPTCHAs require the same amount of time as before — ten seconds — to recognize and type these two words. But now, every test produces a human user's confirmation and the digitization of an unknown word. reCAPTCHA digitizes 45 million words a day, or about 4 million books a year. In addition to the words reCAPTCHA digitizes for Google Books, reCAPTCHA's other significant source of unknown words comes from the archive of the *New York Times*.

The case of reCAPTCHA once again underscores the fact that text takes time. Even the seemingly insignificant act of parroted back some random letters or words occupies us for a collective 150,000 hours everyday. But while the typical production of text is made by one or a few writers producing words serially in sentences one after another, reCAPTCHA has millions of users producing text randomly, separating words from their proper context and syntax and presenting them to us based on their ambiguous form and unlikely transliteration instead. Rather than invention, reCAPTCHA's method is algorithmic. And rather than originality, reCAPTCHA's word generating rationale boils down to one thing: verification.

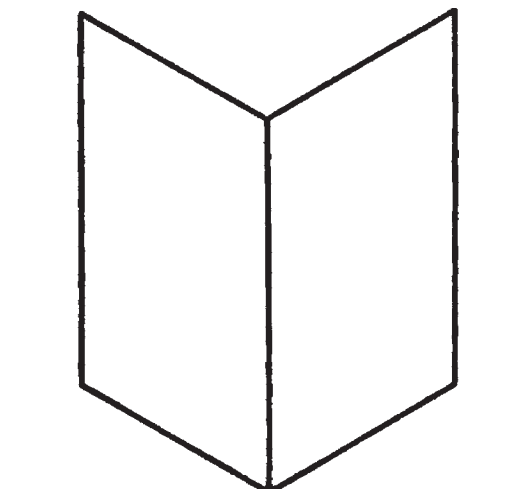
Verification is also central to the snarl of issues surrounding the legality of the Google Books project more generally. Many works it has scanned, like Dickens's writings, were already free of copyright and in the public domain long before the project started. (Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which entered the public domain in 1942, was first published in 1854. Dickens died in 1870.) However, many of the works Google Books has scanned are still under copyright, and Google has scanned them anyway in an attempt to make them more accessible — like a “card catalog,” according to Google — however, authors' and publishers' rights groups have objected to this and sued Google to stop them from scanning works under active copyright. For another large segment of the books Google has scanned, the copyright status is simply unknown. So-called “orphan” works, under copyright but now out-of-print, are those works for which, after a “reasonable effort” has been made to locate a current copyright holder, no such person can be found. On one hand, Google must attempt to verify whether or not a current copyright holder exists. On the other, it must verify to the court that it has been exhaustive in conducting its search in order to make the book available to users of Google Books. And this two-part effort has led to what the *New York Times* described earlier this year as “A Google Search of a Distinctly Retro Kind.” The article continues,

“Since the copyright holders can be anywhere and not necessarily online — given how many books are old or out of print — it became obvious that what was needed was a huge push in that relic of the pre-Internet age: print.

“So while there is a large direct-mail effort, a dedicated Web site about the settlement in 36 languages, and an online strategy of the kind you would expect from Google, the bulk of the legal notice spending — about \$7 million of a total of \$8 million — is going to newspapers, magazines, even poetry journals, with at least one ad in each country. These efforts make this among the largest print legal-notice campaigns in history.

“That Google is in the position of paying for so many print ads is hilarious — it is the ultimate irony,” said Robert Klonoff, dean of Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, Ore. “Klonoff's comment is apt. In its attempt to digitize all the world's books, Google has not only been forced to search for what it cannot find, but the company, which made its billions by serving relevant advertisements to users of its search engine, must now spend millions placing similar ads in tiny publications that its Google Books service (and the scanning of books more generally) may ultimately render obsolete.”

For the readers of *Discovering Dickens*, Google's hundreds of little text advertisements may seem reminiscent of the ads scattered throughout the original part-issues of Dickens's serial works, each of which included 16 pages of advertising flanking 32 pages of original text. The benefits of the “Invisible Spine Supporter” and “Dr. Leacock's Female Wafers” were proclaimed alongside entreaties urging buyers to purchase “Alpaca Umbrellas” and “Children's Frock Coats and Pelisses.” It was a bazaar inside of *Beak House*, a marketplace within *Martin Chuzzlewit*. For Dickens's publishers, his text provided a perfect vehicle for additional advertising revenue. But, with the aid of the recently developed idea of copyright, Dickens's text would soon become a commodity of its very own. (RC)



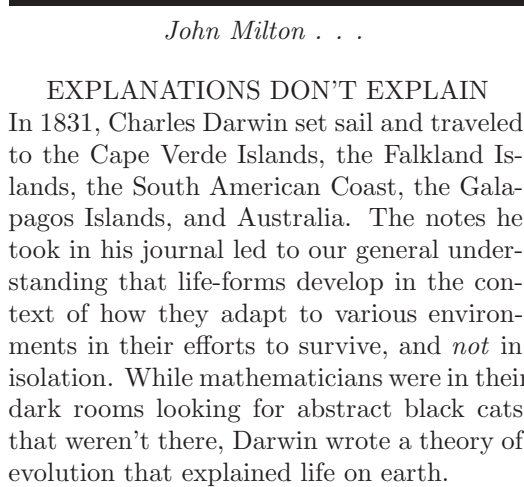
A Reconsideration of the Newspaper Industry in 5 Easy Allusions (1): as you stare at this form, watch your perspective flip back and forth.

# BLIND MAN IN DARK ROOM LOOKING FOR BLACK CAT THAT'S NOT THERE

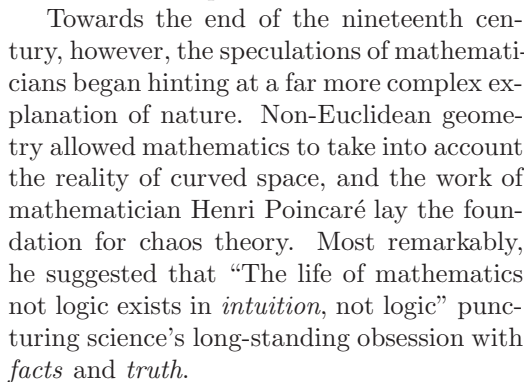
HELLAS — Our story begins in Ancient Greece, with Socrates announcing, “I know that I know nothing.” Clearly, wisdom has always been at the heart of confusion. Centuries later came a statement may have attributed to Charles Darwin: “A mathematician is like a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn't there.” As a scientist committed to cataloging, explaining, and drawing a clear picture of nature, Darwin mocked the mathematician's inability to describe the physical world in anything but abstract and speculative terms. Artists also understand the world in these terms. With their help, we can learn to enjoy the experience of not-knowing and the playfulness of being in the dark.



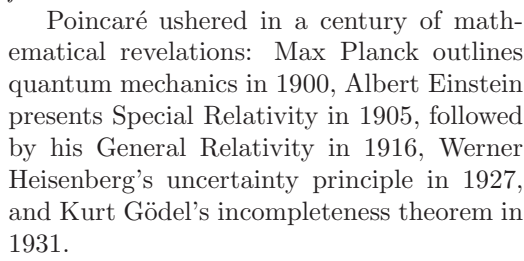
Johann Sebastian Bach . . .



John Milton . . .



Homer . . .



. . . and James Joyce all become blind in later life.

**EXPLANATIONS DON'T EXPLAIN**  
In 1831, Charles Darwin set sail and traveled to the Cape Verde Islands, the Falkland Islands, the South American Coast, the Galapagos Islands, and Australia. The notes he took in his journal led to our general understanding that life-forms develop in the context of how they adapt to various environments in their efforts to survive, and *not* in isolation. While mathematicians were in their dark rooms looking for abstract black cats that weren't there, Darwin wrote a theory of evolution that explained life on earth.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, the speculations of mathematicians began hinting at a far more complex explanation of nature. Non-Euclidean geometry allowed mathematics to take into account the reality of curved space, and the work of mathematician Henri Poincaré lay the foundation for chaos theory. Most remarkably, he suggested that “The life of mathematics not logic exists in *intuition*, not logic!” puncturing science's long-standing obsession with *facts and truth*.

Poincaré ushered in a century of mathematical revelations: Max Planck outlines quantum mechanics in 1900, Albert Einstein presents Special Relativity in 1905, followed by his General Relativity in 1916. Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in 1927, and Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem in 1931.

Working alongside Einstein at Princeton, Gödel inherited a discipline that began to realize that the human mind is *not* a logic engine, but an analogy engine, a learning engine, a guessing engine, an aesthetics-driven engine, and a self-correcting engine. In his speculative mathematics, Gödel arrived at a proof revealing that “all axiomatic theories (top-down ‘explanations’) are necessarily incomplete and that ‘truth’ will always have a hole in it. In other words, all mathematics — even simple arithmetic — always relies on at least one assumption that cannot be proven within its own system.”

To re-state this theorem (outside the language of numbers) would be to claim that it is fundamental to the nature of any explanation that it always contains an element that remains unexplained and not understood.

Re-stated again — all explanations also don't explain.

In the world of science — that fortress of logic, reason, and knowledge — not-knowing has inched its way into knowledge. Not to replace it, and also not to contradict it . . .

. . . but instead to become acknowledged as a necessary part of how knowledge works. The encyclopedic ambitions of the Enlightenment (the historical period leading up to Darwin) began losing ground, and Modernity set off with what John Keats called “negative capability” — the ability to tolerate, and even enjoy, the experience of confusion or doubt.

**THE BLIND MAN**  
Marcel Duchamp was a devoted student of Poincaré's *Science & Hypothesis* (1905), which noted that “the aim of science is *not* things themselves — as the dogmatists in their simplicity imagine — but the relations between things; outside those relations there is no knowable reality.”

Creating an equivalent notion in the language of art, Duchamp formulated his famous algebraic comparison:

The ratio  $a/b$   
 $a$  = the exhibition,  $b$  = the possibilities  
is in no way given by a number  $c$   
( $a/b \neq c$ ) but by the sign ( $/$ )  
which separates  $a$  &  $b$ .

Fifty years before conceptualism, Duchamp disrupted the territory of art at its core, by asking, “Can one make a work of art that is not of ‘art’?” Can there be an art that isn't? How can one invent an entirely other way of thinking and knowing? Can one imagine a new epistemological map, equipped with an additional dimension that reaches outside and beyond the familiar north/south poles of *knowing and not-knowing*?

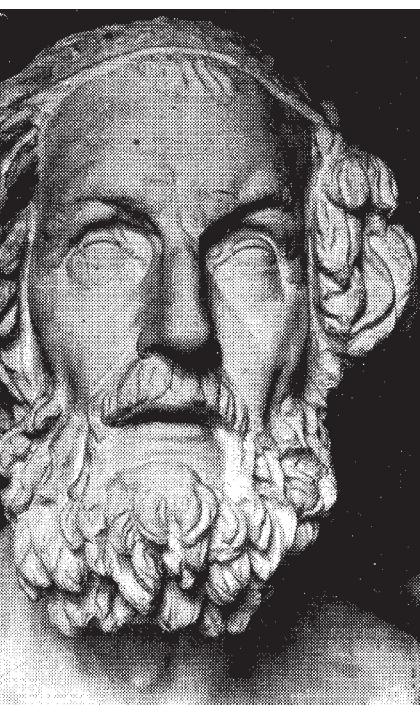
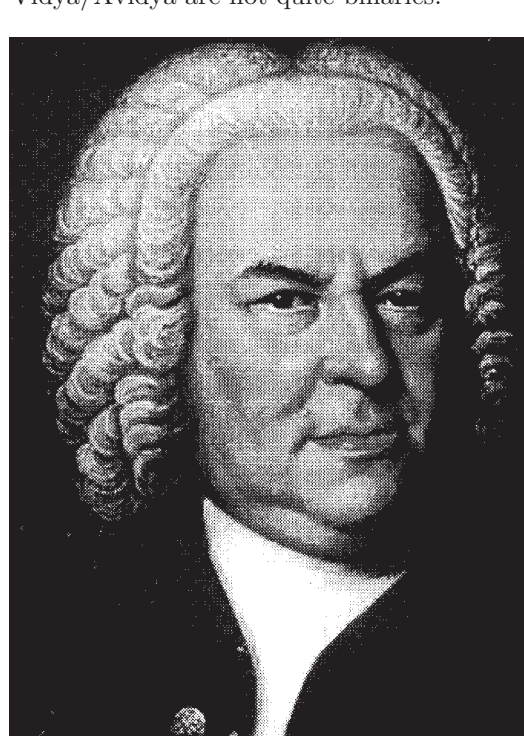
The contemporary cultural theorist Sarat Maharaj has named this other epistemological dimension in his discussion of “xeno-epistemic” and proposal of “avidya”:

“In the provocative spirit of the work of art that isn't, why not adopt the term ‘non-knowledge’ — despite pejorative connotations — for visual arts' cognitive processes? Non-knowledge, at any rate, is not at all the same as ‘ignorance.’ It refers to the knowledge system's ‘other,’ that indeterminate xeno-zone between ‘knowledge/ignorance.’ For this ‘infra-thin’ chink let's use the term *Avidya*. In sanskrit *vidya* means ‘knowledge’ as in the phrase ‘to see-know’: the Latin cognate is *video*, to see, and its modern English cousin is ‘video.’ The prefix ‘A’ signals the neutral gear, a semi-freeze: the idea is that ‘systematic knowledge’ is neutralized in ‘Avidya’ but not entirely annihilated. *Vidya/Avidya* are not quite binaries.”

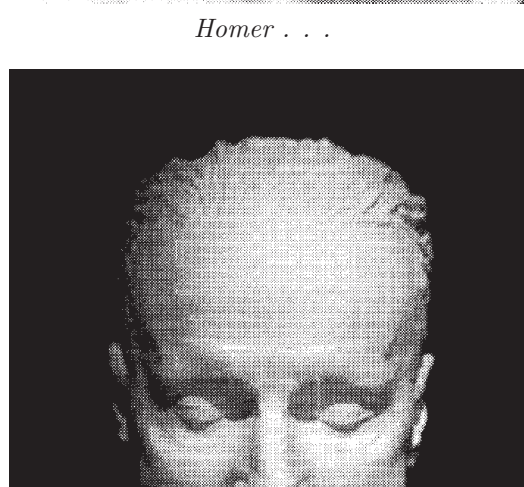
This line of thought culminated in 1987 with French philosopher Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. In it, he argued how the traditional teacher-student relationship does nothing but reinforce inequality, stultifying the learner. A non-emancipated student “is the one who ignores that he does not know what he does not know and ignores how to know it. The master is not only who he exactly knows what remains unknown to the ignorance,” [but] “he also knows how to make it knowable, at what time and what place, according to what protocol.”

A student is held captive by his or her reliance on explanations, “But the child who is explained to will devote his intelligence to the work of grieving; to understanding, that is to say, to understanding that he does not understand unless he is explained to.”

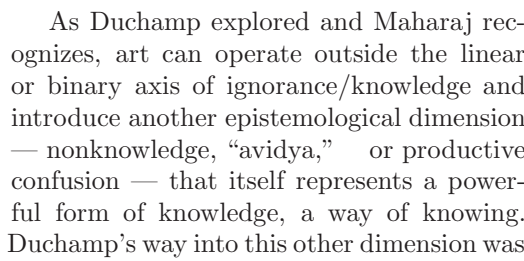
Rancière insists on the equality of all intelligences and considers the central goal of education to be the revelation of an intelligence to itself, and not the gift of a pre-ordained “knowledge.” In his book, he discusses the emancipatory potential in teachers remaining ignorant of what they teach, and to act instead as enforcers and verifiers of the student's own will-to-learn. It is the experience of learning — the doing — that matters, not the knowing of teaching. Moreover, “the student of the ignorant master learns what his master does not know, since he does not learn his master's knowledge.”



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Homer . . .



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As Duchamp explored and Maharaj recognizes, art can operate outside the linear or binary axis of ignorance/knowledge and introduce another epistemological dimension — non-knowledge, “avidya,” or productive confusion — that itself represents a powerful form of knowledge, a way of knowing, Duchamp's way into this other dimension was by way of what he called the “infra-thin.” This is the place of Poincaré's fourth dimension, Gödel's undecidability, Maharaj's avidya, art that isn't, and a work of art that is not “of Art.”

Even Denis Diderot (the inventor of the *Encyclopedia*), did not consider confusion to be the enemy of knowledge. He saw — beyond good/bad — confusion as the condition that defines all of us. As a result, Diderot didn't seek to abolish it, but imagined that “confusion could lead us to a new realism” and identified positive and productive forms of confusion. In *Letter on the Blind* (1749), Diderot embraced the confusion of the blind man, “for if understanding the world required breaking down any subject to its original, elemental components and then putting them back together again in an orderly fashion without skipping any steps, then the blind man — with his superior powers of abstraction and speculation — can do it best.”

Returning to Duchamp: after his ready-made urinal was rejected by the 1917 Armory show, he co-published two issues of a small satirical magazine called *The Blind Man*, referring to the short-sightedness of the critical establishment and of the viewing public with regards to modern art. The articles in the journal were Eric Dycknerts, fueling more speculation.

This aphorism by Eric Dycknerts perhaps best summarizes such playful acts of not-knowing:

“If there's a discrepancy between certainty and truth, the certainty of the discrepancy sabotages its truth.”

**CHILD'S PLAY**  
“The impulse to make a new language is a strong one,” Matt Mullican tells us, “kids do this all the time.” The potential of non-knowledge is often closely connected to the curiosity of children. Not only do children invent new languages all the time, but those languages form the basis for a pedagogical method used in kindergartens around the world. Soon after the Second World War, Italian schoolteacher Loris Malaguzzi started a child-care program near the Northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia.

What is now known as the “Reggio Emilia Method” sees children as little researchers who strive to understand the world, making their own theories to explain it. A teacher's responsibility is to guide their natural curiosity rather than replace it with a knowledge that is foreign to them. Each child has a particular theory in a particular language, making a school into a place of a hundred theories in a hundred languages. While traditional pedagogy tends to favor one of them and discourage the ninety-nine others, the Reggio method recognizes the value of keeping them all, allowing the child to insert a beautifully-impossible cacophony into the fabric of knowledge.

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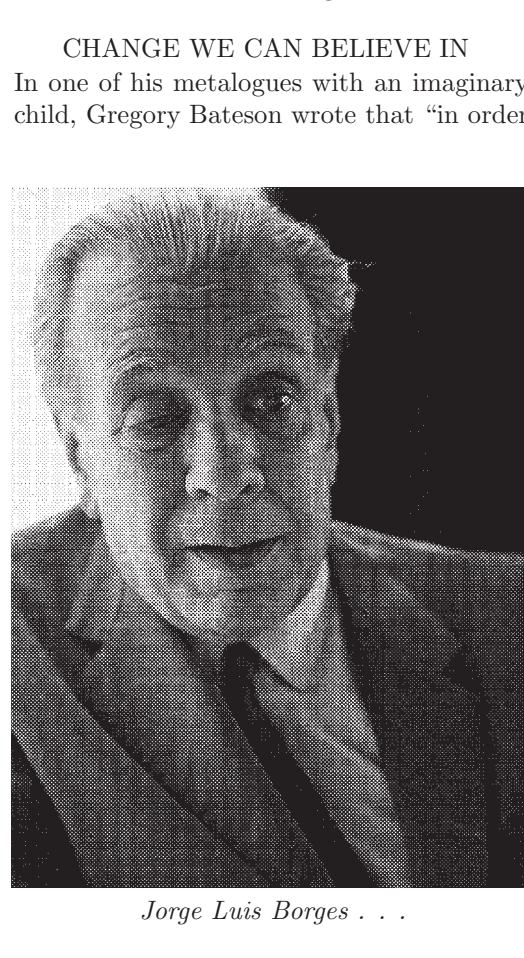
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**CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE IN**  
In one of his metaphors with an imaginary child, Gregory Bateson wrote that “in order to think new thoughts or to say new things we have to break up all our ready-made ideas and shuffle the pieces.”

In his foreword to the well-titled exhibition *Things We Don't Understand*, curated by Roger M. Buergeel and Ruth Noack, Dierrich Kramer notes that “It is not always easy to be confronted with situations that invalidate entrenched patterns of understanding. The value of this confrontation is directly proportional to our ability to convert the crisis of insecurity into the fertile potential of change.”

With that in mind, let us recognize the importance of not understanding a work of art. A work of art opens up that world of non-knowledge and helps to make sure we don't lose sight of it, keeping us curious and actively speculating. “Artists don't solve problems, they invent new ones,” (Bruce Nauman). “Art isn't here to explain things,” (Joseph Beuys). “The artist has an unknowability: the ability to unknow.” (Sarat Maharaj); Robert Rauschenberg said “I could not live without confusion”; and Bruno Munari is even more to the point: “Il più grande ostacolo alla comprensione di un'opera d'arte è quello di voler capire.” (AH)



Jorge Luis Borges . . .

Today I'd like to travel back to the beginning of the video revolution and reflect on two media events produced by Ant Farm in 1975: *Media Burn* — in which a customized Cadillac was driven through a pyramid of blazing television sets — and *The Eternal Frame* — a re-enactment of the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

Twenty-two seconds of footage of the assassination, taken in Dallas in 1963 by Abraham Zapruda, was sold to *Life* magazine on the night of the shooting for \$150,000. *Life* published stills from the film shortly afterwards. (Later, the Zapruda family would be paid \$10 million by the US government for rights to the film). Stills were also re-produced in the Warren Commission Report of September 1964. The Warren Commission also used the film as the basis for a series of reconstructions that served as part of their investigation. The film itself was not broadcast until 1975. Perhaps more than any other, this moving image defined the turbulence of the 1960s for a wide American public during the 1970s.

Don DeLillo's 1997 novel *Underground* captures the sense of this moment in a fictional account of one of the film's first public, or semi-public, viewings in the summer of 1974. The scene takes place in an apartment with television sets in every room. In each room a video of the same piece of footage plays, with a slight delay.

DeLillo writes: “The event was rare and strange. It was the screening of a bootleg copy of an eight-millimeter home movie that ran for twenty seconds. A little over twenty seconds probably. The footage was known as the Zapruda film and almost no one outside the government had seen it. . . .

“The footage started rolling in one room but not the others and it was filled with slurs and jostles, it was totally jostled footage, a home movie shot with Super 8, and the limousine came down the street, muddied by sunlight, and the head dipped out of the frame and reappeared and then the force of the shot that killed him, unexpectedly the head shot, and people in the room went ooh, and then the next ooh, and five seconds later the room at the back went ooh, the same release of breath every time, like blurts of disbelief.”

In this scene, DeLillo combines multiple screens plus the delay techniques of Don Graham's video pieces from that era (a technique also used by Gillette & Schneider in their highly influential *Wipe Cycle*). It merges the use of video as radical software — elements can be patched and re-configured in ways that were not possible with film — together with an understanding that television has been around long enough to be regarded as *junk*. All this is blended with the shock tactics of art-media groups from the early '70s such as Ant Farm, Radical Software, TVTV (Top Value Television).

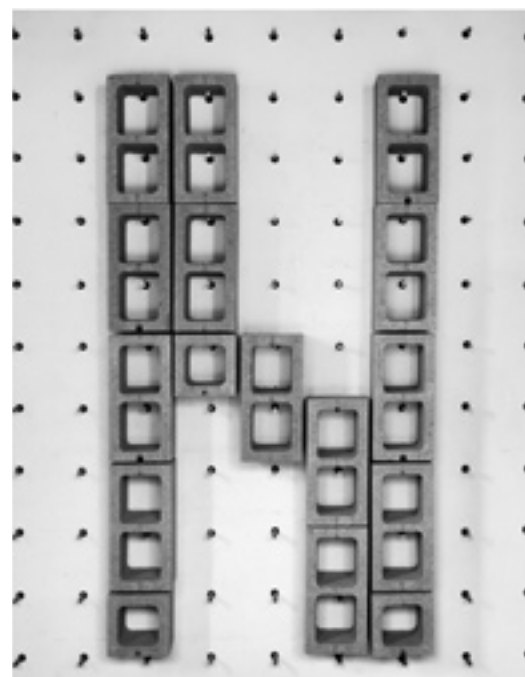
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He stood up from the bench and walked back into the inner space, towards the kitchen, raising his voice asking does anyone want some soup. Pumpkin. It was clear that he'd already prepared this courtesy, calling out more for the sake of speaking his own mind for his stomach, and provoking us into thinking about food and considering our own hunger. He lit the fire under the pan and lifted the lid. The sound of his words carried on and on to us, as he mashed the pumpkins, above the pans and cutlery. He turned around to open a cupboard door and take four deep, white glazed bowls, and four plates. These were stacked and placed on the sideboard. Turning towards a drawer under the sideboard next to the sink, he pulled out spoons, knives, a ladle and a longer serrated knife. These he laid on the plates together with the piled bowls and carried them out to us, laying them down in the middle of the table and then arranging four places for lunch. Facing me, still talking, he put the knives and forks down for his own point of view: knife and spoon right, fork left; then corrected the setting, “So now, after all these years,” he laughingly scolded himself. Another trip into the kitchen, humming to the removal of paper wrappers brought back a square wooden board with a large loaf to one side, a selection of cheese and cold meats on the other.

“Help yourselves.” (WH)



# THEY CAME TO SEE WHO CAME

TIVOLI, NY — You know the script: A politician and a military spokesperson mount the stage, each takes their place behind a podium. They face the ladies and gentlemen of the press and a bank of TV cameras. A line of flags provides an appropriate backdrop as the politician begins to speak. The politician reminds us of the necessity of the action they have taken. The politician reminds us that we did not want war, in fact we did everything in our power to prevent conflict, but if an aggressor willfully turns aside all overtures for a peaceful resolution, and if the aggressor continues to threaten the fundamental values of our society, then there is no choice.

The military spokesperson now points to a screen demonstrating the efficiency of the weaponry our forces have employed against the aggressor. It also displays evidence of the military capacity of the aggressor. It seems if they were given the opportunity they could inflict terrible harm on our forces, and to the way of life many have tried to preserve.

But the press briefing is more than just a script; you also need the stage, the podium, the uniforms, the flags, the press, and the cameras if you want to master *reality*.

Simply through their performance, certain media events can have an effect in the world. In 2003, a military man mounted the stage and provided evidence of Weapons of Mass Destruction. What surprised many about this performance was the comparative ease with which it was exercised and the potency of its result — a war could be prosecuted despite any real “evidence” produced to suggest that such weapons did exist. It was as if the whole machinery of the press briefing was a feedback loop, which justified military action but also legitimized the press briefing itself. This is mastering reality.

For those of us raised with the notion that the press and TV news exist to somehow “get to the bottom” of things, and that the news media is a forum in which things can be proven or disproved, the ease with which transparent nonsense became a matter of fact that could justify fatal action came as a shock.

Whatever this thing we call “the news media” is, it is not in its nature to simply test matters of fact. The WMD incident demonstrated that the apparatus of the media actually has the ability to *produce facts*. The press briefing demonstrates two fundamental things about the structure of contemporary media: 1) It's a feedback loop that gives legitimacy and conveys narrative to its producers, 2) The incantation that “produced” WMD reminds us of French philosopher Michel Foucault's most valuable lesson — *discourse produces its object*.

Today I'd like to travel back to the beginning of the video revolution and reflect on two media events produced by Ant Farm in 1975: *Media Burn* — in which a customized Cadillac was driven through a pyramid of blazing television sets — and *The Eternal Frame* — a re-enactment of the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

Twenty-two seconds of footage of the assassination, taken in Dallas in 1963 by Abraham Zapruda, was sold to *Life* magazine on the night of the shooting for \$150,000. *Life* published stills from the film shortly afterwards. (Later, the Zapruda family would be paid \$10 million by the US government for rights to the film). Stills were also re-produced in the Warren Commission Report of September 1964. The Warren Commission also used the film as the basis for a series of reconstructions that served as part of their investigation. The film itself was not broadcast until 1975. Perhaps more than any other, this moving image defined the turbulence of the 1960s for a wide American public during the 1970s.

Don DeLillo's 1997 novel *Underground* captures the sense of this moment in a fictional account of one of the film's first public, or semi-public, viewings in the summer of 1974. The scene takes place in an apartment with television sets in every room. In each room a video of the same piece of footage plays, with a slight delay.

DeLillo writes: “The event was rare and strange. It was the screening of a bootleg copy of an eight-millimeter home movie that ran for twenty seconds. A little over twenty seconds probably. The footage was known as the Zapruda film and almost no one outside the government had seen it. . . .

“The footage started rolling in one room but not the others and it was filled with slurs and jostles, it was totally jostled footage, a home movie shot with Super 8, and the limousine came down the street, muddied by sunlight, and the head dipped out of the frame and reappeared and then the force of the shot that killed him, unexpectedly the head shot, and people in the room went ooh, and then the next ooh, and five seconds later the room at the back went ooh, the same release of breath every time, like blurts of disbelief.”

In this scene, DeLillo combines multiple screens plus the delay techniques of Don Graham's video pieces from that era (a technique also used by Gillette & Schneider in their highly influential *Wipe Cycle*). It merges the use of video as radical software — elements can be patched and re-configured in ways that were not possible with film — together with an understanding that television has been around long enough to be regarded as *junk*. All this is blended with the shock tactics of art-media groups from the early '70s such as Ant Farm, Radical Software, TVTV (Top Value Television).

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In 1962, Daniel Boorstin coined the term “pseudo-event” to describe events designed solely to be reported: presidential debates, press conferences (and media burns). But Andy Warhol understood better than anyone else that the media event isn't something you simply consume. Describing the unfolding hallucination of the factory, Warhol said, “They came to see who came.” The people who come to see the party become the party, the figure and ground become a single flowing image. In the same way, the figure and ground of the press shifts backwards and forwards from the press as they arrive to report the event and to the press as their bodies provide the props for the event. In the next installment of this series we will look at why we, as performers in the media feedback loop, are losing the script and picking up the format. (SR)

If the 8mm footage was created in the age of the news reel, it is mediated in the age of video, which operates under the economy of the feedback loop — to be re-recorded on to tape and repeated over and over again, to be set in the eternal frame, to cycle within the eternal return of “rolling news.”

Ant Farm's re-enactment of the Kennedy assassination, *The Eternal Frame*, was made the year that Zapruda's footage became “publicly available.” Ant Farm's copy of the film came from conspiracy theory sources and was originally bootlegged out of the *Life* magazine lab.

Ant Farm originally wanted to film early in the morning, to avoid the crowds, but it became evident to them that the light was not the same as the light on the Zapruda footage and they needed it to be as close to the “real thing” as possible.

Via the Warren commission, the Zapruda footage was already caught in a media feedback loop, forming a catalyst that generated the noise of speculation, folding back to create a conspiracy panic. Because it was not visible as a moving image for eleven years after the event, the footage became the absent center of the Kennedy assassination — 22 seconds of action stretching into eternity. The re-enactment served as a response to the belief that the Zapruda footage could somehow reveal something that had been hidden and repressed. But maybe the footage is re-played and re-enacted so often precisely because it *fails to represent*. A failure of representation is, in psychoanalytical terms, the central characteristic of trauma, but the reenactment also fails to speak of something at the centre of the technology of non-scripted film: its promise to display evidence, its promise to *carry the burden of proof*.

Four years after Ant Farm's historic media interventions, Pope John Paul II staged his own media event when he visited Poland. The visit was described by writers Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz as a *shamanized media event*, which through its staging actually steered a course of events (the rise of the Solidarity movement and the eventual collapse of the Polish government). The event was a ceremony, but a ceremony of a particular sort. Like the incantation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, through its performance it established the meaning of the event and institutionalized it in collective memory. It is the moment of shamanistic feedback when a new definition of what is possible is established, and it is then that the next step is urged forward. The media event can be seen as a form of consecration because it gathers into itself a series of values that feed back to form a narrative of a state of affairs that requires action. The ceremony of the count-down (which is itself a media invention, introduced in Fritz Lang's *Franzön Mond*, in 1929) begins the narrative that ends with the moon landing. This event — staged for television from count-down to touchdown — inscribes a series of values through its performance. It speaks of an era of postivist triumph, when American know-how knew how, it represented the end of an era in which the vision of a murdered president was finally re-visited. It joins a string of images that are pre-scripted, including the 22 seconds of the Zapruda footage and the televised funeral of Kennedy, which folds back into itself to make a narrative of reality.

*Media Burn* was performed on July 4, 1975, a few months prior to *The Eternal Frame*. A modified 1955 Cadillac El Dorado Biarritz (The Phantom's *Dreaded Car*), piloted by two drivers guided only by a video monitor, was driven through a pyramid of blazing television sets. As in *The Eternal Frame*, *Media Burn* featured the Artist-President, John F. Kennedy, played by Doug Hall. He gives a content-less speech that sets the stage for the main event. Indeed, the speech highlights the degree to which a media event needs to be ritualized. The speech is one of the support structures that need to be put into place in order to constitute a “real” pseudo-event. The President speaks:

“Who can deny that we are a nation addicted to television and



she discovered that the flea had a penis." It's an obituary for Miriam Rothschild by Anne Wroe for *The Economist*, in 2005. According to the journalist, Rothschild's father "was a flea man" and that was the genesis of the passion that led her to discover the flea's jumping mechanism. This obituary ranges from the eccentric to the strangely poetic as Wroe notes, "The smell of a very gently squeezed ladybird, she once said, will stay on your hands for days."

The obituary column is another of the many glorious cul-de-sacs to be found in the best newspapers. It demands a discipline from its writers that rivals that of the haiku. All the basic biographical information should be included — date of birth and death, family, career etc. But it thrives on the telling detail and on anecdotes that would make a novelist weep in despair. Neil Gaiman, for instance, cites *The Telegraph*'s tribute to Colonel Michael Singleton as his favorite obituary. A prep school headmaster, Singleton was Spartan in his regimen.

"Long walks, cold dormitories and regular hymn-singing were also an integral part of the education, along with cricket nets and Latin prose. Despite a brisk code of discipline, Singleton took a laissez-faire approach out of the classroom. Every November 5 the smallest boy in the school was sent down a tunnel to light the very core of the bonfire. None, so far as anyone can recall, was ever lost."

This is not just life from another, vanished world but also writing that understands the tone needed to delineate it precisely: "What central heating there existed was not always effective, or even switched on. Boys were permitted to capture owls and keep them in the fives court, provided they caught enough sparrows to feed them. One boy recalls being given the task of rearing a lamb to which he developed some emotional attachment. The animal, called Lottie, disappeared shortly before the school's Christmas feast, and the boy realized what had happened only when he was the first to be summoned for second helpings."

Humour and eccentricity certainly help an obituary along and often it's the more obscure candidates who provide this while the famous dead bore us with their historical achievements. Sometimes, though, an obituary can shed an entirely new light on a tired subject as in the case of Lady Bird Johnson.

## ICONS GOVERN ACTION

MANHATTAN — "There is nothing funny about the ural." Peter Fend insists. Perhaps not. Nor is there anything particularly funny about the deteriorating state of our global ecosystem. Nevertheless, several hundred otherwise sober attendees at a recent summit held at the New York Public Library laughed heartily as Fend showed a sequence of Powerpoint (TM) slides leading directly from Marcel Duchamp's iconic ural, *Fountain*, through Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, to a drawing of the globe in which the world's oceans appear to be spiraling down the tubes.

Fend was on his way to Germany from New Zealand, where he divides his time, with a stopover of a few days in New York to appear at the summit. There, he was allotted seven minutes to present the work of Ocean Earth, the corporation he founded in 1980, which has been the focus of his considerable energies for the last thirty years. Fend cited Duchamp's *Fountain* to illustrate what he sees as the profound influence of icons in the development of political and social institutions: "Icons govern action. The ural, like Morton Shenberg's *God*, which is just a piece of plumbing, governs subsequent action. Throughout much of western culture, the notion of the state has been embodied in the leader, the hero, the standing figure. If an icon is terrain, or surroundings, instead of a role model or hero, then it causes a different orientation of social activity — we come to see the ideal as our surroundings, not a leader. The surroundings are whatever bowl we happen to be in."

For Fend, Duchamp's *Fountain*, albeit a ural on a pedestal, is the obvious metaphor to effectively lead society in the direction of topological priorities, toward a radical reorientation of values. While his audience may be laughing, Fend is not. He is taking it all quite literally, and he has a point. After all, if wars are fought over imaginary lines, then icons — the images we project onto the world — would seem to govern action, indeed.

Ocean Earth was formed by Fend in partnership with fellow artists Coleen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince, and Robin Winters as the legal entity *Ocean Earth Construction and Development Corporation*. Over three decades, the company's trajectory has extended from satellite imagery and media programming to the development of alternative energy resources and a nationwide school curriculum with a hands-on pedagogical agenda for sustainable ecology. According to the 1981 Corporate Statement, "Ocean Earth Construction and Development Corporation develops regional plans and other architectural programs that promote those means of energy production which in no way contribute to ecological breakdown of the planet." Instead, Ocean Earth would pursue development of solar-generated energy in a variety of forms, including sea-based biomass, degradable chiefly to methane — the project to which Fend and Ocean Earth are primarily dedicated today, and which is in pilot development for the exhibition *Ruhr 2010*.

To be clear, Ocean Earth, by Fend's own account, is an architectural firm that only happens to "use art ideas and arise from art practices." It is a corporation formed by artists, built on the legacy of Gordon Matta-Clark and others who embraced unconventional architectural practices, envisioning the reorganization of physical space according to ecological priorities. In a culture in which contemporary art practice is often oriented towards observation and critique, and art quietly, if disdainfully, seizes itself somewhere towards the back of the academic or the media-entertainment bus, Fend makes an extraordinary claim for art, which resonates with his take on *Fountain*. As Fend puts it, "Art is the best way to approach the problem [of ecological production] because it is a modeling of what the material values are."

Since its inception, Ocean Earth has initiated a variety of projects using technological means to see and render landscape and potential energy resources in unorthodox ways. The group developed a television program with Paul Sharits in 1981 called *Space Force*, which — in the spirit of Stewart Brand or Buckminster Fuller, though with a decidedly darker tone — was intended to disseminate information from satellite observation of the earth to the public in order to "show the public what endangers it, be that pollution, soil exhaustion, mineral depletion, climatic changes, or hostile military preparations. *Space Force* exposes the public safety dangers to public view, with state-of-art advances in video and film, in photography and television, most dramatically and most instantaneously on television."

The extension of Ocean Earth's ventures into mass media reflects Fend's belief that "media is essentially territorial," and therefore an aspect of architecture. In the 1980s, using publicly-available satellite imagery captured by Landsat, a U.S. civilian satellite, members of Ocean Earth worked with NASA experts to analyze these images and thus produce commercially-viable information which they then sold to major news organizations, including NBC and the BBC. Although the civilian satellite images were of inferior resolution to more sophisticated military satellites, weather permitting, Ocean Earth could see enough to identify air bases and troop movements in hot spots of conflict, including Libya and the Falklands. In the context of the Cold War, the market for images of war zones was greater than that for prospective project sites related to conservation, ecology and land use.

By the end of the 1980s, most of Ocean Earth's founders and early collaborators, including artists Dennis Oppenheim, Paul Sharits, Wolfgang Staehle, Kirsten Mosher, and Taro Suzuki had moved onto other pursuits. Meanwhile, Ocean Earth renewed its energy-focused work. In 1994, a proposal to begin methane production from algae extraction and fermentation in Wellington, New Zealand, which had been many years in development, fell through. Subsequently, Heidi Mardon, a New Zealander who had been a spearhead in the Wellington project, turned to the public school system, becoming director of a program called *Enviro-schools*, with a pilot group of three schools. From this beginning, in 1999, *Enviro-schools* has grown over the past ten years to enroll 213,000 stu-

dents today — roughly 5% of the entire New Zealand population.

Unlike the utopian proposals put forth by Cedric Price, Archigram, and other visionary architects, the proposals of Ocean Earth have taken the form of viable solutions for mass communications, education, and energy production. In many cases, Ocean Earth's work has entailed re-conceptualization of social and political territories along completely different lines, as well as a rethinking of labor. The work sits in unfamiliar territory, somewhere in-between established paradigms for art, business, and science, projecting a worldview somewhere in-between capitalism and anarchist utopia.

Fend is tall and thin, apparently averse to palaver. Conversations with him begin as if they might be ended at any moment by forces beyond immediate control. Until then, there is a great deal of ground to be covered and not enough time to cover it. To a meeting during his recent trip to New York, he brought an oversized suitcase, full of drawings and papers, from which he produced plans and documentation from Ocean Earth as he spoke. Files were opened, Xeroxes were made. Photographs were taken. The air in the room was bated. In Fend's company, one has the palpable sense that the clock is ticking on civilization.

Fend expresses frustration with the economic disempowerment of artists. "I have long argued that the art world is corrupt. It is not transparent and not financially or legally honest. The power structure wants art to be disempowered." It does not want the changes that result from new thought, i.e., art. As a result, the art world has engendered a religion of disbelief. "Whatever is shown or said is supposed to be disbelieved, and it is supposed to not become real. It is supposed to not work."

He calls for artists to assume political and economic power to realize their ideas, particularly because he believes it is the role of artists to conceive of new solutions to address deteriorating ecological conditions. He laments, "artists are often afraid of taking their art to its architectural or mediaspace possibilities." As historical reference points for the influential practice he envisions, Fend cites Renaissance artist-engineers Le Nôtre and Vauban, who developed new strategies for political control of space. Vauban designed a pentagon-shaped fortress for Louis XIV that clearly influenced the design of the U.S. Pentagon building, and Le Nôtre is well-known as the designer of the landscape of modern France, which eventually influenced the city plan of Washington, D.C.

While Fend's models for practice are servants of the state, his agenda for art is cultivation of territory. He explains, "Rather than talk of money, one could use the broader term, from French, of *la Richesse*. Or abundance. Our task is to assure that the territory where we has abundance, that it can support the healthy and long lives of the native animals and plants, and also support people." Thus considered, wealth is territorial. When people reduce wealth production to commodities, with earnings gained from sales to consumers, then society takes a depletive approach to wealth. It plunders the land. The French word for a site of *richesse* is *patrimoine*.

What are we doing about our patrimony? What are we doing, to use Duchamp's model, about our uralms? He called them *Fountainms* that is, they would be sources, or fontains, of more richness and abundance.

With characteristic impudence towards an academic status quo, Fend reaches beyond the widely accepted reading of the ural — that the meaning of a cultural work is unstable, and is more or less an effect of the social and political space in which it exists — to emphasize instead the significance of its physical, formal qualities, in which he sees a new paradigm for thought and action.

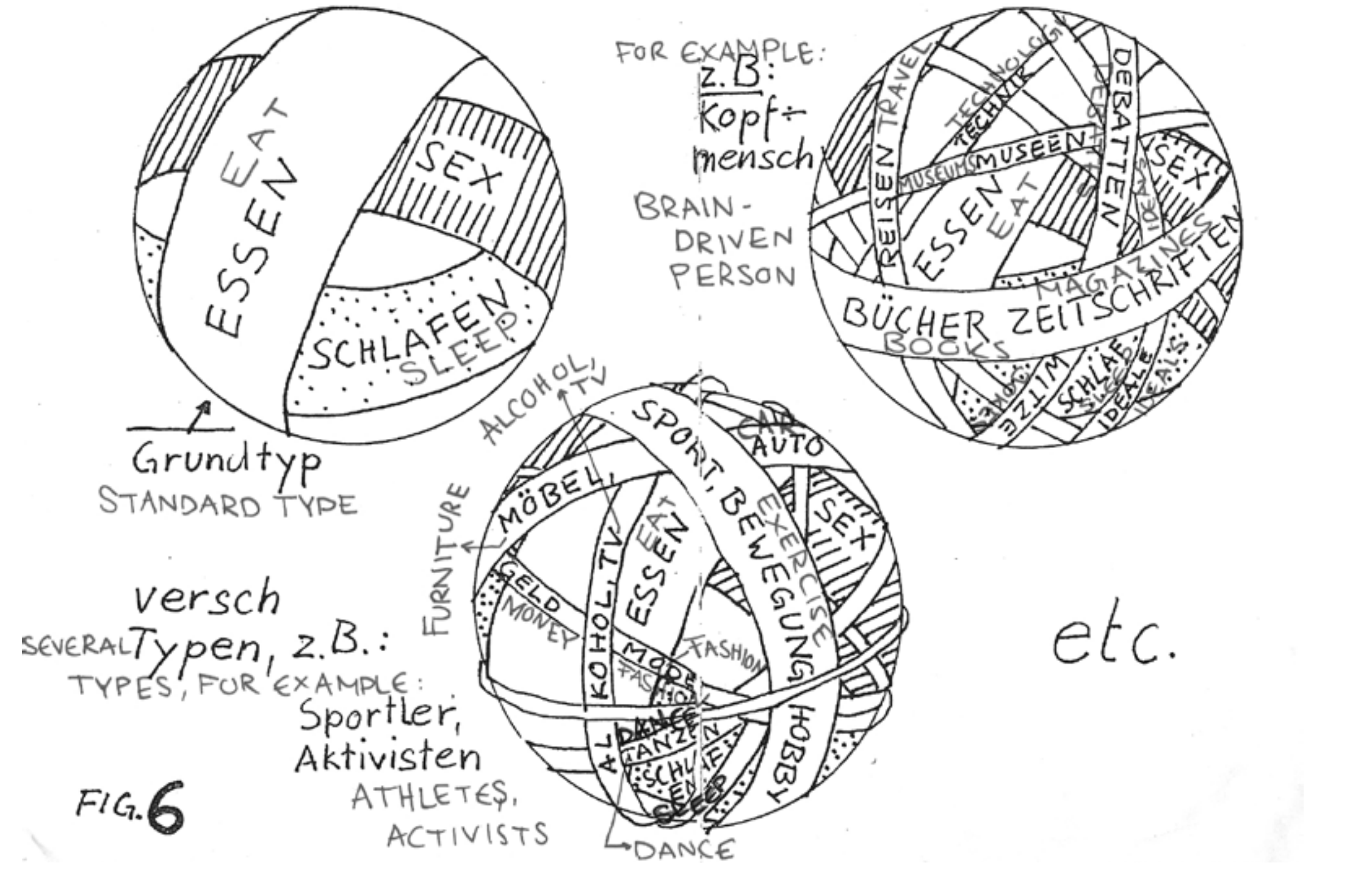
Marco Roth of *n+1*, who met Fend during his recent trip, perhaps best describes the work of Ocean Earth as "the hopeful spirit of Situationism (*soyez raisonnable, demandez l'impossible!*)" grafted on to the technological imagination of Futurism. If those Italians hadn't been fascists, they would've been a bit like Ocean Earth. It seems like a grandiose project, but it's grandiosely for the sake of the community, not for the individual artist. It strikes me as the most thoughtful kind of anarchist, someone who really asks what it would take to break the state or corporate monopolies on the means of control, surveillance and speed, and then sets about trying to realize it." (AK)

Part 2: Headless Body, Topless Bar

## MORE NEWS FROM NOWHERE

GLASGOW — Listen.

"She thought fleas beautiful. Gazing at their stained sections through the microscope, she once said, gave her a feeling as ecstatic as smoking cannabis. In her bedroom she kept them in cellophane bags, in order not to miss a thing that they were doing..." A lifelong atheist. She admitted that she had been tempted to believe in a creator when



## GONZO PRAGMATISM

BERLIN / LOUISVILLE — The fundamental beauty of a manner of thinking — and philosophy of design — that recognizes the value of making well-considered decisions in highly contingent situations lies in its avowal of optimistic practice.

This is the intuition that many situations which seem irresolvable when described in general theoretical terms (ideological, metaphysical, etc.) can actually be resolved, somehow, when you dare approach them with a readiness to listen, learn, negotiate, and improvise. This insight is at the center of pragmatist thought; it is its wit.

"By God! You old bastard! Good to see you, boy! Damn good... and I mean it!" There's been a lot of talk about pragmatism recently, but the re-articulation of its wit is a tricky proposition. Divested of its philosophical humor, pragmatism is reduced to an ideological travesty when it appears in its current dominant form: the imposed pressure to improvise under all circumstances, to the best of your abilities.

This is optimized by the knee-jerk optimism of a "Can-Do" culture, whose attitude of "scrape by and keep smiling" seems requisite for the increasing numbers of people working under precarious conditions. Does pragmatism as proposed in the philosophy

of William James cease to be a creative act — an act of freedom — when precarious living conditions leave you with simply no other choice? How do you set the emancipatory spirit of pragmatism apart from the ideological force that the "Can-Do" imperative makes of it? How can you re-namify its inherent humor and wisdom? Its soul?

It's a question of intention: how to approach a given situation? The political, emotional, and artistic prudence of pragmatism resides in the realization that the specific context of the situation in which one does or says something will determine the meaning and effect of one's actions and words. Pragmatism is defined by the capacity to grasp that context and react honestly to the specific challenges that it presents. Witty pragmatism is the art of responsive and responsible reactions.

In the air-conditioned lounge I met a man from Houston who said his name was something or other — "but just call me Jimbo" — and he was here to get it on. "I'm ready for anything, by God! Anything at all. Yeah, who are you drinks?"

But what if that situation is rightly governed by questionable or intolerable laws? In this case any response that is practically possible within the given situation will abide by those laws and therefore confirm them. Pragmatists who content themselves by "working with whatever possibilities" under oppressive conditions become conformists — by default rather than conviction, it's true, but the result is the same. The tacit acceptance that we simply grin and bear the lives we lead, that radical change is not an option, affords pragmatism a fatalist tinge. Traditionally this fatalism is expressed, compensated, and cloaked by jovial irony, as per the British stereotype: Carry on Sergeant, Teacher, Constable, Nurse, Doctor, England... Don't make a fuss! Carry on regardless!

A pragmatist that might defy this fatalist bias would have to wed its responsiveness with a spirit of non-reconciliation. This stance would invite *discontent* as a motivating force (rather than a side effect in the form of the begrudging and complaining that typically accompanies "making do"). In this spirit, the pragmatist engages with the given not on the premise that "the given" is all there is to life, but with an awareness that things could be otherwise. When facing specific problems, the possibility of radical difference remains in view.

"What's wrong with you, boy?" He grinned and winked at the bartender.

Often it is precisely an underlying sense of irrelevance that allows people to act in a situation at all, simply because this irrelevance loosens the grip of the rules established in that context. It is that not the ordinary rebellious spirit of pragmatism? Its disregard for the rules, laws, traditions — "truths" — that impose standards of *de facto*, by the book, cannot be done (when, as the pragmatic person will *de facto* demonstrate, of course it can)? This critical edge is what can enable pragmatism to cut through the Gordian knots created by false beliefs. When it casts "the given" in a different light and dispels imaginary constraints, pragmatism enables people to act, causing small insurgencies. Irrelevance makes pragmatism a liberatory force.

"Who you work for?" I stared at him again. "Don't you read the newspapers?"

No matter how emancipatory it sounds, this proposal still has a peculiar ring to it. After all, any self-help book or motivational trainer will also aim to teach you techniques

Keith Colquhoun describes a moment in her life like this: "November 22nd 1963 started in a drizzle, but soon turned bright. The sun shone from Dallas, the breeze was light, and Lady Bird Johnson enjoyed the drive in the open limousine, even when the Secret Service man thrust her husband down to the floor, even when the car screeched so violently round the corner by the hospital that she feared they would be flung out of it. Looking towards the first limousine, she saw what looked like 'a drift of pink blossoms' on the back seat. It was Jackie Kennedy lying across her dying husband."

Colquhoun, like his successor Ann Wroe, wrote for *The Economist* one of a few select papers that have transformed the obituary into a minor art form (*The Telegraph* and *The Independent* are the others). At their best, obituary writers can sketch a moment of life that reveals something of an entire culture. Colquhoun, for instance, implies far more about empire, race, and human curiosity that he states in these lines on a deceased monk:

"The achievement of Karl Kehrle, a Benedictine monk, was to breed a very decent British bee. Wherever in the world apiculturists meet they speak in awe of Mr Kehrle's sturdy bee, which produces lots of honey and is reluctant to sting. Like the British themselves, it is a mongrel, combining the virtues of the native bee with those of worthy bees from elsewhere. Mr Kehrle once heard of a promising bee said to be found only in central Africa. Although in his 80s, in poor health and carried on the back of a friend, he tracked the bee down on the slopes of Mount Killimanjaro."

These columns negate the idea of news, exposing current affairs and history itself as the crude curricular vitae of the rich and powerful. Trading on the ostensible reason for their existence — the reporting of a death — they instead broadcast lives well lived or otherwise, replacing the order of intelligence information with the random chaos of the everyday.

This element of chaos characterizes many byways of a newspaper, undermining its more strategic aims. If obituaries are death letters that surreptitiously celebrate life then press photography only comes into its own when it stumbles on a corpse. Photography is perhaps, for editors, the lowest permissible form of journalism (it eschews words entirely, cir-

cumventing reason to rush directly towards our nerve centers). But in the face of disaster, photography will overturn words.



On Friday 13th, January 1928, the *New York Daily News* ran just such a front page. Under a headline reduced to one word — "DEAD!" — there was a full cover picture of a masked woman strapped to an electric chair in Sing Sing prison. Ruth Snyder, a housewife from Queens and Judd Gray, a corset salesman and Snyder's lover, had murdered her husband Albert, the editor of *Motor Boating* magazine. Thomas Howard, a *Daily News* photographer, was present as a witness to her execution and, unknown to the guards, had strapped a camera on his ankle to capture the image. The original shot is pitched upwards at a near 45-degree angle, showing Ruth Snyder beyond the shoes of the surrounding witnesses. The image printed on the front page of the Friday 13th *Daily News*, however, is a straightened and cropped close-up of Snyder strapped to the chair. At the bottom of the page runs a meta-caption, commenting as much on the publication of the image as on the story itself:

*RUTH SNYDER'S DEATH PICTURED! — This is perhaps the most remarkable exclusive picture in the history of criminology. It shows the actual scene in the Sing Sing death house as the lethal current surged through Ruth Snyder's body at 11:?? last night. Her*

helmeted head is stiffened in death, her face masked and an electrode strapped to her bare right leg. The autopsy table on which her body was removed is beside her. Judd Gray, mumbling a prayer, followed her down the narrow corridor at 11:11. "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing!" were Ruth's last words. The picture is the first Sing Sing execution picture and first of a woman's electrocution.

That *Daily News* front page overturned all sense of "news." The power of the image went far beyond the story of Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray's crime and far beyond any treatise on criminology. It thrust readers into deeper issues of ontology, compelling the newspaper to publish an additional 750,000 copies to meet demand and confronted the population with an incomprehensible vision of the world.

Newspapers appear to offer us intelligence that will help us decipher a changing world. In fact, they repeatedly rupture and flood across their boundaries into realms of nonsense, where our true reading pleasure lies.

Obituary expert Nigel Sturck pinpoints just such a moment in his brief account of a British military man: "Major Digby Tatham-Warter of Britain's Parachute Regiment, carried an umbrella into battle at Arnhem in 1944. When a brother officer questioned its value in the face of an artillery bombardment, the major replied: 'But what if it rains?'" (FM)

## THE PITS

NEW YORK — Walking or riding along the avenues, you can imagine the storefronts without tenants. Bank branches, juice bars, shops selling electronics and scarves: all of them gone, unable to make the rent, and the landlords, verging on default, unable to lure replacements. It's a feasible scenario. If you consider the consumer-confidence and consumer-price indices, the wealth destruction, all the layoffs and trickle-down effects, and the allegedly unrelated possibility, as the *New York Times* reported last week, that "something funny is happening on the dark side of the universe." ("A better and more enticing explanation for the excess is that the particles are being spit out of the fireballs created by dark matter particles colliding and annihilating one another in space" — and here we were blaming Alan Greenspan.) A friend who worked in Southeast Asia in the nineteen-nineties, during the recession there, recalls visiting Bangkok and Jakarta to see the abandoned high-rises of the preceding economic boom. He found ranges of half-finished buildings, derelict superstructures occupied by tent shanties and with squatters gathered around fires. It may be no great leap from here to a vision here of burning garbage cans and jerry-rigged cardboard in Washington Mutual's cashless vestibules or the bare aisles of Circuit City.

"What will it look like?" is a question of the hour, as people try to visualize the ways in which life will change in New York as a result of the financial and economic crisis. In the mind's eye, we tend to populate our recessionary streets with squad cars painted green, cat's-eyed ambulances, and other anachronisms — "Fort Apache, the Bronx: The Remake." But, really, the city will probably just look the way it does now. After an extraordinary era of construction and renovation, demolition and replacement, there will almost certainly come a long period in which little to nothing gets built. Putting aside the long-discussed public projects that are endangered or doomed (the Second Avenue Subway, the West Side Rail yards, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Moynihan Station, etc.), dozens of private undertakings have stalled or died. The calls go out to the architects: pencils down. We have inherited, from the good years, a glut of housing, almost all of it the unaffordable kind — condos galore — and an increase in office space amid a sudden, steep decrease in the need for it. Throw in the high cost, or total unavailability, of capital, owing to the credit freeze, and you have a New York that may be frozen in time. The skyline, which has been very dynamic recently, like a stereo's equalizer display, should sit still for a while. The clothes in our closets today will be the ones we're wearing when we're old.

Keep an eye on the construction that developers dig to make way for the foundations of new buildings. The town is pocked with them. The real-estate boom fostered grand schemes, which, though they are in many cases now stillborn, began with holes in the ground. The expiration, earlier this year, of a tax-abatement law, 421-a, encouraged residential builders to dig quickly, to achieve grandfather status and thus better financing. Hence a sudden spate of new pits, some that builders may have had no intention of filling soon anyway. In some cases, if a developer hasn't already paid for the steel, he will be inclined, or forced, to walk away. Buildings that are halfway built tend to get finished, although they might wind up being what are called "see-throughs." What will become of the pits? Can we turn them into half-wild swimming holes, like the granite quarries of New England? Ring them with barbed wire and convert them into debtors' prisons or internment camps for the cultprits who structured synthetic C.D.O.s? They'd make excellent ha-has, for lively horses or livestock. Corn mazes. Extreme-coldfighting arenas. Or perhaps they could serve, over time, as urban rat pits, entrapping and preserving in garbage and white brick dust the occasional unlucky passerby for the scientific edification of future generations, if there turn out to be any. Or they could become parking lots.

Vacant space tends to remain vacant, in anticipation of an upswing. Tax policy, inertia, and the eternal belief that things will get better (profitable) again usually trump civic dreams of pocket parks or stickball fields. Whoever ends up owning it all, after the foreclosures and the workouts are done, holds out for the big payoff. The greatest pit of them all is at Ground Zero, where the squabbling among constituents and stakeholders, as well as the usual big-city incompetence, even before the financial meltdown, has kept the hole a hole for years. Now it's hard to imagine a way out of it. (NP)

From *The New Yorker*, December 8, 2008

IN BRIEF

Size-wise, the largest newspaper published in New York State was an issue of *The Constellation*, issued in New York City on July 4, 1859. The press, designed to accommodate the single sheet opening to 100 x 70 inches, broke down during the first print run.

The second First/Last Newspaper was assembled by DEXTER SINISTER with contributions by Steve Rushton, Angie Keefe, Rob Giampietro, Will Holder, Francis McKee, Peter Fischli & David Weisz, Ryan Gander, Jan Verwoert, Nick Paumgarten, Snowden Snowden, and Jason Fulford. Produced under the umbrella of PERFORMA 09 and presented in partnership with Times Square Alliance. Edited in cooperation with Defne Ayas and Virginie Bobin.

Maskhead set in Strike Alphabet courtesy Shannon Ebner.

Performa, a non-profit multidisciplinary arts organization established by RoseLee Goldberg in 2004, is dedicated to exploring the critical role of live performance in the history of twentieth century art and to encouraging new directions in performance for the twenty-first century.

The traditional site for quiet conversations about important decisions is the drawing room, to which powerful upper class men withdraw (after dinner) to do politics and business. In private, excluding women specifically, and the public generally. In order to disavow this dubious legacy, then, quietly spoken gonzo pragmatists may have to radically resituate the quiet conversation outside the drawing room, in noisy places, central locations, right where problems present themselves and where participation is not just possible but inevitable, simply because people are all around, passing by. Following this thought to its illogical conclusion, then, it would be most appropriate for the negotiations between gonzo pragmatists to take place in loud, populated places, where they are absurdly inappropriate. Given that all the inevitable noise and interruption will make staying focused on any conversation all but impossible, what else could it be? Nothing less than a mockery of the idea that there was ever a "proper" way — by the book of handling such situations. (JV)



Ryan Gander, Banner for Europe, 1999. A banner on the building site for the commonwealth games swimming pool, Oxford Road, Manchester, UK.

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