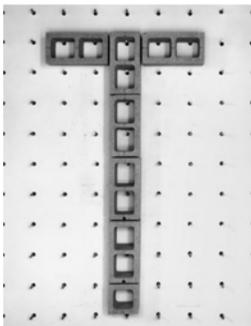


# TWO BLIND MEN DESCRIBE "BLOODY GOOD ELEPHANT"

PORT AUTHORITY — Yesterday's Berlin-based weblog *inmoms.livejournal.com* ran a piece about this paper headed "Newspaper stalked and serenaded 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:



THE FIRST/LAST NEWSPAPER

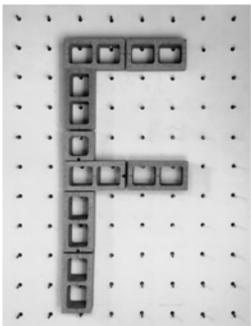
"At the basic level, a transition is simply the process of changing from some state A to another state, B. What we should examine carefully is the degree of change, and our awareness of it. Change is happening all the time, though we are not always conscious of it. But without change there is no perception. 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 microsaccades, 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 microsaccades, 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.

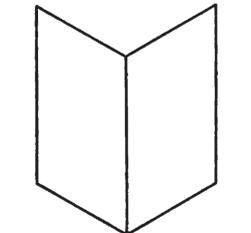
"If I could ask Murch only one question," she wondered, "what would that be —?"

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

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



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



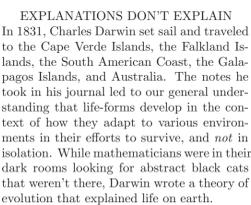
A Reconsideration of the Newspaper Industry in 5 Easy Allusions (1): as you stare at this form, watch your perspective flip back and forth.

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

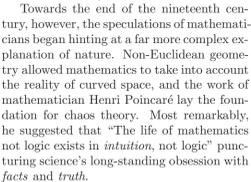
HELLAS — Our story begins in Ancient Greece, with Socrates announcing, "I know that I know nothing." Clearly, confusion has always been at the heart of wisdom. Centuries later came a statement many have attributed to Charles Darwin: "A mathematician is like a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn't there." As a scientist committed to cataloguing, 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.



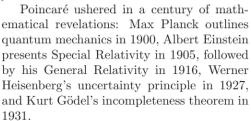
Johann Sebastian Bach . . .



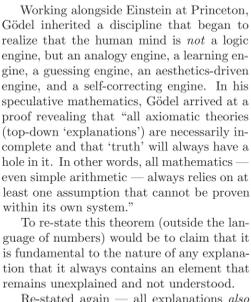
John Milton . . .



Homer . . .



Jorge Luis Borges . . .



. . . 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  $a/b$  is the exhibition,  $b$  = the possibilities,  $a$  is in no way given by a number  $c$  ( $a/b = c$ ) 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":

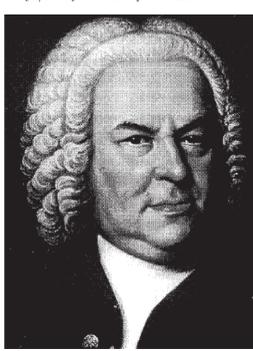
"In the provocative spirit of the work of art that isn't, why not adopt the term 'non-knowledge' — despite pejorative connotations — for visual arts' cognitive processes? Non-knowledge, at any rate, is not at all the same as 'ignorance.' It refers to the knowledge system's 'other,' that indeterminate 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 annulled. *Vidya/Avidya* are not quite binaries."

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.

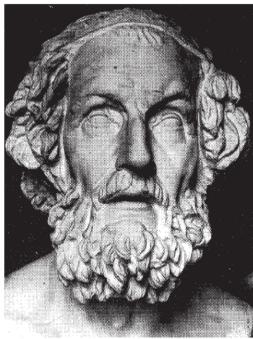
This line of thought culminated in 1987 with French philosopher Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. In it, he argued how the traditional teacher-student relationship does nothing but reinforce inequality, stultifying the learner. A non-emancipated 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."

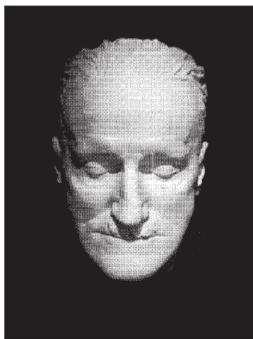
Rancière insists on the equality of all intelligences and considers the central goal of education to be the revelation of an intelligence to itself, and not the gift of a pre-ordained "knowledge." In his book, he discusses the emancipatory potential in teachers remaining ignorant of what they teach, 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."



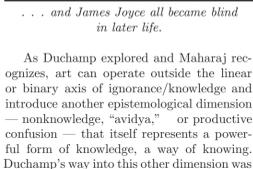
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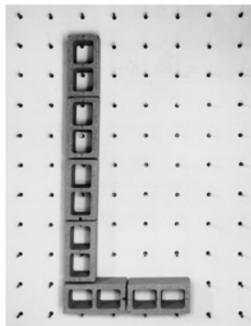
CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE IN In one of his metaphors with an imaginary child, Gregory Bateson wrote that "in order to think new thoughts or to say new things we have to break up all our ready-made ideas and shuffle the pieces."

In his foreword to the well-titled exhibition *Things We Don't Understand*, curated by Roger M. Buergeel and Ruth Noack, Dierrick 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."

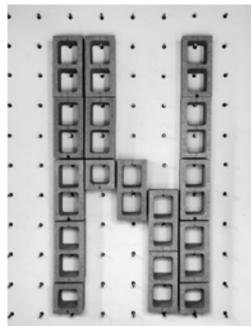
With that in mind, let us recognize the importance of not understanding a work of art. A work of art opens up that world of non-knowledge and helps to make sure we don't lose sight of it, keeping us curious and actively speculating. "Artists don't solve problems, they invent new ones," (Bruce Nauman). "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)

THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE 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)



7 NOVEMBER 2009



DEXTER SINISTER

# How Media Masters Reality #2 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 reproduced 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).

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 psychoanalytic 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 Elinor 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 countdown (which is itself a media invention, introduced in Fritz Lang's *Franz Monn*, in 1929) begins the narrative that ends with the moon landing. This event — staged for television from countdown 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 its self 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 Dream 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 the constant flow of media, and not a few of us are frustrated by this addiction. Now I ask you, my fellow Americans, haven't you ever wanted to put your foot through your television screen?"

The artist-president is the rhetorical shell of politics itself, his speech collapses past, future and present as the ghost of politics past reports on the significance of what is about to happen.

"Today, there stand before us two media matadors, brave young men from Ant Farm who are about to go forth into the unknown, and let me say this, these artists are pioneers, as surely as Louis and Clark when they explored uncharted territory, they are pioneers as surely as Armstrong and Aldrin when they set foot on the moon . . ."

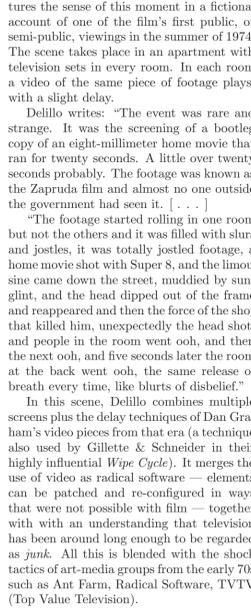
Ant Farm's Chip Lord, speaking on the subject of *Media Burn* in 2002, cited Michael Shomon's seminal book *Guerrilla Television* (1971) which inspired various initiatives combining the collectivist ideals of the 1960s with the potentially democratizing (new) technologies of video, closed-circuit TV, and cable of the 1970s: "[Using TV to destroy TV] was consistent with the *Guerrilla Television* position, to destroy the monopoly of centralized television. There was a lot of rhetoric about how cable TV was going to democratize production."

Ant Farm's media critique can be understood as a critical response to the promise of video, and perhaps more than any other artists they articulated its contradictions. Released from the monopoly of the networks and accessed by ordinary citizens, the Portapak video camera promised personal and social empowerment — make your own social and technological networks, make and distribute your own programs, construct your own social software, democratize artistic practice. But, as we will see in subsequent issues of *How Media Masters Reality*, the values of self-empowerment could easily be accommodated within a media feedback system in which our performance becomes not only a commodity that we sell to ourselves but also a means by which the media could narrativize and legitimize itself.

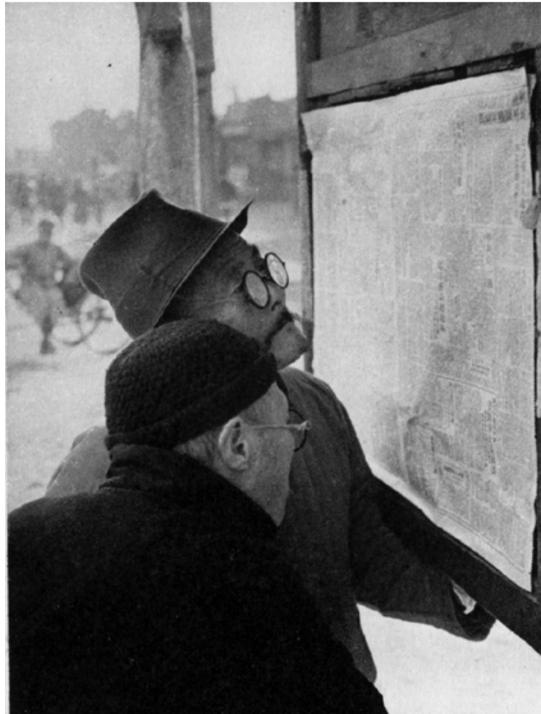
In 1962, Daniel Boorstin coined the term "pseudo-event" to describe events designed solely to be reported: presidential debates, press conferences (and media burns). But Andy Warhol understood better than anyone else that the media event isn't something you simply consume. Describing the unfolding hallucination 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)

THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE 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)



Ant Farm: The Eternal Frame (1975) and (overleaf) Media Burn (1975)



From the New York Public Library Picture Collection: "Beijing. Reading the newspaper. The headlines announce good news: 'The Nationalist armies are advancing toward the South and gaining important successes.' On the same day the Communists reached the city gates."

