



Past Imperfect, no.1

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Preface

This is the first issue of *Past Imperfect*. Issue no. 2 is due to appear in spring 2005 in collaboration with the Secession in Vienna, and our expectations are that issue no. 3 will come out in the summer in collaboration with Casco, Utrecht.

Past Imperfect searches for hidden pasts by lifting stones, poking about underneath and trying to get a glimpse of the events that form history. The past is subjective; its interpretation and therefore the experience of it – and the way that experience rests in memory – is moldable.¹



Excerpts and notes

The artist performs a function, the writer an activity. Every artist is eventually digested by the artistic institution, unless they cease to identify their being with that of language: this is why so few artists renounce object making, for that is literally to kill themselves, to die to the being they have chosen; and if there are such artists, their silence echoes like an inexplicable conversion.²

¹ The *Past Imperfect* issues are realized partly due to the financial support of CBK, Rotterdam; Fonds bleub, Amsterdam; Cascoprojects, Utrecht.

² An unknown writer in *Sisich* <http://www.sisich.sjsu.edu/web/art.online/matt.links/matt.article17.html>, an electronic journal published by the CADRE Institute at San Jose State University. It is produced by graduate students who foster a critical viewpoint on issues and developments wherever crossovers between art and technology occur.

When Lee Lozano became the subject and object of her own art, and conceptual art was increasingly moving towards the disappearance or "dematerialization" of the art object, there was only one consequential possibility that was totally in line with her previous practice: to disappear from the scene. It was inevitable.

Sometimes we wonder how important art is. Not at all, one might conclude. But what if art, in some cases, manages to create possibilities for change, and hence really makes a difference? Even if this exhausts its role, it would still be quite an important accomplishment. Perhaps rigid definitions of art that lead us to treat this kind of art as unimportant, because it is merely temporary, need to be reexamined. Why shouldn't art be temporary and contemporary, as opposed to eternal? Changing our ideas about value and value systems could stimulate thinking about other possibilities – even if they last a split second and have an immeasurable impact.

*If the research into Loos is organized by the gaps in the archive, the research into Le Corbusier is organized by archival excesses. Loos vacates a space and destroys all traces behind him. Le Corbusier fills a space ahead of him, but not just any space: a domestic space, literally a house. To think about Loos one has to occupy a public space, the space of publications, his own and others', but also the space of word of mouth, hearsay, gossip, tips etc.; the enigmatic space of circumstantial evidence. To think about Le Corbusier is necessarily to enter a private space. But what does private mean here? What is this space? And how does one enter it?*³

The past is perfect and imperfect at the same time. The notion of loss, both in a positive and in a negative sense, is everywhere in our search: for example, in the work of Bas Jan Ader and the use and abuse of his archival notes and material long after his disappearance,⁴ or OMA/Koolhaas who have their archives exhibited as an open source of information and inspiration, but also connected to the idea of archiving as a strategy of control. The threat of loss and disappearance – the opposite of life – can lead to the will to control, which promises to stave off the specter of loss, taking over life.

Look at the current map of Israeli-held territory: it looks like military camouflage, dispersed and scattered. If this situation were not so perverse, it might be seen as a brilliant new way of warfare. No front-line troops, no old-fashioned avant-garde, but everything happening at the same time everywhere, on several different scales. Both sides are very good at this type of warfare, but it does not get them very far. "Lay of the Land" by Stephen Zacks and *A Civilian Occupation* by Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman both reveal these camouflage tactics, the architecture of disappearance.⁵ Here, the loss of the object means: the loss of an overview, the loss of visibility.

When we were at the Marres center for contemporary art watching *The Battle of Orgreave*, a film by Jeremy Deller which reconstructs the 1970s coal miners' rising against the conservative government and the planned mine closures, Mat Verberkt said that this was the turning point in the last century, when it was acknowledged that "the enemy" – in the words of Mrs. Thatcher – is not the other, but the enemy within; the enemy is actually amidst us, inside of us. At the same time, the enemy was and still is described in technical, abstract terms; people become mass, a movement becomes the enemy, and that enemy within the mass needs to be eliminated. By making people abstract, it becomes possible to get rid of them. Camouflaging again.

Lozano's physical disappearance was a disappearance from the existing order, from the art world as a system of commodities. But disappearing is not literally vanishing from the world. The works were always relevant but due to her withdrawal they did not become part of art history and its discourse. Therefore her pieces literally disappeared from that field. But Lee Lozano is reemerging: since recently her artistic estate – which includes her early drawings and paintings as well as her more radical instruction pieces – has been represented by Hauser & Wirth, one of the most influential players on the art market.

So it now seems that Lee Lozano's work is on the verge of becoming a commodity. It makes you curious about what will happen in some years: will her work be hijacked, like the work of Bas Jan Ader? Will the hunger of the art lover be

³ Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge MA/London: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 3–4.

⁴ See Wade Saunders, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," *Art in America* (February 2004). Can be found on <http://www.findarticles.com>.

⁵ Stephen Zacks, "Lay of the Land," www.metropolismag.com/cda/story.php?artid=752; Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman (eds.), *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture* (London/New York: Verso, 2003).

accommodated by the possibility of buying a certified remake from the estate (as happens with the work of Bas Jan Ader)? Will the purchaser then own the right to reenact the *Boycott Women Piece* or the *Drop Out Piece* and disappear beyond the point of no return?

In contrast, art in the world of TAZ is a condition of life, and then, disappearance is not too bad and could be seen not only as a negative refusal, since it is becoming a "beyond": beyond definition, beyond control, beyond understanding, beyond naming, beyond enslaving, and . . . beyond owning. Actually, TAZ is freedom, gained through psychological liberation. In that sense it is becoming romantic, adventurous and maybe utopian again; who would not want to be liberated, revolutionary, beyond control? Still, it is somewhere here, in between, where the radicalism is hidden. Silent revolution cracking through the walls.⁶

Greed (1924), a film by Erich von Stroheim, was considered a masterpiece. First consisting of 47 reels of film, it was cut to 42, then 24, then 18 and finally 10 reels – which is two and a quarter hours, one quarter of its original length. The film is of mythical proportions, but the project was considered to be an impossible undertaking both for the maker and the viewer. *Greed* is based on Frank Norris' novel *McTeague*. Von Stroheim, whose career moved from acting to directing, initially wanted to film each and every page of the book, from cover to cover. He took a very radical position in both concept and execution. According to his statements, he regarded the film as an act, a gesture, an idea, more than a material object. The outcome was that nobody saw the film. And though he is surrounded by a mythical image as the all-powerful director and fanatical perfectionist, Von Stroheim remained perpetually out of reach. He "disappeared."⁷

McTeague is imbued with Darwinism and naturalism; naturalism developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to realism, which was considered to be not sufficiently scientific.⁸ When art aims to reproduce life in a 1:1 manner, does it become an impossible mission? When art and life stick together with no breathing space in between, as absolute clones held together with a vacuum seal, does this mean that life itself disappears along with art?

The *Situationist International* asked how critical art can play a role in the revolution. One of their conclusions was that art should not only be critical in its content, but it must also be self-critical in its form; a communication which should contain its own critique.

Despite all the energy that was spent on it, the revolutionary project was defeated in the third part of the twentieth century. Reforms have led to a camouflaged preservation of the old order: radicalism often ends up in appropriation by the old order, by the institutional formats. But when taken to its logical conclusion, radicalism may lead to total silence and disappearance: a continuous struggle between resistance and frustration.⁹



Contents and cases

- 1 Hotel Angst.
- 2 Prora, Hitler's holiday resort at Rugen.
- 3 Hohlweltlehre: hollow/inverted earth theory.
- 4 Saddam Hussein imprisoned at what the CIA calls "Hotel California."
- 5 *Rock My Religion* by Dan Graham ("Does history have any particular relevance in the context of our daily lives?").
- 6 The creation of Absolut Vodka.
- 7 Like Lee Lozano, Ian Wilson is an artist of whom you could say that he disappeared. The difference is, however, that Wilson chose the dialogue as his medium, while Lozano stretched her borders far beyond dialogue. For her there was no point in returning.
- 8 Ritt Goldstein, "Homeland Security: A Bridge from Democracy to Dictatorship," in *Abuse Your Illusions*, ed. Russ Kick (New York: The Disinformation Company, 2003), pp. 241–245.
- 9 Radioactive: fiction created to consider the implications and intersections of the "war on terror" and "homeland security" within the realm of culture. See: <http://www.16beavergroup.org/radioactive/>.
- 10 Marcel Duchamp, *Sixteen Miles of String*, installation for the exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, 1942.
- 11 www.loompanics.com.
- 12 Marc Augé and the acceleration of history.
- 13 Re-appropriation of historical events.
- 14 Elvis meets Nixon.
- 15 *Seeds of Change: Five Plants That Transformed Mankind* by Henry Hobhouse.
- 16 *History of Shit* by Dominique Laporte. Unmentioned, unspoken means unheard, and non-existing.
- 17 The artist performs a function, the writer an activity.

⁶ Hakim Bey, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, (New York: Autonomedia, 1985/1991), pp. 130–133.

⁷ Adapted freely from: Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Greed* (London: BFI, 1993), pp. 10–15.

⁸ A full version of *McTeague* can be found on <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/McTe.html>.

⁹ Guy Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Art and Politics" (1983), www.cddc.st.edu/situation/sitewforms.html, 1963.

- 18 *Non-Disclosure Agreement* by Carey Young.
- 19 *Erased De Kooning Drawing* by Robert Rauschenberg (1953). In 1995, the artist Felix Gmelin made a new painting after Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning Drawing*.
- 20 An empty room where just the wind can blow, to take a breath of air.
- 21 *Nothing* (edited by Graham Gussin and Ele Carpenter) is not really nothing, nor just something. This book, with an empty hole in the middle, is a collection of case studies, with a wide range of works from the fifties until now. No Lee Lozano in this collection; she is the queen of disappearance.
- 22 *Lost Artists* contains a list of 17 pages with lost artists.
- 23 *How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found* by Doug Richmond.
- 24 An article about the work of Bas Jan Ader by Wade Saunders in *Art in America* (February 2004) is a case study of the exploitation of a disappearance.
- 25 Michael Petry, *You Are Here. Re-siting Installations*, about the reuse, remake and reinstalling of works of art.
- 26 "Bas Jan Ader: Lost at Sea" by Samuel P. Klaus.
- 27 The relation between language, immateriality and flexibility and the readiness of conceptual art to become a social activity.
- 28 There is a rumor that the PS1 studio contains a cutting by Gordon Matta Clark.
- 29 Search for "Matta Clark" in the computer database of the public library of New York: no hits.
- 30 Was it because Lozano was a woman that nobody seemed to notice her disappearance, or are some people such a pain in the ass that nobody misses them?
- 31 Alfred Loos destroyed his archives so that nobody could do anything with them he would not approve of.
- 32 The resemblance between map and camouflage gear. Camouflage and Israeli warfare.
- 33 *Recycling - Recycling*, a lecture by Mark Wigley on the invisible radical.
- 34 *A Clockwork Orange* by Stanley Kubrick was withdrawn by Kubrick from British cinemas.
- 35 *Punishment Park* by Peter Watkins.
- 36 *Break Down* by Michael Landy.
- 37 *Appear and Apparition* by Alexis Vaillant.
- 38 TAZ is ... refusal to participate, to have, to be and to (inter) act. This could be seen negatively but also as a source, a possibility, an opening up to an alternative.
- 39 Cases of disappearance, perfectionism, excessive control, withdrawal: Howard Hughes, Michel de Montaigne, Henry David Thoreau.
- 40 Melatonin: night becomes day and day becomes night. History accelerates and the question of time, or the lack of it, can be resolved.
- 41 The singer Amanda Lear archived, conserved and stopped time.
- 42 David Reed and The Vampire Study Center.
- 43 Michael Jackson, Neverland and the wish to influence time.
- 44 Celebration, a Disney-designed new urbanism. No birds fly around in Celebration. Life is excluded.

- 45 The Palm is a palm-shaped island and a luxurious holiday resort overlooking the Persian Gulf, just off the Dubai coast.
- 46 Invented utopias.
- 47 From gated communities to plastic surgery to hyper-fabricated reality to cryogenics: freeze, wait, reanimate.
- 48 Getting lost.
- 49 Mapping without a map.
- 50 *The First Guided Tour Into The Void* by Yves Klein.
- 51 *Narcotourism* by Francis Alÿs.
- 52 Baudrillard on disappearance and anorexia.
- 53 The survival guide for demonstrations by Jota Castro.
- 54 Bermuda triangle.
- 55 Collection of manifestos, protocols and conferences that deal with rejection, progress, destruction, disappearance, dropping out, all part of a continuous movement of change; fix, establish and loosen up.
- 56 The Commune: the self-empowerment of the proletariat, which made them masters of their own history, not so much at the level of governmental politics as at the level of everyday life.
- 57 The Futurist Manifesto.
- 58 "Some Void Thoughts on Museums" by Robert Smithson.
- 59 It was at the Chelsea Hotel that Yves Klein wrote his *Manifeste de l'Hôtel Chelsea* during his first one person show in New York at Leo Castelli in 1961, when the response to his show made him feel it was necessary to explain himself.
- 60 Henrik Oleson: "Lack of information and art is a device to bring back a non-existing history."
- 61 To take part is not to drop out.
- 62 *Looking for Mr. Fluxus: In the Footsteps of George Maciunas* by Grady Turner, Raimundas Malasauskas and Skuta Helgason.
- 63 Luther Blisset and the disappearance of the individual.
- 64 Elaine Sturtevant's withdrawal.
- 65 Fake weapon company.
- 66 Corrections & clarifications.
- 67 May 1968 graffiti: It seems important to keep up the long tradition of direct response, to testify without interference.
- 68 *The Dialogue Piece* by Lee Lozano (1969): "The purpose of this piece is to have dialogues, not to make a piece. No recordings or notes are made during dialogues, which exist solely for their own sake as joyous social occasions."
- 69 Semantic web?
- 70 Ian Wilson presents oral communication as an object: all art is information and communication.
- 71 James Collins realized *Introduction Piece No. 5* (1970). A certificate proves that he, as a complete stranger, approached a person in Hyde Park, to whom he introduced himself. The person agreed to participate in this artwork and signed a document with photograph showing that this meeting took place. This document constitutes the art piece.
- 72 Lies, disinformation and urban legends are part of media-related misleading information. *Past Imperfect* is a product of this dynamic.

- 73 Gianni Motti took photographs of war scenes in Bosnia – beautiful photographs of landscapes, smoke and destruction. The photographs are so beautiful that they look as if they were staged rather than real, but they are all photographs of actual situations encountered during this war. No manipulation. No disinformation. No lies. Just facts. The photographs were rejected as unsuitable for news-paper publication. They were too beautiful. They look like a Jeff Wall.
- 74 *What You See Is Where You're At* by Luke Fowler (1999).
- 75 Mythological aspects and myths.
- 76 Erich von Stroheim, *Greed*, 1924.
- 77 Radicalism might, when taken to its full consequences, lead to total silence and disappearance: a continuous struggle between resistance and frustration.
- 78 "If a government no longer knows how to solve a problem within the borders of legislation and the tolerance of public opinion, then they call on the secret agent." Willem Velthoven, "Editorial," *Mediamatic*, no. 9.
- 79 The Italian Autonomists.
- 80 Who was to blame? Timothy Garton Ash welcomes an independent inquiry into the Paris bombing of 2009.
- 81 "The margin may be a place of relegation, or of voluntary exile, but for those whose natural habitat it is (and I speak of my friends), this is one place for active people to be. There are others." Norman Potter.
- 82 On July 4, 1845, Independence Day, Henry David Thoreau retreated to Walden Pond where he would declare and practice his own independence.