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Assembly: Corrective Unrest and Image Instruments^{*}

Agenda

- A. Tools for today
- B. Sternberg Press
- C. Bruce Sterling images
- D. Pirate Affect
- E. Extended image captions from LA

A. Tools for today

“De-authored production is the natural state of things, for artists, curators, and producers. The idea of authorship in terms of autonomy or ownership is a market term, not a philosophical one. Nothing exists in a void, and that’s why the word process always pops up (or its contemporary synonym, research)—the process of how a community or an idea emerges ... I think what we do is editing, not publishing; because that’s the part we can lay claim to in terms of production in a space, an invitation or [a] book. I think of all these activities in terms of stories rather than moments. Running a space or thinking about a program is about a narrative: how to be actively and consciously part of the bigger picture, something that over time or in retrospect is about a development and perhaps eventually a history or a canon ... To facilitate conditions—such as openness, hospitality, transparency—and let things run their course. Things don’t happen on Facebook, they happen somewhere else: in a space, a site that transforms potential into production, but not in a corrective or responsive way to what’s happening elsewhere.” (Mai Abu EIDahab)¹

^{*} *Corrective Unrest* is a term by James Joyce.

This document is a transcription of a presentation given at *Image Research and Its Futures* seminar, Goldsmiths, June 19, 2014, as part of the AHRC-funded Looking at Images project.

My presentation today takes as its starting point the position of an artist-researcher-editor, and it assumes a certain agency and singular voice. But against this force of an artist-researcher-editor, let us quickly shift our view to Abu ElDahab's proposition, namely that production and product implicitly announces a certain community, before it might get caught into market logistics and economies. So let us talk about text, image, book, and research as a gathering of people, a product—thing or material—which emerges only on the basis of a coming together. For *Image Research and Its Futures* then the idea is to set up an assembly, shifting the focus from the beginning on from my own voice to a more communal site. For that reason, the questions that essentially structure the propositions here, can build the base for a debate and for a collective material forming part of the publication. Contained in these notes on editing as agency is also a flattening of format in the sense of text, image, or book becoming 'equal tools,' which may be relevant regarding today's agenda around image research.

The format of assembly takes its features and politics from the format of the forum, described by Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman in *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics* as follows:

The forum provides the technology with which ... claims and counterclaims on behalf of objects can be presented and contested. It includes the arena, the protocols of appearance and evaluation, and the experts. The forum is not a given space, but is produced through a series of entangled performances. Indeed, it does not always exist prior to the presentation of the evidence within it. Forums are gathered precisely *around* disputed things [in this case images]—because they are disputed.²

Forums are not fixed, even if they are sometimes consolidated within fixed institutional structures; they are dynamic and contingent, temporary, diffused, and networked by new technology and media. They emerge around found evidence; they flex, transform, sometime combine with other forums, while at other times they contract or simply come apart, burst, unravel before us.³

The format of forum or assembly underlies my investigation, methodologies, and selection of disputed things. The performance of discourse however has to be questioned: while there is always a staged and highly systematic approach in running a conversation, it is the unpredictability and diffusion of any encounter and networked structure which shall become apparent in these undertakings. Looking for evidence is an interesting angle to look at artistic material both in terms of image and text, and text as image and vice versa. The relation to the legal, media, and law, shall be considered case by case.

What is the sound of an image?

Is there an imaginary turn?

Is the image a site of diagramming theory, of doubling production, of copyright hunting, of art market logistics and the currency of art–research?

Is the image a formality?

How can a text become an image?

How “free” is an image?

And what futurities and forces are produced by the image?



A dedicated period of working with the publishing house Sternberg Press in Berlin has developed from my involvement in EP, a book project founded and directed by Alex Coles.⁵ Sternberg Press are EP collaborators who publish this new book series focusing on both historic and contemporary thematics that actively interrelate art, design and architecture. In the position of creative director for EP, my prior, conceptually driven, focus on publishing modes and printed matter moved into more unfamiliar territories, including the practicalities of editorial management and the technicalities of production, as well as setting out a different cultural-political context. The Sternberg residency in January 2013 provided the conditions and context to explore this space of activities from within the core of publishing, from working on-site with experts in the field.

Sternberg Press is a publishing house with a focus on art criticism, theory, fiction, and artists' books. It was founded by Caroline Schneider in New York in 1999 and "set in motion with a pocket book series—edited in part with Nicolaus Schafhausen.

Dedicated to an expanded notion of writing on art, Sternberg has created a formidable platform in which practitioners from the fields of art and culture (architecture, design, film, politics, literature, and philosophy) can engage in a critical discourse."⁶ As such, the book—printed matter—is a debate itself, and gives rise to further enquiries on the debate of the book as debate and material entity.

During the residency my initial aim was to look into this notorious claim for discourse, into the mechanisms and apparatuses of distribution, and what 'institutional critique' could mean in current modes of text as cultural production. The question of the 'image' within this context became pertinent only at a later stage. Or more precisely, the image and its status within book research and independent publishing surfaced significantly in the past year.

My work with Sternberg feeds into EP on a practical and theoretical level. It also supports my position of research fellow in cultural theory, where my focus is on a publishing practice, connected to the political in art (collective imagination and fictional collectivity), the immediate architecture of text (editorial practice, design), and the question in what way knowledge in art is by necessity accumulative and a plural voice (status of "not-knowing"). These three interrelated fields of exploration highlight a relationship to current production machines, understood as dispersed structures, not easily to be grasped as a totality, and impossible to categorize and historicize. As a practising artist I am interested in the idea of the artist as editor / the editor as artist; in what way editorial practice interferes with presumed artistic principles, or is intrinsic to it. An increasing amount of artists today take significant editorial responsibilities, not only with regard to artists' books; this effect of 'manual assemblage' of image and text informed part of my investigation in Berlin.

My actual work at Sternberg involved drafting and updating lists, including the distribution list and the publication list, searching Amazon distribution, handling image copyright enquiries, scanning material, taking photographs for the Sternberg Press Facebook site, and more generally working on EP and other books. Meetings and conversations with the small team of Caroline, Leah, Max and Tatjana were rare. There was no time.

About my residency a report had to be written to provide evidence. The report ended up being a screen-printed limited edition poster, titled GRUND RISSE, made in collaboration with the designer Pascal Kress. I was aware of not crossing boundaries in terms of copyright fringing with all these texts and images floating around me as part of my daily work – material clearly authored by other artists and writers, and in process of becoming final publications. The poster aims to reflect this conflict around properties, copyright, forgery, piracy, intimacy and hospitality, but also the drive for finding ways and detours to make this 'dispute' somehow transparent.

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BOSÇAN FIELD
TERRA NOVA OIL FIELD
TENGIZ FIELD
TAMBAR OIL FIELD
CORMORANT
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SARRR FIELD
ZHANAZHOL FIELD
OSELYAR OIL FIELD
YURI KORCHAGIN FIELD
TREBS AND TITOV OIL
FIELDS
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BENTLEY OIL FIELD
PIPER OIL FIELD
FORTES OIL FIELD
YUZHNO-RUSSKOYE FIELD
BRAE OIL FIELD
CANTARELL FIELD
CHICOTPEC FORMATION
KUL-MALOUB-ZAAP
ARYSTAN OIL FIELD
MANGALA AREA
BORANKOL OIL FIELD
PANNA-MUKTA OIL FIELD
ORINOCO BELT
VANKOR FIELD
ATHABASCA OIL SANDS
COLD LAKE OIL SANDS
PEACE RIVER OIL SANDS
BOJURI FIELD
MIGDO OIL FIELD
TUAPSE FIELD
HELETZ OIL FIELD
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SAKHALIN-II
SAKHALIN-III
WAHA FIELD
ZELTEN OIL FIELD
ZHIGLII MOUNTAINS
BOLIVAR COASTAL FIELD
THUNDER HORSE
OIL FIELD
MONTE GROSSO OIL FIELD
MONTE ALPI OIL FIELD
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KHURAS OIL FIELD
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RAMAN OIL FIELD
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ADAR OIL FIELD
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UNITY OIL FIELD
VALD AGRI OIL FIELD
TEMPA ROSSA OIL FIELD
MAGNOLIA OIL PLATFORM
TARN OIL FIELD
SPINDETOP
KUPARIK RIVER OIL FIELD
GOOSE CREEK OIL FIELD
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CHOCALHO OIL FIELDS
KIZOMBA B
KIZOMBA C: MONDO, SANI
AND BATUQUE FIELDS
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MARKS OIL PLATFORM
MAD DOG OIL FIELD
PETRONUS OIL PLATFORM
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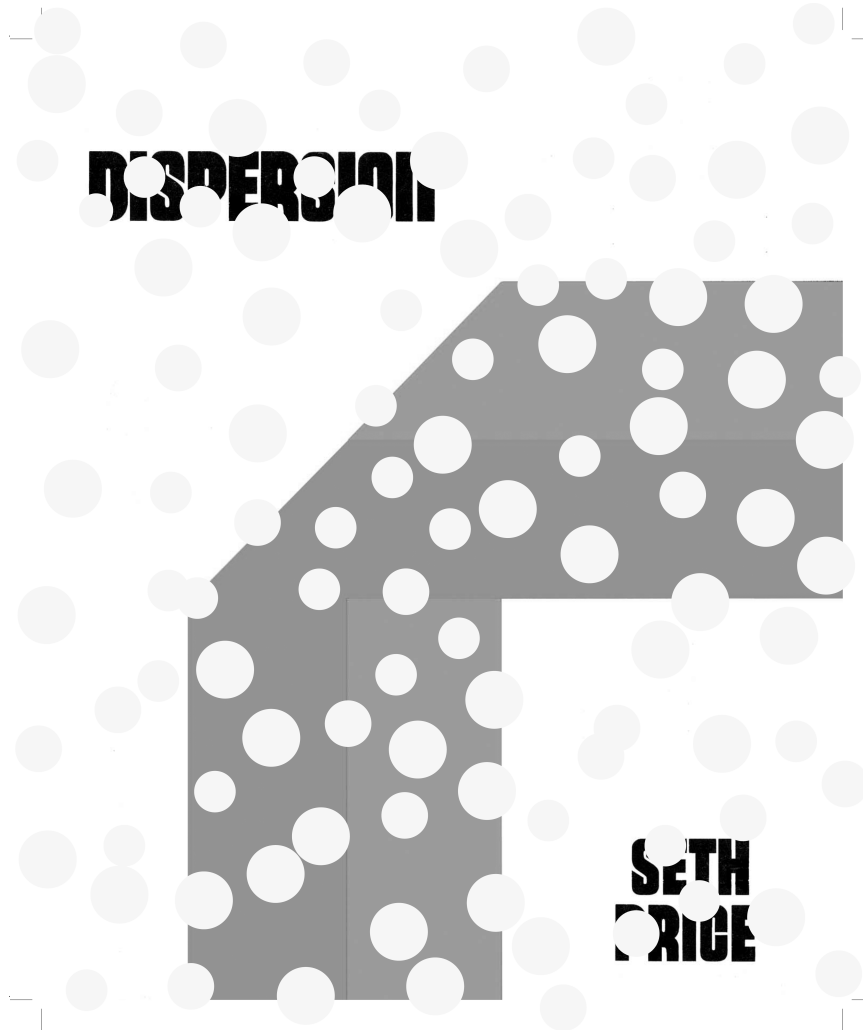
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REPORT FROM A RESIDENCY
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BEING
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C. Bruce Sterling images

Case two relates to my current involvement in image research and copyright hunting for the second volume of EP, *Design Fiction*. The visual material presented here as part of my talk is a selection from a number of images of two defunct Sci-Fi journals, *Science Fiction Eye* and *Cheap Truth*, some of which will run alongside an interview with Bruce Sterling conducted for the book. The images have been provided by the Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, with whom I am extensively in touch with regarding contract, permission agreement, fees and reproduction rights.

D. Pirate Affect



Pirate Affect, 2011, is a piece of work developed in response to an invite by AND Publishing, London, for their investigation in book piracy. AND describe The Piracy Project as “an international publishing and exhibition project exploring the philosophical, legal and practical implications of book piracy and creative modes of reproduction ... The Project has gathered a collection (catalogued online) of more than 150 modified, appropriated and copied books from all over the world ... pointing at the concept of originality, the notion of authorship and politics of copyright ... The Piracy Project is not about stealing or forgery. It is about creating a platform to innovatively explore the spectrum of copying, re-editing, translating, paraphrasing, imitating, re-organising, manipulating of already existing works. Here creativity and originality sit not in the borrowed material itself, but in the way it is handled.”⁸

Pirate Affect is my contribution to The Piracy Project and consists of two steps:

1. Upload the URL of artist Seth Price's publication *Dispersion* onto AND web site: andpublishing.org/PublicCatalogue/PCat_record.php?cat_index=10
2. Send piece of work as a symbolic act

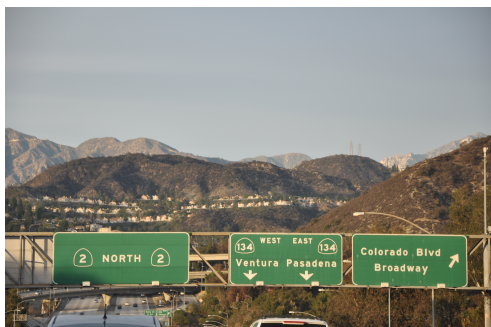
By adapting and distributing Price's URL of *Dispersion*, the original source is kept intact and anyone can print or consume the work (a booklet) from its first manifestation. The piracy act here is performed as a kind of hijacking in the sense of dis- and relocating the URL onto another host site, that of AND publishing. This is a discreet piracy. It does not directly interfere with the design, authorship, format or content of the 'first' or original work, but underlines the very ability to interfere with anything published online. There are already facsimiles and translations of *Dispersion* in circulation. In addition to this non/interference = non/action, I suggest a symbolic act of dispersion in the form of a number of special envelopes, which will be sent through different types of institution: government (Ministry of Justice), art gallery, university, creative business and independent architect/PHD student. So dispersion—distributed history—is channelled.

I have been thinking about the pirate as a non-state actor (private parties who are not affiliated with any government), and piracy's historical obligation of a relation to an act on the sea. It is interesting to formulate book piracy as a comment on knowledge and knowledge culture. The theft in that case concerns information, text or image, and is possibly based on a lack of access to knowledge; but also hints to the value knowledge plays in our society, and the commodification of knowledge.

E. Extended image captions from LA

The final case around future image research is a book contribution for *Beyond Echo Park* (co-edited with John Reardon), a forthcoming publication on Los Angeles properties, future materials, and Tujunga stories. Without going into details into how the book came about from a long-term perspective, it basically develops from an invite to and our subsequent participation at Printed Matter's Los Angeles Art Book Fair 2014. This all happened from having recently published *PROSPECTUS*,⁹ a book on alternative art schools, institutions on the move (à la architect Cedric Price), secondary networks, minor communities and the educational turn.

For *Beyond Echo Park* a collaborative piece between the LA-based writer Chris Kraus and myself developed. It exists of a series of photographs I took during our stay there as part of my research and actions, which are framed, underlined, or introduced by extended captions by Kraus, with whom I'd been extensively in touch in connection with the fair, and her absence from it. We had wanted her for our panel discussion there. I conclude this presentation with a reading of extracts from this work:

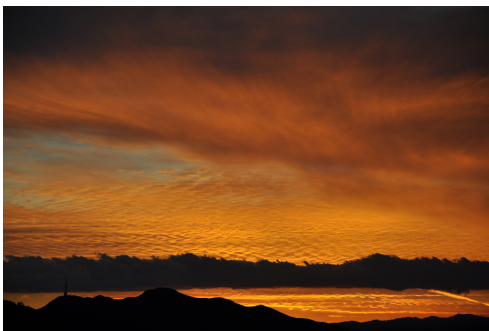


Kraus: “But when the time [of the LA Art Book Fair] came I was in Mexico, six hours away. Verina and I had emailed several times, and she’d expressed interest in using some material I had at home, so arrangements were made for her to stop by our house in Tujunga and pick it all up.”



“We’ve lived in Tujunga for more than three years. Set at the base of Mt. Lukens (elevation 5000’), less than a century ago it took a “long day” to drive the 20 miles to here from downtown LA. Now it’s less than a half-hour freeway drive north on the 2. Home to the “Little Landers”+ movement, a utopian scheme led by a social philosopher and a real estate speculator in 1907, Tujunga was incorporated into greater LA by 1927. In later years, Tujunga became known as a good place to buy speed – a haven for bikers, libertarians, gun-enthusiasts, blue-collar Republicans, etc. A short walk up our road takes you into the hills. From there, you can disappear on further trails into the Angeles Crest Forest that spans more than a thousand square miles, and ends at its northernmost point in Antelope Valley desert towns of Lancaster, Palmdale and Pearblossom.

Our house is owned by the two adult sons of Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, who died here during the Station Fire in 2009. Mrs. Smith, who’d lived in this house throughout her adult life, refused to leave with other evacuees. The fire did not reach the house, but – confused and panicked – she suffered a stroke. We still feel her benign ghost, and it’s still known on the street as the “Smith family place.” In her mid-70s, neighbors say, Mrs. Smith worked outside in her yard every day.



Verina and friends arrived late in the day. Driving back to the city at dusk, the tall buildings of downtown LA suddenly come into view, the city revealed as you drive down a long hill. LA looks like the Emerald City from here (the skyline appears in similar views from Glendale and Lincoln Heights and Elysian Park) and the winter night crashes down on black hills like a tropical drink.”

¹ Mai Abu ElDahab & Will Holder interview (2011), in Mai Abu ElDahab (ed.) *From Berkeley to Berkeley: Objectif Exhibitions, 2008–2010*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, pp. 10–11.

² Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman (2012) *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, p. 29.

³ Keenan and Weizman, 2012, p. 30.

⁴ *Image Research and Its Futures*, Goldsmiths, June 19, 2014, part of Looking at Images: <http://blog.soton.ac.uk/wsapgr/2014/06/19/image-research-its-futures/>

⁵ Alex Coles and Catharine Rossi (eds) (2013) EP Vol. 1: *The Italian Avant-Garde: 1968–1976*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

⁶ Sternberg Press, www.sternberg-press.com/?pageld=93

⁷ Karl Marx (1993 [1939]) *Grundrisse*. London: Penguin Books.

⁸ The Piracy Project, andpublishing.org/projects/and-the-piracy-project/

⁹ Verina Gfader and John Reardon (2013) *PROSPECTUS*. London: Artschool/UK Press. Contributors: Roy Ascott, AA Bronson, Michael Craig-Martin, Neil Cummings, Alice and Rita Evans, Antonio Faundez & Paulo Freire, Verina Gfader, Fritz Haeg, Ruth Höflich, Ivan Illich, Oliver Klimpel, Adam Knight, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Cedric Price, John Reardon, Matthew Stadler and Richard Wentworth.