



Escape Velocity
Alternative Instruction Prototype for Playing the Knowledge Game

A postcard book by David Tomas

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Hours of listening to popular and academic lectures on questions related to the histories and theories of contemporary art, new media, and their artistic uses, coupled with an equal investment of time devoted to the consultation of contemporary art magazines and print-based monographs and anthologies can lead to two banal, yet significant observations. First, the increasing intellectual complexity and density of the theoretical underpinnings of contemporary art. Second, the origins of both the theory and the artworks are often taken for granted. Although interesting and informative, these lectures, magazines and books almost always highlight issues of content over context as if the former was independent of the latter. In the case of books and lectures on contemporary art, “context” refers to the principal site not only for the formation of the artist but for the production, dissemination, and archiving of knowledge concerning the histories, theories, and practices of contemporary art. In North America, and increasingly in other parts of the world, this context is the university. Although rarely acknowledged, this institution processes the art world’s human and intellectual raw materials and transforms them into viable products (artists, theories, and practices) on a day-to-day basis.

The university is now the principal institution, as measured by the numbers of artists who pass through its system, for the schooling of the contemporary artist in the Anglo-American art world. It is also the primary institution for the education of historians and theorists. Thus, the separation between content and context, relative to the university, should be considered more significant and central to the creative process than it appears to be, although questions of research and education have recently become important topics of debate.¹ Perhaps one of the reasons for this paradoxical historical occlusion can be traced to the university’s deceptive illusion of transparency. The university seems to have been relegated – indeed negated – to a benign unconscious presence in the art world, when in fact it has always had the disturbing – and destructive – potential to serve as a *measure of progress* (and ultimately of *viability*) against which to pass judgment on the archaic models of creativity that still dominate the art world’s culture, economy, and socio-institutional organization. Although the university governs, and increasingly regiments, the intellectual framework of contemporary artistic production, its formative presence has been eclipsed, as if by an unconscious collective desire to avoid acknowledging its influence, notwithstanding the fact that academic methods of conceiving and compartmentalizing knowledge are deeply implicated in how artworks are visualized, produced, and received today. This occlusion has been reinforced by the ubiquitous and uncritical use of academic tools (the conventionally – that is, academically – formatted book) and methods of presentation (predictable academic layout conventions) that artists have unconsciously adopted by way of their reading practices in order to communicate information to their intellectual peers in the most efficient and democratic manner. What is at issue here, of course, is the way artworks are conceived so as to function in relation to specific bodies of information and disciplines of knowledge.

Artists are university-integrated intellectuals to the extent that they can now pursue PhDs in practice, they can now compete for grants in the category of the social sciences, and they can now actively pursue collaborations with colleagues from other disciplines including anthropology, cultural

studies, communications studies, computer science, and mechanical and electrical engineering. Given this new multidisciplinary institutional environment, one would expect that the question of knowledge construction, transfer, use, and dissemination would occupy a central – and reflexive – position in artistic production and, by extension, in the core cultural matrix of each product since it can now easily be considered a purely *academic* product. While art’s discursive systems have now attained a degree of academic respectability, artists still avoid engaging with the university in the same way they critically engage with the gallery or museum. The academic institutionalization of “artistic creation” should also be factored into the way contemporary art histories are constructed, since they too are invariably the product of an academic environment, its disciplinary structure, and its methodological models. It is relatively easy to conclude that these new academic conditions of production are, for the most part, rarely, if ever, acknowledged by the majority of contemporary artists and other art world protagonists (gallery owners, curators, museum directors, boards of trustees and so on) as important or significant frames of reference in the production and reception of artworks, although their effects have had an ubiquitous impact on the art world and its products.

Escape Velocity traces the transformations in the identity of an artist who was initially educated in a vocational art school environment and subsequently pursued a university-based education that began in the mid 1970s and has continued today in the context of an academic teaching career. In contrast to most artists who import information and knowledge from other disciplines, the artist in *Escape Velocity* attempted to create a visual practice by moving between specific disciplines (art, anthropology, and the history of science) and by producing visual works that could be considered, one way or another, to conceptually exist between these disciplines. The book’s title captures the essence of this movement, its efforts, and its results.

A Question of Context

There has been a progressive transformation in the institutional foundations and concepts of knowledge in the art world since the late 1950s, while, paradoxically, the major categories of subject matter in the visual arts have survived such fundamental epistemological revisions. This has created, and perhaps even facilitated, a gradual stealth-like epistemological mutation, thereby ensuring that its effects have not been readily detectable precisely because of the continued presence of centuries-old categories of subject matter like the human body (in almost every sphere of contemporary art) or genre painting (whose persistence serves as a reassuring historical filter in advanced post 1980s large-scale photography). In contrast, the best barometer of these changes and the most efficient measure of their significance is to be found in text-based conceptual art with its focus on words, ideas, and language and its interest in other disciplinary forms of knowledge such as philosophy (Joseph Kosuth) or physics and the social sciences (Bernar Venet, Hans Haacke). While most art related activities have ignored their conceptual roots in the university, conceptual art did in fact produce work that could not exist without an implicit acknowledgement of the role of university-based knowledge in both its production and reception.

What would happen to our understanding of contemporary art, its history and theory, or media-based visual practices

(and most art practices today are media-based), if one took account of the university as a specific context for the production of knowledge and used this context as a foundation for the development of an alternative art/media history and theory as well as using the university and its disciplinary matrix as the basis for the development of innovative forms of counter-practices that are nevertheless still – and paradoxically – predicated on them? Is it even possible to de-program the university-trained artist and the academically-informed institutional milieu in which he or she functions today? And if it *is* possible to deprogram the artist, where would this lead when considered in terms of new methodologies and practices, as well as new models of reception, in a world that has been dominated over the past fifty years by succeeding waves of advanced academic theories? When one considers the contributions of cybernetics, semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, anthropology, communications studies, film studies, gender studies and, more generally, a transdisciplinary politics of representation or a collective acknowledgement of the multiple and contradictory composition of social identities, one is confronted with the broad success that these key movements and ideas have had in transforming not only the social sciences but also the visual arts. This success is compounded by the death of the author and the unlimited extension of textual practices across disciplines and cultures. Today, however, these compounded academically-based upheavals no longer seem to have the revolutionary potential and specialized progressive appeal that they had fifty or even fifteen years ago. So questions remain concerning the role of art and the artist in a world not only governed by academic theories but also framed by the ongoing operations of a post-1990s New World Order: If it is possible to de- and reprogram the academically-trained artist where would this lead from the viewpoints of post-disciplinary methodologies, practices, and models of reception?

This short book attempts to answer some of these questions in a creative and provocative manner by proposing a history/theory of media that begins with the university as a *meta-medium* for the conception and production of artworks. The book addresses the question of university-based education directly and traces the impact of the medium and its educational model on the history of one particular art practice. But its objective is not only to broadly and succinctly trace this history; it also proposes an alternate approach that is presented in a form that reflexively mimics one of the most widely used tools for contemporary university-based public presentations and therefore for the transmission and dissemination of specialized disciplinary forms of knowledge: PowerPoint. This visual tool is widely used by academics, the business community (and it is worth noting that business interests are now deeply implicated in the day-to-day activities of the university), as well as by artists, historians, and theoreticians who might consider themselves to be, in some sense, non-academics. It is therefore through the articulation of content *and* a specialized, yet popular, visual tool that this book attempts to rethink the question of the relationship between artistic education, contemporary art, and new media practices insofar as the university can be considered to be a new artistic meta-medium relative to older and more traditional academic and artistic media. The PowerPoint format points, in its turn, to other popular formats, such as the postcard, that have been used by artists as economical

vehicles for the transmission of their ideas and works. *Escape Velocity* exploits this ambiguity in order to draw attention to the multiple possibilities that are created by the marriage of new and old communications formats. The postcard is an economical and robust design solution for coupling images and personal messages in an open layout context. It also serves as a bridge with alternative publishing formats that were used by artists in the 1960s and 1970s, and it can be used as a simple yet efficient template for referencing contemporary screen-based computing technologies, such as the intelligent phone and the tablet computer, that have been designed for rapid information consumption and ultra-portable multitasking activities.

Why choose the university as a new context for the production and theorization of visual art and media-based artworks? On the one hand, the paradoxical and artificial separation of theory and practice in the university, a situation that mimics a culture wide, if not global, western socio-economic, industrially-conveyed separation of process and product is astonishing. This distinction has been encouraged and reproduced by the compartmentalization of disciplines such as Art History, Visual Art, Cultural Studies, Visual Studies, Communications Studies, and so on, even if these disciplines share common goals, references, and strategies. On the other hand, given this contradictory situation, one is also constantly surprised by the way contemporary artists use academic knowledge as a means to develop, clarify, and promote visual propositions while resolutely refusing to acknowledge the university's role or its ultimate impact on the production *and* the reception of artworks. Instead of treating the university as a new meta-medium that should be factored into the material foundations of the creative process, most artists continue to produce work as if they are still operating in a traditional craft- and object-based art economy (a situation that seems to be actively promoted by galleries, museums, and auction houses). What would happen to the concepts of creative content or aesthetic experience if the university was treated as a (new) technology and/or as an advanced meta-medium? One answer can be found in the kinds of new content-forms that can emerge from a “creative” use of advanced presentation technologies. PowerPoint, for example, is rarely, if ever, considered to be an acceptable end product of a research process in the academic world. Instead, it is invariably seen as a convenient form of shorthand – an efficient way to present, in an acceptable fashion, edited forms of visual information for rapid consumption and analysis. However, new kinds of visual propositions/micro-works, or perhaps even media-based artworks could be produced from these kinds of shorthand practices. Such propositions and artworks would operate most efficiently in a context in which the university would be redefined and conceptually updated; in other words, it could be conceived as a hardware environment and each discipline a different software program. One could then imagine specific kinds of counter-practices coalescing in opposition to this environment and its array of programs that would promote alternative models of the world – ones that would be more attuned to the contemporary possibilities of fragmented and accelerated knowledge production, circulation, reception, and consumption that are the basic characteristics of contemporary global subsistence.

Specific shorthand presentation technologies like PowerPoint, or Apple's equivalent, Keynote, can be exploited

and tailored to reprogram the history and practices of contemporary art in different ways than those promoted through the conventionally presented radical theoretical and historical contents of academically-formatted books. This short publication attempts to provide one model, one possibility, one example, of how this reprogramming can be achieved. In contrast to more conventionally designed books, this one is conceived in a visually reflexive way through its reference to, and reformatting of, some of the common visual presentation strategies that PowerPoint and Keynote have developed. The result is a compact visual manual whose presentation mimics some of the shortcuts and shorthand conventions of these common methods of presentation while (it is hoped) avoiding the barren trap of excessive theoretical simplification.

Why choose to use PowerPoint or Keynote in order to encourage and enhance the visual impact of knowledge fragmentation, articulation, and dissemination? Although PowerPoint has been widely criticized because of its association with Microsoft-dominated computing practices, its widespread and uncritical use across disciplines and professions, and its encouragement of an overtly reductionist and regimented approach to information presentation and knowledge transmission, it has been chosen as a template for the presentation of information here precisely *because* of its ubiquitous use across academic disciplines from the humanities to the sciences to the visual arts and its specific qualities as a presentation technology that mimics how knowledge is now conceived and disseminated in our culture. By using a reprogrammed, re-articulated, and reformatted version of this presentation technology, *Escape Velocity* attempts to highlight not only its ubiquity but also its unique capacity to encourage a radically abridged economy of thought that now operates as one of the dominant communications paradigms for the rapid transmission of visual ideas and information in our culture. PowerPoint and Keynote's common altered cultures and visual logics, through transposition between media (computer and book – a calculated, if risky, reversal of the widely accepted distinction between advanced and archaic media), exploit the way that they reduce, condense, streamline, and accelerate knowledge in terms of selected criteria of presentation (simple, clear graphics, highly compressed yet lucid quantities of information) in order to highlight a new concept of trans-academic knowledge presentation.

Turbo-knowledge

PowerPoint and similar shorthand-based presentation systems have a particular relationship to knowledge, and academic knowledge in particular, that is well defined by the word “turbo-knowledge.” This category of knowledge is the result of the pre-packaging and acceleration of information through media that are designed to operate with optimum efficiency in a culture whose economy functions according to the basic premise that information must be received, understood, and processed within the boundaries of a thirty-second attention span. Hence turbo-knowledge's simple visual language and its straightforward and efficient slide-based sequential presentation format in programs like PowerPoint or Keynote. These economical programs for the compression, acceleration, and reception of knowledge are not, at first sight, so very different from what are normally valorized as shorthand

presentation methods in a university. They are akin to photographic slides organized in carousel form and they bear a close kinship to the more ad hoc visual presentation strategies used in classes and seminars in which knowledge is transmitted in a transient oral fashion with accompanying text/slide presentations and supporting diagrams which serve as visual shorthands or mnemonic graphic devices. While PowerPoint or Keynote presentations produce very different spatio-temporal and visual/aesthetic experiences of knowledge than those produced by a book, article, or lecture, and while they can easily be distinguished from a slide presentation because of their high-quality graphics and their ability to present complex visual propositions in sophisticated sequential articulations of text, graphics, photographic, and videographic information, their complex programs allow for a degree of automation, flexibility, and speed that is beyond the reach of older technologies and methods of presentation.

Turbo-knowledge's ideal medium is to be found in PowerPoint or Keynote. However, its media antecedents include the photographic slide, the file card, the microfiche card, the footnote, the word definition, microfilm, and the bibliographic entry in which information is often presented in block form and organized in a concise and sequential fashion in order to facilitate its efficient reception and where its streamlined form allows it to be quickly accessed and used in different ways. Another antecedent is, of course, the postcard with its standard format and limited space. Turbo-knowledge is also an efficient means of communicating information in a transverse fashion and it can, under certain circumstances, promote mutations in the artist's identity. For example, it can serve as a quick and efficient medium for the provisional relocation of artistic activity in another discipline (artist as anthropologist, artist as historian). These distinguishing visual and historical characteristics ensure that these kinds of presentation technologies test the limits of knowledge in relation to its historical functions, disciplinary uses, and future conditions of existence, transmission, and reception. This book's visual structure is therefore based on the premise that turbo-knowledge is the most appropriate model for conceptualizing and theorizing new kinds of practices where the transfer of information, knowledge, and identities are no longer limited by disciplinary boundaries and where form and content are tailored for rapid consumption.

Moreover, the movement between disciplines has always been considered an antithetical site of visual activity or “negative” production vis-à-vis the academic environment, its economy, politics, and disciplinary structure. To escape from one's disciplinary formation and its world view demands a conceptual and physical effort (and risk) that can be measured in terms of a process of re-education through the gradual assimilation of new disciplinary knowledge and the production of different kinds of works (contents).² This effort can be understood, metaphorically, to take the form of the overcoming of a gravitational (disciplinary) force field (knowledge, methodologies, world views) through a movement that progressively “accelerates” away from an old configuration or system of knowledge. Its velocity is a function of a measured overcoming of the old by way of the assimilation of new information, knowledge, and methodologies, and it represents the intellectual and physical effort needed to overcome the resistance and inertia of habitual (disciplinary) thought. In reality, there is never a clean break with the old.

Instead, micro-passageways are created for the transfer of information, methodologies (or their fragments), and ideas that can result in eddies of micro-disciplinary dialogues. These eddies are composed of “liquid knowledge” (fluid and quixotic knowledge consisting of dislocated disciplinary fragments or elements that have no immediate relationship to their origins); more sedentary forms of “hard knowledge” (an “architectural” configuration of information that is cast in a stable spatio-temporal form); or “soft knowledge” (a malleable and flexible “architectural” arrangement of information).³ Since there are, in the case of the artist in *Escape Velocity*, three “force fields” to overcome (Art, History of Science and Anthropology), the metaphor applies to each of these disciplines and, most importantly, to the movement between them. One concrete result of this movement has been the publication of three books that address issues in each discipline in unusual, yet common ways.⁴ Another has been the production of a sequence of visual works. By personalizing the trajectory of the artist and the mutations in the artist's identity that result from this compounded movement as the artist is consecutively de/reeducated and de/re-skilled, the book provides the reader with an actual “case study” by means of which he or she can uncover and explore not only some of the parallel formats for the articulation of information when the university and its communications systems, technologies, and cultures are factored into contemporary “artistic” processes of production, but also some of its actual products since one of these products is this book.

The university is currently a battlefield with contestants promoting different visions of the most appropriate form and function of knowledge associated with various academic disciplines when approached from the perspective of democratically supported and socially productive forms of applied research. Words and phrases like “appropriate,” “function,” “knowledge,” “democratic,” “research,” “democratically supported,” “socially productive” and “applied research” have become the sites of conflicting interpretations as various political factions have attempted to redefine the university's function under the guidance of progressive, neo-liberal, or conservative socio-economic paradigms. Increasingly, the university's traditional (if fictional) secular neutrality and its (nominal) educational independence are subject to covert political pressures and more or less direct exterior economic controls in the name of an amalgamated form of socio-economic rationality framed by a populist democratic ideology. The advocates of this ideology have held the university accountable to the socio-economic expectations of the majority, as opposed to answering to the long-term educational needs of a progressive society and its evolving culture. Their will has been gradually imposed on the university over the last few decades through the introduction of various regimes of bureaucratic efficiency. The university conceived as a utopian space of free thought and the site of multiple forms of independent research is now under scrutiny in the name of new norms of productivity and democratic accessibility and new socio-economic standards of accountability that are increasingly used to determine the parameters and value of research. These criteria have transformed the university into a site of contestation in which the role of free thought, free speech, and open-minded or “disinterested” experimentation are the battlegrounds for alternative

interpretations of their social roles and functions. Insofar as the traditional function of the university must be defended as essential to the healthy development of a society and culture, and insofar as Art is now a university-based academic discipline in the Anglo-American world, it must now play an essential – if eccentric – role in defending progressive values and practices as well as defending its own vision of their visual and aesthetic dimensions and functions as motors of social progress and cultural regeneration. This book contributes to this defence through the concept of turbo-knowledge that it proposes and exploits for its own ends with the objective of critically and reflexively examining Art's contemporary conditions of existence.

A Question of Subject Matter

What are the issues and elements that are bound up with an attempt to produce visual works that exist between disciplines and which take the university as their new context and *condition* of production? What is the status of these works from the viewpoint of “Art” and other disciplines that are implicated in the production of these visual works? These questions cannot be answered in a satisfactory way unless one adopts a historical viewpoint and explores how knowledge was conceived and then re-constituted and re-articulated within the visual arts *before* and *after* the artist entered the university and the institution became a key reference for the production of art. Today, the progressive artist and the enlightened work of art are no longer tied to archaic, manual forms of skill-based training and vocational models of apprenticeship. Art's nature and function, its economy and its institutional framework have been the subject matter of many artists' practice since Marcel Duchamp's early twentieth-century probings of its limits. In the 1960s and '70s Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, and Hans Haacke explored issues and developed practices that probed the art world's institutional matrix. But they overlooked a new emerging context for the production of artists and their art and for the dissemination and exchange of their ideas. Art, in the late twentieth century, was increasingly produced within, or in relation to, a multi-disciplinary, university-based environment and the artist was educated on the basis of academic or corporate business-oriented career models as universities themselves were infiltrated by a new economic rationalism in the 1980s and 1990s. Increasingly, the artist was encouraged to produce new visual works that operated in relation to other disciplines such as the hard and soft sciences, cultural and communications studies, visual studies, design, and even business studies. This *modus operandi* was complemented by the use of new technologies and media with their automated methods of production (computer, digital video, and photographic technologies, amongst others).

The contemporary artist's visual activity, as distinguished by new academic and/or business models and related research environments, bears little relationship to a previous generation's vocational picture-making or object-building practices. One way to highlight the distinction is to point to the role of theory as a fundamental frame of reference and filter for an adequate and critical engagement with contemporary works of art. Another is to point to the increasingly intimate relationships that exist between academics from other disciplines and artists who teach in universities or artists who are university trained. Yet another is to point to the institutionalization of a

new advanced stage in the education of the artist: combined doctorates in theory and practice. The new conditions for the education of the artist and for the production and reception of artworks have led to a new kind of artwork that is conceived explicitly or implicitly as operating *simultaneously* in relation to a number of academic disciplines and within the frameworks of various academic or academically-supported traditions and theories. Art is now the product of multitasking knowledge, a widespread feature/methodological practice that is one of the distinguishing hallmarks of the kind of information culture in which both art and the university exist and function.

Previously, artworks and scientific and technical projects have been conceived in terms of autonomous products, and their ideational cultures have always been mapped in those terms. This book proposes a new and opposite strategy: namely that the “work of art” is nothing more than the *graphic and spatial history* of an *idea*, often related to existing academic theories, and that this idea's genesis is technologically mediated and ultimately framed by a specific type of environment: the university. This approach is fundamentally different from Conceptual Art's transformation of the concrete art object into the form of an idea (or system) in a number of important ways. First, there is no engagement with the definition or parameters of “Art” or any of its objects that does not take account of its *relationship* with the other disciplines. Second, the approach does not take for granted the existence of an autonomous “art world” or of the independent existence of autonomous, discipline-bound objects. Instead, it seeks to replace the art-related-object with another kind of *work* that is capable of ultimately existing between different disciplines. Since ideas are concretized through different kinds of media and inscription/recording technologies, the content of the object also relates in surprising and intimate ways to the *history* – past <-> present <-> future – of these media and technologies. However, insofar as these media/technologies cross disciplines, an object's content can also include other disciplinary content, but only *in media/technologies' terms*. Hence the importance accorded in this book to the *history* of media and technologies of reproduction since it can become the meta-context for the production of a certain class of visual work. Insofar as they also operate in the meta-medium of the university, some reflexive forms of artwork have the status of meta-contextual/meta-academic visual works.

It is on this basis that one can conceive of a practice that is situated at an interface between *research* in the history and use of new technologies and different ways of displaying and experiencing transdisciplinary knowledge and representations. This research is predicated on a nonlinear or relational history of media and technologies that is congruent with the parallel existence of a relational transdisciplinary history of subject matter in the university.

Subject matter in the visual arts is at the heart of the articulation of the production process as well as being implicated in the correct and uninhibited reception of a work of art, even when this work is radical. Until the first quarter of the twentieth century, subject matter could be organized into well-demarcated categories (portrait, landscape, still-life, nudes) and visual and technical innovations could be easily measured against these categories in ways that allowed for a clear tension to be articulated between the known and the unknown, convention and innovation. Thus the formal and

material innovations of cubism could be measured against the conventional art historical categories of the nude and still life, or, later, in the 1960s and '70s, a number of performance art's radical gestures could be measured against its articulation of the existing categories of the body (Gilbert & George's *The Singing Sculpture*, first presented in 1969, or Robert Morris' *I Box* from 1962) or landscape (Dennis Oppenheim's 1970 *Parallel Stress*, Parts I & II).⁵ However, it was also in the 1960s with the work of conceptual artists like Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry, Bernar Venet, or the collective of artists that operated under the title Art & Language that the question of subject matter was opened up in previously unforeseen ways – towards, for example, a radical questioning of the categories of subject matter that sustained art as a coherent and well-recognized discipline.⁶ The ultimate unacknowledged reference and principal site for the questioning and transformation of subject matter in the visual arts was, of course, the university, and the presence and significance of subject matter as an organizing principle of knowledge was, and continues to be, reflected most clearly in the form and organization of the university's library or library system which is at the heart of academic research practices, including those of contemporary artists.

The library is a repository of knowledge that has been codified and classified in terms of different subject matters that are operated upon by various representatives of the disciplines that constitute the university in its various forms. With the consolidation of the visual arts within the university in the 1960s and 1970s, the previously unexplored, or haphazardly explored, question of the nature, organization, and “display” of knowledge in the visual arts and, in particular, its relationship to other forms of knowledge, became a key issue in the production and reception of artworks, even if this was not openly acknowledged. Perhaps then it is not surprising that it was during this period that Bernar Venet produced his photostatic and photocopied physics books, or that Joseph Kosuth created his *Information Room* (1970) or that Art & Language presented its *Documenta Index (Index 01)* in 1972.⁷ Nor is it surprising that Vito Acconci should have conceived of his *Info-System/Bookstore* for Documenta X in 1997 since this work, along with Kosuth's, points directly to the influence of books on the production and reception of artworks.⁸ In fact, Kosuth and Acconci's artworks could serve as different paradigms for the work of art in the age of the university-trained artist – the former in terms of library or home-based research/work spaces and the latter in terms of the university bookstore. But these are limited and rare examples that still retain close ties with the idea of an autonomous discipline since they only reveal (Kosuth) or mimic (Acconci) new sites for the importation and absorption of ideas *from elsewhere*.

Nevertheless, it is during a period of transition, like the one that existed during the 1960s and '70s, that one can clearly see how subjects are constituted and consolidated while still being able to track the instability of the interrelations between data, information, “knowledge,” media, and subject matter. It is also during such periods of transition that artworks take on a reflexive quality and began to question their own *modus operandi*. To understand the role of the university today and use this understanding to develop new practices it is necessary to return to the '60s and '70s to measure the contextual and intellectual distance that separates that period

in the history of art from the present one. This book presents a measure of the development of a visual practice that bridges this distance.

1. See for example *Texte Zur Kunst*, theme issue *Artistic Research*, June 2011 and its network of references.

2. On the question of risk see David Tomas, "Une pratique entre les disciplines: risques et enjeux" in *La mémoire, le virus, le risque: Actes des tables rondes du 10e anniversaire de la Galerie B-312* eds. Marthe Carrier and Jean-Émile Verdier (Montréal: Galerie B-312, 2003), 41–47.

3. The question of what constitutes knowledge is complex and has been widely debated in every discipline from philosophy to visual art. For purposes of this book, knowledge is defined as a systemic configuration or agglomeration of specifically organized information – a meta-informational matrix that embodies a point of view of the world – that is capable of retaining its stability across time and space however short the extension or expanse might be. Knowledge models the world and is used to probe and speculate about its nature. From an anthropological viewpoint all human artifacts and systems of ideas are configurations of knowledge about the world and humanity's position in it. Societies and cultures are large-scale meta-informational matrices whose economies, customs, and systems of belief model the world and organize human activities according to those models. From the university's viewpoint, knowledge can take the form of a discipline, it can be transmitted orally, or it can be conveyed by a book, slide, or PowerPoint presentation (or similar mobile storage medium). In each case, the form is in itself a specific knowledge matrix. The question of knowledge's reception adds a layer of ambiguity to its interpretation and gives it an essential elasticity that allows for its productive mutation in the hands of groups and individuals, a phenomenon that is essential for a society and a culture's ecological health.

In this book, knowledge can be understood to take three basic forms:

1) Hard knowledge: Within the university, knowledge has traditionally been transmitted by way of books, which stabilizes it and allows it to voyage across space and time in a permanent,

coherent fashion. For the artist, hard knowledge has been traditionally transmitted via paintings, drawings, or sculpture. Today it can be transmitted via single and multiple channel films and videotapes, installations, etc.

2) Soft knowledge: This term refers to knowledge that has been transmitted orally through the medium of lectures and seminars within the university but is also recorded and codified in the form of notes, diagrams and sketches.

3) Liquid knowledge: While it retains its kinships to information and data, liquid knowledge is mobile and its affiliation to hard and soft knowledge is simply based on it being spatio-temporally disenfranchised and therefore nomadic. It moves along disciplinary fault lines, cracks. It fills the gaps that might exist between the more stable architectural forms of hard and soft knowledge. It moves along invisible pathways and it can appear in very different hard and soft formations. Liquid knowledge from different disciplines can form transdisciplinary "eddies" between these disciplines under the right circumstances.

4. David Tomas, *Transcultural Space and Transcultural Beings* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996); *Beyond the Image Machine: A History of Visual Technologies* (London & New York: Continuum, 2004); "For a Negative Practice of Photography: an interview with Alberto Cambrosio" in *A Blinding Flash of Light: Photography Between Disciplines and Media* (Montreal: Dazibao, 2004) 31–41. Originally published in French in *Parachute* no. 37 (1984–85), 4–8.

5. Dennis Oppenheim, "Parallel Stress" Parts I & II, 1970, in Ursula Meyer's *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972), 198–199.

6. See the relevant artist entries in Ursula Meyer's *Conceptual Art*. See also, for example, the exhibition catalogue *January 5–31, 1969* (New York: Seth Siegel, 1969).

7. For Kosuth see, Ursula Meyer's *Conceptual Art*, 170–171. For Art & Language see the exhibition catalogue *L'art conceptuel, une perspective*

(Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1990), 110–111.

8. Acconci's work is presented in *Documenta X's Short Guide* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 1997), 14–15.

NO. 1



NO. 2

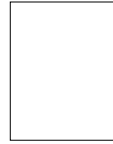
Artists are a product of their time. They 'emerge' at a specific period in history, they react to their environment and implicitly or explicitly to the history of their discipline, and they disappear leaving a body of works behind (or not) ...

For an artist who emerged in the mid-1970s (as opposed to the late 1950s, early or late 1960s) there were some specific questions that were highlighted by the most radical art of the time.

One set of questions was focused on 'What is the function of Art?' Is this function social, political or cultural? Is it composed of a mixture of the three? If so, what are the proportions of this mixture?

Another set of questions was focused on 'What are the limits of art and how are they registered, assessed and/or transgressed?' Can one produce a visual/aesthetic proposition that simultaneously refers to the art world, its history and products and to the mundane world of everyday existence? Can one import elements of the latter in order to reconfigure the parameters of the former?

These were two challenging constellations of questions that confronted an artist who might have wished to critique and expand on an 'immanent' late 1960s and early 1970s conceptual art heritage.



Four horizontal lines, likely a placeholder for a postcard address or text.

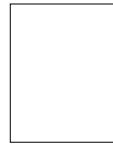
Today the artist functions in a different socio-economic and political universe.

**The artist is now a 'witness' whose job it is to inform or sensitize the public to historical and contemporary events.
The artist is someone who makes people 'aware.'**

However the artist continues to function within a particular cultural and disciplinary context and this context seems to be taken for granted by the majority of artists who present their work in museums and galleries. The quest to understand content has eclipsed the quest to understand context, and so Art's old socio-economic and cultural regime remains in place to ultimately govern artistic production in the name of democracy and a new more complex and sophisticated form of social realism that has been deployed under the guise of a new ethnographic turn.

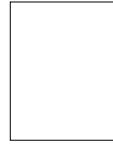
Art no longer serves the members of a society in a self-reflexive, experimental and critical fashion in order to better understand it's social functions or it's 'place in the world.' It now serves society in the capacity of a perambulating social and political consciousness. However this consciousness is no longer critically conscious of it's own conditions of existence.

Context is content: the determining context; the governing context...

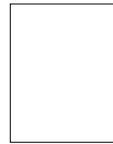


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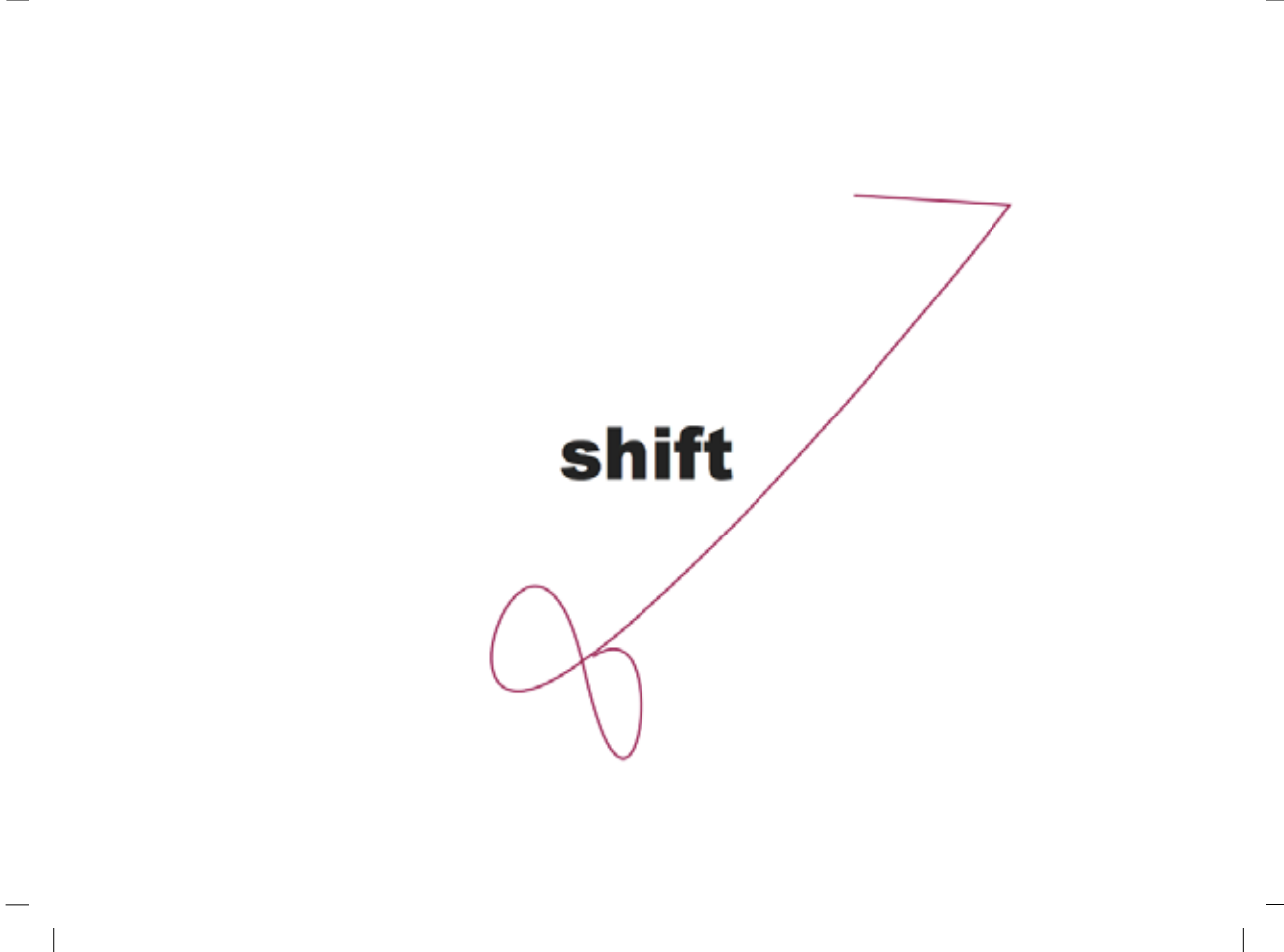
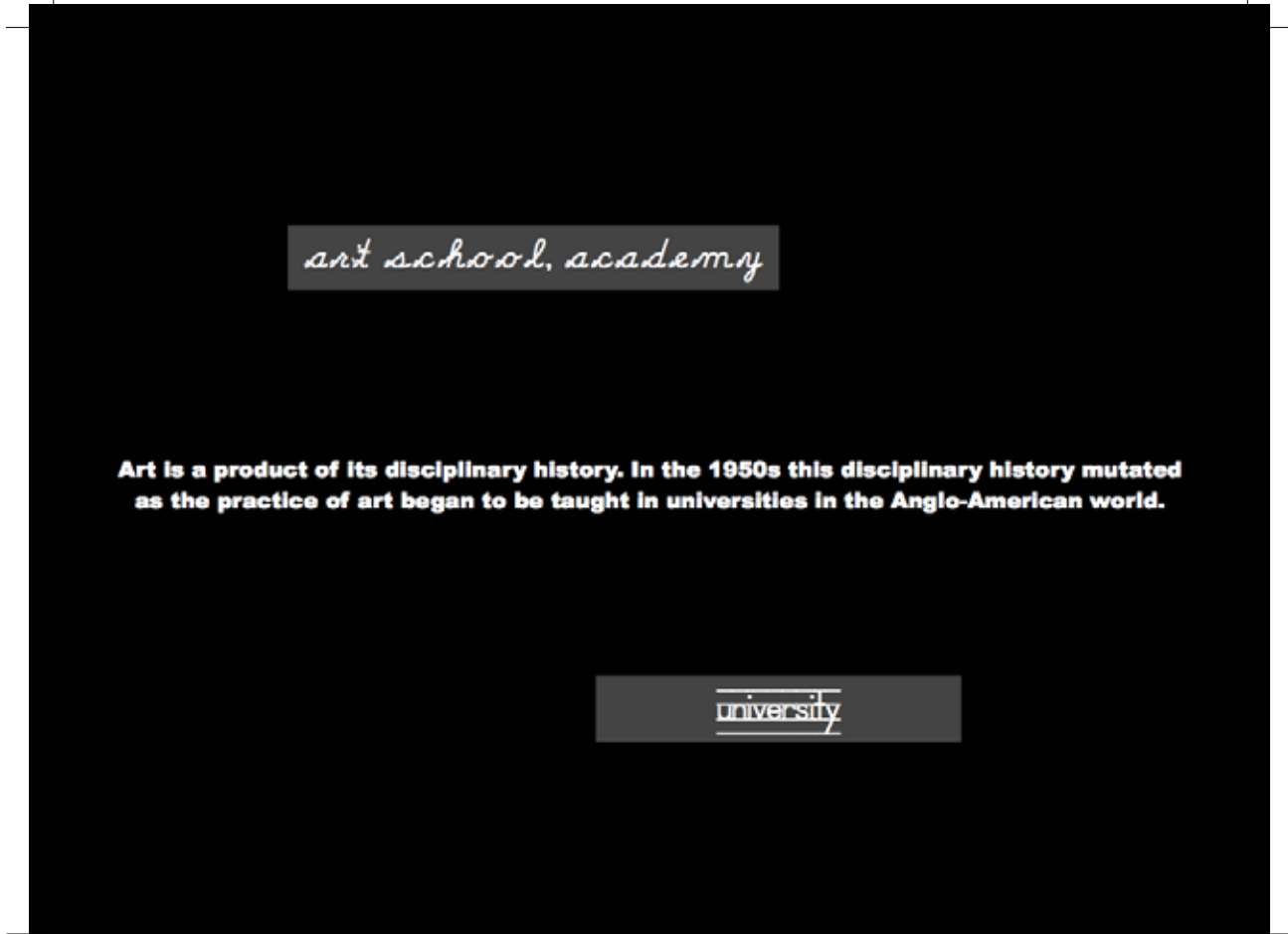


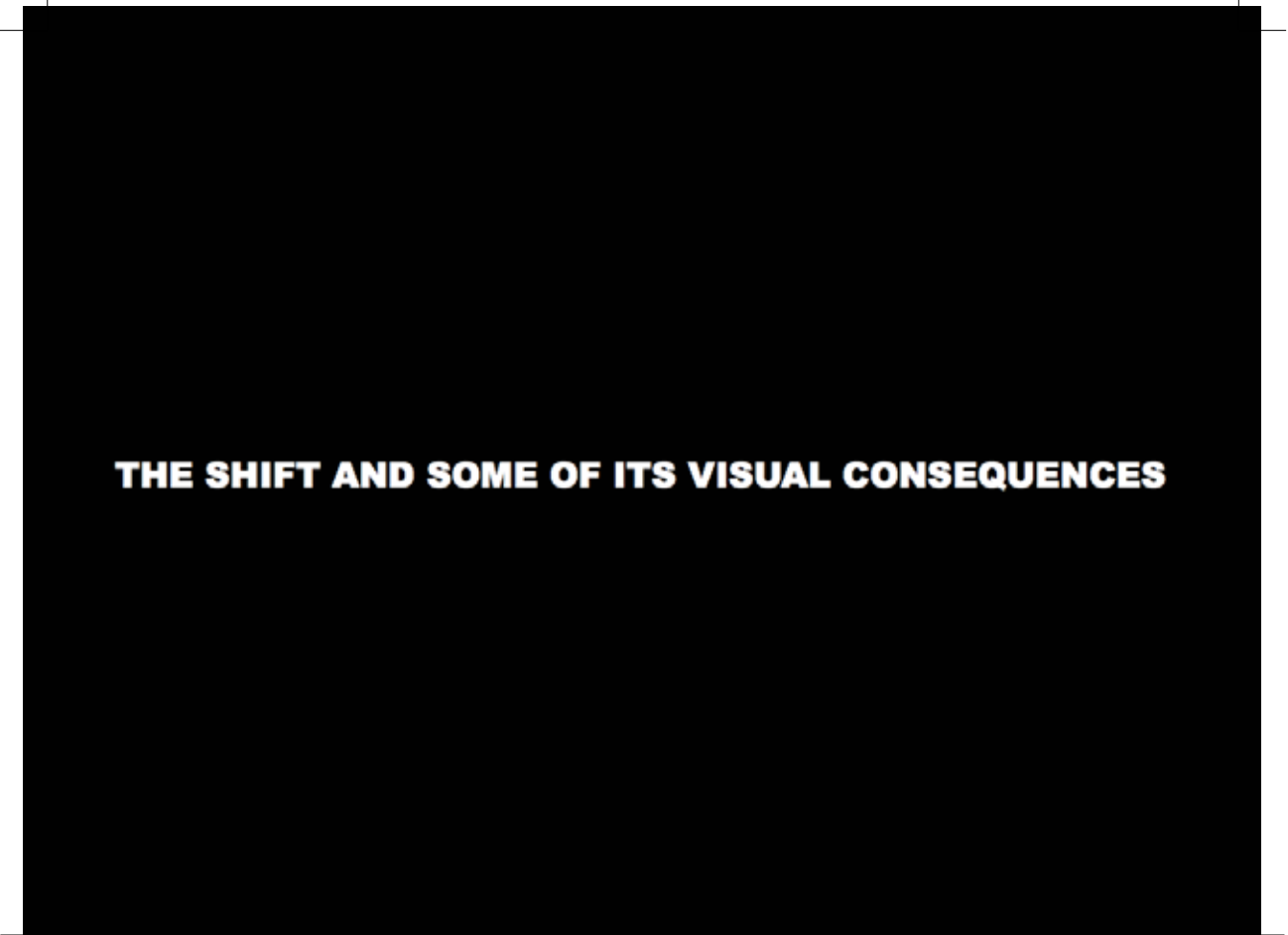


Four horizontal lines for writing an address or message on the back of the postcard.

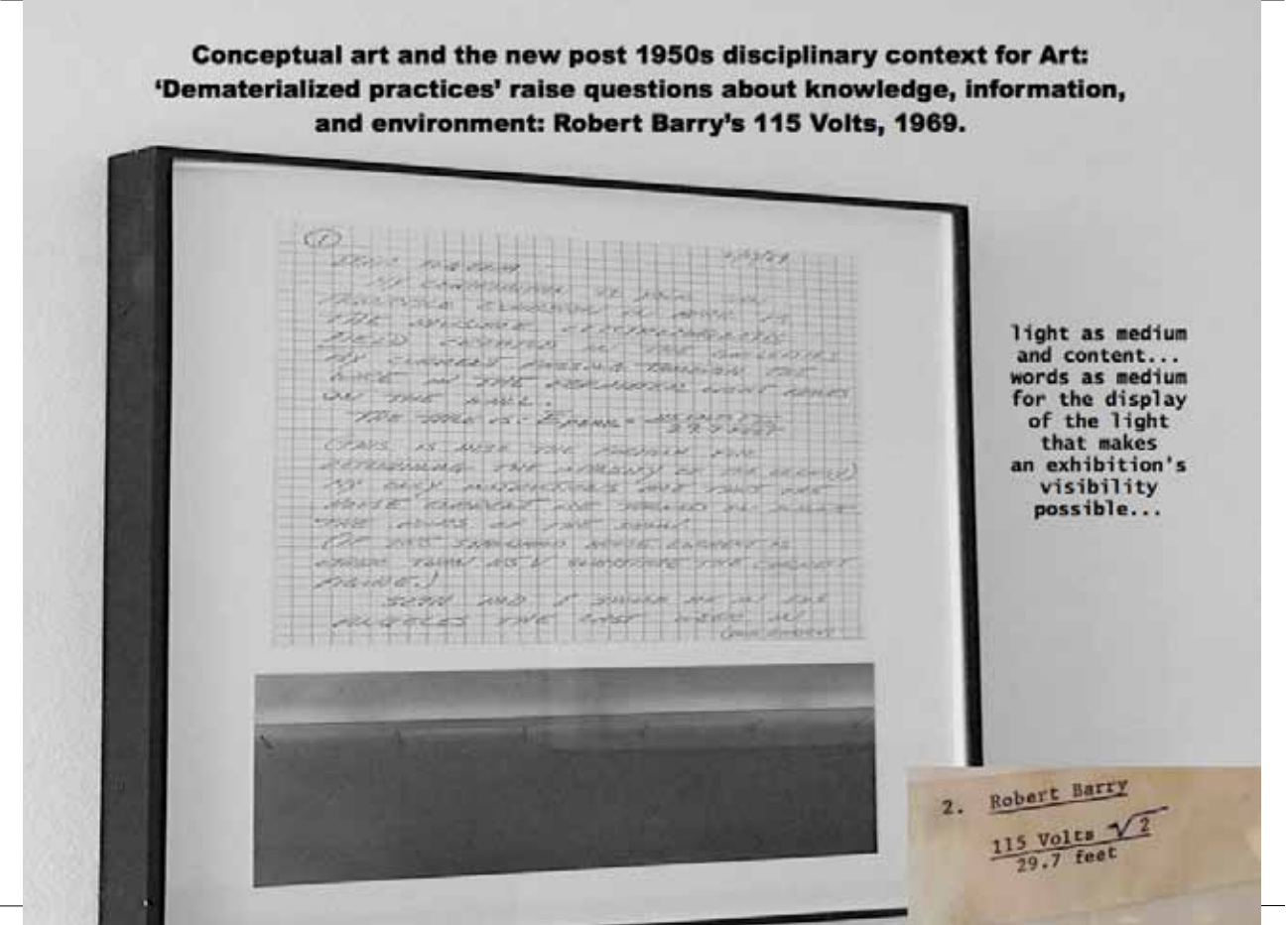


Four horizontal lines for writing an address or message on the back of the postcard.





THE SHIFT AND SOME OF ITS VISUAL CONSEQUENCES



Conceptual art and the new post 1950s disciplinary context for Art: 'Dematerialized practices' raise questions about knowledge, information, and environment: Robert Barry's 115 Volts, 1969.

light as medium
and content...
words as medium
for the display
of the light
that makes
an exhibition's
visibility
possible...

2. Robert Barry
115 Volts $\sqrt{2}$
29.7 feet



**Robert Barry's contribution to
Seth Siegel's 'January 5-31, 1969' exhibition**

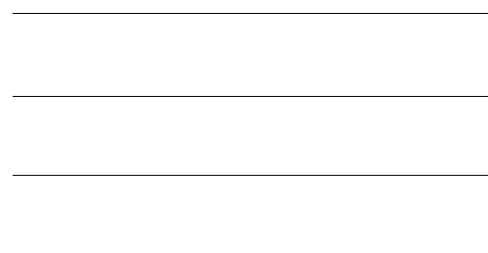
Robert Barry

1. **Wall to Wall interior Piece**, September 1968, thin black plastic line and screw eyes, 21'10" x 12'4" (x 7'H). Collection: Mr. and Mrs. John W. Wendler, N. Y.
2. **Outdoor nylon monofilament installation**, December 1, 1968, nylon monofilament and screw eyes, 65' x 43' (x 14 1/2' — 16" above ground). Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Topol, Mamaroneck, N. Y.
3. (Proposal for) **99.5 mc Carrier Wave (WBAI—FM)**, 1968, 99.5 megacycles; 5.4 kilowatts, New York. Collection*
4. **88 mc Carrier Wave (FM)**, 1968 88 megacycles; 5 milliwatts, 9 volt DC battery, Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Manuel Greer, N. Y.
5. **1600 kc Carrier Wave (AM)**, 1968, 1600 kilocycles; 60 milliwatts; 110 volts AC/DC. Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Topol, Mamaroneck, N. Y.
6. **New York to Luxembourg CB Carrier Wave**, January 5 — 31, 1969, (N. Y. station WR2WER to Luxembourg station LX1DT), 10 meters; 28 megacycles; 180 watts. Collection*
7. **40 KHZ ultrasonic soundwave installation**, January 4, 1969, 8.25 mm ultrasonic soundwave. Collection: Mr. Seth Siegel, N. Y.
8. **0.5 Microcurie Radiation Installation**, January 5, 1969, Barium-133, Central Park, N. Y., 10 year duration (approximate). Collection: Private, N. Y.

*Nontransferable.

Facing page: Photograph of Catalog number 2.

Following page: 2 photographs of artist's studio being occupied simultaneously by Catalog numbers 4 and 5.



Here then I propose rests the viability of art. In an age when traditional philosophy is unreal because of its assumptions, art's ability to exist will depend not only on its not performing a service—as entertainment, visual (or other) experience, or decoration—which is something easily replaced by kitsch culture, and technology, but, rather, it will remain viable by not assuming a philosophical stance; for in art's unique character is the capacity to remain aloof from philosophical judgments. It is in this context that art shares similarities with logic, mathematics, and, as well, science. But whereas the other endeavors are useful, art is not. Art indeed exists for its own sake.

In this period of man, after philosophy and religion, art may possibly be one endeavor that fulfills what another age might have called "man's spiritual needs." Or, another way of putting it might be that art deals analogously with the state of things "beyond physics" where philosophy had to make assertions. And art's strength is that even the preceding sentence is an assertion, and cannot be verified by art. Art's only claim is for art. Art is the definition of art.

books
articles
newspapers
photographs
information
knowledge
art

**Conceptual art
and the new post 1950s
disciplinary context for Art.**

**The art work's
new information economy:
Joseph Kosuth's Information Room,
1970.**



Joseph Kosuth: Information Room, 1970.



Four horizontal lines, likely a placeholder for a postcard address.

SOMETHING WHICH CAN NEVER BE ANY SPECIFIC THING

Robert Barry, Vancouver

The rise of the power of the word and its domination of the object, circa 1969: Robert Barry's contribution to the '995,000' catalogue, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1970.



Four horizontal lines, likely a placeholder for a postcard address.

pāint'ing, n. 1. the act or occupation of covering surfaces with paint.
2. the act, art, or occupation of picturing scenes, objects, persons, etc. in paint.
3. a picture in paint, as an oil, water color, etc.
4. colors laid on. [Obs.]
5. delineation that raises a vivid image in the mind; as, word-*painting*. [Obs.]

Joseph Kosuth's contribution to Seth Siegelaub's 'January 5-31, 1969' exhibition





ART's new context of production:

research memo:

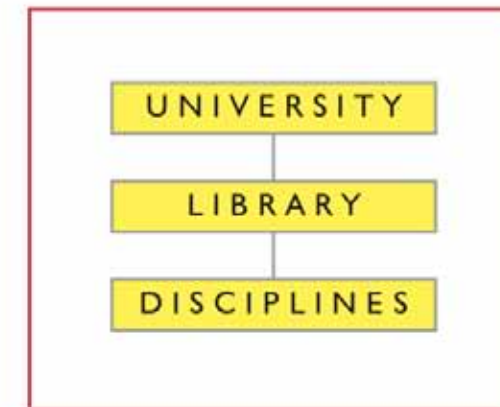
The University

Lee Lozano (U of Chicago), Joseph Kosuth (New School), Robert Barry (Hunter College),
Douglas Huebler (University of Michigan), etc. etc.

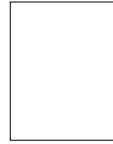
**compose a list
of all the
educational
institutions
frequented by
major artists
since the 1930s
and then
organize it
on the basis
of a timeline
(date[s]/name of
artist/institution/
subject/degree)
and also geographic
locations**

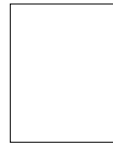
dedicate the project to mark lombardi

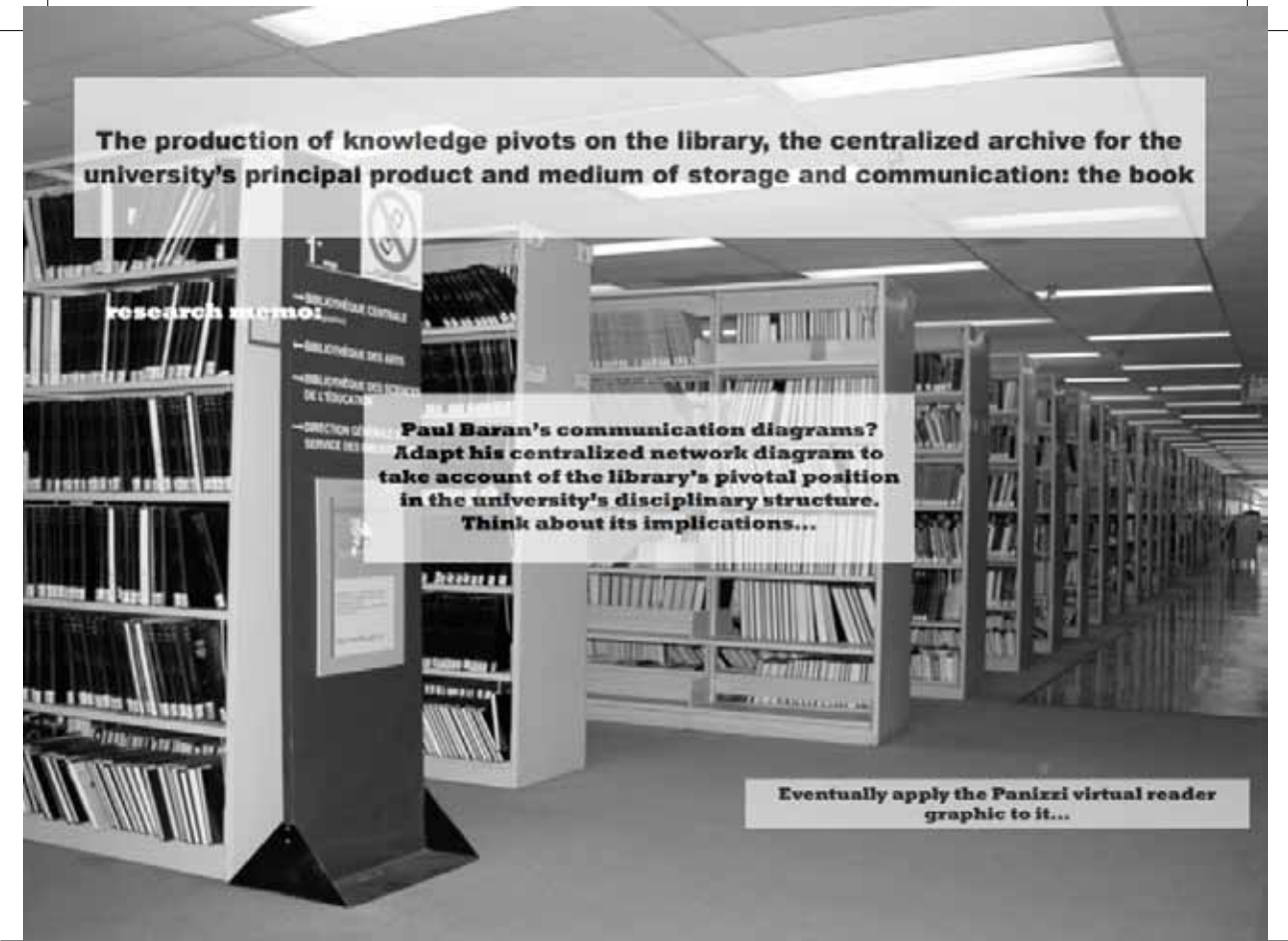
NEW MEDIUM FOR THE FORMATION OF THE ARTIST
AND THE CONCEPTUALIZATION AND PRODUCTION OF
ARTWORKS IN THE 1960s-1970s

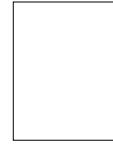


PRODUCTION
OF BOOK-
BASED
KNOWLEDGE









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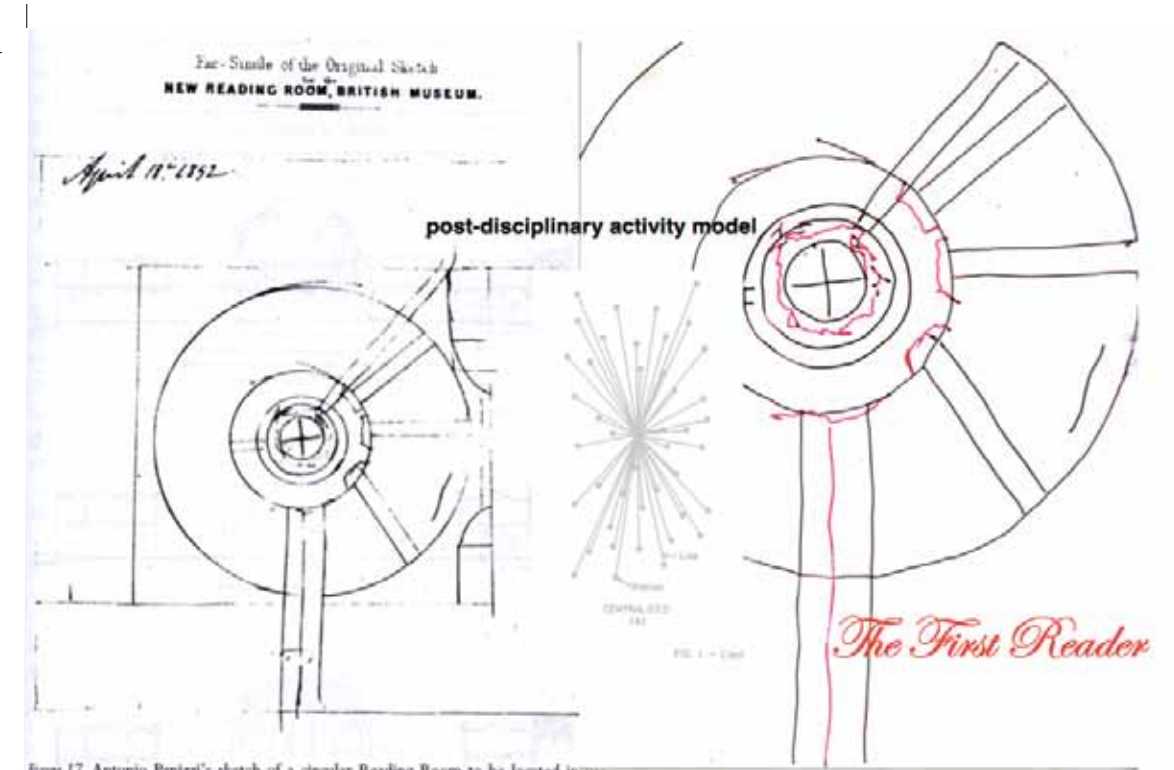
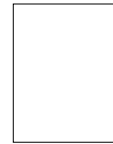
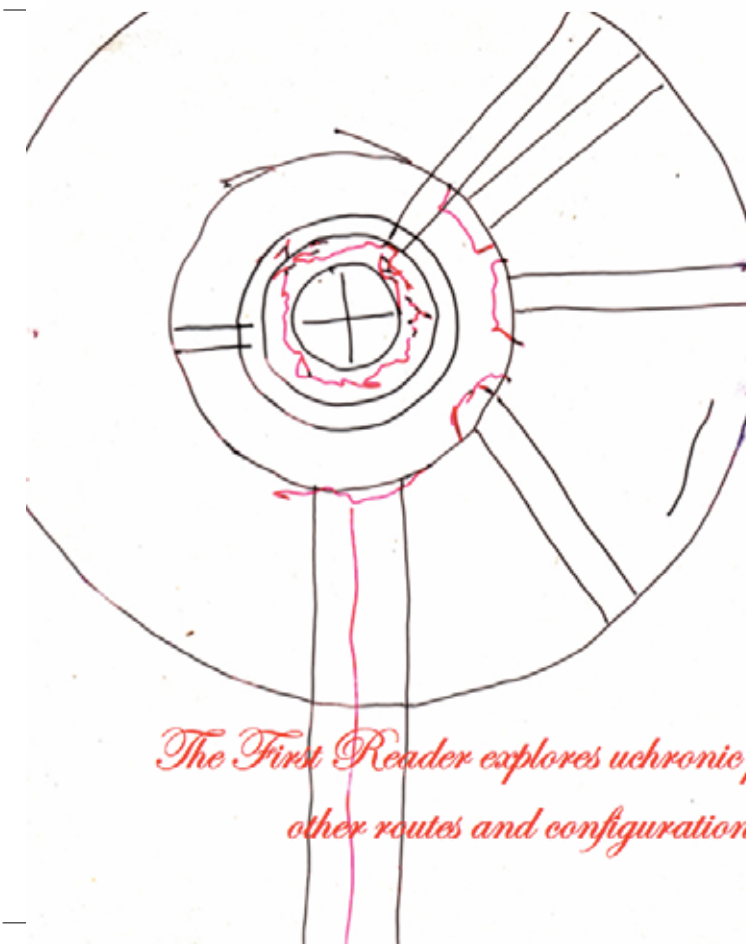


Figure 17 Antonio Panizzi's sketch of a circular Reading Room to be located in the central quadrangle of the British Museum, April 18th, 1852. Reproduced from A List of Books of Reference in the Reading Room, 1859, facing p. xvi. Courtesy of the British Museum.

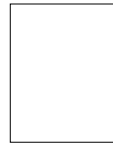
Panizzi virtual reader graphic



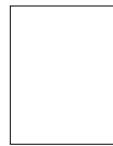
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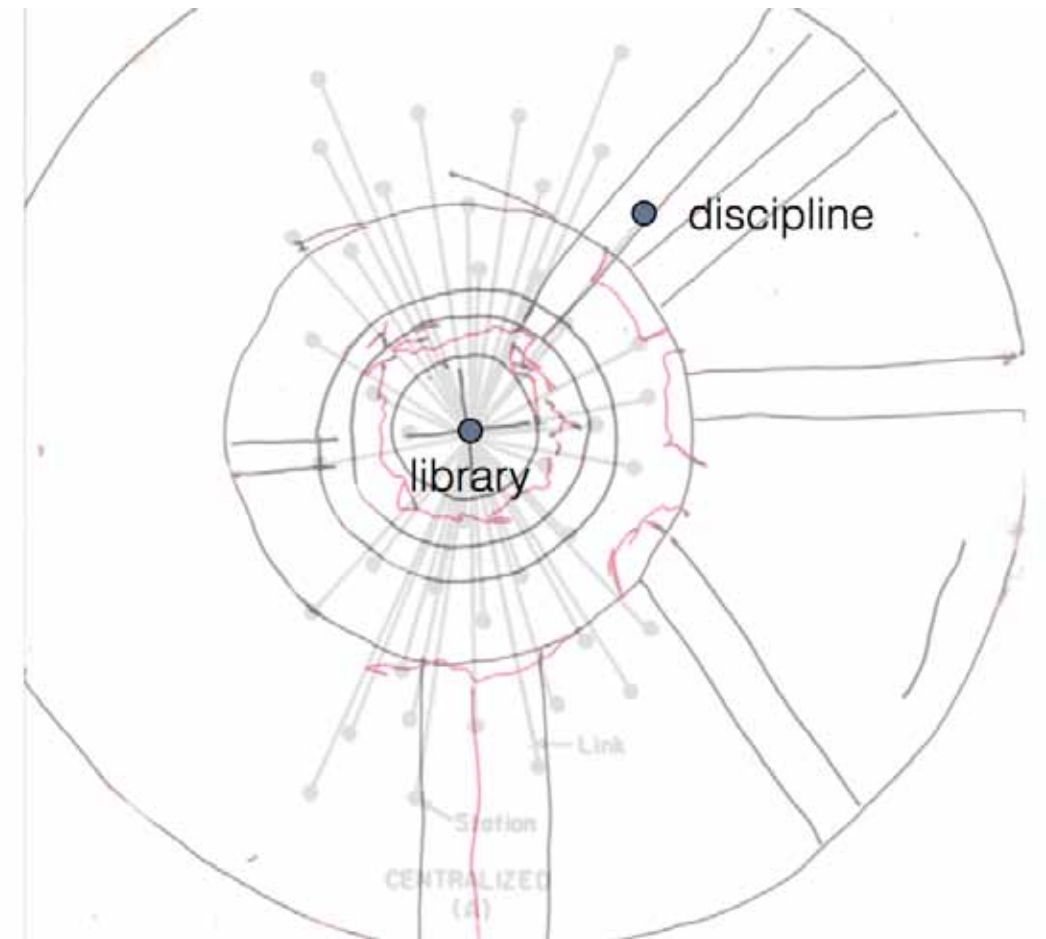
Panizzi virtual reader graphic



Four horizontal lines for writing.



Four horizontal lines for writing.









The University: Context for the Production of Knowledge ... and Art.

- A) **Knowledge**
- B) **The archive of knowledge**
- C) **The archive of its system(s) of classification.**
- D) **The dissemination of knowledge according to a basic system of organization and classification: the discipline and sub-discipline.**
- E) **The university is a liminal socio-cultural space devoted to the production of knowledge according to a system of disciplines and sub-disciplines.**
- F) **The university is a rite of passage based on a disciplinary division of labour devoted to the production of knowledge upon which a society and culture are founded.**

books
 articles
 newspapers
 photographs
 information
 knowledge
 art





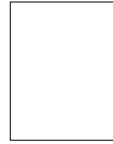
45° 30' N - 73° 36' W

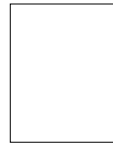
● *reduce to Clarendon 40pt.*
- SHOW AT SIR GEORGE WILLIAMS ART GALLERY
+ SAIDYE BRAONFMAN CENTRE - FEB - MARCH, 1971 +
inventory

reduce to Clarendon 60 pt. (U.C.) or equivalent (L.C.) ORGANIZED BY GARY COWARD + BILL VAZAN Over

45 30' N - 73 36' W are the geodetic co-ordinates of Montreal. They locate us by a coding system that is outside the usual ones, with their references to the histories of culture, race or politics. They relate to the history of technology, and are purely informational.

one planet, one nation. sun ra



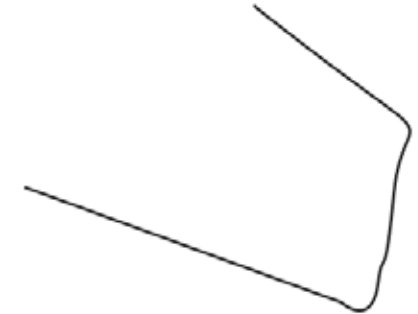


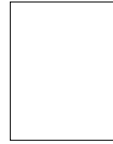
At present she was studying the
History of Art
("the second raters last refuge").

Vladimir Nabokov



interlude



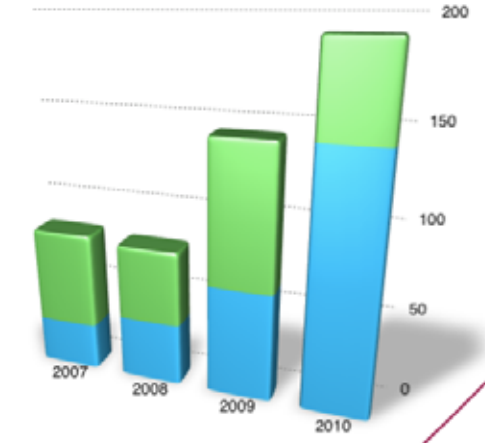




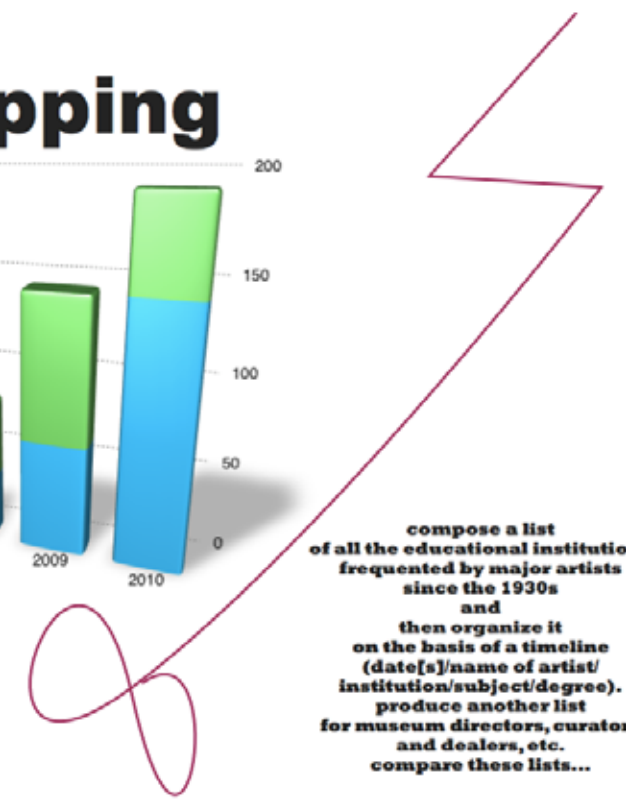


books
articles
newspapers
photographs
information
knowledge
art

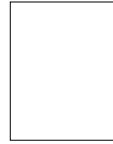
mapping



compose a list
of all the educational institutions
frequented by major artists
since the 1930s
and
then organize it
on the basis of a timeline
(date[s]/name of artist/
institution/subject/degree).
produce another list
for museum directors, curators
and dealers, etc.
compare these lists...



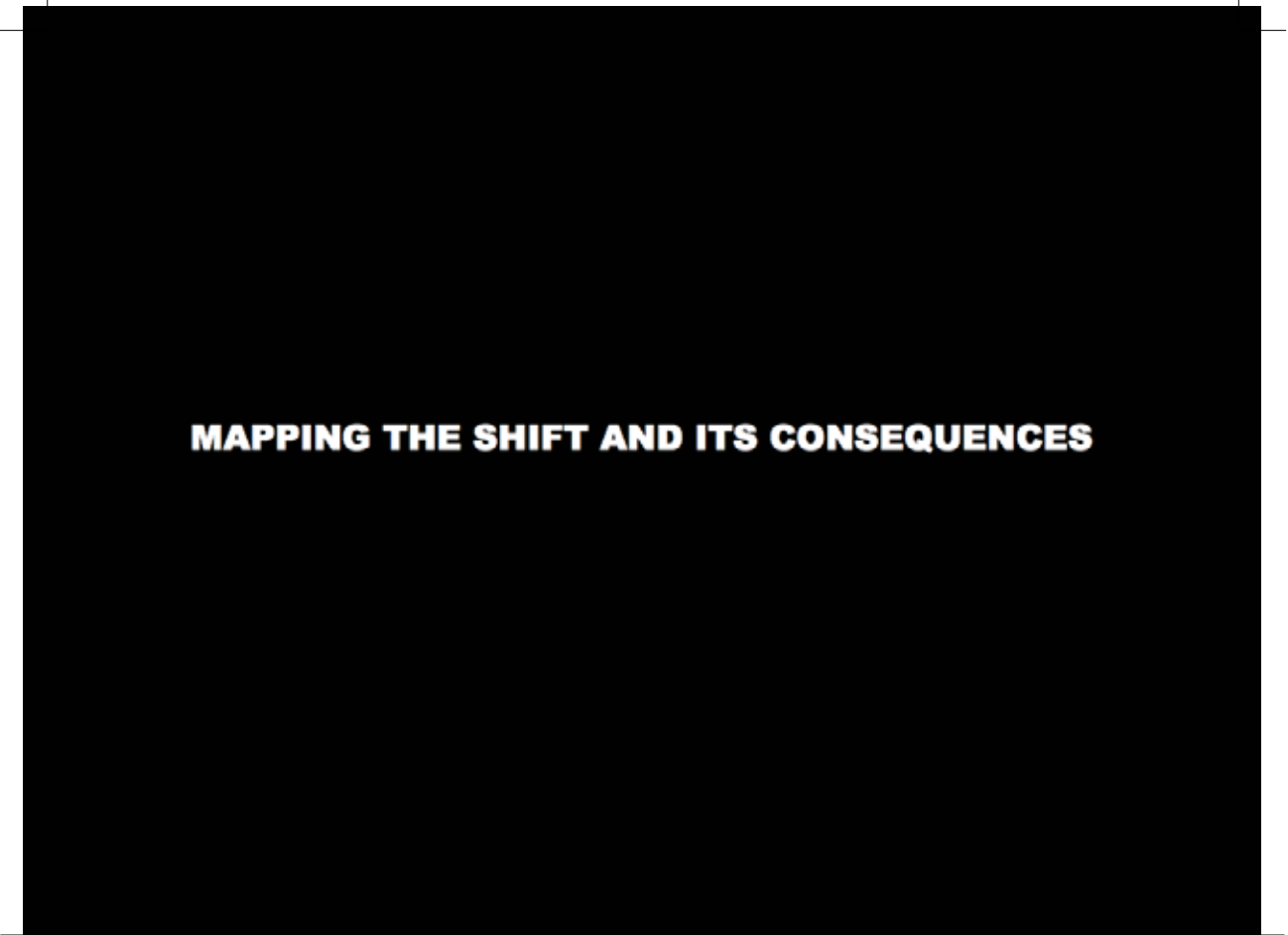
ESCAPE VELOCITY NO. 27 A POSTCARD BOOK BY DAVID TOMAS, 2011



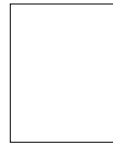
dim lights ...



NO. 29

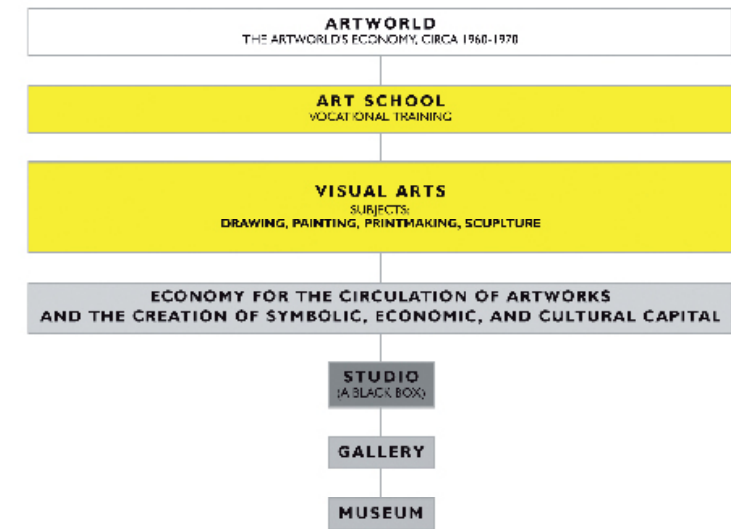


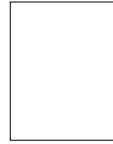
ESCAPE VELOCITY NO. 28 A POSTCARD BOOK BY DAVID TOMAS, 2011



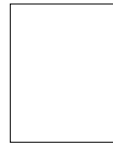
NO. 30

TRADITIONAL CONTEXT FOR THE PRODUCTION OF ARTWORKS IN THE LATE 1960s-EARLY 1970s IN ENGLAND





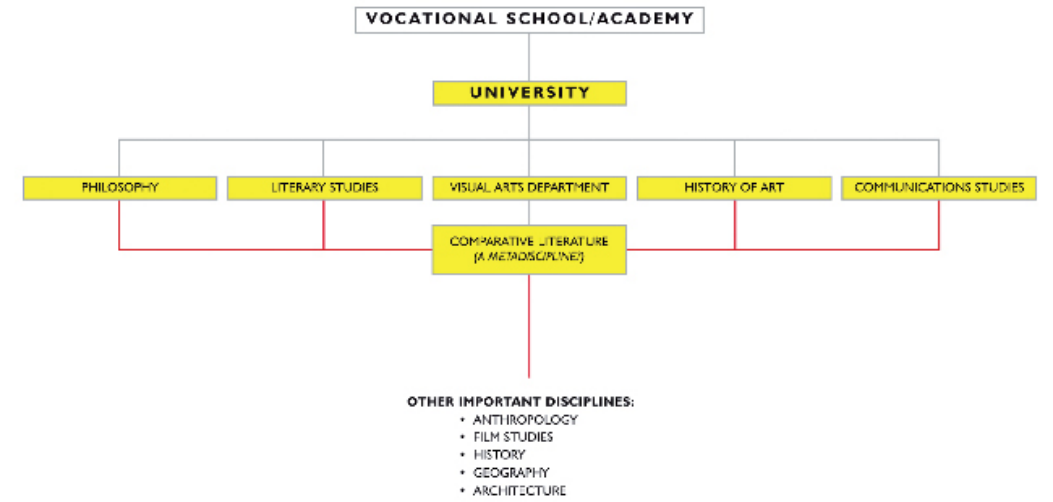
Four horizontal lines for writing, intended for a postcard message.



Four horizontal lines for writing, intended for a postcard message.

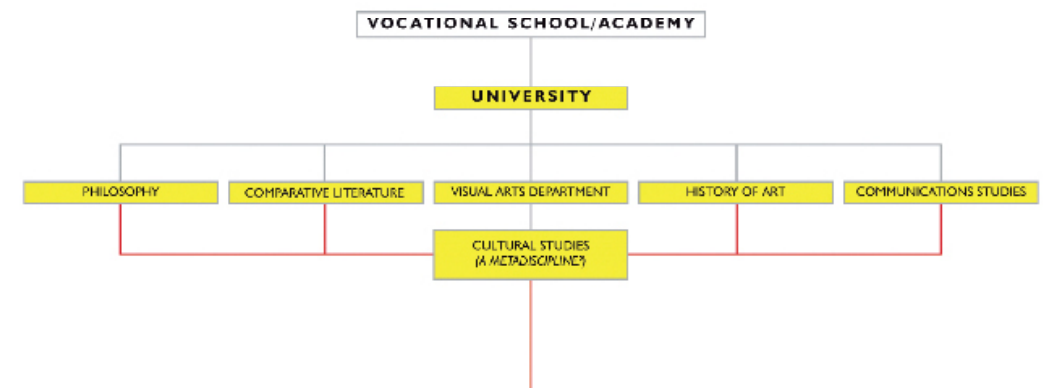
II

NEW EMERGING CONTEXT FOR THE PRODUCTION OF ARTWORKS IN 1960s-1970s



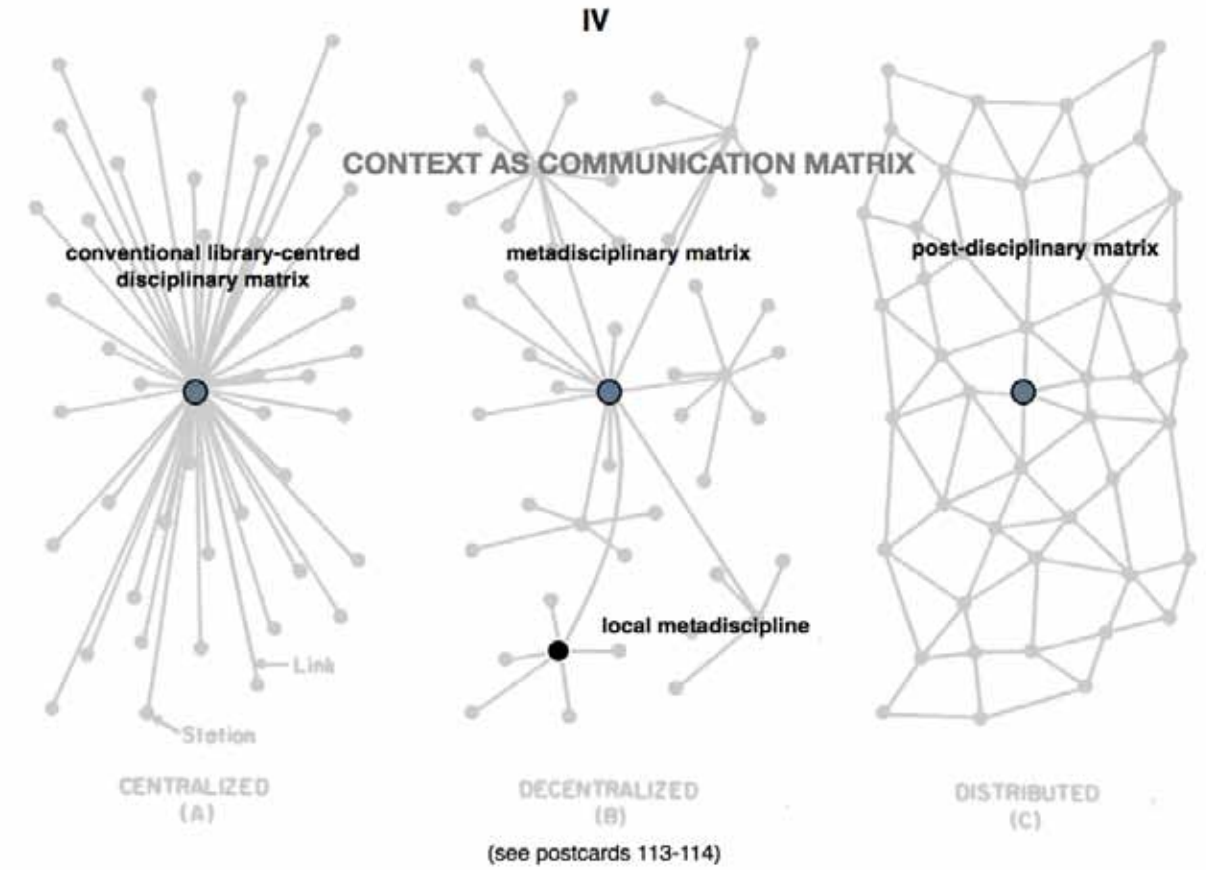
III

NEW EMERGING CONTEXT FOR THE PRODUCTION OF ARTWORKS IN 1980s-1990s









Two strategic options for developing a visual practice in the age of the university.

- A) **Accept the place of art as an academic discipline in the pantheon of disciplines and then treat artworks in the same way as any other academic product: Artworks are defined by specific disciplinary parameters and art is produced in relation to those parameters. In other words, art is recognized and accepted as Art because it claims to be art and not something else. However—and this is the important point—it is now housed in an institutional context that also hosts other disciplines. This was not the case before.**
- B) **Explore and critique this new context of production by first acknowledging the context and then by focusing on the space between disciplines as the privileged location for the emergence of another kind of visual practice.**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

'WORKS ON THE HISTORY OF PHYSICS'

DAVID TOMAS - NOVEMBER 02 - 28, 1979
OPENING - FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 02 at 8:00 P.M.

Statement by the Artist

There are established means of exploring and presenting forms of knowledge. These include the painted surface and displays associated with museums. In structure these methods provide a means of organizing and presenting or 'carrying' a body of knowledge. The formal attributes of these objects reflect the culturally conditioned activities which form the basis of their manufacture. As methods they also stand as memories and histories of these activities. As objects for analysis they provide the means of exploring aspects of the organization of the systems of knowledge they embody. The particular objects categorized as scientific instruments and their associated experimental results provide the means of exploring the cognitive aspects of man, not only the sensory stage of cognition, but also the relation between the empirical and theoretical levels vs. scientific cognition.

If one assumes that the human mind 'regardless of the identity of those who happen to be giving it expression, should display an increasingly intelligible structure' (Levi-Strauss), it then becomes immaterial when considering two distinct thought processes which of the two takes shape through the other. What becomes important is that one should shed light on the other. In fact, that light should be shed on the structure of the human mind.

I have an interest in these thoughts.

Within this context the function of the artist is to discover and structure of cultural organization, and it is to this structure that the artist ultimately addresses himself.

DAVID TOMAS lives and works in Montreal. His long standing interest in science has led him through fellowships, research papers and lectures on the subject. He exhibits in Montreal and is the recipient of a Canada Council Junior Grant.

archive document



A good deal of the most rigorous and stimulating work produced in the last 14 years has borrowed notions from other fields of knowledge and applied them to examining the structural parameters of art . With the switch from , for instance , artist as historian to historian as artist the reverse procedure is true . As a historian one now has to relearn what those activities are that could be defined as 'artistic' within what can be termed a ' post-conceptual condition '. Any productions from this point of view reflect this epistemological reorientation .

catalogue statement, 1980

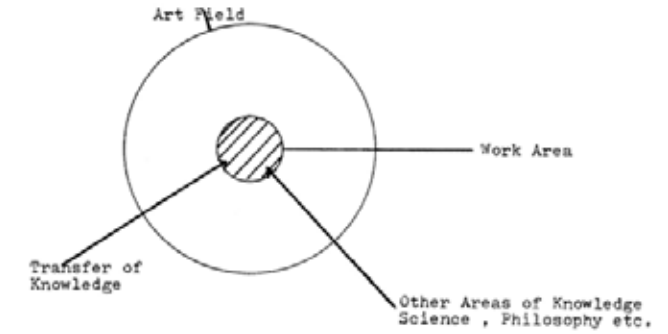
archive document



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TWO MODELS FOR THE TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE IN ART
AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES (FIRST DRAFT -- OUTLINE
16/4/80)

MODEL 'A' -- SINGLE CONTEXT , SINGLE MEANING



Transfer of Knowledge Possible Between Art Works
and/or Producers. However Transfer of Useful
Knowledge Out Into Other Fields Unlikely.

STAGE I

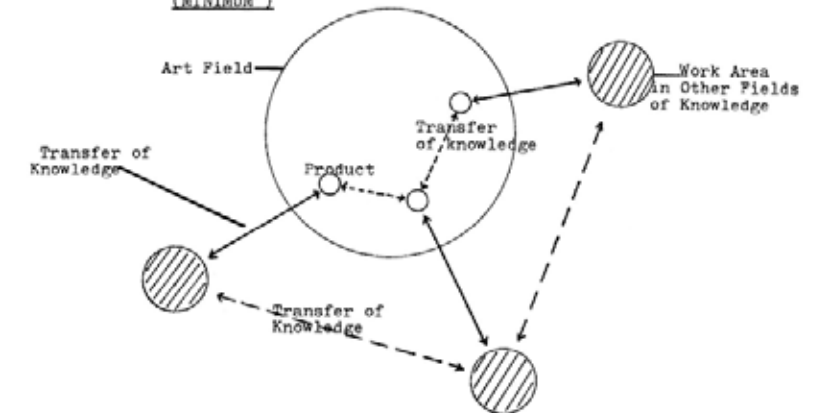
**art as a form of knowledge
that interacts with other forms of knowledge
within a university-based system of knowledge**

archive document

ARTIST AS HISTORIAN

TWO MODELS FOR THE TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE IN ART
AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES (FIRST DRAFT -- OUTLINE
16/4/80)

MODEL 'B' -- DUAL CONTEXT (MINIMUM) , DUAL MEANING
(MINIMUM)



Transfer of Knowledge Possible Both Inside and Outside as Well
as Between Fields of Knowl-
edge STAGE II

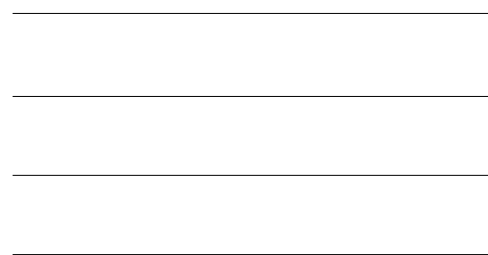
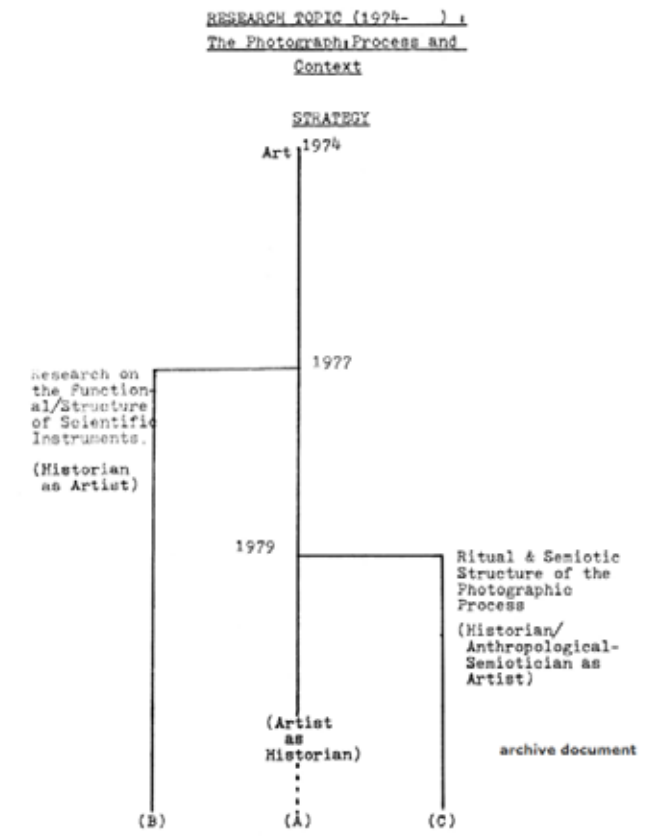
**... explore the university's knowledge and disciplinary matrix
in a quest for other forms of knowledge ...**

HISTORIAN AS ARTIST

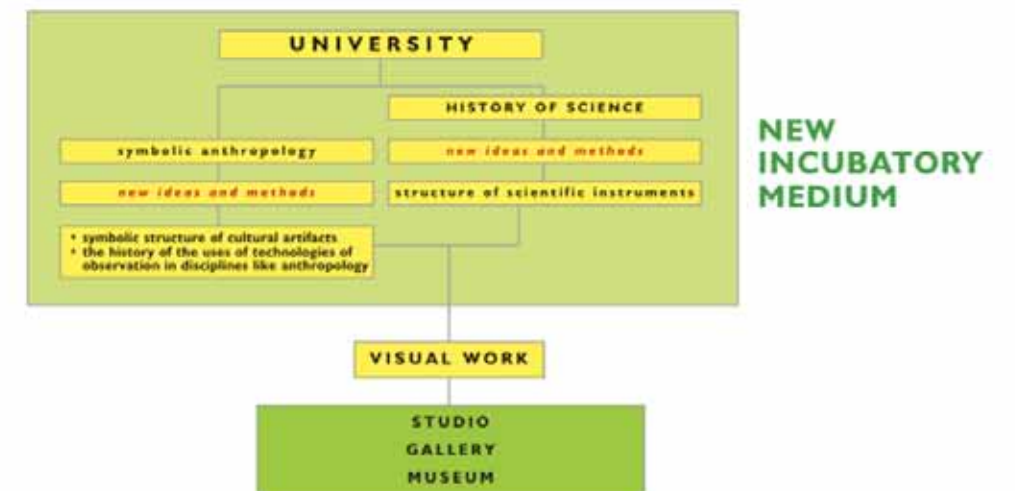
archive document

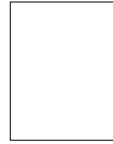


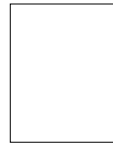
Four horizontal lines for writing.



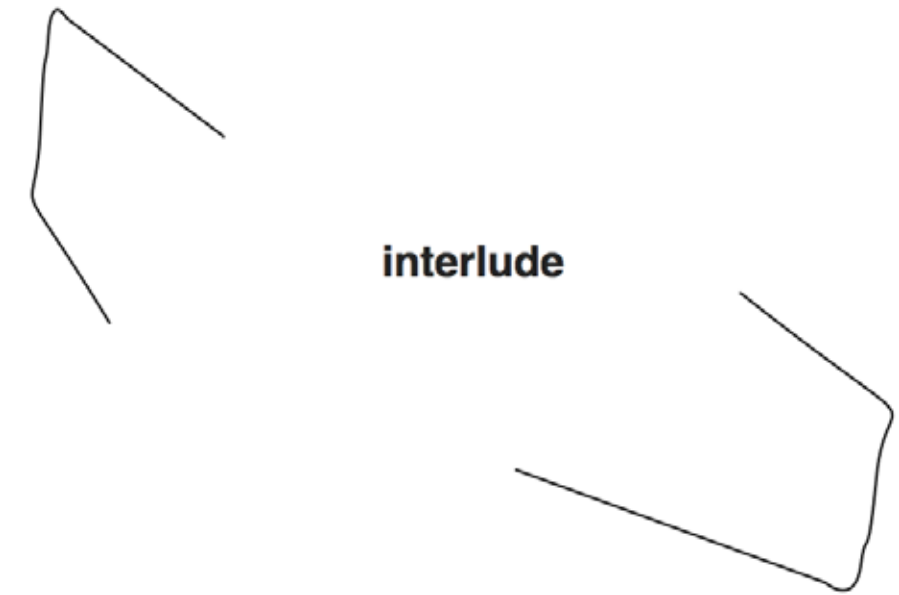
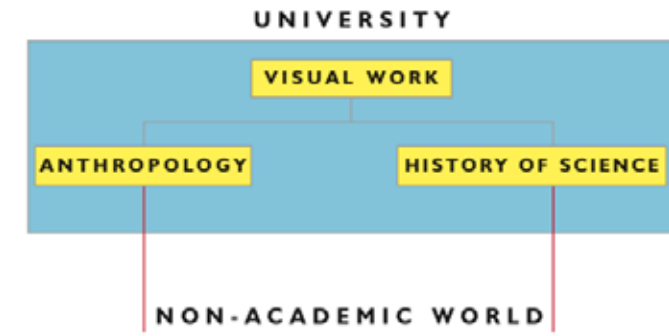
CIRCA 1980: THE VISUAL WORK'S CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ARCHITECTURE: A TRANSDISCIPLINARY OBJECT THAT CANNOT BE COMPLETELY ASSIMILATED IN THE ART WORLD



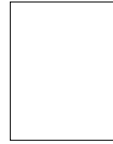




THE ARTWORK TRANSFORMED INTO A VISUAL WORK
THAT EXISTS BETWEEN FIELDS OF KNOWLEDGE AND IN
MOVEMENT BETWEEN THEM



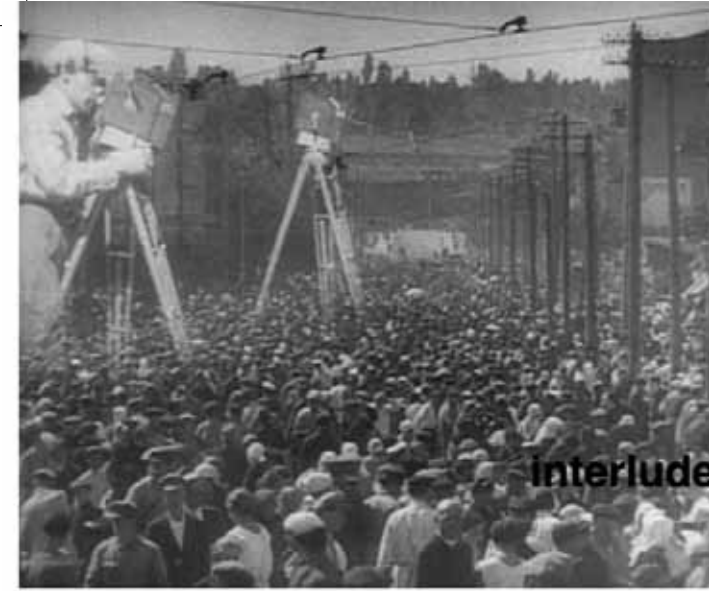
ESCAPE VELOCITY NO. 41 A POSTCARD BOOK BY DAVID TOMAS, 2011



ESCAPE VELOCITY NO. 42 A POSTCARD BOOK BY DAVID TOMAS, 2011



NO. 43



TRM

... the space between .. ?

NO. 44

WHAT IS THE SUBJECT MATTER OF ART?



... distant voice linking up the slide sequence ...



SUBJECT MATTER, IN GENERAL, IS ANYTHING WHICH CAN BE CONTENT FOR SOME THEORY.

WIKIPEDIA

avant-garde

subject matter

dada

constructivism

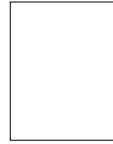
surrealism *Photography*
(an early nineteenth century invention)
is a key to the art of the twentieth century.

APPROPRIATION ART

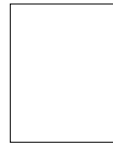
conceptual art

etc.

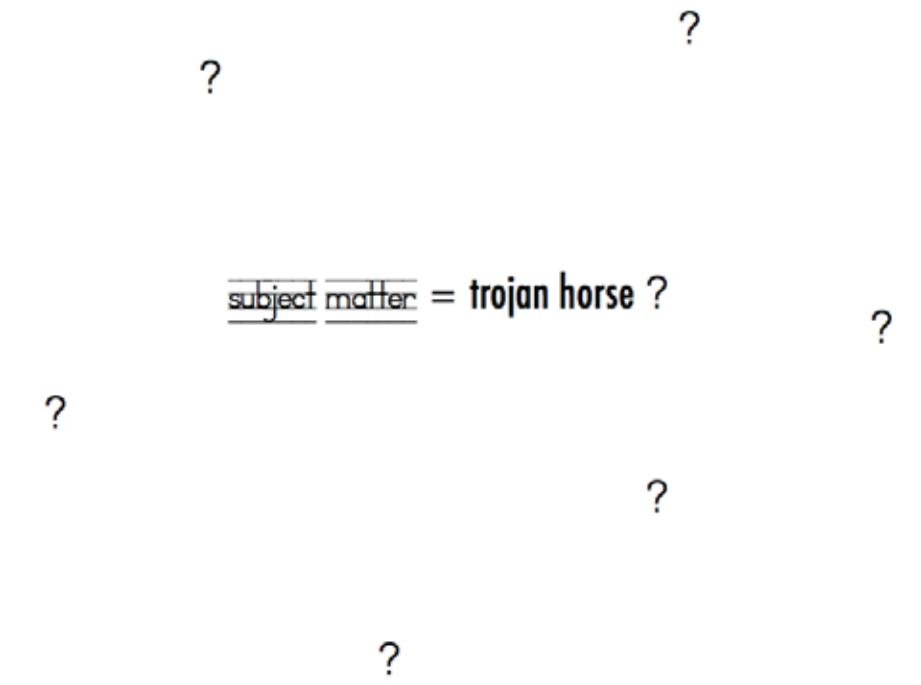
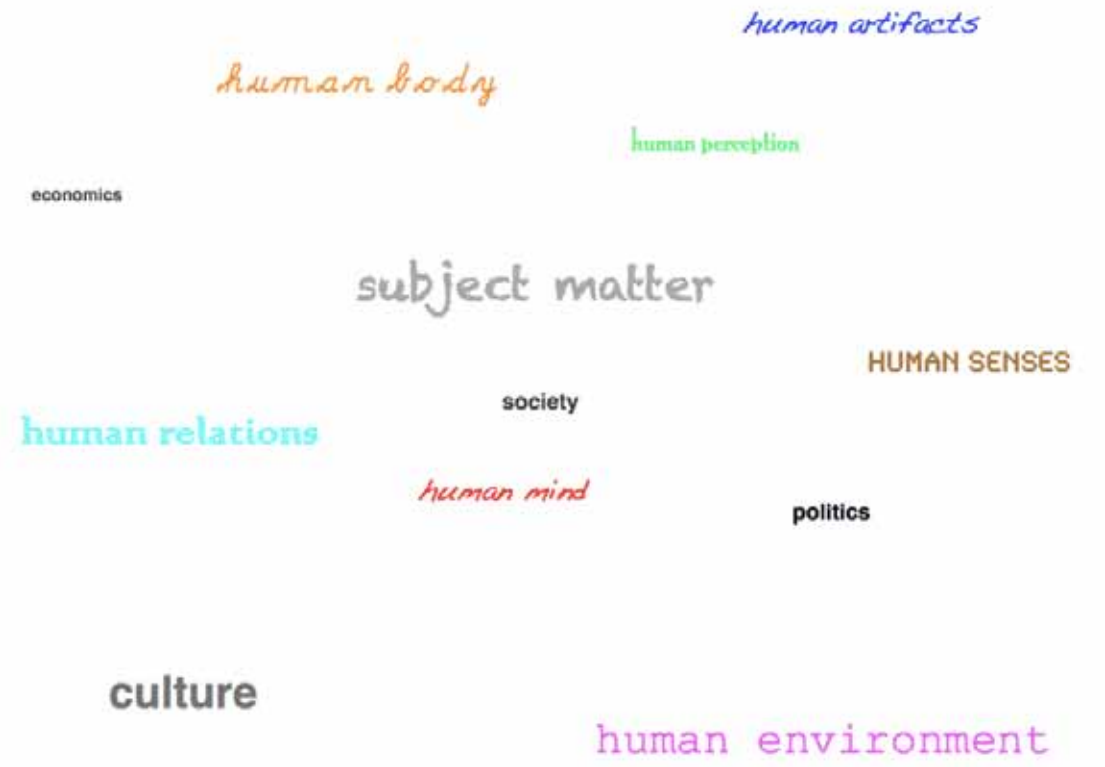
etc.

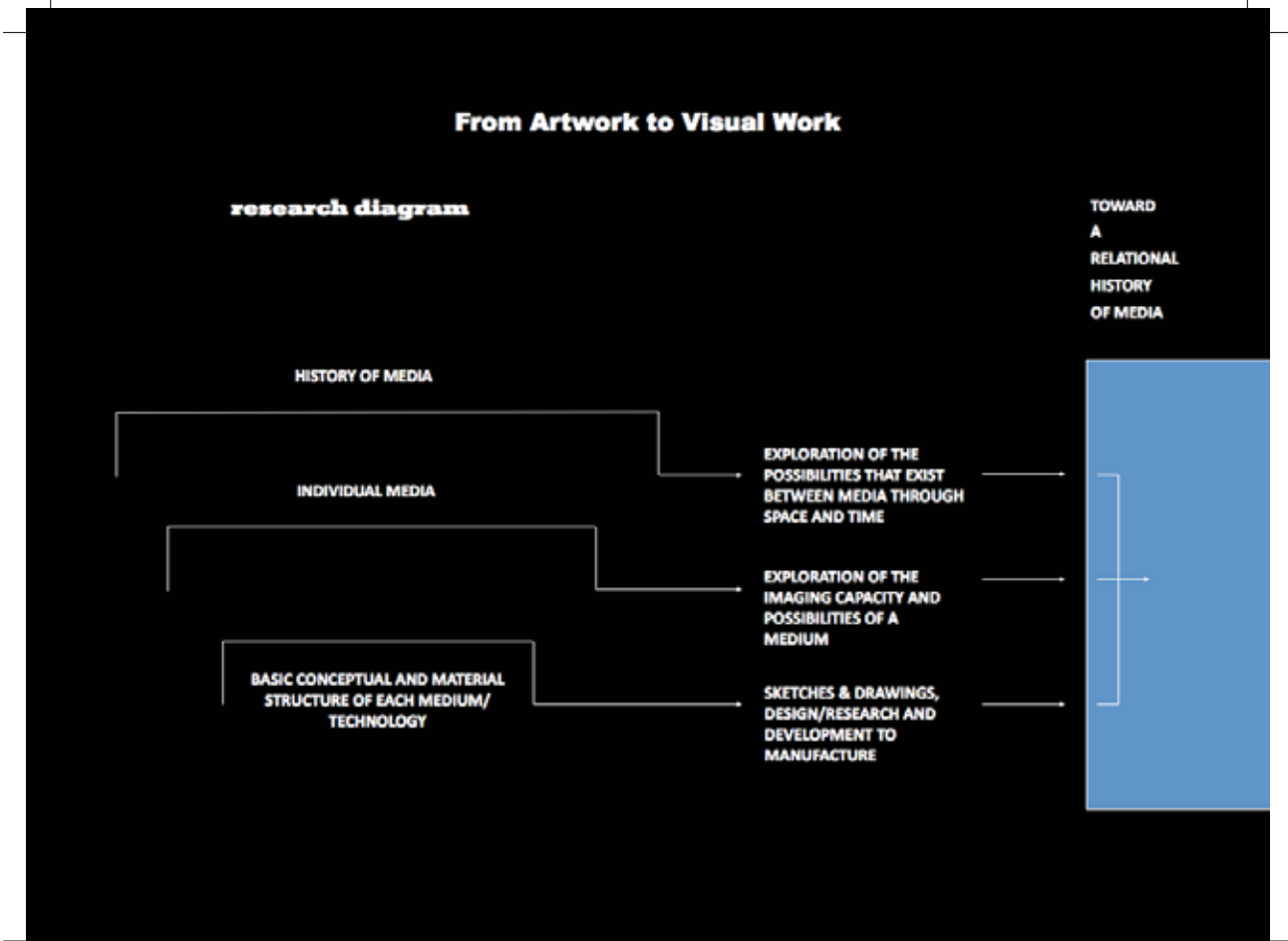


Four horizontal lines for writing a postcard message.



Four horizontal lines for writing a postcard message.





Notebook I: 4 panels - each 22 1/2" x 34 1/2"

21 Installation shot A Particle Trace, ~~1975~~ Pencil + Xerox 1975

22 Detail Panel 1

23 **Can transdisciplinary media such as the printed book or photograph be used to archive and communicate interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary forms of knowledge?**

24 Detail Panel 2

25 Detail Panel 4

Notebook II: 4 panels - each 22 1/2" x 42 1/2" + lead object, 1975

26 Installation shot A Lead Sun

27 Detail Panel 1

28 Detail Panel 2

29 Detail Panel 3

30 Detail Panel 4

31 Detail Lead object.

32 Installation shot An Unusual Event Recorded in IL

Nuovo Luminato Vol. I No.3 March 1955 and Volume III No.2 February 1956

31 1/2 x 47, 1976-1979 Drawing + Xeroxed books 1976-1979

33 B Use up.

34 Installation shot Optica, 1979

35 Installation shot Optica, 1979



Four horizontal lines for writing on the left page.

- 42 ~~Work~~ work up of drawing
- 43 Detail of Drawing
- 44 Installation Shot, ~~Optim 1979~~. The Discovery of the Positive Electron, 1933 - 10 Pieces, Historical Display 1976-79.
- 45 Installation shot
- 46 Installation shot
- 47 The First Photograph to be Interpreted as a Positron (Published 1933). Display Drawing 1979.
- 48 The Positive Electron, 1933. Display Drawing, 1979. ^{22x30"} ^{22x30"}
- 49 Time Transfixed (After R. Magritte) Display Drawing 1979. ^{22x30"}
- 50 A Photographic Record of the History of Motion. . . . Display Drawing 1979. ^{22x30"}
- 51 Madame Marie Curie 1972, 1977. Drawing $15\frac{3}{4} \times 19\frac{3}{4}$ + Note, 1972, 1977
- 52 (Right) W.C. Röntgen - A Portrait of W.C. Röntgen, the Discoverer of X-Rays. Made On teh Day of His Initial Discovery, the Day he Took the First X-Ray Photograph and the Day His Work Was Published. Drawing 1972, 1977. ^{14x18"} ^{1972, 1977}
- 53 (Left) J.N. Niepce - A Portrait of Niepce in 1826, Made After He Had Successfully Fixed by Means of A Camera Obscura and Light Sensitive Chemicals the First Image From Nature. Drawing, 1972, 1977. ^{12x12"}
- 54 The Original Tube Used By J.J. Thomson to Measure the Ratio of Charge to Mass of Cathode Rays in 1897. Display (Display 1 and 3 information panels) 1977. ¹⁹⁷⁷⁻⁷⁹
- 55 Work up of Display 1 + 3 accompanying information panels, ~~1977~~ each $22\frac{1}{2} \times 35"$, 1977
- 56 Same as above. Display 2 and Note 1 1979.
- 57 Close up of Display 2.

historian to historian as artist the reverse procedure is true . As a historian one now has to relearn what those activities are that could be defined as 'artistic' within what can be termed a ' post-conceptual condition '. Any productions from this point of view reflect this epistemological



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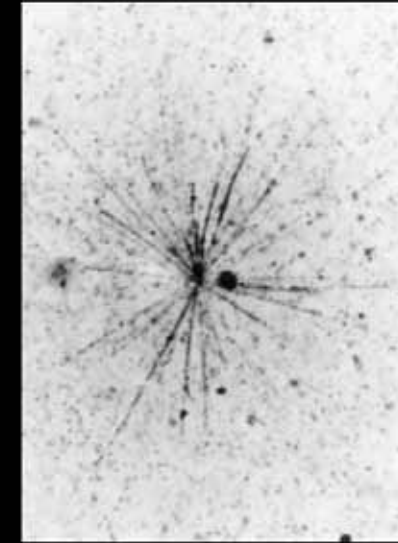




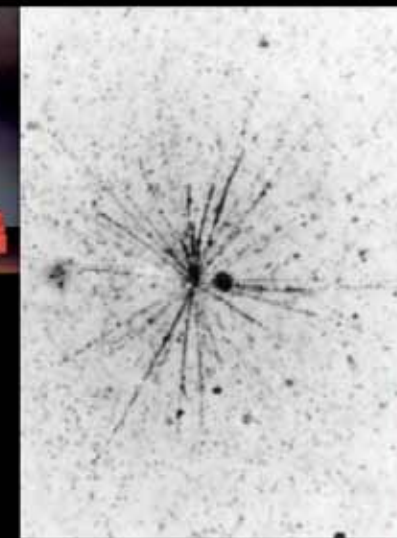


Some types of photograph exhibit 'limit characteristics' that shed light on the disciplinary foundations of knowledge. In these cases, meaning is context and technology specific. These photographs raise questions about the receptivity of visual works whose logic derives from a movement between disciplines. If receptivity is a question of subject matter, knowledge and disciplinary parameters, then what happens to works that operate in the space between disciplines?

Right: Jeff Wall, *Picture for Women*, 1979 (Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882)



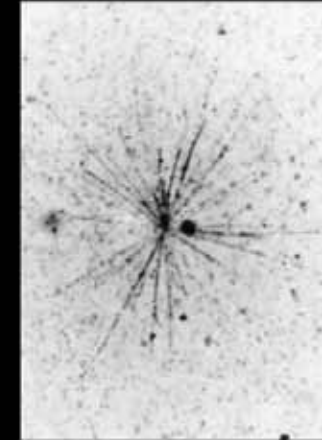
**Early photomicrograph of the disintegration of a silver nucleus, 1948.
Jeff Wall, *Stereo*, 1982 (Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863)**







The photograph's presentation outside of its disciplinary matrix raises questions about its content and status.
1) What is an image's epistemological status? How does one understand its function in the visual arts as compared to how its function is understood in the physical sciences?
2) Is an image just an image or is it the product of a process of production that also has a specific symbolic structure and set of cultural attributes and meanings?



One can treat an imaging technology such as photography in trans- and interdisciplinary terms since it not only moves between disciplines, it is also implicated in producing new forms of knowledge. This appears to be an obvious and indeed a simple observation...

Photography is a product of the non-relational aesthetic that pervades the 60's, and its ramifications for all the arts are innumerable. Still photography is notoriously unselective; though it can be made to falsify or over-dramatize its subject, once a viewpoint is chosen extraneous detail cannot be omitted, nor reality re-arranged. It can bring art to the level of everything else (Ruscha's books) or mischiev off reality (Baxter) or prove that the work of art exists specifically (Ruppberg, Morris) or generally (Smithson, Huebler). Bruce Nauman extracts the punning potential of photography, as he dealt with pure in his seminal piled, random rubber sculpture (he, Hesse and Viner were the first abstract artists to work significantly with soft materials), then in his elaborately titled "representational" pieces, in photographs ("Flour arrangement") and now in holograms. His films and tapes play deadpan act on timely fiction (fact taken on faith): "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths". "Do you believe that?" "I don't know. I think we should leave that open."

955,000
AN EXHIBITION ORGANIZED BY LUCY LEPPARD
THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY
JANUARY 13 TO FEBRUARY 8, 1970

- A) But media have their own inbuilt histories, cultures and systems of belief because there is no such thing as a technology that exists outside of its cultural matrix.**
- B) What is photography's cultural matrix?**

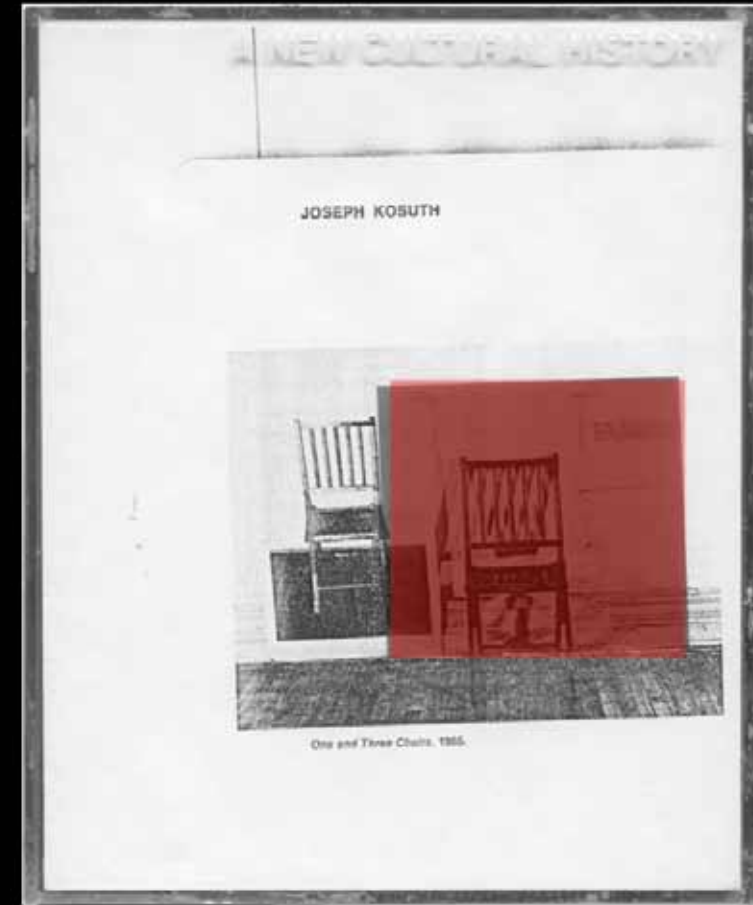
ESCAPE VELOCITY NO. 55 A POSTCARD BOOK BY DAVID TOMAS, 2011



ESCAPE VELOCITY NO. 56 A POSTCARD BOOK BY DAVID TOMAS, 2011



NO. 57



NO. 58

What is photography?

- A) Is it simply a kind of picture making technology that can be used by anyone for any type of picture making activity?**
- B) Is it a method of communication and transportation?**
- C) Is it a kind of portable discipline that is devoted to the production of a specialized form of symbolic knowledge?**



- A) **There is a history of photographic images (a culture of images or a culture of representations).**
- B) **There is a history of photographic apparatus, or technical and mechanical systems (a culture of technology).**
- C) **There is the history of a practice that begins with the idea that it is not just a question of images or a question of technology, there are other kinds of questions that are implicated in the formation and deployment of these cultures; and they might be more fundamental.**
- D) **There is also the question of photography's relationship to a technical culture that emerged at roughly the same time in the first half of the nineteenth century.**
- E) **There is also the question of its basic socio-cultural and symbolic function: What is photography's socio-cultural logic and its symbolic function in western culture?**



There is the question of photography's relationship to a specific technical culture that crystallized in the first half of the nineteenth century:

- A) **Photography emerged in tandem with other new forms of transportation and communication:**
 - B) **The steamship**
 - C) **The railway locomotive**
 - D) **The telegraph.**
- It is therefore important to remember that photography is not only a picture making technology, it is also a system of transportation and communication. This means that it is a component in a nineteenth century matrix of transportation and communication that still serves as the basic infrastructure for our communications and transportation networks today even though its elements might have changed form.**



In 1904, the American historian Henry Adams stated that he had witnessed four impossibilities in his lifetime:

- A) **THE DAGUERRETYPE**
- B) **THE STEAM LOCOMOTIVE**
- C) **THE STEAMSHIP**
- D) **THE ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH**



Adams' statement embodies three important propositions concerning media history & an art practice that operates in terms of this history:

- A) **Media history is not necessarily constructed in terms of specific disciplines and isolated media (history of photography, new media, etc.).**
- B) **Media history can function like (or through) a hub (Adams' mind or its equivalent) that links technologies of transportation and communication that include imaging technologies like photography.**
- C) **Media history should take account of the imaginative tension that can exist between the impossible and the possible.**



YORK Four Days Stage-Coach.
 Begins on Friday the 12th of April 1706.
ALL that are desirous to pass from London to York, or from York to London, or any other Place on that Road, Let them Repair to the Black Swan in Holborn in London, and to the Black Swan in Coventry in York.
 At both which Places, they may be received in a Stage Coach every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, which performs the whole Journey in Four Days, (if God permits) And sets forth at Five in the Morning, And returns from York to Stamford in two days, and from Stamford by Huntingdon to London in two days more. And the like Stages on their return.
 Allowance each Passenger 100. weight, and all above at a Demand.
 Performed By { Benjamin King, esq.
 Henry Harrison,
 Walter Baynes.
 Also this gives Notice that Newcastle Stage Coach, lets out from York, every Monday, and Friday, and from Newcastle every Monday, and Friday.
 Ready in at 05.00. of Mr. Bodington for 2. plan for Monday the 5 of June 1706.

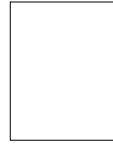


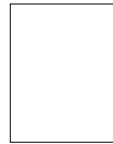
**O. Winston Link,
HOT SHOT
EASTBOUND AT THE
IAEGER DRIVE-IN, W.V.
1956**



There is also the question of photography's basic socio-cultural and symbolic function:

- A) **An anthropological/symbolic understanding of photography's basic socio-cultural logic and function in western culture can lead to a different kind of photographic practice: One that is not implicated in an ongoing expansion of its product line. This alternative begins, instead, with photography's symbolic matrix and its process of production.**
- B) **This alternative practice can be accessed in many ways. One way is through an act of denial, or negation, vis-à-vis the idea of fixing conventional subject matters in photosensitive emulsions..**
- C) **But in order to negate one has to have a clear idea of the reason(s) for this act of negation.**









what if ...

**... In other words: What was photography
If
It was not just a new type of semi-automatic picture making technology?**

(Question posed for the period 1839-1980)



Some conventional answers (circa 1839):

Photography was...

- A) **A symbolic and metaphoric extension of drawing and painting (Arago, Talbot...).**
- B) **A prosthetic extension of the eye (Arago...).**





Some other answers:

- A) **Photography was a new automatic (and therefore democratic) method of picture making.**
- B) **It was a semi-automatic way of framing reality.**
- C) **It was also a semi-automatic way of creating non-linear narratives (remember the space between photographs is as important as the photographs themselves...).**

answers:

the space in between ...



Another more unusual answer:

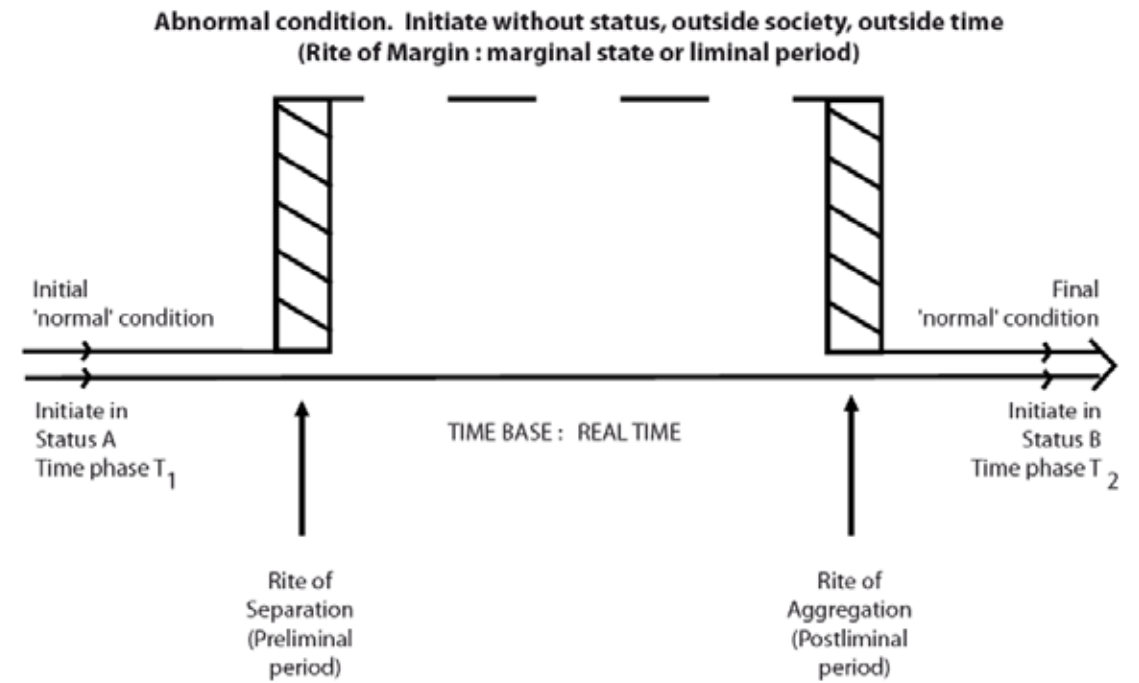
Photography is as much a ritual process as a manufacturing process that is measured in terms of the "quality" of its products.

**photography as ritual process...
a visual practice that maps out photography's symbolic culture**

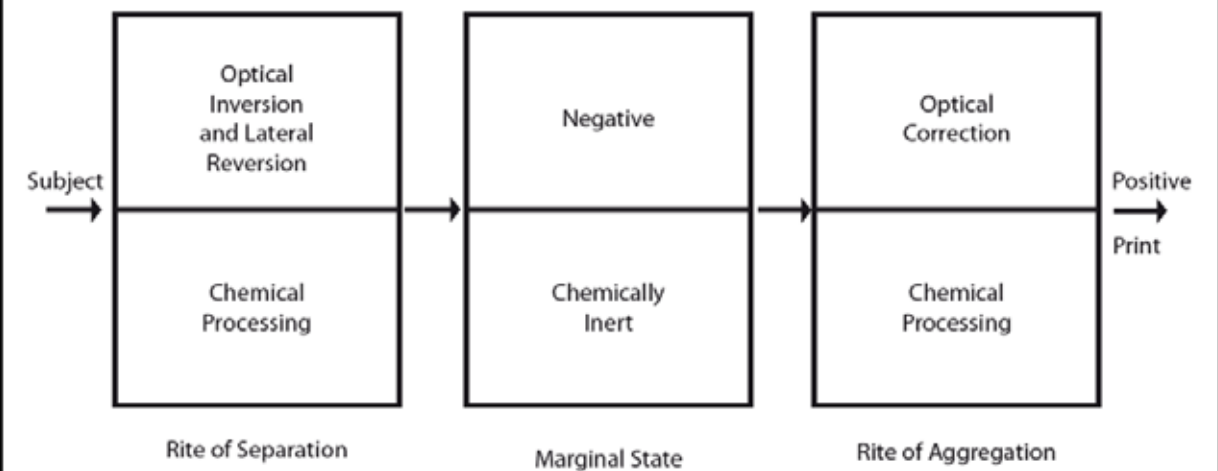
(symbolic anthropologist or meta-symbolic photographer?)



**This answer is interesting because it opens the way for a reassessment of photography's socio-cultural functions:
A photographic rite of passage 1839-1980.
1) The basic structure of a rite of passage ritual.**

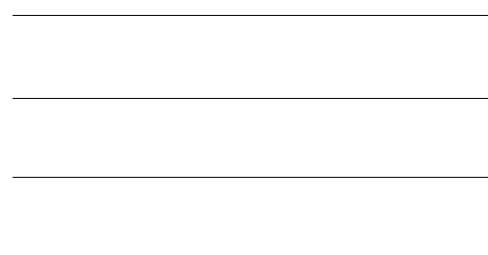
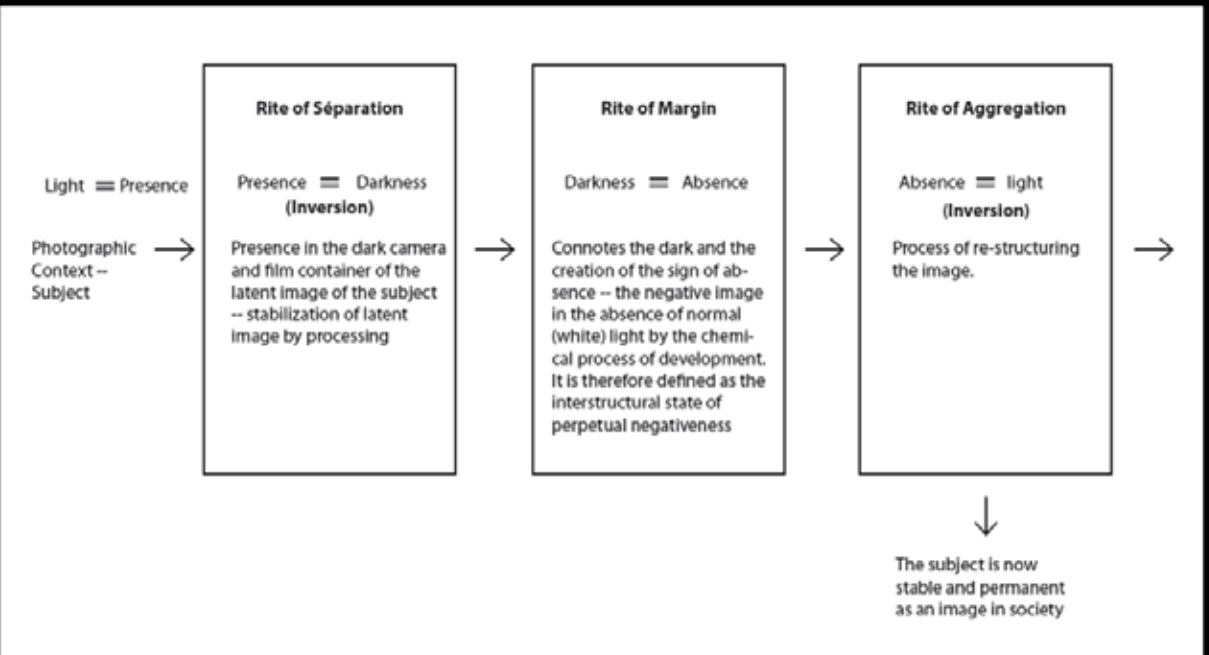


**A photographic rite of passage 1839-1980.
2) The photochemical and optical process.**

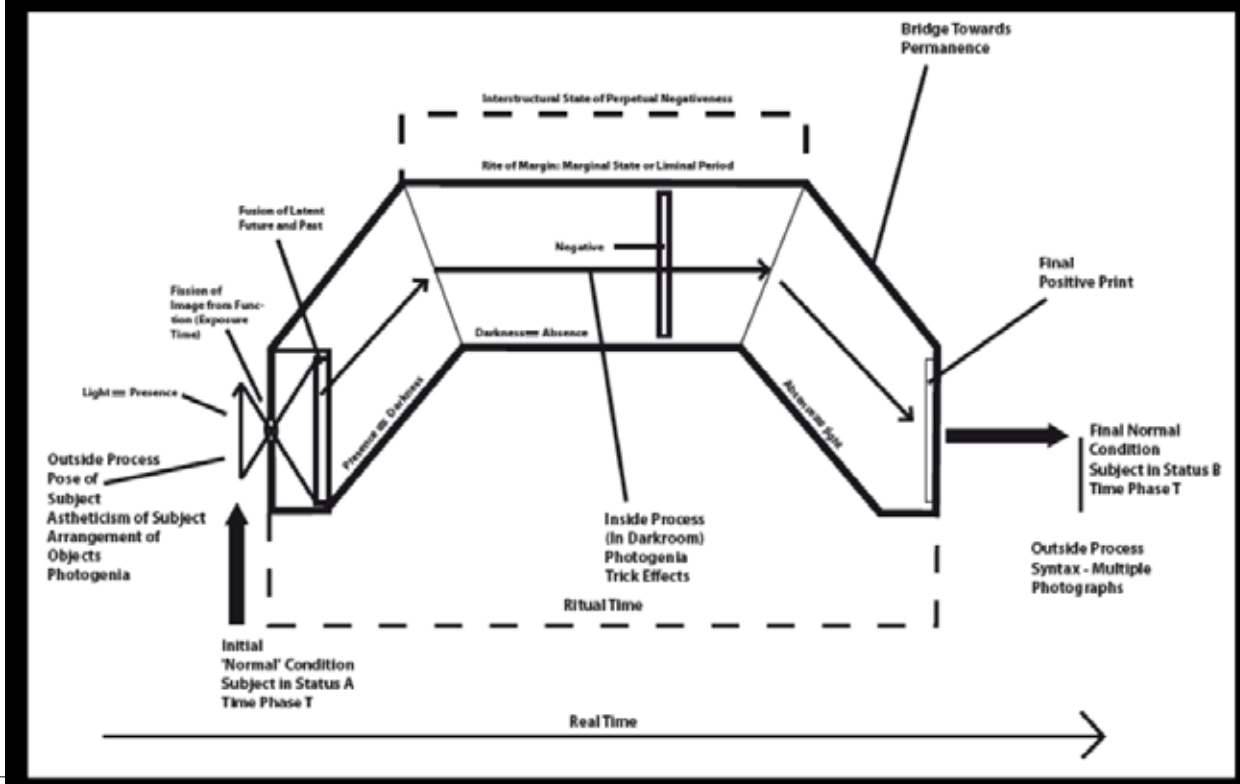




**A photographic rite of passage 1839-1980.
3) The basic symbolic transformation.**



**A photographic rite of passage 1839-1980.
4) The articulation of optical/chemical and symbolic transformations.**





Thus there was/is more to photography than its being a sophisticated picture making technology.

- A) **It was/is a mode of manufacture/production.**
- B) **It was/is a ritual process of production.**
- C) **It was/is a generic mode of ritual production.**
- D) **It was/is a generic mode of reproducing the Judaeo-Christian myth of creation. ◀**

▶ See D. Tomas, 'From the Photograph to Postphotographic Practice: Toward a Postoptical Ecology of the Eye,' *SubStance*, No. 55, 1988, 59-68.
 'Toward an Anthropology of Sight: Ritual Performance and the Photographic Process,' *Semiotica*, Vol. 68, No. 3/4, 1988, 245-270.



What is photography?

1980-2010









was / is
and will be
1980 / 1982



- A) **Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida (1980): A book that marks the death of a conventional analogue-based model of photography through its reading of the photographic image's special culturally sanctioned relationship with the world. The concept of death therefore operates in two ways:
death of the mother,
death of the cultural/symbolic matrix.**
- B) **Ridley Scott, Blade Runner (1982): The first important meditation on the cultural matrix of a posthuman world of simulation in which the eye is the final frontier between truth and deception. Beyond this point, there is no possibility of optically detecting the true from the false. When we cross this frontier we enter a new picture making regime and matrix of cultural possibilities...**

Photography is still a technology of reproduction. But it now operates in a different world: A world that functions according to other cultural/representational rules. This paradigm shift will have an impact on the collective mnemonic archive that photography has produced and regulated since 1839.

- A) **Photography's conceptual matrix has mutated in form.**
- B) **In its more radical form it is no longer simply a specific kind of product, digital or analogue, as so many artists and others still think it is.**
- C) **It is an attitude.**
- D) **It is a way of conceptually framing space.**
- E) **It is a way of conceptually dividing space and time.**
- F) **It is a way of thinking the space between images.**
- G) **It is a way of life.**
- H) **It is an anthropological condition of existence.**





What were the natures and functions of photography and artworks in the late twentieth century?

Could they overlap?

Could they be measured in relation to and against other disciplinary forms of knowledge?

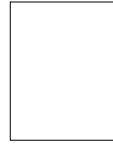
What were the roles of photography in late twentieth century art making and knowledge generating activities?



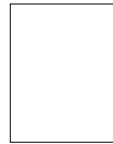
During a century and a half photography was also more than a complex technological process and more than a simple product.

- A) **The interdisciplinary conditions were perfect, in the 1970s, for the development of a meta-symbolic photographic practice that was rooted in a relational or meta-history of picture making media.**
- B) **This approach was in marked contrast to photography's more conventional uses as a picture making and documenting medium whose logic was rooted in a 'culture of representation.'**
- C) **Previously, photography's meta-historical disciplinary or trans-disciplinary statuses were never explored or even acknowledged in practices geared to a culture of representation. The camera was for the most part used (or conceived) as a document producing machine by most artists in the 1960s and 1970s.**
- D) **But the development of a meta-symbolic photographic practice promoted another way of understanding and visualizing photography and media history...**

Photography is a product of the non-relational aesthetic that pervades the 80's, and its ramifications for all the arts are innumerable. Still photography is notoriously unselective; though it can be made to falsify or over-dramatize its subject, once a viewpoint is chosen extraneous detail cannot be omitted, nor reality re-arranged. It can bring art to the level of everything else (Ruscha's books) or ricochet off reality (Baxter) or prove that the work of art exists specifically (Ruppberg, Morris) or generally (Smithson, Hübner). Bruce Nauman extracts the punning potential of photography, as he dealt with puns in his seminal piled, random rubber sculpture (he, Hesse and Viner were the first abstract artists to work significantly with soft materials), then in his elaborately titled "representational" pieces, in photographs ("Flour arrangement") and now in holograms. His films and tapes play deadpan out on timely fiction (fact taken on faith): "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths". "Do you believe that?" "I don't know. I think we should leave that open."

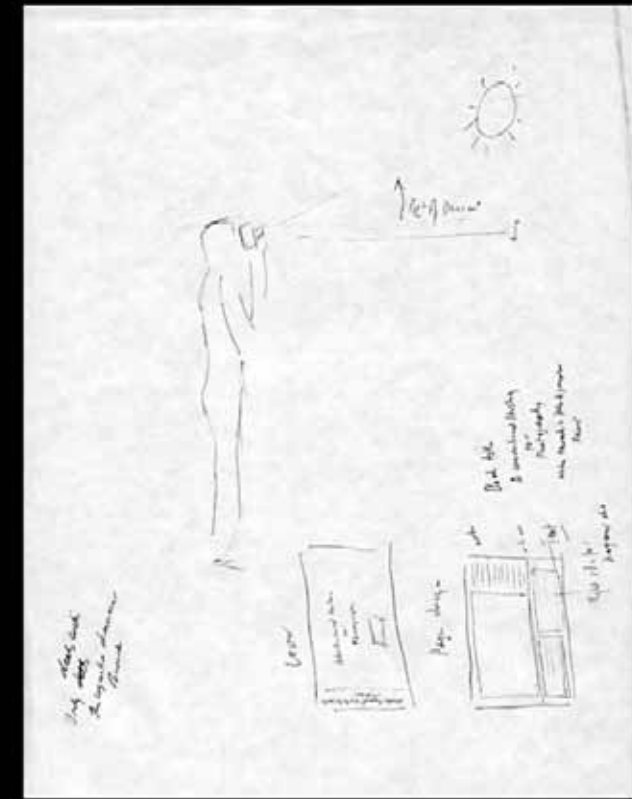


Four horizontal lines for writing an address on a postcard.

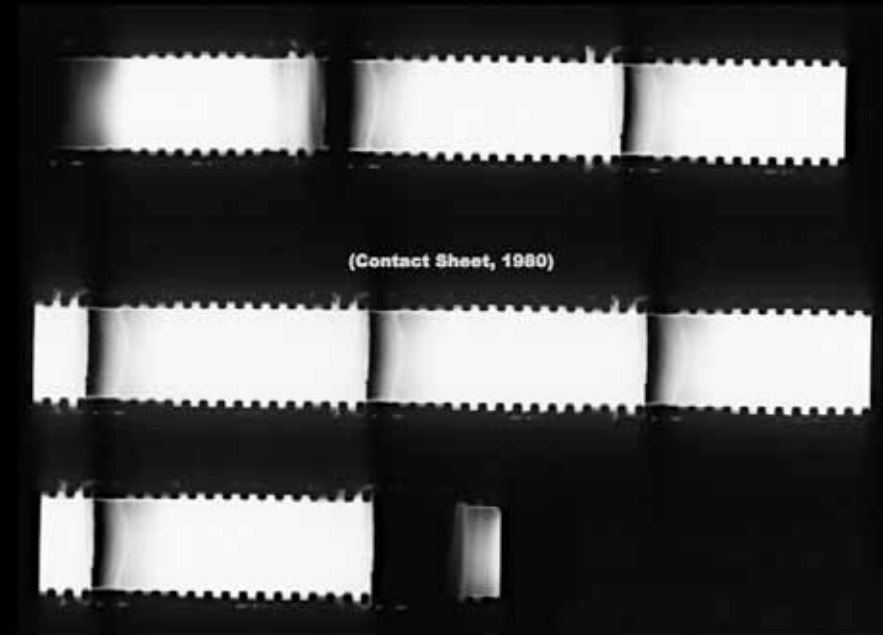


Four horizontal lines for writing an address on a postcard.

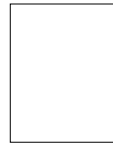
... act of negation-



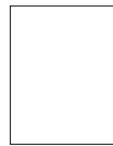
- another history of media?



(Contact Sheet, 1980)



Four horizontal lines for writing a message on the back of a postcard.

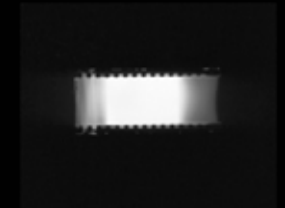


Four horizontal lines for writing a message on the back of a postcard.



negative ...

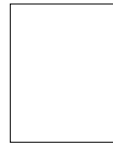
... selected negative.
Compare to Hiroshi Sugimoto's long exposure photographs of cinemas.
Note the different relationships with the concept of a photographic subject:
movie vs. pure sunlight, cinema vs. photographic film strip.
Compare both to pertinent sections of Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)



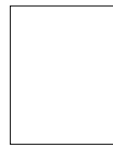
I'm a habitual self-interlocutor. Around the time I started photographing at the Natural History Museum, one evening I had a near-hallucinatory vision. The question-and-answer session that led up to this vision went something like this: Suppose you shoot a whole movie in a single frame? And the answer: You get a shining screen. Immediately I sprang into action, experimenting toward realizing this vision. Dressed up as a tourist, I walked into a cheap cinema in the East Village with a large-format camera. As soon as the movie started, I fixed the shutter at a wide-open aperture, and two hours later when the movie finished, I clicked the shutter closed. That evening, I developed the film, and the vision exploded behind my eyes.

Hiroshi Sugimoto

<http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/theater.html>



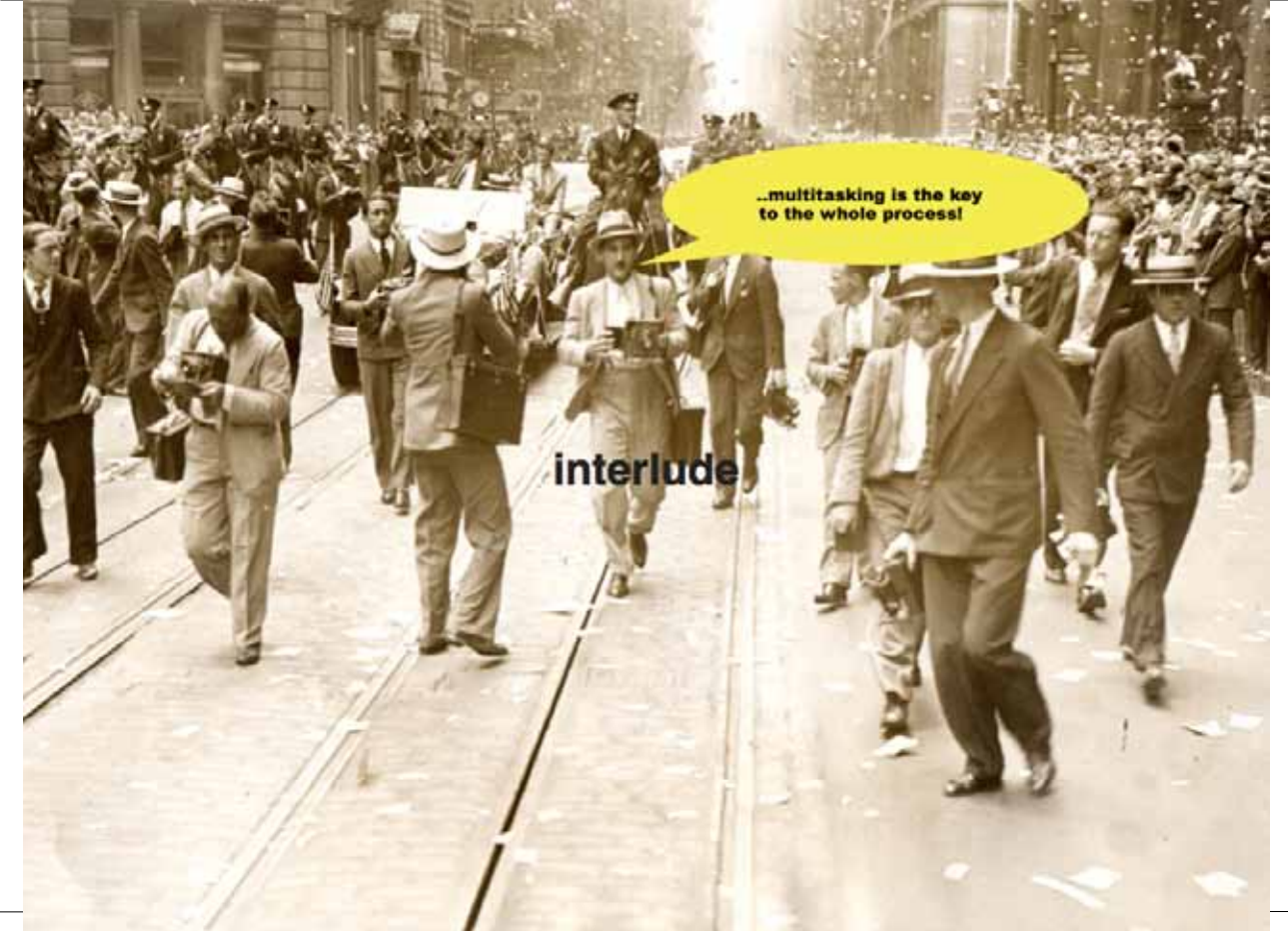
Four horizontal lines for writing a message on the postcard.

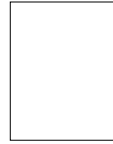


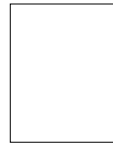
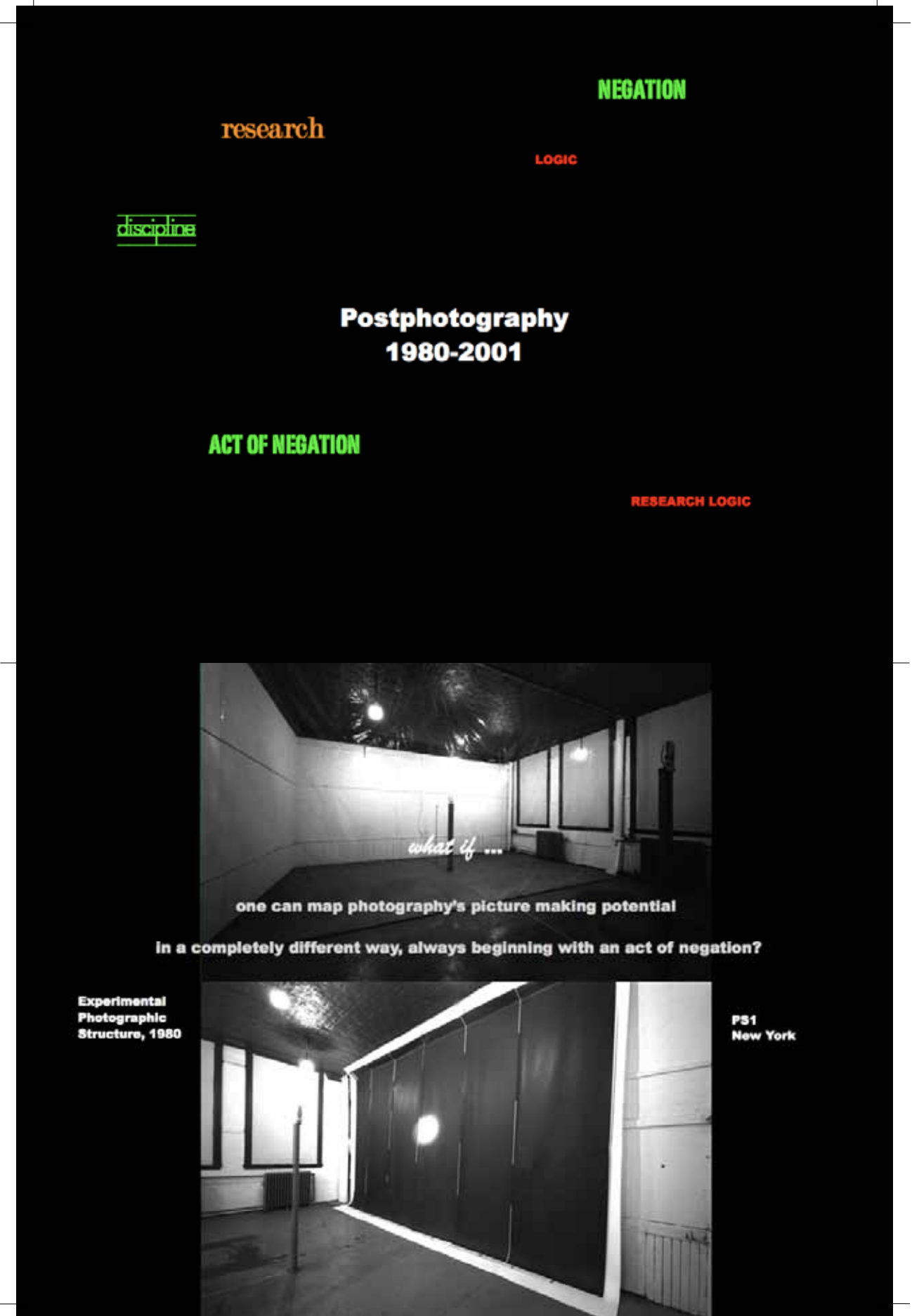
Four horizontal lines for writing a message on the postcard.



interlude







... take notes ...



Four horizontal lines for writing.



... post-academic artifact:
transdisciplinary research module (TRM) for an alternative knowledge society?

(hypothesis, hybrid research strategy, spatial methods of argumentation, multimedia-based citation network, visible/invisible bibliography, unconventional visual results etc.)

a TRM is the result of
a contact and cross-fertilization between the concept and function of a research paper
and the concepts and spatial possibilities of installation and/or performance



Experimental Photographic Structure III, 1982



Four horizontal lines for writing.

... post-academic artifact:
transdisciplinary research module (TRM) for an alternative knowledge society?

(hypothesis, hybrid research strategy, spatial methods of argumentation, multimedia-based citation network, visible/invisible bibliography, unconventional visual results etc.)

TAP

trans-academic parasites (TAPs):
'academic' books whose conceptual and
methodological approaches to historical
and other data are based in one way or
another on the logic or information
generated by TRMs



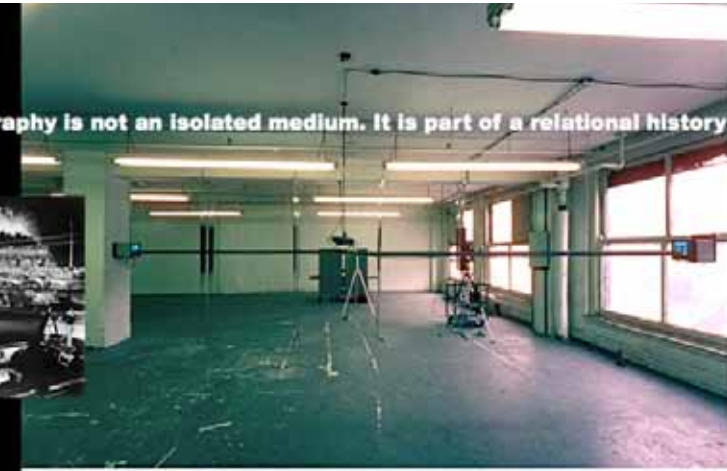
there is a constant nonhierarchical
oscillation between TAPs and their
foundational elements (research papers)
and TRMs

a TRM is the result of
a contact and cross-fertilization between the concept and function of a research paper
and the concepts and spatial possibilities of installation and/or performance
art
(see Wilson Module, 1976-1980 & revisit postcards 29-88 with this definition in mind, change labels where appropriate)...
begin over again...





Photography is not an isolated medium. It is part of a relational history of media.



CCTV video camera & monitor



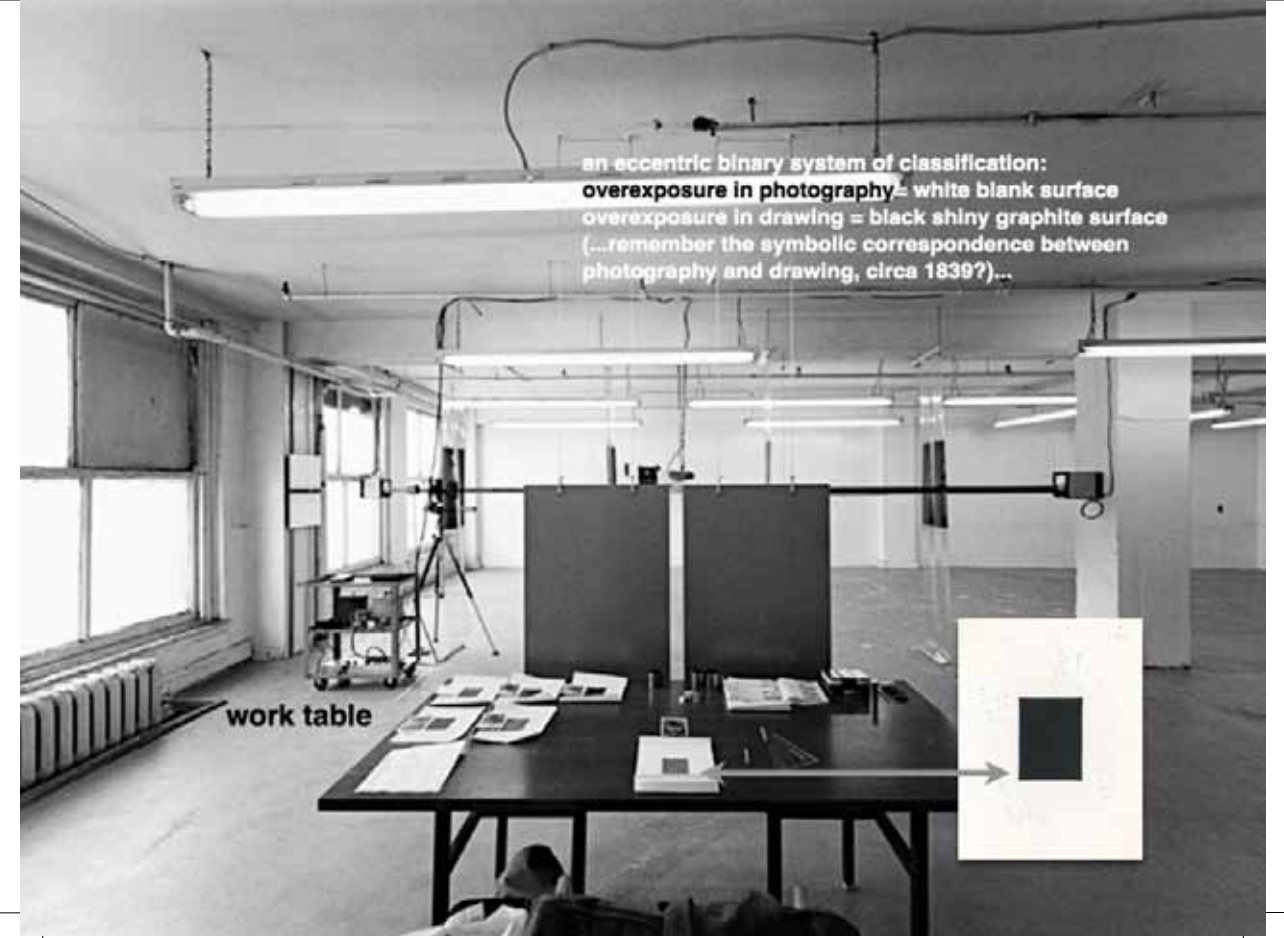
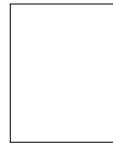
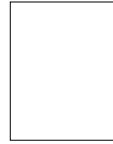
locomotive

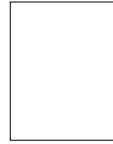
Polaroid Land Camera Model 95

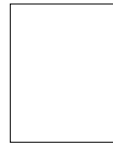


1860s Harrison Globe lens

Polaroid Land Camera Model 95

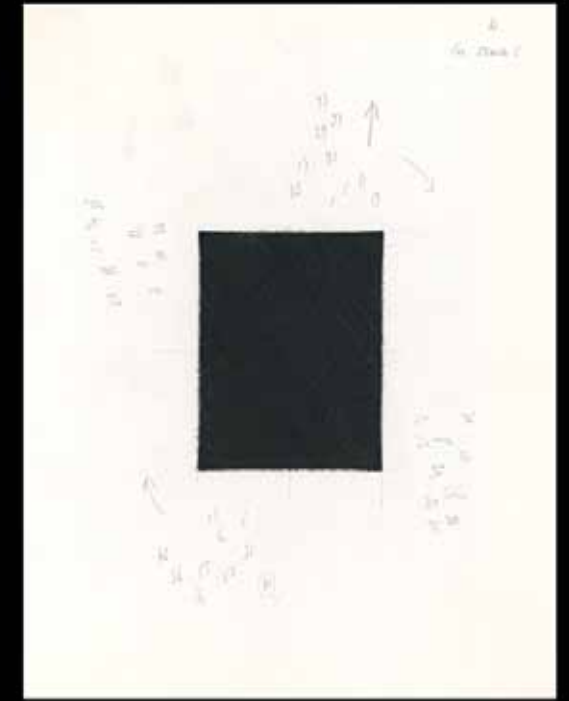








**Kazimir Malevich,
Last Futurist Exhibition
(1915)**



**TRM
Act of Negation**

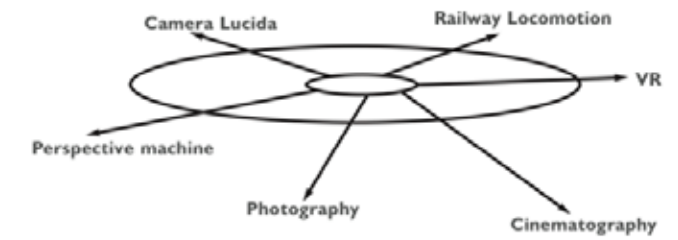








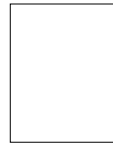
Networked/Intersystemic Approach to the History of New Media



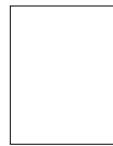
Old Technologies become New Technologies Depending on One's Spatio-temporal Orientation and Historical Viewpoint

****Layered/multi-dimensional approach to media history and to the culture of new technologies****

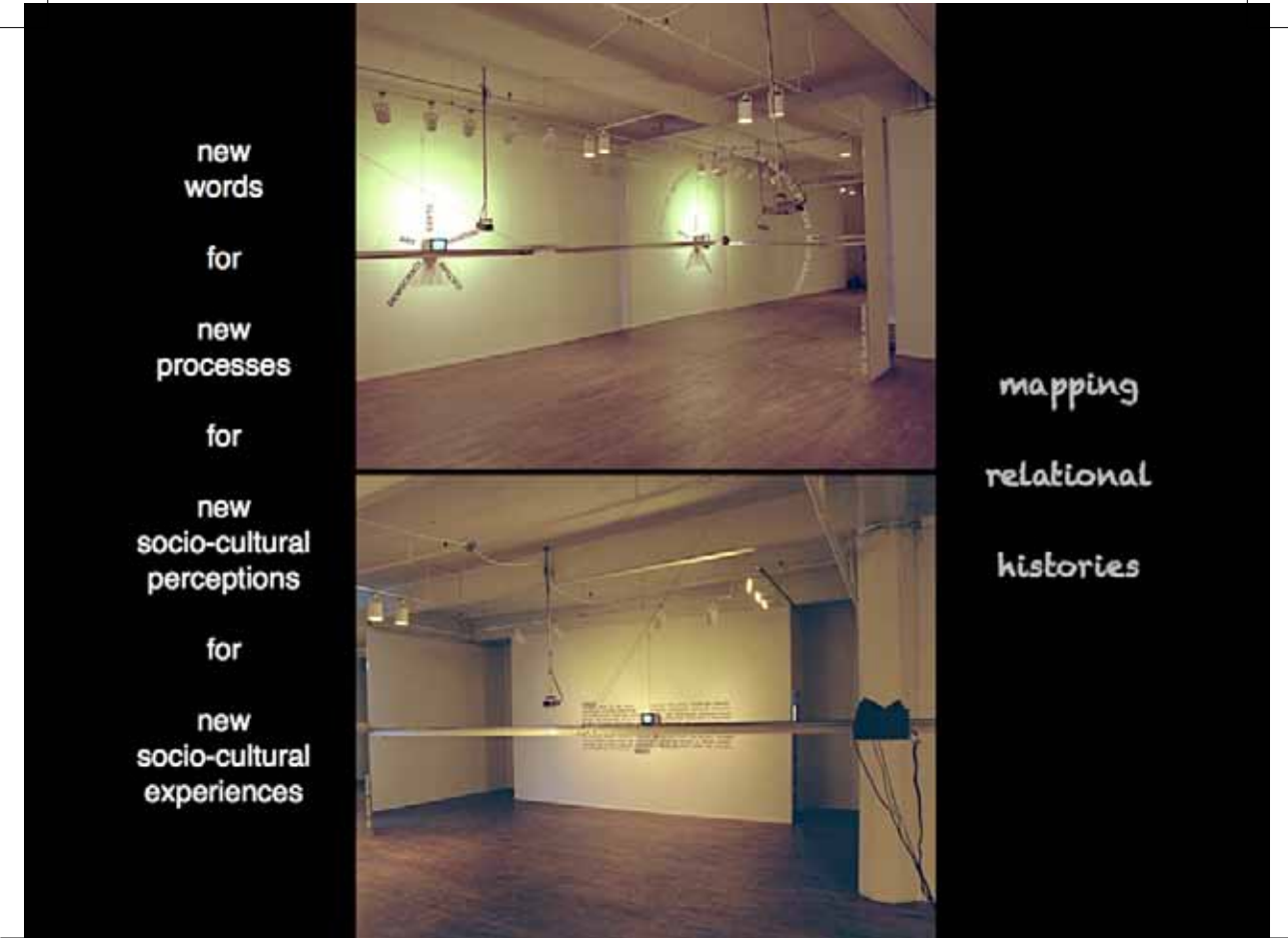
TRM/TAP research diagram

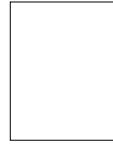


Four horizontal lines for writing a message on the postcard.

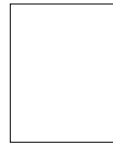


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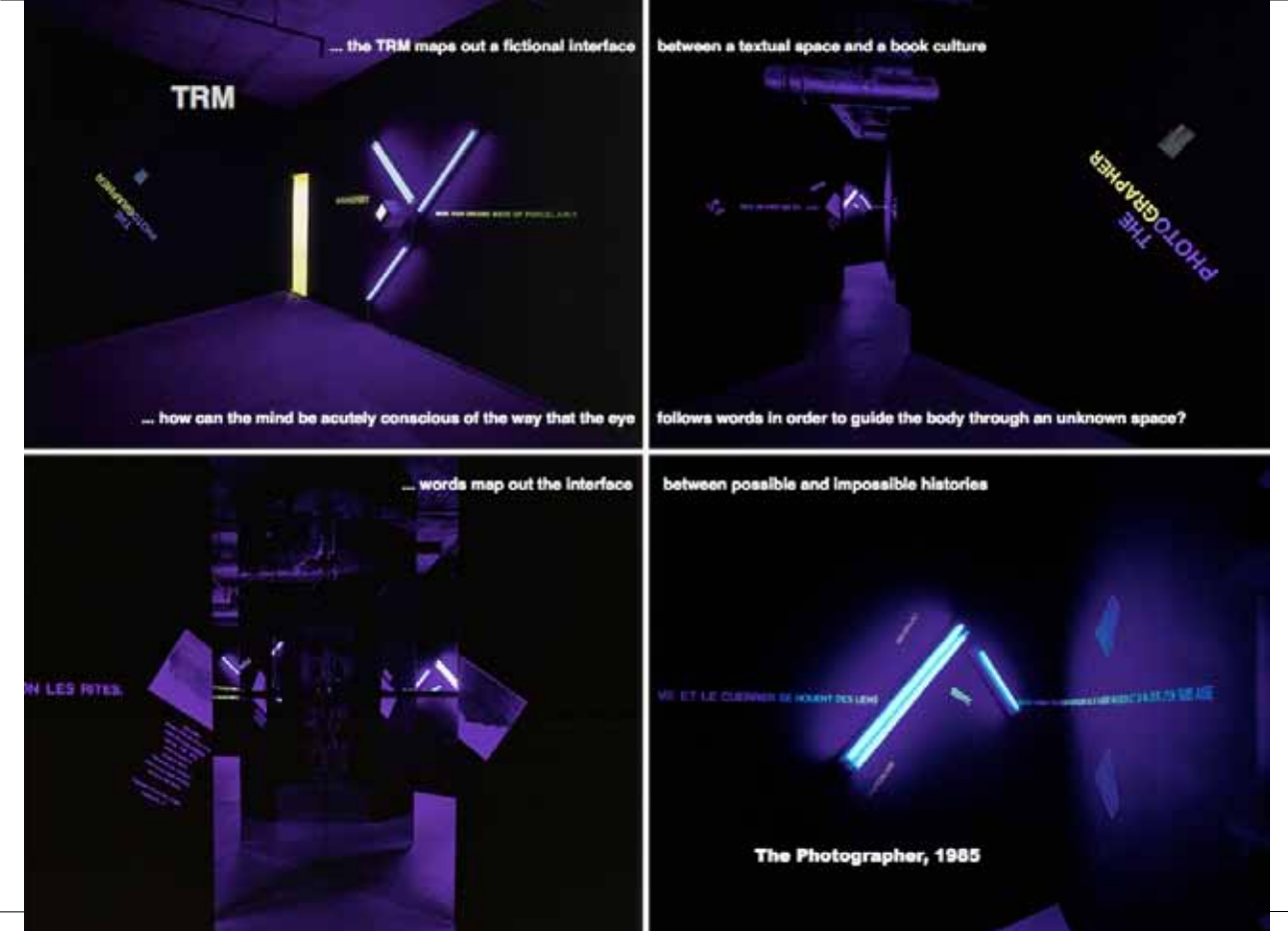




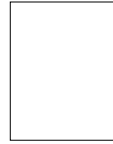
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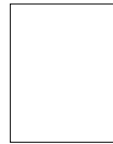
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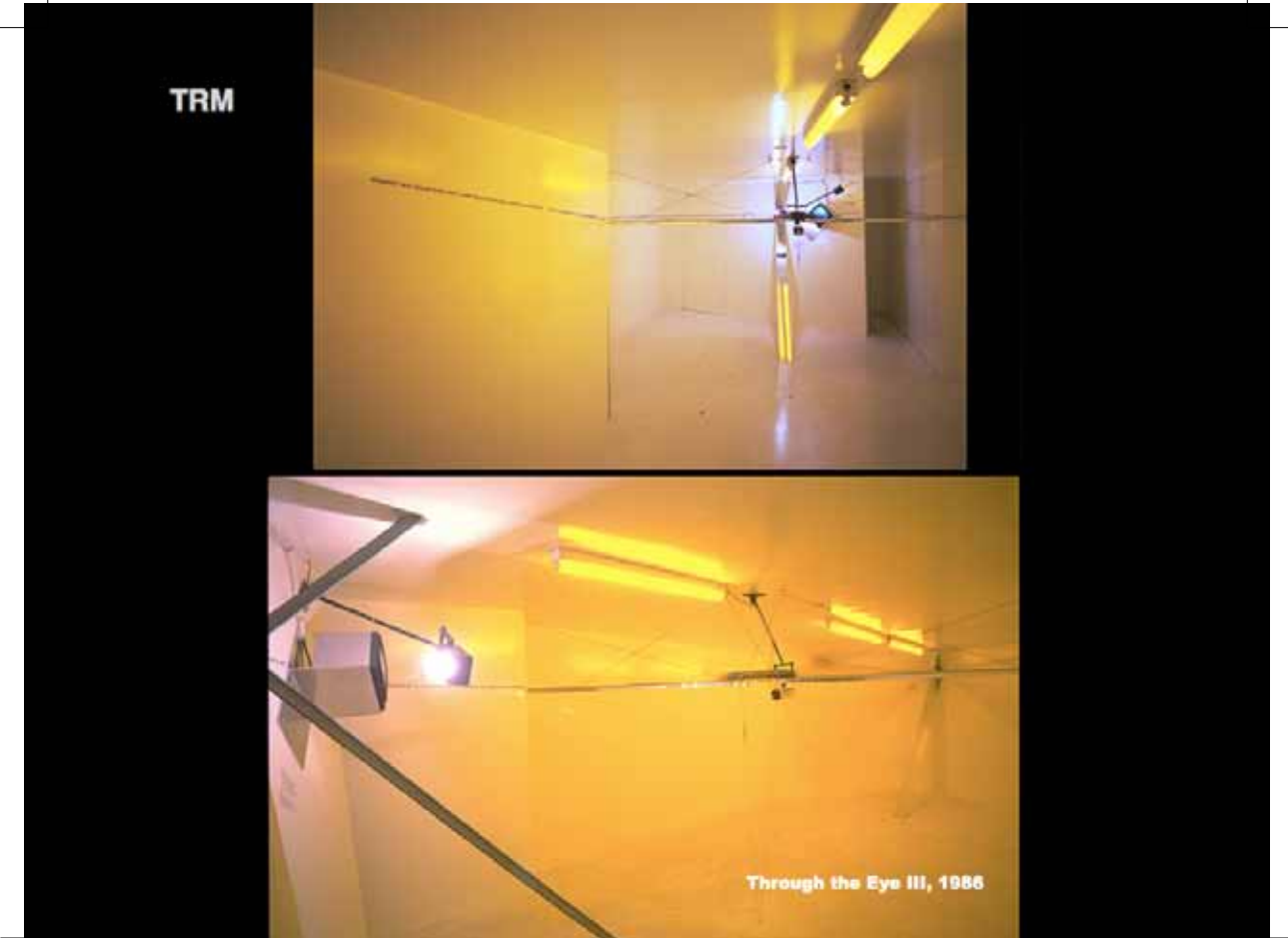
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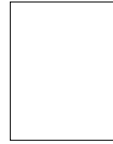
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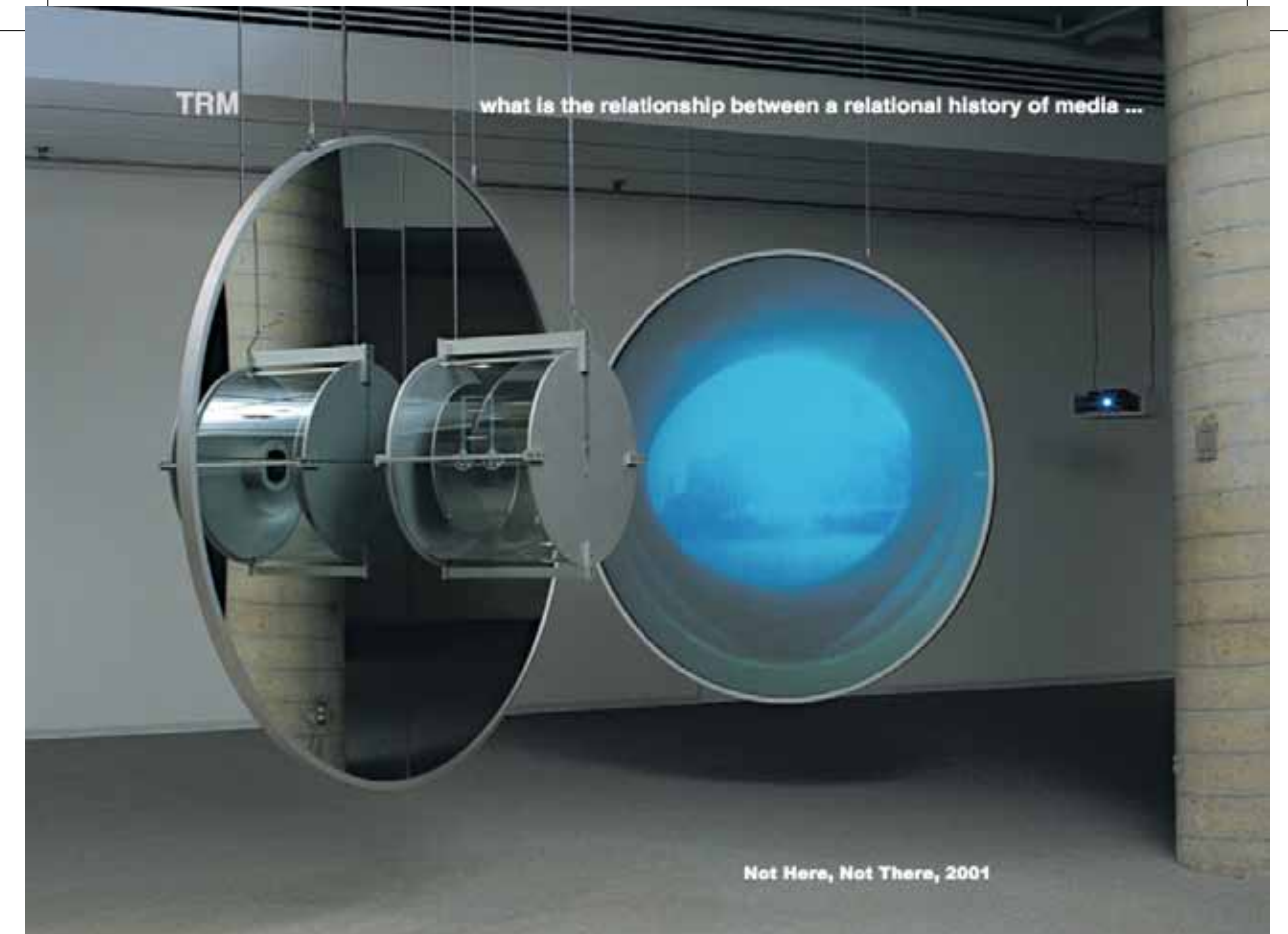
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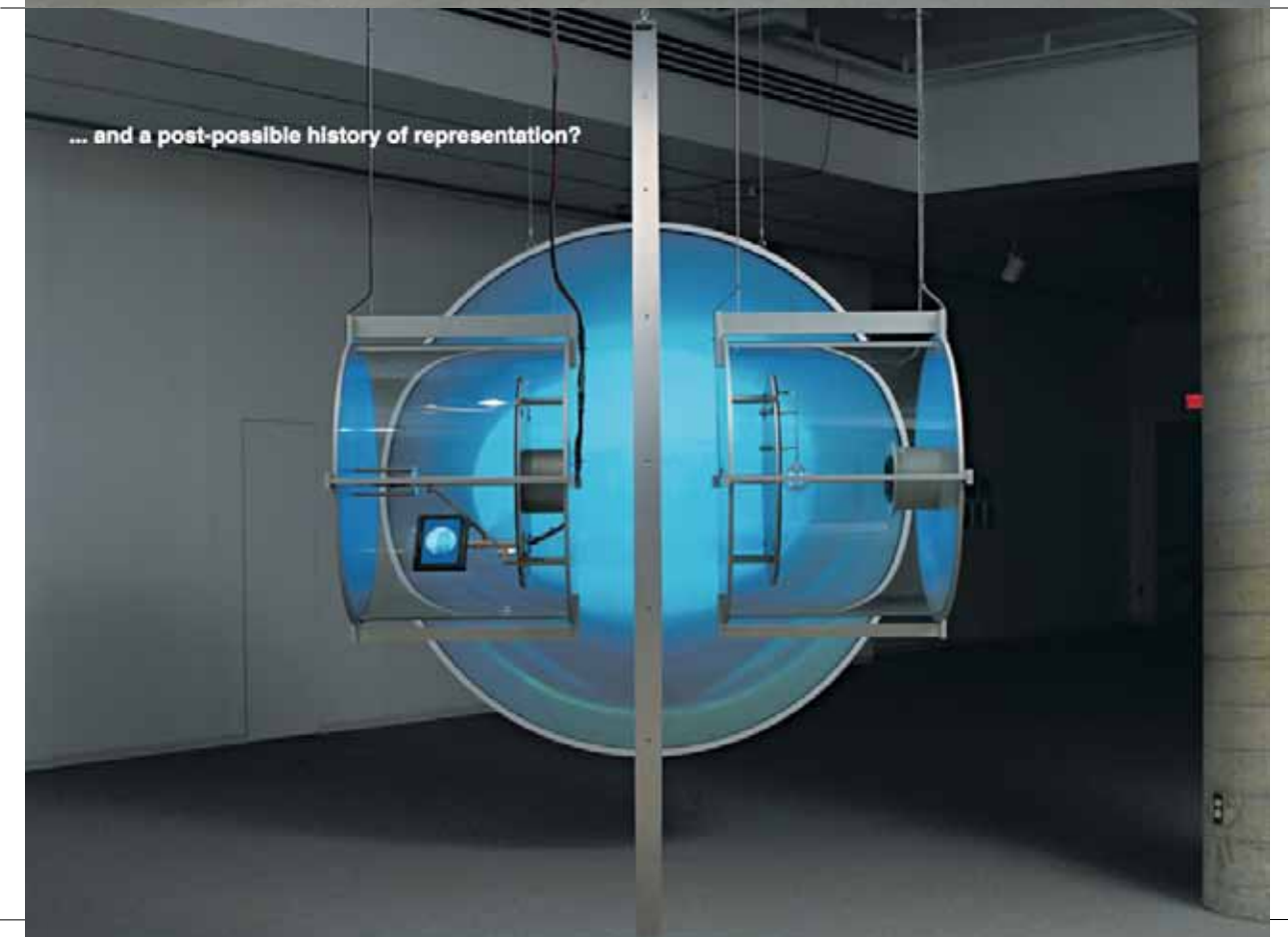
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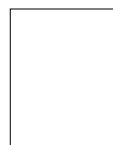
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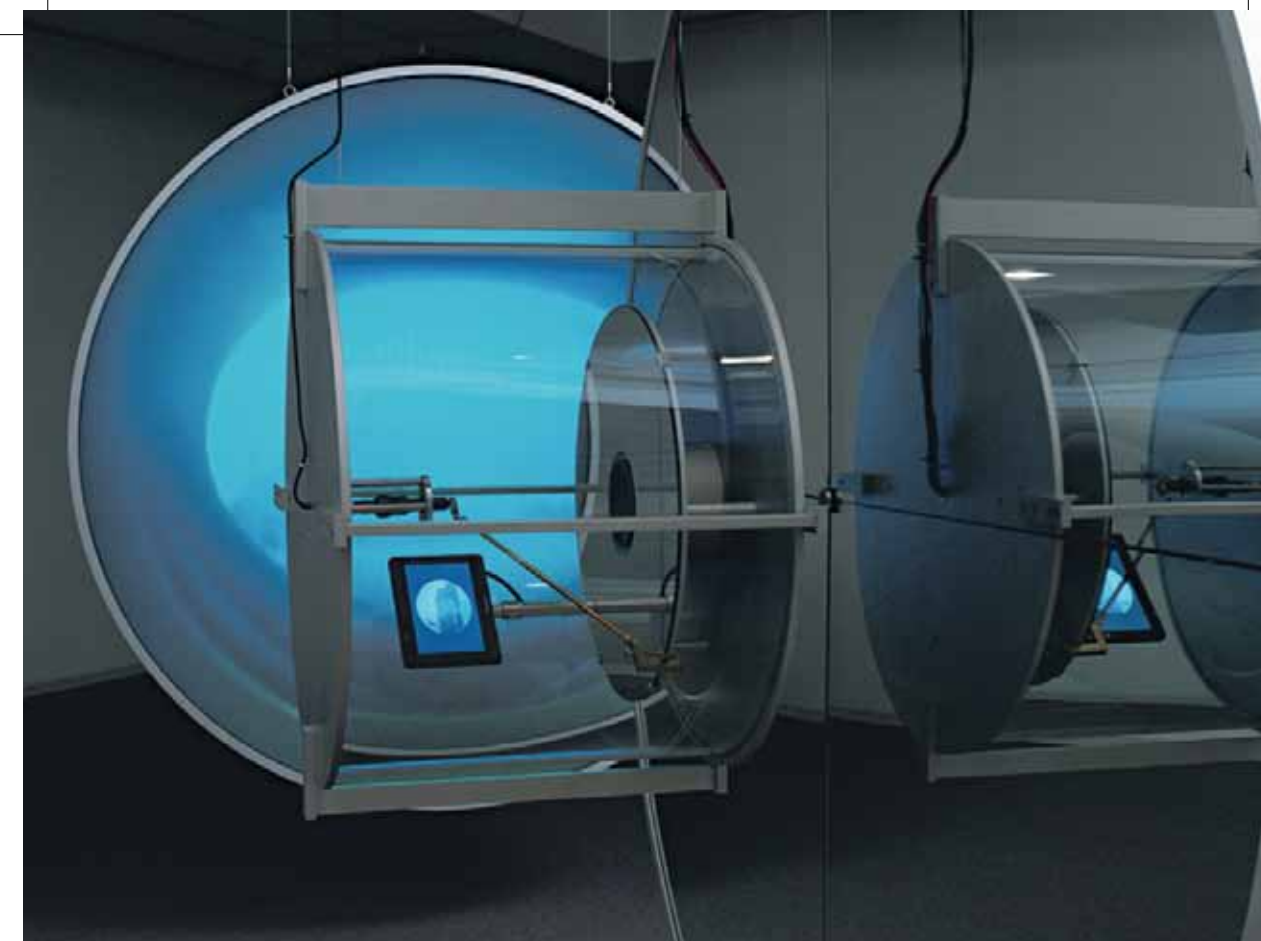
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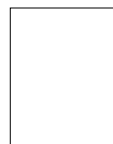
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interlude



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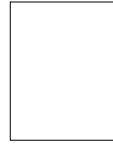
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OUR EYES, SPINNING LIKE PROPELLERS,
TAKE OFF INTO THE FUTURE
ON THE WINGS OF
HYPOTHESIS.
DZIGA VERTOV

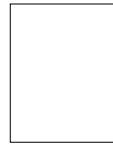


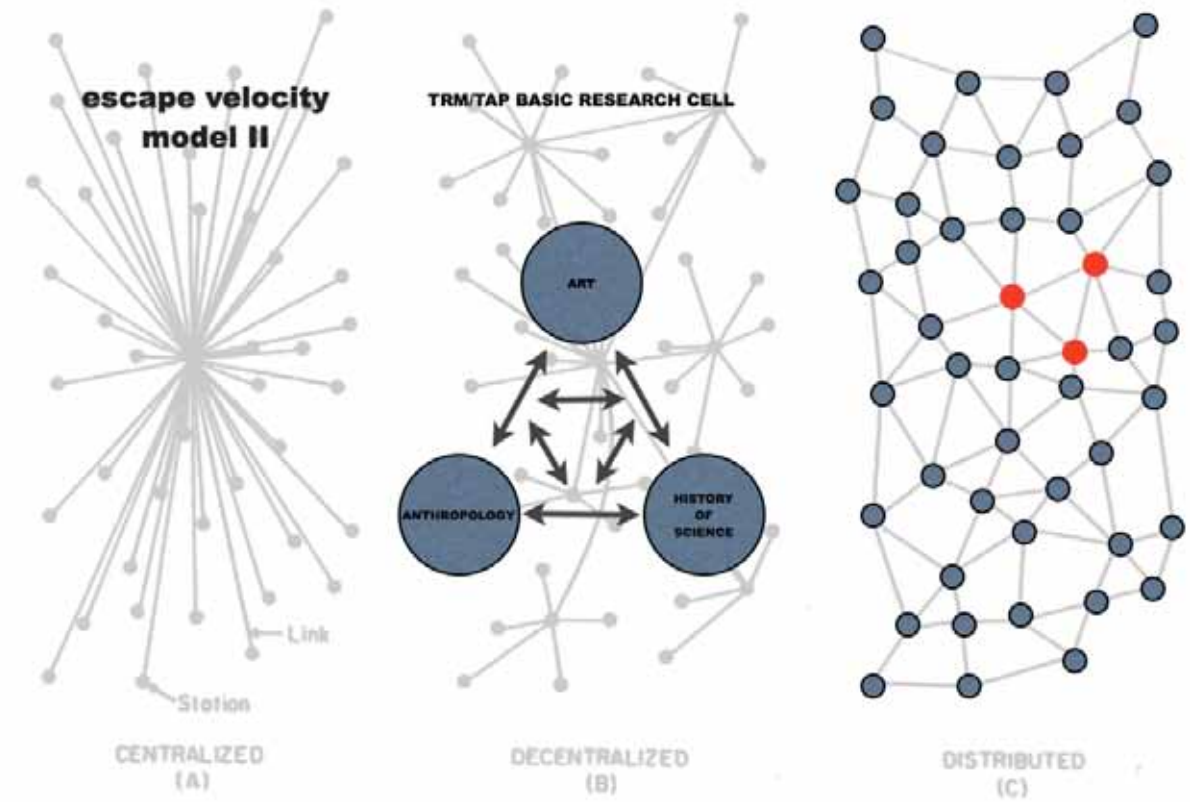
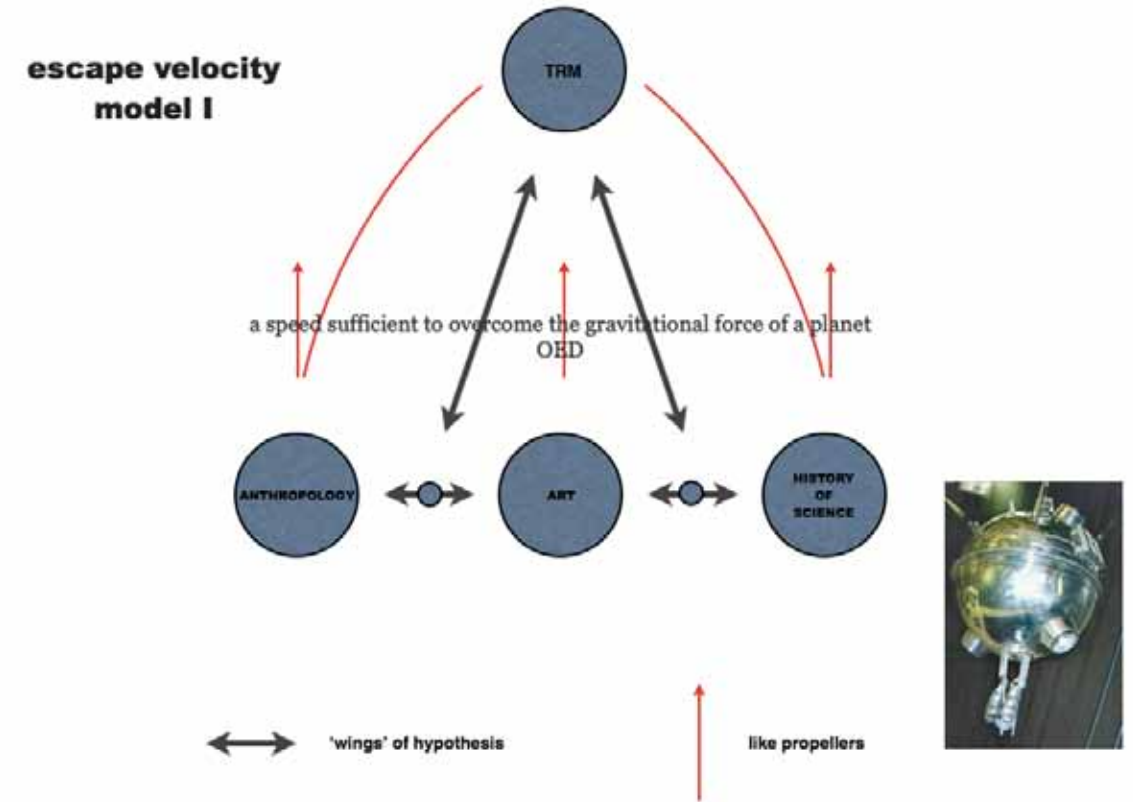
escape velocity

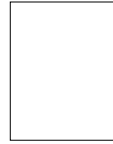
a speed sufficient to overcome the gravitational force of a planet
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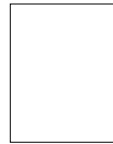
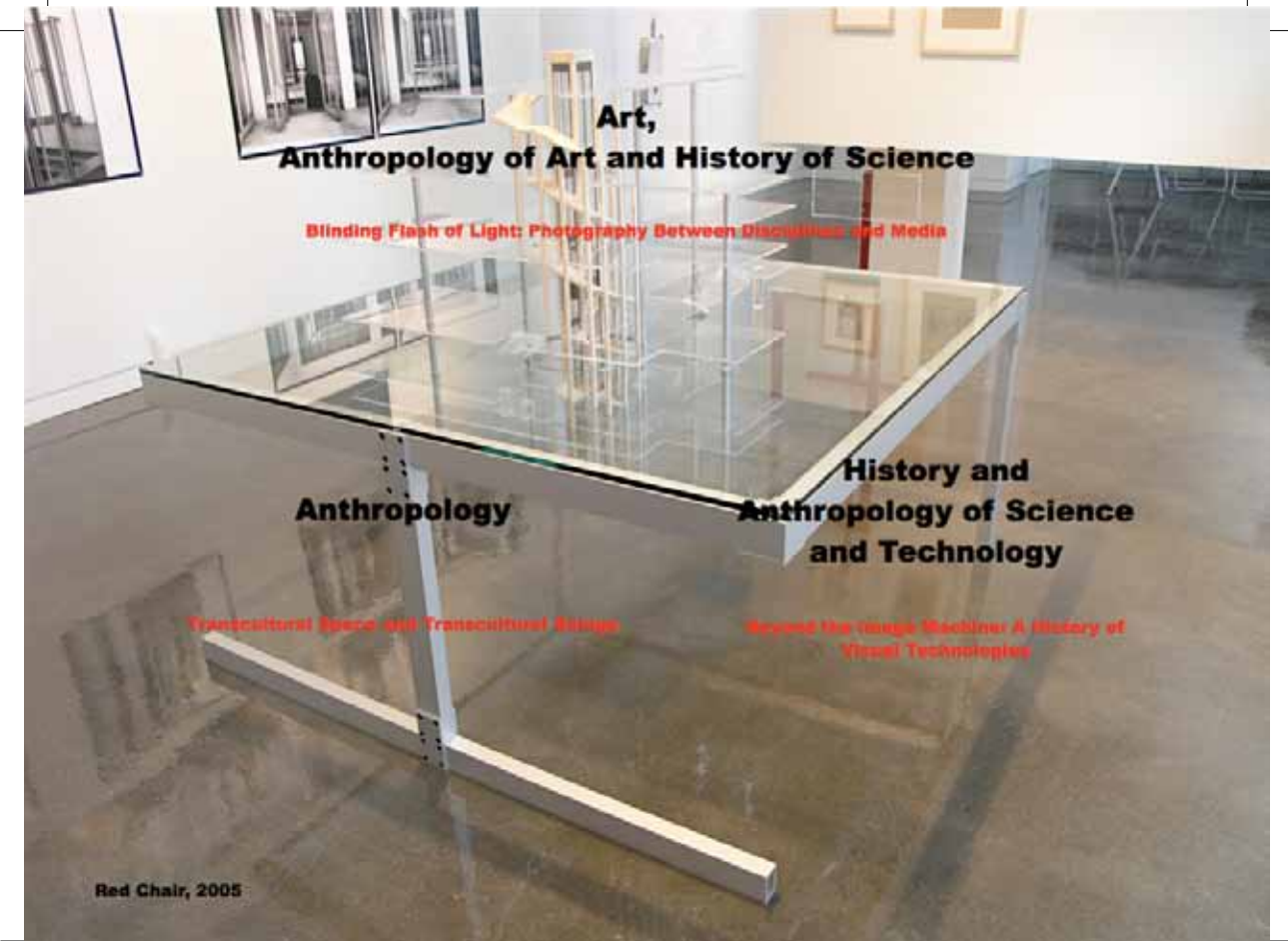
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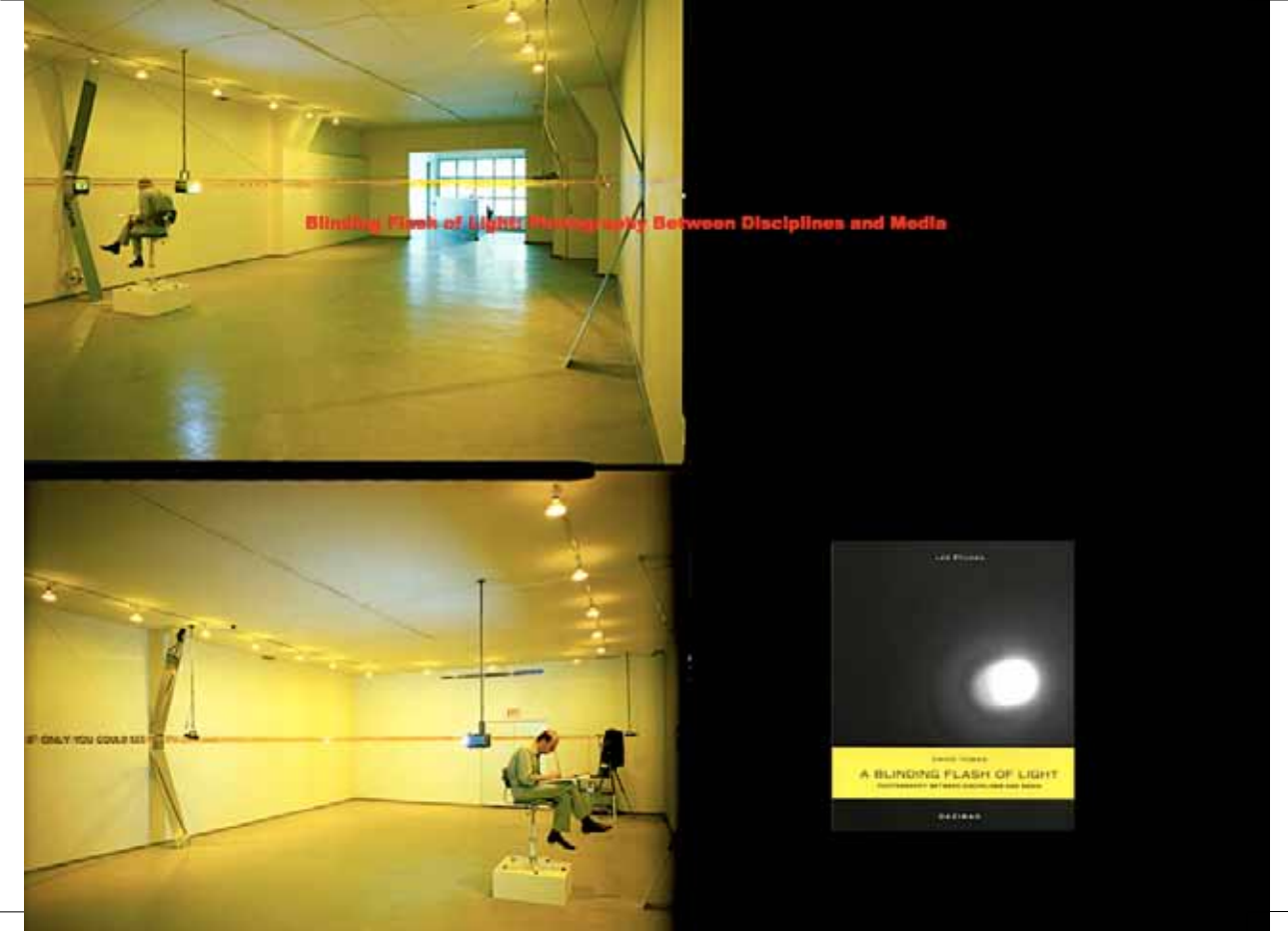




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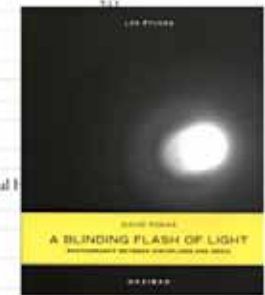
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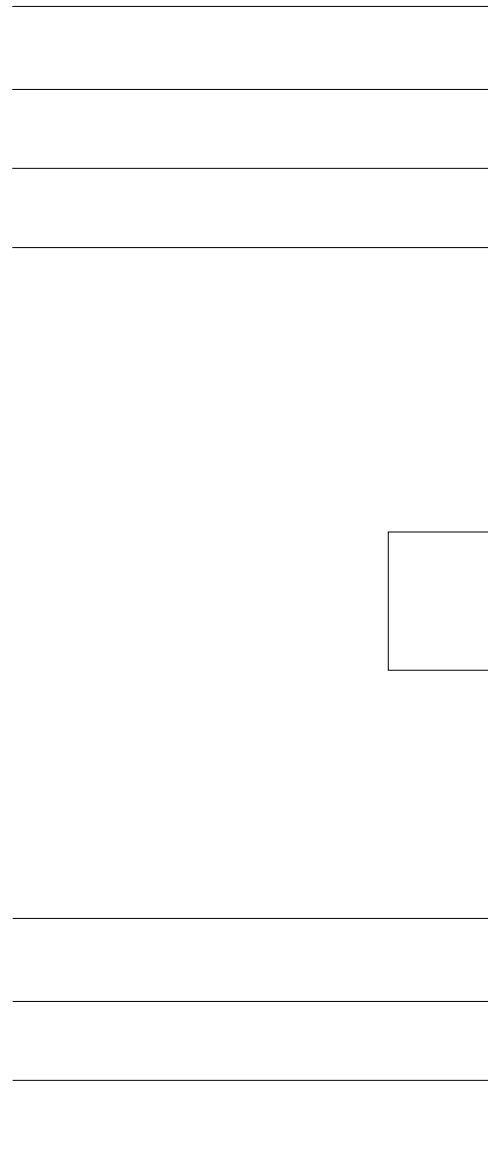


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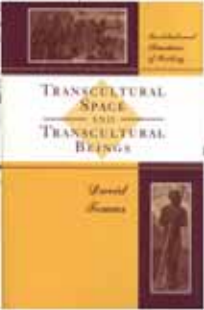
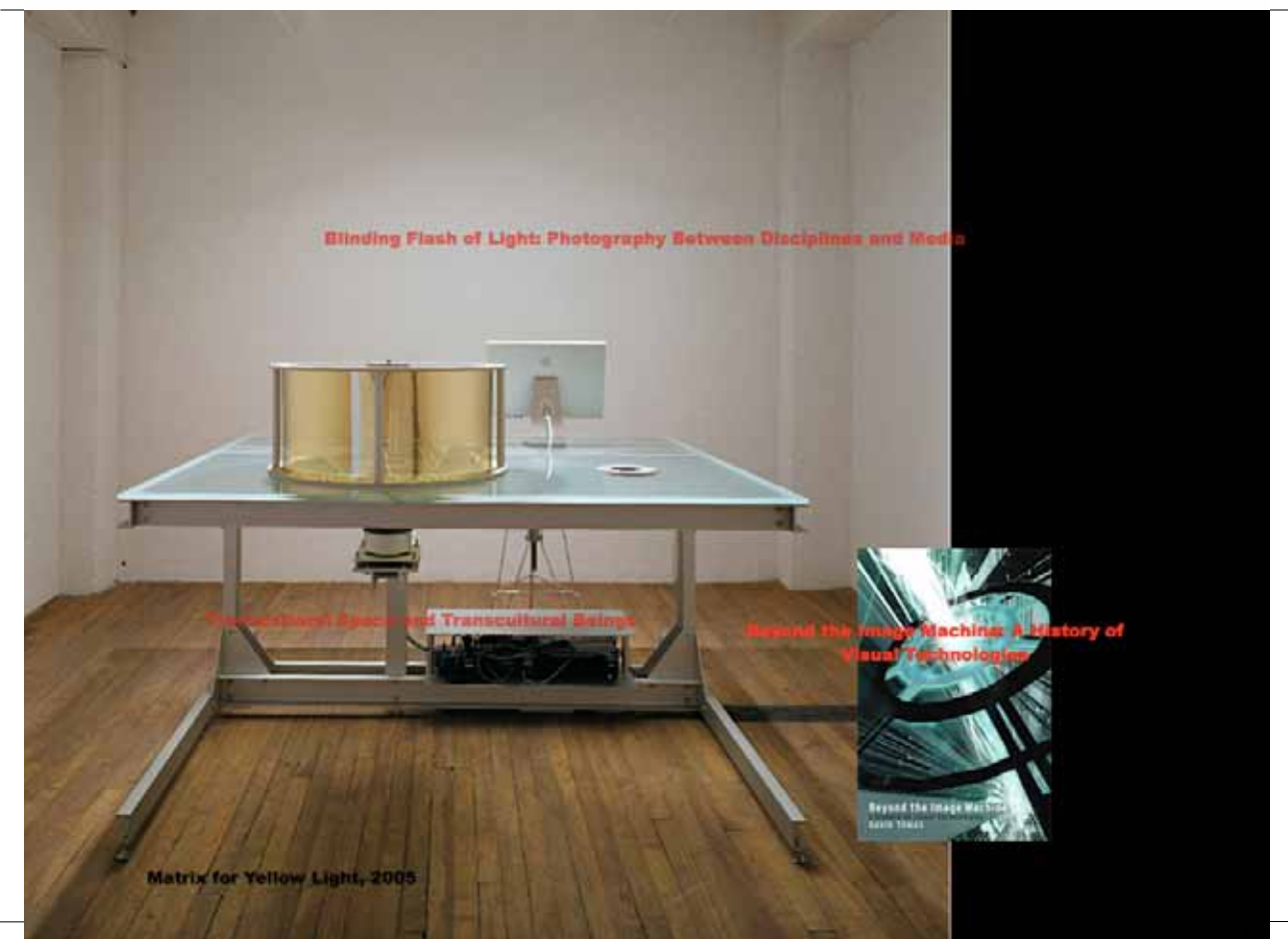
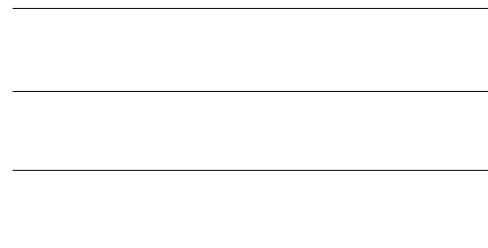
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Transcultural Space and Transcultural Beings

Beyond the Image Machine: A History of Visual Technologies



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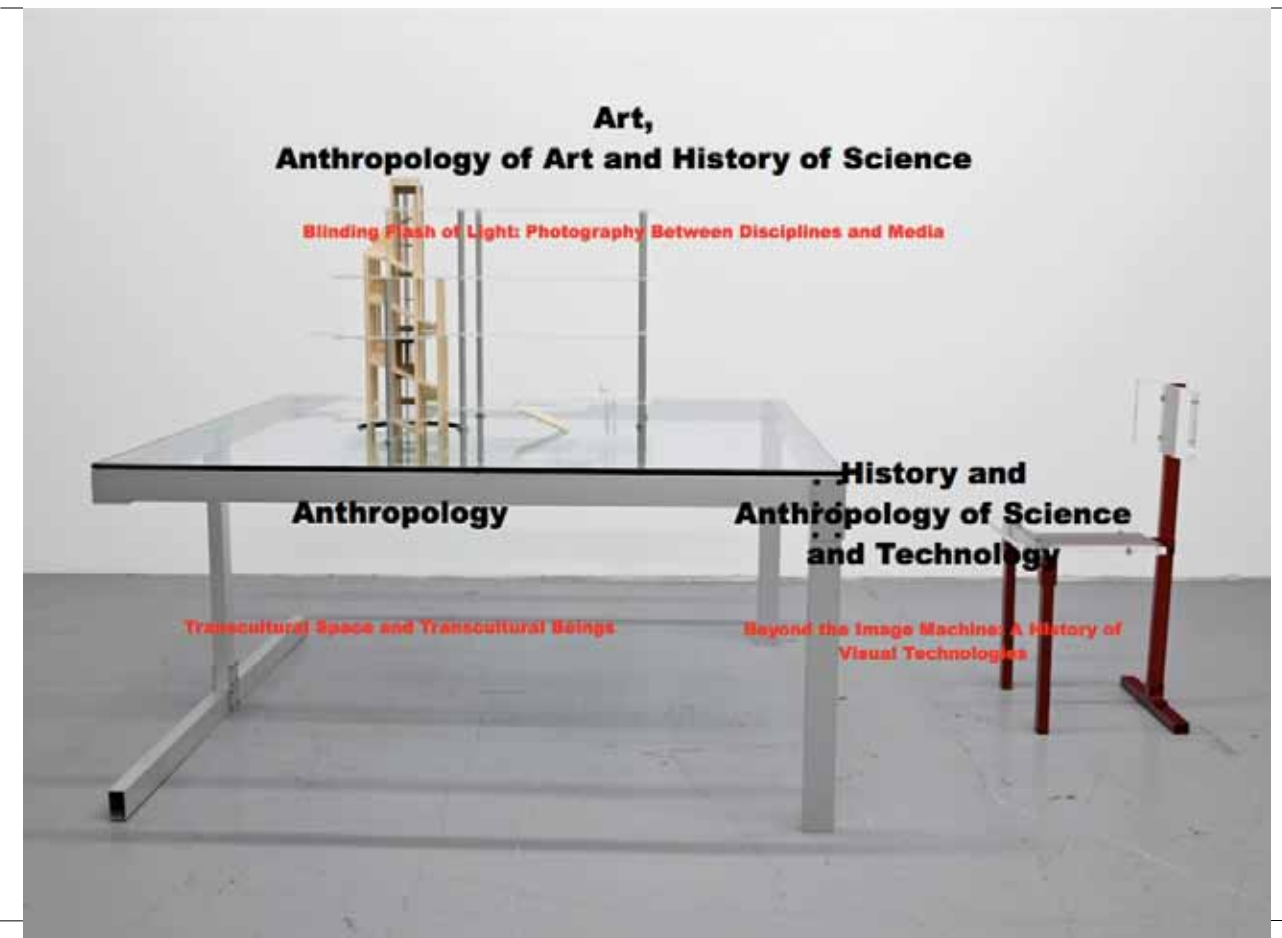
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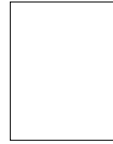
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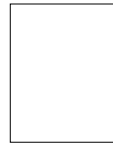
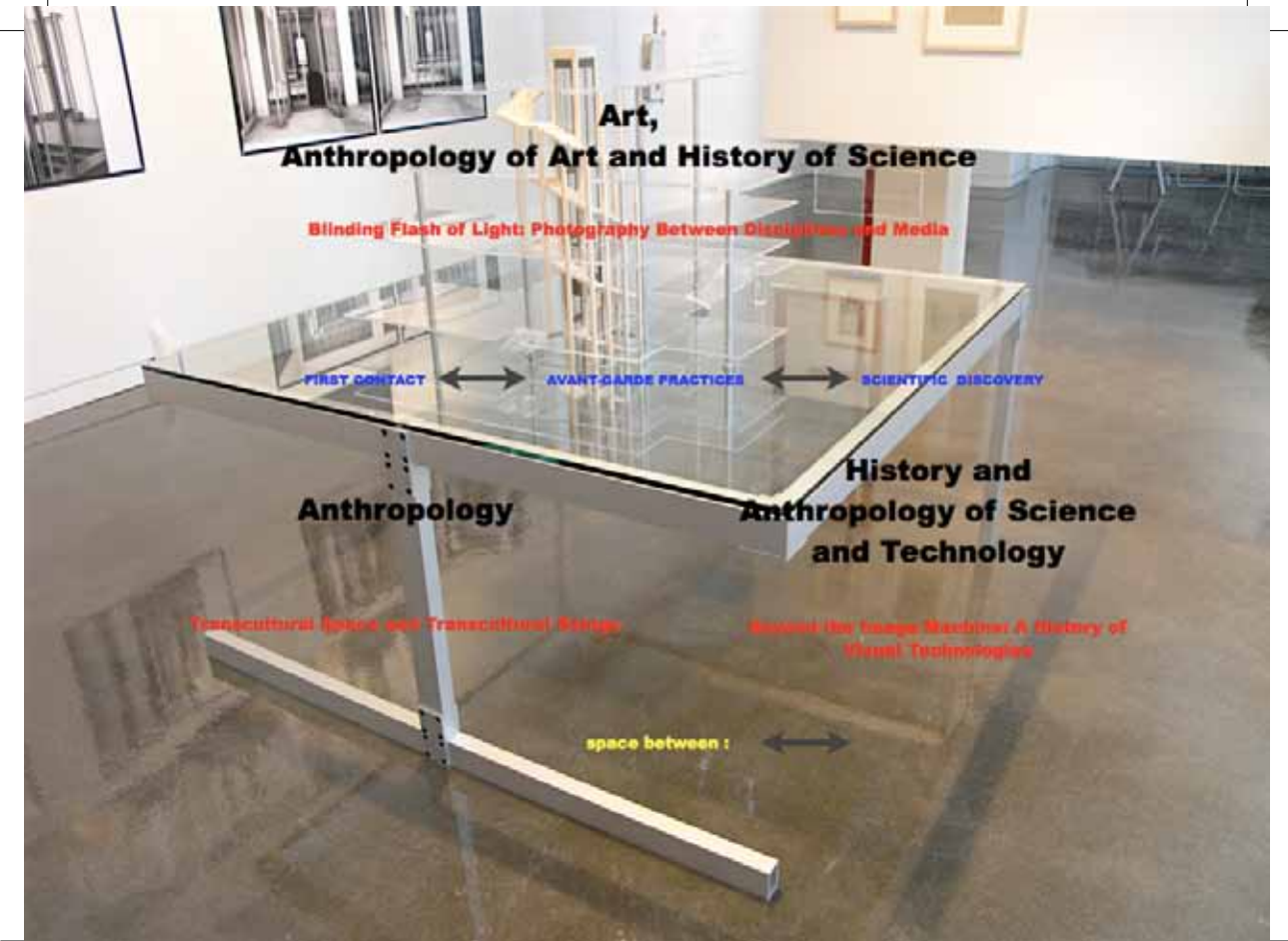
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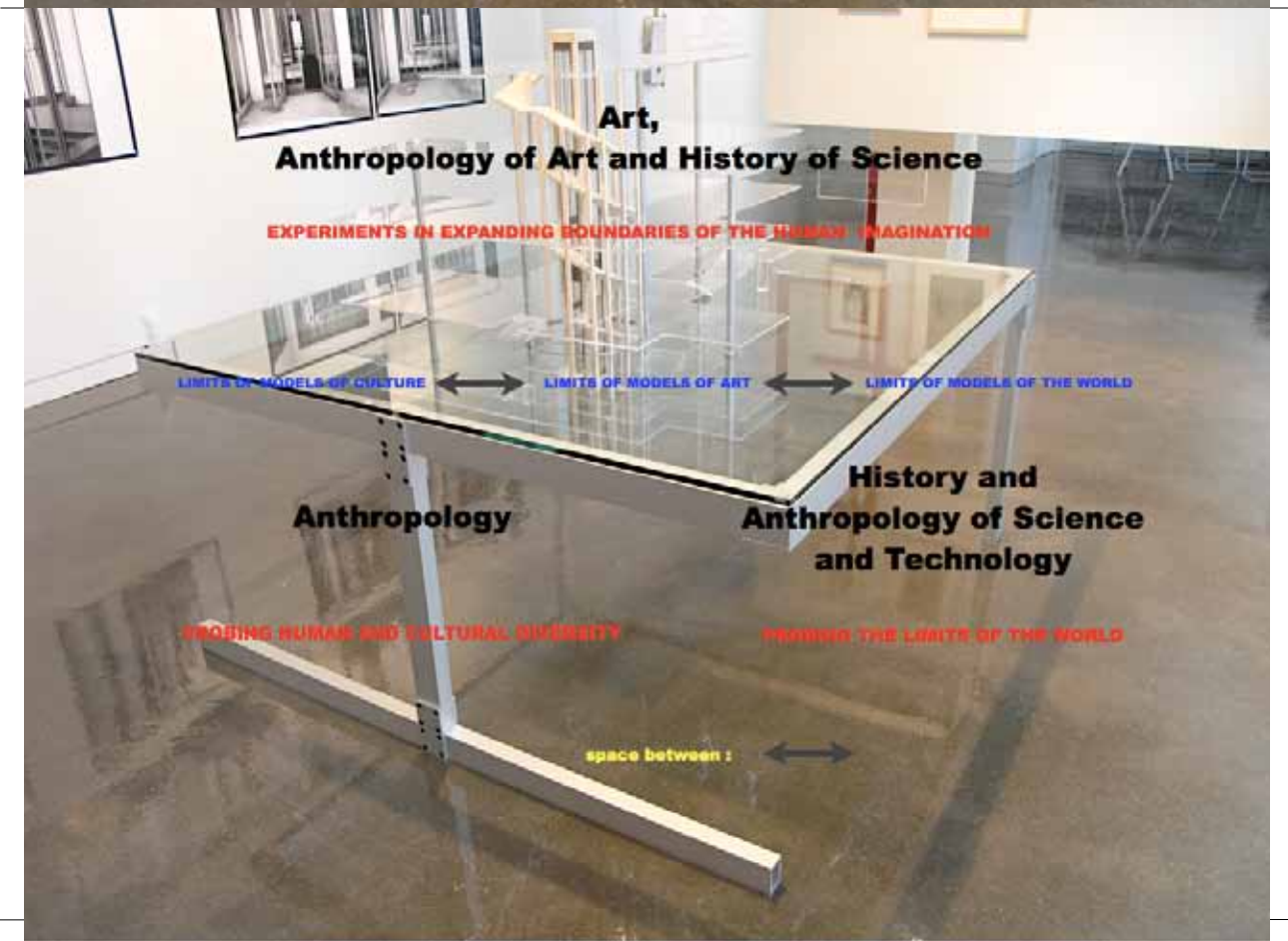


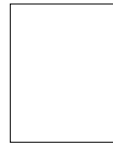


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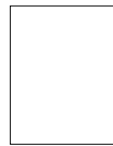
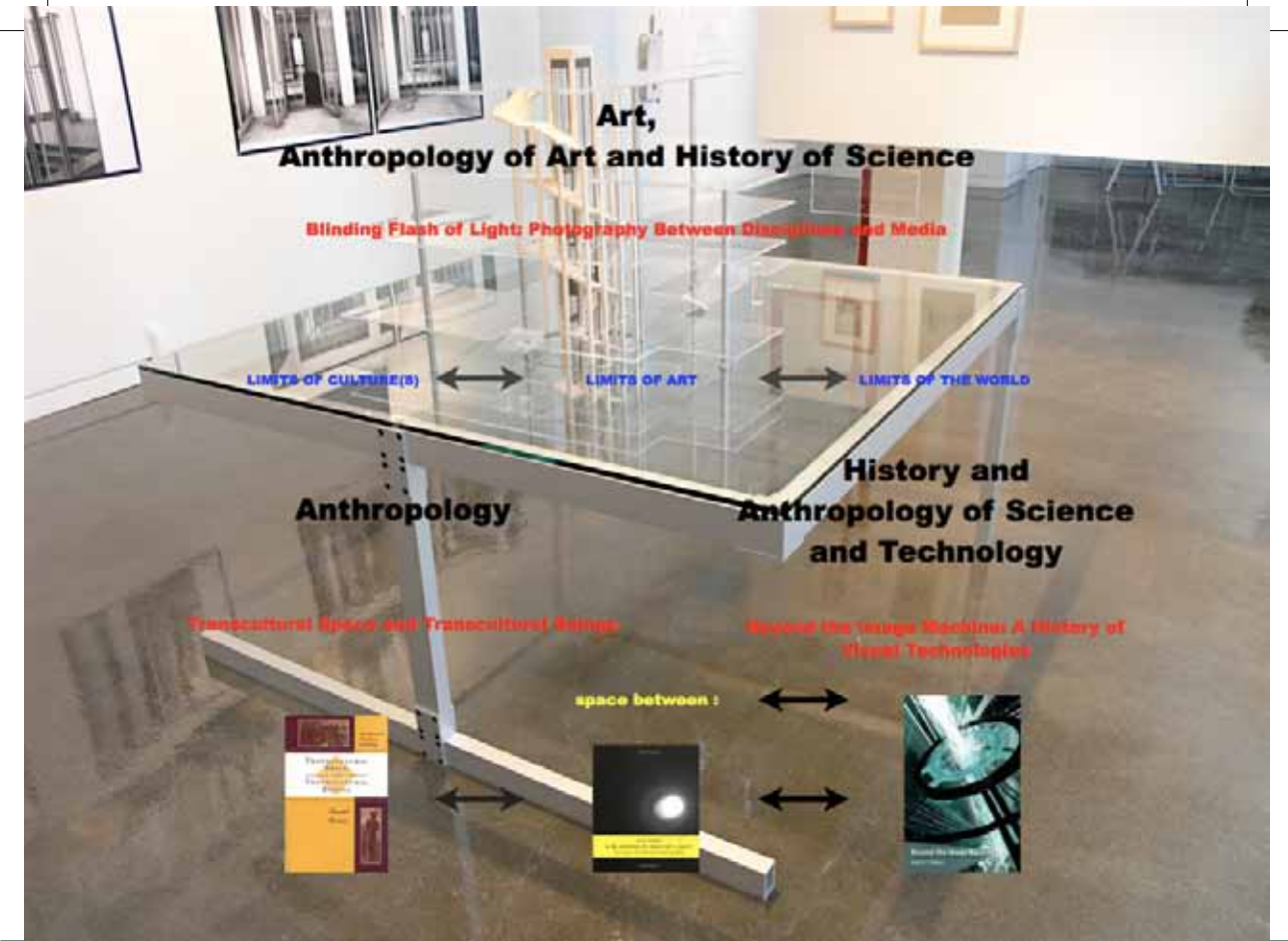


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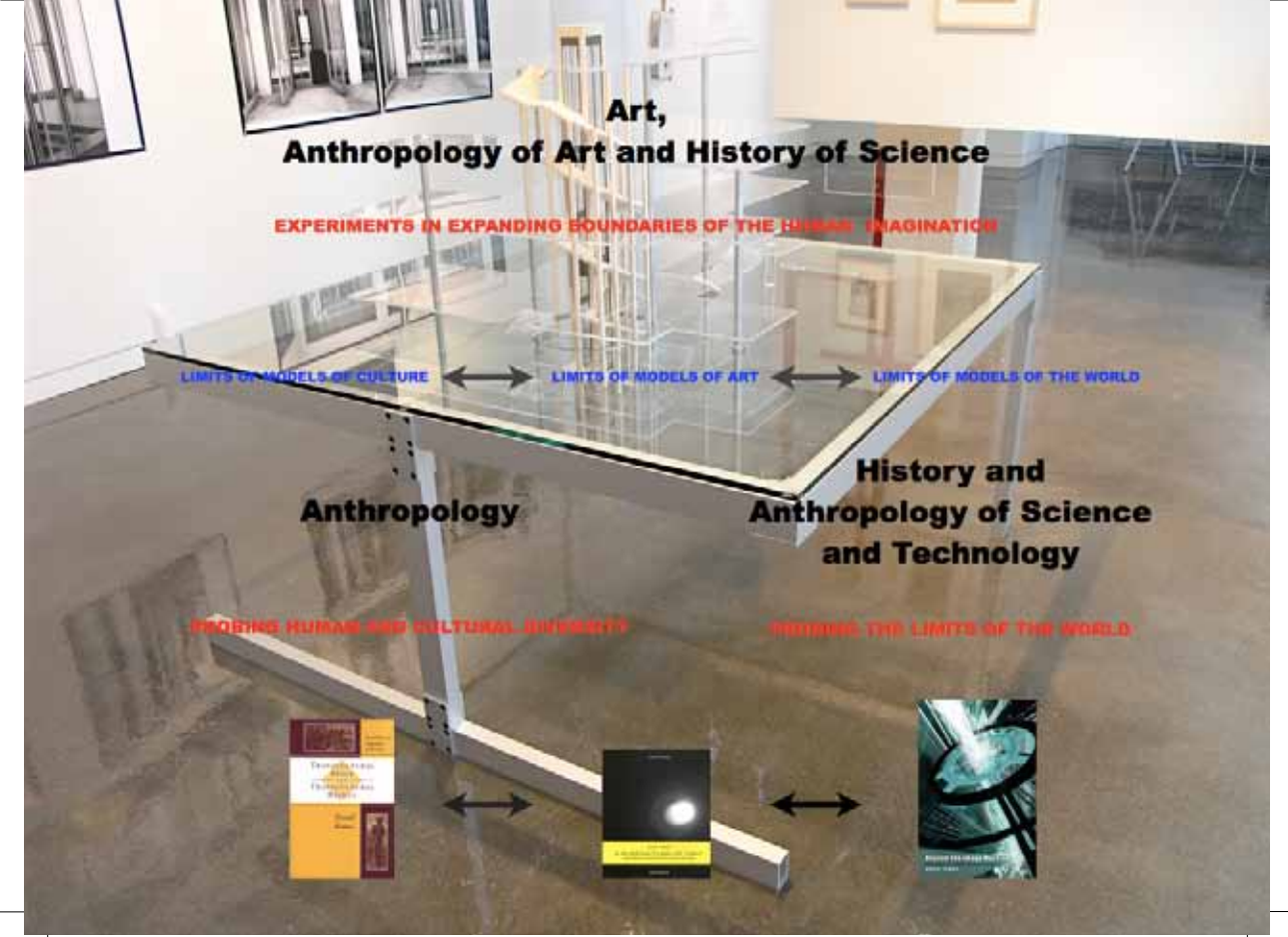


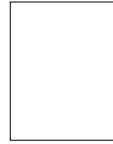


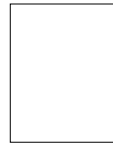
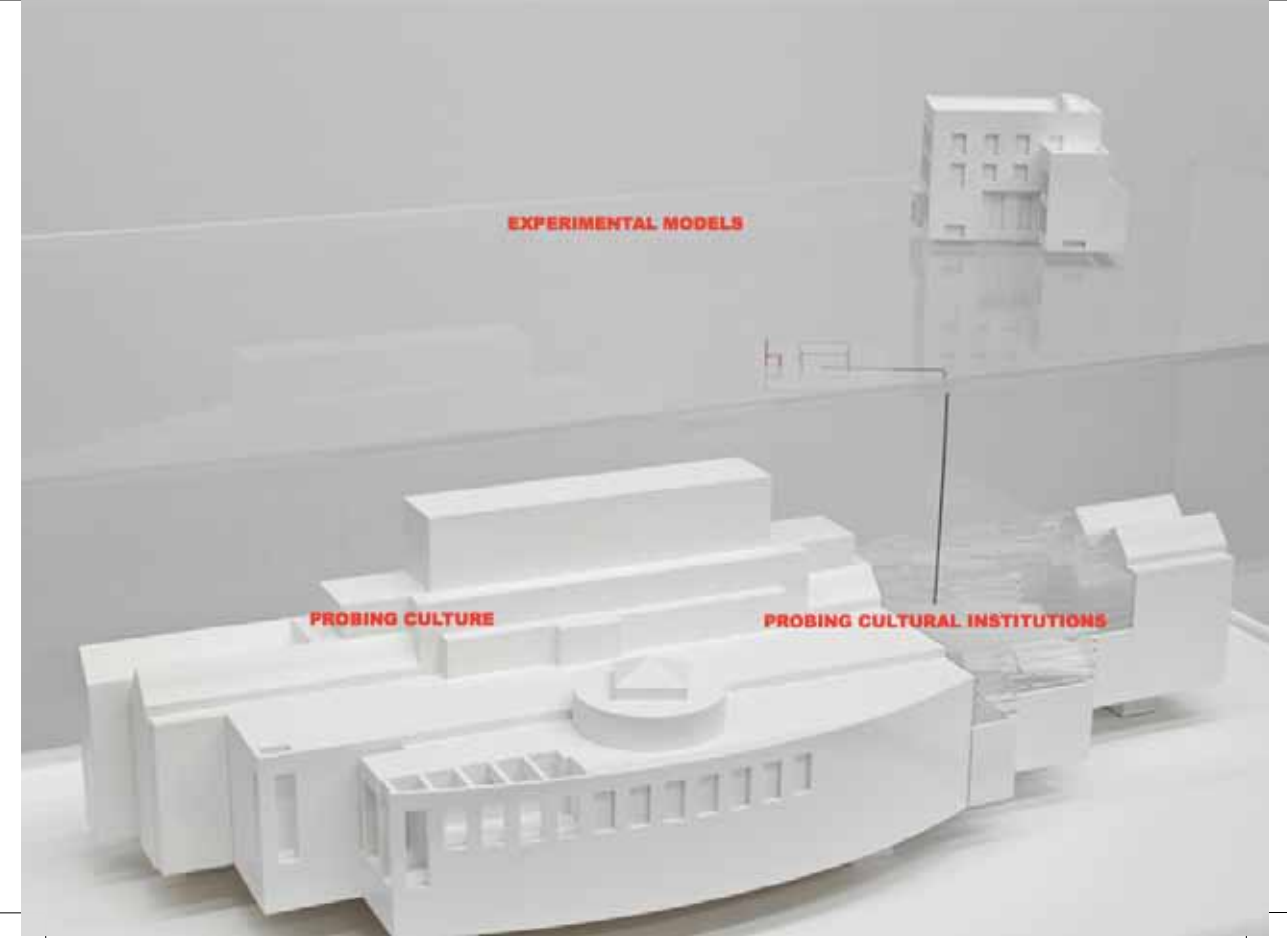
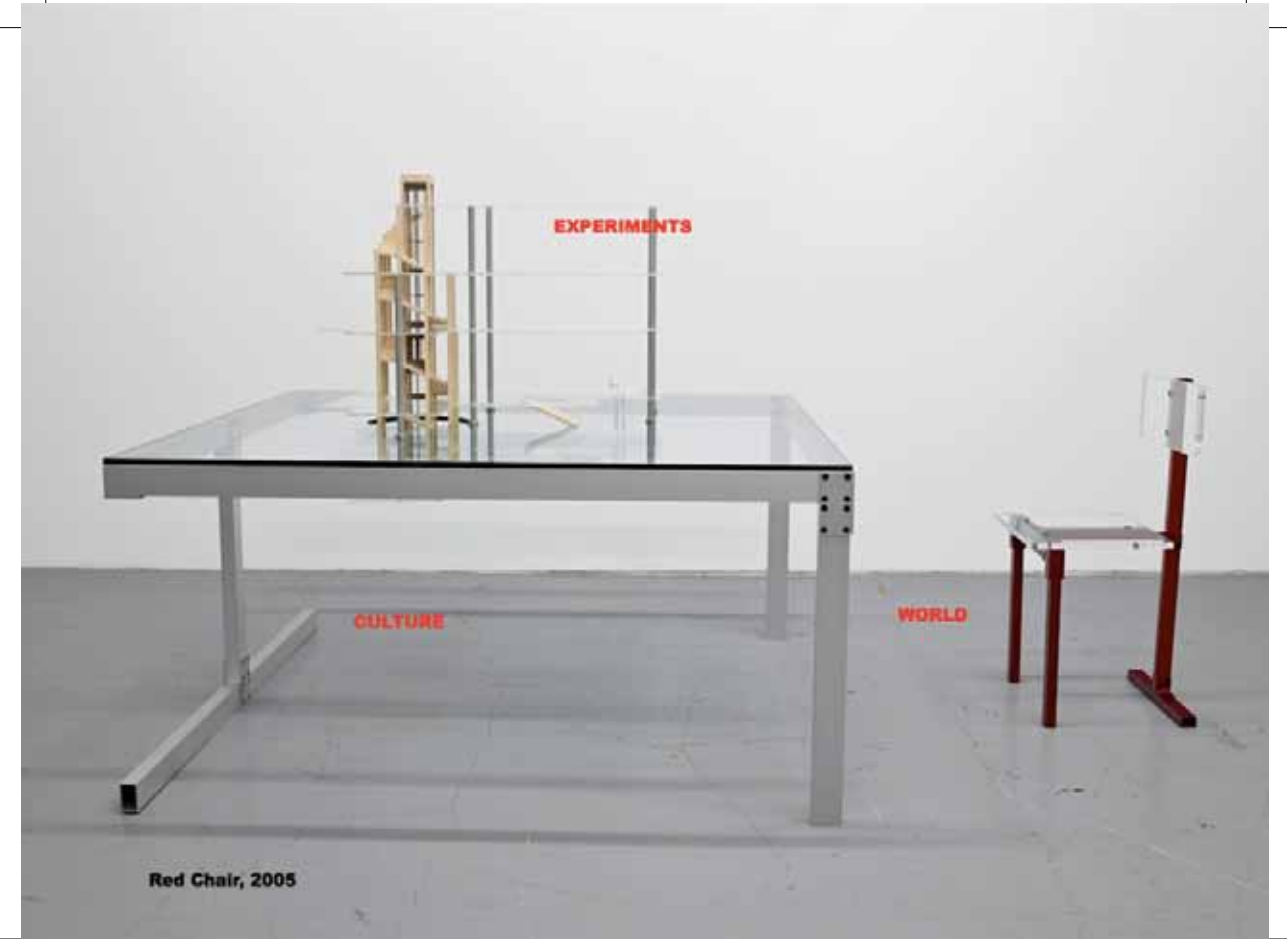
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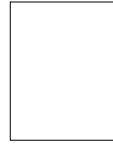


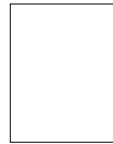
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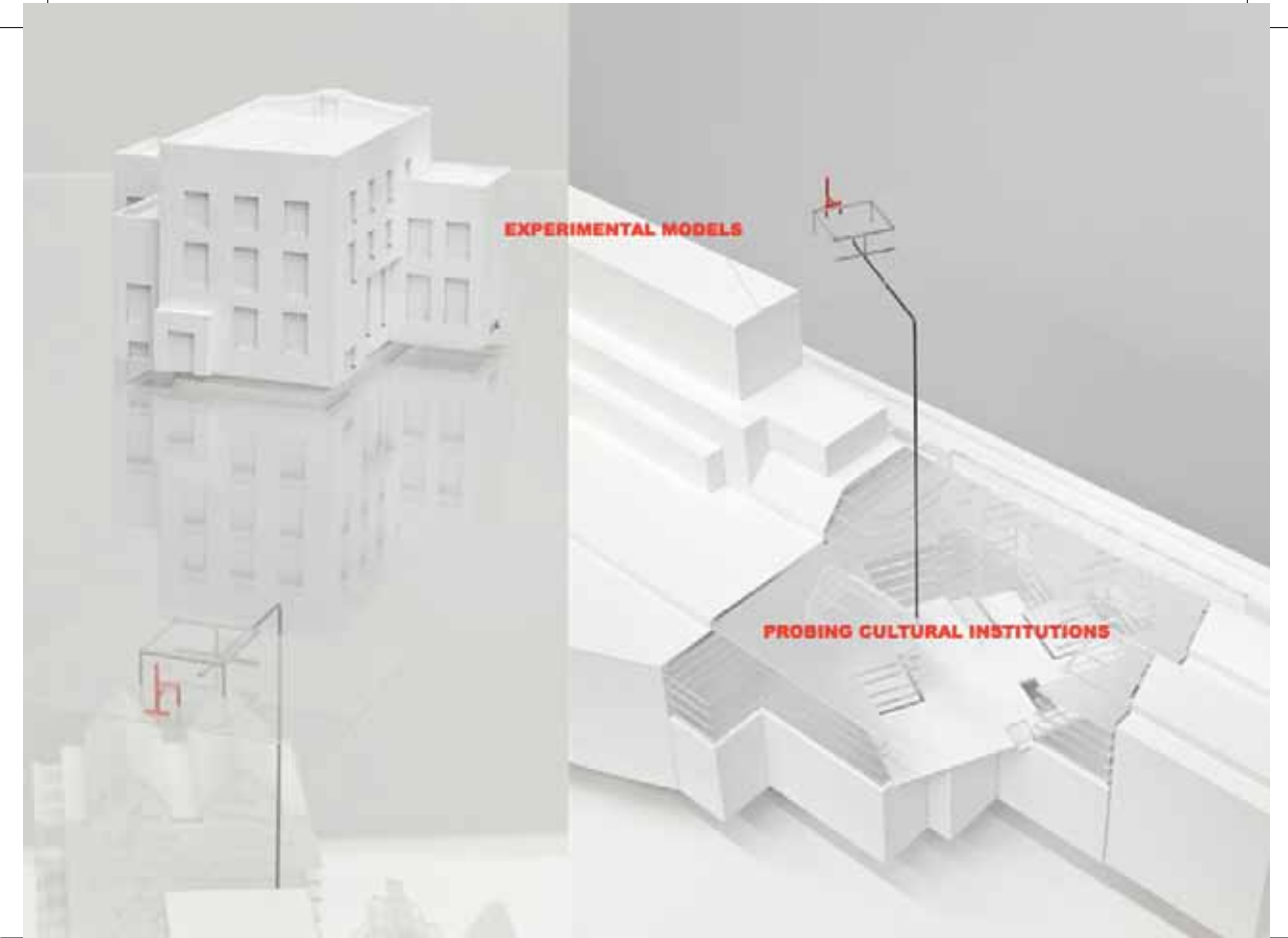


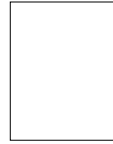


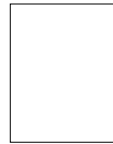














Red Chair, 2010

**EXPERIMENTS
PROBING CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS**

extend the tactics...

multitask
the question of
probing cultural
institutions
(see EDITIONS 2003-2011
for appropriate
examples)



**POSTSCRIPT
&
INTRODUCTION TO THE MANUAL**



research addendum

1975-77

*** observe the university's changing environment ...
and its role in art production today ...**

*** change tactics, begin over again..**

2011





1.1 FOR A NEGATIVE PRACTICE OF PHOTOGRAPHY:
AN INTERVIEW WITH ALBERTO CAMBROSIO

ALBERTO CAMBROSIO: Your work is situated at the juncture of two fields of activity, the artistic and the academic. We might see in that an attempt at an artistic deconstruction of academic discourse, an attempt which, from a practical point of view, nevertheless creates certain objective limitations to the exposure of your work. People active in the field of art don't read, or at least don't master, scholarly and technical publications, while academics do not 'consume' art exhibitions the way they consume the books and articles written by their colleagues. You work in a sort of 'no man's land.' Is this a conscious strategy?

DAVID TOMAS: Yes, because with respect to the sense that there are two fields of knowledge—the scholarly and the artistic—what's at issue, on the one hand, is to establish a relationship with a body of information which is not, or so it would seem, material out of which an artistic discourse can be constructed; and, on the other hand, to put in place a methodology which, strictly speaking, is not that of the academic field. We might say, therefore, that I operate in a 'displaced' space, because I have to produce a discourse in relation to an 'artistic' frame of reference while at the same time raising questions that do not really belong to this particular field; and that I try to find a way of producing a discourse which, while it can't really be described as 'academic,' nevertheless incorporates strategies that are related to research practices. Thus the texts that I publish in academic journals, for example, are implicitly conceived in a visual context, or in relation to a visual milieu. On the other hand, my 'visual texts' are conceived in relation to these 'scholarly' texts. Between these two poles something is set in play, which consists, for example, of critiquing, at the level of representational form, what could be seen as a visual given, while at the same time critiquing what 'representation' might be in the academic field.

CAMBROSIO: So you refuse any rigid distinction between the artistic and academic fields, and you prefer to see yourself as a sort of symbolic process constantly moving back and forth between one field and the other. Nevertheless, those who see you from the outside are able to follow this movement only with great difficulty. And so they want to position you within



'Experimental' Photographic Structure (seen from the left and the right), 1980, installation at R.S.I., New York. A transparent partition divides the room into two spaces: the space of the photographer's activities and the space of the viewer's activities. In the former, a metallic rod marks the place where the stroboscope was originally located, and an electronic timer where the camera was placed. In the latter space, an electronic timer is also seen, as well as a 6 metre by 4.2 metre 'photograph.' The two timers, each the mirror image of the other, oscillate in cycles of ten-seconds—the exposure time of the 'photograph.'

Photographs: D. Tomas.

one or the other of these two categories. How can you escape this polarization imposed from outside?

have to initiate a process of negation in order to start this process anew, in order to create a field that I call 'negative' with respect to the other two fields. The problem, however, is first and above all not to be a victim of the seduction yourself, not to take yourself as an artist or

one or the other of these two categories. How can you escape this polarization imposed from outside?

TOMAS: There are two ways. The first is social, and consists of legitimating yourself in each of the two fields simultaneously through scholarly articles and art exhibitions. But, in so far as the legitimation process is closely tied to a given field, and not to both fields at once, the problem of the intelligibility of the discourse I'm trying to put in place remains. Because, in the end, there is no way of escaping a discourse which attempts to trap an agent and to draw it into its own field. The discourse can also refuse to define the agent—the discourse can ignore it and thus plunge it into non-knowledge. The other, more interesting way, is to persuade the two fields that a third space exists, a space which has a specific relationship to each of them. To reach this point, you have to set up a sort of seduction, which is both visual and intellectual, a sort of transgression that will simultaneously deny both poles. This gesture of negation thus plays the game of power (the game of legitimation), in so far as the power of legitimation is always played out with respect to a non-knowledge which, by definition, is beyond a field's frame of reference. In other words, we can seek this state of non-knowledge by means of an act of negation embodied in a gesture of transgression. You

an academic and thus find yourself ipso facto in one field or the other. On the other hand, the effect produced by the seduction carried out by a non-knowledge¹ can most likely only be described by means of an institutional discourse, which implies a 'third' role, defined by its connection to the positive roles of artist and academic (in my case, of anthropologist). This third role is the role of the photographer. This choice is neither fortuitous nor arbitrary, because it is linked to the idea of a history of the Western gaze, a history which combines the anthropological, artistic, and photographic gazes.

CAMBROSIO: Between these two fields, however, there is dissymmetry. You thus can't expect, by situating yourself in the middle, to have the same effect on each of them.

TOMAS: Historically, the field most susceptible to being interested in such a project has been the artistic field, which, at least in appearance, is by tradition 'open.' There is no reason why, however, the artistic field should, *a priori*, be more open to such a strategy. This is true even if we consider its tradition, which, for its part, is conditioned by its own history, by the history of its knowledge. There is no place in this history for a seemingly 'negative' space, conceived of in terms of its relationship to another field. On a strategic level, you can see a natural effect of rejection, which is the result of an institutional and artistic 'dual constraint,' because, on this level, non-knowledge must also be out of the field's frame of reference. This dual constraint is thus produced in the exhibition setting: a negative discourse is strategically present within a positive setting, that of the gallery or museum as an institutional component of the artistic field.

CAMBROSIO: I'd like to return briefly to the problem of how the movement through which you construct your discourse is perceived. Where you postulate the existence of an oscillation, we might simply see a doubling: there is not just one David Tomas, but two—one for academics and one for artists. How can your movement be made visible?

TOMAS: At the moment, my strategy consists, quite to the contrary, of moving about without anyone noticing the movement. At the precise moment when the movement becomes evident to those observing it, at the precise moment when your extra-institutional position is perceived, that's when people start to say "But, in fact, he's not really an academic," or, similarly, "But, in fact, he's not really an artist." You have to avoid exposing the movement, while also avoiding the danger of symbolic dissolution, which threatens any immobile agent deprived of an institutional definition. On the other hand, the vision of the artist as 'undivided entity' is a Romantic vision. In actual fact there is no unique entity but rather, precisely, movement

between two roles defined by sociocultural fields. Existence between the artistic field and the academic field can never be embodied in a specific individual. You therefore can't see yourself as automatically existing between two positive fields, but only as movement.

CAMBROSIO: Is your ultimate goal subversive? In other words, does it seek the dissolution of these two fields? Or is it, rather, a personal strategy of differentiation?

TOMAS: At first, I borrowed elements from the history of physics which I incorporated into my work. This was a way of questioning the premises of the artistic field. It was less a subversive act than an act carried out from a critical perspective. The external elements I incorporated into my paintings questioned an art—painting—that is incapable of conceiving of itself as an historical art. I use the word historical here not with respect to the limited discourse on painting but in the sense of a larger discourse, the discourse of a displaced knowledge within a given representation. Problems concerning the history of physics, once they are transferred to an artistic framework, question the notion of such an art form's subject.

This underlying approach also characterizes my more recent work. Before, when I used the history of physics, I transplanted—when all is said and done quite naively—the elements of one history into another. My current work on the ritual of photography questions the very notion of photography as a sociocultural process and, simultaneously, questions the definition produced by the discipline of anthropology concerning what a ritual is. I replaced the process of transplantation with simultaneous criticisms of the anthropological framework and the artistic framework. In this way, for example, I am both subject and object of an anthropological practice, both indigenous person (a photographer) and anthropologist (I observe the practice of photography). The link with anthropology allows me to construct a series of interrogations into the status of an anthropologist who sees himself as the subject of his own research, while also constructing a series of investigations into the status of an indigenous person who tries to think beyond his own culture, in the sense in which he might see himself as the subject of his own anthropological practice. The doubling is carried out through a reflexive process: as a photographer, I see myself in relation to an anthropological theory of the photographic process (and in so far as this is a theory I developed in 1979—in my role as an artist—there is a doubling of roles involved); as an anthropologist, I 'observe' what I have become as a sociocultural subject of study, and I 'see' that in changing the activity of a photographic practice (which is to say, by theorizing it from the point of view of anthropological knowledge), anthropology has become not only a science of observation but also an applied and experimental science. Because I (the anthropologist) begin to manipulate photography on

the basis of its 'knowledge,' the status of anthropological objectivity is altered. The artist, the other pole of this process, sees photography (and, in its terms, anthropology as well), from an aesthetic perspective, as a form of representation: a spatial graphics. And so this reflexive process appears once again in the oscillation between the role of the artist and the role of the anthropologist. The result of this strategy is not an academic representation, nor is it an artistic representation, it is the verbal and visual representation of a visual mutation on the academic and artistic levels. The fields of art, photography and the Academy dissolve into their own gazes. For me, it is necessary that this movement, which I have been describing at length, not be the result of an act of bricolage. It is a subversive strategy which attempts to establish a homogeneous field, because the different fields evoked have, since the nineteenth century, been intimately connected to the complexity of a history of the Western gaze. This history has yet to be written: under the fixed gaze of the scholar, the Western gaze has taken possession of multiple universes which form the fabric of the sociocultural space in which our daily life is defined.

CAMBROSIO: At an exhibition at Optica gallery in Montreal in 1979, at a time when you were using the history of physics, there was a painting upon which you had attached, immobile, a locomotive. In your more recent work, which we might call 'negative,' miniature trains (which are now in movement) are invariably present. Using this train element, can you better explain how a seemingly 'positive' discourse (in both an artistic and an anthropological sense) has been incorporated into your work?

TOMAS: The painting you are referring to took up the theme of a painting by René Magritte entitled *La Durée Poignardée* (*Time Transfixed*, 1938) in which could be seen, among other things, a train. By linking Magritte's painting to the work of Galileo, I wanted to create a poetic space, to cross a horizontal movement (the train in motion) with a vertical one (the object falling in accordance with Galileo's law). In this transcription, as you have observed, the train was attached to the canvas and was suspended in space, thus defying its own physical movements. In this way, I was asking myself what a train falling in the space of a painting might be, and in general, what it might be in pictorial space. I took up this question in my subsequent work by superimposing a photographic discourse (the stroboscopic photography of an object falling in space) onto the history of painting, which I condensed and questioned in the way I had when transcribing Magritte's painting. From the point of view of my personal development, this painting was the first in which a train appeared as a physical object. For four years afterwards I didn't use trains, and when I did return to them, they were in motion.

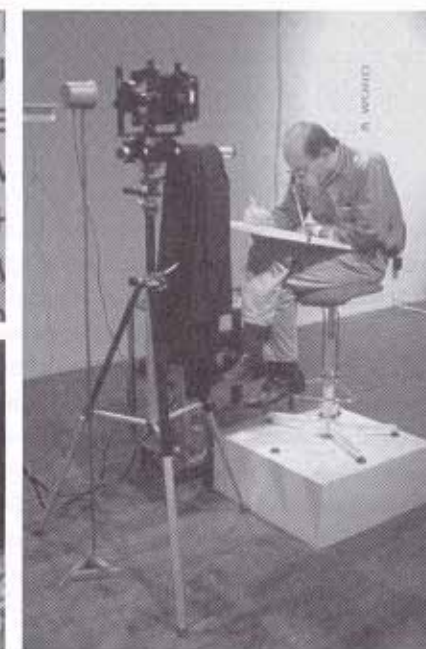
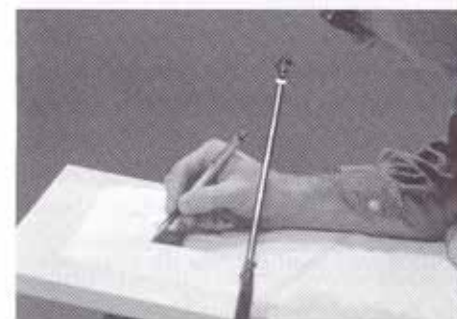


'Experimental' Photographic Structure III, 1982, installation at the Belgo Building, Montreal. This work is divided into three axes: the axis of the photographer's activity, the axis of the draughtsman's activity, and the symbolic axis of history. The first axis includes, in order, a mirror, a stroboscope, a camera, and four transparent positive 'photographs.' The second includes a drawing table, at which the artist is seated, a Polaroid camera, and a quote printed on the wall. The third intersects the other two and is made up of video cameras and a miniature train, which moves between two points marked by video monitors. Two video cameras 'record' the train's trajectory. When it crosses a bridge located in the axis of the draughtsman's vision, a viewer is asked to take a photograph: the draughtsman's act of negation consists in making a 'black' drawing of it.

Photographs: D. Tomas

Let's go back, for a moment, to the first painting. The transcription of Magritte was meant to be analytical. It was a metadiscourse on the original painting: by adding the parameters of the two movements (horizontal and vertical) and by making reference to a law of physics discovered by Galileo, I was transposing another domain onto art. Between Magritte's train and my own, the discourse was reversed. I now think that this attempt to enquire into the parameters of a field by transferring elements from another field into it was naive, and prevented me from enquiring into art's sociocultural framework. Although I was interested in this question, my work was still directed towards the problems posed by the epistemological status of the 'framed' image and not towards a larger context. In the meantime, I moved into the academic field, passing from the history of science to anthropology. I thus chose a broader field, one that was capable of relating apparently heterogeneous, yet socioculturally linked, elements such as trains and the photographic process in a reflexive way.

CAMBROSTO: For the exhibition of your work at Galerie Yajima in 1983 (*Photography: A Word*), you were seated on a draughtsman's stool a few metres away from a mirror, which was pierced at its centre in order that the railway line that extended from you, and that supported a train which circulated in both directions, could pass through. Among the various objects that



Photography: A Word, 1983, installation at Galerie Yajima, Montreal. This work takes up most of the elements present in the previous pieces (the axes of the photographer and the draughtsman, and the symbolic axis of history). When the train crosses a bridge mid-way along its trajectory, the image of the train is shown on the video monitors, which thus redistribute it in space. Simultaneously, this prompts the draughtsman's activity, which lasts only as long as the train is crossing the bridge.

Photographs: Centre de documentation Yvan Boulerice

completed this structure were a camera and a stroboscope. I wonder if you could explain the function of the stroboscope?

TOMAS: In general, photography has been at the root of all my work since 1975, whether directly or through pictorial transcription. As for the stroboscope, I had already made reference to stroboscopic photography in my transcription of *La Durée Poignardée*. It then appeared in all of my work after 1980, which attempts to create a negative discourse. In this work, it functions as a 'mechanism of negation,' making it possible for me to trace a negative field. Concretely, I use it to produce a negation of the conventional photograph, in so far as it is an image created by light that reflects off the objects of the universe. In photographs produced with a stroboscope (which I call "ideologically complex and brute") the light source is turned towards the lens and towards the photographic film. We are thus in the presence of a radiated light. On the other hand, the process of development, for its part, is completely conventional. Thus, from the point of view of the conscious act of negation, conventional photography 'implodes' and, significantly, the photographic process is projected into a space which can never be the space occupied by its conventional history because there was a shift from the meaning of the photograph to its context. Its history is, in fact, the history of a process of producing subject/images and not simply the history of light deposited in successive layers through the action of a stroboscope. With such an act of negation, I aim to produce sedimentation, a deposit—and a hole of light (to speak metaphorically)—which functions only as a sign of itself and not as a sign of a (vertical) narrative in a photographic space. We thus arrive at a narrative without a history, because history, from the point of view of conventional photography, has been displaced elsewhere, beyond a negative discourse with respect to its own conventional history, and towards its production strategy. In other words, the stroboscope represents the sign of a transgressive gesture, an act whereby I turn a light source against the history of the photographic, anthropological, and artistic gazes.

CAMBROSIO: What, to remain with the Yajima exhibition for a moment, was the relationship between the stroboscope and the train?

TOMAS: The stroboscope was placed at the end of the rails, just in front of the camera lens. It functioned as a source of light directed not towards a subject (the rails, the train, or the general context of its production), but towards the photographic lens. It was thus a source of pure light. Like the object that was 'falling' in the painting exhibited at Optica, the train at Yajima moves in space. As a concrete object, it takes a specific historical form (it is a 1930s

Burlington Zephyr) and we can thus assert that it moves within the time of its own history. Nevertheless, it is no longer an historical object, but an object as process, because its role is that of a subject for the act of photography. It is a subject, however, that can never attain the condition of photographic subject, because between the rails and the camera is the stroboscope, which fills the camera's viewfinder and points towards the lens (which is another historical artifact: an 1860s Harrison Globe lens). The stroboscope thus blocks the train's access, and that of the general context (the photographic subject), to the chemical status of photographic subject/image. The resulting photograph is completely white (complete negative entropy). This photograph is then used as the subject of another transgressive gesture by a draughtsman who is seated behind the camera. As for the draughtsman's role, it is not arbitrary either, because it is situated on the 'track' of a history of the Western gaze. (Fox Talbot, an unskilled draughtsman, used a camera lucida for his drawings in the 1830s before he began his research into photography.) The photograph is thus negated in turn: the draughtsman produces an entirely black drawing (complete negative entropy). The displacement of conventional photographic discourse is twofold: a play takes place between the photograph and the drawing. At stake is the classification of the universe into light and darkness, day and night, presence and absence.

With respect to my earlier work, another change is visible: instead of an object limited to a specifically artistic discourse, there is now an object which truly operates within a cultural, social, political and economic discourse. I say "political," because what is at play in the positive histories of the fields in question, and in the gallery space in which these objects are found, is power. These objects are present as representatives of the strategies of the producer, that confront the strategies of the viewer, which are governed by the conventional history of photography, a history that is simultaneously cultural, social and political. The discourses linked together by the horizontal axis of movement between the role of the artist and the role of the anthropologist are in a vertical relationship, so to speak, with the negative discourse suspended beyond the positive discourses. Objects such as the train and the stroboscope thus undergo a doubling, symbolizing both what they are in their own histories (the Burlington Zephyr and the Harrison Globe lens) and this other, 'non-historical' existence, which is to say what they could be, or would be, in this negative space that is brought into play in the gallery setting.

CAMBROSIO: There is a fundamental difference between your 'history of physics' period and your 'negative history' period. In the former, you already employed a metadiscourse: you did not have direct access to physics but rather to a discourse on physics, which you then articulated to artistic discourse. Now you are both anthropologist and an 'indigenous person' and you are thus also, without mediation, an anthropologist. I would say that the difference is twofold, because not only were you not a scientist before (a physicist), while you are now (an anthropologist), but before you could not be a subject of study within physics (you are not an elementary particle) while now you can be an indigenous person. Another difference is that photography is a technological object of study and not a scientific one. What's more, it operates within a world said to be ordinary, and not exclusively within a laboratory.

TOMAS: The irony of what I do resides precisely in the reversal of this relationship. The result of my work functions, for the moment, within an environment that is just as esoteric as the laboratory. This environment is the art gallery. The effect of work exhibited in a gallery is just as esoteric as the effect produced by physical energy in a laboratory, because, in the end, in an art gallery we don't see the same articulation of photographic operations that we see in the 'realistic' world's frame of reference. In place of this reality, there is a displacement of the positive discourses, which is carried out by means of a 'hyper-realist' discourse (Jean Baudrillard). I have become a simulacrum in a discourse-simulacrum, a model of a model within a model of a model which multiplies in multi-dimensional spaces, because instead of a reference to reality there are, precisely, references to models: of art, anthropology and photography. References to a set of models which extend within a space dominated by the 'panoptical gaze of the scholar.' Faced with the silence of all these voices, which are simulacra of their own histories, we no longer find either the artist or the anthropologist, dissolved by their own gazes, but only an articulation between light and darkness (a basic model of classification). Nevertheless, between light and darkness there is the transgressive gesture, as well as the trains, the lenses, and other objects, which function like toys: stripped of their own histories, they fill up a timeless history thanks to a gesture that relates them to an eternal present.

CAMBROSIO: At the outset of this interview, I attempted to pin down the socio-logical dynamic of your project and you replied by situating it with respect to two fields, the artistic and the academic, which function as social agents of legitimation. Afterwards, however, your comments increasingly followed the path of an inward reflection on your project. You seem to want to avoid analyzing your position within the field of symbolic production and to return to the more reassuring terrain of the internal logic which underlies your work. Insofar as this

observation is true, we might see your anthropological discourse as a ruse, as an attempt to shield yourself as producer from the objectifying discourse of the sociologist.

TOMAS: Not at all. The displacement you detect in my comments was prompted by the need to render intelligible the strategy I adopted with respect to the two fields, both within each and in my movement between them. All artistic, anthropological and photographic forms of knowledge, as we know, represent instances of social activity. While my discourse may seem to privilege an internal logic with respect to an external 'socio-logic,' this shouldn't be seen as a ruse that attempts to remove me from the horizon of the sociological gaze, because one cannot subtract oneself from 'its' field of interest, but only make oneself intelligible in terms of this interest. What I have tried to explain, both in my work and in my response to your questions, is my attempt to pinpoint the question of the education of the Western gaze as it has become clear to me. At the centre of my work is an attempt to subvert the problem that is at the heart of the education of the Western gaze: the inscription of a subject/image. My strategy consists of enquiring directly into the logic of such an inscription. In a world of visual models, my approach defies a system of education; a simple gesture of negation allows me to explore certain aspects of the sociocultural and political anatomy of this question. The success, or lack thereof, of my approach can only be measured by the interest or lack of interest it provokes in others. As for myself, I have never stopped being interested in the socio-anthropological implications of this approach, even when I try to distance myself from them. You mustn't forget that these implications are instances of the socio-logical objectifying gaze. And, after all, your question is also the product of this objectifying interest.

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Translated by Timothy Barnard

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... slide show, voice, notes, questions...