

## PAST IMPERFECT

PAST IMPERFECT explores the relations between the radical output of the conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s and everyday life, gradually moving on to include how radical ideas from the past are linked to those of today. In all corners of life—politics, literature, intelligence, science—radical actions, even if they seem to have disappeared into oblivion, influence and shape the public arena.

This publication is the result of a research, intensely guided by curiosity, amazement and suspicion, accepting the risk of being totally incomplete or overly thorough. PAST IMPERFECT searches for hidden pasts by lifting stones and poking underneath; collecting cases around notions on disappearance (persons, information), perfection, excessive control, compulsion and withdrawal—as varied as causal developments (Ford boxes), state fiction and ambiguity (Absolut), coincidental histories (from aubergines to Hotel Angst), preservation and destruction (from Amanda Lear to Howard Hughes), dark politics (Elvis meeting Nixon), the haunting of artifacts and economical speculation (Corbis), erasure (from Alfred Loos' archives to Willem de Kooning's drawings), protection (Walden's utopia), the impossible made possible (Houdini), ... and much more.

*Lisette Smits & Bik Van der Pol, ed.*



PAST IMPERFECT...

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# PAST IMPERFECT

*Bik Van der Pol*



## DARK GREEN AND DEEP RED

He now lives in Sicily, Italy. The ideal locale for a man who swears by the 'bella figura', by the streamlined interpretation of a classically cut suit. Even in those days, conscious of his small rather over-muscular body, he dressed impeccably in three-piece suits. A habit that elicited constant speculation about his true occupation and lent him a refined yet incongruous air in the Moscow of the nineties. He now seems to own a record company. At that time, he was a popular DJ, partly because of his involvement in bootleg western pop music.

I met him at a party for veterans – young men of nineteen or twenty, fresh from Afghanistan – held in the cellars of an embassy unbeknown to the diplomatic staff. In a suit that was tailored to perfection, leaning lightly on a slender walking stick, he seemed more at home in a 19th century sanatorium than a basement reeking of liquor and dope. We nodded at each other in passing in a first, mutual confirmation of our presence.

It was the era of perestroika, an issue that all my Russian friends pondered rather listlessly. As if it were only the umpteenth version of an endless flow of political rhetoric; nothing more than a requisite topic to be chewed over with foreigners like me. Perestroika gave me the chance to visit the Baltic States and be a juror during the INDEPENDENT FASHION FESTIVAL in Riga. The reference to independence and fashion, what's more in English, were deliberate provocations on the part of the Latvian organisation which now, in the spirit of perestroika, the Kremlin had to tolerate. My visa only let me travel to Latvia via Russia, which obliged me to spend a night in Moscow. Friends picked me up from Sheremetyevo II, and immediately bore me away with them to this underworld where I was introduced to Misha, a nuclear physicist who had recently quit his job and for the next few years couldn't get a visa for the US, so had started a band. And now, thanks to Rubik, the man in the suit with the walking stick, was about to produce his first record.

Rubik Kinebanian proved to be of Armenian extraction, the bearer of numerous passports and, because his grandmother lived in Paris, a regular visitor to the West. Which not only explained his styled suits but encouraged him, in his own words, to be circumspect: 'Let Misha believe in the western dream. I only know hell, whichever way the wind blows.'

Rubik offers to walk with me to my friends' house in the Arbat, the old centre of Moscow. I recall the scale-less vacancy of the streets and the pinkly glowing skies behind one of the Stalinist

cakes that were then typical of the city's skyline. Three tank wagons drive towards us in line, filling the entire width of the boulevard, spraying the streets clean. Rubik pushes me into a doorway. 'Not with this suit' he mutters and I have to laugh at the feigned indignity in his voice. He invites me to join him and take tea with a friend. 'We're nearly there. She lives in the Arbat as well and never sleeps. No, she'll love to see us.' Her house is almost right opposite the residence of architect Melnikov. From her hall you can see the famous turret studded with hexagonal windows. Like many other doors in Moscow, her apartment door is covered with fake black leather and flaunts four or five locks. I can hear someone rummaging around; the door opens a crack and a dark eye regards us. 'Rubik!' The door widens to reveal a small woman, sharp featured with black curly hair. She embraces Rubik and gestures me to enter. Behind her are stacked dozens of chairs and tables. A narrow aisle has been left clear. She goes first, picking her way through the labyrinth of household goods to an equally over-full salon. Would we like tea, she queries and apologises for having run out of sugar. Rubik has already sat down. Our hostess pats the velour seat of the chair that is to be mine, inquires who I am, where Rubik has been the past few months, all the time searching for her cigarettes. 'Rubik, those criminals have started their pogroms again. I hardly dare step outside and she, my poor daughter...' She points to a corner of the room where a girl lies sleeping on a chaise longue. Then she turns to me and asks me what I'm doing in Moscow for God's sake. Before I have a chance to reply, she slaps her cheek. 'What am I thinking! You must eat first.' She gets to her feet again, and it is only now that I realise she is wearing a dark green dress, almost certainly an Azzedine Alaia. The knitted fabric and body-hugging cut clearly bear the signature of the designer who at the time ranked among the world's most sought-after designers. She returns with a plate of cold meats, tomatoes and gherkins. Rubik isn't hungry. He prefers to sleep, and lies down on one of the couches. She wants to know who I am and what I do. 'Ah, fashion!' she says, once I've explained that I am travelling to a fashion festival. I ask if she's interested in fashion, gesturing to her green dress. 'This!' she cries, pulling at the fine tricot of the dress as though to shred the fabric from her body. She takes my hand and drags me through the furniture maze to a room where a dozen or so dresses with the label AZZEDINE ALAIA, PARIS are draped over yet more chairs and tables. I'm instantly led back, as though the dresses are only to be seen. She collapses, exhausted, in her chair and lights a cigarette. 'I've been foolish.' She whispers. She motions



A VIEW TO A KILL,  
Grace Jones' costumes by Azzedine Alaïa

around her and asks: 'Do you believe in furniture?' 'I believe only in furniture', she continues. 'All my family, all my friends, they now live in the US or in Israel of course. We can no longer live here. Not since the Chechens flooded the city - criminals the lot of them. Last week, one of them accosted me in the street. They're going to get me too. They want our homes, they want our furniture, but I've promised I'll keep these. You never know - my friends just might come back. My husband and I were also planning to leave, along with our daughter. Here he was a professor at the university and now he plays bridge all day in Miami with a group of senile old people. What an idiot, what a waste - someone with his mind! And then Sotheby's opened in Moscow. Wanting the work of Russian artists. I decided to auction all my paintings. I'd hardly sold anything in all those years and thought I'd sell two, maybe three, but a woman from Miami bought the lot. Can you imagine, my entire life, sold in one go. I miss them. She sees it as an investment. She wanted us to come to Florida too. He got a visa first; my daughter and I were to join him later and learned English in the meantime. And then the problems started. I was not allowed to open a foreign currency account and she could not pay in roubles. But she wanted to give me something nevertheless, a surprise, and last week they arrived; fifty four dresses by her favourite Paris designer. I'm going to sell them, we need food, but the dresses are very thin. I believe in furniture.' We look around the room wordlessly, as though trying to appraise the value of its contents in silence. I hear Rubik get up. He promises to take me to the airport and tells me to get a move on. She wants to introduce me to her daughter, and wakes her up. 'How do you do, my name is Sarah.' says her daughter in accentless English. They both accompany us to the street. Rubik stops a car and asks the driver if we can pay him to take us to the airport. We wave to each other. Sarah stands next to her mother, wearing an almost identical dress. This time deep red.

(translated from the Dutch by Lisa Holden)

*Guus Beumer*



## WALDEN

'My imagination carried me so far that I even had the refusal of several farms—the refusal was all I wanted—but I never got my fingers burned by actual possession'. July 4th, 1845, Independence Day. Henry David Thoreau retreats to Walden Pond where he would declare and practice his own independence. Radically disappearing from the average and the mundane he retreated into nature. In extreme introversion he celebrated 'allegiance not to the republic but to the individualism for which he stood'. For Thoreau, the true America was yet to be discovered, and its revolution was

still only a promise rather than an achievement. He developed a method to bring about social change: Walden is a reaction to the 'slavish and materialist' lives of American citizens, and its remedy is individual action based on principle. "In private lives more than in public measures the salvation of the country can be found [...]. The power of the individual - because no two of us thought alike - has the power to awaken his neighbors from their torpid lives of expediency to lives of principle."

from: Introduction to WALDEN & CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, H.D.Thoreau (1854)  
image: www.historyplace.com

## FIRST GUIDED TOUR INTO THE VOID

The FIRST GUIDED TOUR INTO THE VOID by Yves Klein offers a chance for an unforgettable voyage. 'First, stand in front of a window, if possible on an upper floor. Hold your breath (breath is a precious material). Open the casement and now you can begin. Run towards the opening, whose size with respect to your own body will of course have been verified in advance, because you have to be able to spring out of it without any damage. So run toward the window and when you are just



a few paces from the opening, spring into a horizontal position with a thrust of the heel, so that your body suddenly rises to the height of the window and thus surges out into the void'.



from: BLUE COMPANY, OR, YVES KLEIN CONSIDERED AS A WORLD-ECONOMY, by Nicolas Bourriaud. p.43-44, in YVES KLEIN, LONG LIVE THE IMMATERIAL. Published by T.A.T., Paris, 2000  
images: www2.let.uu.nl

## SOME VOID THOUGHTS ON MUSEUMS

Robert Smithson considered museums as tombs. The continuous struggle and the constant self-declaration of 'the museum in crisis' is already the whole 20th century old. Time and again museums are attacked, closed down and reopened or reformulated again, like a constant amnesia, a tantalization. Why are we doing this? Why are we occupied all the time with collecting, storing, showing, destroying, and collecting again? And why don't we manage to either accept the museum as a tomb, a storage place, strange, maybe. Or, if we do not accept it, why are we then not doing something about it? Do we

really like to be in a continuous crisis? Or are we just void ourselves, do we not know what to do, are we leading an empty life in our own time, which does not allow us to be generous to other times, because they remind us that we are mortal, and that we are just a number, or less, in a long line of history?

'Tomb furniture achieved apparently contradictory ends in discarding old things all the while retaining them, much as in our storage warehouses, and museum deposits, and antiquarian storerooms.'<sup>1</sup>

'History is a facsimile of events held together by finally biographical information. Art history is less explosive than the rest of history, so it sinks faster into the pulverized regions of time. History is representational, while time is abstract; both of these artifices may be found in museums, where they span everybody's own vacancy. The museum undermines one's confidence in sense data and erodes the impression of textures upon which our sensations exist. Memories of 'excitement' seem to promise something, but nothing is always the result. Those with exhausted memories will know the astonishment. Visiting a museum is a matter of going from void to void. Hallways lead the viewer to things once called 'pictures' and 'statues'. Anachronisms hang and protrude from every angle. Themes without meaning press on the eye. Multifarious

nothings permute into false windows (frames) that open up into a variety of blanks. Stale images cancel one's perception and deviate one's motivation. Blind and senseless, one continues wandering around the remains of Europe, only to end in that massive deception 'the art history of the recent past'. Brain drain leads to eye drain, as one's sight defines emptiness by blankness.

Sightings fall like heavy objects from one's eyes. Sight becomes devoid of sense, or the sight is there, but the sense is unavailable. Many try to hide this perceptual falling out by calling it abstract. Abstraction is everybody's zero but nobody's nought. Museums are tombs, and it looks like everything is turning into a museum.

Painting, sculpture and architecture are finished, but the art habit continues. Art settles into a stupendous inertia. Silence supplies the dominant chord. Bright colors conceal the abyss that holds the museum together. Every solid is a bit of clogged air or space. Things flatten and fade. The museum spreads its surfaces everywhere, and becomes an untitled collection of generalizations that mobilize the eye'.<sup>2</sup>

1. George Kubler, THE SHAPE OF TIME: REMARKS ON THE HISTORY OF THINGS. First published in ART MAGAZINE, Feb 1967, excerpted from ROBERT SMITHSON, THE COLLECTED WRITINGS, edited by Jack Flam, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, Ltd. London; 1996 / Originally published in THE WRITINGS OF ROBERT SMITHSON, edited by Nancy Holt, New York University Press, 1979  
see also: www.robertsmithson.com



## BIG ENOUGH FOR A 17-STORY BUILDING



The crater at Entiwok Atoll (Marshall Islands), after the hydrogen test in November 1952, sloped down to a

maximum depth of 60 metres—roughly the height of a 17-story building. Elugelab, the test island, completely disappeared.

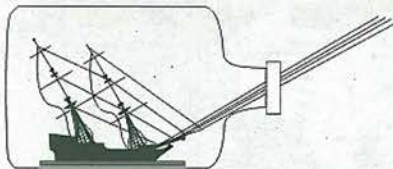
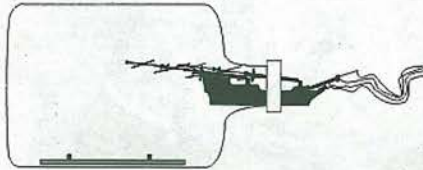
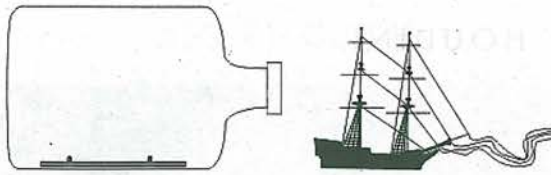


## HOUDINI



image: [www.americaslibrary.gov](http://www.americaslibrary.gov)

## SHIP IN A BOTTLE



There are many methods for putting a ship in a bottle. The secret of getting the ship in a bottle is the masts. The simplest and most widespread way of inserting a ship into a bottle is turned back masts with a long thread running out of the bottle neck. The mast has a hinge at the bottom which permits the mast to easily lie back. There are many different types of hinges which can be used. When you pull the thread that is running out of the bottle-neck, the mast is raised to a vertical position. It is necessary to cut this thread afterwards.

## SQUARE MELONS



## PAST IMPERFECT

'[...] Gradually but determinedly avoid being present at official or public "uptown" functions or gatherings related to the "art world" in order to pursue investigation of total personal & public revolution. Exhibit in public only pieces which further sharing of ideas & information related to total personal & public revolution.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From: GENERAL STRIKE PIECE (started Feb. 8, 69) by Lee Lozano

Many of the early conceptual artists working in the '60s and '70s were acutely aware of the art system within which they wanted to operate, and Lee Lozano (1939-1999) was no exception. Lozano adopted a far more personal approach than many others and allowed herself to be guided by her own personal circumstances. Her text pieces reflect a rigorous conceptual art practice that was consistently developed in her 'resistance works', from GENERAL STRIKE PIECE to BOYCOTT WOMEN through to her final DROP OUT PIECE, at which point she ultimately stepped outside of the art world.

The consequence of this artistic and radical act is that her work has as good as vanished from the annals of art history and her oeuvre has for a long time remained hidden. It seemed that at the time at which Lee Lozano became the subject and object of her own art, conceptual art was increasingly moving towards the disappearance or 'dematerialization' of the art object and there was only one logical, and maybe inevitable, option that was totally in line with her previous practice: to disappear off the scene.

In 2001 we were invited by Büro Friedrich (Berlin) to present our work alongside text pieces by Lee Lozano<sup>2</sup>. While researching her work it became painfully apparent how little of Lozano's life, work, and thought had survived. A couple of lines in the GLOBAL CONCEPTUALISM<sup>3</sup> catalogue, Lucy Lippard's SIX YEARS: THE DEMATERIALIZATION OF THE ART OBJECT<sup>4</sup>, and Dan Graham's ROCK MY RELIGION<sup>5</sup>, plus some articles in ART IN AMERICA and ARTFORUM is all that we could find on her ten-year art career. THE DALLAS OBSERVER published an article in response to her death, mentioning: 'Lee Lozano was among the most celebrated conceptual artists of the 1960s. So why is she buried in an unmarked grave in Grand Prairie?'<sup>6</sup>

Lozano's physical disappearance may have caused a disappearance from the art world as a system of commodities, but it did not mean that she had completely vanished from the world. Her work forms a hidden part of art history and its discourse, which is re-

<sup>2</sup> This exhibition INSERT (2001) was the starting point for research into the similarities and differences between the artistic practices of the 1960s and today. Three public meetings with young artists, curators and collectors who were active players in the art field of the '60s and '70s, and a curator and artist who take the premises of conceptual art as a tool for their artistic approach, were set up to emphasize the relationship between radicalism and the consequences of conceptual art.

<sup>3</sup> GLOBAL CONCEPTUALISM: POINTS OF ORIGIN, 1950s-1980s, edited by Philomena Mariani, published by Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1999

<sup>4</sup> SIX YEARS, THE DEMATERIALIZATION OF THE ART OBJECT FROM 1966 TO 1972, edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard, published by University of California press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 1997

<sup>5</sup> ROCK MY RELIGION, WRITINGS AND ART PROJECTS, 1965-1990, by Dan Graham, edited by Brian Wallis, published by M.I.T., 1993

<sup>6</sup> In the four years since this research began, however, Lee Lozano received more and more attention through exhibitions, texts in magazines and hits on the internet (hits with Google increased from circa 4 to more than 662).

emerging today. Her artistic estate – which includes her early drawings and paintings as well as her more radical instruction pieces – has only recently become represented by Hauser & Wirth, one of the most influential players on the art market. To withdraw from the system is apparently much more difficult than to stay in it.

(“QUOTE”): SOUND OF “MAY” FADING IN BACKGROUND, FOLLOWED BY SOUND OF “ALSO SPEECH SAATHINSTR”(S. STRAUSS) FOLLOWED BY SOUND OF “THE BLUE DANUBE” (J. STRAUSS) – SOUNDTRACK, BOOK (S. NUBRICH)

GENERAL STRIKE PIECE (STARTED FEB. 8, '69)\*

GRADUALLY BUT DETERMINEDLY AVOID BEING PRESENT AT OFFICIAL OR PUBLIC “UPTOWN” FUNCTIONS OR GATHERINGS\* RELATED TO THE “ART WORLD” IN ORDER TO PURSUE INVESTIGATION OF TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION. EXHIBIT IN PUBLIC ONLY PIECES WHICH FURTHER SHARING OF IDEAS & INFORMATION RELATED TO TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION.\*\*

IN PROCESS AT LEAST THROUGH SUMMER, '69.

\* WITHDRAWAL FROM 3-MAN SHOW COMPILED BY RICHARD BELLAMY, GOLDBOWSKY GALLERY, 1078 MADISON AVE.

† DATE OF LAST VISIT TO UPTOWN GALLERIES FOR PROMISE OF ART – FEB. 13, 69

“ “ “ “ “ A MUSEUM – MARCH 29, 69

“ “ “ “ “ UPTOWN GALLERY OPENING – MARCH 15, 69

“ “ “ “ “ A BAR – APRIL 5, 69

“ “ “ “ “ ATTENDANCE AT A CONCERT – APRIL 10, 69

“ “ “ “ “ FILM SHOWING – APRIL 4, 69

“ “ “ “ “ AN “EVENT” – APRIL 10, 69

“ “ “ “ “ A BIG PARTY – MARCH 15, 69

‡ TERMS OF TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION SET FORTH IN BRIEF STATEMENT READ AT OPEN PUBLIC MEETING, ART WORKERS SOLIDATION, SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS, APRIL 10, 69. FURTHER PARTICIPATION IN ANY WORKERS SOLIDATION OR ANY OTHER GROUP DECLINED AS PART OF GENERAL STRIKE PIECE. THIS INCLUDES ARTISTS AGAINST THE EXPRESSWAY GROUP & OTHERS.

§ FIRST PIECE EXHIBITED AT ART/PEACE EVENT, N.Y. SHAREPEACE FESTIVAL, PUBLIC THEATER, MARCH 5, 69. GRASS PIECE # 1 AND GRASS PIECE EXHIBITED IN NUMBER 7 SHOW COMPILED BY LUCY LIPKARD, PULLA COOPER, MAY 18, 69. INVESTMENT PIECE # CASH PIECE, IN LANGUAGE III SHOW, DNAM GALLERY, MAY 24, 69.

LEE LOZANO, JUNE 12, 69.

Lee Lozano, UNTITLED (GENERAL STRIKE), handwritten version, February 8, 1969  
courtesy: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. /  
Alexander A. Goldfarb Contemporary Art Acquisition Fund

Still, one may ask: what is radical about living out artistic concepts that are completely invisible? Do radical positions in the arts have any effect on the way in which we experience reality? Or is the total fusion of art and life really just a radical concept that does not have any impact on our living and thinking? In this way a radical practice becomes neither part of an everyday reality nor inscribed into history. Nevertheless, we would like to speculate that such radical events and choices are picked up later to generate change in current constellations. Perhaps they do not immediately influence reality, but hold on to a potential role to become part of a future discourse.

The silence around Lozano's work was 'deafening'. Are some people such a pain in the ass that nobody misses them? Was her approach perhaps too radical, too disturbing for the existing order,

7 The artist performs a function, the writer an activity. Every artist is eventually digested by the artistic institution, unless they cease to identify their being with that of language: this is why so few artists renounce object making, for that is literally to kill themselves, to die to the being they have chosen; and if there are such artists, their silence echoes like an inexplicable conversation. It is obviously insufficient to repeat empty slogans: 'the artist has disappeared'. Rather, we should reexamine the empty space left by the artist's disappearance; we should attentively observe, along its gaps and fault lines, its new demarcations, and the reapportionment of this void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance'. from: an anonymous writer in SWITCH (<http://switch.sjsu.edu/web/art.online/matt.links/matt.art.cadre17.html>) is an electronic journal, by the CADRE Institute at San Jose State University. Published by graduate students who foster a critical viewpoint on issues and developments wherever crossovers between art and technology occur.

8 Cases of untimely death, like Smithson, Matto-Clark, Bas Jan Ader, Jimmy Hendrix, Janice Joplin, Jim Morrison...and radical disappearances 'affirm a romantic cliché of the '60s as a period of mortal risk and heroic sacrifice. The figure of the tragic artist who gave all for his or her art is appealing, playing into the nagging suspicion that our culture is a simulacrum of another more real [...] and confirming Smithson's entropic prediction of the triumph of the spectacle over high art, or inauthenticity over authenticity.' from: IMPURE THOUGHTS. By James Meijer. THE ART OF SAM DURANT, ARTFORUM April 2000

or too difficult to fit in that it became more convenient to not speak about her at all? After all, when things are not brought out on the surface they appear not to be there, and no questions are asked. The will to communicate and inform (Lozano's DIALOGUE PIECE is crucial here in the way it presents meticulous recordings) paradoxically did not become part of a public discourse. In spite of the extreme control Lozano exerted through her work, it ended up in final silence, and subsequently created a lack of discourse, an empty space, a vacuum.<sup>7</sup> To address disappearance is to enable that which was absent to become present. The presence or absence of knowledge and information does influence our daily lives, it constitutes collectiveness and publicity.

PAST IMPERFECT takes its title from C. Carnes' book of the same title which looks at the relation between history and the movies, describing how the spectacularization of reality can take over perception, thus making what actually happened disappear. Analogue to the book—which explores 'life according to the movies'—PAST IMPERFECT explores the relations between the radical output of the conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s and everyday life, gradually moving on to include how radical ideas from the past are linked to those of today. This exploration would like to be free from nostalgia, romanticism or idolization of people and periods.<sup>8</sup>

1ST WK AUGUST, 71

DECIDE TO BOYCOTT WOMEN.  
THROW LUCY LIPKARD'S ~~BOOK~~ 2ND LETTER ON REFUNCT FILE, UNANSWERED.  
DO NOT GREET ROCHELLE BASS IN STORE.

2ND WK AUGUST, 71

PAULINE TAVINS CALLS AUG 11. TELL HER I AM BOYCOTTING WOMEN  
AS AN EXPERIMENT THRU ART DEFECT THAT AFTER THAT  
"COMMUNICATION WILL BE BETTER THAN EVER!"

PEYOTE TRIP AUG 10 71: PURIFICATION  
OF THE UNCONSCIOUS\*. I BEAT THE SAND WITH JANE'S  
PUSSY/WILLOW WHIP.  
I STOP HOLDING ON TO WALTER DE MARIA. \*DEEPBRAIN

AUG 12 71  
IM FUCKIN UP BAD, MAKIN MISTAKES. ONE HOUR LATE TO MEET  
BELLAMY HERE, I MISSED HIM (HE LEAVES NOTE) IT'S MY DEEPBRAIN  
RESISTANCE TO... WHAT? BELLAMY? KELSEY? DO I WANT TO LOSE  
MY LOFT FOR ACTION? UTTER CLAUSTROPHOBIA IN TIME/SPACE OF PRESENT.  
I MISSED HIM ALL LAST WEEK TOO.  
ALSO FUCKED UP WITH BUSINESS COMPATIBILITY BOOK.

EXPERIMENT: WRITE TO PEOPLE IN ATTEMPT TO  
COMMUNICATE AFTER MERCURY GOES RETROGRADE AUG 13.  
GOING TO ROOF LOOKING AT MARS & (STRAIGHT) QUARTER  
MOON, STARS & NEIGHBOORHOOD CALMS ME.

BROOM WEEK IN HALIFAX: THE MAGIC WORD TO CANCEL SPELLS  
IF ANYONE TRIES TO LAY A SPELL ON YOU, OR TO COUNTERACT A  
WITCH'S POWER; YELL: ORTHOGRAPHY!

Lee Lozano, BOYCOTT WOMEN PIECE, 1971  
courtesy: The Estate of Lee Lozano, Hauser & Wirth, London / Zürich

The way in which individual radical actions influence and shape the public arena have not been limited to the field of art. In all corners of life, politics, literature, intelligence, and science, radical steps – even if they initially seem to have disappeared in oblivion – turn out to have equal importance. Everyday we are confronted with events, choices and gestures in the world, which we perceive radical and therefore have shaped our research. These have made this archival research more profound, more penetrating, and it forced us to look beyond radical positions in art only.

PAST IMPERFECT is not a scientific inquiry but an exploration from a rather individual point of view, guided by curiosity, amazement and suspicion, thus accepting the risk of being totally incomplete or overly thorough. One cannot escape the question as to where the difference lies between individual and political radicality, and to what consequences individual action might have for the public realm, community or society at large. Through exploring, asking questions, trying to find relations, wondering about differences and sameness, an understanding of the world and its radical issues seems somehow more important than a constant line-up of false or short-term conclusions. The refusal to participate, to have, to be and to (inter)act can be seen negatively but also as a source, as a possibility, an opening to an alternative approach. The difficulty with Lee Lozano is that her disappearance did not allow the generation of an aesthetic; we cannot build aesthetics on someone who is not coming back. But her work still exists! It's only the mediation of it that is absent. Aesthetics cannot be developed if not mediated, if not being talked or written about. It won't be negotiated, nor considered. It will get lost.

Yet, according to the world of TAZ<sup>9</sup>, refusal can be a purposeful 'tactics of disappearance'. The disappearance is 'beyond definition, beyond control, beyond understanding, beyond naming...'<sup>10</sup> and beyond owning. The refusal of visibility and of all mediation is a refusal to become spectacular, a refusal to become a commodity.

Perhaps after all, the choice to disappear is romantic, adventurous and even utopian; who would not want to be liberated, revolutionary, beyond control? Still, it is here, in between total visibility and disappearance, where radicalism has potential if one wants to create change.

<sup>9</sup> From: THE TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONE, by Hakim Beji, pp. 130-133

<sup>10</sup> Idem

## Casco Issues #9:

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