

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...

LISTENING STATION BLACK MARKET

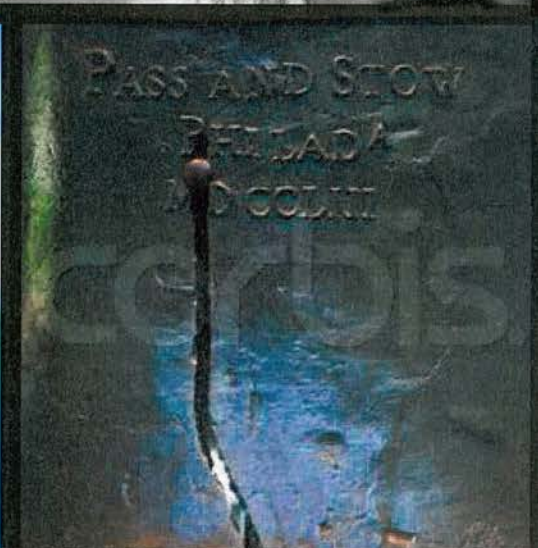
Stevan Vucovic

NEVER TRUST A PRETTY FACE

MELATONINE

THE PHILADELPHIA EXPERIMENT

CASCO ISSUES N°9



LISTENING STATION



Listening station, Menwith Hill, photo Bik Van der Pol

The listening station in Menwith Hill, northern England, was installed by the (American) NSA (National Security Agency). This listening station is part of a large network of communication satellites and stations throughout the world. Any type of electronic communi-

cation can be intercepted, received, deciphered, classified and filed, thanks to an exceptional informatics system. This includes telecommunications of a military, strategic or diplomatic nature, as well as information of a commercial, industrial, financial, scientific nature,

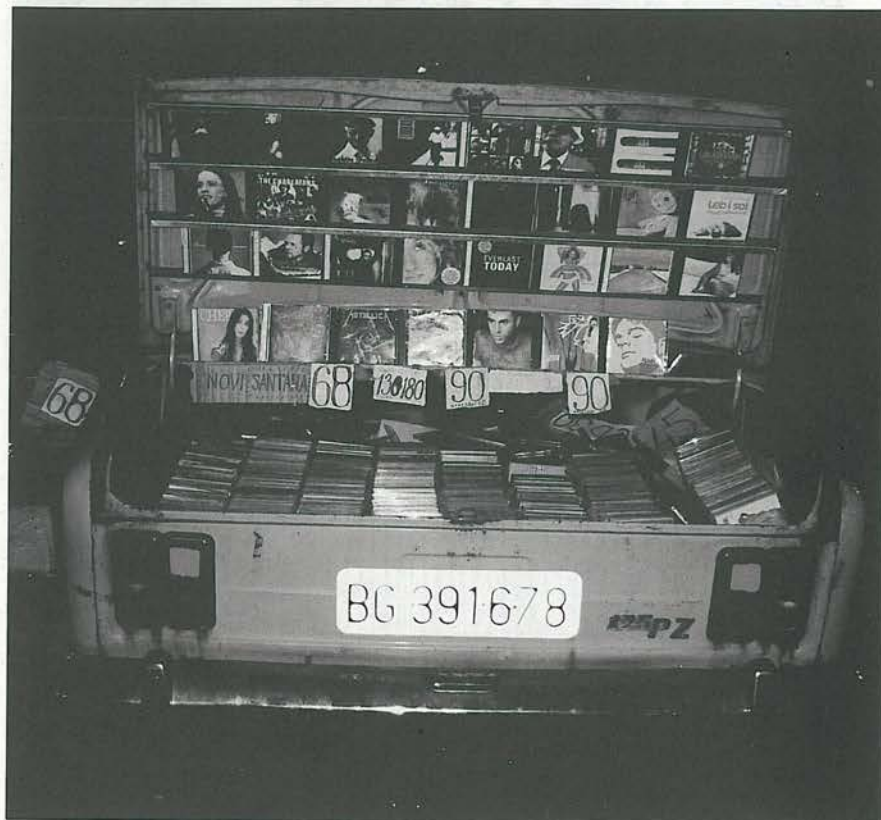
and private calls, which are all under surveillance. The NSA has access to two billion messages. It is estimated that more than ten thousand conversations are reported daily.

<http://www.mail-archive.com/kominform@lists.eunet.fi/msg00693.html>
<http://www.fas.org/irp/nsa/>





BLACK MARKET



CD market on Boulevard King Aleksandar (previously called Boulevard of Revolution) photo: Ana Dzokic, Belgrade, 2000

I am quite attached to cinema as a specific space for viewing films, with some nostalgia for my formative teenage years, which were largely spent in the cinema of the film museum in Belgrade, which, at that time had the third largest film collection in the world. These days the majority of the films that I see are on a computer screen, which is mainly due to the fact that these films are sourced through spontaneous digital file sharing, from mp3 music files to dvx film files, jpeg images and txt data books and texts. Despite strict anti-piracy legislation, these networks still exist locally in Belgrade, and in its surrounding region, amongst a wide range of individuals and groups who are affiliated to contemporary culture, and who sample this material as fuel for their daily existence.

In fact, not only locally but worldwide, the flows of digital data are much more driven by a multitude of pro-active users and popular protocols than determined by legislation, ownership or the new global rules of corporations. This particular film sharing community is not just about nineties Napster ideology, it is more about having one to one contact with a range of others that have completely different lifestyles and connections, but share an affinity to the history of film and contemporary film production. It is about temporary communication that is materialized through the exchange of a fetish object, such as a disk containing a rip-off DVD film, or a bootleg recording from a cinema, sometimes dubbed with a strange language. All of these have a certain aesthetic that might easily get lost when CDs and DVDs become replaced by developed data carriers in a few years time. Recently there have been changes in the ethnological aspects of these exchange rituals. Until a year ago, while street vendors were tolerated to sell illegal copies of films, music, etc, these communities did not exist in a full sense. Nowadays, when one can get a prison sentence for even distributing a small number of copies of something under corporate copyright, there is much more trust and solidarity required, thus this has become more communitarian than any of other-types of exchange around film.

The list that I have compiled is not aiming to constitute a canonical body of historical films that address the topic of history or to disclose hidden traces of histories we might learn from. It has a wide body of sources, which stem from what William Burroughs called 'the image virus'—the addictive nature of certain types of narratives and representational schemes, through which we imagine history, as well as contemporary life. Slavoj Zizek once wrote that what Classic mythology was for the Greeks and the Romans—in the sense of framing the realm of their imaginary and offering the topology of common places for the every discourse of the times (and the romantic world of Freud, with his Oedipus and Electra complexes is still a reference to that)—is today the mythology of Hollywood and non-Hollywood film production. Quite a number of these films are part of the culture industry. I did not select the most experimental or the most innovative films (even though *Intolerance*, *BRONENOSETS POTYOMKIN* and *TRIUMPH DES WILLENS* are definitely, at least technically, some of the most innovative films in the history of film), but scanned a reference list of my own, which is what I would go through if I were to try and make a film in a historical genre. Some of these films I hate (in general, for instance, I completely dislike comedies), but find them magnificent in the way that they

treat some of the common topics of film mythology and especially historical mythology in film. In that respect, I often find myself identified with the character of General George Patton in the film of Franklin J. Schaffner, stating during the battle with Rommel's tank brigades: 'Rommel, you magnificent bastard, I read your book!'...

We have to see all of the canonical films of the cultural industry if we want to fight it in any respect... it is these magnificent bastards whose films we have to see if we want to confront them in the struggle against cultural hegemony, and sometimes even for a trace of visibility in a cultural field that continues to become increasingly commercialized... A good example of a way in which altered histories could easily be made out of the culture industry's canonical and highly ideologically loaded films is Diane Nerwen's video: THE GREAT YIDDISH LOVE/DIE GROSSE JIDDISCHE LIEBE, which operates inside a dialectic of sampled footage and music, including a dialogue between Marlene Dietrich and Zarah Leander which never occurred in real time, but was produced as a montage of their film roles, packed into a melodrama of lesbian Yiddish love in Nazi Germany...

So, here is the randomly gathered list, arranged according to the year of production:

Stevan Vucovic



1. JUDITH OF BETHULIA,
D.W. Griffith, 1914



2. BIRTH OF A NATION,
D.W. Griffith, 1915



3. INTOLERANCE,
D.W. Griffith, 1916



4. STACHKA,
Sergei M. Eisenstein, 1925



5. BRONENOS
POTYOMKIN,
Sergei Eisenstein, 1925



6. LA PASSION DE JEANNE
D'ARC, Karl Dreyer, 1928



7. GOLD DIGGERS OF 1933,
Mervyn LeRoy, 1933



8. TRI PESNI O LENINE,
Dziga Vertov, 1934



9. TRIUMPH DES WILLENS,
Leni Riefenstahl, 1935



10. SANTA FE TRAIL,
Michael Curtiz, 1940



11. THE GREAT DICTATOR,
Charles Chaplin, 1940



12. MRS. MINIVER,
William Wyler, 1942



13. BATAAN,
Tay Garnett, 1943



14. GUADALCANAL DIARY,
Lewis Seiler, 1943



15. HENRY V,
Laurence Olivier, 1944



16. OPFERGANG,
Veit Harlan, 1944



17. PAISSÀ,
Roberto Rossellini, 1946



18. GERMANIA ANNO ZERO,
Roberto Rossellini, 1948



19. SANDS OF IWO JIMA,
Allan Dwan, 1949



20. SENSO,
Luchino Visconti, 1954



21. NUIT ET BROUILLARD,
Alain Resnais, 1955



22. THE
COMMANDMENTS,
Cecil B. DeMille, 1956



23. BEN-HUR,
William Wyler, 1959



24. SPARTACUS,
Stanley Kubrick, 1960



25. IVANOVO DETSTVO,
Andrei Tarkovsky, 1962



26. ZULU,
Cy Endfield, 1964



27. THE LION IN WINTER,
Anthony Harvey, 1968



28. Z,
Costa Gavras, 1969



29. PATTON,
Franklin J. Schaffner, 1970



30. THE ASSASSINATION
OF TROTSKY,
Joseph Losey, 1972



31. SUTJESKA,
Stipe Delic, 1973



32. JEDER FÜR SICH
UND GOTT GEGEN ALLE,
Werner Herzog, 1974



33. THE MESSAGE,
Moustapha Akkad, 1976



34. THE MARRIAGE
OF MARIA BRAUN,
R.W. Fassbinder, 1979



35. CALIGULA,
Tinto Brass, 1979



36. GALLIPOLI,
Peter Weir, 1981



37. ZELIG,
Woody Allen, 1983



38. DANTON,
Andrzej Wajda, 1983



39. ROSA LUXEMBURG,
Margarethe von Trotta, 1986



40. THE LAST EMPEROR,
Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987



41. JFK,
Oliver Stone, 1991



42. MALCOLM X,
Spike Lee, 1992



43. SCHINDLER'S LIST,
Steven Spielberg, 1993



44. NIXON,
Oliver Stone, 1995



45. NASSER 56,
Mohamed Fadel, 1996



46. HAMSUN,
Jan Troell, 1996



47. ASOKA,
Santosh Sivan, 2001



48. GANGS OF NEW YORK,
Martin Scorsese, 2002



49. HERO,
Yimou Zhang, 2002



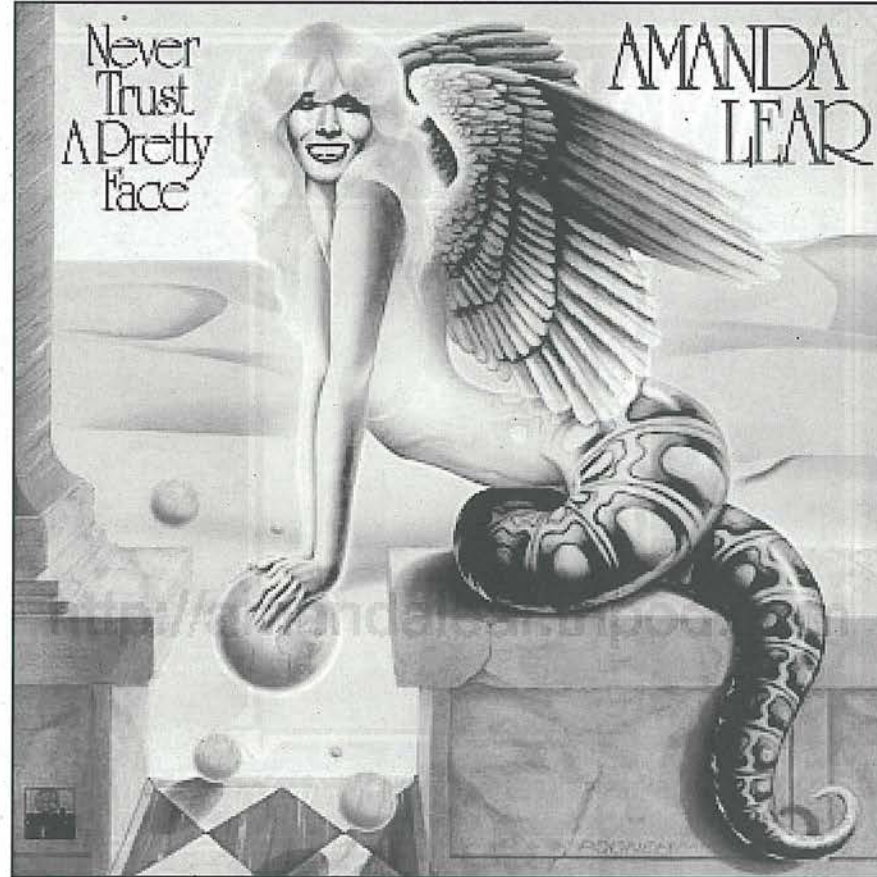
50. KINGDOM OF HEAVEN,
Ridley Scott, 2005

NEVER TRUST A PRETTY FACE

The singer Amanda Lear eliminated mirrors from her apartment, replacing them with an integrated video circuit, so the light of her image followed after her like the most intimate of companions (like her shadow, you could say). If the aging Castiglione had veiled the mirrors in her home to avoid witnessing the progress of her decrepitude, Amanda would not have to fear meeting her reflection, she'll just stop taping the images on the day of her choice and the screens will return her eternally young image, in an apartment where time would stop, the movable property of the living would no longer be distinct from immovable real estate.

The means of communication would become a synthesizer capable of mixing body and field in her house, the video game becoming a way of playing indefinitely with everyday life, accomplishing Baudelaire's notion: 'Countless layers of ideas, images, feelings have fallen successively on your brain as softly as light. It seems that each buries the preceding, but none has really perished.'

From: THE AESTHETICS OF DISAPPEARANCE, Paul Virilio, 1991, Semiotext(e).
First published in French in 1980.





MIROIRS

Words and music: Amanda Lear,
 from: NEVER TRUST A PRETTY FACE, 1978

Tu dis que tu as peur des miroirs.
 Tu as peur de l'œil des caméras.
 Au lieu de t'enfermer dans le noir.
 Arrête donc ton cinéma.

Miroir reflétant quelques plis.
 Qui sont là même quand tu ne ris pas.
 Tes cheveux deviennent-ils un peu gris.
 Tes yeux ont-ils perdus de leur éclat.

Et oui ton corps si désirable,
 Se flétrira tandis que moi.
 Je suis une poupée gonflable.
 Mais toi tu n'es qu'humain: tant pis pour toi.

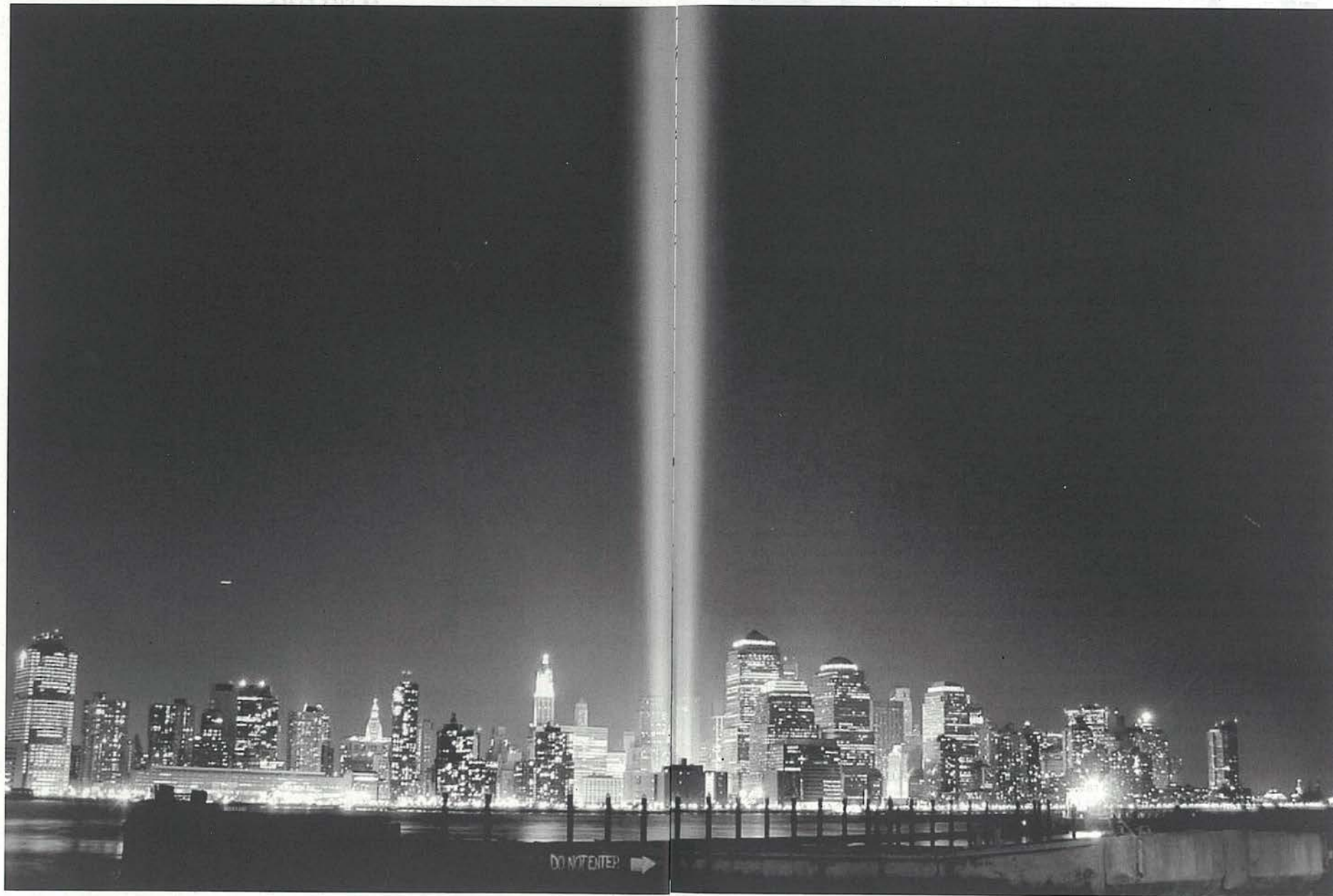
Mes lèvres sont en polyester.
 Elles ne se gercent pas l'hiver.
 Mes yeux sont peints couleurs de l'arc-en-ciel.
 Ne clignote jamais au soleil.



Pourquoi ta peau n'est-elle pas synthétique?
 Plastique comme ces poupées gonflées.
 Mes cheveux en nylon ou en acrylique.
 Evidemment défense de fumer.

Les miroirs ne font pas tant d'histoires.
 Ils reflètent sans réfléchir.
 Insensibles à ton désespoir.
 Résigne toi donc, résigne toi donc à vieillir.

Amanda Lear



9/11 monument, photo: www.glasgowfirstaid.org



MELATONIN

Night becomes day and day becomes night. History accelerates and the question about time, or the lack of it, can be resolved. 'You can't live in New York during the day, you can only live here at night' filmmaker Abel Ferrara says in the essay **THE BIG NIGHT** by Paul Virilio. Melatonin is the medicine that helps shift the days for the nights. Compressing and intensifying life, testing the borders of endurance, a continuous experiment, an enchanted pinball over the planet.

Melatonin is a natural hormone made by your body's pineal gland. The pineal gland lies at the base of the brain. And when the sun goes down, and darkness comes, the pineal gland 'goes to work.' As melatonin production rises, you begin to feel less alert. Body temperature starts to fall as well. Sleep seems more inviting. Then melatonin levels drop quickly with the dawning of a new day. Levels are so low during the day that scientists often have difficulty, detecting melatonin then.

Melatonin levels go hand in hand with the light-dark

cycle, not just for people, but as well for plants and animals to keep alert during the day. Melatonin production is also related to age. Children manufacture more melatonin than the elderly do. Melatonin production begins to drop at puberty.

THE PHILADELPHIA EXPERIMENT

The Philadelphia Experiment, otherwise known as Project Rainbow, has been a subject of long controversy and debate. It was an attempt by the US Navy to create a ship that could not be detected by magnetic mines and-or radar. There was also talk of invisibility projects and mind control experiments. The public will never know the truth behind this project.

On August 12th, 1943 the USS Eldridge with a full crew aboard reportedly underwent the Philadelphia Experiment. The men did not know what was to happen. The generators were fired up. The switches were thrown. The ships outline could be seen in the water. There was suddenly a blue flash and the ship disappeared entirely. No radio communication was possible. It was gone. In about three hours it came back. One of the masts was broken. Some personnel were partially



images from the movie
THE PHILADELPHIA EXPERIMENT, 1984

embedded in the deck. Others were fading in and out. Some disappeared entirely. Many were insane. They decided that there would be one more test without personnel. In late October 1943 the test occurred. The ship disappeared for twenty minutes. When it returned, they found equipment missing. At that point, the navy stripped the ship and stopped the project. The Eldridge served in the war and was turned over to Greece at the end of the war.
source: www.abovetopsecret.com/pages/philadelphia, www.crystalinks.com/philadelphia, www.viewzone.com/philadelphia

Casco Issues #9:
PAST IMPERFECT
Compiled & edited
by Bik Van der Pol
and Lisette Smits, 2005

Concept: Bik Van der Pol

Research: Liesbeth Bik,
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Editor-in-chief: Lisette Smits

Final editing: Emily Pethick

Print: Raddraaier, Amsterdam
Printed in the EU
Edition: 1000

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Casco / Lisette Smits
and Bik Van der Pol, ed.
ISSN 1385-9064
ISBN 3-86588-218-8

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PAST IMPERFECT has been
generously supported by:
Mondriaan Foundation,
Amsterdam; City Council
of Utrecht; Fonds voor
Beeldende Kunst, Vormgeving
en Bouwkunst, Amsterdam;
Prins Bernhard Fonds;
Cultuurfonds Andersson Elffers
Felix, Utrecht and CBK, Centre
for Visual Arts, Rotterdam

The project PAST IMPERFECT
by Bik Van der Pol was con-
ceived at Casco, office
for Art, Design and Theory
in November 2003.

Parts of the research have been published
earlier in: LIFE, ONCE MORE. FORMS
OF REENACTMENT IN CONTEMPO-
RARY ART, Sven Lütticken ed., Witte de
Wijth, Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam
2005. PAST IMPERFECT,
Bik Van der Pol, Seccession, Vienna, 2005

Photography colour pages (top to bottom):
Jason Hawkes
Joey Nigh
Helen King
Unknown
Unknown
all images taken from www.corbis.com