

Modern Lovers

Modern Lovers
Exhibition catalogue

C o n t e n t s :

Modern Lovers
Pil and Galia Kollektiv



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Introduction (an autobiography of
João Delgado in the third person)
sala-manca



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Op Hop Detonation: Introducing the
hyper-modern in contemporary music
Avi Pitchon



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+ Florian Balze, Bernd Behr, Claire Hooper, Jacob Dahl Jørgensen, Pil and Galia Kollektiv, Lapinu, David Mabb, Goshka Macuga, David Maljkovic, Gail Pickering, planning
to rock, sala-manca

Modern Lovers Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Well the old world may be dead
Our parents can't understand
But I still love my parents
And I still love the old world

Modern Lovers, "Old World"

In 1976, as punk rock was busy smashing the cultural rubble left behind by the second world war and rejecting the consumer society that had emerged from the ruins, one band bravely announced that it wanted no part in this destruction. Jonathan Richman's *Modern Lovers* sang about how they still loved the old world. Neither parents nor girlfriends could understand, but the decaying inner city with its false promises of progress still held a fascination for Richman, who claimed he wanted to keep his place in this arcane landscape. Punk's assault on culture was the logical conclusion of modernism's linear narrative of art as a force of innovation that must reject preceding artistic movements to establish new ones. Echoing the negations of Dada, it set out to put an end to this narrative, an end to culture. It is partly because of this inherently destructive and totalising side of Modernism that it has come under harsh critique in the post modern era. Nevertheless, we are still caught up in the same

dialectic of progress, revolution and destruction. Post modernism has failed to unseat our desire for the revolutionary moment, even as it has been co-opted to the degree of meaninglessness by the discourses of marketing and Capitalism.

The term 'reactionary modernism' has been applied by Jeffery Herf to the Weimar republic and the Nazi party's fraught alliance with science and simultaneous rejection of the enlightenment values from which it had evolved¹. More recently, writers like Kanishka Jayasuriya and John Gray² have observed that contemporary Anglo-American neo-liberalism is similarly engaged in a reactionary modernising project, imposing the free market everywhere as a kind of scientific, rational economics, while disposing of the universalistic values that are its logical conclusion: "Economic borders are opening for the movement of capital while political borders are closing to the movement of people"³. But if 'reactionary modernism' is not an oxymoron, then neither is a non-nostalgic appropriation, or retromodernism. In his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche describes 'historical man' as impelled towards the future by looking to the past⁴, and it is this kind of utopianism that must be recovered from modernism to counter the conservatism of its current neo-liberal incarnation.

In the introduction to his history of modernism, *Farewell to an Idea*, T. J. Clark imagines an archaeologist of the future stumbling upon a

painting by Malevich, a collage by Heartfield and so on, and attempting to interpret the twentieth century in retrospect⁵. In many ways, the culture we are currently living in is the culture of that archaeologist: we are retromodernists, living and reliving the ruins of the twentieth century as a collection of relics and rituals whose original meaning we are unable to understand or embrace. Unlike Clark's archaeologist, though, we do not seek to reconstruct the past from the evidence. We are not looking for truth and we make no pretence at scientific objectivity. Le Corbusier looked at the house as a machine, Mondrian reduced painting to a mathematical formula and Rodchenko designed uniforms for the proletariat, but we are more selective in our appropriation of their discourse, refraining from such wide enforcement. In a recent article relating to the Modernism exhibition at the V&A, J. G. Ballard has written about the performance anxiety that modernist architecture inspires through its expectation of rationality and clarity at all times⁶. We are no longer horrified by universalism. It has become so implausible that its exemplars are now empty stages for us to inhabit with our own subjectivity. We are truly modern lovers, driven by a love for the modern, a desire to make it our own.

Take a closer look at that geometric Mondrian, though, and a different picture emerges. It is easy

to forget what any major retrospective show reveals: that modernist art was seldom perfect. The Joseph Albers paintings that look so crisp on Tate Modern's exhibition poster are nothing of the sort in real life. The edges of the collaged paper cuttings stick out of the canvas, austere black and white silk printed images are smudged, the lines dividing a canvas according to some obscure equation are hand drawn. Nor was the approach to science as cold and objective as we like to think it was, the Suprematists were preoccupied with "non-objective feeling" and the fascination with the machine was often quite spiritual, art and research converging in the bizarre experiments of Nikolai Ladovski's psychotechnical laboratory. Modernism was only truly modern insofar as it functioned as a blueprint for cataclysmic change, as ideology rather than pragmatics. It's not a coincidence that the arrow is its graphic icon, always pointing towards, but never arriving at, a utopian plateau. Modernism is about becoming, not being, and as such, it is not interested in attaining resolution, which is why soon as they came into power and toiled to make this utopian blueprint a reality, the great modern ideologies stopped being modernist. In comparison, our own times seem to lack this sense of a projection towards an unmaterialised future. Art today presents us with a subjectivity that is a process of repression and remembrance, of chasing down

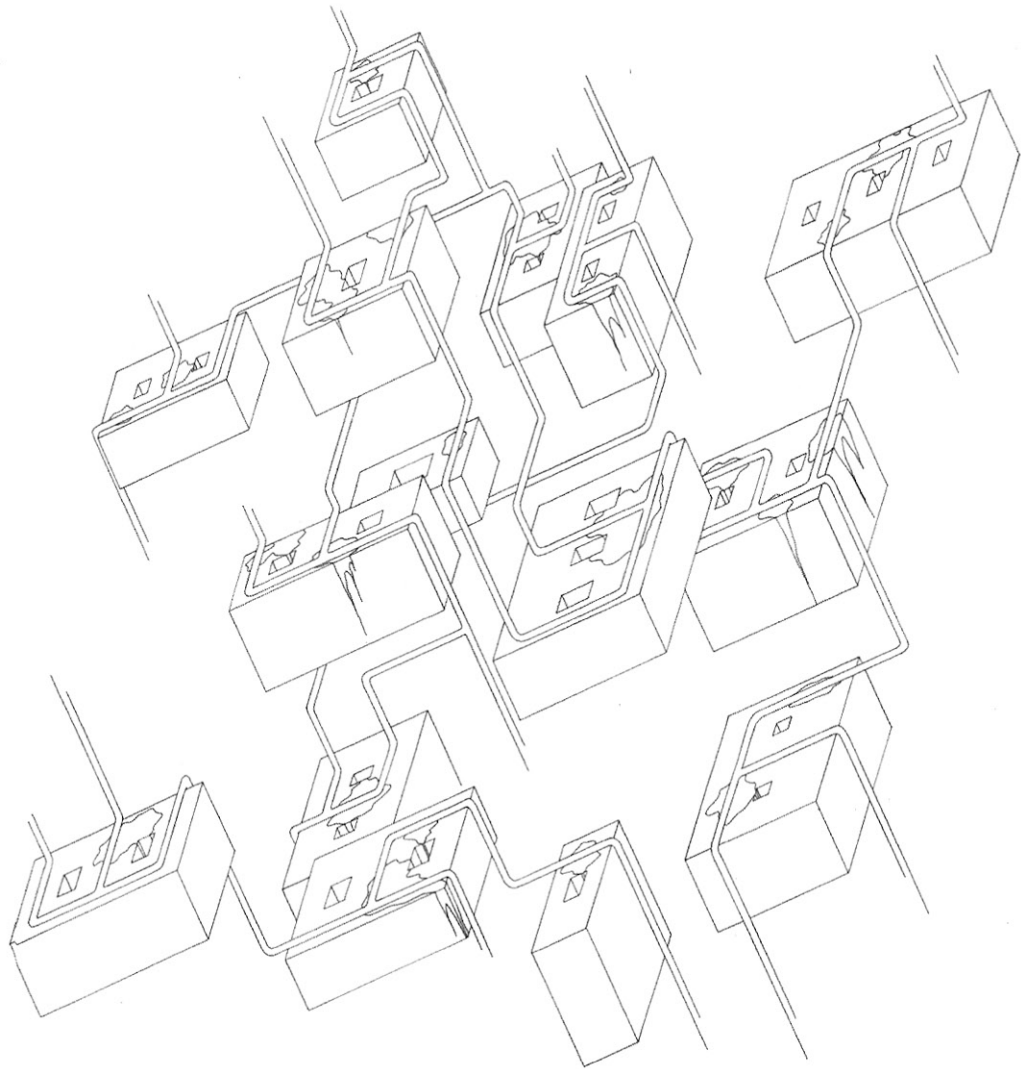
Fragments of ethereal memory, a nostalgia for cohesion. This is perhaps why so many artists and writers are again finding the modernist moment so irresistible, despite the negative connotations of totalitarian regimes. Suhail Malik, writing in the Showroom Annual documenting the gallery's New Moderns conference, identifies this renewed interest in the legacy of modernism with "the return of a certain faith in the power of transformation through cultural activities"⁷.

Rather than looking back at a better or simpler time, when the avant garde gesture was still a disruptive possibility, the artists in the exhibition Modern Lovers use the blueprints of utopia to look forward, inscribing their own arrows on their archeological findings. Like Jonathan Richman, they keep returning to modernism for something else. Instead of taking it at its word when it proffers revolution, they turn to it in search of reform, opting for negotiation and strategic repositioning instead of an outright rejection (as Régis Debray pointed out, the revolution revolutionises the counter-revolution). Still loving the old world and desiring a dialogue with the past, perhaps as an antidote to the eternal present of Capitalism, they are willing to engage with its aesthetics and ideas on equal ground. Leaving behind the ironic deconstructions of postmodernism, they find perspectives worth salvaging and juxtapose them with contemporary visual productions. Trading in the grand narratives of modernity for a more personal approach, they don't seek the

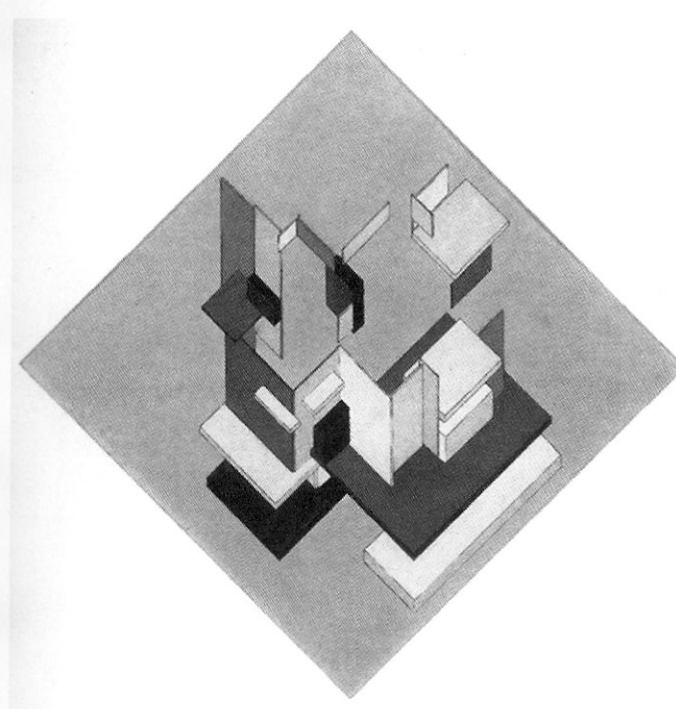
purity of form that drove the avant garde movements that inspire them but rather revel in adulteration, dilution and contamination of the past by the present.

Notes:

1. Herf, Jeffrey, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
2. Gray, John, *Al Qaeda and What It Means to Be Modern*, London: Faber and Faber, 2004.
3. Jayasuriya, Kanishka, "Howard, Tampa, and the Politics of Reactionary Modernisation", in *Australian Review*, 3/06.
4. Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Untimely Meditations* [R. J. Hollingdale - trans.], Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
5. Clark, T. J., *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 1.
6. Ballard, J. G., "A Handful of Dust", *The Guardian Review*, London: Guardian Unlimited, 20.3.06.
7. Malik, Suhail, "What is New About 'New Moderns'?", *The Showroom Annual 2004/5*, London: The Showroom Gallery, 2005, p. 53.

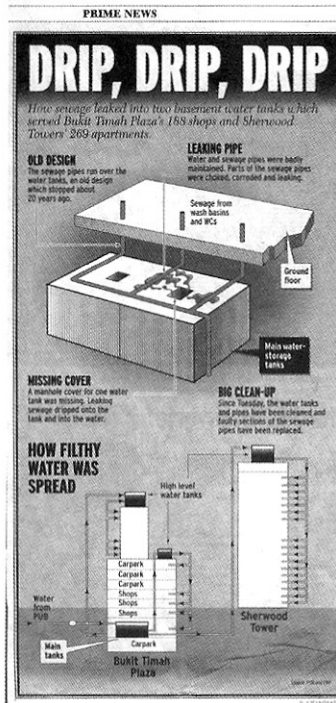


opposite:
Bernd Behr, *Septic Circuit*,
ink on vellum
48 cm x 48 cm



above:
Theo van Doesburg,
Contra-Construction
Project, Anamnetic,
1923, selected by
Bernd Behr

right:
The Straits Times,
Singapore, August
24, 2000, selected
by Bernd Behr



Arturo Maure

Delgado has not published a single poem under his name, but it has been claimed that he has published many poems and a few literary essays under the pseudonyms: Arturo Maure Rodriguez, Marian Loop,

Autobiography in the third person

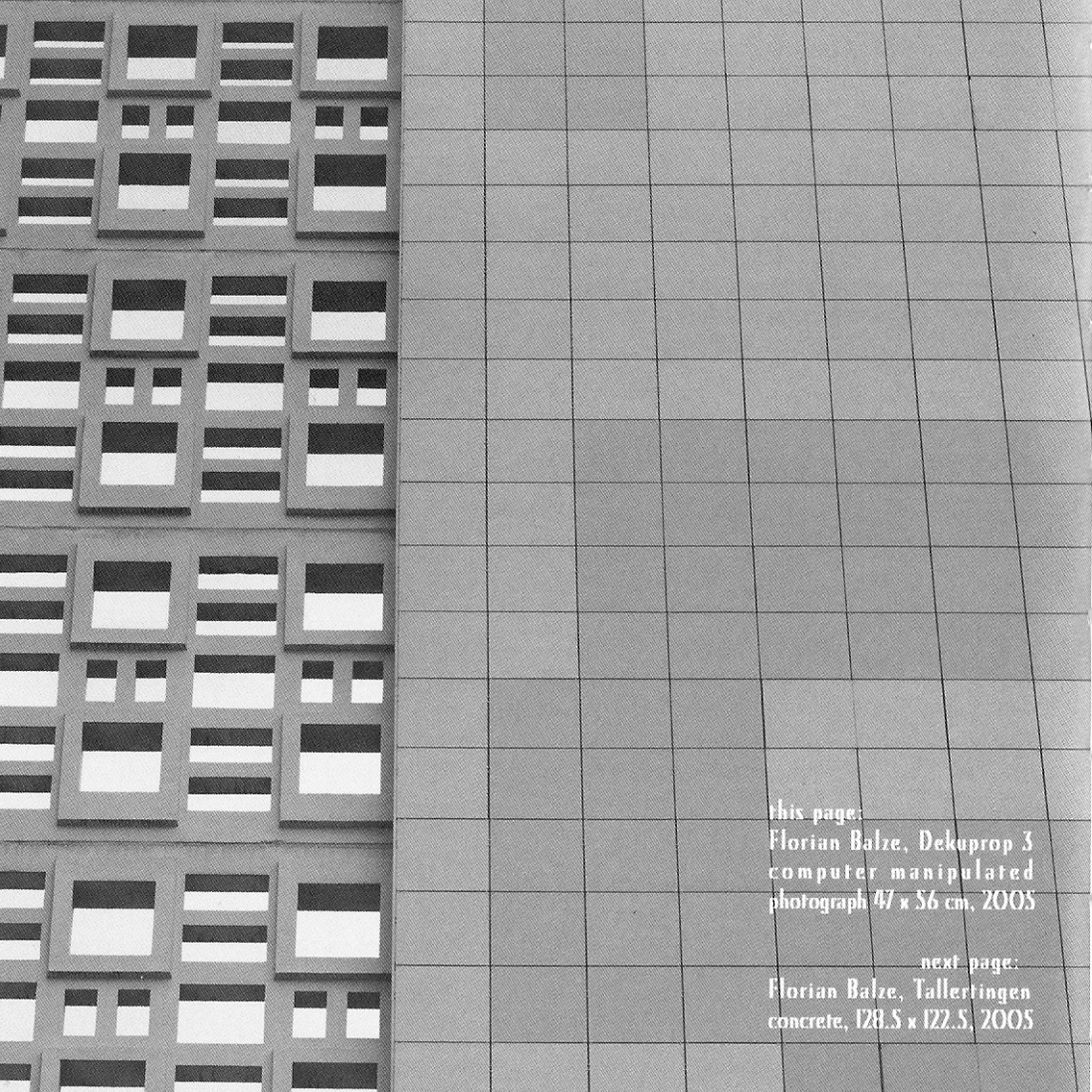
João Delgado, Portuguese poet. Was born or died in Lisbon. Lived for three days in Alcantara. On the fourth he joined the navy. Arrived with it in Buenos Aires. There he read the great poets of the twenties in the seventies, participated in evening art classes at municipal night schools, which urged him to quit poetry and the arts. It is said of him that one evening he discovered a memorial tablet in a square in the fourteenth quarter, that he jumped three times higher than his tall brother and that in the nights he collected what he threw out at noon.

João Delgado

76

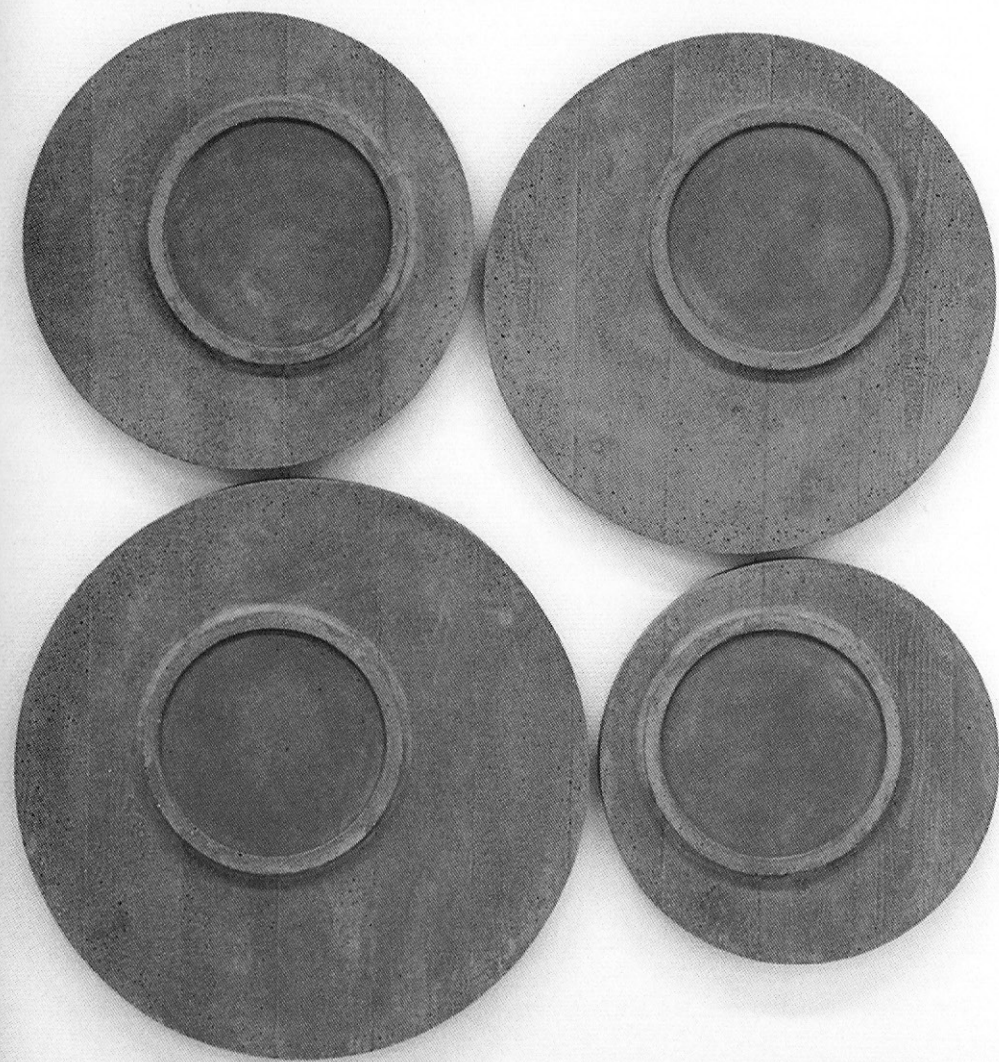
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this page:
Florian Balze, Dekuprop 3
computer manipulated
photograph 47 x 56 cm, 2005

next page:
Florian Balze, Tallertingen
concrete, 128.5 x 122.5, 2005



Delgado disappeared. It is said he went on to hunt elephants. We who knew him know this rumor is unfounded¹. We all recognized its literary origins. Some identify in this version the voice of Delgado, an indication that he is alive and well (that he managed to bypass the military dictatorship and Hemingway and steal the border).

Delgado was a multi-disciplinary artist. Among his many occupations — poet, installation artist, journalist, researcher, composer and collector of worthless objects. “Delgado’s many occupations can be interpreted as an attempt to strengthen the oppressed individual against the power of the oppressing collective” (Rodriguez). Delgado wrote in order to be forgotten, in order to dissolve into otherness. He was pursuing conciseness, or a multi-faceted anonymity. Delgado’s complete body of work has not been collected to this day, despite the efforts of Arturo Maure, his classic domino opponent (the author of this essay). It should be said here, without adding a footnote, that Maure, whose role model was Max Brod, devoted his life to the dissemination of Delgado’s work.

In his work, the Portuguese-Argentinean poet anticipated post modern art by more than thirty years, and, moreover, the school of post-realist research, which, he predicted, will evolve in the second decade of the twenty-first century. This discipline, he estimated, will rightly destroy his minor works (in the post realist sense of the word) which include this prediction itself. Neither the critics nor the academic world paid any attention

to Delgado’s work. The only instance of a discussion of his poetics is Rodriguez² research proposal for his doctoral thesis at the University of Buenos Aires (a proposal which was not accepted). Its topic was ‘the poetics of Delgado in light of shadow’. The author’s intent was to crown Delgado the first post-realist poet. “Delgado — a Great Poet” was the title of Rodriguez’s work. The starting point of his research was a rich metaphor, probably borrowed from the words of Delgado himself. These words were said of a volume of poetry by Moises Benedeto, chief executive of the Buenos Aires Electricity Company, which was handed out to all employees of the city’s company as a gift to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Benedeto’s becoming a money earning poet. Using the same urban metaphor, relating both to the aesthetic value of the word and to its market value, Rodriguez changed the intended name to turn the bitter simile into a compliment(!):

“The quality of Delgado’s writing is higher than that of the dearest nylon”.

The research proposal was accompanied by many drawings unrelated to the thesis, and presented to the public at a mass demonstration, which he organized in the spirit of May ’68, with the aim of displaying the force of Delgado’s poetry. At this demonstration, flags were flown bearing slogans such as:

1. For a comprehensive study of Delgado’s concise art.
2. We are all Portuguese poets.
3. Humour is still funny.
4. Po-et-ry is killing us³.

The relationship of these slogans to the political reality and their subversive power were a secret on everyone’s lips. During the demonstration, pamphlets were distributed, on which was printed on one side:

“At last we have discovered who turned the signified into the signifier: D.E.L.G.A.D.O.”

And on the other side:

“I am the synecdoche Rodriguez”

The most powerful point of the thesis was actually a quote about myself⁴ (in bold type):

One must point to the final stanza of the poem V-Ino

“No recuerdo el olor a vino, siquiera cuando bebo vino
No quiero ser victima de la metafora, beber de los espejos,
Cuando digo vino digo o quiero decir vino
Y cuando digo rosa quiero decir rosa o vino?”

I do not remember the scent of wine even when I drink wine /
I do not want to be a victim of metaphor, to drink from the mirrors /
When I say wine I say or wish to say wine /
And when I say rose I want to say rose or wine?

As a precedent and a continuation of the first stanza of Jorge Luis Borges’ El Golem

“Si (como el griego afirma en el Cratilo) el nombre es arquetipo de la cosa, en las letras de rosa esta la rosa y todo el Nilo en la palabra Nilo.”

If, (as that Greek in Cratylus did write), the name is but an archetype of things, in the four letters of a rose the rose exists and all the Nile in the word Nile.

The statement supporting the thesis arises from that of Borges, lover of parables:

“João Delgado’s literary talent surpasses that of João Delgado’s”⁵

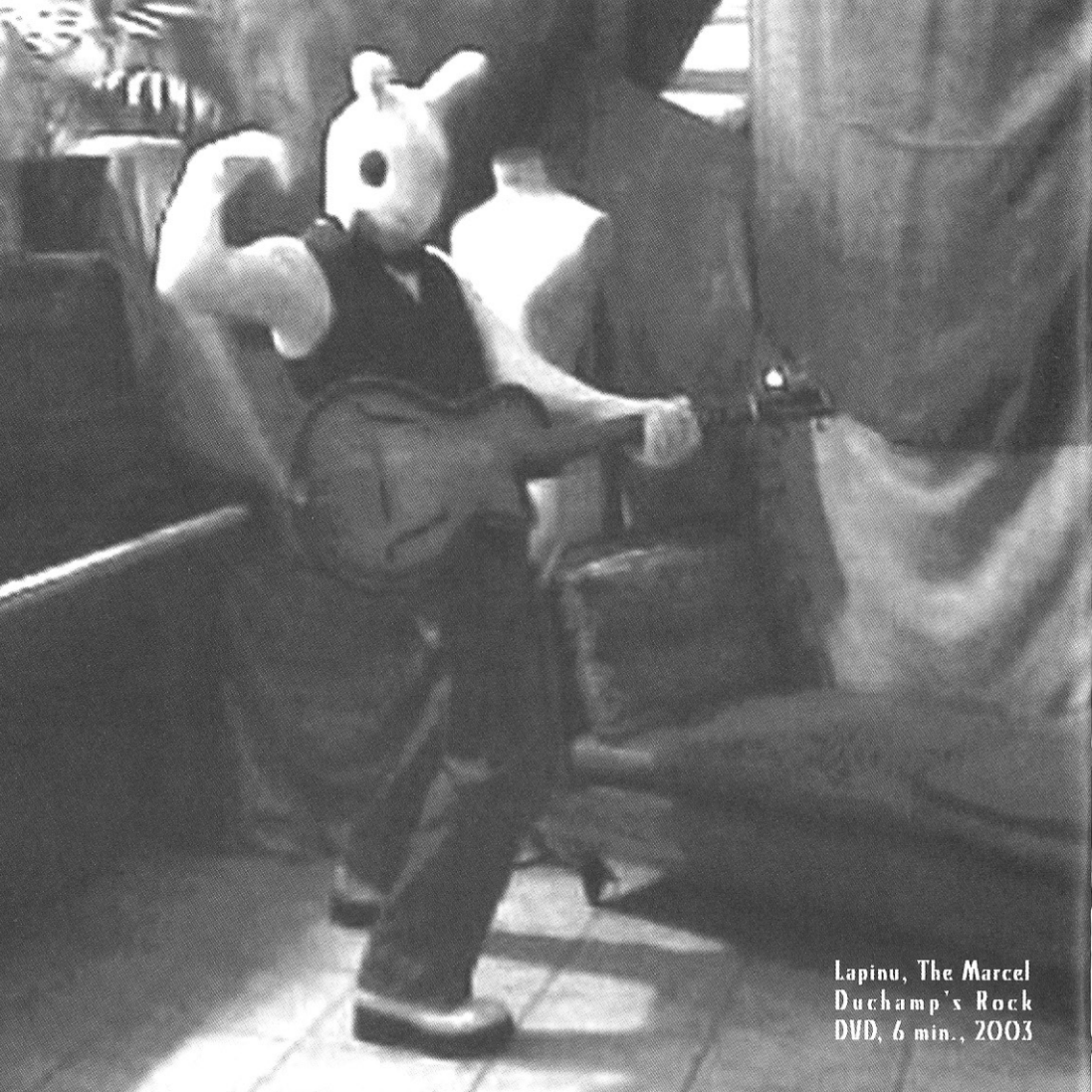


André Breton, holding a poster designed by Picabia for a Dada festival in Paris, 1920, selected by Lapinu

Thence my conclusion:

“It would not be an exaggeration to place the statue of Delgado amongst the statues of the great poets in the writers square.”

Rodriguez thought that his comparison to Borges, the great Argentinean writer, who won worldwide



Lapinu, The Marcel
Duchamp's Rock
DVD, 6 min., 2003

recognition outside Argentina, would, by the same logic, grant Delgado's poetry, which was also virtually unknown in Argentinean literary circles, international fame. Where Rodriguez's research proposal failed was in citing Delgado himself:

"Delgado is not a poet, Maure. The pen burdens me. The type writer is a violent and frightening world. Maure, you are wrong. (Delgado)"

This line, which in Rodriguez's opinion was the proof of the poet's greatness and supported his thesis, was his downfall. The reason was that according to the scholars of the Spanish language academia there is no place for transition between third and first person when speaking of the same person, both in poetry and in prose. Post realism was not yet established. This kind of transition was considered an affront to common sense. However, the negation of the transition from third to first person was nothing but an anticipation of the politics of the abolition of the independence of the singular and poetic individual over the past forty years in our land, at the very least.

p.s: Due to the political situation, I am unable to finish the article. I am of the opinion that were Delgado to read my words, he would say to me: "Maure, you are wrong." I must now go hunt elephants.

April 1976⁶

notes:

1. See Rodriguez, "Official Version", a hand-written article by Rodriguez, wherein the author develops the thesis negating the rumour claiming that the poet left to hunt elephants. The article is based on Delgado's story "The Elephant Stepped on the Bells", in which an elephant leaves the jungle for the big city and becomes a successful writer.

2. [editors' note]: Arturo Maure's pseudonym.

3. [editors' note]: in the original Spanish, "La po-cía nos mata", wordplay on the similarity between "poesía" and "policía".

4. See Arturo Maure, "Estudio nro. 2", *Críticas y ensayos* 25 (1963), pp. 15 - 53.

5. This wordplay is a reference to João Pinto Delgado, one of the poets of Portugal's *conuertos* who lived in the 16th century and was considered as important as Garcilaso de la Vega and Luis de Leon.

6. [editors' note]: in March 1976 the military forcibly takes control of Argentina. The article was written, judging by the signature, between a week and a month after this act.

Op Hop Detonation

Introducing the hyper-modern in contemporary music

Avi Pitchon

Have you ever noticed how music in sci-fi films - *Clockwork Orange* (record shop scene), *Star Wars* (Mos Eisley cantina scene), and *Buck Rogers* (dance ball scene) - attempted to predict the music of the future by taking '60's/'70's then-cutting edge lounge, easy listening and Moog synthesizer stereo sounds to different extreme logical conclusions of either utopian or dystopian proportions? Either regal, neo-classicist new wave (*Buck Rogers*) or trivial, populist bubble-gum pop (*Clockwork Orange*), and ultra-cheesy, speeded-up toy jazz (*Star Wars*). Uncannily enough, these films did, in fact, predict the future - but what they predicted was the contemporary appropriation of their own musical visions, because it is precisely this romantic naïveté that contemporary lounge, electro-pop and avant-pop music tries to recapture. Therefore, perhaps for the wrong reason, the fact remains that these films were correct about what music will be heard in the future. This non-linear conceptual (and who knows, perhaps actual) wormhole demonstrates the intensity of relations between modernism and the contemporary in music.

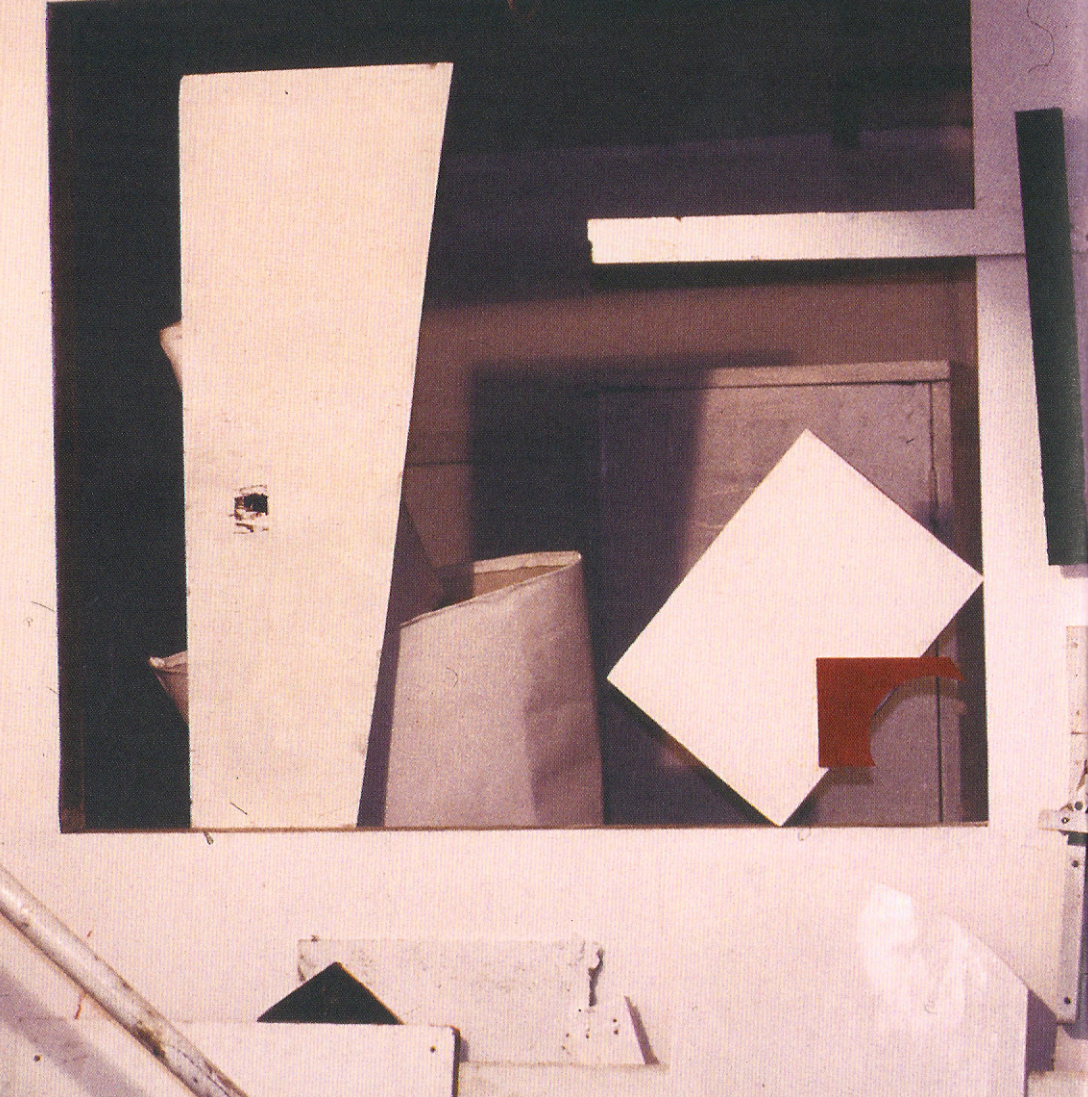
The band Stereolab seems like an ultimate postmodern test case in the sense of adopting the aura of the modernist past and using it in a contemporary context, whilst installing subtle

upgrades into it thus making it relevant in discourse. Stereolab not only pushed the aforementioned shingle, optimistically futuristic '60's sound to an extreme logical conclusion by playing (and worshipping) a range of analogue instruments lead by the Moog. They also adopted, to fetishistic levels, a parallel, positive aesthetic model and jargon of popular technological progress (as demonstrated in the latest developments in hi-fi sound reproduction). The image of the atom as popularised in the '50's and in Technicolour, abstract pop and op art of the '60's joined utopian, scientific post-war mumbo-jumbo culminating in the very band moniker, song titles like 'The Free Design' and the naming of their own record label 'Duophonic Ultra High Frequency Disks'. This setup backed lyrics with a strong, manifestational utopian flare discussing political and social issues in a rigorously Marxist tone, as opposed to more trendy counter-cultural sensibilities. Yet, the lyrics addressed contemporary, globalised, post-Fukuyama neo-liberalism, and injected renewed zeal to a struggle caught in a millennial dead end. The song 'Wow and Flutter' envisioned the downfall of Capitalism with unprecedented clarity and confidence: 'I thought IBM was born with the world/The US flag would float forever/The cold opponent did pack away/The capital will have to follow/It's not eternal, imperishable/Oh yes it will go/It's not eternal, imperishable/The dinosaur law'. When asked whether Stereolab are a post-modern revolutionary cell, singer Laetitia Sadier rejected the term, upholding a genuine belief in humanism and progress, as opposed to any adoption of complex tactics and

right:
Roger Roussot in
Matoum et Téuibar,
May-June, 1929,
photographed by
Claude Cahun,
selected by Pil
and Galia Kollektiv

next page:
Pil and Galia Kollektiv
The Future for Less,
super 8 and 16mm film
transferred to
DVD, 10 min., 2006





David Maljkovic, *These Days*,
DVD, 5:34 min., 2005

a toying with linear, formal historical time². One must conclude then that basic notions of post-modernity indeed do not suffice to understand Stereolab.

A different term ('high post-modernism'?) must be coined to describe processes deeper and more meaningful than the mere signification of Modernism's end, and the subsequent mannered, empty juggling of its aesthetics. What is now taking place instead is a positive, constructive revisiting of modernism: salvaging, recycling, and most importantly revising aspects that are still potent, that shine from underneath the rubble with a mythical Phoenix-like glow. This is a shift from nostalgia/retro to retro-activism or, in terms of the band who re-aligns modernist totalitarian utopias to the highest degree, Laibach: retrogarde

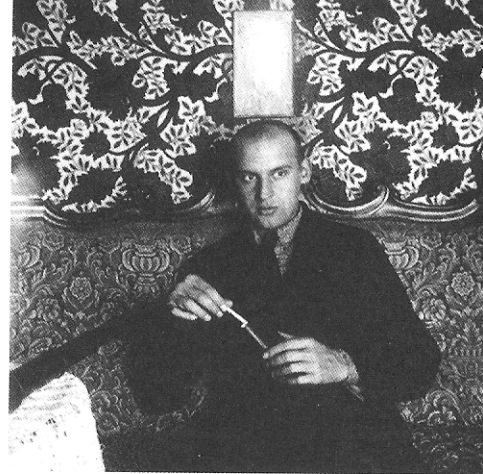
Thanks to a liberation from modernism's sweeping universalism and bridge-burning arrow-of-progress

momentum, a conceptual fold opens where - like the role of songs in Bollywood musical narratives - the rush of linear time halts and we are free to inspect ideas, symbols, shapes and styles (frequencies, emanations) that were left behind and are worthy of picking back up. Yet, an even deeper and more dramatic process is taking place, fortified by recent understandings and interpretations of quantum physics: the realisation that the past is dynamic, and as perception of it shifts, so does the present in its entirety. This realisation allows us to tap into the deepest underlying essence of modernism - its will to power - the axis of its eternally becoming threshold stance in the gate of sacred dreamtime.

Modernism's biggest blindspot was mistaking its aesthetics for pedagogic aids to carry its ideas, while in fact it was the other way around - the ideas themselves had style and shape - not only by merit of being organised into manifestos, but

by the actual poetic force of the single words (I am an Anarchist not because of the logic of stateless organisation but as slave to the sound of the word 'Anarchist'). Sound is the gate, allowing these processes to be detected. Laibach, the musical branch of the NSK art collective, is its populist public face. Like Stereolab but for different reasons, Laibach reject interpretations of their approach as post-modernist in the narrow sense. Laibach cheekily describe themselves as 'classicist magicians': the ideas, aesthetics and musical influences the band welds together into the more-authoritarian-than-authority-itself Trojan horse that they are, range from ancient/classical Europe, to romanticism, modernism, sci-fi, disco, punk, industrial, techno and contemporary thinking such as Slavoj Žižek's. On their last album, Laibach proclaimed 'we are time'.

This deep grasp of modernity as the recent station in a cycle of threshold stances is allowed to be fully explored mainly and initially in the music scene, later overflowing into art, design and of course cinema. Laibach puts into context more marginal musical movements, namely neofolk and black metal (or Viking and pagan metal), who, in their neo-romantic rejection of the modern, of progress and the slave (Judeo-Christian) mentality it entails, look back to mythical, at times invented, 'lost ancient wisdom', or a forgotten golden age. While high post modernism legitimises this walk among the ruins in search of lost gems, these movements expose a certain naïve reactionary



Alexander Rodchenko in a Kazan collectors apartment, 1915, selected by David Mabb

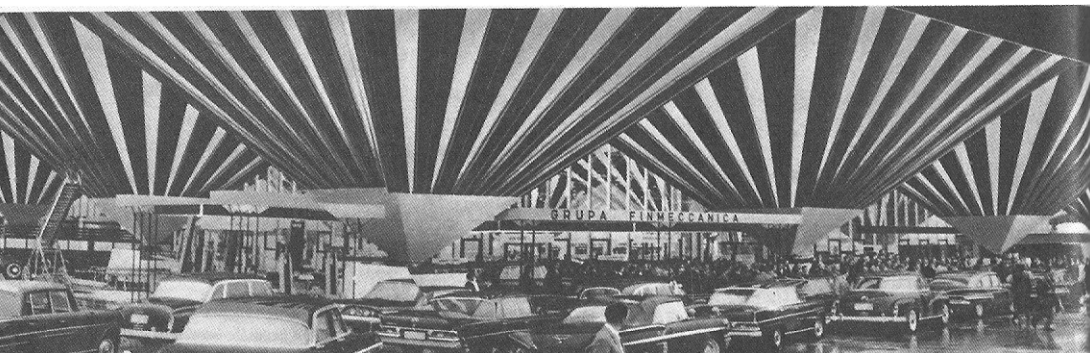
blindspot, since the golden age they seek is hidden not only in the chronologically ancient - it is outlining modernist aesthetics, art and architecture, as well as playfully hiding itself behind the contemporary. Yet, each specific temporal/aesthetic key can open the door. Ultimately, that is the remaining relevant function of individuality today

Notes:

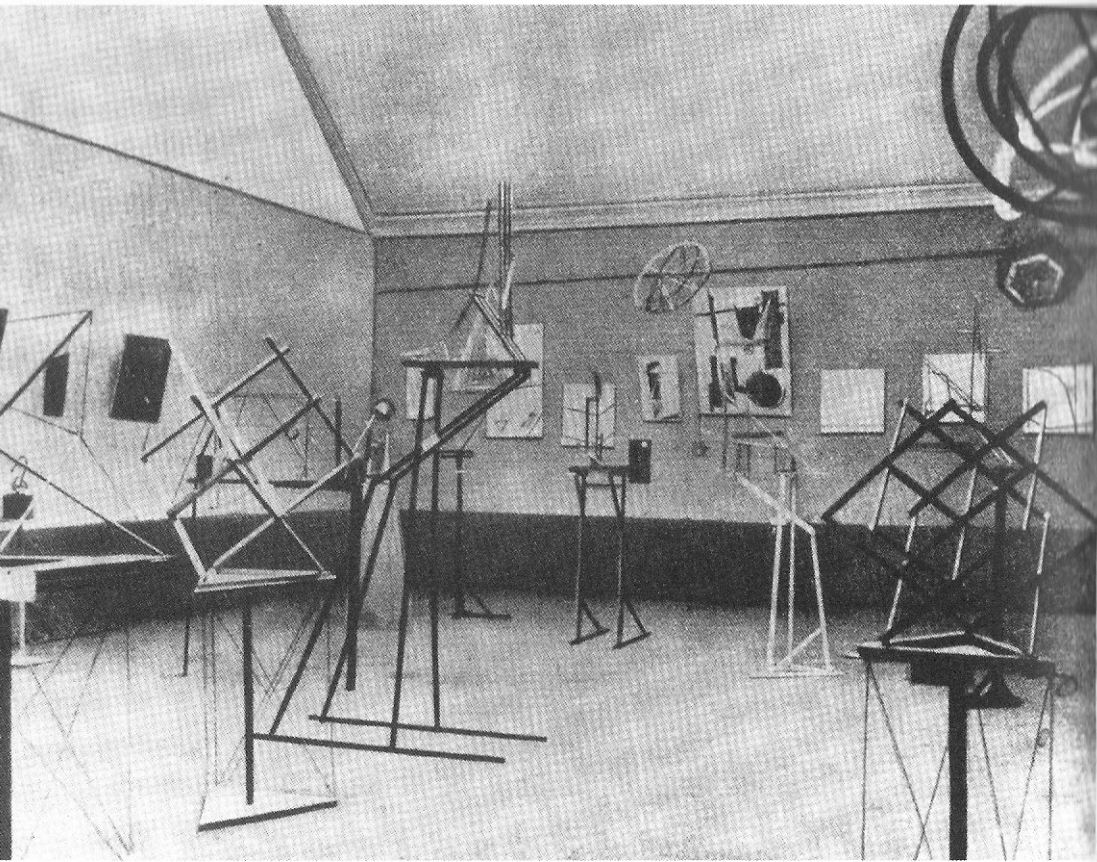
- 1 Mars Audiac Quintet, Duophonic UHF Disks, 1994.
- 2 Pil & Galia Kollektiv interviewing Laetitia Sadier, Essence #9, 1999.
- 3 Aui Pitchon, Post Modera Post Mortem, Terrorizer Magazine, 2003.

next page: David Mabb, Construct 24, Morris, Medway/Rodchenko, Gas oil on canvas, 56 x 56 cm, 2006

The Italian Pavillion, Zagreb Fair, 1960s, selected by David Malykovic







above: The Obmokhu group exhibition, Moscow, May 1921, selected by Jacob Dahl Jürgensen.
previous: Jacob Dahl Jürgensen, 'Antiprism Pavillion (sketch for a stage set)', mixed media, 2006.

We thus see how false it is to say that such writing
leads toward photography or toward the cinema.

The concern for precision which sometimes borders on the delirious (those notions so nonvisual as "right" and "left," those calculations, those measurements, those geometric points of reference) does not manage to keep the world from moving even in its most material aspects, and even at the heart of its apparent immobility. It is no longer a question here of time passing, since gestures paradoxically are on the contrary shown only frozen in the moment. It is matter itself which is both solid and unscable, both present and imagined, alien to man and constantly being invented in man's mind. The entire interest of the descriptive pages—that is, man's place in these pages—is therefore no longer in the thing described, but in the very movement of the description.

From which it invents lines, planes, an architecture; and such description particularly seems to be inventing its object when it suddenly contradicts, repeats, corrects itself, bifurcates, etc. Yet we begin to glimpse something, and we suppose that this something will now become clearer. But the lines of the drawing accumulate, grow heavier, cancel one another out, shift, so that the image is jeopardized as it is created. A few paragraphs more and, when the description behind it: it has instituted a double movement of creation and destruction which, moreover, we also find in the book on all levels and in particular in its total structure—whence the *disappointment* inherent in many works of today.

148 For a New Novel

The definite attraction which cinematographic creation exercises upon many new novelists must be sought elsewhere. It is not the camera's objectivity which interests them, but its possibilities in the realm of the subjective, of the imaginary. They do not conceive the cinema as a means of expression, but of exploration, and what most captures their attention is, quite naturally, what has most escaped the powers of literature: which is not so much the image as the sound track—the sound of voices, noises, atmospheres, music—and above all the possibility of acting on two senses at once, the eye and the ear; finally, in the image as in the sound, the possibility of presenting with all the appearance of incontestable objectivity what is, also, only dream or memory—in a word, what is only imagination.

There is in the sound the spectator hears, in the image he sees, a primary quality: it is *there*, it is present. The breaks of cutting, the repetitions of scene, the contradictions, the characters suddenly paralyzed as in amateur photographs afford this perpetual present all its force, all its violence. It is, then, no longer a question of the nature of the images but of their composition, and it is only here that the novelist can recognize, though transformed, certain of his literary preoccupations.

These new cinematic structures, this movement of images and sounds, turn out to be directly apparent to the ungratified spectator; it even seems that for

149 Time and Description

Left:
Alain Robbe-Grillet,
For a New Novel,
selected by Claire Hooper

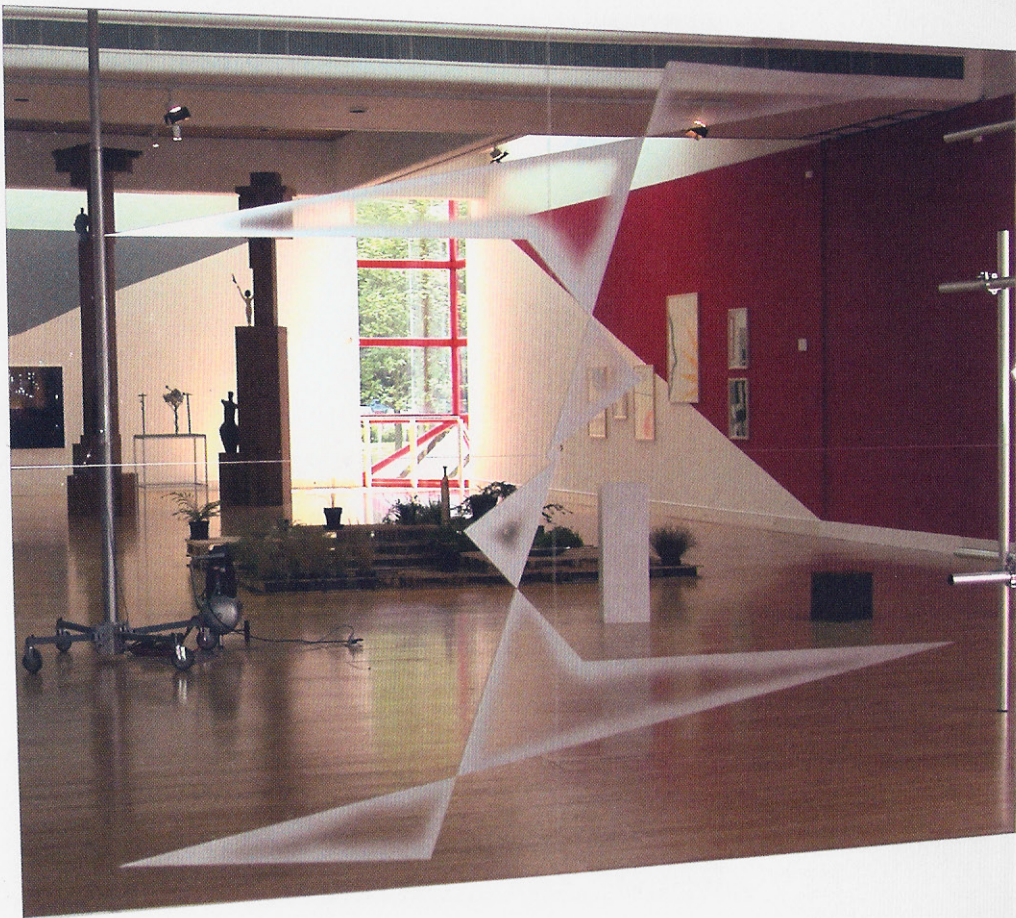
next page:
Claire Hooper,
Legacy and Estate:
DVD, 2006.



planningtorock
Untitled (Helmet),
mixed media, 2006

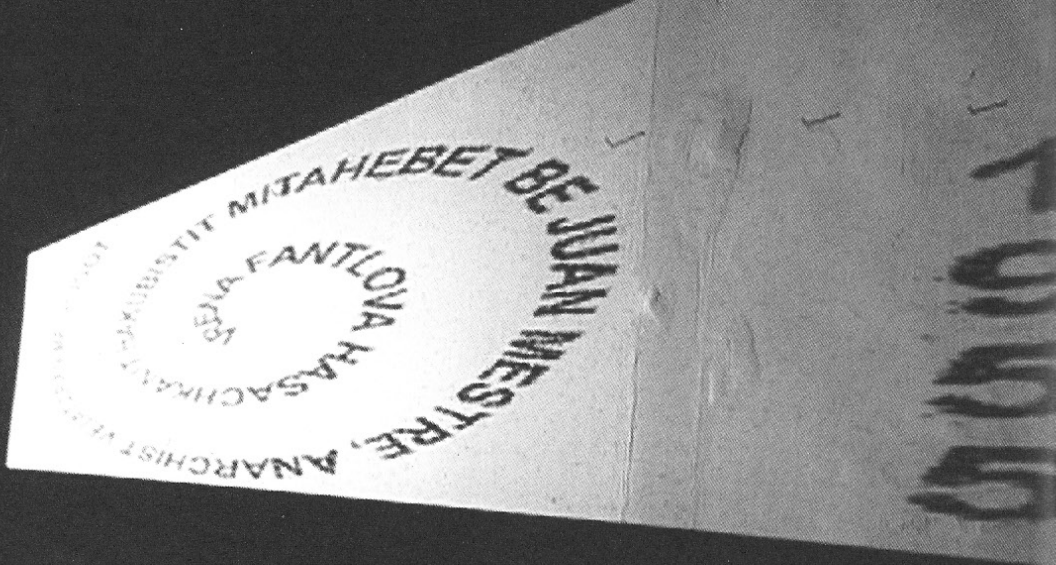


above: Aleksandr Rodchenko, *The Pioneer Girl*, 1930 , selected by Gail Pickering
opposite: Gail Pickering, *Grotto (for 'Dissident Sunset')*, graphite on paper, 28 x 22 cm, 2005



opposite:
Goshka Macuga,
Drawing no 4. 'Path
of Movement of a
Point' after K.
Malevich, sand
and blasted mirror
90 x 120 cm
approx., 2003
[courtesy: the
artist and
Kate MacGarry]
right:
Russian
cookbook, 1952,
selected by
Goshka Macuga





sala-manca, Concrete Rresponse I, performance, 2002

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Three Colts Lane
Bethnal Green E2 6JB

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