The Event of Art

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Art as a Recording, but What Kind?
There are three threads that move through these works. First, a material investigation of the regimes of the network as they transform the notion of the self and subjectification, which is a putting into relief of the technological apparatuses that atomize our bodies, cities, representations and self-representations. Second, a self presenting of the now, being now, being present, by foregrounding the artist’s body and the self, a self of appetites and limits, a situational reader and being in the world, one that makes marks, gestures, movements, allusions and performances. Third, a tactile working of books, fabrics, plants, stones, plastics, paper—things of immediate touch, things of volume, weight, decay, light, and folds.

Only as an aesthetic product can the world be justified to all eternity.

(Nietzsche)

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Art as performative recording

an enactment, a depiction, a form, a format, a fabrication, an undoing, a becoming, a self-questioning, an interrogation, a critique, a reading of recording, the recording that makes art, the recording that remembers art. The recording in itself of no particular aesthetic value, or such is the claim, but to record is to be present to the event of art, to give form.

The real seems less real than the as-like-real that we create with our technology. Rather we live in the “now now”: recording, watching and archiving live footage, texting, emailing, and taking pictures of everything. We record in order to know and then forget ourselves. (lior)

When I first started taking photographs, I wanted to take an interesting photograph, I wanted to photograph interesting things, I wanted to make ordinary things interesting by photographing them in interesting ways, I wanted to seek out interesting things that were photographic, I wanted the camera to do more than simply take a picture, more than record what was in front of me—I was puzzled by photographs, until I realized I could photograph photography and that everything was being photographed, and that I could make photographs of the seeing of pictures, of visualization.

The camera is an interface onto the world. It both records what’s there and what’s not there, in its recording it creates what was not seen but is then conferred to it by virtue of photography. Photography contrary to what most people may believe does not record the world, it makes it other and strange. But it is a something. Of course this is not what we generally think of when it
comes to pictures. We think the photograph (at least certain photographs) and the world, the same thing, and we think the photograph evidentiary of the world, a piece of it, something simply sampled in time from the real. Regardless of what a photograph shows us, it becomes a thing in this world, a material, even if it is code, passing about on the network, it is a thing.

If the camera records and invents things, what about words and spoken language and all that disappears with it. Imagine a world before recordings, before the transmission of recordings. Imagine a world where only a particular person or special place conferred and embodied things. This is the question of aura raised by Walter Benjamin in “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”: the event in the oral tradition is experienced once, and if repeated, done so only through in place and in person in ritual. For the most part art is encountered through recordings and without recording, there is no transferable art. What then of something immaterial like oral language? And what does it mean to give form and rhythm to a thing such that it is doesn’t disappear.

While waiting in a line at a benefit party for the Dia Foundation, I struck up a conversation with an editor from the magazine *In Style*. Soon we got to talking about art and I told her of my most recent piece, a webcam fixed on an igloo in Antarctica. We would watch the igloo melt in real time from winter to summer solstice. She received the idea quite enthusiastically.

Fifteen minutes later I was around one of the tables talking with an artist when I heard someone calling my name with some urgency. The *In Style* editor brought me over to several collectors and introduced me as the artist doing the melting igloo piece. They were very intrigued by it as they were collectors of conceptual photography (making it clear how the photography they were interested in was vastly different than a Weegee). They went on to ask where they could see the piece. I was delighted by their earnestness and began to construct an elaborate tale of the path to its viewing involving virtual touring through vast tundras, secret passwords, controlled access.

The idea of the melting igloo is aesthetically pleasing: the decay somehow pristine, exquisite and of course foreboding of the continual warming of our planet.

The fabrication of the idea and its dissemination at this event includes the aesthetic of the idea but also the joy of making an idea, of telling a story, and of making something appear and have substance that’s not there.

The performative story supersedes the reality of the igloo: its fabulation is the work of art and it’s a work that could only really happen with this particular audience, in a context of art professionals. The urinal in the bathroom is a urinal, but within the white cube it becomes something else, or does it. At this very social evening of art something appeared and then vanished.

Art is always a possibility, if we look just to the right, or left, just above or below, or straight on, in front of us, inside ourselves. Its possibility is there. Not just by looking, but also touching and daydreaming and wordplay. But how to
capture it, materialize it, bring to it the frame of art, to the event of art, so that it in its presentation it is perceived as such.

How to make this “melting igloo” a material thing, move from the realm of the sayable to the visible and the tactile?

How to make it transmittable and iterable?

Wherein is the work of art in the sense that it can be?

Would it look something like this? The oral becomes written. The written becomes object. And what kind of object?

The initial role of photography in conceptual art was to document actions or phenomena. . . . The view that underlies much early photography by conceptual artists was that the camera was an “opinion-less copying device.”

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**MELTING IGLOO**

Waiting in the bathroom line at a benefit party for the DIA Foundation, I struck up a conversation with an editor from In Style. We were all feeling a bit frisky and soon I was telling the editor that I was involved with Net Art (I'm always unsure what to tell people I do; the answer varies as mood and circumstance demand.) I told her my most recent piece was a web cam fixed on an igloo in northern Alaska. We would watch the igloo melt in real time from winter to summer solstice. She received the idea quite enthusiastically.
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Fifteen minutes later I was around one of the tables talking with an artist when I heard someone calling my name with some urgency. The InStyle editor brought me over to several collectors and introduced me as the artist doing the melting igloo piece. They were very intrigued by it as they were collectors of conceptual photography (making it clear how the photography they were interested in, one of them said, was different than, let’s say, a Weegee.) They went on to ask where they could see the piece.

I was delighted by their earnestness and began to construct an elaborate tale of the path to its viewing involving virtual touring through vast tundras, secret passwords, controlled access.
Conceptual art's primary visual source looks to be the academic textbook, where a poorly printed photograph or diagram, accompanied by a caption, is standard fare. But the fact that this mode of address is culturally omnipresent does not make it invisible, for, as I have already pointed out, there are informational modes distinct from it that, by contrast, always render it visible again: it is only invisible in context.

(Mike Kelley)

Much of conceptual art illustrated an argument about art, giving that argument a form or format a presentation style, like one might find in a science fair on a poster board. It wasn’t performing the argument in the work itself, well not entirely, but sort of true. Because in itself the “work” is elsewhere and the photograph and text speak to it. The work isn’t what you see in itself but it is.

Yoko Ono, in Grapefruit, asks or instructs her reader to “make a painting in your head.” The work is the instruction, “make a painting in your head.” Anyone can do it. You just simply start painting in your head. Now the Igloo could be presented as, “stand in any public line or at a party, make up a story of an imaginary work of art of yours.” Whereas Grapefruit is a book of instructions, activating the imagination, the Igloo is an action, presented as a performance, but presented precisely how. This increasingly became the thing that intrigued me. Art as an event of an operation, a displacement, a refiguration, a material operation, that remains with, is and is part of the thing presented, the thing both itself and transformed, its former self and new self.

The Igloo could be presented as, “stand in any public line or at a party, make up a story of an imaginary work of art of yours.”

It would be a story about showing her the pictures she would want to see, only those pictures and no others. she had a very visceral reaction to anything red. i remember when i sent her long stem crimson roses and asked the young delivery man to dress as matador. i sent him a manet picture of a panting copied from goya. at the door she was overwhelmed by the sensation of color, became dizzy he told me, she fell, flinging back on a glass table. he took her to her white couch and cleaned the blood from her pale palpitating skin.

It would be a story about multiple classifications.

It would be a story not about modeling information for the user along there preferences but about bringing about in them my sense of the image.

It would be a story about two different image files (in whatever format I’d choose), I would write a program to predict the chance if one was the illegal copy of another. I would look for things like cropping, rotating, making negative, or adding trivial details that would change the image.
It Would Be a Story

A very long title for a work of art that does not exist, or does it? Without recording what was art? Were the magnificent cave drawings art, or ritual, or art for ritual? What was that relationship between the making of the drawings and the being with the drawings?

Language dreaming, language, a computational sounding
dreaming as in, lost in a dream, unrecoverable, the body
possessed by words, sound before alphabets, sound before writing,
words speaking bodies, words slightly more useful, words at a
limit, slightly more attractive, to seek a form to come, sense
between bodies and language, a sign is not itself but different
from all the other signs

I don’t know how much all these language games are important because meaning is not uttered only in language—with signs.

Dreaming Alphabets, 1999

language as an asignifying register, stutters and stammers, to
call forth—to invoke—an audience.

performance

for two performers. one reads and the other
enacts the letter forms of the alphabet spoken
“judged by what the sole person takes over—from inherited
language which “verses and thinks for him”–, whatever he adds by
herself is marginal. No one is capable to abandon the “mental
mass” and replace it by a new self-creation.”

How do words move our bodies and how do our bodies move words?
And what are the many things our bodies do outside of language.
Plants, rocks, air, the sea, atmosphere, other animals, the sky,
move as bodies, as intensivities. Words move through our bodies,
we taste them, we sound them, their sounds shape us. Our world
shapes us, has given us our shape. we live within it, along side
it, through the eons of it.

The things that speak besides words. The things that just are
and that we sense but can’t speak.
How to seek a form to come.

If the expressive power of language is only one register of our experiences there is everywhere a plenitude of expressivity to be found.

The work of art is always in search of expressivity, material and form.

The artist gathers up the many materials of the world and works within and with the material sense at its limit, at the limit of how such material is thought and felt and held and beheld by the artist.
The images above tell us, show us, that a work, is. Their form represented in an image and words, ah, but the sounds you are not hearing.

In *The Sounding of My Alphabet*, I record every letterform, myself saying them in various places, sample them and play them back electronically in pitches and variations my body’s instrument can not. My voice now, captured inside the instrument, a double of me, cleaved from me is now the materiality of computation, giving the “samples” of my new voice, new body. I live along me in recording. Recording is the double, the ghost of me, and, a thing unto itself and for some the only thing, the real thing.
Actions are actions only if they are recorded

staging action, the real as a real stage, artist as performance, artist performing the world as art, artist seeing the world as becoming art amidst its realpolitik, “the politics of reality,” the artist never alone with art, a complicit alongsideness, mutable, global, fiscal, wherever, whatever, now, the period between 1973 and 2008, we know what comes next as things stand—more contemporary art, neo-objectivity in the face of co-option, the world not a moral argument—or a conceptual, “reasonable” argument—but an aesthetic, phenomenological one, art comes first—not truth, not survival, not necessity. Actions without uttering a single word.

Art is a staging, of action, staging of a discourse, without uttering a single word.

The studio can be as virtual as real and can also be a place from which actions are staged with and by the artist as performer.

For some time artists have brought the studio into their art, made it part of their art, just as artist have used the frisson of the institution of art, the white cube of the gallery, of museum, as a context and place to work against. Bruce Nauman brought his studio to the fore in an exemplary way. He, his body, his studio, working in the studio, he made present to himself through and in videos and photographs. His actions were often simple, including expelling water from his mouth, “fountain,” walking about, playing his violin, putting his head in a chair, all of these actions recording his presence to himself in the space of his studio.

In some sense the recording of an action, almost any action would do, as any of them, perform the artist. Nauman’s work isn’t, in any sense, heroic, pointing to a towering creator of genius, no. He is more like a Beckett character or Buster Keaton, ironic, distant, stupid and tiresome, and as such in his anti-heroism, epic. Why, because the artist works, he or she toils, he or she labors and makes arts. We may have an image of the artist at a Biennale, at a celebratory dinner, or in the headlines with record breaking auction prices. But not in Nauman’s world. In the confines of the studio, the artist does time, pays the price of her obsession, is as much trapped by art as having those few moment of grandeur, only to fall back again, in search of the beautiful imaginary.

The artist works, labors to make arts. We may have an image of the artist at a Biennale, at a celebratory dinner, or in the headlines with record breaking auction prices but in the confines of the studio, the artist does time, pays the price of her obsession, is as much trapped by art as having those few moments
of grandeur possessed by clarity, only to fall back again, in search of the beautiful imaginary.

Many artists will remove the studio or the stage from their work. They stand outside the work. Or rather the work is to stand apart from them.

The studio puts on the now and expresses well the idea of Actions which is to present the present, to make something an event of now, a self seeing. It is to make or behold something to come alive, to see or render it, an “it” of which without form is “it” is not, until figured in some way.

Photography, video becomes the site to perform and capture the body in action, the action that is now, not yet a network to distribute and archiver those recordings.

I find myself sensing the artist studio is everywhere, the stage is any possible place, any possible anywhere and photography and recording there to witness or perform the stage. And the opportunity to perform the photograph.
To “see” one’s self at the moment of recording in a future space of representation.

We post photographs of ourselves, almost continuously. Our lives are events to be pictured. Are past is somewhere in those recordings, no need to remember them, the recordings will be pushed me.

If the camera frames and produces events, the body does so prodigiously. The body, its appetite and sensations, its hunger and sleep, its taste and dreaming, blindly and beatifically sensing, flailing and soaring, carrying itself about, its being is of course, organically, inevitably, at a natural and terminal limit, and in all of this, a most complex event, part of everything and singular at the same time—what more media is there than our bodies.

If we are seduced and enthralled of our instruments, they are but outrageous extensions of ourselves, heighten prosthetics, extending our senses of sight, touch, hearing, mobility, increasing our speed, altering our metabolism.

My body as an object of sense and perception.

My body as an object map, a perceived and perceiving subject, constructing and deconstructing, and do so much without me thinking about it.

My body, bodies, social bodies, our actions and representations, myself is complicated and made to be complicated in art, made to be seen as body art, body politic, world body, live body, living body, marked body, state body, beatific body, refuse body. Art then gives me, my body, my sense, my senses a frame of being.

In art man enjoys himself as perfection.

So said Nietzsche, but perhaps in art man enjoys all the folly of imperfection and contingency in life. That is why the event is so pleasurable, as a moment seized, seen and made shareable or transmittable.

When you get a sense of your body, your ego, you, as a set of instructions, habits, indoctrinations, needs and wants, reflexes—then your body can become a material, you can become art, you give yourself, your body, your knowing self, the permission, the attitude and altitude of possibility, of not hanging on to something, allowing yourself not to know—which i feel starts from knowing, sensing your body, as this thing, this appetite, this fleshy boney digestive thing, this machine, this assemblage assembled.
Balloons

There is something so immensely jovous about running under a bouncing ball. It is that delight that I wish to convey not so much in the image but in the recording of the action. When the ball is airborne, it is a balloon, it has transposed its properties, amphibian-like. Running underneath it, I engage the ball in its process of transposition, at its internal limits, enjoying myself at the juncture at which this balloon turned ball (and back) enjoys itself.

I run under a balloon that was a moment before a ball. The camera puts on the event. It is me and the ball becoming balloon staged in photography.

Actions

The following pieces comprise an ongoing series of actions or events representing the exploration of physical and representational spaces.

I collaborate with this man, a carpenter to measure himself, the measure of a man.
At the French Pavilion at the 2000 Biennale, there is an empty room. I place a small video camera on the floor in the center of the room and turn it on. Soon, those that enter the room play and position themselves to the camera. The audience becomes participant becomes media. Years later I am in the Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale, “We Have Never Participated.” I look up the 2017 French pavilion and it is a recording studio set up for the audience to audition.

Giving presence to the body—embodied and spatially situated. Becoming with the world.

Over time I ask myself how can we come to know ourselves knowing. By seeing the instruments that figure us.

Maybe it is only more recording that can overcome the world recorded. If the camera once was witness to the world it now enacts it.

To be of the world, I become a recording. After all, are not instructions a making present, the act of making present, a cascading forth, an event.
A series of performance works called *En Garde*. *En Garde* as you may know is a term used in fencing to warn your opponent to be on guard and to assume the position preparatory to a fencing match about to ensue. To humor my small child, I do many of these small moments of *En Garde*. Here, eating ice cream I lunge my small plastic spoon forward and declaim *En Garde*. 
And here in the pool with the plastic floating spaghetti string. It is humorous, silly, but infectious and immediately puts on the moment of the now.

In doing this we would put on the moment creating another relation to our environment and ourselves. We would create an event of art.
To engage the public. Public art. Art as conversation. Art as *mise-en-scène* outside the institution of art.
Wherever I go I see a stage for an action, a chance to put on a moment of life, of reading this with that. Everything is an encounter. Everywhere is my studio. It’s not the action per se, but action in action. I want to stage an event for a recording.

Appearance, not of an image but the coming together of making an image. Something there that is not there. An image of appearance. The child to come, the birth of the image, the appearance of the event to come.