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Contemporary Art & Criticism

Wet

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D'Arcy Wilson—Sara Cwynar—Moyra Davey
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Leonard Koren—The Hypnotic Show—Chronovisor
Acquiring Modernity—Wet Places



\$8.75 — Display until December

Chronovisor: *Archive* (Mirko Smerdel, Rowena Harris, Johann Arens, Cathy Haynes, Verity Birt, Patrick Hough)
South Kiosk, London
May 15 – June 20, 2014
by Dan Munn

Modelled on the archive produced by Benedictine priest Pellegrino Ernetti's 1960s "Chronovisor", a mechanism with which he allegedly watched ancient Roman theatre and the crucifixion of Christ, the South Kiosk gallery's second exhibition is introduced as a body of "problematic evidence." Skepticism surrounding Ernetti, who was variously considered disillusioned or fraudulent (or both), is projected through this archive onto the referentiality of the document within contemporary art. Taking up a range of realist and didactic forms including timelines, the performance remnant, the map, aura reading, and amateur home video, the exhibition's six artists antagonize the authority of these representational conventions in relation to time.

Cathy Haynes' four framed prints from the series *Life Map (Tristram Shandy)* (2014) privilege open and organic systems, their title contextualizing the liquidic trace within marbled paper as an alternative to the timeline. The prints reference and amplify the unique hand-marbled pages of the first edition of Shandy's fictional autobiography, although unfortunately mostly the former, paradoxically making the life map's richness of interpretation subject to the linearity of provenance. Haynes also presents a work from her personal collection, *Life Map (George III)* (2014), an early timeline

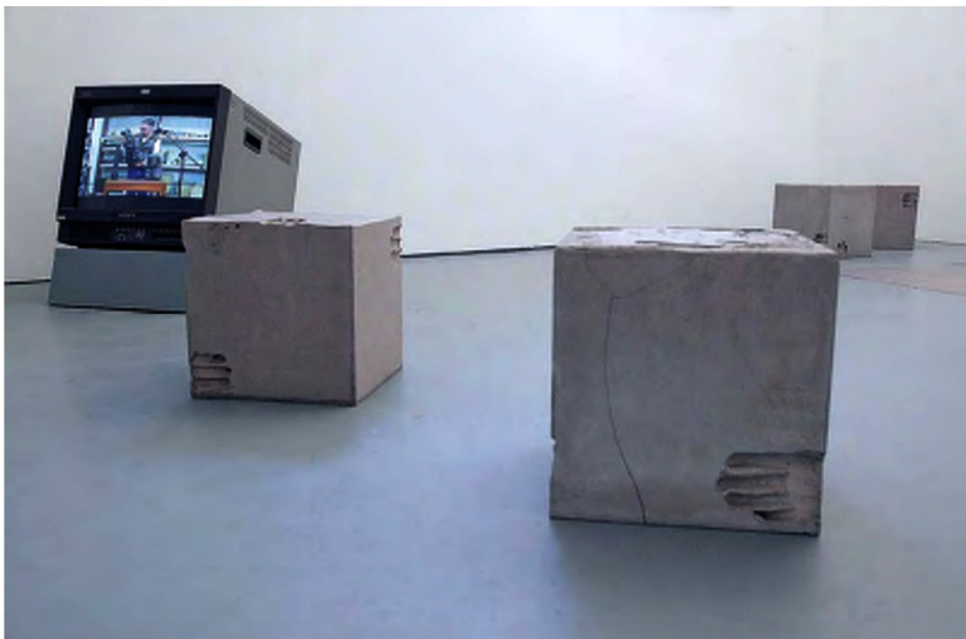
format in which images of events with labels such as "Massacre of the Jews," "East India Company Established" and "Shakespeare" spiral inwards until they arrive at an image of King George III. The work identifies the diagrammatic inscription of time as a long-standing site of political contest.

Rowena Harris's *Haul* (2013) is a series of concrete blocks with handprints at their edges, as if they were moved while wet. Under scrutiny however, the industrial precision of the cubes and the lack of distortion in the handprints suggest that the faces of the cubes may have instead been poured separately as tiles and assembled at a later time. This thinly veiled deceit, which toys with the timeline of the work's production, a narrative we otherwise accept so readily in works such as Walced Beshty's *FedEx*[®] series, bronze boxes whose surfaces react to handling and scuffs over a specific time period that is denoted by shipping service information included in the title.

In *Manual* (2014) by Johann Arens, a Google Street View capture focusing on a disembodied hand is printed across floor and wall in a subtle white cube adaptation of the technology's 360-degree projection. The hand, belonging to a Street View van driver, springs out of a blurry haze not unlike the fog of non-existence that gradually engulfs the image of Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*, his hand weakening as if by some kind of spell bringing to life the reversal of the photographic process. The blurring of the van is aimed at producing a non-subjective visual landscape; however, the hand, pointing as if giving directions, accidentally expresses the driver's indirect, behind-the-scenes role within the vast production process of Street View. Typically, the people Street View captures are superfluous to user navigation, an excess of high-resolution big data visualization.¹ By highlighting this incidental appearance of the worker's hand, Arens humanizes the globalized labour that produced this ubiquitous navigation tool.

Antagonizing this process of corporate *heritagization*, the nine prints from Mirko Smerdel's series *There is a light that never goes out* (2010) utilize images of the once-revolutionary Gamma 60 computer²

- 1 This can only be heightened in the future with 3D scanning technology for smartphones such as Google's *Project Tango*, which works "to give mobile devices a human-scale understanding of space and motion." <https://www.google.com/atap/projecttango/#project>
- 2 Established in 1958, the Gamma 60 was produced at the same time as the Chronovisor.
- 3 Chris Kraus goes as far as to say that "anything is permissible in the contemporary art world so long as it is pedigreed, substantiated, referentialized." *Cast Away*, 2001
- 4 "These images are not the substitute for my memory, they are my memory," *Sans Soleil* (1982) by Chris Marker



Rowena Harris, *Haul*, 2013 and Patrick Hough, *Object Interviews* (Part I and II), 2013, installation view at South Kiosk, 2014, London
 PHOTO: DAVID M.C. MILLER AND PETRA; IMAGE COURTESY OF SOUTH KIOSK, LONDON

that appear in *From mechanization to automation in banking services*, a publication found in the archives of Unicredit Bank, the commissioner of Smerdel's project. Smerdel rephotographs the images with a Kirlian camera which, according to its creator, is capable of showing the "life-force" or "aura" of its subjects. Here the camera acts not on the Gamma 60 and its operators but instead on their representation within the paper print in a considered mistranslation, refusing the weight of historical reference and instilling its images' bright colours with a minimalist flatness.

In contrast, retrieving the multiple lives inscribed onto the object is the focus in *Object Interviews (Part I and II)* (2013) by Patrick Hough in which Egyptologists describe replicas of ancient Egyptian objects that are used as film props. Various aspects of the props are discussed, from their source iconography to their simulated and actual deterioration and their imagined function within the mise-en-scène. This lively 'antique road show' style ekphrasis keys heavily into the value of referencing within contemporary art.³ Touching on discourses in neuroscience and psychoanalysis, the speaker (who is not identified) in Part I discusses how deteriorated or incomplete objects elicit conscious and subconscious attention, yet this post-structural fragmentation unfortunately does not extend to disrupting the authority of its own documentary format.

In Verity Birt's *Birthday* (2014), a voice-over taken from *Messiaen on Debussy and Colour* and low-definition footage of subjects participating in acts such as a piano recital and recreational activities in lakes and pools are manipulated and cut together rhythmically. Through their use of online digital media, these patterns make contemporary the murky, repetitive, nonlinear aesthetic by which archaic analog video forms have conventionally been posited as a visualisation of human memory. Like Haynes' ambitions to visualize our "internal landscape of time," Birt's adopted filmmaking trope conflates digital and organic memory, wetware and hardware. *Birthday* doesn't however - as other works in this exhibition have begun to do - deal with the logic of this aesthetic before using it to point to alternative experiences of time.

One example of this logic is the compression of the clips in Birt's piece, which results in a loss of information in the accelerated image made nostalgic and alludes to the story of the Chronovisor's conception (Ernetti was filtering harmonics out of Gregorian chants when he heard a voice speaking to him, causing him to theorize the persistence of sights and sounds). Even if, as Chris Marker posited, a deluge of external images overrides the precarious inner memory (i.e., the aptly termed "embodiment of memory in technology")⁴, behind every aesthetic of memory is the human hand, eye or mind. It is not unusual that, in their response to the temporal omnipresence of the Chronovisor, many of the works in this fictional archive mimic, analyze, are marked by or stand in for these organs and appendages. In their comparatively lackadaisical evolution they form the stable base on which social and technological actors produce (or fabricate) an image of their time.

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Moyra Davey: *Burn the Diaries* Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna February 21 – May 25, 2014 by Yuki Higashino

One of the achievements of historical conceptualism is its introduction of the everyday into the language of art. However, it can be argued that its necessity to reject authorial subjectivity in order to dismantle the myth of creativity resulted in a somewhat abstract and generic notion of the everyday, diluting the contextual understanding necessary for effective critique. Reintroducing this specificity into the methodology of conceptualism has been a central concern of critical practices since the advent of *Kontext Kunst*, and it is within this historical perspective one can decode Moyra Davey's exhibition *Burn the Diaries*.

The exhibition is a precisely focused one consisting of photographs, a video and a publication. The photographs, titled *Of Jane* (2014), are a new group of pictures from the artist's "mailers", where she folds her prints into the shape of envelopes, image-side out, and posts them to her friends or to the venues that are holding her exhibitions. With the creases, wears and tears, handwritten addresses, stamps and tape that kept them together still visible, these prints—pinned to the walls—awkwardly occupy the blurry zone between object and image.

The pictures show a pile of books, a corner of a ceiling, a woman reading in the subway, a section of a gravestone, an unmade bed with books on top and other such images from daily life. This is the everyday of a person enmeshed within the particular social and economic circumstances to which Davey belongs. In other words, these are pictures that eschew the pretense of objectivity without falling into the clichés of subjectivism.

With the exception of one image of a sole landscape, what these pictures have in common is that they all show the *details* of things. They are fragments, or clues, which do not come together as a totality. On the contrary, they testify to the inadequacy of large tableaux, which dominate contemporary photography, by demonstrating that even the smallest and most mundane thing that could be photographed is still too complex to be instantly legible. Although there is an air of melancholy in many of her photographs, Davey's depiction of the everyday is resolutely unsentimental, due to the clear indication of intentionality in her act of taking pictures as well as the serial character of many images. Davey's works suggest the presence of logic, yet this logic can only be speculated. The images are diaristic not only because they depict private life, but also because they constitute a tightly controlled system and habit that are akin to diary keeping. There is a methodological affinity between historical conceptualism—especially the works of Douglas Huebler—and Davey's works, but Davey synthesizes this methodology with sharp contextual observation.

The video in the exhibition, titled *My Saints* (2014), revolves around a passage from Jean Genet's *The Thief's Journal*. It shows interpretations of this passage (which, in the course of the video, we learn is about the sadistic pleasure a thief takes in watching a man's frantic search for his stolen money) by several people, many of them adolescent. (The viewer notices that the woman reading