A FOLD IN THE FABRIC

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

In a digital age, the relevance of medium-specificity—the age-old commitment to artistic mediums like painting, sculpture, performance, and the various forms of mechanical reproduction—is slowly but surely fading to black. The exhibition "A Fold in the Fabric" addresses this issue of medium-specificity as it is absorbed in an ephemeral realm of less physically tangible materiality. Andy Graydon, Sabrina Gschwandtner, and Dominique Petitgand's artistic practices are located in between mediums and lack a fixed and weighted presence. Reflecting on the traditional artistic forms, we are all too familiar with the frame of a painting, the plinth supporting a sculpture, and vitrines containing rarified objects. Even in the context of newer media, a video or digitally rendered installation might play repeatedly, or loop, on a monitor. Relative to this common trope, "A Fold in the Fabric" pushes medium-specificity toward dissipation.

During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, theories of technological relevance and obsolescence have been developed to help justify the human (or capitalist) quest for the new. In this pursuit of the next invention and the latest model, mass-produced technological objects and gadgets are always teetering toward their expiration. So we face an environmental quandary: what to do with the cast-off technologies that have now become ephemera? In other words, the role of these objects is fulfilled as manufacturers develop new technological systems to dominate the market.

Pioneering the discourse on the electronic age, Marshall McLuhan envisioned a technological implosion when he described how technical objects that have reached their end may be re-inscribed with new use, or in some cases, disuse. More specifically relevant to understanding the artists' technological investigations is McLuhan's observation that, "the artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs."[1] Sabrina Gschwandtner's *Phototactic Behavior Behavior in Sewn Slides*, 2004, gives the 35mm slide show—a technology on the verge of discontinuation—a handmade quality with her stitched, sewn, and punctured slides. Petitgand's audio tracks broadcast disjointed voice recordings that work against the prescribed use of an audio recorder. And Graydon's *Scaffold (526 West 26th Street #310)*, 2006, takes a video projector and literally upends it to project a slowly moving outline onto the unremarkable molding along an area of the adjacent wall and ceiling.

The connective tissue linking these works is their position in relation to narrative, which is one of resistance. In 2001, artist Matthew Buckingham produced an edition of posters installed in public spaces in Cologne, Germany, entitled *Narrative*. For this work, Buckingham printed a poster reducing narrative structure to the five following points:

1. Undisturbed State
2. Disturbance
3. Struggle
4. Deadline
5. Disturbance Eliminated

Recognizing that Buckingham's skeleton of a narrative must be fleshed out, an argument can be made for rethinking these basic tenets of narrative, and advocating for the use of unresolved, and obsolete mediums to inflect the tone of the narrative voice.

That the exhibition presents a group of artworks that at first appear to be non-narrative in their structure gives reason to acknowledge narrative as a medium in itself. Working with media as disparate as slide shows, soundtracks, and video programming and projections, each of the artists uses technology to realize a conceptual outcome. Identifying with particular technological supports, recently discussed by art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss, the three artists challenge existing narrative possibilities. No longer illustrative, the narrative structures of these works are psychedelic, associative, and disjointed. According to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, one definition of narrative is "the representation in art of an event or story." Looking at narrative in terms of visual (or in Petitgand's case, audio) representation makes possible a broader interpretation of each of the artists' works.

For a number of years, Sabrina Gschwandtner has synthesized film materials with techniques associated with the craft and literary arts like knitting, sewing, and publishing. For an exhibition at Socrates Sculpture Park in 2005, she collected enough film footage and slide material to fill a dumpster, which she turned over to the park's visitors for a project she calls *The Found Footage Dumpster*. Over the course of three weeks, passersby and in-the-know film enthusiasts and practitioners were invited to produce their own montages from the found materials. The project culminated in a series of screenings presenting newly made "found footage" works generated by found materials coupled with the artist's open invitation for participation, doubly testing the limits of randomness as an artistic and a curatorial strategy. Through *The Found Footage Dumpster*, Gschwandtner addressed how excess media and technology materials can be recycled as a means for constructing a publicly determined narrative. At LMAKprojects, Gschwandtner's *phototactic Behavior Sewn Slides*, recalls the format of the filmstrip—a relic of her generation's elementary school days. Yet the projected images within this slide show do not follow a familiar narrative structure. Recalling Abstract Expressionism, crude textile patterns, and twinkling cityscapes in the night, the projection also captures the experience of visual perception that is marked by closing and opening the eye, framed by protective fringes of eyelashes.

Gschwandtner's piece, like Graydon's and Petitgand's, might be best understood in relation to a looping structure, a

concept that Rosalind Krauss revisited in "Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition." In this text, Krauss cites several important artworks by Sophie Calle and Christian Marclay, among others, as adhering to a looping and repetitive narrative structure that she calls "invaginatory."[2] In a basic translation, the term "invagination" recognizes how technological supports produce narrative arcs that become circular and circuitous, and ultimately, in their repetitive design, fold within themselves. Rather than address the term as a gendered formal structure, it seems appropriate to acknowledge the loop as a long-term historical perspective, where seemingly disjointed and unrelated events repeat over time to produce a more coherent meta-narrative.

Dealing with the structure of the gallery space, Andy Graydon's *Scaffold (526 West 26th Street #310)* is a digital video projection that outlines a wall-to-ceiling corner of LMAKprojects's gallery space. Prior to LMAKprojects's arrival to Chelsea, architect Steven Holl was commissioned to redesign the space for use as a gallery. With subtle adjustments to the interior, the space now has been made to appear more symmetrical and "cool." McLuhan's categories of "hot" and "cool" media designate "hot" media as that which is high definition (like a Hollywood film) and therefore does not require active audience participation. "Cool" media requires more participation by the audience, whose interpretation, or reading between the lines, shapes how the particular media is received."[3] In cool media terms, Holl's redesign of the gallery's interior architecture highlights the building materials, but also maintains an illusionistic quality where the structural guts are not fully revealed, leaving something to the imagination. Graydon's projection is site-specific to the molding it outlines in the gallery, and in its title, *Scaffold (526 West 26th Street #310)*, references the technical supports that are used in construction and building maintenance. Graydon's project furthers several divergent artistic trajectories. The askew placement of *Scaffold (526 West 26th Street #310)*'s projection is reminiscent of James Turrell's light pieces from the late 1960s in which the artist projected colored light into the corner of a dark room. Around the same time, David Lamelas produced *Límite de una proyección I* (Limit of a Projection I) in 1967. Graydon's light source is the projector beam, which hearkens back to Anthony McCall's *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973. Graydon's predecessors pushed against the prescribed use of cinematic light and space. In Graydon's case, he is advancing the use of new media to more deeply explore a particular space—the edge of the ceiling— that is often overlooked during a typical gallery experience.

Andy Graydon, *Scaffold (526 West 26th Street #310)*, installation views, 2006, site-specific installation with video projection, dimensions variable.
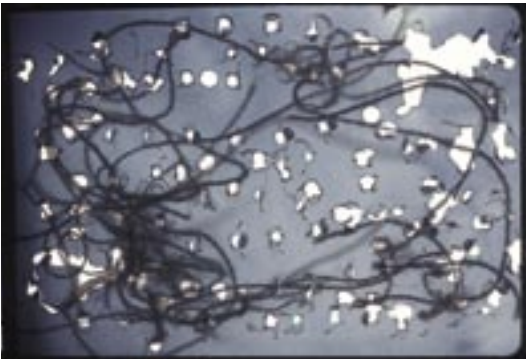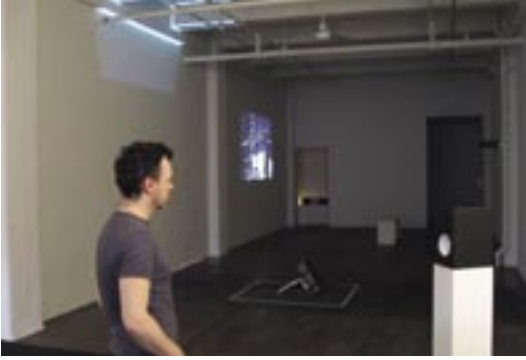
"A Fold in the Fabric", installation view, 2006, LMAKprojects, New York City.

Sabrina Gschwandtner, *Phototactic Behavior in Sewn Slides*, 2004, slide installation, dimensions variable.

Sabrina Gschwandtner, *Phototactic Behavior in Sewn Slides*, 2004, installation view.

Dominique Petitgand's sound installation *Proportions*, 2006, is a collage of sound recordings that moves between several sources: a woman speaking in French and a man speaking in English, audio feedback, and musical chords. Initially, the male voice seems to function as a translator of the woman's fragmented French. Of the various sound sources, the male voice is the clearest audio component, yet the message is unresolved:

> *She says she's not really sure
> She doesn't have a sense of the
> real in any case and senses it
> even less in the small things It's
> kind of like distances, distances
> of time, she's not really sure
> She finds it strange*

Here again, in Petitgand's work, we are caught in a space between expectation and uncertainty. This time, the space is within a sound broadcast that vacillates between easy listening and feedback. Are these words and sounds intended for our listening, or are we eavesdropping on a therapeutic, private conversation? One thing is clear: Petitgand's *Proportions* occupies the airwaves and soundscape that artist Vito Acconci deemed the next layer of public space to be capitalized on in making a work "public." Acconci wrote that sound "...it fills up the air and doesn't take up space. Its mode of existence is to be in the middle of things; you can do other things while you're in the middle of it."[4] It is over time that Petitgand's message is understood, through repetition and coexistence with other works. Petitgand's editing of invisible media accentuates that which seems to be fractured and fleeting, but upon closer reading of the transcription, the recorded voices agree on their uncertainty about time and place, and space between translation. In trying to make sense of the exhibition, the "fold" may be a space of simultaneity or a series of secretions where ideas can be layered together to generate new meaning. It is within this not-yet-established space that new mediums can be best supported, and the truest artistic practice—unresolved and unruly—can flourish.

—*Sara Reisman*

[1] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 70.

[2] Rosalind Krauss, "Two Moments from the Post- Condition," *October*, No. 116, Spring 2006, 62.

[3] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 36.

[4] Vito Acconci, "Public Space, Private Time," in *Art and the Public Sphere*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 176.

DOMINIQUE PETITGAND

Born in 1965 in Laxou, France. Lives and works in Paris.

Since 1992, Dominique Petitgand has been making sound pieces in which the montage of voices, silence, noise, and music produces a series of micro-universes that hover constantly between the reality principle and immersion in dream-like fictions free of context or the sense of time.

Recent exhibition venues include Art in General and the Swiss Institute in New York; gb agency in Paris; l'Arsenic in Lausanne, Switzerland; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (MuHKA) in Antwerp, Belgium; Le Confort Moderne in Poitiers, France; and elstatic in Turin, Italy.

PROPORTIONS

In *Proportions*, Dominique Petitgand explores the concept of definition and the barriers created as a result of interpretation, comprehension, and obfuscation. Three characters, each defined by their own distinctive language, attempt to make connections with each other through their isolation. The first character is the narrator, who is French, and describes her experience of time and space. The second character is the translator, who is American, and tries to interpret the complex concepts and emotions of the narrator from French into English. The third character is the theme that is, like fragments of a film score, undefined and ambiguous yet links the characters together through an enigmatic language of prattle, noise, and song.

Dominique Petitgand, *Proportions*, 2006, two-channel sound installation, dimensions variable.

I don't know, I,
but anyway

it's as if,
like a sense of direction

I don't have a sense of time

the same kind of thing,
I don't know

especially for little things,
but anyway

I have no sense of time,
direction or proportion

I don't know,
it's like distances

I don't know how far,
about time

I don't know,
it's strange, I have

Dominique Petitgand,
"Proportions",
sound installation with 2 speakers, 1997 / 2006.