

SECRET SOCIETIES

TO KNOW, TO DARE, TO WILL, TO KEEP SILENCE

June 23 – September 25, 2011

WALL PANELS

Eva Grubinger:
The Trial of Henry Kissinger, 2009

In 1973, Henry Alfred Kissinger, US Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977, received the Nobel Peace Prize for his involvement in the resumption of peace negotiations in Vietnam. At the same time, a military coup, supported by one of the largest political interventions by American secret services, eventually lead to the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende, and the succession to power of dictator Augusto Pinochet. Kissinger's involvement in the infamous 'Operation Condor' still remains ambiguous. Under this code word, secret services of Latin-American military regimes acted to persecute left-wing and pro-communist supporters around the world. To this day, Kissinger has managed to evade international jurisdiction. It is slightly irritating that the judge's gavel is not – as one might expect – placed on the judge's table, but rests on a die on the opposite side. Who is in a position to administer justice, and who has the power to take law and justice into their own hands?

Ulla von Brandenburg:
Karo Sieben (Seven of Diamonds), 2007

A stage without actors, an upturned playing card, a colored chessboard - is it about to start, or is the game already over? Will the thread help me to escape the maze? John Dee (1527 -1609), mathematician and counsel to Queen Elizabeth I. was familiar with the Vitruvian rules of architecture and geometry. He devoted the last third of his life almost exclusively to the pursuit of contacting angels in an attempt to uncover the universal language of Creation. As a follower of Marsilio Ficino, who revived Neo-Platonism during the early Italian Renaissance, Dee did not consider mathematical research and analysis of hermetic magic and divination, as disparate concepts. Rather, he regarded them as different aspects of a consistent worldview with the identical task: the search for a transcendental understanding of divine concepts hidden behind the visible world.

Joachim Koester:
The Hashish Club, 2009

'The Hashish Club' conjures up the ambiance of the Hôtel Lauzun on the Ile St. Louis in Paris, which, from 1844-1849, was the meeting place for the 'Club des hachichins'. Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire, Ferdinand Boissard and numerous other artists, writers and scientists (e.g.

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Eugène Delacroix, Jacques-Joseph Moreau, Honoré de Balzac) regularly gathered there to experiment with drugs, mainly with hashish. These meetings became weekly gatherings with quite particular rites; the participants dressed in Arabian outfits and drank strong black coffee. Some well-known writings were created under the influence of hashish, for example, Baudelaire's 'Les Paradis Artificiels'. Koester's work plays with the still wide-spread belief of a connection between drug experience and creativity, and the somewhat pompous exotic elements that are supposedly part of a cult. The film shows black and white shots of cannabis plants, blurring into a psychedelic series of images, and yet still visualizing, in a strange unemphatic, reticent way, the experience of drug-induced ecstasy.

Enrico David: Spring Session Men, 2003

A strange wooden chorus line of grotesque dancing male figures forms a frieze reminiscent in style of art deco and inlay painting. The male body is 'compressed' to form a clear-cut décor, the artist himself refers to a 'formalistic hysteria'. Furthermore, files and a fictional company logo are visible on a large conference table. All this brings to mind a bizarre boardroom or conference hall of a secretive fraternity. What kind of group has their meetings here, what kind of decisions are made, which rituals performed? A further prop in this boardroom is a circular lamp attached to the wall by a strip of leather, giving the impression of a large-scale medal. The abstract medal, reduced to its basic form, sheds no light on the 'merit' of this society since there is no stamping. It reappears as a minimalist logo on the papers displayed on the conference table. These papers or 'memos' talk of 'hard decisions', 'stiff designs' and remind employees: 'there is still a lot out there to be exchanged'. Due to the exaggerated postures of the nude male figures clutching their crotches, we tend to read between the lines of these terms and phrases. Overall, this installation is reminiscent of fraternities and evokes an ambiance of suppressed homoeroticism. The additional drawings of male bodies squeezed into shapes resembling corsets point in the same direction.

Cerith Wyn Evans: Acéphale, 2001

The neon art work depicts a life-size headless figure. The male body holds a flame in one hand, and a short dagger in the other. There is a skull in place of his genitals, and a labyrinth inside his stomach. In 1936, French artist André Masson created this figure for the French magazine *Acéphale* ('without head'), published until 1939. 'Acéphale' was not only the title of a magazine, but also of a secret society; Jacques Lacan and Walter Benjamin were amongst its members. The organization 'Acéphale', founded in 1936 by writer Georges Bataille, kept its meetings top secret. It considered itself to be a spiritual-occult, yet secular and anti-religious organization, performing mythical and orgiastic rites – sometimes at night in a forest near an oak tree struck by lightning. *Acéphale* members were asked to meditate on texts by Nietzsche, Freud, Sade and Mauss recited during the meetings. Subject to this image of the beheaded is the programmatic objection to logocentrism and purposive or instrumental rationality – also in the sense of a communal experiment contrary to, or alongside fascism, that is to say a society of conspirators without leader or core. The symbolic decapitation, however, also signifies a kind of liberation and change in thinking toward ecstasy.

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Luca Vitone:

Souvenir d'Italie (Fondamenti della Seconda Repubblica), 2010

The large-scale print on paper displays a list of over 900 members of the secret lodge 'P2' (abbr. for Propaganda Due). It contains names of numerous well-known politicians, journalists, industrialists, military officers, financiers, members of the secret service and university professors. Amongst others, current Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, as well as the head of the former Royal Court, Victor Emmanuel of Savoy, were involved with the P2-lodge. This list was found during a search of Licio Gelli's villa near Arezzo.

The discovery of the Masonic lodge, lead by Gelli and dissolved in 1981, was a by-product of the investigation into the activities of Sicilian financier Michele Sindona. Gelli's career began in the fascist party, although he managed to prove after the war that he had helped the partisans. As secretary of a Christian Democratic politician in Rome, he later established connections to secret services and to the Vatican. At the same time he rose through the ranks of the Freemasons, where he was instrumental in the restoration of the exclusive lodge 'Propaganda'. Under the name 'Propaganda Due', he soon developed it into a potent organization. 'P2' left a trail through almost every scandal, attempted coup, bomb attack, and a large number of unsolved crimes. The select committee led by politician Tina Anselmi drew the conclusion that the lodge did not aim to seize power, but to control government indirectly. For that purpose, the lodge used the secret services as well as right-wing extremists, and invested in a complete pervasion of the media, and control of the state apparatus and the economy.

To paraphrase the inscription in English:

'In the year XVI of the Second Republic, Italy dedicates this commemorative plaque in memory of its best sons to the founders of the homeland for their engagement and their sacrifice'.

Goldin & Senneby:

The Decapitation of Money

This installation brings together two historic events from the late 1930's and early 1950's. The first part of the installation consists of a large format photograph of the interior of the Russian managed EUROBANK (now known as VTB-Bank), which shows a tapestry by French artist Jean Lurçat. The various motifs such as the sea, the sun, the moon and a tree are reminiscent of motifs frequently used by George Bataille's 'Acéphale'; in one of his texts on economics he wrote about the affluence of society and its excesses. During the 1950's, Soviet and Chinese banks deposited dollars in the Parisien EUROBANK, outside the territorial borders of the USA, whereby the money forfeited its natural, symbolic value in exchange for a virtual one – the money was decapitated. This installation is part of a long research project the artists have been doing on a mysterious off-shore company called "Headless".

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**Brice Dellsperger:
Body Double 22, 2007**

This video work is a remake of Stanley Kubrick's movie *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Performer Jean-Luc Verna plays every role, male as well as female. Kubrick's film is an adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's tale *Rhapsody / Dream Story* (1925/26). Schnitzler describes how the seemingly harmonious marriage of Viennese doctor Fridolin and his wife Albertine fell into crisis through suppressed desires and erotic fantasies. A central element of the novella as well as Kubrick's adaptation is Fridolin's nocturnal visit to a secret masked ball that turns into an orgy of sexual rituals. Kubrick found inspiration for his scene of the masked ball in an orgy that supposedly happened in 1501 at the Vatican Palace. He emphasized the religious component of the secret gathering by using Latin chants played backwards, as well as chants from Southern India during the orgy scene.

**Sean Snyder:
The Site 2004 – 2005**

The Site examines visual and text data distributed by the media at the time Saddam Hussein was caught. He parallelizes visual surveys of the humble hut in the village of Dur where, in 2003, Hussein was detected and arrested by American soldiers, including excerpts of journalist's reports about the locality Hussein was last hiding in. In this way Snyder questions the news value of the images and texts and also how they are played off against each other to support their validity. Next to pictures of the humble and dilapidated hut Hussein was living in are media quotes. Snyder highlighted the nouns referring to the items inside the hut in boldface. Thus a kind of inventory emerges that says much about the almost obsessive descriptive urge journalists feel, and about the effort they make in reconstructing the last whereabouts of Hussein for the benefit of the readership.

**Jill Magid:
18 Spies, 2008
I Can Burn Your Face, 2008**

In 2005, the New York-based artist Jill Magid was hired to produce art for the AIVD (the General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands) for their new headquarters in The Hague. Her mission was to "provide the AIVD with a human face". After being formally vetted, Magid was given unprecedented permission to interview agents within the organization, these conversations were meticulously recorded by her in handwritten notebooks. Over the course of three years, Magid continued to explore the emotional, philosophical, and legal conflicts between "protective" institutions and individual identity in an unpublished manuscript detailing her experience with the organization and its agents. By collecting agents' personal data, Magid hoped to sketch the "face" of the organization. Before the opening in The Hague, Magid gave the agency a copy of her working manuscript to redact. Unfortunately, the AIVD did not like what they read. They confiscated a number of pieces after the show had already opened, and returned to Magid, via a representative from the Dutch Embassy in Washington D.C., a heavily redacted version of the text she had offered them. Magid's installation highlights the legal and ethical issues of presenting work focused on an organization mired in secrecy. In *The 18 Spies*, eighteen letterpress prints (seven

have been confiscated by the AIVD) describe the eighteen agents with whom she met. To 'burn' a face (as in the neon) is a term, used by the AIVD, meaning to expose an agent's identity.

Tobias Zielony:
Le Vele di Scampia, 2009

Le Vele di Scampia is a futuristic housing estate in northern Naples. "Le Vele" ("The Sails") were squatted by mafia families even before completion. Today the building complex is a symbol of the Camorra's power in the Naples region and a key centre of European drug trafficking. Tobias Zielony's film of the same name from 2009 originates in this very place. Seven thousand single images, shot at night with a digital single-lens reflex camera, are used to create nine minutes of animation film. The image sequence is dissociated from real time, some scenes run faster, some slower than reality. The result is an uncomfortable rhythm. Supported by harsh cuts and by the film's motives, this rhythm recalls early silent movies. This adds to the mysterious, stage-like character of the architectural set on which the people Zielony meets stage their own roles in society for his camera.