

SMART Papers *Endless Installation: A Ghost Story For Adults*

*Public Space With A Roof*

*21/03 - 26/04/2009*

*“The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. (...) To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on the text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.”*

Roland Barthes

Public Space With A Roof was founded in 2003 as an artists’ initiative and a research project space with the aim of enabling young artists to develop and present their ideas, realize collaborative projects and engage in critical discourse. Our own theoretical curiosity was translated into practice through large-scale research projects as we searched for the format that enables open discussion with regards to questions and ideas we had ourselves as artists at the beginning of our careers. In December 2007 we closed the project space as we felt the need to further challenge our artistic language and practice, and create new dialogues with other spaces and other audiences.<sup>1</sup>

Our projects have always taken the form of an installation that functions as a meeting point for different artworks, theories and ideas to be viewed from new perspectives. We constantly aim to activate the spectator and offer a continuous journey that is both physical and mental; hence all building elements of our installations are created with the aim to capture and engage the minds of spectators and prolong their experience within the work for as long as needed in order to gain new knowledge and insight. The installation is actually just one moment in our creative process that can be summarized as: *preliminary questions – research – installation turned into exhibition – lectures and discussions – conclusions and again new questions*. In this way, our projects offer the viewer a journey that begins with questions and turns full circle with a new set of questions that are then reiterated, transferred and explored into future projects. By creating installations that mainly function as platforms for the works of other artists, by dedication to the notion of collaboration and exchange; we intend to blur the borders between the magnitude of roles assumed to be taken by contemporary artists, such as the artist as activist, the artist as producer and the artist as curator.

‘Endless Installation: A Ghost Story For Adults’ aims to share the discoveries made during an intensive research regarding questions of architecture and the narrative of exhibition making, as well as definitions related to authorship. The best suitable form for this we found to be the exhibition structure; the exhibition appropriated by the artists as their main medium. Our position is to reject the artificial distance from the art works we are presenting: thereby negating the guiding principle in contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the history of Public Space With A Roof (PSWAR), past projects and activities please visit: [www.pswar.org](http://www.pswar.org)

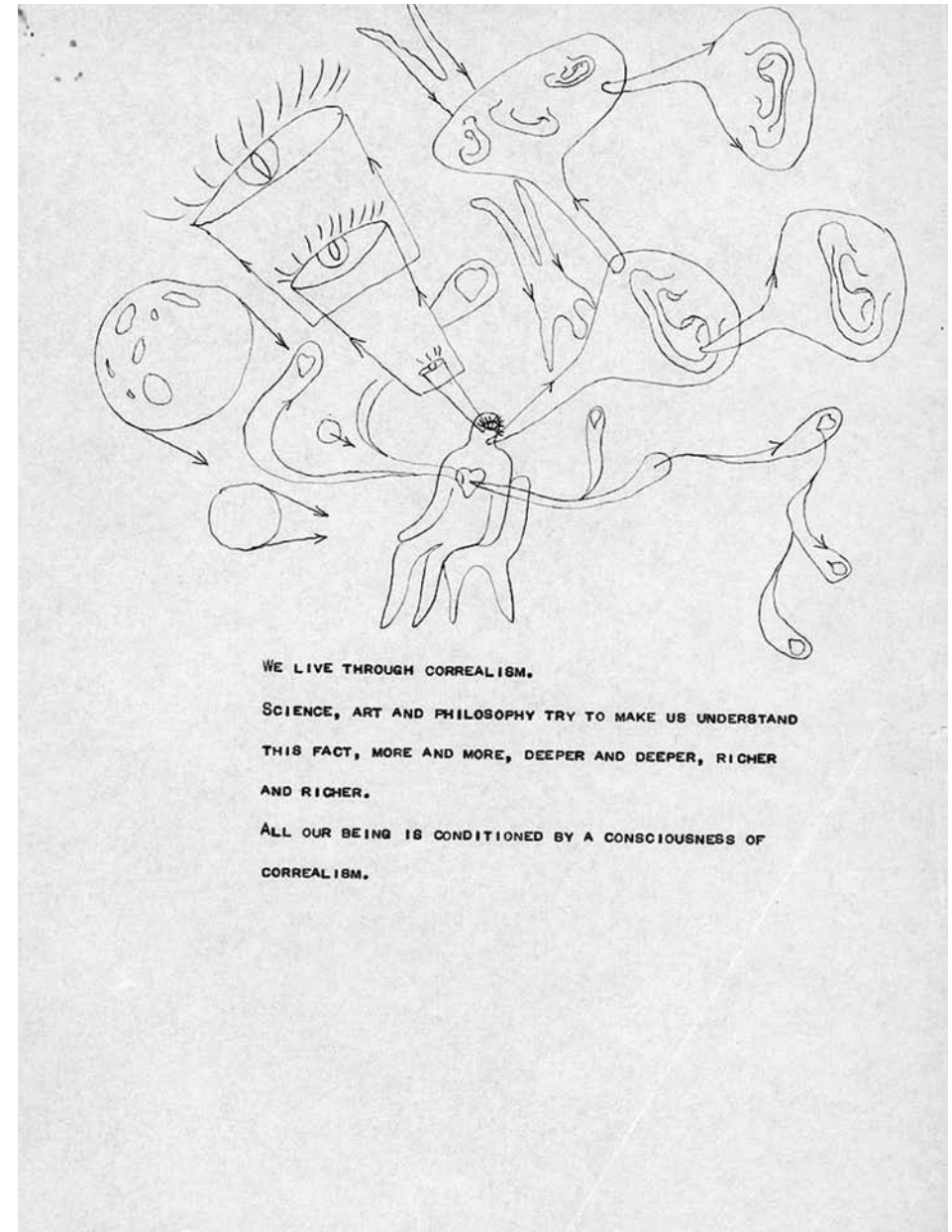
exhibition making. Instead, the exhibition became a form in itself to express personal impressions and the intimate fascination with the artists and works we present. This process and the act of our collaboration challenged our own notions of individual authorship, subjectivity and identity. Our hope is that the installation recreates this experience and offers the viewer time and space for reflection and further inspiration.

#### 4 *Three Characters in Search of an Exhibition*

During the final phase of our research, we decided to create a spatial confrontation between the work of three individuals who have made the strongest impact on us and who became our primary sources of inspiration: Frederick Kiesler, Aby Warburg and Meir Agassi. As these persons lived through three different periods of time and were from distinct geographic locations, and had never met 'in real life', our project became a fictional meeting point for their individual 'universes'. This fictional montage allowed us to define junctures of their ideas as well as offering new readings on their individual practices. In essence, we envision this exhibition as a theater piece where the actors are not living beings but are manifest in texts and images.

The core impulse that lead us to re-examine the legacy of creative individuals from the past came after encountering the work of the Austrian-American architect, sculptor, painter, designer, and art historian, Frederick Kiesler (1890-1965). The connection between our own practice and his main considerations stimulated us to research his archive and ideas, that notably still have not inherited a place in official art curriculum. Kiesler was tireless in his pursuit of radical new concepts of interior spaces. For this project we were inspired by his ideas that positioned new ways of coordinating architecture with paintings and sculptures, expansion of art forms in the exhibition space, elimination of the frame, coordination of the spectator, and the idea of creating an endless sculpture. In our interpretation, the endless sculpture translated into a search for forms that provides the basis for endless combinations of its building elements, being able to constantly shift perspective, create new configurations and narratives.

The narrative construction for 'Endless Installation: A Ghost Story For Adults' was further inspired by the work of the art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929). His life-long project 'Mnemosyne' presented a new approach to this discipline and formulated a new science that, according to philosopher Giorgio Agamben, still has no name. Warburg consciously refused the approach of aestheticizing art history and a formal consideration of images. Instead, he combined anthropology, ethnology, mythology, psychology, and biology as a way to overcome the existing disciplinary borders. By placing together images from different historical periods and cultures on his famous



panels, Warburg opened a new space in which to reflect on the human necessity of visual expression. According to him, images possess tremendous energy, with the potential to make man regress or guide him on his path to knowledge. The subtitle of our project comes from Warburg's enigmatic description of his atlas of images, 'Mnemosyne', as "a ghost story for truly adult people." This atlas was conceived as a gigantic condenser for gathering energy currents that continue to animate Europe's memory in the form of its 'ghosts'. By gazing upon this atlas of images which he saw as movements frozen at the moment of their greatest intensity, "the 'good European' would become conscious of the problematic nature of his own cultural tradition, perhaps succeeding thereby in "educating himself and in healing his own schizophrenia."<sup>2</sup>

Our third 'character' is the Israeli-born writer, critic, and artist Meir Agassi (1947-98) who spent the last years of his life in Bristol, UK, leaving behind a complex body of work that has only recently been discovered and appreciated. The specific language he developed in his last years came from his own 'schizophrenia' and the impossibility of expressing himself in a united body of work as one artist. To solve this, he created the Museum of Meir Agassi<sup>®</sup> which hosted the work of various fictional artists, each representing different aspects of questions he was interested in, as well as the various ghosts inhabiting his mind. This way, he urges us to re-examine the common definitions of the author and authorship. In his questions, we found the best expression for the questions we wanted to touch upon in this project: "How to bring together fragments of different idioms? How to be able to work differently and with different conditions under one roof? How to bridge the impossible gap between the incomprehensible, strange, incoherent, muddled, disjointed, disoriented, obscure, diverse, incomplete, lost fragments of the past and the incomprehensible, strange, incoherent, muddled, disjointed, disoriented, obscure, diverse, incomplete, lost fragments of the present?"<sup>3</sup>

A hidden, invisible character joined this journey into history and enabled us to formulate a position from which to understand the work of these remarkable individuals: a creature invented by the writer Kobo Abe in his book *The Box Man* (1973). In this novel, Abe created a psychological study of a 'box man' who decides to continue his 'normal' human existence with a cardboard box over his head. The box man exists as a disturbance of the prevailing order, 'the opposite of a ghost', somebody who is alive but who other people pretend not to notice. The outside world is far from ready for a creature like this, so he becomes a victim of their non-acceptance. He cannot be traced by the eye of the system which wants to classify and control him by knowing

<sup>2</sup> Agamben, Giorgio. *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, (Stanford University Press, 1999), p.96.  
<sup>3</sup> Agassi, Meir. *Some Notes Toward The Meir Agassi Museum<sup>®</sup>*, Special edition of 50 copies of in conjunction with The Artists' Book Fair 1995 at the Royal Festival Hall, London, November 1995, p.9

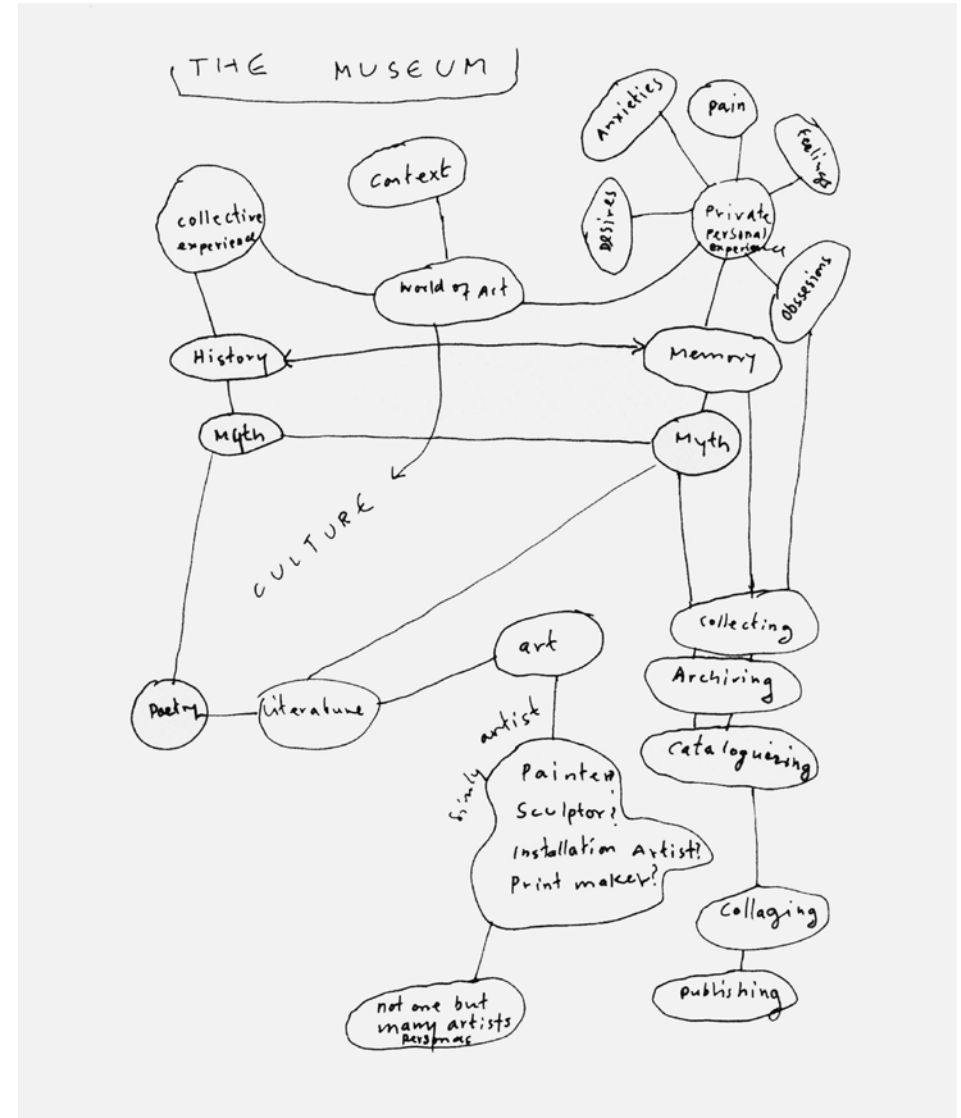


his face and name. What makes this novel a masterpiece is Abe's ability to constantly shift perspective on the same events, confronting the reader with his/her illusion of the possibility to entirely master the text. In the same way, we are aware of the impossibility of mastering the work of our three figures; instead, we chose to see them as particular cases of 'box men'. Their position as 'outsiders' during their lifetimes also gave them the freedom to play with the building elements of the world and reality they encountered, allowing them original and unique formulations within schools of thought usually forced to stay within the confines of their boxes. What we learn from them is persistence in expressing oneself in new ways despite contemporary rejection, the battles they had with their own 'ghosts' and a valuable lesson on the fragility of human existence. In the end, all we are left with are their rich oeuvres as sources for endless inspiration of next generations.

### Installations

One of our principal guiding ideas when building installations is the specificity of the institutional and architectural context of the space in which our projects take place. The central point of this project is an architectural structure in the largest exhibition space which simultaneously functions as the end of our research and as the starting point for the exhibition. Conceived as the 'brain' of the project, it hosts our provisional archive with all the elements we collected during the tours and detours of the research. It is a collection of various signs, texts, images, films, thoughts, fragments, books, etc. that fought their way to be included. Built in a particular way, the structure itself also functions as an amphitheatre where people can be seated and take part in lectures and debates. Its construction reflects the origin of contemporary theatre stage, following the idea of the mnemotechnical theatre by Giulio Camillo (1480-1544). His aim was to create a structure that would enclose "the nature of all things that can be expressed in speech" and ensure whoever entered would immediately grasp the knowledge contained therein.

Out of this 'brain', we have selected particular elements to create various forms and their content in the other exhibition spaces. This part of the exhibition reveals the traces of the processes we went through while making it, and so turns the experience into an 'anti-exhibition' as defined by Tadeus Kantor (1915-1990), a renown Polish artist and theatre director. According to him, exhibitions usually function as 'decoration traps' - hiding all the chaotically spinning ideas and imagination behind the works of art. Our aim was to break this rule and test how the revelation of these processes influences the perception of the exhibited artworks. Thus the exhibition can be viewed as just one way of interpreting the collected material and just one possible narrative to emerge around the work of these three remarkable individuals.



On a formal level, the narrative is built-up out of quotes and visual fragments with the aim to create new meaning from existing facts and data. We are interested in following Walter Benjamin's idea of montage and history as "a secret protocol between the generations of the past and that of our own. For we have been expected upon this earth."<sup>4</sup> Or, in the words of the renowned German film author, Alexander Kluge, we are interested in these historical figures following the principles of "arrière-garde" which aims to bring forward all lost utopian aspirations of past political and aesthetic projects. According to Kluge, any project for authentic renewal must consciously take a detour through the past and good or bad "old" in order to avoid creating the "bad new."

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## Lectures

### **March 22, 1:30 pm: On Frederick Kiesler and Meir Agassi**

Monica Pessler: *The Artistic Environment - Frederick Kiesler's model for apprehending relations*

Yaniv Shapira: *Who Are You Meir Agassi?*

### **April 5, 2 pm: On authorship**

Alex Ferquharson: *When Can an Exhibition be a Work of Art?*

Simon Sheikh: *F for Fake. Notes on the Signature, Authorship and Authority.*

### **April 12, 2pm: On the notion of outsider artist**

Naomi Aviv: *Meir Agassi: An Insider in the World of Outsiders*

Simon Ferdinando: *Flight Of The Anal Sadistic Warrior: In search of the Orphic Artaud*

### **April 19, 2pm: On theory and artistic engagement**

Introduction to the work of Alexander Kluge

Koen Brams: *The World Question Centre Questioned - about James Lee Byars' World Question Centre, produced by the Belgian Radio and Television and realized by Jef Cornelis in 1969*

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## Screenings

### **Films by Alexander Kluge**

*Yesterday Girl* (Abschied von Gestern), 1966, 84'

*Part-Time Work of a Female Slave* (Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin), 1973, 87'

*Artists in the Big Top: Perplexed* (Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: ratlos), 1968, 100'

*The Power of Emotion* (Die Macht der Gefühle), 1983, 112'

*Blind Director: The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* (Der Angriff Der Gegenwart auf die übrige Zeit), 1985, 106'

*Blind Love – Talk with Jean-Luc Godard*, 2001, 24'

*Love Makes You Perceptive* (a compilation of TV films about love)

*Where We Come From, Where We Go To* (a compilation of TV films about mankind, evolution, and environment)

*High on Work* (a compilation of TV films about work, economy, capitalism and crisis)

*The Poetic Power of Theory* (a compilation of TV films about Aristotle, Heidegger, Spinoza, Marx, Nietzsche, and Kant)

*Serpentine Gallery Program* (a selection of Alexander Kluge's TV films)

*The Magic of the Darkened Soul*, 2008 49'

### **Films by Angelika Wittlich**

*All Emotions Believe in a Happy Ending* (a documentary about Alexander Kluge), 2002, 78'

### **Films by Jef Cornelis**

*documenta 4*, 1968, 54'

*documenta 5*, 1972, 54'

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 1940. Gesammelten Schriften I:2. Suhrkamp Verlag. Frankfurt am Main, 1974. Translation: Dennis Redmond, p.2 [http://filepedia.org/files/Walter Benjamin - On the Concept of History.pdf](http://filepedia.org/files/Walter_Benjamin_-_On_the_Concept_of_History.pdf) (visited February 25, 2009)

## Biographies

Public Space With A Roof is:

Tamuna Chabashvili, born 1978, Tbilisi, USSR; Adi Hollander, born 1976, Brussels, Belgium; Vesna Madzosi, born 1976, Zajecar, Yugoslavia. They live and work in Amsterdam.

### *The installation (in order of appearance)*

Frederick Kiesler, Czernowitz, Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1890 - 1965, New York, USA.

Aby Warburg, Hamburg, Germany, 1866 - 1929.

Meir Agassi, Kibbutz Ramat Hakovesh, Israel, 1947 - 1998, Bristol, UK.

Susan Lipski, Detroit, USA, 1947 - Ceased her activities 1998.

David Strauss, near Wittenberg, Germany 1909 - 1984, Kfar Ganim, Israel.

Mo Kremer, Hannover, Germany, 1920 - 1993, New York, USA.

Kobo Abe, Tokyo, Japan, 1924 - 1993, Tokyo.

Walter Benjamin, Berlin, Germany 1892 - 1940, Portbou, Spain.

Antoin Artaud, Marseille, France, 1896 - 1948, Paris, France.

Ronald Barthes, Cherbourg, France 1915 - 1980, Paris, France.

Kurt Schwitters, Hannover, Germany, 1887 - 1948, Kendal, England.

Jean-Luc Godard, born 1930, Paris, France. Lives and works in Paris.

Bertold Brecht, Augsburg, Germany, 1898 - 1956, Berlin, Germany.

Orson Welles, Kenosha, Wisconsin, USA, 1915 - 1985, Los Angeles, USA.

Alfred Hitchcock, London, UK, 1899 - 1980, Los Angeles, USA.

Juhani Pallasmaa, born 1936, Hämeenlinna, Finland. Lives and works in Helsinki, Finland.

Philippe-Alain Michaud, born 1961. Lives and works in Paris, France.

Tadeusz Kantor, Wielopole Skrzynskie, Austria-Hungary, 1915 - 1990, Krakow, Poland.

Georges Didi-Huberman, born 1953, Saint-Etienne, France. Lives and works in Paris.

### *Lectures and screenings*

Naomi Aviv was born in 1955. She lives in Tel Aviv, Israel. She is a freelance curator of contemporary art, writer and lecturer. Since 2000 she is a member of the Plastic Art Department of the Art and Culture Board of the Ministry of Education. She is a member of the special Committee Reviewing the Quality of the Museums in Israel and of the committee for the curatorial award. She publishes essays in catalogues and art publications, has curated numerous exhibitions in Israel and abroad, including the Israeli Pavilion at the International Sao Paulo Art Biennale, Brazil. She is also the editor of the book *The Jar from Tennessee*- 50 articles on international art and artists written by the late author, poet and artist Meir Agassi.

Koen Brams was born in 1964 Turnhout, Belgium. He lives in Luik, Belgium. He studied

psychology at KU Leuven. From 1991 until 2000 he was editor-in-chief of the art magazine *De Witte Raaf*. Since 2000 he has been a director of Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht. He has published *De Encyclopedie van de Fictieve Kunstenaars* (The Encyclopedia of Fictional Artists), 2000 and initiated in-depth research of work of Jef Cornelis. Together with Dirk Pültau, he is currently undertaking a number of research projects relating to an alternative history of art in Belgium since the seventies.

Jef Cornelis is a film director living and working in Antwerp. Between 1963 and 1998 Jef Cornelis worked as creator, director and scriptwriter for the Flemish public broadcasting company (VRT). Apart from being a television maker Jef Cornelis has been an active participant in the international art scene. Since the sixties he has been involved in various art initiatives (such as the alternative art space A379089, with Kasper König coordinating, and Panamarenko, James Lee Byars and Marcel Broodthaers participating). The films Cornelis has directed on art, architecture, literature, theater and opera include *Picasso in Paris*, 1966; *documenta 4*, 1968; *James Lee Byars*, 1968/69; *Marcel Broodthaers: Museum for 17th Century Art*, 1969; *Dutch Architecture, 1920 to 1940*, 1971; *documenta 5*, 1972.

Alex Farquharson is an internationally renowned curator, critic, university lecturer and writer. His last exhibition 'If Everybody Had An Ocean: Brian Wilson, an Art Exhibition' was the second most visited exhibition ever at Tate St Ives. He writes for a range of magazines, including *Frieze*, *Art Monthly* and *Artforum* and has contributed to numerous books and catalogues on contemporary art. As Tutor and Research Fellow in Curatorial Studies on the Curating Contemporary Art MA at the Royal College of Art he led weekly seminars on aspects of experimental exhibition history. He curated around 40 exhibitions while at Spacex in Exeter and the Centre for Visual Arts Cardiff, 1994 – 2000. He is currently director of the Nottingham Contemporary, a contemporary art center under construction.

Simon Ferdinando is an artist-curator who lives and works in Amsterdam. Born in Mombassa, Kenya he studied fine art at Goldsmiths College 1984-1988, and first encountered Artaud in the exhibition 'Aftermath 1945-1954. New images of man' at the Barbican Gallery in London in 1982. He is currently preparing an academic study on Artaud, Bacon and Van Gogh.

Alexander Kluge was born 1932 in Halberstadt, Germany and lives in Munich. He is a film director, intellectual, a storyteller, and a cultural critic. He studied Law, History and Music at universities in Marburg and Frankfurt am Main and received his doctorate in Law in 1956. During his studies in Frankfurt, Kluge became acquainted with Theodore

Adorno at the Institute for Social Research. In 1958 Adorno introduced Kluge to Fritz Lang, unexpectedly initiating his interest in film. Kluge is one of the key figures in reviving German cinema and a major force in the genesis and development of New German Cinema. He was among those who penned the inflammatory Oberhausen Manifesto, a document signed by 26 irate young German filmmakers at the 1962 Oberhausen Film Festival. In 1962 Kluge became director of the film institute at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, Germany. In 1988, he began working for German cable television on the RTL and SAT1 channels. His incredible visual creativity is expressed in couple of hundreds feature and TV films, among them *Yesterday Girl*, 1966; *Artists in the Big Top: Perplexed*, 1968; *Part-Time Work of a Female Slave*, 1973; *The Power of Emotion*, 1983; *Blind Director: The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time*, 1985.

Monica Pessler was born in Graz, Austria in 1965. She studied art history at Karl-Franzens University in Graz and has worked in the arts for museums and youth initiatives. Pessler has also worked at the Steirischer Herbst-festival, has been involved in exhibition and publication projects and has written contributions for catalogues and magazines. She is currently director of the Austrian Frederick and Kiesler Private Foundation in Vienna.

Yaniv Shapira was born in Kibbutz Yizrael, Israel in 1967, where he currently lives. He has a B.A. in Art History and Jewish Philosophy and an M.A. in Art History from Tel Aviv University. He is a graduate cum laude of the Diploma Studies in Museology at the Genia Schreiber University Art Gallery, Tel Aviv University. From 1995 he worked at the Museum of Art, Ein Harod and since 2004, he has been curator of the Kibbutz Art Gallery, Tel Aviv curating numerous exhibitions.

Simon Sheikh is a curator and critic who lives and works in Berlin and Copenhagen. He is Assistant Professor of Art Theory and a Coordinator of the Critical Studies Program, Malmö Art Academy in Sweden. He was director of Overgaden – Institute for Contemporary Art in Copenhagen, 1999-2002 and Curator at NIFCA, Helsinki, 2003-2004. He was also editor of the magazine *Øjeblikket* 1996-2000, and a member of the project group GLOBE 1993-2000, as well as editor of OE critical readers series, published by b\_books Berlin. Sheikh curated numerous exhibitions and his texts are widely published in various periodicals such as *Afterall*, *AnArchitectur*, *Springerin*, and *Texte zur Kunst*.

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Endless Installation: A Ghost Story For Adults

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