

# A CURRENT PROPOSAL

“So that finally, there is one last thing we should stop doing. We should stop calling ourselves new. We are not. They were new. We are old, and we have not necessarily aged as well as we should. To cite Eliot again: he reports himself as answering someone who objected to, I suppose, Shakespeare, Dante,

and Homer on the grounds that we know more than they did by replying, “yes, we do, and they are precisely what we know.” Hollis Frampton, ‘Invention without a future’, lecture from November 17, 1979

AROUND FOUR BLOCKS of print we shall postulate four ultramundane margins that shall contain indeterminate information<sup>1</sup> as well as reproduced reproductions. Within these cascading pages, we will outline A CURRENT PROPOSAL from Dexter Sinister for THE LAST (OR FIRST) NEWSPAPER.

## Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space

For many artists the universe is expanding; for some it is contracting.

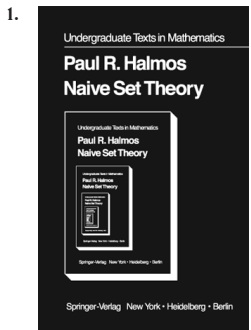
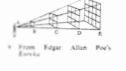
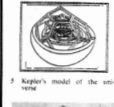
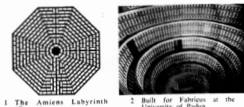
By  
ROBERT SMITHSON

AROUND FOUR BLOCKS of print I shall postulate four ultramundane margins that shall contain indeterminate information as well as reproduced reproductions. The first diastole shall be a labyrinth<sup>1</sup>, through which the mind will pass in an erratic, thus eliminating the spatial problem. The next encounter is an abstruse anatomy diagram<sup>2</sup>. Quickly the mind will pass over this dizzy height. Here the pages of time are kept thin, even when it comes to a pyramid<sup>3</sup>. The center of this pyramid is everywhere and nowhere. From this center one may see the Tower of Babel<sup>4</sup>, Kepler's universe<sup>5</sup>, or a building by the architect Lebus<sup>6</sup>. To formulate a general theory of this inconceivable system would solve its symmetrical perfection. Ready to trap the mind is one of an infinite number of ‘cities of the future’<sup>7</sup>. Insular codes<sup>8</sup> and extravagant experiments<sup>9</sup> adumbrate the ‘obscure’ abstractness<sup>10</sup>. One becomes aware of what T. E. Hulme called ‘the fringe... the cold walls... the lead nowhere’.

In Ad Reinhardt's ‘Twelve Rules for a New Academy’ we find the statement: ‘The present is the future of the past, and the past of the future.’ The dim surface sections within the confines of Reinhardt's standard 100° x 60° ‘painting’, disclose faint squares of time. Time, as a colorless intersection, is absorbed almost imperceptibly into one's consciousness. Each painting is at once both memory and forgetfulness, a paradox of darkening time. The lines of his grids are barely visible; they ‘waver’ between the future and the past.

George Kubler, like Ad Reinhardt, seems concerned with ‘weak signals’ from ‘the void’. Beginnings and endings are projected into the present as busy planes of ‘activity’. In *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, Kubler says, ‘Actually in... the interchromic point when nothing is happening. It is the void between events.’ Reinhardt seems obsessed by this ‘void’, so much that he has attempted to give it a concrete shape—a shape that evades shape. Here one finds no allusion to ‘duration’, but an interval without any suggestion of ‘life or death’. This is a colorless portion of a hidden infinity. The future crisscrosses the past as an unobtainable present. Time vanishes into a perpetual sunset.

Most notions of time (Progress, Evolution, Avant-garde) are put in terms of biology. Analogies are drawn between organic biology and technology; the nervous system is extended into electronics, and the muscular



Altered cover of Paul R. Halmos, *Naive Set Theory*, 1960

“From kindergarten, most of us remember the Broken Telephone Game. One person whispers a word or a phrase into the ear of the person next to him. That person, in turn, repeats it quietly to the next. And so on until, at the end of a long line of people, the language finds itself transformed. Dispersed information is information spread too thin. In efforts to stop information, younger artists have made their work to operate inside of a Broken Telephone Game, generating a slippage of meaning and welcoming processes of mistranslation.” Anthony Huberman, ‘Naive Set Theory,’ *Dot Dot Dot 15*, 2007



“At Gavin Brown’s Enterprise, a gallery in Greenwich Village in New York, I’ve admired for a while the painted statement that wraps round the façade of the corner building. It says ‘the whole world + the work = the whole world. It is *Work Number 300* by Martin Creed and implies a worldview in the form of a simple mathematical equation that seems to embed the logic of Naive Set Theory. Underlying this simple sentence is again simple Set Theory. The set of the Whole World contains everything in the whole world and the Work is a thing in the Whole World, so then the Whole World must necessarily completely contain the

In “Quasi-infinities and the Waning of Space” (*Arts Magazine*, 1966), latent Futurist predecessor Robert Smithson leaned heavily on Yale historian George Kubler’s little book *The Shape of Time*<sup>2</sup> to assert that time moves not forward in a straight line, but instead, intermittently and coincidentally in retreating and recursive loops — more knot than arrow.<sup>3</sup>

Work. Adding the Work back to the Whole World leaves you again with only the Whole World. This idea of art-making echoes the ideas of James, Gödel and Halmos. The Work is produced only by practice and is only added to the Whole World which, although it contains every thing in the whole world, is also, by definition, incomplete. Very lovely.” David Reinfurt, ‘Naive Set Theory,’ *Dot Dot Dot 17*, 2008

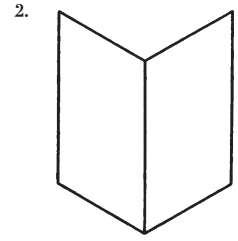


Fig. 5.

“The exciting thing about all this is that as it is new it is old and as it is old it is new, but now we have come to be in our way which is an entirely different way.” Gertrude Stein, *Narration: Four Lectures*, 1969

“This book has a lot to say about Ancient Greek perspectives and their meaning but there is one perspective it misses. That is their view of time. They saw the future as something that came upon them from behind their backs with the past receding away before their eyes. When you think about it, that’s a more accurate metaphor than our present one. Who really CAN face the future? All you can do is project from the past, even when the past shows that such projections are often wrong. And who really can forget the past? What else is there to know?” Robert M. Pirsig, ‘Afterword,’ in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, 1974.

“As far as I am concerned, there are no such things as forms that are more or less up to date. All forms, materials, ideas, and means are available and to be used. Walking by means of stepping to one side takes us out of the system that goes straight ahead. There is no goal before us with laurels for the first to arrive and ashes for the last.” Michaelangelo Pistoletto, ‘Famous Last Words,’ *Bit 2*, June 1968



Optical illusion

“It’s quite the same here as anywhere else, but here it’s made quite clear: space is generated by need. Let’s say you’d like to take a walk. You simply project in front of you the necessary space which you walk across as and when. The same with time. Just as a spider secretes the thread down which she climbs, so you secrete the time you need to do whatever you need to do, and you proceed along this thread which is visible behind you but usable only in front of you. The key lies in working it out properly...” Rene Daumal, *A Night of Serious Drinking*, 1938

1.



"The rest of time emerges only in signals relayed to us at this instant by innumerable stages and by unexpected bearers ... The nature of a signal is that its message is neither here nor now, but there and then." George Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 1964

## Detroit Free Press

A restoration that evolved into a redesign.

AND SO WE DEPART from February 20, 1909—E.T. Marinetti's manifesto appeared today on the front of *Le Figaro*.<sup>1</sup> *We had been awake all night my friends and I, under the mosque-lamps whose filligree copper bowls were constellated like our very souls ...* Then this morning's *New York Times* p. A14 under "Detroit Journal", the headline reads: "In a Grand Experiment, 2 Daily Newspapers Now Not So Daily."<sup>2</sup>

It's a big news day in Detroit: Michigan State made the Final Four basketball playoffs to be held in the Motor City next weekend, and yet more bad news for the city's auto-industry as the new administration demands GM surrender Chrysler's independence to a partnership with Italy's Fiat. However, these stories merely frame the real subject of the article: how the local interest in both events has brought the current crisis in the newspaper industry into sharp relief.

All of this news would have landed on hundred of thousands of Motor City doorstops on Monday morning, in the form of *The Detroit Free Press* and *The Detroit News*. Would have, that is, except that Monday—of all days—was the long-planned first day of the newspapers' new strategy for surviving the economic crisis by ending home delivery on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. Instead, on those days, they are directing readers to their Web sites and offering a truncated print version at stores, newsstands and street boxes. "This morning I felt like something was missing," said Nancy Nester ... "There was this feeling of emptiness."

These three column inches offer a pretty concise distillation of the economic issues directing large-scale newspaper publishing now—it is a perfect time to hollow out the old form, and MAKE IT NEW.<sup>3</sup>

ing. Linotype operators who had made a typing error couldn't easily go back to delete it, and had to finish the line before they could eject the slug and re-key a new one. Since slug would be discarded, the quickest way to finish the line was to run a finger down the keys, creating this nonsense phrase. Occasionally and accidentally the words appeared in a final edition.

## THE WEATHER

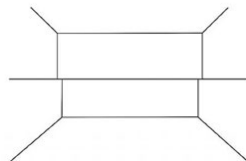
No smog today. U.S. Weather Bureau forecast: Night and morning clouds but mostly sunny afternoons today and tomorrow. Little change in temperatures. High today about 70. Rain probability 10% today and tonight, 25% tomorrow. Yesterday's high, 67; low, 59.

2.



The *New York Times*, National section, Tuesday 31 March, 2009

"It is up to the reader-viewer to decide how to, so to speak, circle the square." Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Movement: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rapture*, 1986



"New work always involves objections to the old, but these objections are really relevant only to the new. They are part of it. If the earlier work is first-rate it is complete. New inconsistencies and limitations aren't retroactive; they concern only work that is being developed ... It's not like a movement; anyway, movements no longer work; also, linear history has unraveled somewhat." Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects,' 1965; and *Untitled*, Etching, 1974

"In other words—and this amounts to an aesthetic system—the only meaningful way in which art can speak of man and his world is by organizing forms in a particular way and not by making pronouncements with them. Form must be a vehicle for thought; it must be a way of thinking." Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, 1962



3. Ezra Pound, *Make it New*, 1934

"The man who claims to be modern must be proficient in the highest degree, for unless he can atone by creative ability for his break with tradition, he is merely disloyal to the past. It is sheer juggling to look upon a denial of the past as the same thing as consciousness of the present. Today stands between yesterday and tomorrow, and forms a link between past and future; it has no other meaning. The present represents a process of transition, and that man may account himself modern who is conscious of it in this sense.

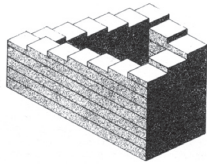
Every good quality has its bad side, and nothing that is good can come into this world without directly producing a corresponding evil. This is a painful fact. Now there is the danger that consciousness of the present may lead to an elation based upon illusion: the illusion, namely, that we are the culmination of the history of mankind, the fulfilment and the end-product of countless centuries. If we grant this, we should understand that it is no more than the proud acknowledgement of our destitution: we are also the disappointment of the hopes and expectations of the ages. The modern man is aware of this. He has seen how beneficent are science, technology and organisation, but also how catastrophic they can be." Carl Gustav Jung, 'The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man,' *Collected Works*, 1953

Novo Scotia's men's basketball team downed Alberta, 79-65, but the Alberta women reversed the result, winning 65-34. m e etoaln shrdlu

ETAOIN SHRDLU is the approximate order of frequency of the twelve most commonly used letters in the English language and best known as a nonsense phrase that sometimes appeared in the days of "hot type" print publish-



Various recent standard newspaper formats, culminating with the “Broadsheet”-format *Guardian* (since reduced to the “Berliner”).



1. Quasi-infinity

“Art histories may be measured in time by books (years), by magazines (months), by newspapers (weeks and days), by radio and TV (days and hours). And the gallery proper—*instants!*” Robert Smithson, ‘Quasi-infinities and the Waning of Space,’ *Arts Magazine*, 1966

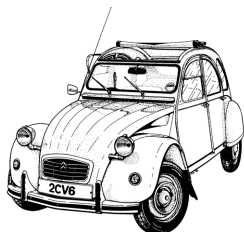
**OUR INTENT IS DIRECT.** This November 2009 as part of the visual art performance biennial, we wish to produce **THE (FIRST) (LAST) NEWSPAPER**, strictly in the continuous present<sup>1</sup> on a daily basis for three weeks. Half publishing, half performance, our newspaper won’t present only the NEWS, but will borrow promiscuously from the past, present and future looping back both to where newspapers started and to where they will go.

**PICTURE THIS AS A “BROADSHEET”<sup>2</sup>**—precursor of the modern newspaper—set up to report past and future events *as they happen*; designed to be looked at as much as read, in private and in public, engaging both a general and a local interest. In other words, this is a newspaper that self-consciously **PERFORMS** its specific cultural context.

Although news-on-paper existed both before and after the invention of moveable type in the mid-15th century, the broadsheet format established a newspaper’s key technical and typographic conventions which (just about) remain today. The broadsheet is still the largest standard newspaper format, characterized by long vertical pages. The term is derived from popular prints, usually single sheets, sold on the streets and containing various types of matter from ballads to political satire. The first broadsheet was also the first Dutch newspaper, *Courante uyt Italien, Duytslandt, &c.* published in 1618, Amsterdam. Prior to this, news periodicals had been pamphlets in quarto-size. Broadsheets developed further in the New World after a British tax of 1712, levied duties on newspapers based on the number of pages.

Crucially, the broadsheet’s large format was designed at dual purpose—to be posted in **PUBLIC** for communal reading and to be taken away to be read in **PRIVATE**. This tension between the essential public-ity of a newspaper and its dense contents remains.

“To start with, the marginal position should not be mistaken for plain dissent, which in terms of ‘stance’ or ‘posture’ often merely inverts what it dissents from, and re-institutionalises; nor does the margin involve secession (or even countenance it). Margin dwellers are balancers, contributory yet withdrawn. Bridges may be built there, or ropes thrown across, though more often, connections are merely pointed to; alternatives weighed and canvassed; sources noted. The line that divides the margin from the text is more than one of address and identity—there is usually an economic barrier—but it is wise to remember that the margin needs its text. Forgetful of this a margin is apt to become a chasm. Recognisably the expertise of a marginal is apt to be narrow but deep; a feature that suits their habitat; but of course when the marginals find the text wholly unacceptable they will tend to develop their own pursuits in some depth, cramped as they are for working space. This always shows, even when rationalised as minimalism. On the other hand a margin’s interactive function—even if temporarily suspended—is actually its saving grace, and can out-perform any Debray-like parallel structure, which has no declared relative scale, or means of crossing over. The margin does not hesitate to foray into the text when its offerings otherwise go unheeded, or when food is scarce. There can even be frivolity, and an exchange of artefacts. The Citroen 2CV, for instance, plainly a margin vehicle—it has that narrow look, and the conceptual rectitude—was of course designed



for the text, and is somewhat uneasily back there in a renewed lease of life. In sum, therefore—and not to stretch this line of thinking too far—the margin may be a place of relegation, or of voluntary exile, but for those whose natural habitat it is (and I speak of my friends), this is one place for active people to be. There are others.” Norman Potter, *Models and Constructs: margin notes to a design culture*, 1990



2. *Courante uyt Italien, Duytslandt, &c.*, June 1618. The *Courante* was a single folio sheet, meaning a full sheet folded once to form 4 pages and then cut open at the fold. The first issues were printed on just one side of the sheet, initially without a serial number, date, or publisher’s imprint—features now considered essential to newspapers, and which were to follow in subsequent years. The main text runs in two columns, separated with a gutter and a line running in it. There are no empty lines within the body text. The body of the text is printed in Dutch black-letter, except for the numbers. Roman type is used for datelines which also act as headlines for the news items. The text is fully justified and the beginnings of paragraphs are identified with indents approximately the size of the line-height.



*The Rocky Mountain News* (nicknamed the *Rocky*) a daily newspaper published in Denver, Colorado printed its final edition on February 27, 2009. *The Rocky* was the most recent victim of the savage economics of contemporary newspaper publishing. The front page of its final paper recycled the front of its first from April 23, 1859, layered with a solemn goodbye note to its faithful readers.



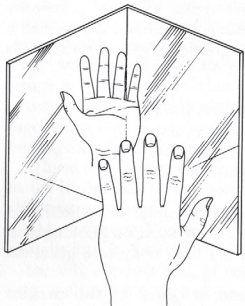
Umberto Boccioni, *The Development of a Bottle in Space*, 1912



1. Street newspaper, China

- (number of) adjectives
- (number of) adverbs
- (percentage of) area not occupied by type
- (percentage of) area occupied by type
- (number of) columns
- (number of) conjunctions
- (depth of) depression of type into page surface
- (number of) gerunds
- (number of) infinitives
- (number of) letters of alphabet
- (number of) lines
- (number of) mathematical symbols
- (number of) nouns
- (number of) numbers
- (number of) participles
- (perimeter of) page
- (weight of) paper sheet
- (type of) paper stock
- (number of) prepositions
- (number of) pronouns
- (number of) points) size type
- (name of) typeface
- (number of) words
- (number of) words capitalised
- (number of) words italicised

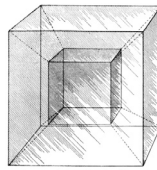
"SCHEMA for a set of pages whose component variants are to be published in various places. In each published instance, it is set in its final form (so it defines itself) by the editor of the particular publication where it is to appear, the exact data used to correspond in each specific instance to the specific fact(s) of the published final appearance. The work defines itself in place only as information with simply the external support of the facts of its external appearance or presence in print in place of the object." Dan Graham, March 1966



On reflection, we realised real news doesn't need a press release.

'Once it's typed it's published', John Chris Jones, *Spanner*, 1979

"No sooner has this text been written than it will be full of holes." Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War,' *Flash Art*, 1967



Anomalous view of a "rebus" of four dimensions appearing as a figure of three dimensions.

WE PROPOSE TO USE THE *COURANTE* (trans. *current, common, prevalent*) AS A WORKING MODEL, and produce a series of daily broadsheet newspapers during the three weeks of PERFORMA. These would be single-sided, relatively inexpensive web-offset printed flat newsprint sheets assembled from one central location and dispersed from several off-center ones (even other cities<sup>1</sup>, i.e. Detroit); displayed both flat, hung in public for collective onsite reading, and folded to be taken away for private reflection.

We will be responsible for all aspects of production and distribution including necessary editorial collaborations. Remaining holes in this current proposal will be plugged in the coming months.

\*IMPORTANT\* The nature of this project requires the confirmation of a single lump sum budget, negotiated and delivered in advance. The precise outcome—size of the format, quantity of the print-run, extent of its content, and scale of its dispersion is DIRECTLY RELATIVE to the \$\$\$ afforded to the project. You *very visibly* get what you pay for. We generally ask for a working fee of around half the production budget. Bearing all this in mind and given that we intend to work full-time during these three weeks in November as well as concertedly from now leading towards the project while anticipating the likely production costs involved, we suggest a sum of minimum \$30,000.

Our broadsheets must be both UNAPOLOGETIC (not excused by their ambiguous status as an art project) and PLAUSIBLE (organized and edited with rigour and conviction); and they must be produced under the twin principles of (a) THE REFUSAL TO TREAT THE PAST AS PAST and (b) whether NEWSPAPERS or FUTURISTS, WE MUST COMPLEXLY APPLY RATHER THAN SIMPLY CELEBRATE THEIR INHERITANCE.

DS



If asked to judge which of the two piles illustrated is equal in height and width, most people would choose the one on the right—but measurement will show that it is in fact the left-hand pile.

"The present is the future of the past, and the past of the future." Robert Smithson quoting Ad Reinhardt, 'Quasi-infinities and the Waning of Space,' *Arts Magazine*, 1966

"Try writing what you have written in the past tense in the present tense and you will see what I mean. What we have to do is to give back to the past we are writing about its own present tense." Professor Greg Denning, website, 2002

"Hot media—newspapers, novels, and especially such white-hot media as scholarly and stat correlations—will pre-empt all hotness. In their detachment (amidst the general coolness) they will draw even further back, in order to maintain and to become even more themselves in their own right and hotness. The 'footnote' will be the hottest point in these fires. The 'footnote' will be utter detachment and dis-engagement, a radical and liberal barrier behind which to fight or hide. Refuge of those escaping the global village. The last and perhaps only means of those escaping the 'appearance' of appearances. Or the 'state' of the modern state. Or the 'disposition' of others' dispositions. The 'form' of forms. The 'function' of functions. The 'condition' of conditions. The 'temper' of tempers, the 'dilemma' of dilemmas, the 'plight' of plights, the 'aspect' of aspects, the 'pomp' of pomp, the 'mode' of modes the 'tenor' of tenors the 'style' of styles the 'end' of beginnings the 'middle' of middles and the 'beginnings' of the end." Donald Porter, *As if a footnote to the Final Glory*, 1974



"In October 1978, during the midst of a two-week printers' strike which completely halted daily publication of *The New York Times*, an alternative newspaper appeared in street boxes one morning. Created by a consortium of sharp wits including George Plimpton, Christopher Cerf and Nora Ephron, *Not The New York Times* was a spiritual companion to *The Times* produced as a precise doppelganger but with less-than-completely true stories. For example, an interview with Genghis Khan—"not such a bad fellow"—that originally appeared in 1241 was reprinted as an author's favorite and followed by a report of the collapse of the Queensboro Bridge under the weight of 10,000 runners in the Rheingold Beer Marathon. "After *The New York Times*, November 14, 2008