

M I R A G E

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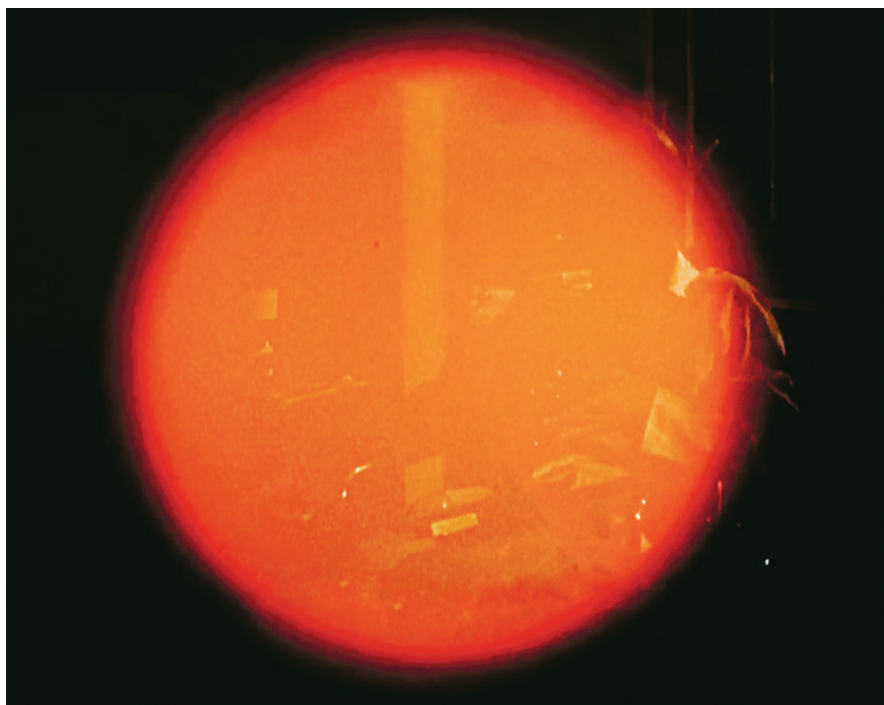
M I R A

G E

you cannot occupy yourself exclusively with
mind stop we must also occupy ourselves with matter
stop there is no escape from physicality stop or escape
from mind stop these two things are constantly on
a collision course stop hugs and kisses

s t o p

m i a



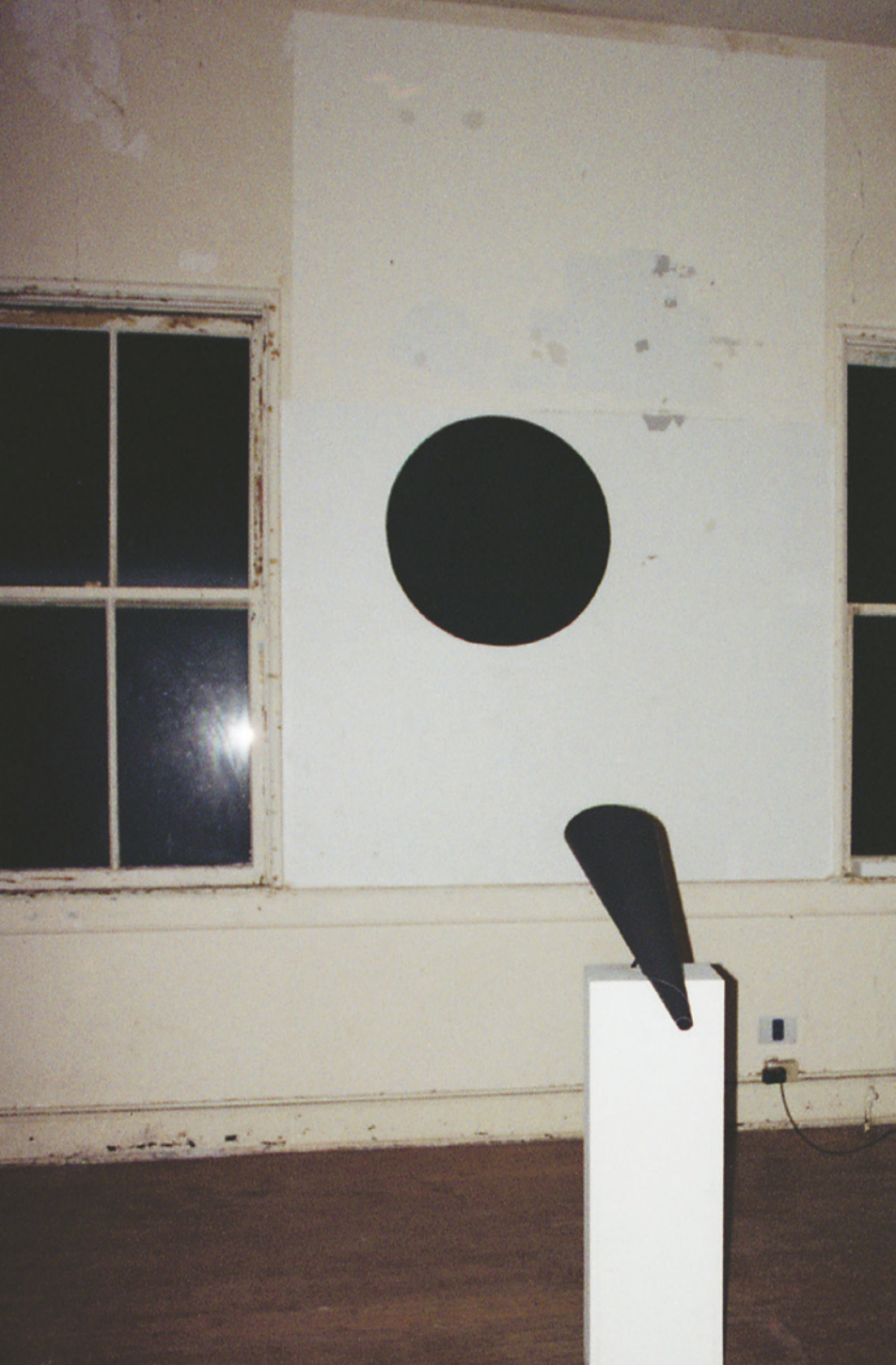
Every time Jacob G. walked near the shed,
it seemed to him that he had already passed it that day.
So he stopped,
and then walked around it
several times
and in the end
he would walk away
and come back again
so he could finally return
and sit on the chair
next to it.

In order to free himself of this insistently returning feeling, he repeatedly marched around a circle marked on the ground with a stick, right next to his watchman's lodge.

His movements were heavy and he trudged like an elephant.

He cursed, and wiped his face with a handkerchief every so often.

One day, instead of a circle he outlined a square, which markedly improved the way he felt.



A neon sign installed on the night
of September 7-8, 1984, on the wall of room 28 in the Chronos &
Coatlicue Hotel:

*Superstars
are
fading*



Vehicular traffic is banned in Lafayette Hills. Residents leave their cars at a school playground adapted as a parking lot, located about a mile and a half to the west of town. They reach their homes on foot, on a walkway covered with wooden boards, with lamps shining above it at night.

Bags filled with a mixture of raw meat, absorbent cotton, felt, butter, feathers, and peat were left under cars in the parking lot. They were discovered at random, one after another, all through May 1986. When the sixth package appeared, an evacuation of the cars was ordered and a search of the nearby hills conducted.

These discoveries are very well documented:

- 127 photographs, 10 cm x 15 cm, taken by J.F., a policeman from the Lafayette Hills station
- 9 polaroids taken by Jan G. Lee
- a 16-mm film (12' 56") shot by Jan G. Lee—on deposit with the local police
- one large-format sketch by Jan G. Lee
- a situational mock-up featuring model cars, in a glass display case, made by Jan G. Lee and his niece Elisabeth
- over eight hours of audio recordings with eyewitnesses, recorded by the police on tape
- replicas of the discovered parcels in 1:1 scale, polystyrene, made by Jan G. Lee—on deposit with the police.



Jan G. Lee was born in Lafayette Hills, California, in 1938. An artist and author of literary texts, he is a forester by education. From 1968 to 1971 he conducted artistic actions (“visions”) at Mount Diablo State Park, using natural processes (objects subject to rotting, erosion, melting, crystallization, turning to powder, etc.) and including various species of animals and plants (such as Nesting—birds’ nests made of valuable ores, Poisoning—the production of vials of emerald-colored poison from the extract of *Toxicodendron diversilobum*, and Layering—drawings made by animals walking over cardboard set up near watering holes). In the mid-1980s, in a rented warehouse on the outskirts of town, he began making detailed models and mock-ups of his hometown of Lafayette Hills, along with dolls depicting its residents.







The girl standing at the entrance to Highway 80 in the town of Auburn is named Mia. She is holding a sheet of heavy cardboard with the inscription (dark lipstick, format A2):

Everywhere I haven't been yet.

Mia is determinedly carrying out her travel plans. When she woke up early on the morning of March 13, 1971, she drew a large spiral on a map (eyes closed so that the line on the map would be random) stretching from the West to the East Coast, from the far South to the very North. The drawing was made rapidly, without lifting the pencil from the map. Mia promised herself that over the next two years she would visit all the cities through which the spiral passed. The girl runs away from home. She's 16. She might pass for pretty but you can't get a good look at her because she's constantly moving her head, nervously. She has big cloudy eyes, thick braids, and is developing cataracts. The girl's parents state that she's retarded and headstrong. The girl regards her parents as unworthy of her love. When Mia goes completely blind, which will happen, counting from today, in exactly 247 days, she will be wearing a black leather coat and a heavy, dark-green woolen skirt. The girl is leaning on a limestone outcrop in Ouachita National Park.

(additional information: lighted cigarette, mussed hair, and in her pocket a shell of the extinct cephalopod *Jeletzkytes furnivali*)

Mia is tired of traveling and her head remains motionless.



The line trodden into the shore of Neah Bay was 130 kilometers (about 80 miles) long. For comparison: the distance from A to B on the farms (known in these parts as “ranchettes,” and sold in Lafayette Hills by Jacob Glessner) is one mile, and the distance from B to C is one kilometer.

Beneath the sand on which the line was trodden at ebb tide live age-old organisms—*Panopea generosa*. They look like a human penis rotated in a shell. The oldest individual of this species, discovered on the coast of the United States, was 168 years old.

The longevity of these creatures is probably connected with their lifestyle. They live in the sand where no one bothers them and they barely move as they patiently filter water.

A note about this creature, together with a sketch (Jan regarded it as repulsive) was found in the *Notebook of Miracles and Peculiarities of American Nature* that Anna kept.



Once there was a sandbox filled to the brim
with black
and white
sand.

The black sand
filled the right side of the sandbox.

The white sand
filled the left side of the sandbox.

One day a small child entered the sandbox and began
moving around
in a circle
clockwise
and did so for many hours.

When the child was finished the sand was
gray.

Then the child decided to undo this chaos and began treading
in a circle
counterclockwise
and did so for many hours.

The longer the child walked, the more the sand was
gray.

Crying was no help.

Chaos had intruded on the sandbox once and for all.



Collection no. 1

Untitled (direct-to-camera action on the road, with no audience).

1. Maple syrup is poured over the windshield of a car until the windshield wipers, which are turned on, stop working,

the rolled-down driver's side window, the radio, honky-tonk music.

2. A picnic phonograph set with snails placed on the turning record.

3. A road map wrapped in white gauze and buried to a depth of 80 centimeters (shovel, bucket, water for pouring on the ground). A small black-and-white flag (checkerboard pattern) to mark the spot.

4. Photographing helium released from a tank against the background of:

a. a lake

b. boulders

c. a forest

d. an empty highway

e. a swamp.

5. A dotted line one mile long, diesel fuel leaking from a car traveling at a speed of 12 miles per hour.



Idea for a radio show noted down by Anna on the back of a postcard from 1933 (photo on the averse: a brick building with a chimney next to a train track, with the inscription HET KRUIKJE POTTENBAKERY PUTTEN):

The show tells the story of a TV talk show featuring a dead person. The medium, a girl brought in straight from Poland, mumbles in a low, indistinct voice. She chews her fingernails and rumples her dirty apron. She pours hot wax into a dish of water. She spits at a mirror. She claps and strikes herself on the cheek with a deck of cards. The stage setting is tawdry, like something from B-horror movie, and the narrator describes in detail the elements of decoration: sofas, black garlands, candles, mirrors, etc.

The studio audience becomes bored and unable to summon up any enthusiasm for the old-fashioned performance. When the voice of the dead woman is finally heard, it sounds weak and artificial.

“Ask me about something,” it implores listlessly.

The presence of the deceased electrifies the medium, who smiles and sits up. From a sheet of paper, she solemnly reads out in impeccable English questions that strike the audience as peculiar:

“Why are you not a logical positivist?”

“Does nature exist for you?”

“What is your critical standard?”

The dead woman answers only the second question. Her answer is in the negative.



(...)*

– Your actions in the landscape and works connected with language are linked by a drawing from 1966 titled Hourglass.

It reminds me of an archaeological dig. It seems to suggest that both natural elements (mountain ranges, canyons, water reservoirs, etc.) and architecture are letters in the landscape that make up words and sentences, and their disintegration is semantic disintegration. (photograph displayed on the wall from a slide projector: no. 62a)

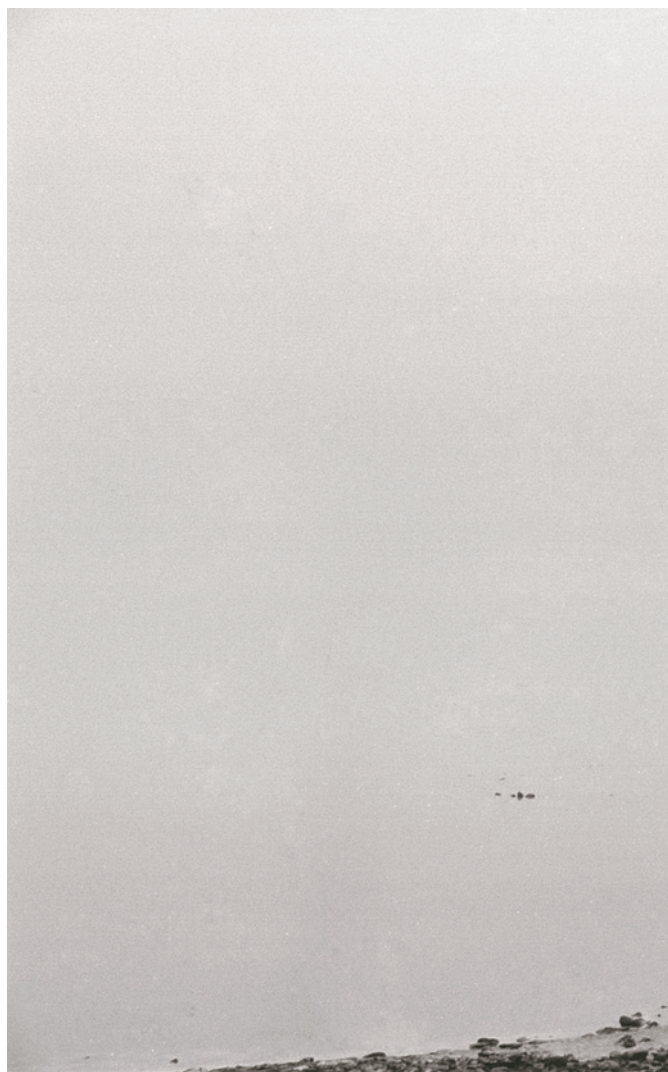
– I am glad that you mention that work. Hourglass arose not long after my return to art, in 1965, after two-year break in my work. For some time I had no desire to create art and I was tired of it all. Just touching paint was enough to make my skin break out in a rash. The very thought that I might run into someone in the studio and talk about art again filled me with ennui. And then it all came back to me. It was early in the spring of 1965. I began conducting comparative studies of artistic, industrial, natural, and urban forms, etc., as part of a particular intellectual project that was certainly not limited to aesthetic issues. In my opinion, Hourglass emphasizes the insistent presence and materiality of a metalanguage that has been forgotten about by modernist criticism and art, which painstakingly separate word and image.

– Could you describe this work more precisely?

– It is a pencil drawing on a horizontal leaf of lined white paper. The leaf of paper might be associated with an official table, and it contains handwritten words, on the lines. All the words are partially buried in “sand” consisting of thousands of dots added in pencil. Terms connected with nature studies and with grammar are mixed together there. Formally, it is a tectonic hierarchy of layers. Words piled up... They

are petrified by the sand and make up a deposit awaiting the purifying action of a construction bulldozer. As you can see, my vision is fundamentally geological. The way I envision geological formations is based, among other things, on the interpretation of the contemporary industrial landscape, and is definitely far from an ecological idyll...

*(...)





Note on the inside of the front cover of Brian W. Aldiss's book *Earthworks* (first edition, 1967): a proposal for the staging of a reconstruction of an interview by Andrew S. Gaff with the artist and writer Abraham Lee, conducted in 1973.

An empty stage with a plinth (an openwork steel construction painted black), 140 centimeters high. Atop the plinth is a small portable television set (for instance, a Mini Star 416).

The floor is wooden and scuffed. A black curtain in the background conceals the entire rear wall. On the floor, at the edge of the stage, is a small lightbox bearing the word "applause."

The image on the screen is black and white, slightly distorted. On the television screen can be seen the legs of a seated man—the camera captures only the image from the waist down. The man lounges nonchalantly in an armchair. He swings a leg over the back of the chair. His gesticulating hands appear in the frame at times. Sound is transmitted from the dressing room. Two men's voices. The sound is clear and emanates from speakers arranged on the floor. It can be heard clearly throughout the studio.

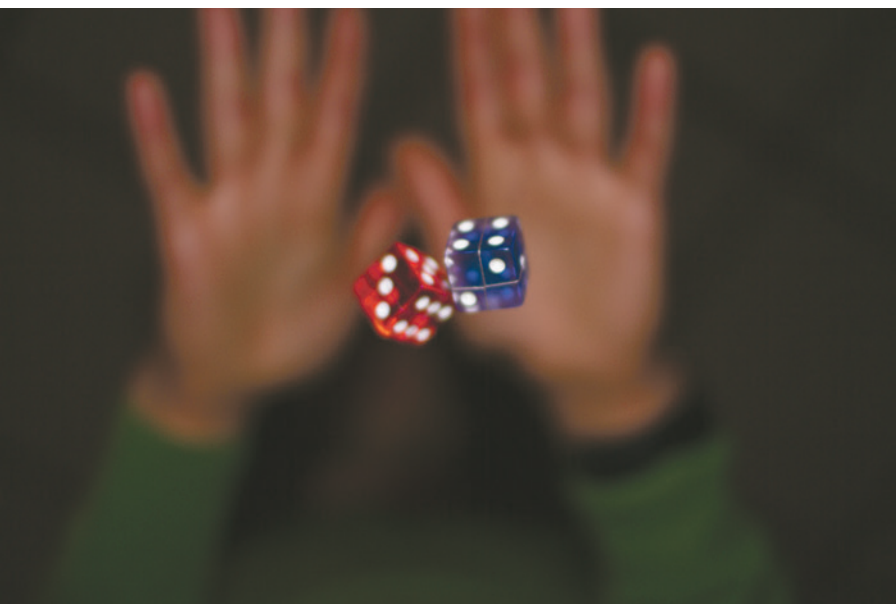


*The first one to visit John Hardy in his cell,
Was a little girl dressed in blue.
She came down to that old jail cell,
She said, 'Johnny, I've been true to you.
God knows, Johnny, I've been true to you.'*

*The next one to visit John Hardy in his cell,
Was a little girl dressed in red.
She came down to that old jail cell,
She said, 'Johnny, I had rather see you dead,
Well, Johnny, I had rather see you dead.'*

*'I've been to the East and I've been to the West,
I've travelled this wide world around,
I've been to that river and I've been baptized,
So take me to my burying ground,
So take me to my burying ground.'*

Fragment of the traditional folk song John Hardy, telling about the life of a railroad worker from West Virginia. Hardy was hanged on January 19, 1894, for the murder of a man who beat him shooting dice.



Collection no. 2

Untitled (direct-to-camera action on the road, with no audience).

1. A black square measuring 120 cm, burned into the grass. A lighter, string, 4 wooden pegs.
2. A telephone booth, a number selected using dice, keeping up a conversation with a stranger for as long as possible (any language).
3. Moths (100 units) released at night into a hotel room with tightly closed windows and a shining stroboscopic light.

Duration: 60 minutes.

4. Seeking water with the aid of a titanium divining rod.
5. Tracking a stray cat for 24 hours. Documentation: drawings, photographs, 35 mm film, audio recording.



The last mock-up of Lafayette Hills that Jan G. Lee made is a visualization of the future of the city. The mock-up is simplified and geometrical. The buildings are carved out of high-quality wood. Down the middle of the mock-up runs a stream of water (there was much talk in the late 1980s about rerouting the small Lemuria River, which made a wide loop around the city). A small button under the table even makes it possible to change the direction in which the miniature river flows. It can be seen precisely in the mock-up that the river divides the city into two almost identical halves. The water flows from south to north. The city will be well organized in the future, although it will be hard to find anything sensible to do there (thought Jan, bending over the mock-up). Industrial buildings, parking lots, and several shopping centers will be found in the western half. New residential tracts will fill the eastern part. Some of them will never be occupied. After several years they will begin to turn into wild gardens: weeds will overgrow the balconies and trees will sprout on the roofs. The derelict buildings will never be torn down.



(...)*

– In your text from 1967 you describe a found monument, a sandbox that you called “a model of a cosmic beach,” regarding it as a perfect illustration of the phenomenon of the breakdown of language . . . (photographs displayed on the wall by slide projector: 61 a and b)

– Language interested me as a material entity, but not as a means of creating images. I built my texts the same way I constructed my works. In the text I made use of a tale about a child who wades into a box containing light and dark sand, not mixed at first. In the box of sand I saw the breakup of whole continents, the drying up of the oceans, the death of the dinosaurs and the erosion of their skeletons. There exist only millions of grains of sand, whole layers of bones and stones ground to dust! This is also why entropy is one of the key concepts that has to be assimilated when speaking about the works I realize on beaches. I have used the term entropy in the orthodox scientific manner, referring to the second law of thermodynamics that has been obligatory in physics since the mid-nineteenth century. On the basis of this law arose the hypothesis of the so-called heat death of the universe. Entropy is a force that makes the universe tend irreversibly to dispersion. The drama of decay is written into the existence of architecture and works of art (like all material things), the irreversible processes that lead to the extremes of chaos and exhaustion. This is also why chips and rubble are more important to me than a shape emerging from a piece of marble modeled with a chisel or a newly opened building.

(photographs displayed on the wall by slide projector: 61 c)

Over time, I came to understand that I was most interested in urban outskirts, areas of a worse category: garbage dumps, closed-down factories, slag heaps, excavations. I began exploring the side effects of industrial spread and the expansiveness of the human species. I set fire to piles of trash and photographed them from a cherry picker; I scattered stone chips on the road and allowed the tires of trucks to smash them into dust. In 1970 I burned down what was left of our family vacation home in Wolcott, on Lake Ontario. There wasn't much

left of it; the ceiling had caved in and an elm several meters high was growing in the kitchen. The moment when I put it to the torch was my farewell to nature.

– Through the contemplation of ruins?

– Yes. I think that, through our sentimental approach to architectonic wrecks, we will never let them depart from our cities. It's incurable.

*(...)



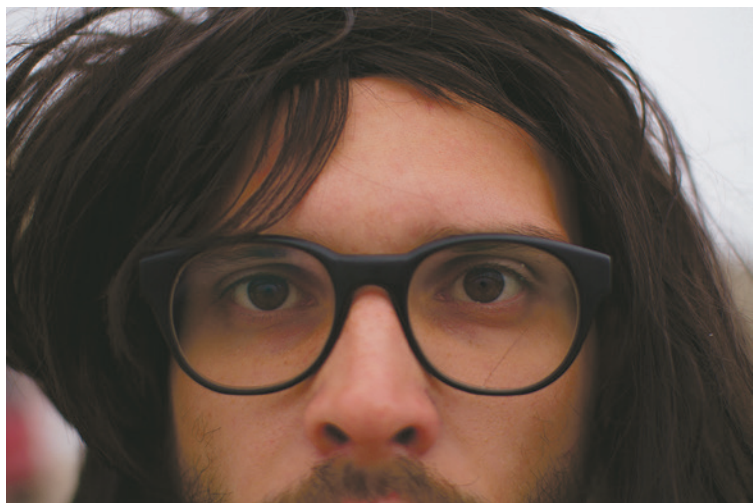


Mud was poured into a small hole dug at the foot of a hill between campus buildings (ONE HOLE IN THE GROUND APPROXIMATELY 1' x 1' x 1' / ONE GALLON MUD POURED INTO THIS HOLE). After a few dozen seconds the mud froze—the frost was exceptionally bitter that day.

Directions for tourists: Liquid Crystal Building, football field, parking lot.

A group of 17 students took part in the event (one of them, Joshua W., turned out to be the arsonist who was later responsible for destroying the memorial room where the documentation of the creation of the work was stored), along with two teachers representing the faculty (Anonymous, Anonymous) and a parking-lot attendant (Benjamin S.).

It might therefore be said that my work is an artistic misfortune.



List of the items placed in the exhibition A Great Hypothesis Presented on the Basis of a Collection of Small Objects, Earth Museum in the Suburbs, 1945:

A small bottle filled with white powder. A bird cage (bird droppings on the floor, scattered feathers, seed). An oar hung on the wall at an angle of 35 degrees. A paper bag filled with the chitin carapaces of insects, various species. A rusty alarm clock. L. R. L.'s Boy with a Dinosaur, oil on cardboard, 65 cm x 100 cm, 2016. Thirty-six glass balls of various sizes. A pile of vinyl records cut with a knife and glued with insulating tape. A thermos containing penicillin tablets. A flower pot containing ashes and glass balls. A three-quarters-empty jar of honey with a bumblebee drowned inside. A concrete block. A head x-ray. A spider in a photographic frame. A book about predatory birds of North and Central America. A jute basket. A dried gill of a Nile perch. A hydrant wrapped in bandages. A ball of blue modeling clay with a diameter of 8 cm. Feathers of a blue macaw bound with string. The skeleton of a small mammal (species unidentified). Bottles containing mold cultures.



. . . I also discovered that my brain is discarding colors. As if it were losing them, one by one. The longer I travel, the narrower the scale of colors I notice. I might wake up one day in a world in which only a single color exists. . . . I think a lot about the contradictions between what I see and what I dream about. The image is varied. I do not know how to reconcile the dynamics of the situation in which I find myself and the limitations of my own body. How many places can I visit in the course of the next two years? Places, non-places, cities, non-cities, houses, non-houses . . . I believe only that the things I do must be as natural as nature itself. All my attempts at naming the shapes and colors I encounter are ineffective. Now I cannot even summon up the faces of the people I have met in recent months. Yet the journey is full nevertheless. I now think that colors are non-essential, because after all the only thing I will see in the end is the white Sun shining against the background of a white sky . . .



(...)*

– What about the Moon? Could it be a place where new forms of property are tested? Or a new currency or alternate economic models?

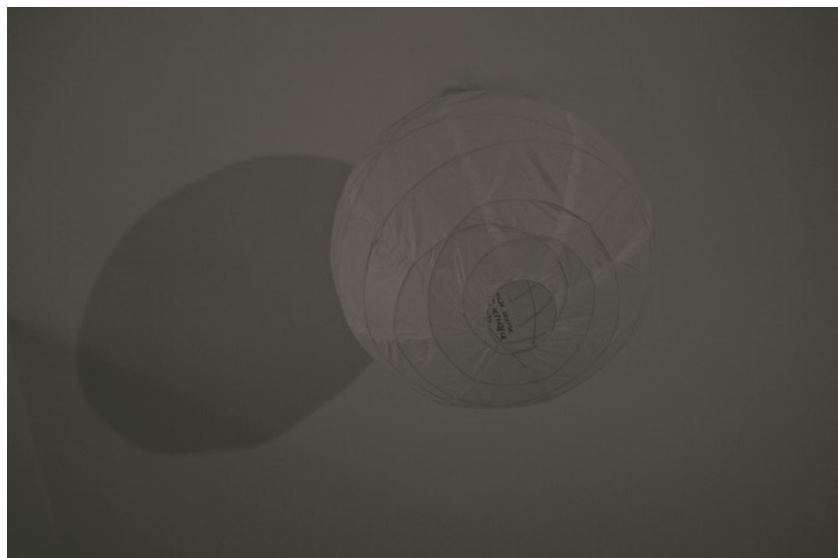
– I doubt it. I once described the Moon as a very costly non-place. Its presence, as well as its supposed accessibility, leads humanity to try very hard. The promises of the future excite everyone. Tomorrow counts for more than today. Regardless of their form, the important thing is that the promises are not fulfilled now. Let salvation occur tomorrow or, even better, the day after tomorrow! But the future is already badly out of date and simply ineffective. (a plastic dinosaur and a golf ball are placed on the table)

At the moment when we took our first step on the Moon, we felt free, we forgot about our previous obligations. In a strange and irrevocable way, the scenarios of tomorrow have made us depraved. What are those scenarios?

– The ones born of comics for children and science-fiction films?

– Yes, those are proposals for the future. The vision of settlements on new planets, inexhaustible energy sources, breakthroughs in the field of physics and that kind of nonsense. Of course, we are in quiet despair over the fact that we didn't meet any green humanoid creatures on the Moon or any kind of omniscient monster with one eye in its forehead that would have answered all our doubts. For me, this is embarrassing. We have degenerated intellectually. Discourse takes place at a shockingly low level. I feel that this whole cosmic enthusiasm is forced. Many scientists and the politicians who listen to their infantile prophecies try hard to breathe some kind of significance into this pseudoenlightened propagandistic mire, but with every passing moment we sink deeper into the banal.

*(...)



place X

1. open borders
2. a range of points
3. external coordinates
4. subtraction
5. undefined
certainty
6. diffuse
information
7. reflection
8. edge
9. defined place
(physical)
10. the many

place Y

- closed borders
- a choice of matter
- internal coordinates
- addition
- defined
uncertainty
- concentrated
information
- mirror
- center
- no place
(abstract)
- the one

One of the annotations in the instructions for the strategic board game “Dialectics of Place: The United States of America Sets out to Conquer Neighboring Countries” (year of production: 1971).

Collection no. 3

Untitled (direct-to-camera action on the road, hotel version)

1. Millet sown on pulp made of paper (ripped-out, chewed-up pages from the telephone book additionally mixed with tap water) in a hotel teacup stolen during breakfast. The teacup is placed high up on a wardrobe, out of sight.
2. Cut hair glued to the face with the help of soap, like a beard – 3 polaroids.
3. Washing in the bathtub with an unknown person, mirror painted over with white cream, burned myrrh
(documentation: 8 mm film, camera directed toward the mirror).
4. Lipstick inscription concealed behind a wardrobe:
DEAD TREES ARE A.
5. 10,000 dots made with black marker inside the cover of a hotel copy of the Bible.



Dearest Sister,

Even though I miss you very much, I cannot write about where I am now, or betray my future plans. Let's leave things as they are and be happy. I have been thinking for a long time how to explain my disappearance. Last night I decided to prepare a riddle for you. I hope that solving it will soothe your nerves.

What is it that
constantly changes its shape
but retains the same internal order?

What is it
for which there is no place on earth,
and that has no definite borders?

What is it
that affects other things,
and at the same time permits other things to affect it?

What is it
that is always available,
yet still remains unnoticed?

What is it
that is made up of many parts
that at the same time can be parts of something completely
different?

What is it
half of which looks very familiar,
and the other half of which resembles nothing you know?

What is it
that changes into something else at the precise moment you
learn of its existence?

What is it? Figure it out, Sister!

Always yours,

Mia



The giant magnetic semi-circle located in a chamber beneath the post office building in Lafayette Hills has dimensions of 366 centimeters by 36.6 centimeters. The object is curved, and an iron pole runs through its center. The semi-circle, on which the inscription “Pangea 1882” is inscribed, rotates slowly on its own axis in a counter-clockwise direction. A full rotation takes 24 hours.

The chamber is air-conditioned (installed in the 1970s). The entire mechanism, despite the passage of the years, works flawlessly.

The mechanism is intended to slow the drift of North America away from Europe as a result of the motion of tectonic plates. The semicircular structure was based on very precise calculations and innovative engineering solutions that were the work of the self-taught inventor Richard Emmanuel Lee. He asserted that Lafayette Hills was the “planetary command center” and that every event occurring there resonated on a far greater, global scale. His hypotheses led to the introduction of many curious ordinances (intended to protect Earth from danger) within the administrative boundaries of the city. Several of them are still in force today. For instance, it is forbidden to walk around town with a lighted cigarette, or to prospect for water with the help of a divining rod (with the exception of instruments made of titanium).

From November 1975 until the mid-1980s, the attic of the post office building was used by the inventor’s greatgrandson, the artist Jan G. Lee, as a photographic darkroom. There, Lee developed tens of thousands of photographs documenting his “forest period” (1968-1971). He praised the place in the book dedicated to the history of his family, *We Aimed To Be Amateurs* (MIT Press, 1998), as “exceptionally insulated” and “characterized by high-quality, sticky darkness.” At the same time, he complained that the rumbling originating underground had a calamitous effect on the quality of some prints, in which “things that do not exist” appear time after time.



(...)

Got no honey baby now

Got no sugar baby now

Who'll rock the cradle?

Who'll sing the song?

*Who'll rock the cradle when
I'm gone?*

I'll rock the cradle

I'll sing the song

I'll rock the cradle when

I'm gone.

Excerpt from a traditional
American song, author of the
lyrics unknown.





Photographs of Anna—found, or clipped from newspapers and catalogues—were found in a binder labeled A. T. ZALOON / OUTSIDE. One of them, illustrating a brief text announcing an exhibition of Anna's drawings in the May, 1981 issue of the art magazine *Stuff*, was included by Jan in the book *We Aimed To Be Amateurs*. The photograph is black-and-white and indistinct: a smiling woman with dark hair smoothly pinned and combed upward. Large, bright eyes. Her head fills almost the entire frame. Only at left can a swing and a regular dark shape, probably a sandbox, be seen. Anna is wearing a white blouse with a collar. She looks like a schoolgirl playing hooky. She might have then been about 25, or at most 27 years old. When looking at the photograph through a magnifying glass, it is hard to resist the impression that the sandbox (or whatever the container is) is filled with black sludge.



Neon sign installed on the morning of
September 9, 1984, on the wall of room 2 in the Chronos & Coatlicue
Hotel:

*You don't
have to
have cows
to be
a cowboy*



(...)

*What are we in the infinity of ocean and sky?
A small baby at the breast of eternity?
Have you ever heard of happiness
Springing from a deep well of sorrow?
Of love, springing from pain and despondency,
agony and death?
Such is mine.*

Excerpt from the poem *From the Deep Waters of Sleep* by
Anna T. Zaloon, transcribed in the notebook marked K/1975.



The earth collected early that morning by Jan had a rusty tinge. It was clay-like, cold, sticky, and clung to the skin. The man squeezed the clods tight, rapidly forming them into the letters of the alphabet. He arranged them on a table in order from A to Z and sprinkled them with water. When he had accumulated six complete sets, he regarded the job as finished and set about making breakfast. Early that morning Jan put the meat of *Pandalus platyceros*, fried in butter, on his toast, sprinkled it liberally with sage leaves, and drank strong black coffee to go with it. It was seven o'clock in the morning and the brisk air filled his lungs. The next day, Jan arranged the letters into a sentence on the post office roof: "He doesn't know anything about you at all."

The inscription was not visible from street level. Over the following days, the letters dried out in the sun and turned to powder. The summer rain (which did not fall until Sunday, September 7, in the hot and exceptionally dry year of 1975) rinsed what remained of the inscription off the roof.



Collection no. 4

Untitled (direct-to-camera action while traveling by car).

1. A blindfolded journey in the trunk of the car, burlap sacks full of dried herbs (sage, oregano, lavender, etc.).
2. Recitation to music of excerpts from Artist's Contract (The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement), 1971.
3. Animistic journey:
 - a. all passengers travel in dog masks.
 - b. total silence prevails from the beginning to the end of the trip.
 - c. passengers communicate with each other by displaying packets of colors.
4. Seeds of the hemp Cannabis sativa sown next to all signposts bearing the names of localities encountered during the trip.
5. Conversation with a hitchhiker, intended to change the destination of his journey in such a way that he travels in the direction opposite to his plans.



Jan G. Lee devoted chapter 14 of his book *We Aimed To Be Amateurs* to his grandmother Miranda's shamanic practices. He begins the chapter with a story he heard from her as a child:

Step by step, in a way that might be called a miracle, a pond appeared in the town's main square. The pond wasn't very big, but it was deep, and from its turbid water issued a lazy burbling and a bluish fog. The use of the word "miracle" is intentional. The pond belonged to the category of unexplained and peculiar things. One day, it simply 'opened up.' Not all at once, of course. First, there was a crack. It broadened slowly, almost imperceptibly. The breakthrough came at night. Several people living in the vicinity heard a loud thud followed by a dull grinding and a splash. In the morning, the fissure in the ground was already full of rust-colored liquid. As the pond grew larger, the water became clearer and clearer, and the bottom, full of sharp edges and fractures, became visible. Surprisingly quickly, the residents of the city began growing accustomed to the presence of this unanticipated arrival. It turned out that the pond emitted a pleasant, rumbling, rhythmic sound. It had a lulling effect. Closing one's eyes, one could imagine a train passing through an underground tunnel. The ground vibrated and a tingling ran through the body.



Neon sign installed on the evening of
September 9, 1984, on the wall of room 11 in the Chronos & Coatlicue
Hotel:

*take a sick
picture*



Anna filled up her notebooks. She kept several of them at a time, in a compulsive way, devoting at least two hours a day to writing. There were things there that Jan preferred not to read (he read them later, one way or another). Some things he did not understand, and others wounded him painfully. Anna had good intuition and a gift of eloquence. Her style was exquisite. Reading the notebooks might therefore have been pleasurable to Jan, if not for all those outbreaks of exaltation. He regarded Anna's first published texts, about museums and language, as "extremely hysterical." In the face of the erudite cascades of words, he had every right to feel himself to be a provincial artisan devoid of imagination. On the second anniversary of Anna's death he decided to read a fragment of her diary (T/1981) on Lafayette Air, a local radio station, during the nighttime Concealed Stories program. As he stated, the excerpt accurately portrayed the spirit of the city where they had spent two years of their lives together—a place that "has no history of its own and will always be passed over by all great events." The excerpt that Jan read began as follows:

I am convinced that the future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical past; it is in yesterday's newspapers, in the jejune advertisements of science-fiction movies, and stacks them up in the cold rooms, or places them in the celestial playgrounds of the suburbs.



The Goddess Coatlicue: There is no tomorrow before you.

The Titan Chronos: And you have no past behind you!

The Goddess Coatlicue: One way or another, we don't have much time left to do anything . . .

After a moment's thought, Mia used an eraser to rub out part of the text, leaving only the fragment:

we don't have much time left to do anything . . .



What are the wild waves saying,
Sister, the whole day long,
That ever amid our playing
I hear but their low, lone song?
Not by the seaside only,
There it sounds wild and free;
But at night, when 'tis dark and lonely,
In dreams it is still with me.

Joseph Edwards Carpenter (1813–?)



(...)*

– Do you remember your first visit to a museum?

– Of course (laughs), perfectly!

– Is it a funny memory?

– Exceptionally. I was then about seven. It was the mid-1940s. I lived with my parents in Rutherford. My father decided that he finally had to tidy up the seashells I carried to my room. And it wasn't only seashells. I also collected insects, minerals, and bark. I had several wasp's and hornet's nests, kindling wood, and pine cones. But above all, I collected seashells. I loved them! Their spiral shapes delighted me, they were miniature architecture, like little houses, settlements from Mars. I studied them for hours under a magnifying glass, measuring them and taking notes. I felt that I would solve the riddle of the universe and learn the primal formula. Together with the seashells I dragged a lot of dirt, sand, and probably fungus into the house (laughs). I remember that when I got into bed I could feel little grains of sand in the sheets.

– What did your parents think of this fascination?

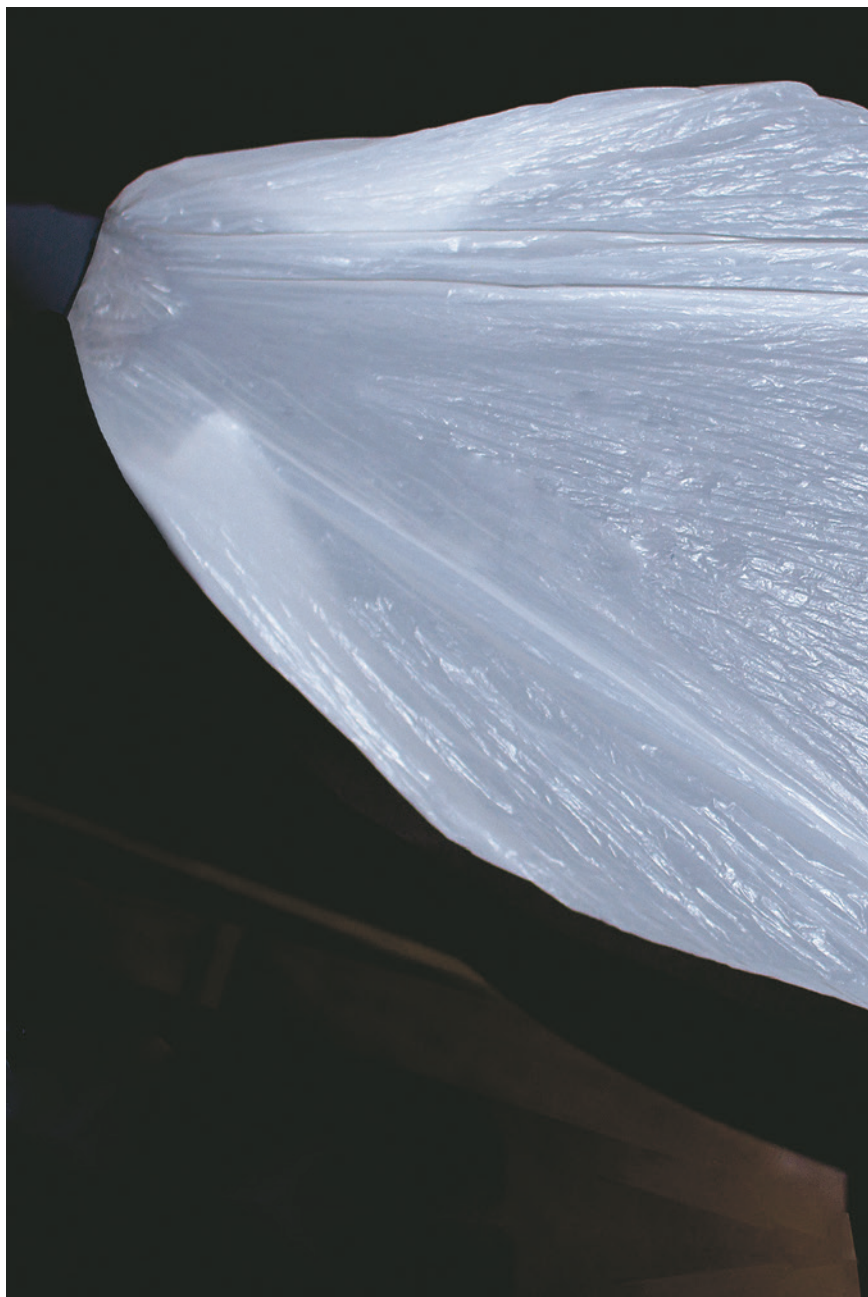
– I think they were even proud of the fact that I had some kind of hobby, which must have set me apart from others my age. But the sight of mud on the floor and sand in the bedding probably didn't delight them. One day my father called me. He ordered me to go downstairs to the basement with him. A sign reading EARTH MUSEUM IN THE SUBURBS was nailed to the door. I remember it very well: meticulous capital letters in dark-green oil paint. Inside, in the largest room in the basement, my father had installed wooden shelves on which there stood empty preserve jars, various cases, and even an empty aquarium left over from the stick insects I had raised as a small child. He must have thrown out tons of trash to make room for me. It was really touching. I spent the whole weekend moving and arranging my collections. I created a taxonomy for my own use, pseudoscientific categories, I gave names to the seashells, and made labels with descriptions. Most of the information was completely made up, or constructed on the basis of the scanty information I derived from books my parents borrowed for me at the municipal library. Aside from the

“permanent collection,” I also had a special section for “temporary exhibitions” that concentrated on the marginal items in my collection: stones or the chitin carapaces of insects. I remember that I also devoted a separate exhibition to “evidential material” that confirmed the hypothesis that the dinosaurs died out because a meteorite struck the Earth. I collected all the evidence that same summer in our yard (laughs)! I dug up some old vials, bird feathers, and a strange stone. That was enough to fill in the whole rest of that story. The Second World War ended that same summer, and various stories got through to me, but I filtered them out and they were like tales from a distant planet. I created my own museum on the basis of private canons. My world fit into the basement.

– Did any vestige remain of that childhood activity?

– The basement was filled in and the house torn down in 1949. The museum is probably still there under the ground. In other words, exactly where it belongs. What had been categorized went to the grave, doomed to dissolution. I am excited by the idea of the death of mausoleums where things petrify. That is precisely why I regard it as my first, fully conscious work of art . . .

★(...)





Collection no. 5

Untitled (direct-to-camera action, hotel version).

1. Learning by heart a useless text, min. 4 pages of typescript (fragments of the telephone book, classified ads in the local paper, etc.).
2. An envelope with a ten-dollar bill inside, left at the reception desk, addressed to NASA, a small fragment of a meteorite (approx 1 g), a postage stamp.
3. Matchboxes filled with a mixture of raw meat, absorbent cotton, felt, butter, feathers, and peat, arranged on the table by weight, from the heaviest to the lightest.
4. Throwing leftovers from breakfast out the hotel window to birds sitting on the branches of trees, loudspeakers with music placed on the window sill.
5. A 24-hour attempt to erase from memory a useless text, min. 4 pages of typescript (fragments of the telephone book, classified ads in the local paper, etc.).



One of the best known residents of Lafayette Hills, Jon-Erik Beckjord (1939-2008), was the founder and director of three museums—in Los Angeles, Malibu, and San Francisco. All of these institutions dealt with collecting evidence for the existence of unidentified species of animals, such as the Cardiff Giant or the Loch Ness Monster. Beckjord stated that the sudden appearance and disappearance of these beings is relatively easy to explain. They inhabit other dimensions, and we see them only when they emerge for a moment from a space-time tunnel. The exit of one of these tunnels is located at the bottom of Loch Ness, which according to Beckjord explains the appearance there every so often of an animal that looks like an ichthyosaur. Another tunnel ends right at the Cross Mountains adjacent to Lafayette. The researcher learned about the existence of the mysterious passages from the beings that come from parallel universes. He communicated with them using telepathy. The first message he received was as follows: *We're here, but we're not real, like what you think is real.*

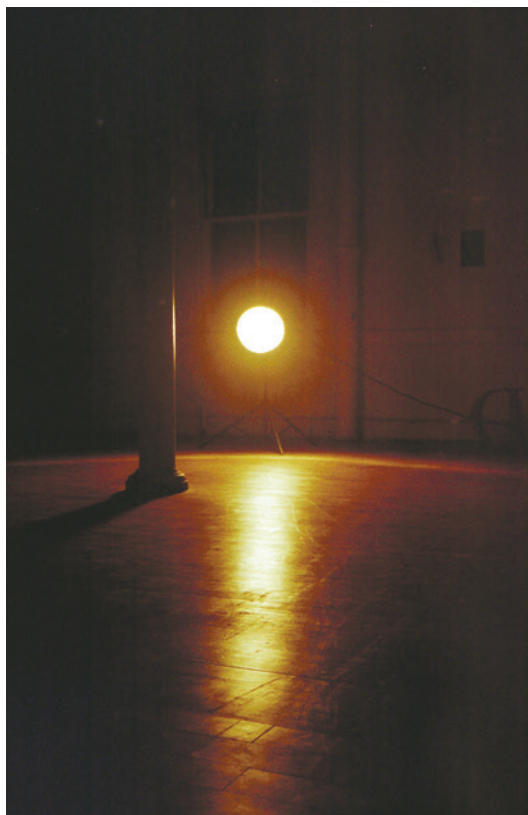


Anna collected peculiar stories. From the spring of 1978 to the end of 1980 she kept what she titled the *Notebook of Miracles and Peculiarities of American Nature*, filling it with press clippings, notes, and her own drawings of natural oddities and phenomena of the human mind. The collected information served as the basis for her 1981 work *Taxonomies (Version A)*, a large-format three-dimensional collage filling a room with the dimensions 560 cm x 300 cm x 270 cm. One of the stories that Anna used came from the vicinity of Mount Diablo. In 1873, during work at a stone quarry, a live frog was found encased in a solid limestone boulder. The skin of the animal was moist and the smell that emanated from the opened boulder was said to resemble a “swamp odor.”



Neon inscription installed on the
morning of September 11, 1984, in the underground garage of the
Chronos & Coatlicue Hotel:

HOLLOW BLOCKS
IN
A WINDOWLESS
ROOM



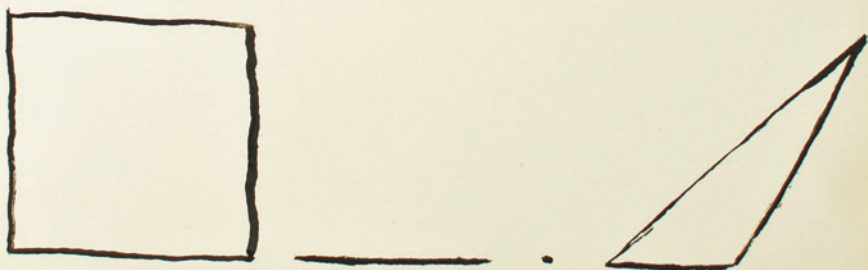
*O, Death
O, Death
Won't you spare me over 'til another year
Well what is this that I can't see
With ice cold hands takin' hold of me
Well I am death, none can excel
I'll open the door to heaven or hell
Whoa, death someone would pray
Could you wait to call me another day
The children prayed, the preacher preached
Time and mercy is out of your reach
I'll fix your feet 'til you can't walk
I'll lock your jaw 'til you can't talk
I'll close your eyes so you can't see
This very air, come and go with me
I'm death I come to take the soul
Leave the body and leave it cold
To draw up the flesh off of the frame
Dirt and worm both have a claim
O, Death
O, Death
(...)*

Fragment of a traditional country song performed in Appalachia in the early 20th century, author of lyrics unknown.



Contents of the recovered backpack:

- 2 cakes of laundry soap
- towel
- kleenex
- socks, 7 pair
- panties, 5 pair
- short-sleeve shirts, 5 (various colors)
- woolen cap
- 2 pair of pants
- 1 pair of shoes, tennis type
- dress (blue with white dots)
- woolen sweater
- clothes string
- sleeping bag
- 3 pencils
- pencil sharpener
- box of colored pencils
- scissors
- adhesive tape
- Peter D. Ouspensky's book *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (without cover)
- 6 lined notebooks
- 2 graph-paper notebooks
- knife
- toothbrush
- can opener
- canned fish
- thermos of water
- package of melba toast
- hashish, 3 g
- package of modeling clay, 200 g, color blue
- can of tobacco, approx. 100 g
- rolling papers
- benzene lighter
- aluminum cup
- spoon and fork, bound with rubber band.



The photograph (black-and-white, format 9 cm by 13 cm, published on page 5) used in the introduction to the book *We Aimed To Be Amateurs* comes from the private archive of Jan G. Lee. It was taken in the spring of 1984 and was placed in the folder described as REMAINS NO. 37. Lee believed there was no such thing as an unneeded photograph. Even the ones that do not come out at all or that were taken by mistake might prove useful some day. The shelves in the artist's studio in the attic of the Lafayette Hills post office bent under the weight of folders full of old photographs found in trash cans, family photographs, press clippings, faxes, and illustrations torn out of books. Each of these pictures was placed in an envelope on which the following information was painstakingly noted in calligraphic writing: date of the addition of the picture to the archive, brief description of the situation in which it was taken or found, subject. The artist did not find any use for his collections until the mid-1990s. He decided then that the illustrations in his book devoted to the fortunes of the Lee family would come exclusively from his archive. The photographs that were not used at that time were burned in the tile stove that the artist used to heat his studio. The photograph used in the introduction was described as:

APRIL 16 1984 / NIGHT OF APRIL 12-13 / STUDIO, SOMNAMBULIST
SESSION / CATEGORY: "ECTOPLASMS"



When Jan saw Anna for the first time, she was lounging comfortably in an armchair in the living room of their mutual friend, the art critic Andrew S. Gaff. Anna was looking at the log burning in the fireplace, leaning her head on her right hand. The glare of the fire lighted up Anna and the Labrador at her feet, which answered to the name Hongerige Wolf. Through Jan's head ran the thought: "The artist is the consumer of the most refined comfort." He luxuriated for a moment in that insight, after which, completely unnoticed, he withdrew from the room in order to write the sentence down in his notebook.



Neon sign installed on the night of
September 9-10 on the facade of the Chronos & Coatlicue Hotel:

*THE
AVANTGARDE
OF ALMOST
COMPLETE
BLINDNESS*



In 1966, a competition was announced for a monument to Lafayette Hills, which would emphasize the role of the city as the “command center of the universe.” The contest was sponsored by the Association of Artisans and Artists of the City of Lafayette, at the express wish of the city’s mayor at the time, General Howard E. Kester. Thirty-eight works were submitted. One of them was made up exclusively of the text of instructions for the erection of the monument. Below is a transcription of the first page of the text, numbered 1/2 (the name of the author is unknown; it probably appeared on the second page). The emblem of the submission was THE CRYOSPHERE (also repeated on the envelope, which is extant). The second page of the competition proposal is lost, sharing the fate of 17 other submissions of which there is no trace in the municipal archives.

Black cypher #1

010010010010010010 \times 12 M = 72 (1) + 144 (0)

010010010010010010 is the initial sequence for the placing of six massive hexagonal modules.

Each module has 12 mirrored surfaces (12 M)

6 modules are visible

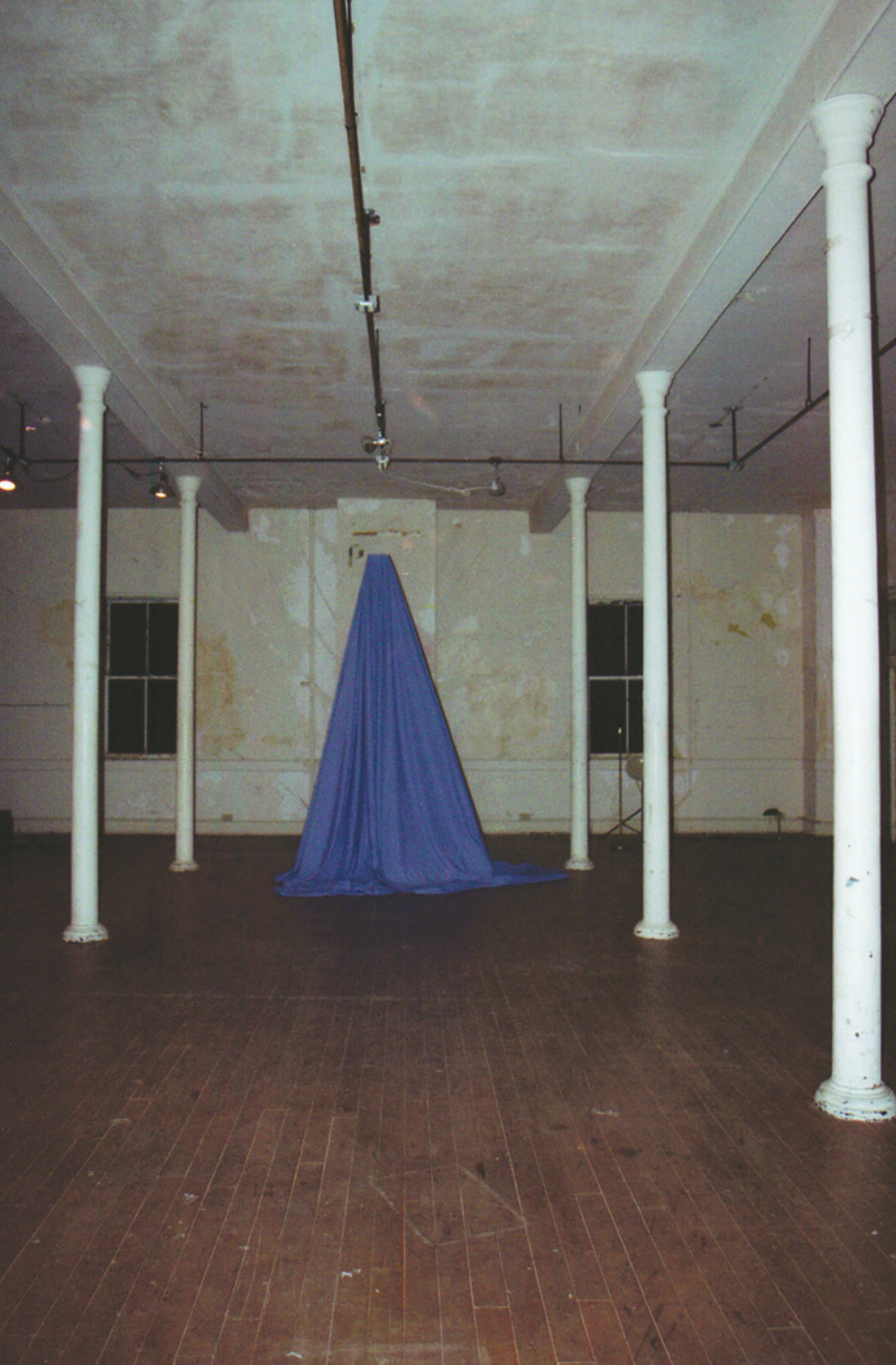
12 modules are invisible

72 mirrors are visible

144 mirrors are invisible

66 2/3% of the entire work is visible

...



A brief scene used in the radio program *Pointless Vanishing Points* (first season, 1968-1972), takes place in the Cordier and Ekstrom Gallery in New York:

RS: And so you are interested in alchemy?

MD: Yes.

RS: Do you think of yourself as something in the nature of a priest?

MD: This peculiar American sense of humor is puzzling to me . . .

RS: Does it strike you as plebeian?

MD: Yes, that's exactly what I think.

RS: And so, the class struggle?

MD: Do you regard me as a reactionary?

RS: A mechanistic reactionary . . .

MD: You will discover some day that ideas are machines.

RS: I'm not interested in machines. I'm interested in language.

MD: And occultism?

RS: Only as science fiction.

MD: Chess?

RS: Monopoly?



(...)*

– And so dinosaurs and their destruction are an important subject for you. And the history of mankind?

– It doesn't overly interest me. All these paper copies of events hang together in one piece only with the help of pitiable biographical data. Those, however, are only scraps of biographies, meaningless quotations.

– And art history?

– That's an even more hopeless case. No one treats art history as a weapon, as explosive material that can be placed in front of a police station. It thus slowly settles in the form of succeeding tectonic layers. They crumble and die out, and only the shell remains. Not a single living being inhabits this shell. Not even any dead soul wanders there.

– Do you therefore regard museums as serving to present the erosion of ideas and objects that automatically become prehistory?

– Museums always contain within themselves the promise of something exciting, arousing. That promise hangs in the air, seemingly within reach. Yet the only thing we find are the vestiges of exhausted reminiscences. As you admit, vestiges of reminiscences do not amount to much. A visit to a museum is thus like a stroll from emptiness to emptiness. Beyond that, it is the juggling of anachronisms that are toxic. In the end we stop, blind and numb, in front of the remains of something that previous civilizations called "paintings" or "sculptures." I also think of newcomers from the future who will contend with genuine emptiness, absolute stupefaction, inertia. This is the archeology of nothing. It will seem that there are windows everywhere, but beyond them we will find nothing.

– Necrophilia?

– If we begin seeking pleasure in this then yes, it's necrophilia. Museums are tombs, and what's more, the whole world is becoming a museum. The habit of doing art is not in bad shape, despite the death of painting, architecture, and sculpture. The museum is spreading, embracing whole galaxies, immobilizing the eye of the beholder. One way or another, what I am saying is a collection of generalizations. I myself dream of opening a museum: a museum dedicated to the celebration of emptiness, such an absolute void that reception will not be disturbed by anyone else's reminiscences.

*(...)



Anna T. Zaloon, *Selected Drawings* (1972-1981):

★

Shavings from colored pencils collected in an aquarium with a capacity of 10 liters, to a depth of 4 cm. 50 ml. of water. Live earthworms (6-8 pieces).

★

Exercise in fixing and correcting a drawing in memory:

A game of Battleships.

Two players sitting back-to-back.

Two clean sheets of graph paper.

Modification of rules: drawing and recording the position of the battleships is forbidden.

★

Blindfolded toss of a piece of charcoal (tied by an elastic string to a lamp suspended from the ceiling) against a white wall.

★

Colored pencils of various colors (at least five packs) cut in even segments 10 mm long, glued to the ceiling at irregular intervals.

★

One hundred attempts to draw an ideal circle in a lined notebook.

Each time, the drawing is rubbed out with an eraser. Pieces of detached paper, mixed with graphite and rubber, sprinkled next to the notebook.

Measurement of the height of the heap of waste.

★

Drawing in blood of *Limulus polyphemus* on paper, 26.8 cm x 20.8 cm. Two spirals.

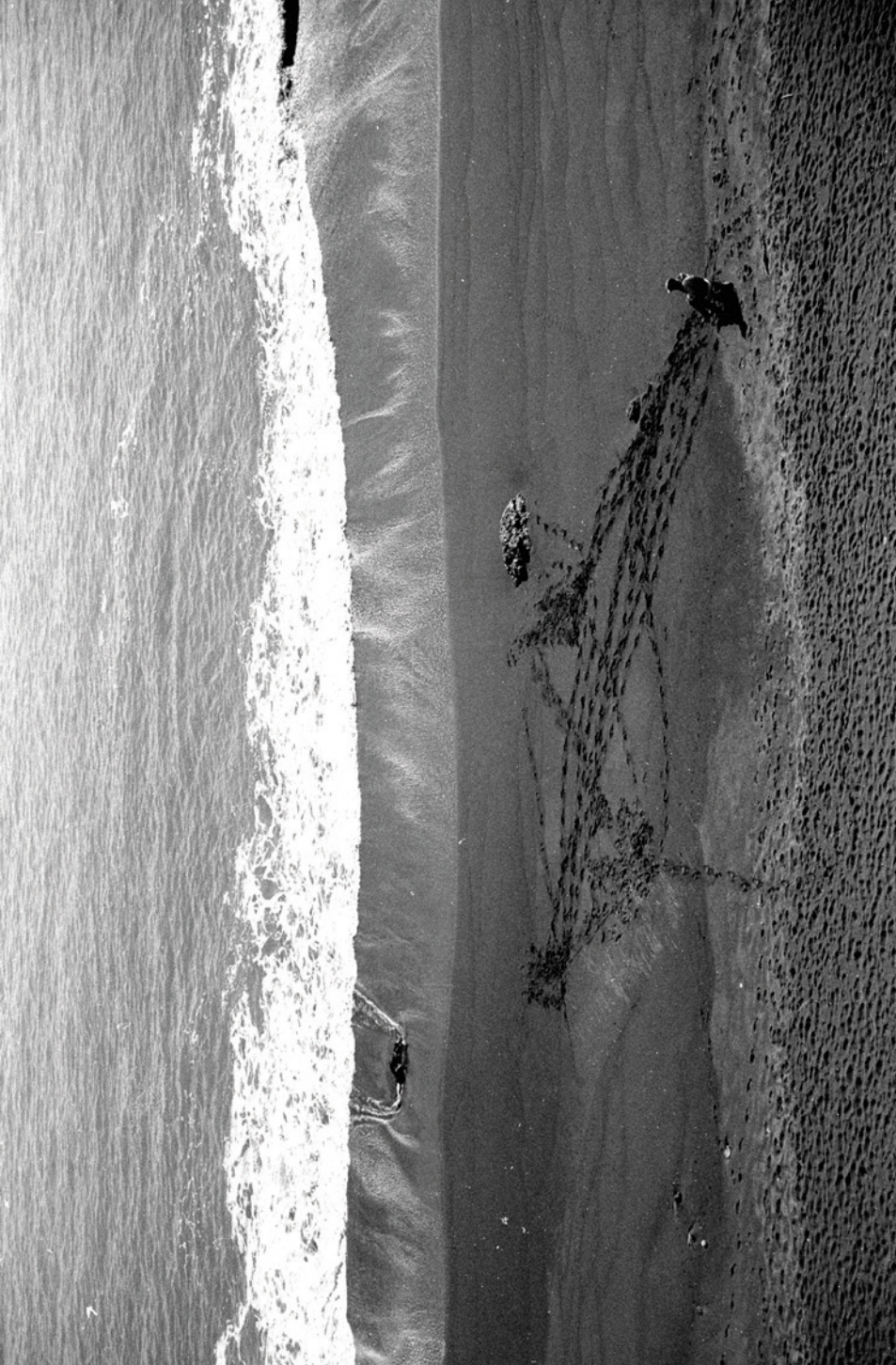
★

Wiping dirty hands on the wall, always at the same height, at the entrance to the apartment.

Duration: 12 months.

★

Colored pencils of various colors put through a meat grinder: the dust is scattered on the sidewalk (refreshed every morning), just outside the doors of an empty gallery.



Before leaving the room the girl took one more look at the map of North America that had hung above her bed since times unremembered. She climbed up on a chair and began delicately running her fingertips over the cardboard, seeking an irregularity. Her fingers stopped in the vicinity of Sun Valley. A coffee stain in that place deformed the paper. There was a convexity of approximately 3 millimeters there. When Mia was a little girl, it seemed to her that the stain resembled a tiny octopus with the head of a dog. She took down the map and turned it around. On its reverse she wrote in black crayon: FAREWELL TO FARAWAY FRIENDS, after which she left the apartment.

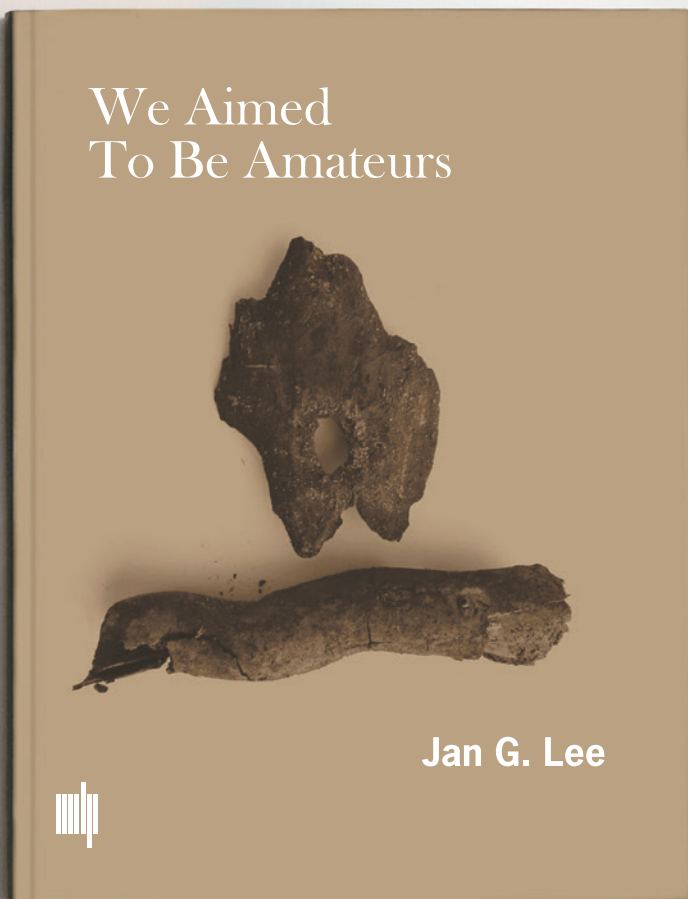


Jan G. Lee

"We Aimed To Be Amateurs"

NYC Premiere Book Signing & Talk with the Author

Sunday, April 12th 1992, 6-8 PM



Printed Matter is proud to present the new book by American pioneering green-conceptual artist, Jan G. Lee "We Aimed To Be Amateurs".

The collateral show, curated by the artist's wife Anna Zaloon, will present over 100 of Lee's drawings as well as accompanying posters, silkscreen prints, photos and ephemera. The exhibition will run April 12th - May 30th 1992 at the Printed Matter storefront.

Printed Matter, Inc.

195 Tenth Avenue New York, NY 10011

The material for this publication was collected between December 2011 and February 2012. It consists of email correspondence between Łukasz Jastrubczak and Sebastian Cichocki, in the form of a game or “duel” of image and text. Jastrubczak’s photographs arose during the artist’s journey around the United States, and Cichocki’s textual responses (treated as “curatorial guides and references”) were written in Poland and based, in part, on earlier essays by Robert Smithson. In response to photographs sent by email, texts arose that were guides for the taking of subsequent photos, and so on. The authors had 24 hours to respond.

Sebastian Cichocki, Łukasz Jastrubczak

M I R A G E

Translated by William Brand

**Photographs: Łukasz Jastrubczak
and Małgorzata Mazur**

Photograph on p. 5: still from Rear Window, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1954)

Photograph on p. 19: still from Vertigo, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1958)

Illustration on p. 117: poster from the series Mirage (variant no. 3), designed by Fontarte, 2012

Texts: Sebastian Cichocki

p. 32: John Hardy, trad., United States, late 19th c., author of lyrics unknown, (representative recording: Meg Baird, Sharron Kraus and Helena Espvall on the album Leaves From Off The Tree, 2006, Bo' Weavil Recordings) – excerpt.

p. 58: Sugar Baby, trad., United States, first half of 20th c., author of lyrics unknown, (representative recording: The Baird Sisters, album Lonely Town, 2011) – excerpt.

p. 68: Verse attributed to Johanna Ader-Appels, mother of Bas Jan Adera, conveyed telepathically by her son on Sunday, October 12, 1975, on the basis of an essay by Erik Beenker, "Bas Jan Ader (1942–1975 missing at sea). The Man who wanted to look behind the horizon," in: Bas Jan Ader. Please don't leave me", Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2006

p. 82: What are the Wild Waves Saying, trad. (shanty), England, late 19th c., lyrics: Joseph Edwards Carpenter – excerpt.

p. 92: O, Death, trad., United States, author of lyrics unknown, (representative recording: Ekkehard Ehlers, album A

Life Without Fear, 2006, Staubgold)
– excerpt.

The fragment on p. 74 comes from Sebastian Cichocki's text "Kościół, mgła i staw," Obieg, 1-2 (81-82, 2010).

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