

Mapping | Measuring | Recording

In early 2002 The Dia Art Foundation New York presented a new large-scale video installation by Bruce Nauman entitled *Mapping The Studio I*. The installation consists of 7 video projections and multiple audio tracks of ambient sounds. Nauman recorded the night time activity of his cat chasing mice in his studio during the summer of 2000. The footage shows long stretches of inactivity in a desolate studio, occasionally disrupted by cat or mouse movements. Nauman commented that he "used this traffic as a way of mapping the leftover parts and work areas of the last several years of other completed, unfinished, or discarded projects." From the early 1960's onwards the studio space plays an important role in Bruce Nauman's work, when he started to use his studio activity as a strategy for his practice.

A quite distinct method supports Mel Bochner's work. In *Measurement: Room (1969)* he maps the space by using rationalising systems, questioning the relation thinking-seeing. He creates a tape and Letraset line drawing supplemented with the actual measurements directly on the wall, essentially making a large-scale diagram of the room. Here, Bochner eliminates the 'object' in art and replaces it by a self-referential, closed system (the meticulous quantification of the room).

In Kris Van Dessel's recent work, both of the above-described works collide in an alternative fashion.

After an intense period of painting, Van Dessel - having profoundly explored the medium of painting and feeling constraint by its very precepts - takes up the challenge of freeing himself from the (exclusiveness of) the medium, techniques and conventions. There is nothing impetuous in his decision and with ultimate dedication and precision, he embarks on a renewed quest. Through mapping, measuring and recording he allows the overlooked to take centre stage in his work. Out of the everyday elements are tested on their potential to generate and crystalize into visual recordings of actions in time and space.

Initially Van Dessel takes his studio as his *prima materia*; the workshop acts as a point of reference to determine his own stance. The effective measuring of the studio space through the use of the X, Y and Z axes and his position within it (e.g. *HOTSPOT, 2011*) is emblematically resonating the meaning of being an artist in contemporary society.

In *390843.6 LITRES* Van Dessel quantifies his studio by calculating its litre volume and in a clear-cut manner he fastidiously places one point for each litre unit on an A4 sheet of paper. Even though every point in the Euclidian space is determined by three coordinates (on the X, Y and Z axes) and as such represents a unique position, the accumulation of points by an extemporized repetitive movement is an effective means to blurring the logical authority of mathematical strategies. The ballpoint blue particles, which dust the basic plane, are electrifying the pictorial membrane. This blue haze annihilates a sense of depth or direction and prevents the viewer to breach into a nocturnal abyss. The vast number of points liquefies into an almost monochrome plane, instigating an ephemeral open system.

Distraction | Action | Reaction

In a second movement, Van Dessel surmounts the boundaries of his studio to demonstrate and question the artist's relation to the world. Piercing a little hole in the whitewashed window of this studio (*THE ENDURING THRUTH, 2011*) is a direct attempt to entering this outside world.

REBOOT resumes this action but the unfolding is stretched out in time and space. Three identical wooden cubes of 7cm across are industrially coated with several protective layers of white paint. Since May 2011, one cube is circulating on Van Dessel's studio floor capturing all the dust, residues and studio actions. The second cube is now left on the floor of the gallery to record the dynamics of the place during the exhibition. Ultimately the third cube will endure a similar treatment at the location of a private or public collection. What could be perceived as a (static) triptych with all its art historical connotations is transformed in an interrupt in the mundane space. The work brings about a template for connecting time and place through interaction driven by chance.

In the structured processes that Van Dessel applies to questioning the distance between life and art, this element of chance is acknowledged as an innate part of the work. As Bruce Nauman, referring to and inspired by Cage in relation to the chance element in his work *Mapping The Studio*, he takes up an observational position concerning the work unfolding.

(*TRAVEL*) *GRAVEL* marks a further venture into the world beyond the confines of the artist's studio. Since January 2012 Van Dessel collects the gravel that falls off his shoes every time he enters his car. The collection of small stones is a remnant of his daily actions. Once the gravel will be placed on the gallery floor, the visitors of the exhibition will unintentionally disperse it again. In contrast to the mathematical and structured compositions (e.g. *Triangular and Square Numbers, Ten to 10*) Mel Bochner makes with stones on the gallery floor in the early '70,

(TRAVEL) GRAVEL brings to mind the cairns on a mountain to guide hikers in bad weather conditions. Van Dessel's miniature urban version however is not directing the viewers to a set point but introduces them to the risk a wayfarer has to accept to encounter the unexpected.

The construct of the title indicates the method and materiality of the work as well as the intent to keep the gravel in its dynamic course. The accidentally collected stones are not reduced to their materiality as object, but kept in their perpetual flow. Van Dessel arrested this flow just for a moment when pouring the gravel in a heap on the floor. When he allows the work to dissolve again into the (urban) landscape, he also anticipates its possible expansion in the social space.

Invisibleoutvisible

In *DISTANCE 1:100 M > B* an interval of 48,3 km between the artist workshop and the gallery is visualised in an A4 pencil drawing. By applying a scale of 1 to 100, Van Dessel breaks the measured line up in 48300 elements of approximately 1 cm long. He once more executes the meticulous task of counting and traces the short lines along a ruler, turning the distance into a plane. Remarkably, the mathematical veracity is transformed in a sensitive meshwork of superimposed fragmented lines as an archi-textural plain of graphite density, which is enticing the viewer to meander in the work.

Where *DISTANCE 1:100 M > B* exists in a spatial actuality, *SWITCH* operates as a multi-layered spin hesitating between the visible and the invisible.

At first sight *SWITCH* seems related to the work of the *Light and Space* artists such as Robert Irwin, James Turrell and more directly to the prominent work of Dan Flavin. However, Flavin commented on his early work (e.g. *The Nominal Three*) that he 'intended rapid comprehension, get in and get out the situations', suggesting there is no point to linger or contemplate the work. The fluorescent light fixtures being physical facts as part of a whole situation, objects mounted on the wall in a serial arrangement. Although some of his contemporaries including Donald Judd objected to this pictorial reading (and linked it to temporality for instance) Barnett Newman interpreted Flavin's work as a continuation of painting with lights rather than paints.

Van Dessel's work conveys hardly anything of the above; in *SWITCH* he takes another step further in the systematic reduction of the physicality of the work. By substituting the gallery lightings for those of his studio and vice versa, he sets up an open structure that renders possible a kind of swapping between levels of reality. It seems neither that the fixtures, nor the light is carrying the thought under investigation. Maybe it is the entropic condition comprised in this event that intensifies the peculiar (un)reality of this new state. Although some scars of the original (light) situation are visible, the almost abstraction of the tangible introduces discomfort and possibly provokes solipsistic conceptions. The generous act of Van Dessel to share the intimacy of his workplace with the viewer is a complex and challenging one. There is no potential for narrative or visual clues the viewer can rely on to comprehend the work as in the Bruce Nauman video installation described above. The viewer is thrown back onto his own foresight and imagination.

Van Dessel's work interlocks as a complex matrix of action and reaction, places and coordinates, time and duration. One element unravels another one and yet one more, as in a fractal structure. Consequently the exhibition itself is part of its development. Van Dessel's work probes the object status of art, the role of the spectator and above all the intrinsic meaning of the artist's function. To experience his work demands an engagement, an interaction with it that somehow goes beyond comprehending it as a mere work of art. In his own quiet but convincing language, Kris Van Dessel creates open structures enabling new realities, which eventually open in the world a wider perspective.

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