RED HOOK JOURNAL

Press Releases

To Whom it May Concern

Bruce Hainley

In lieu of an essay on essays (catalogue, or otherwise art-related), I was going to say that I'm packing my bags and hauling my ass out of here, but I don't even have to pack my own bags anymore . . .

With Tina Fey finally agreeing to co-showrun for a season, NBC's picked up my new series for Amy Sedaris, *Sub Marina*, about a Marina Abramovi? stand-in who subs when the artist is absent (as everyone knows, her "art" has been made in absentia for decades). The sub lives in a sub-basement of MoMA, from which Klaus Biesenbach doppelgängers try constantly to evict her, and, although born and raised in West Virginia, she's forced to speak with a Serbian accent. In the pilot, Marini (Sedaris) has to (1) keep an appropriate gaze despite staring at a person whose cross-eyes, Marty Feldmanesque, accentuated by a caterpillar unibrow, make it impossible to focus soulfully; and (2) figure out a way to retrieve an e-mail before it's opened (commissioned to review the updated [Robert Wilson intro!] paperback of James Westcott's biography, *When Marina Abramovi? Dies*, for *W* magazine, Marini mistakenly attaches, instead of her final version, a draft of her text, at a point when she was still stuck on how to go further than her opening line: "Not soon enough."). Hijinks ensue. There's tweaking to do (I got some notes that suggested Abramovi? be Kim Kardashian and the Biesenbachs Ryan Seacrest clones), but, still, um, yeah, smell you later.

What image am I seeing?

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Why put up with the miserablism of art writing, even for catalogues, the only “luxury” real estate available for any art writer—albeit only when published by a commercial gallery or private collection (museums, très hit-or-miss, usually claim empty pockets, most of the supposedly fanciest paying the least, blithely ignoring the fact that “prestige” won’t buy a cup of Blue Bottle coffee, much less a bite of one of Caitlin William Freeman’s goodies)—when Comcast and actual Malibu property beckon? I mean, you already know the drill, exhibition calendars arranged two or more years out, the fact that some kind of text, almost without exception, no matter how pointless, will be printed, yet writers as the last to be considered, their “product” often relegated to the status of ad copy to flow around the pictures, so why not put up with the demands for someone really important, like Alan Ball or, as I call him, Alan Testicle?

The essay, sure. No matter what it’s supposedly about, it should always cause meaning to skid. Obviously, it should embrace the fact of writing’s non-codependency while questioning what it means for something to be “about” something else. Have fun with that. But while no one should be in favor of vapid irresponsibility or the unethical (!=raised eyebrow), start haranguing about testing the limits of exegesis and blah blah blah abandoning the status quo of curating and—yikes!—it’s starting to sound like you’re jonesing to spearhead a new journal with Neville Wakefield and Jens Hoffmann, funded by Dasha Zhukova. *Delegational Anaesthetics!* (Skype editorial board meeting this Sunday, 2 a.m. GMT.)

At least Dasha will make sure there’s an app for it.

So before the private jet finishes taxiing, let me try to downshift into a more mellow gear.

Or not.

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I was going to suggest that writers take back the liberties artists have for decades taken from them, but my iPad battery's in the red, and, honestly, I've never met another writer—a person who tries to get words to warp space-time—who takes, for example, Lawrence Weiner seriously *as a writer*, although by the sheer number of publications dedicated to or by him you'd think he had contributed something to literature, to writing, as prepossessing as . . . Dave Eggers'. Graphic designers, absolutely, but not writers. There's no liberty there to be taken, kids, that well's run dry, which isn't to say that the cold corpse of e. e. cummings doesn't still cry comma tears.

Speaking of which: watch for my next project, *Sacred Cows*, opening Memorial Day weekend 2012.

What do you think this is "about"?

It's not "about" spite.

It could be "about" trying out different vocal registers, venom and bleakness among them.

It could be "about" how to face the situation of the dominant, "about" attempting to figure out, bluntly, how any thinking person should operate under the presumption that the current m.o. of too many of those with power (?) in the art world—curators, collectors, writers, editors, art consultants, and even artists—is to produce art's obsolescence. (That m.o. won't succeed in the bitter end, but it may look like it has, for a long, long time, and, well, *super!*)

Where was I, Todd?

Todd whispers in my ear, How to proceed, sir.

Right.

Don't.

Don't operate.

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Unless Deitch et al. pony up that what they’re test-marketing for (bypassing Koons, Prince, Hirst & Murakami, Inc., entirely) is an artist willing to do anything, an artist willing to stop at nothing to be a celebritized A-lister or a brand (iME!), PR-able and cross-platform ready, then take every chance to

remind them that Gaga's got that covered and really doesn't need any assist from what used to be, not ever quaintly, called "art"—or just turn your back on it all and scribble for actual Hollywood power.

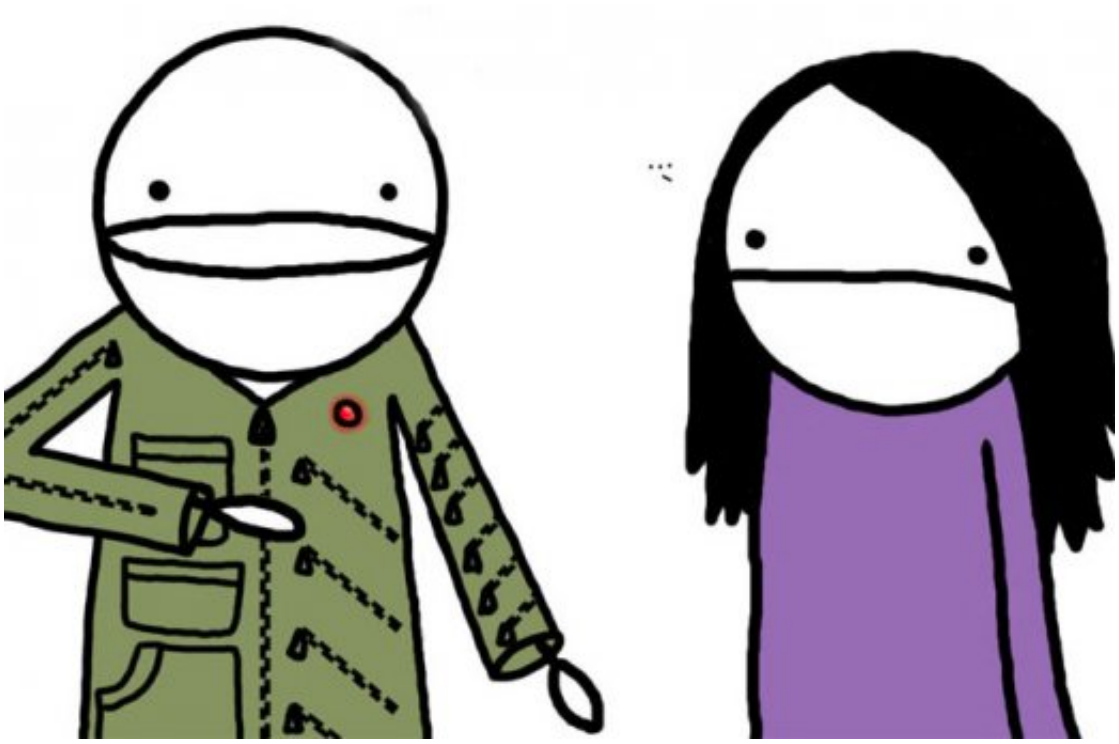
Meaning that this is "about" care?

Um, are you applying for a job at Hallmark or trying to get J. J. Abrams' attention?

For more than JJ's once-over-twice, after mentioning that you've seen Warhol's pitch notes for a bewigged superhero named The Figment, suggest that Andy was already adding up a different cost-benefit analysis entirely when he floated "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes," a maxim that plots the horizontal of the geographic (global fame) on the vertical of time (fifteen minutes), i.e., one billion YouTube hits can't be wrong, but they equal what half-life of celebrity or consequence?

It's so much easier not to care.

Before my golden parachute arrived, I was actually going to quote Gertrude Stein ("Act so there is no use in a center.") and then suggest that you doubt, if not exactly everything, then at least all the things in the grammar toolbox, all the blossoms in the writerly garden: mess with syntax; fuck with form (recognizing the genre you're engaged in); piss off your (metaphorical) parents (few now helming *October* or the Whitney ISP ever have); ride the proverbial jocks of writers worth the bother (so as to organize some fresh rendezvous of questions and question marks).



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Not any more. Even my assistant, Todd, has better things to do than interrogate the received idea of what a catalogue or any other kind of essay is or should be; than attempt, rhetorically, to stir up trouble; to breach propriety and piety; to surprise; much less than to put on the “explanation hat” and spell out all that’s been ignored, by history and historians, about the subject at hand. I mean, Todd has invitations to RSVP, dry cleaning to collect, reservations to book, complex schedules to keep, and Prius-driven miles to go before he sleeps.

Todd must have passed me some powerful Kush because I was just about to launch into some sort of bibliographical cheat sheet for how to continue to care or at least dwell care-adjacent.

Jill Johnston? When’s the last time you read her first book of essays, *Marmalade Me*? Lady was covering the cultural waterfront, knew everybody who mattered, said what she thought about what they were up to, tweakily, not afraid of making a mess when a mess was needed.

Anne Carson’s “Answer Scars”?

Dave Hickey’s “Detroit Dharma Diva”?

Or everything by George W. S. Trow?

That all seems like such a long time ago.

Really, at the moment, *Glamorama*’s all you need.

If asked, just say it’s a book about terrorism, that you heard Gosling and Bigelow are attached.

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Bruce Hainley is a contributing editor of *Artforum* and the author of *Foul Mouth*, *No Biggie*, and, with John Waters, *Art—A Sex Book*. His monographic study of Sturtevant, *Under the Sign of [*sic*]*, and a book of selected essays will be published in 2012. Issue #5 of the journal *Pep Talk* is dedicated to his work. He teaches at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California.

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