

# PERMANENT FOOD



# Concerning some seductive Unidentified Published Objects and other hybrid real and virtual arrangements

On the back cover of a young American rock band's first album is a phrase that could well be the motto of many experimental magazines: «We did it because we didn't know it was impossible». Economically and practically speaking, the first issue of any new magazine is always a struggle. In the world of image and contemporary art, however, a number of French and other European magazines have managed to overcome some of the difficulties with a new critical approach to the form and interface of publication.

## 1. *Semaine*, a new geography of periodicity

In today's art world, in France and elsewhere in Europe, the real difference lies in the great diversity of actions being carried out on the ground, despite the increasing difficulties for survival faced by small art centres — as opposed to the power of official art.

Analogue, a publisher from Arles run by **Gwenola Menou**, is working to encourage access to art. They also publish books, such as *L'anthologie de l'art* by **Jochen Gerz** which sparked year-long exchanges between artists and art critics. The collection also includes **Raymond Hains's** *La boîte à fiches* a compilation of childhood photographs by this New Realist, with notes and commentaries, including puns and cultural references.

*Semaine* is a weekly contemporary art magazine, which centres on the transience of the works and exhibitions presented from a historical perspective. The editorial team define it as «archaeology of thought». This exploration is developed in the different sections by means of weekly booklets. *Semaine* directly interviews artists, exhibition curators and authors; once all the information has been compiled, they prepare an eight-part catalogue, which is published every two months. This format makes it easier to sell.

## 2. The collector as a model

Some artists are inherent collectors: examples include Joachim Schmid and the French artist Claude Closky, who brings out small theme magazines and catalogues, in which the artist tries to find his own order within the range of diverse images. On his website, Schmid says: «This series of books centres on the themes presented by everyday, amateur photographers. Images found on photo-sharing sites such as Flickr have been collected and ordered in a way to form a continually expanding encyclopaedic library of digital photography. Each book is comprised of images that focus on a specific photographic event or idea, the grouping of photographs revealing a language of modern vernacular photography».

In his book *Penser/Classer*, Georges Perec offered another literary model based on a reference to language and its organisation, which is still the subject of experimentation and reference for many new artists.

Since the early days of the cinema, we have known that by combining images we can give them a new meaning, in accordance with the principle of logical sequence and film editing.

### 2.a. An organised collection

In order to be taken seriously in the official art world of art centres, Kunsthäuser and museums, one needs to produce books and catalogues of no fewer than one hundred pages. On this principle, the publisher M19 (the name is a reference to the 19th of May), publishes a yearly magazine entitled *Grammes d'Art*, containing works by international artists.

The publisher composes and publishes magazines and books and provides a specific space for previously unseen work. The title of each issue reflects its exact weight, so for example the second issue is entitled *1865 Grams of Art*. The collection is meticulously run by its founders, Pierre Drenan and Frédéric de Lachèze, who painstakingly select artists

related to a single theme or who share a common artistic vision. It is the differences between the various works that give their critique its full meaning.

### 2.b. *Permanent Food*, a high-performance archive

There are plenty of UPOs (Unidentified Published Objects) on the art market. *Permanent Food* is one of them, a twice-yearly magazine edited since 1995 by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan and Paola Manfrin with help from Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. Although this is not a virtual publication per se, it has no editorial staff or office and is an excellent instrument for keeping up with current visual trends. It is published by L'Association des Temps Libérés and Les Presses du Réel (Dijon, France) and distributed by Idea Books (Amsterdam, Netherlands) in collaboration with the Dijon Consortium.

Each issue includes a selection of images, taken from publications from around the world, presented in the form of press cuttings. The visual force of the images is achieved through a rigorous juxtaposition of different contexts. The long selection period helps create, as Paola Manfrin puts it, «a sequence that in some ways describes the historical moment you're living». On occasions, they play at being critics; for example, they followed up an idea by Mariuccia Casadio, the editor of *Vogue Italia*, and brought out a special issue with material from different editions of *Vogue*.

This corpus of images generally plays with irony, building a stark language taken from mixed sources, with touches of black humour and more dramatic flourishes. It creates a new accumulation-based logic, introducing new parameters of interpretation. Despite the fact that the basic unit is the twin-page spread, it might be seen as a diptych. But under the unwritten rules of *Permanent Food*, less similar images are juxtaposed, each taken from extreme areas of meaning or usage. The result is to mislead the reader, who initially struggles

to trace a common link between the images and thus uncover their meaning, which is never immediately obvious. Understanding requires an effort. Yet the mystery does not last forever, and after leafing through several twin-page spreads one ends up constructing or reconstructing the meaning. Paradoxically, another of the advantages of this format is that we actually spend more time examining each image than we would normally. Each issue is to some extent built around what might be termed black holes in the iconography, within which new relations emerge and meanings are kept suspended, creating their own memory.

### 3. *lacritique.org* (magazine section) and *Photos Nouvelles*, half-way between website and paper

We wanted to strike a reasonable balance between Internet and print publication, but did not have sufficient funds at this time to print an online version of our magazine at → [www.lacritique.org](http://www.lacritique.org); as a result, we decided, in discussion with our editorial committee, to collaborate with some existing magazines. We have organised an exchange with *Area revue*s(. Each theme issue of the publication contains articles and interviews with artists, exhibition curators, philosophers and personalities from the world of the human sciences. The latest issue, for example, centres on «art values» and includes my piece on **Jean Kapéram**, an outsider from the New Realism group and one of the first artists in France to look at media aesthetics and start working in this area. He was also one of the first people in this country to use a computer to create drawings (for the graphic version of his series *Million*). For us, this was a chance to offer a whole series of texts and illustrations online related to these interesting and now historical works. In the field of creation, we often concentrate solely on new developments and end up leaving historical gaps and we wanted to reverse this trend.

In this regard, we are also working with *Photos Nouvelles* (Publishers Atlantica), a two-monthly magazine specialising in contemporary photography of all genres. As a result, we can publish large numbers of images, even though it is organised by portfolios with no particular theme-based order. This process of exchange has been favoured by the current situation of high printing costs and sustained demand; although readers are increasingly connected to the Net, many still prefer book format.

Nonetheless, even in a virtual medium we still want to offer the same quality of approach, and we have therefore divided our sections up into concepts relating to different specific theoretical tools.

- *Écarts* (Differences), is about norms and standards and the Greek term «doxa» and raises the issue of beauty and taste.
- *Précipité* (Precipitate), used in the chemical sense of the term, seeks to illustrate the relationship between artists and their environment.
- *Nécessité* (Necessity) tries to reassert the urgent need for an author to find his or her aesthetic forms through everyday practice. It refers back to Kandinsky's inner necessity, but in a wider sense; it has to do both with desire and with reactions and chance.
- *Pretexte* (Pretext). The work is considered as an object that is separate from the subject; the relationship is linked to the community and to its political commitment, based on the creators' discourse.
- *Tactique* (Tactic) tries to analyse the market positioning of contemporary art, careers and the economy, which are so important as materials.
- *Lacunes* (Gaps). When recent art history highlights its lacunae in some artists or trends, its permanent forgetting or its conceptual faults, the time has come to question our own system.

All these entrances allow us to experiment with other interpretations of images and works.

#### 4. *Synesthésie*, from an online magazine to a real Virtual Art Centre

Anne-Marie Morice founded this magazine of Internet creation fifteen years ago, using the opportunities offered by new technologies to dedicate a space to artists working in this experimental area, and also to give them a chance to contribute their own reviews or theoretical ideas. The website is organised into different sections — «magazines», «blogs», «theoretical zooms», «events» and «resources» — with links to the various artists dealt with.

The theme of the most recent issue was the city and its new developments and within this framework, at the end of the year, *Synesthésie* collaborated with the biennial Art Grandeur Nature, in exhibitions organised in open spaces throughout the *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis. Through their installations, sculptures and other pieces, the artists examined the relationship between different places and their use by the inhabitants. These issues were also addressed by philosophers and art critics, who analysed the dynamic constitution of the new urban spaces in relation to the concept of «area». Previous issues of the magazine, announced through a newsletter, always included at least one theoretical chapter. They have also published a print edition, financed by the Local Conseil General, which has enabled them to sell a booklet with the theoretical texts and a catalogue (*Graphics: Pierre di Scullo Atelier*, distributed by Le Comptoir des Indépendants).

More recently, the magazine has had a presence at fairs and other events, such as La Force de l'Art, a triennial that seeks, with relative success, to summarise the present position of contemporary French art, although it has been widely criticised for the works selected (very few women and always the same artists, although some are undeniably very good). One of their successful decisions has been precisely to work with *Synesthésie*; this has enabled them to provide space for

some genuinely different projects, such as Isabelle Grosse's 3D video *Upstream* and Serge Lhermitte's recent *Small Dictionary of Body and Social Postures in Urban Situations*, for example. The show has given the virtual collection selected by Anne-Marie Morice's team a new opportunity for visibility in the Gran Palais and over the Internet.

In recent decades, performance art has often been linked to body art and to live performance, very close to choreography and independent of history, arising from the urgency of the present. Although the real, flesh-and-blood, body is not present in the magazines, we have sought to accompany these types of project with new bodies of images, trying to create new forms of energy, based on the different means of production and other means of distribution. It is a whole new interpretation with different strategies that have already been the subject of experimentation in contemporary art.

→ [www.synesthesie.com](http://www.synesthesie.com)

→ [www.lacritique.org](http://www.lacritique.org)

→ [www.lespressesdureel.com](http://www.lespressesdureel.com)

→ [www.analogues.fr](http://www.analogues.fr)

→ [www.m19.fr](http://www.m19.fr)

→ [www.areaparis.com](http://www.areaparis.com)

→ [www.atlantica.fr/API/Photonouvelles.php](http://www.atlantica.fr/API/Photonouvelles.php)