



© Natascha Stelmach When I peeled you off the road I could still hear your heart and falling 2006



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Boris Eldagsen – No Cure
24 August to 29 September 2007
project supported by the City of Berlin

Thomas Weinberger – Lux Loci
24 August to 16 September 2007
project presented in association with thirtyseven degrees – Contemporary Fine Art Gallery, Sydney

Natascha Stelmach – The Book of Back
24 August to 29 September 2007
project supported by Australia Council, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, the Australian Embassy in Berlin and the Sidney Myer Fund

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The GerMANY FACES Australia arts festival highlights the many and surprising facets of modern Germany in Australia. Spanning a wide cultural variety – film, dance, cabaret, electronic music and contemporary visual art – the festival showcases cutting edge programs, challenging ideas and daring performances. Encouraging new spaces for encounter and opportunities for dialogue all festival projects are presented with Australian partners.

GerMANY FACES Australia runs from 10 September to 20 October 2007
www.germanyfaces.com.au



COVER IMAGE: © Boris Eldagsen No Cure 2006 production still
LEFT FLAP: © Natascha Stelmach Good Girl #1 2006
RIGHT FLAP: © Thomas Weinberger House and Garden 2007



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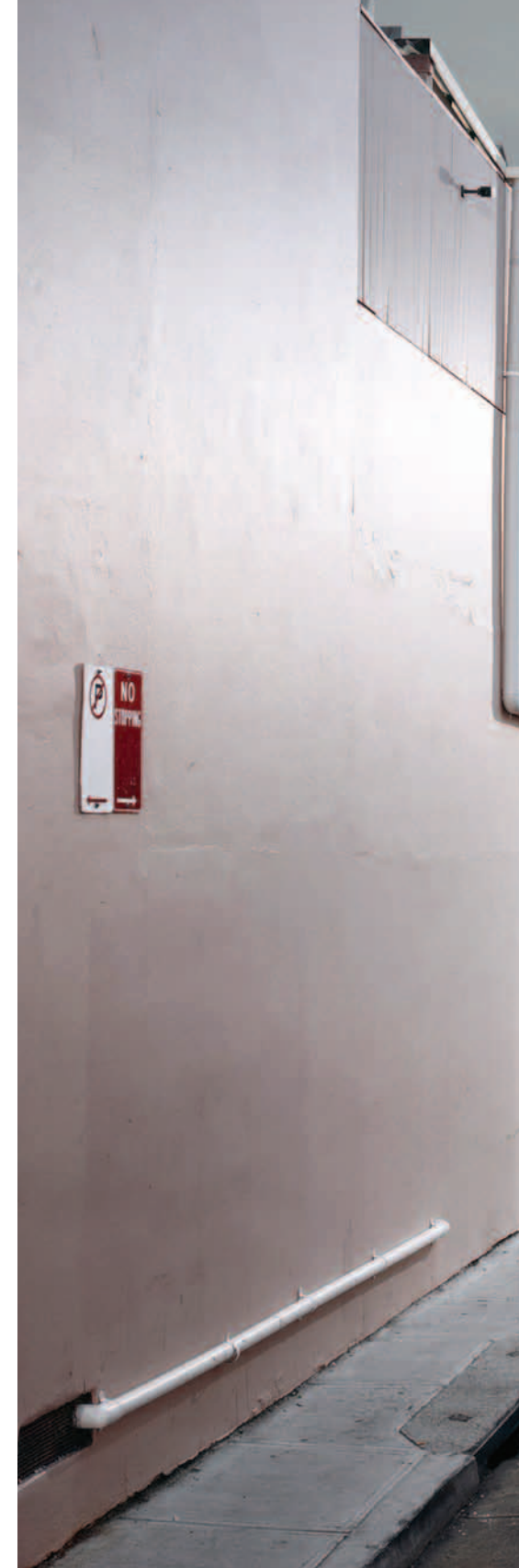
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NEW GERMAN PHOTOMEDIA



australian centre for photography





ABOVE: © Boris Eldagsen *No Cure* 2006 production stills

NO CURE

BORIS EL DAGSEN

This haunting, immersive work creates an environment that is both poignantly introspective and breathtakingly spectacular.

Four massive monoliths form a rectangular space into which the viewer steps to encounter a quartet of elderly visages, each taller than a person. Their rheumy eyes stare out at you blankly... You feel a little uncomfortable that they are looking at you... then, more disquietingly, that perhaps they are really oblivious ... One of the aged faces begins to sing ... The music sounds vaguely familiar, wisps of a melody you can't quite place ... Wagner perhaps? And the words ... those words ... they sound like ... surely not? ... The Cure?

No Cure found its genesis in an unlikely place – Majorca – that quintessential cut-price Mediterranean paradise for the northern European package-holiday-maker. Finding himself on the island Boris Eldagsen sought refuge from his fellow German tourists in the Karaoke bars beloved of the English on vacation. He became fascinated by the phenomenon of the 'absent orchestra' and began to explore the kinds of music that proved most popular in this form of self-made entertainment. In particular he gravitated to the songs of the English post-Punk band The Cure, finding in Robert Smith's lyrics the poetry of angry despair.

The final installation takes these elements and builds them together with a twist. The words are now sung not by disaffected English youth but by German men and women approaching the end of their lives. Despair presents a new face: resignation. Sounded phonetically, the words are sung without comprehension. Like the mind in extreme old age the ideas half form, falter and fade.

*If only I could remember
Anything at all*

While working on the piece Boris came to Melbourne and began to work with the Australian composer David Chisholm who created a musical underscore based on Richard Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. The melodies, drawn from Siegfried's funeral march, are elusive – "like water slipping through your fingers", as Boris puts it. While the refrain repeats "... just like the old days ... just like the old days ... just like the old days ..." the acoustic atmosphere shifts, suggesting an old gramophone is playing in distant room. The past maybe another country but, in these twilight years, death waits patiently just beyond the door. So close.

*I am slowing down
As the years go by
I am sinking
So I trick myself
Like everybody else*

There is a personal resonance here for the artist. The youngest of the family, his father was already in his late forties when Boris was born and, had he survived, would now be the same age as the performers in this installation. And, in a kind of numerological pun, Boris spent his formative years in the penultimate decade of the 20th century – the decade of Richard Smith and The Cure – a child of the eighties.

Now, in the first decade of the new millennium, death appears as a thief and the mental database aspires to a digital consistency. But it is our frailty that makes us human. That is our inheritance and the foundation of our connectedness. Here, dwarfed by the encircling faces of old age, the viewer is left to contemplate the transience of life and memory, and the slow fade into eternal stillness.

*A monument to the ruined age
Ice in my eyes*

And eyes like ice don't move

Alasdair Foster

All quoted lyrics by Robert Smith



ABOVE: © Thomas Weinberger
Zone 30 2007

LEFT: © Thomas Weinberger
Bridge and Tunnel 2007



LUX LOCI

THOMAS WEINBERGER

Internationally acclaimed German photographer Thomas Weinberger transforms mundane scenes into spectral landscapes. His photographs seem to exist outside of real time and space. Their glittery, desolate beauty is vaguely unsettling: something almost imperceptible is not quite right. Weinberger's photographs gently tug at the subconscious, they are tinged with mystery: dark, slippery and tantalising.

As Weinberger puts it, his photographs "don't have any reference to reality on our planet." Which is not quite true. He starts with the real, but ends up somewhere else, somewhere not entirely of this world. In *Lux Loci* he presents recent photographs of Sydney, from our iconic Harbour Bridge to modest inner city lanes. Yet these images are more strange than familiar. In a nifty twist, their very strangeness seems to reassert photography's link to the indexical; Weinberger's photos are like evidence brought back from a parallel universe, our city, slightly tweaked.

Slowly, it becomes apparent that it is a clever trick of the light which gives Weinberger's photographs their surreal edge. A self-taught photographer, Weinberger found he was able to create a unique otherworldly atmosphere through an innovative photographic technique of combining long exposures; one taken during the day and one at night. In this way he captures an improbable, seductive quality of light that doesn't actually exist.

The skies in Weinberger's photographs seem almost electrically charged with a lush, luminous grey that is neither light nor dark, night nor day, but simultaneously bursting with the potential of both. Because of this, he is able to infuse even the most banal scenes with a palpable sense of anticipation. Ordinary landscapes become liminal zones; something is going to happen.

Through Weinberger's lens, in photographs such as *Keep Out* and *Rest in Peace*, even Sydney's quiet suburban streets seems to pulsate with dramatic potential or impending doom. In *Bridge and Tunnel*,

he manages to make Sydney's central business district skyline look fake, or in fact so hyper-real that it seem unreal. All of Weinberger's images illicit a theatrical tingle of suspense. Devoid of people, they resemble stages without the actors, or movie stills in which the action is taking place just off camera and is poised to spill onto the scene.

While many European visitors to Australia are drawn to our idiosyncratic landscape, vast tracts of desert, rain forest and coasts so different from their own natural environments, it is perhaps not surprising that as a former architect, Weinberger chose to spend his time in Sydney concentrating on human-made structures. As he admits, "Every picture that a photographer takes is in reality a self portrait." In his life, as in his mysterious images, Weinberger strives for an equilibrium; a balance between day and night, reason and emotion.

Tracey Clement



ABOVE: © Natascha Stellmach
Nazi Girl 2006

RIGHT: © Natascha Stellmach #2
from the Act II Hotel series 2006

The Book of Back

NATASCHA STELLMACH

Entering the installation *The Book of Back* is like stepping into a hall of mirrors. The setting is sparse, bringing to mind a child's bedroom. It is here where stories and images from the artist's book intertwine with video footage and the book itself, to form this dark, tangled interior. The book includes prose and short stories by the artist, staged photographs, scans of found and family photographs and reproductions of objects made by Stellmach to evoke a family story with its repressed dramas and secrets.

Sinking into the dark poetry of the book, the reader is spun into a world within worlds, to a point of intense psychological discomfort. The narrative opens with the immigration of a young German couple to Australia, told in fragments and mainly from the perspective of their child, in whose room the viewer stands. The child is suffering under the new situation, being torn between worlds. In the second act, both typography and content suggest stories from the previous generation, in which tragedies such as war and abuse threaten to resurface. A suicide is implied in the third act, in a book within a book, in addition to a surreal and bizarre tale where Bon Scott, Adolf Hitler, Diane Arbus, a dog and the Brothers Grimm meet in an outlandish twilight zone.

While her oeuvre often carries autobiographical traits, to limit the reading of Natascha Stellmach's work to this

personal level would fall short of the mark. She seeks out contemporary realisations of timeless themes: tragedies, fears, anxieties. These have a long tradition in the history of literature and, more recently, in film and are conditions for which psychoanalysis provides a diagnostic vocabulary. Stellmach draws her inspiration from Black Romanticism, from the dark fairytale and its successors in popular music such as Death Metal and Grindcore, and before that the melancholy ballads of Leonard Cohen. The twisted scenes in the installation's video, together with the nightmarish score by David Chisholm transform Super 8 images from an apparent idyllic childhood into a disturbing sequence.

The concept that best describes many of Stellmach's works is the German term *unheimlich*. While this is usually translated as 'uncanny', the original German expression encapsulates much more. Literally meaning 'unhomely', it implies the very opposite of what is comfortably familiar. Freud explicitly described the idea as belonging to the 'domain of aesthetics' using examples from literature to make his point.¹ So it is no wonder that the *unheimlich* re-emerged later in the context of film theory and more recently it has been haunting contemporary art. In its implication that the repressed is suddenly manifest – the trusted is no longer trustworthy – the *unheimlich* is certainly at work in *The Book of Back*.

That Natascha Stellmach projects these dark

premonitions onto a child's bedroom, a site that is all too often seen as idyllic and carefree, makes this installation even blacker. This room is a place of distress, a visible expression of the protagonist's mental state, but it is also a catalyst to evoke the creepy feeling of the *unheimlich* in the viewer. However, just as things get almost too gloomy, she fractures the illusion with irony – the theatricality of the fake blood, squashed frogs and worlds within the wardrobe – allowing us to peer behind the mirror again. Just for a moment.

Astrid Mania

Translation by Natascha Stellmach

This is an edited and translated version of an essay written for the first presentation of *The Book of Back* at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, where the project was originally developed while Natascha Stellmach was on the Australia Council's one-year Berlin artists' residency.

<Note>

¹ Sigmund Freud 'Das Unheimliche' in *Psychologische Schriften* (study paper) vol IV pub: Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, James Strachey, Frankfurt/Main 1970 p243

Boris Eldagsen

Born in Pirmasens, Germany 1970.

Based in Berlin.

Studied Philosophy at The Albertus Magnus University in Cologne and The Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. Studied Fine Arts at The Academy of Fine Arts in Mainz, Germany, The Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, Czech Republic and the Sarojini Naidu School of Fine Arts, Dance & Communication in Hyderabad, India. Works as a multi-media consultant and an arts lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts in Mainz, Germany and The Centre for Ideas (Victorian College of the Arts) of Melbourne University, Australia.

Received the Award of the German Federal Minister of Education & Science and the Award of the Friends of the University Mainz. Recently selected for the Körber-Stiftung Photo Award 2007 in Hamburg.

Exhibiting since 1991 with more than 20 shows including the Kunstvereine of Bonn, Dortmund, Frankfurt, Mainz, Wiesbaden; Bundespressehaus, Berlin; Kunst-Museum Ahlen; Deichtorhallen, Hamburg; Strychnin Gallery, New York; Australian Centre of Photography, Sydney; DUMB (International House of Art), Brno, Czech Republic; Galerie Wyspa, Gdansk, Poland; European Media Art Festival, Osnabrück; 14th Internationales Kurzfilmfestival, Hamburg; and the Biennale of Electronic Art Perth (BEAP).

Thomas Weinberger is represented by thirtyseven degrees – Contemporary Fine Art Gallery, Sydney.

Boris Eldagsen is represented by Herrmann & Wagner Berlin.

Thomas Weinberger

Born in Munich, Germany 1964.

Based in Munich.

Studied architecture at the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich and the University of Rome La Sapienza (1986–94) and worked as an architect 1995–98. From 1999 he has worked as an artist focusing on photography.

Exhibiting since 2000 with more than 15 shows including Bozar Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium; Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal; Stadtmuseum Delmenhorst, Germany; Rathausgalerie München, Munich, Germany; Kunstmuseum Celle, Germany; Museum Bochum, Germany; Voltashow 02/03, Basel, Switzerland; Nusser & Baumgart Contemporary, Munich, Germany; Art Madrid, Spain; Orangene, Munich, Germany.

Represented in public and private collections including Munich Re, Munich, Germany; Banco Espírito Santo, Lisbon, Portugal; European Patent office, Munich, Germany; ING Bank, Netherlands; M & R Goedl, Assenhausen, Germany; Klein, Stuttgart, Germany.

Thomas Weinberger is represented by thirtyseven degrees – Contemporary Fine Art Gallery, Sydney.

Boris Eldagsen is represented by Herrmann & Wagner Berlin.

Natascha Stellmach

Born in Melbourne 1970 of German parents.

Based in Berlin and Melbourne.

Studied applied science at Latrobe University, Melbourne and applied photography Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. She was a guest professor at the Akademie für Bildende Künste, Mainz, Germany (2004–2005).

Received McGregor Prize for Photography (Highly Commended) 2000; Wild Spaces Environmental Film Festival New Filmmaker Award 2000; Wyndham City Contemporary Art Prize 2001. Recipient of the Australia Council 12-month Künstlerhaus Bethanien artist residency, Berlin 2006.

Exhibiting since 1996, in over 50 exhibitions including The Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney; The Australian Centre of Contemporary Art, Melbourne; The Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Melbourne; The Next Wave Festival, Melbourne; Palais Porcia, Vienna; Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin; The International House of Photography, Hamburg and the International Film Festivals of Edinburgh, Hannover and Taiwan; and the Biennial of Electronic Art Perth (BEAP).

Represented in public and private collections including Kunstsammlung Akademie der Künste; Künstlerhaus Bethanien; The Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne and Yarra Melbourne Libraries, North Melbourne. Natascha Stellmach is represented by Herrmann & Wagner, Berlin.

About the artists