Artists Statement

A CENTRAL thought behind the video compilation stored inside the Minority Logbook is to archive multiple notions of the other and to further communicate them during screenings in transition; while the archive travels through neighboring societies—where the dominant culture in one place is a minority in another location just beyond the border. A large part of the project’s route crosses a region where displacement and forced migration have created an utterly reallocated configuration of marginal communities. It is an opportunity to (through the use of related visual documents) interconnect groups, that have always been apart from the dominant culture. But it is also an impetus to reveal contrasts in different locations due to historical status and attributes connected to locally diverse developments.

The process of collecting films followed the intention of juxtaposing a variety of views, taken from the field of visual anthropology, the domain of art video and documentary, NGO material, TV productions, and more rarely self-documenting approaches from within the communities. Whilst, generally speaking, one finds a rather limited concern toward minorities throughout local art communities, there appears to be a wider interest from other societies, be it scientifically, politically, or purely visually motivated—and in more than a few cases from abroad the geography of the subjects. As a consequence, the distinct angle of every single film of the archive is made evident to the viewer, by clearly labeling the included films by categories of representation/description, with their specific backgrounds offering a range of interpretations of collective identities and related histories. In a wider comparison this might visualize the different layers of the representation of minorities—sometimes indicating how a minority and the term itself is utilized, but also capitalized (even symbolically) by various interests. This concern is certainly more valid for some productions than for others. Since the early days of cinema on to documentary and ethnographic film, marginalized groups have been the focus of investigation and familiarization. Rather than being given the chance to portray themselves, minorities have routinely been depicted by others.

This selection is an attempt to extend the most commonly determined descriptions of the idea of minorities into various further meanings of marginalization, including national, ethnic, and gender-related viewpoints. The featured groups may not necessarily be numerical entities, such as migrant communities and refugees—there are also communities that may not wish to be classified as minorities. None of these groups are homogenous, so even within them, some members face further marginalization for various reasons. Currently, one of the more utopian groups (with an ambitious claim to be acknowledged through equality and mutual respect in all societies) is the queer community.

Operating as a diffusion unit, the traveling archive could provide an insight into minorities’ conditions of existence but also indicate their relation toward the governing interpretation of culture and therefore mainly question the forms of segregation performed by the latter.

*Don’t Trust Anyone Over Thirty*

*A satiric history of the promises and contradictions of late 1960s youth culture and its generational politics was crystallized in the slogan Don’t Trust Anyone over Thirty. Likewise, the eponymous opera provides a bitter-sweet reflection on the demise of the psychedelic era: in 1968, Topanga Canyon is the home of hippies, outsiders, and teenagers—and of the puppet-rock-opera’s tragic hero Neil Sky (whose name is a fusion of Neil Young and Sky Saxon of The Seeds), and his entourage. These people are not only believers in and practitioners of rock and roll, but also young, beautiful, and famous. The opera’s story charts the career of Neil Sky, who is elected President of the United States after instigating teenage riots to change the voting age to fourteen and putting LSD in the drinking water of the Congress. But after President Sky retires, and the over-thirty population are in LSD re-conditioning camps, he faces his own termination. Continually splicing disparate media together—opera and rock, live and recorded music, the proscenium and the television screen, the 1960s and the 2000s, real people and puppets—Don’t Trust Anyone Over Thirty is the result of a collaboration in its best and real sense between a group of artists and musicians.*
For Children Only?

by Chris Dercon

NOT long ago, Parkett published a hilarious interview with the artist Dan Graham that was conducted by a ninth-grade student. The student, Carmen Rosenberg Miller, had carefully prepared her Questionnaire for Mr. Graham. During the interview, Dan Graham spoke at length about the numerous projects he had made with and for children. It was possibly the most revealing interview Graham had given in a long time.1

Carmen Miller: Do you like music more than art? Why?

Dan Graham: I used to love music more than art because it is more play than business … because it is a form of communization … because it creates ecolastic pleasure and is closer to the body … because it is disposable culture and about instant clichés of the moment like my first conceptual work for magazines pages … because it is pop culture, which I can experience with normal people … because it is a kind of hobby, just as my first art was a hobby. I know that through my sense or nonsense of an ego. I experience my second childhood, when the young child first experiences his/her sense of an ego. I know that through my two-way mirror work. I never read Lacan, but I feel my work involves the Lacanian mirror stage of childhood, when the young child first experiences his/her sense of an ego. I know that through my art I make new friends. And through my hobbies of rock music, architectural tourism, and travel, I stay young. I know I am a child when I watch other Avic people (I am an Avic) behaving childishly, like me. It’s difficult for me to directly answer your question, it’s too perceptive for me—or maybe I am not that self-perceptive. But I thoroughly appreciate your question.

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WILD IN THE STREETS: THE OPERA

Dan Graham’s rock opera for puppets, Don’t Trust Anyone Over Thirty, has a long history. While it was created in 2004 with his friends, the artists Tony Oursler2 and Rodney Graham,3 it was originally conceived with the architect Marie-Paule Macdonald in 1967 as a mini-rock opera entitled Wild in the Streets.2

The opera’s tragic-comic narrative is the redolent ad absurdum of the hippie generational politics contained in the 1960s youth slogan, “Don’t trust anybody over thirty.”

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2. Tony Oursler conceived the psychedelic visuals for the opera, which are projected larger than life onto the entire front wall of the stage structure—designed in collaboration with French set designer and artist Laurent P. Berger—that focuses the energy of the live band in a box on one side, and the puppets in a rectangle on the other side, all connected by one big video screen that can change scale whenever needed. Through his videos, which are an integral part of the opera and determine its visual appearance, Oursler brings the puppets by master puppeteer Philip Huber to life and, at the same time, produces a unifying visual connection between the narrative sequences on the puppet stage and the interjected live music of Japander.

3. Rodney Graham, conceptual artist, writer, musician, and actor, and one of the early collaborators of the project, wrote and performed the nostalgic theme song for Don’t Trust Anyone Over Thirty, and 24 or Fight that accompany the videos and are counterparts to Japander’s wild-punk anthems. “In the time period when this work takes place, ideals were still in place above money, and the theme loosely traces this decline: from utopia to market. I was really thinking of Neil Young and trying to do something along those lines.”

4. The 1968 B-movie Wild in the Streets—starring Shelly Winters and Richard Pryor—tells the story of Max Platow, a teenager with a penchant for home-made explosives. When Max and his friends, he runs away from home to emerge seven years later, now 22 years old, as Max Frost, the world’s most popular rock star and head of a multi-million dollar empire. Frost and his entourage join causes with California Congressman John Fergus to get the vote for 14-year olds. (Hence the song 24 or Fight!). Eventually, Frost runs for President. Winning in a landslide, he issues his first presidential edict: All oldsters are required to live in retirement homes where they are forced to engulf LSD, taking the 1960s slogan Don’t trust anyone over 30 to its most extreme.
THE CULT OF YOUTH

Dan Graham has worked on similar themes, for example, in one of his earliest essays, *Eisenhower and the Hippies* (1967), as well as an unproduced science fiction film-script that he wrote with the experimental filmmaker Erika Beckman in the 1980s entitled *Arcadia*. In the script, Graham narrates the strikingly different ideals and cultural habitats of the original hippies and the so-called neo-hippies. In 1993, *Mike Kelley* beautifully articulated the concerns that he and Dan Graham share regarding these generational issues. In *Wild in the Streets: The Sixties* Dan Graham and Marie-Paule Macdonald tackle the ageism of the sixties new left and, too, the continuing ageism of the various subsequent American underground youth movements.

For those of us who are now long past the age of thirty, the age at which you become useless, it is a bitter experience to look back and see how a generation was seduced by this cult of youth. We were blind to the fact that our beliefs were a by-product of the capitalist commodity fetishism and planned obsolescence we were supposedly against. Consequently, it might not be that surprising that Dan Graham has staged his newest version of *Wild in the Streets: The Sixties* with puppets on strings—an all-marionette cast—instead of a cast of cheery children. Maybe Trey Parker and Matt Stone’s scandalously silly movie *Team America: World Police* was on his mind too! Even the live musicians of *Top of the Pops* were long past the age of thirty, the age at which you become useless, and they led Dan Graham to test his own spaces for rock. Graham’s collaboration with the composer Glenn Branca in *Musical Performance and Stage Set Utilizing Two-way Mirror and Time-delay*, was displayed in the Bern Kunsthalle in 1983. It involves the self-awareness of both the performers and the audience regarding the experience of being on stage. In 1994, Graham conceived a series of events, involving this and other aspects of rock-architecture featuring Cedric Price, Mayo Thompson, Marie-Paule Macdonald, Eared Armaily, Rodney Graham, and Tony Oursler for the Staedelschule in Frankfurt.

The ARCHITECTURE OF ROCK

For a long time, Dan Graham has been interested in something he calls the architecture of rock. The progression of rock music—from Woodstock to disco and rave—has been associated with a range of rock-and-roll films that engage the rich interior spaces of fantastic opera houses such as Brian de Palma’s *Phantom of the Opera* or Marie-Paule Macdonald’s utopian design, *Night Club for the Rolling Stones* (1968), offer an alternative architectural vision to the commercially packaged Hard Rock Café, and they led Dan Graham to test his own spaces for rock. Graham’s collaboration with the composer Glenn Branca in *Musical Performance and Stage Set Utilizing Two-way Mirror and Time-delay*, was displayed in the Bern Kunsthalle in 1983. It involves the self-awareness of both the performers and the audience regarding the experience of being on stage. In 1994, Graham conceived a series of events, involving this and other aspects of rock-architecture featuring Cedric Price, Mayo Thompson, Marie-Paule Macdonald, Eared Armaily, Rodney Graham, and Tony Oursler for the Staedelschule in Frankfurt.

COLLABORATORS AND FRIENDS

A long time friend of Dan Graham recently described his experience of friendship and collaboration with him. "Dan Graham does have a way of pounding away at few artists over and over again, wanting to work with them and always bringing up their work in discussion. He loves anything that deals with children, the repressed and its link to the lower middle class and humor; that is why he is such a big supporter of Paul McCarthy." The lift of Graham’s collaborations and collaborators is quite long and resembles an extended family. Dan Graham has frequently called upon the architect and architectural critic Marie-Paule Macdonald, musician and composer Glenn Branca, writer and curator Rudiger Schoettle, video artist Tony Oursler, artist photographer Jeff Wall and many others. But there is another side to the coin. Kim Gordon, the bassist of Sonic Youth, wrote in an introduction to Dan Graham’s book, which appeared in 1993, “Dan was the first person to encourage me to write. By participating in a performance of his, involving an all-girl band, he also encouraged me to play music. Sonic Youth would never have existed without Dan Graham.”

IV

Teresa Seeman, assistant to Dan Graham, brought the Brooklyn duo Japandroids into the project. Matt Reilly and Ian Vasiuk had founded their art project in 2001 when they met at the Pratt Institute, where they both studied Communications Design. The live-performing neo-punk band Japandroids represents the antipode to the hippie-puppet-band of Neil Sky & The Sky Tribe in the rock opera. As Dan Graham puts it, “Japandroids bring in the young energy that is so important.” The tension between what’s happening on the puppet-stage and the rough performance and music by Japandroids is a core element of the show. In 2006, Japandroids released the soundtrack *Don’t Trust Anyone Over Thirty* with 14 songs.

2 Mike Kelley, introduction to *Wild in the Streets: The Sixties* by Dan Graham and Marie-Paule Macdonald (Ghent: Inschoot, uitgevers, 1994).
DON’T TRUST ANYONE OVER THIRTY

You can’t do much in this heat
Except go wild in the street
I mean, it’s got to be at least a hundred and three
I’m stickin’ to the trees cause my knees ain’t right
They can ship you overseas but they can’t make you fight

Seems you can’t trust anyone over thirty
Based on the shit I’ve seen
Yeah, don’t trust anyone over thirty
‘Cause they’re fuckin’ old and their fuckin’ mean
But you better learn to take it if you’re gonna dish it out
There’s always someone spoils your fun
When your fun has just begun

It’s all downhill after twenty-three
I’m President Sky and I decree:
There’s always someone spoils your fun
When your fun has just begun

You can’t trust anyone over thirty
Based on the shit I’ve seen
Don’t trust anyone over thirty
‘Cause they’re fuckin’ old and their fuckin’ mean

Rodney Graham

3 Unless otherwise indicated, all of Dan Graham’s quotations are from a videotaped interview that Carmen Dacron conducted in 1984.
4 Diedrich Diedrichsen, “Regularity and Distillation,” in Don’t Trust Anyone Over Thirty, ed. T-B Art, pp. 49.