

Stroom

EN

A Glass
Darkly

A Glass Darkly

Introduction

A Glass Darkly looks to examine a historical vision in the light of the present moment. 2014 marks exactly 100 years since the German visionary writer Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915) wrote the book *Glasmarchitektur* (Glass Architecture). According to Scheerbart, only living inside glass architecture could elevate society by allowing contemplation of the infinite and the spatial, liberating humanity from the brick culture that tied it to the Earth. Written the same year that his friend and peer, the architect Bruno Taut, exhibited his famous *Glass Pavilion* at the Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne, the book exemplifies the modernist ideals of transparency and universality as projections for a progressive 'new culture'. How do these ideals stand up today?

Avoiding focusing on the nostalgia for modernist architecture still ubiquitous in western culture, this exhibition looks to take the key historical propositions of glass architecture ideology in order to analyse them comparatively with their contemporary ramifications. The notion of 'transparency' in particular is the focus of much attention today, not necessarily in strict architectural terms but

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28 September - 23 November 2014
Opening: Saturday 27 September, 5 pm

as something that is symbolic of the growing tension between private and public space. Whilst considering the aesthetics of transparency, the artists and artistic duos participating in *A Glass Darkly* also contemplate the profundity of what living under such conditions means for the human subject.

The exhibition seeks to understand these questions from numerous perspectives, looking at everything from private and public life, technological freedoms, ownership and rights, and legislative and financial accountability. Each artist here might be described as working reflectively, holding up a mirror to life in contemporary society, questioning the extent to which the idea of transparency in itself is being used as a kind of veil. What thresholds might we maintain in our lives when we weigh up the aspirations and vulnerabilities that come with 'open' society? Most significantly perhaps, the exhibition asks: might an awareness of this apparatus prompt us once more to think about the possibilities for another "new culture"?

A Glass Darkly is conceived by Nav Haq following an invitation from Stroom Den Haag to develop an exhibition in response to the organisation's own research into the writings of Paul Scheerbart.

**Iman Issa
Imogen Stidworthy
Metahaven
Natascha Sadr Haghghian
& Rashad Becker
Noam Toran
Vermeir & Heiremans**

Iman Issa

Images of a Center, 2005
single-channel HD video, 5:49 mins.
Courtesy the artist and Rodeo, Istanbul

Iman Issa's broad practice considers the experiences of the individual within those of the collective. Her works are narrative based, forming stories that deliberately withhold a specific social or geographical context, opening them up to the associative potential of the viewer. Characteristically abstract yet familiar, the place depicted in Issa's video work *Images of a Center* describes "... a city of transparent houses and pearlescent cars...". It bears a strong visual and narrative relationship to architect Bruno Taut's visionary proposal for a utopian city made of crystal houses high in the Alps (*Alpine Architecture*, 1919), seen as a response to the events of World War I. The artwork was motivated in part by Issa's consideration of the relationship between personal visions and an idea of a collective or shared space, as well as the images and language deemed adequate for conveying this relationship. *Images of a Center* was also created specifically using rights-free images of idyllic natural landscapes that the artist sourced from the internet – reiterating the tension between private and public realms.



*Images of
a Center*,
2005

Imogen Stidworthy

Sacha, 2011, installation in two parts:

Sacha, 2011

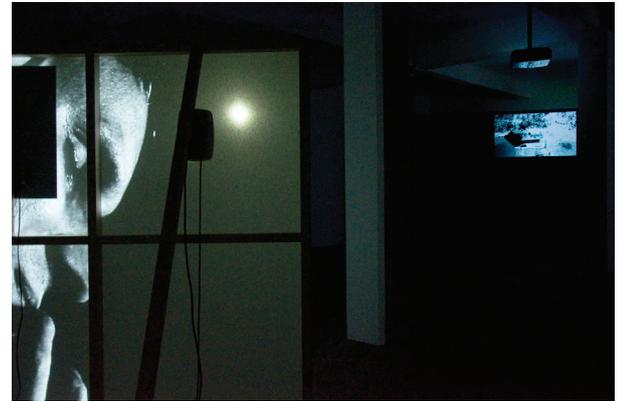
HD video projection with 3-channel soundtrack, 3:10 mins. loop, b/w, Russian and Flemish spoken with Russian-English transcript. Projection on acoustically transparent cloth on wooden screen, 310 x 240 x 85 cm

Scan, 2011

3D laser-scan transferred to HD video, 4:27 mins. loop, b/w, silent, projected onto black Molton cloth on wooden screen, 270 x 152 x 85 cm

Courtesy the artist, Matt's Gallery, London, and AKINCI, Amsterdam

Imogen Stidworthy's installation *Sacha* reflects on the politics of listening, elucidating ways in which power operates within visual and sonic regimes. Combining different components that form an audio and visual environment, *Sacha* portrays on one screen wiretap analyst Sacha van Loo, who works for the Antwerp police analysing voice recordings made during the surveillance of suspects. Having been blind since birth, he understands space through acoustics and his highly developed echolocation skills, which, with his fluency in numerous languages and dialects, also help him to analyse speech and the unspoken intentions and meanings in dialogue. In the video, van Loo is seen analysing a voice recording in Russian – the recording is in fact the voice of the artist reading a passage from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novel *In the First Circle* (1968) in the original Russian. Van Loo struggles to understand the words, through her imprecise pronunciation. In this story, a group of imprisoned Soviet scientists and linguists are commanded by Stalin to



Sacha, 2011,
installation view

develop a voice scrambler to protect Stalin's personal telephone line, and a voice-printing machine for enabling the KGB to identify people through wiretap recordings of their voices – one technology for destroying language and the other for capturing it.

In a second video, the eye is drawn through the virtual space of a 3D laser-scan of city streets. This most precise mapping of surfaces involves no optical technology and works on a principle that is closer to how we hear than to how we see. In relation to the reality of Van Loo's listening and blindness, this technological image suggests different paradigms for how we conceive of and form images. Furthermore, the work implies that whatever our homes are made from, the pervasive reach of this visualising technology will always render it a kind of transparent architecture.

Metahaven

The Good Ship Anonymous, 2013

Container ship with data servers in international waters
Ship model, wood, epoxy, panels, aluminum frames, 120 x 240 cm

Large Data Collider, 2013

Circular data centre on the border between Russia and Norway
Epoxy model, panels, aluminum frames, 240 x 240 cm

Whistleblower's Health Spa, 2014

Plywood, synthetic resin, 105 x 60 x circa 50-70 cm
Commissioned by Stroom Den Haag

Black Transparency Videogram, 2013

HD video. 14:00 mins.

Courtesy the artists and Future Gallery, Berlin

Much of the practice of Metahaven (studio for design and research) responds to the veils of authenticity dominating our increasingly antagonistic geo-political and technological landscapes. Their recent projects consider the phenomenon they label 'black transparency' to describe the means for involuntary transparency instigated by whistleblowers and hackers on nation-states and organisations. Black transparency initiatives are perceived as needing to be amorphous, performing a kind of improvised dance to survive at the fringes of the legal and political apparatus of the entities it exposes. It finds temporary homes in jurisdictional enclaves while forming short-lived data exchange havens, existing in a way that paradoxically fights for transparency, yet deliberately remains in the dark. Considering the internet as the principle instrument of freedom connecting the global populations, Metahaven's cluster of projects under



Large Data Collider, 2013

this title of *Black Transparency* are a set of reflections and proposals for these contemporary movements. The video *Black Transparency Videogram* is an opus for those possessing or desiring a political conscience. Collaging footage of anti-austerity riots alongside images of deserts or lava flows, it symbolises the possible new and shifting terrain for our increasingly merged physical and virtual selves. Two recent architectural models for black transparency hubs – *The Good Ship Anonymous*, and *Large Data Collider*, are also presented alongside the new model *Whistleblower's Health Spa*.

Natascha Sadr Haghighian & Rashad Becker

play:display, 2000-2014

7" vinyl, 10:00 mins., edition of 500

Published in collaboration with Apparent Extent

Courtesy the artists

play:display is a sonic investigation into the notion of transparency. It is a soundscape formed by Natascha Sadr Haghighian and Rashad Becker from audio recordings made at two architectural sites in Berlin. One is the Reichstag (home of the German parliament) redesigned by Sir Norman Foster, the other is the renowned Sony Center at Potsdamer Platz designed by Helmut Jahn. For the recording, two contact microphones were used, installed onto the glass surfaces with an adhesive compound. Contact microphones are corporeal-sound converters, translating vibrations into voltage. Both sites are characterised by a dominant glass element, where 'transparency' seems to be the main emphasis of the architecture. At the Reichstag, the glass dome symbolises a new radical expression of democracy, and at the Sony Center, the particular transparent quality is considered a 'feature of the culture of a new millenium'. Borne from the ideal of being a democratic element, transparent materials cover more and more surfaces. From transparent buildings to transparent public figures, it suggests that transparency equals accessibility and accountability. But in analysing the acoustic quality of a material like glass, it demonstrates that transpar-



play:display,
2000-2014

ent materials can also withhold and separate things. Whilst glass allows visual access, it is highly impermeable for sound. The recordings were inspired by the writings of R. Murray Schafer who states in *The Glazed Soundscape* (1998) – “The soundscape of every society is conditioned by the predominant materials from which it is constructed”, suggesting that the invention of the glazed window not only created the notion of a ‘here’ and ‘there’ or a ‘beyond’, but also introduced a fissure of the senses.

Please ask at the reception for a free copy of the vinyl record.

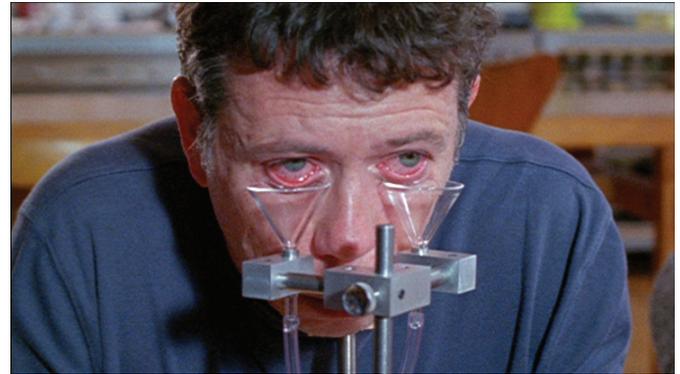
Noam Toran

Desire Management, 2005

Film shot on 16mm and HD video, 11:15 mins.

Courtesy the artist

Desire Management is a film comprising five sequences in which objects are used as vehicles for dissident behaviour. In the film, the domestic space is defined as the last remaining private frontier for our desires. It portrays places where bespoke appliances provide unorthodox experiences for alienated people: an airline hostess re-enacts her job in simulated turbulence; the owner of a mysterious box which men ritually visit to look inside; an elderly man who enjoys being vacuumed whilst naked; a couple who engage in baseball driven fantasies, and a man who is coaxed by his partner to cry into a strange device for flavouring her tea. Based on real testimonials and news reports, the objects all specifically created for the film attempt to reveal the inherent need for expression and identity formation in the face of conformity. In contrast to the modernist ideals of transparency, the work actually posits that the effects on the human subject through exposure to the outer world causes us to seek the spaces for utopian desire in the inner subjective world.



Desire Management,
2005

Vermeir & Heiremans

ART HOUSE INDEX (AHI-), 2014

Video *AHI-*advertisement (4:00 mins.), website-simulation (2:38 mins.) hosting a financial algorithm (in development), maquette, video with interview (36:00 mins.), leaflet
Courtesy the artists

In their research-based collaborative practice A.I.R. Vermeir & Heiremans focus on the dynamics between art, architecture and economy. Central to this practice is the artists' own home, a self-renovated loft apartment in a post-industrial building in Brussels, which they define as an artwork. The artists use their home as source material for considering architecture as a space for the projection of desires. Whilst keeping their home invisible, they create what they term 'mediated extensions' that create a kind of hyper-visibility for their domestic space through visually translating it into installations, videos and publications.

The artists are developing *ART HOUSE INDEX (AHI-)*, a new 'extension' in which they address the symbiotic relation between art, real estate and high finance. It proposes the creation of a new financial instrument that involves turning the idea of 'the home as an artwork' into a financial tool. Whilst speaking to bankers about the fictive nature of contemporary financial products, the artists were struck by the creativity of banking in seeking to dematerialise real estate into liquid asset form. Vermeir & Heiremans subsequently considered the possibility of creating *AHI-* as a financial vehicle that uses their art house as the underlying asset. An index is a statistical composite that measures changes in the economy or in a particular market, in this case the art- and real estate market.



Art House Index (AHI-), 2014

Credits
Art House Index:
Vermeir & Heiremans in collaboration with:
Justin Bennett,
Amir Borenstein,
Ciel Grommen,
Dieter Leyssen,
Rekall Design,
Peter Sileghem,
Salome Schmuki,
Werner Van Steen

The potential value of the index would be in its ability to transform an opaque static product that is difficult to trade, like a house, into a transparent, virtual, 'liquid' investment that is highly accessible for investors. *AHI-* aims to critically assert art itself as a producer of value within the speculative construct of an index existing both within and beyond the art market.

AHI- is present here via a short publicity video visualising their art house unfolding as many different virtual houses, each with a view over different global skylines, all of them related to places in the world where the artists have produced or presented their work. The artists are also collaborating with website designers to develop a functioning representation of the index, visualising how value in the index is composed. Additionally, there is a spoken and printed interview with banker Frank Goodman impersonating a number of financial advisers that are collaborating with Vermeir & Heiremans. The *AHI-* project will culminate in their upcoming film entitled *MASQUERADE* (2015).

Colophon

Curator and texts:

Nav Haq, curator at M HKA

Basic guide design:

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M HKA

Volker Zander

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(1) Environment and its influence on the development of culture

We live for the most part in closed rooms. These form the environment from which our culture grows. Our culture is to a certain extent the product of our architecture. If we want our culture to rise to a higher level, we are obliged, for better or for worse, to change our architecture. And this only becomes possible if we take away the closed character from the rooms in which we live. We can only do that by introducing glass architecture, which lets in the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars, not merely through a few windows, but through every possible wall, which will be made entirely of glass – of coloured glass. The new environment, which we thus create, must bring us a new culture.

From: Paul Scheerbart, *Glass Architecture*, November Books (London, 1972). Originally published as: Paul Scheerbart, *Glasarhitektur*, Verlag der Sturm / Berlin W 9, 1914.



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