



SCRIOBH 7 - CONFINEMENT DOSSIER - 2020

"The artist always precedes the psychoanalyst" J. Lacan

In times of confinement and restriction of social interaction, we invited several artists from a diversity of fields to tell us about their experiences during the confinement measures at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. We put to them the following questions:

Q1 - *What is your experience, as an artist, of the impossibility to carry out cultural and artistic events 'in the flesh'? What is different when the audience / spectator is 'virtual'?*

Q2 - *In your particular form of art, what are the effects of the exclusion of the body in the encounter with the body of the other, i.e. what is different / new?
Can you relate this to the notion of 'presence' (can you -as an artist- do without physical presence?)*

We aim at learning from them, since we believe that their experiences and know-how can contribute to our thinking about subjectivity and about the analytic encounter.

L A U R E N T S A U E R W E I N

Laurent Sauerwein's interest in working with images stems, in part, from his former involvement in the media, as a print and broadcast journalist. After having spent fifteen years in the press, as a senior reporter, editor-in-chief and occasional anchor for French public television (France 2), he then, in pre-Internet days, founded NAVIGATOR, one of the very first French startup companies devoted exclusively to interactive multimedia. Laurent Sauerwein has, for many years, written a monthly column in "Etapas Graphiques", the leading French graphic design magazine.

In the most recent years, he decided to devote some time to teaching, and the remaining time to his own work as an artist. He directed the digital studio at the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs in Strasbourg. He was head of the Communication Design department at Parsons School of Design in Paris, and is a cofounder of the Ecole Multimedia, an adult training center in Paris. He also taught International Communications and Information Technology at the American University of Paris, for which he created a graduate program on Communication and Sustainable Development, in Tamil Nadu, South India.

His exhibitions as an artist range from Galerie Sonnabend, in Paris, to the Cartier Foundation and the Paris Museum of Modern Art. He has shown photo/text installations in Shanghai and Guangzhou, China.

Laurent Sauerwein is now retired from his salaried jobs. He lives and works in Berlin with his wife Leigh, a writer who has published over 25 books, mostly for young adults and children. They have three grown children who were scattered all over the planet, United States, South India, Vanuatu in the South Pacific, and have now moved back to Europe, in Paris and Berlin.

Current work (post-2010) www.facebook.com/sauerwein.artlab/ / Current photographic work: www.facebook.com/sauerwein.bildfabrik/ / Older works: www.youcantouch.com

CONFINEMENT: NOTHING CHANGES / EVERYTHING CHANGES

What has changed, for me, as an artist, in this period of confinement, in my daily life and activities? I seem to go through my daily routines unperturbed. Are there lessons I could draw concerning my art practice, the mediums I use, my work, its process, its pace, its destination and its finality? Or is it too early to tell what this new experience will bring? It's only been a month since my wife and I are recluses and, at this stage, I'm surprised that I don't yet feel jailed in. How long must we endure the isolation before we realise that something has been profoundly altered, and there is something that we have, maybe irretrievably, lost? Or something gained?

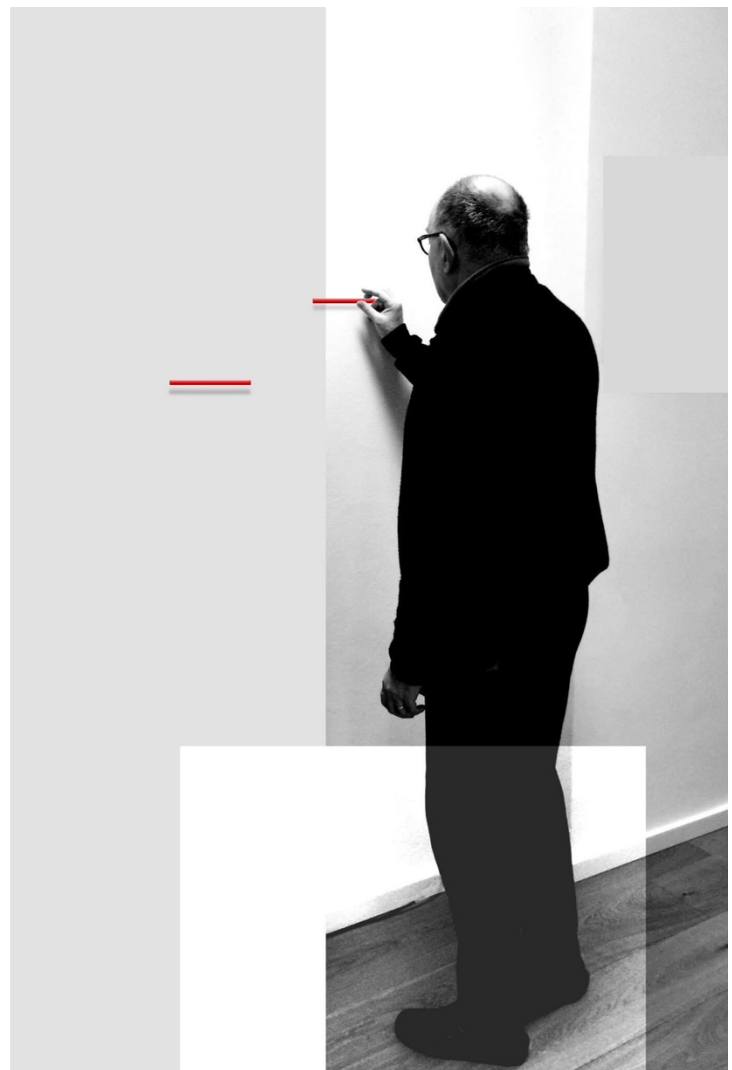
I am an artist having moved from Paris to Berlin ten years ago. That, in itself, is an indication of the state of mind that brought us here at the time, and it prevails today. Berlin is a progressive town with a tormented past. It is full of scars and holes, like the gaps left by the removal of the wall that circled a part of the city. These empty zones are full of memories, left-overs from another period, another confinement. And they are now building potential too, luring mostly profiteers and speculators, and also sometimes, too rarely perhaps, inviting progressives to build or rebuild or somehow reconfigure another future.

WHITE

We painted the walls white —all rooms, all white— when we bought and renovated this Berlin space. That was ten years ago. Today, we are confined in white, to the extent that such a color exists, and considering the festival of light and shadow. We have refrained so far from

hanging any pictures. Since we have moved here, these walls have been like a clean slate, to the extent that slates are ever clean, a fertile playing field for imagination.

My wife and I are both high-risk targets for COVID-19, because of our age (75), and because of various physical issues relatively common at that age which increase our vulnerability. So



we stay locked in. There are two bolts on our door. We've been married for 55 years, so I guess we enjoy each other's company. She's a writer and busy with and on her own devices. We don't leave our Berlin apartment. At all. It's an all white, bright, proliferating ground-floor space open on three sides and with high ceilings. In our living-room, an extension into the courtyard, there are two skylights through which you can actually see the sky. It's an ornate *Altbau* (meaning 'old building') dating 1888. We have food delivered by various Berlin services, or occasionally brought to our door by two of our adult children who live nearby. They stop at our doorstep, and we wave good-bye through our ground-floor window as they walk away.

WALLS AND LIBERATION



In spite of the social isolation and the seriously problematic lack of physical exercise, we're doing fine. To be perfectly frank, there are even days when I paradoxically find that this confinement is a liberation. To explain this paradox, I should mention the fact that although we are locked in, I have a long standing familiarity with electronic communication technologies, which at least enable us to look out and explore endless virtual spaces in that other dubious place called cyberspace. We also interact with many ghostly presences, numerous family and friends. I have been a pioneer in this interactive multimedia field, and have taught its various practical codes and utopias in several American universities. I am

convinced that computers or iPads and their social networks both connect us and keep us apart. They have, for many years, also become central in my multimedia art practices.

As an artist who has a serious interest in psychoanalysis, and having studied various aspects of the subject within the context of the ECF in Paris, I am familiar of course with Lacan's lapidary formula: "The artist always precedes the psychoanalyst", and I have often thought about its meaning and implications. As we tend to take that elegant remark for granted, as an artist, I like to jokingly add that, on the psychoanalytical Indian trail, "I periodically turn around to see how far behind the analyst is". Joking aside, I have no particular interest in "applied psychoanalysis" and I adhere to Lacan's view that psychoanalysis and art are distinct practices, without subservience to one another, in a structural relationship which he describes as a homology.

TELE-EVERYTHING

In our times of confinement and social distancing, these questions of distance take on a particular resonance of course. It is, again, as an artist and former analysand that I approach them. Just exactly how far can the analyst be? If we are scattered and confined in different locations, could we attempt psychoanalysis from afar? Is a form of tele-psychoanalysis conceivable? But is that not a contradiction in terms? In such a case, the sessions would be dislocated, remote and synchronous, meaning that both analyst and analysand would be sharing the same time if not the same space, connected/separated by networks and, for instance, video on distant screens. If taken a few steps further, analyst and analysand would share *neither* the same space, *nor* the same time, the electronically mediated a-synchronous dystopian relationship taking the intermittent form of an exchange of email, for instance. Whether synchronous or a-synchronous, text-only, audio or video, such technologically mediated configurations are body-less, and that is their main characteristic —their main flaw in my opinion.

WALLS AND GAPS

As an artist today confined in a comfortable Berlin apartment, I have played around with such losses, gaps, slippages and dissociations. I do it every day. They are in fact at the very core of my artistic practice, the various ways in which I explore, on screens and off screens, digitally or physically, sometimes haptically, wrestling with the Real.

Psychoanalysis is another matter. It cannot be reduced to a chat or exercise in communication. Maybe because I have also worked as a journalist for many years, including on television, I am convinced of this. My own psychoanalysis grew out of that experience.

Thus tele-psychoanalysis would, I believe, not only dismiss the body: what would be lost in the process would be speech itself, which is so crucial to the psychoanalytical experience. With recorded (electronically differed) or even live (electronically altered) voice, what is lost are live words, fresh language ("la fraîche"), words as they are spoken, with a naked voice, Lacan's "la lalangue" as it is uttered and stuttered.

Can analyst and analysand be confined in their respective spaces and somehow "connected", and —most important— to what avail? Can psychoanalysis be deprived of the actual and shared presence of the bodies that are engaged in it? What becomes of transference, incidentally? Questions abound.

As an artist, my approach to art follows Lacan's ethical injunction to "not give way on one's desire", although he was essentially addressing the analyst.

I never date my works, meaning I don't attach to the piece the date I finished working on it. There's no indication of origin or time of production because the decentralised and discontinuous route remains open. The most important date, in my opinion, is always the last, in other words the times at which the viewer encounters the work and thus contributes to it, completes it, as Marcel Duchamp pointed out.



BETWEEN HERE AND NOW, AND THERE AND THEN

I am struck by the way in which my artistic work tends to unfold itself in a kind of limbo since we moved to Berlin. This characteristic predates the period of confinement. It might signal a return to formalism. In no particular connection to geography or chronology, I go through my daily work routines, accumulating digital drawings and notes on several computers and iPads,

and sharing tidbits and highlights of notable works on social media. Those are key moments of my artist's journey, through which, step-by-step, I construct a body of work.

BODY OF WORK

"I distribute several colored objects in various places, and I occasionally move them around". It is with these words that I, most succinctly and cryptically, describe my work on ARTLAB, one of my pages on Facebook. They echo the work I was doing in the 70's and the exhibition I had at Galerie Sonnabend in Paris in 1972. Subsequently, I showed other lines of work, more concerned with architecture and utopia, at the Cartier Foundation and the Paris Museum of Modern Art, or word/image relationships in Shanghai and Guangzhou. When we moved to Berlin, I was looking for a clear break and new challenge, so I decided to reconnect with that work originally shown in 1972. Pressed to define it, I usually say that it is post-minimalist sculpture combined with actual performance, and conceptual, although I don't know of any art which isn't, someho.

So in our Berlin space, confined or not, day after day, I imagine and draw objects of various colors, placed on various backgrounds, which I eventually intend to move in actual space, at certain times. At this stage, my work takes essentially the form of computer drawings: there is no audience, and I don't actually move anything in real space and time. This particularity makes my work particularly suited for confinement, it seems! As an artist friend had aptly remarked in 1972, narcissism was lurking if I put myself too theatrically forward as I moved things around in a gallery space. So I thought at the time that I needed to put more emphasis on the object than on the event, event though the two can't be dissociated. Bertolt Brecht put it simply in his "Me-Ti, The Book of Changes": objects are events.

As a result, the work is neither centered its physical and material boundaries, nor on the actual occurrence of something done to it, or the operation which is occasionally performed with it, as moving it from here to there. It is an object decentered, gone beserk, driven to distraction. It is decentered by the presence of a manipulator, as in the Bunraku tradition of Japanese puppet theater, by the spectacle of its production, and by the fact that it emerges from a vast network of representations and reference without which it would go totally unnoticed. The work can take place only in relation to other spaces, schedules, things/events: announcements, invitations, verbal descriptions, recordings, written accounts, reviews, conversation, hear-say, memories, rumors... After all, it is that whole system, spatial and social construct, which we call art, or at least the art world. And it is in that loose, floating framework that, willy-nilly, something is being said.

In choosing to focus my work on the preparation of the actual circulation of objects, and on the different options I am confronted with in the process, I am looking for a tenuous path of desire between 'and-and' and 'neither-nor' that, in the immediate aftermath of 1968, I thought would promise an alternative to the market and participate in a broader political project.

In this light, what constitutes a "body of work" and what distinguishes it from all the other activities which we call life? I am taking second look at work produced in the early 70s, a revisit of sorts but knowing that there's no looking back. Just a double take maybe. In an age of copy and paste without scissors or glue, we draw fuzzy lines and the walls which tightly separated public and private spheres have become porous, pulverized by networks and surveillance cameras. Our confinement is real, and relative, like my art work is in flux. It is both focused and diffused. It's an object/event which points in many directions, including its own history, its both obdurate and evasive materiality, and the world around it.

Caption 1:

Laurent Sauerwein in Berlin, 2018

Caption 2:

SHIFTING OBJECTS AROUND

In 1972, at Galerie Sonnabend in Paris, I had a show in which, from time to time, I moved around three pieces of wood on the marble floor (I'm on the right in this photograph taken by Gerard Malanga, and fellow-artist André Cadere is visiting/intruding on the left). The French writer Roland Barthes came to the opening and, noticing three banal struts of clear wood lying here and there on the floor of the immaculately empty gallery, he asked with an incredulous smile "Is this your work?". I replied "Yes", and I moved, ostensibly but not dramatically, a piece of wood. "So it's like a game", said Barthes. "Well, I hadn't thought of it that way, I replied. But if it's a game, I don't know the rules".

Caption 3:

Six bicolored painted aluminum rods placed on print (tabletop installation).