



With small and big tools from

Marina Abramovic
Dante Alighieri | J.F. Kennedy
Irina Aristarkhova
Atelier for Special Tasks
Mary Ayling
Joseph Beuys
Michael Borowski
Dylan Box
Richard Buckminster Fuller
John Cage
Niklas and Lisa Carstens
Catastrophe Institute
Doris Cordes-Vollert
Mike Davis
Hans-Peter Dürr
Bart Eddy
Albert Einstein
Theaster Gates
Marcel Geisser
Maximilian Goldfarb
Roland Graf
Jeffreen Hayes
Erwin Heller
Lisanne Hoogerwerf
Toby Huddlestone
Sadashi Inuzuka
John Maynard Keynes
Osman Khan
Maria Lai
Lambchop
Lissa Lobis
Geert Lovink
Charlie Michaels and Bird
Patrik Mimran
Rebekah Modrak
Anne Mondro
Lord Mountbatten
Anais Nin
Franc Nunoo-Quarcoo
Asta Nykänen
Janie Paul
Charlie Richardson
Rainer Maria Rilke
Stephanie Rowden
Allen Samuels
Albert Schweitzer
Shu-Huai and Verity
Rudolf Steiner
Juliane Stiegele
Johannes Stüttgen
Nick Tobier
United Transnational Republics
Paul Valéry
Götz W. Werner
Max Zurbuchen

Art
Science
Economy
Education
Philosophy
Spirituality
Practice
Politics
Society

What do you really want?

UTOPIA TOOLBOX is the first volume of a series of three.

It contains a selection of texts, images, conversations, citations and do-it-yourself actions and aspires to support the search for individual or societal ways in a time of great challenges. There are contributions from different fields: arts, science, economy, education, philosophy, spirituality, practice, politics, and society. The overarching connective tissue is creativity. It will be illuminated in this book as one of the most important resources of humans – maybe the only one left – to show us a way out of the present day crises.

This is a **manual** for an effective use in daily life, with **empty pages for ones own ideas**. It is a tool of encouragement, a contribution for the shaping of an uncertain future, of a more balanced global order. It emerged out of unlimited curiosity, and is meant for searchers of all ages.

UTOPIA TOOLBOX

For working on the future

An incitement
to radical creativity

.1

Assembled by Juliane Stiegele
US Edition in cooperation with Nick Tobier

Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design, University of Michigan
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TOOLBOOKS

for us all.

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All interviews were conducted by Juliane Stiegele unless otherwise indicated, and originated between 2009 and 2012.

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www.utopiatoolbox.org



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01 | INTRODUCTION

Utopia Toolbox contains tools for the near future – a future which will most likely require us to create and encounter design processes beyond familiar dimensions.

This first volume comprises a collection of texts, artistic works, interviews, quotations and do-it-yourself-actions – contributions from people of various backgrounds, professions and walks of life.

Utopia Toolbox **is intended to support us in our search for individual and collective paths in these times of great change and transformation.**

Utopia Toolbox is concerned with the future design of the spaces between people: political, social, artistic, scientific, economic, philosophical, spiritual, practical.

**It is a manual to be put into practice in everyday life.
It is a tool of encouragement.**

The European, Asian and some US-American contents of this volume have been compiled from a selection of personal or indirect encounters with individuals over the last few years. Each offers important impulses for orientation, valuation, proposals and possible solutions. I kept my eyes open, sought dialogue, added some of my own input and now pass it on to others. In addition to the original German version of the book, published in 2013, co-author Nick Tobier assembled a series of contributions from practices in the United States.

Utopia Toolbox believes that access to utopia on a purely intellectual level is too constrictive and exclusive, and so embraces intuition, spirituality and physical experience on an equal basis.

This book operates via an extremely extended sense of creativity that does not exclude any area of life. **The contents target man's creativity as our most valuable and most important resource** – the only one that may respond effectively to global crises.

Where else could future solutions come from, if not from creativity?

By its very nature, a toolbox contains no finished pieces, but some of the means by which these pieces can be manufactured or repaired.

We must make use of the tools ourselves, though.

The book thus generates more questions than it offers answers. For this reason, the layout leaves space for one's own ideas. Between the contributions, some **empty pages pop up to be filled with one's own thoughts.**

The selection of tools remains incomplete, even unbalanced and random, as is the case with most real toolboxes: they may contain ten sorts of dowels but no file. And some curious empty compartments as well. But this missing something may also lead to individual improvisation and supplementary material.

Utopia Toolbox's composition, at first glance apparently unsorted and thrown together, allows us, when using it, to discover decentralized structures and references to unusual criteria. The open format of the book may inspire us **to leave behind accustomed, worn and trodden paths of thought** and to venture new aspects.

In our attempts at practical life, chaos repeatedly reveals itself as an essential condition for the genesis of creativity. **When everything is in its place, there is no need for creativity**, for presence of mind, for intuition. And a temporary creative alienation quite frequently sets curiosity simmering, motivating us to take the first step.

If this reaction is triggered, the aim of this book will have been achieved.

Disintegrating organizational structures on various levels are also precursors and preconditions for a fundamental reorganization on a global level. We will, presumably, need to practice a far higher degree of chaos competence. This could begin by practicing, right now in homeopathic doses, transforming the disorganized that is inherent into a kind of everyday alchemy for sustainable ideas: from small, individual, inconspicuous changes to groundbreaking new creations.

Utopia Toolbox can be used in many of ways. Reach your hand in to take out something specific, or tip the whole box out to realize the diversity of its contents at a glance and pick out individual excerpts as required. Follow your nose and purposely select just the right nail, or leave things to chance and enjoy rummaging. And, of course, try out the essence of the various contributions in everyday life: for example, open the book at page 396 | 397, put it in the kitchen, where it intervenes in your daily routines and procedures, and, during the course of a week-long experiment, see how this sentence influences your personal life.

A separate list of contents is enclosed to facilitate locating contents according to topics.

The contributions are intended to open doors at least a crack, doors whose existence one perhaps did not even suspect, and to get a scent of the rooms behind them. If one's interest is awakened, the tracks can be followed – conceptually, and via the links and recommended reading at the end of the chapters and the book.

What drives us, what drives the people whose achievements are encountered in this constellation? A diverse spectrum of possible catalysts come to mind: curiosity, courage, deficits, suffering, distress, a reflective perception, pleasure in acting out one's creative potentials, a vision, yearning, escape from lethargy, some banal coincidence or – love.

One could say that all these individuals have something in common: their

lasting motivation despite obstacles. With many of them, this persistence is a life long quality. They do not stand still, which would mean taking a step backwards, due to the passing of time.

In the meanwhile, exponential numbers are awakening and very consciously attempting to raise their voices, to insist on changing the course of many misguided developments of our present age. Across the globe, we can already find countless committed proposals, undertakings and visions. Some day – and this may come at a time that exceeds our life span – they will join together and take effect. Optimistically assuming that the general framework we created for ourselves leaves us enough time, this appears to be the only strategy that really promises change.

Utopia Toolbox is a step, a contribution to the designing of an uncertain future, to the search for a more balanced global order. It began with endless curiosity and is intended for "students" of any age, such as I am myself.

Juliane Stiegele
Munich, 2014

It is not because things are difficult
that we do not try them,
it is because we do not try them
that they are difficult.
Seneca

There is nothing immediately remarkable about the N street cohousing community in Davis, California. What began as a standard subdivision – three-bedroom/two-bathroom houses built in the mid-1950's separated by fences appears at first glance to be emblematic of a sort of generic American dream of home ownership.

In 1986, two then neighbors – Kevin Wolf bought what is now the common house, his wife Linda Cloud purchased the house next door – took down the fence separating their individual properties and, by this act, started the process of creating a functional utopia.

In this modest but radical action, N street neighbors transformed a status quo of individual property into an opportunity for a shared life. Utopia sounds like such a fantastical, unattainable state, but taking down a fence, well, we could do that. Can we? Would we?

Taking down a boundary to create a new domain is a cooperative act that acknowledges the fundamentally social realm of these utopias. The fence that serves as a physical manifestation to delineate our limits – whether the extent of personal property, or a marker of our belief system, who we let in and who we keep out has echoes in current debates on immigration, social reform, minimum wage, a basic wage.

The boundary we are protecting is conceptual as well as physical. Within this perimeter is an ideal – an individual domain, a castle, where I can do as I please. Can we create utopian states and conditions, or are we too comfortable with the way things are? Within this volume, the visions offered – whether in an orange peeled cooperatively by two individuals or on the scale of trans-national republics – are calls to action. For the individual or society bounded by a static ideal inevitably faces a challenge of whether to become an active part of a changing world or seek to wall it off.

By definition, and from its roots, utopia is from the Greek word, composed of *ou*, "not", and *topos*, "a place". Etymologically, utopia is uncomfortable, a place which does not exist, a fantasy, invention or fairy-tale. It is a neither here nor there slippery space, one that is a perfect creative opportunity, as the form and definition are both to open to interpretation and impossible to arrive at. Utopia Toolbox – its contents and its contributors – invite you to work with us through this opportunity.

It may be uncomfortable.

We are forming a happy state,
not picking up some persons to make them alone happy,
but are establishing the universal happiness of the whole.
Plato

Plato's vision – where all residents would share in the community's wealth [as they shared wives and children] demands an acceptance of a lack of personal freedom in exchange for the greater good. Likewise, in Thomas More's Utopia – where all houses are identical, the lack of individualization is met with the benefits of living with no need for locks, and the pleasures of a six hour work day.

The removal of a property fence, then, strikes a small note for collectivity rather than a deafening roar of defiance, a tinkerer's sensibility of altering a scenario rather than a conjurer's magic transformation. The invention, the fairy tale or the parable of N Street is that, poised between not and a place is that fence line that separates us from one another – neither yours nor mine, here nor there, but something for us to contend with together. The prospect of this and other functional [as opposed to visionary or fantastical] utopias raises a gentler alternative – subversive in both their individual and collected efforts to live by intent, and that Utopia's territory is wherever there are places for emergent creative aspirations.

Since 1986, N Street's community has grown by accretion to 19 houses, adding one house at a time as they become available for sale or by interest, with the community taking down the fences between them and combining the backyards. They have also added two houses from across the street. Currently, approximately 50 adults and 5-10 kids live there and N Street neighbors share a common house – a four-bedroom/two-bathroom apartment upstairs with the community's dining room seating up to 50 people down-stairs, a large shared kitchen, a TV/meeting room, a bathroom and a shared laundry room. This is, without doubt, a functional utopia, one that has arisen by organic growth and need rather than ideal, thus, not a blueprint – but an heuristic.

In concrete attempts to arrive at less slippery forms, utopian visions have often occurred within boundaries where the variables are easier to control. The individual domains of utopias, whether perfected homes or gardens, have antecedents in visions of Paradise [from the Persian *pāiri daeza* for "part" or "enclosure"]. The Persian idylls were walled gardens with metaphoric rivers and springs depicted through sacred geometries painted on tiles or woven in carpets that separated an ideal from surrounding arid deserts and harsher realities. Within the walls, inhabitants dwelled in harmony, rather than at odds with reality in a kind of perpetual spring.

As the Persian garden depends on a binary opposition between the variability of the world beyond and the predictability of the world within, the quest for utopia is often paired with a setting that can be controlled. Thomas More's Utopia, created an island "off the coast of somewhere, whose way of life provides not only the happiest basis for a civilized community but also one which all human possibility will last forever." The suggestion, like the walls of the desert paradises of Persian gardens, is that the ideals will hold persistently, threatened neither by change of mind, body or physical challenge.

Is there a hold function for an ideal? Might I find the key commands – Control shift hold? We may presume that this dynamic is either magic, or through sheer will power, or forceful suppression of dissent, as states of perfection from – a climax forest, or a successional forest, a perpetual state of re-balance.

The original intent of this book was to signify not only an aspiration and intent towards utopia [by design, by choice] but a process more akin to the actions of a verb than the stasis of nouns in which volumes like houses are finished once they are built. The Davis community describes this ideal well. As artists and designers we are accustomed to production, to giving form by building or adding to the world. By removing gates and fences, N Street sees the process as dynamic, and not irreversible.

We will need this dynamic if we are elastic – in thought, in form, in ambition. If we are brave enough to create and design for the needs of the young, the old, the winter, the summer. If we embrace planning and design for change and dynamism rather than perfection.

The communes of the 1960s in the United States were often an attempt to greatly improve the way humans live together in communities. The "back to the land" movements and hippies inspired many to try to live in peace and harmony on farms, remote areas, and to set up new types of governance. Many of these were based on a period-specific idealism, some of which faded as the optimism of the time period collapsed under the collective failures, assassinations, environmental and social crises that proceeded in the 1970's. Rather than dismiss these past attempts as "utopian" as if to suggest the impossibility of living in a fantasy, let us instead accept the need for fantasy, to point to alternative modes to try, and, in the same spirit of generosity to learn from these experiences that with fantasy there is also friction. It is through this friction – like the grain of sand that produces a pearl through the irritation caused to an oyster – that we can, as individuals with intent, collectively irritate one another and our society to fashion our next utopias.

Nick Tobier
Ann Arbor, 2014

**for
staying
is nowhere**

03

03 | ATELIER FOR SPECIAL TASKS

Interview with Patrik Riklin

Could you please give a time lapse description of the origin and development of the Atelier for Special Tasks?

One could say that the Atelier for Special Tasks is actually nothing other than the sand box in your parent's back yard. My brother and I have transferred it to the world of adults, into the "Atelier für Sonderaufgaben – Atelier for Special Tasks". What you see here in the "atelier" is like a playground, only a bit more professional – meanwhile we have grown up a bit and we naturally think differently than children do. Intuition and intellect have mixed up in a new formula into an artistic way of thinking. The Atelier for Special Tasks is a concept, that is also framed biographically, and has a lot to do with our childhood and how we were always on the go as twins. We actually have been – like today – almost manically excessive, internally driven by deep passions, with the drive to fulfill self-defined goals. This memory has definitely created the foundation of today's Atelier for Special Tasks: categorically anarchistic, independent and autonomous. We entered the field of art intuitively, developed and laid down our own rules, beyond right and wrong. We were much more interested in the idea of a perfect dilettantism. One day we reached a point when we did not have a job – after an education as architectural draftsmen. We wondered: should we wait to find a job or should we try to invent our own jobs? We realized pretty soon that we wanted to study art. It was during our art studies we have founded the Atelier for Special Tasks without knowing what we intended to do with it later on. At the beginning there was no content, but there was already a vessel. The name came up coincidentally, when we found a pile of signposts with small labels at a condemned house. One of the signs that especially attracted our attention read "Sonderaufgaben – Special Tasks". We took that sign to the atelier and one day – again by coincidence – a journalist came by and made the connection between our atelier and our activities and named it all the Atelier for Special Tasks.

That's how it came to be: with a lot of intuition. Back then it was a small-scale enterprise. Today we work professionally as an institution and we try to actualize our special tasks without compromising and, in a certain way, radically. Atelier for Special Tasks is basically an experiment, insofar as one can't necessarily live on it. But it is a way of working where pleasure and curiosity have priority.

What characterizes us is "serious cheerfulness" – or, as a journalist once described it: "The Atelier for Special Tasks resembles two serious harlequins for social questions." Every human being has different special tasks; that's

why we didn't even want to explain the label "special tasks". We can't define it; for one person climbing a tree is a special task, for another one it's frying an egg. At the beginning we left that open. These days we have a profile, and we can say much more about what interests us on our special task.

The form of an Atelier for Special Tasks is so broadly defined, that it can grow along with an entire biography.

Nothing would be more boring than someone creating his own program and then working for the rest of his life according to it. We are growing older, and today I think differently than I did yesterday and tomorrow it will be different again. The Atelier for Special Tasks is like a process, like an opus, an installation that functions like an instrument and that also projects an image for us. The atelier was for me always a form that on the one hand takes place in the mind and that has nothing peripheral on the other hand. I look at it as an institution in the midst of society and not as something exotic. To get to the point: it is our goal to create unusual situations; situations that do maybe not yet exist, to conceptualize them, but also to actualize them. To think and to act. Frank and I have never been theoreticians; maybe that's why we were bad students. We always had trouble with the written words that one has to learn. But we were always good at implementing the written word and living outside of it.

To create unusual situations is an appealing thought for me. To act out new realities and put them together anew, even if it is confusing in the beginning and people might think: fish and sugar don't go together – but then again it might work anyhow; it's the desire to experiment at the risk of failing. There are so many reasons to drop projects because one cannot push them through. That's an absolute taboo for us. There is no reason to not go through with a project because one has no money or because nobody thinks it's cool – we just do it.

Art in our eyes is destined for a higher task, and it is challenging us again and again about what might be the mission of art in our time. This conflict alone challenges our consciousness with the conception of new ideas. Especially with one of our latest conceptual works, "Melser Denkpause – Adjournalment of Mels". The work had a radical impact on the day-to-day life of a village community. The idea to cut the electricity supply for 10 minutes a day for half a year triggered an unbelievable controversy. A situation that at first appeared fictional, all of a sudden is becoming reality; a reality that is closing in on us anyhow, if we take a close look at the future of our energy supplies.

We can say today that the Atelier for Special Tasks is digging around in different functional systems of every day life and interfering with them constructively, interrupting them, expanding them and reassembling them. We dissolve social incrustation and melt dead-locked structures to discover new everyday realities.

One of your most impressive projects is "The Smallest Summit Meeting in the World". In a reversion of the annual G8 summit meeting of the most

powerful nations of the world you referred to the smallest political units and staged, after extensive preparations, a summit meeting with the mayors of the smallest villages of the six Alpine neighboring states on top of a modest Swiss mountain. How did the Great compare to the Small?

This question is very gripping. Nobody is actually really interested in the Small. Small is generally synonymous with insignificance – in this case a minority in its most extreme form. We were interested in the smallest basic units of a democratic union in the form of a community, to meet its president and to shift the attention to the Smallest.

So what does that mean for us? I don't think that there's a big fundamental difference whether I would talk to a small or a great president. I believe that the governing mechanisms in a small community, as far as it concerns political affairs, are almost symmetrical to those in a big community. I do not see how the human beings involved are any different.

Whether I would have had to do an interview with Barack Obama or with the "smallest" president in France is basically for me the same thing. The only difference is: One of them is very famous and the other one isn't known at all, one has power and the other has none. The Small and the Great are very relative for me. That was for me the most important insight: as soon as one puts the "small" on the stage it's all of a sudden getting big. The story "The Little Prince" by Saint-Exupéry, where the Little Prince on top of the globe tries to touch the stars, inspired me to that realization. One could see our project as an analogy to the "Little Prince" where visions and dreams come true. That's why we were looking for a special mountain top in the Swiss Alps where a human being would look bigger in proportion to the peak and where "The Smallest Summit Meeting" would be illustrated by a descriptive photographic image.

Those six smallest alliances gained some notoriety because of the project. The project was not only noticed in the art community but also in a political context: what does it mean when suddenly the small ones join forces? Is that authorized at all: to meet at a mountaintop without telling the media and the press what one has discussed? Since we had made an agreement at the Summit Meeting to keep silent about the discussion to protect the small ones, we prevented it from being trivialized in the media, like: "They only talk about cows, forest roads and chickens anyways."

We wanted to protect the whole thing and at the same time give it some currency, in the sense of mystery, and we wanted to show how a revolution is starting: like when someone throws a pebble into the water and those circles are coming up – somebody starts something and that can trigger something.

On one hand we have worked with the idea of an adaption of the big summit meetings and at the same time have shown that one can change something in a microcosm – above all from a human and emotional perspective. The big difference to the big powers is more likely the political deformation – because if you are Barack Obama you have inevitably been deformed as you have pursued this path of big and powerful. You are then basically an instrument, a cool machine, and this machine is coded to other powers. Those codes communicate with one another but they don't have anything



The "Smallest Summit Meeting of the World"
The six presidents of the smallest political
communities in Central Europe
2004

As soon as one puts
the Small on stage
it's suddenly big

to do with human beings and what they are, if they were not politically deformed. When I talk however, to a huntsman, a mason or to a bank clerk who is, at the same time, a mayor or president of his village, then it's still a human being I'm talking to. That sure makes a big difference. The motif of the project was human encounter. It was about learning from each other in order to experience what one has not known before. That worked out beautifully without us having to objectify the "presidents" simply for a ludicrous staging.

That's exactly what you needed to produce the character of the Summit Meeting.

Sure. The participants were supposed to be authentic and not to feel used. "Big and Small" was fascinating because something big might be hiding behind something small. That was for me the basic insight from the project. The entirety of the world can unfold in the smallest village.

From the mountain top now below ground: how did this idea of a "Zero Star Hotel", located in an ancient underground bunker, come up and how was the project developed?

Both projects – if one juxtaposes them – employ similar artistic strategies: to focus attention on a niche that wasn't illuminated before. It is again a concept of a counter-movement: contrary to the conventional rating of hotels with "stars". All the hotels are fighting for as many stars as possible and the industry makes a lot of money by pushing the hotels to do more in order to gain stars.

We had the idea to ask ourselves: What would happen if we would install a hotel at some eerie place where nobody would expect a hotel, and what would happen if we would rate it with zero stars? We arrived at the antithesis of the familiar hotel as an epitome of a luxurious stay outside of one's own home.

The Zero has fundamentally negative connotations, like zero points, zero motivation, zero tolerance. We were thinking about where to position our hotel, which constitutes an artistic project – at the end we are not hoteliers but artists. We are interested in the intervention into the system, the extension of the rating system to the opposite end and a direction where "zero" does not necessarily mean "bad" but signifies independence and freedom. One is trapped in the rating system of one to seven stars and has to conform. "Zero Stars" is – we did research – a blank page, undefined. We occupied that Zero and argue that we have invented the first "Zero Star Hotel" in the world.

We also found out that the hotel industry has big problems with this Zero and would ban it, if only they could. But we have all the rights for this Zero according to the Trademark Protection Act, and worldwide at that! The industry must now figure out what to do with the Zero that is naturally con-

founding the system, because if the Zero is better than what is associated with it, it distorts the system. The guest might wonder why he is paying \$ 50 for a bad 3-Star-Hotel if he can stay in a "Zero Star Hotel" for only \$ 30 – and it's much more interesting at that. The idea is to turn the spotlight on the seemingly unremarkable which suddenly is reversed and regarded positively. Nobody would ever have advertised with zero stars before – not even the hotels with one or two stars would advertise or call attention to their rating – that starts with 3 stars. Considering that "Zero Stars" should have been even less interesting, all of a sudden it tilts public opinion, because now it is hip and people think: This really looks interesting and appealing. We considered the big artistic potential of the project. I would argue that no hotelier is hot for "Zero Stars" – only art can do that. Behind art lies the magic of innovation that is able to break through grid-locked systems.

I'm pretty sure that no hotelier from inside the system would ever have come up with such an idea – it had to come from the outside.

It's a classic example of how to think outside the box: If everybody is moving forward, why don't we move backward? There is this proverb in Switzerland that I really like: "Where everybody walks no grass is growing." Frank and I and the Atelier for Special Tasks have always worked according to that motto – not just to provoke but because we like to look at things from a different angle. Provocation though is an integral and necessary part of our conceptual art.

Where everybody walks
no grass is growing.

Hasn't the Hotel meanwhile developed a momentum of its own?

The project has evolved a lot. What we have unleashed with the idea wasn't what we expected at all. It started with an initial media announcement of the 24 hours test run of the worldwide first "Zero Star Hotel" and that test run came as a real bombshell to the media – even CNN was reporting it. That has pushed the "Zero Star Hotel" idea so much that we officially opened for good – even though that wasn't intended at the beginning. The "Zero Star Hotel" is a work in progress, a mobile installation. The actual concept is fixed but what will come of it is written in the proverbial stars. The Hotel has been running for many months now and is functioning like a normal hotel operation. There are always new chapters emerging – like recently, that the "Zero Star Hotel" is now ranked as one of the hundred best hotels in Europe. That is naturally a beautiful award for a concept located on the fringe of the usual form.

The "Zero Stars Hotel" has a finger on a conceptual pulse because it works with something nobody can be proud of – but then suddenly one can be proud of it. People just did not recognize the value of it. They recognized the value anew! The "Zero Star Hotel" is like a pill that one takes, experiences, and that takes time to work. The subversive work is well on its way.



Zero Star Hotel
Detail



The longer the topic is up for consideration, the better the art is able to find its way into society. And the more normal it becomes. Whenever one puts the sign "Caution Art" on it, it stays a marginal event, a footnote. We are now amongst the hundred best hotels in Europe, worldwide amongst the hippest and ranked in Japan among the "hot trends 2010". That is proof that art has won a victory because the Hotel Industry is accepting us.

That was ultimately possible because you did not label it as "art" but left it to the others.

Well, we meet the category "unrivaled" because one can't just put us in a box...

The "Zero-Stars-Hotel" also outsmarts the usual art context. It conquered a place in everyday life and business without art prostituting itself or becoming a commodity. We differentiate between good and bad commercialization. The "Zero Stars Hotel" is an installation that can be replicated internationally. It's an art edition in the form of a hotel. However, if the "Zero Stars Hotel" were not somehow exclusive and not art it wouldn't have earned the above-mentioned awards either.

What would be the maximum you could achieve with your art – be it in terms of personal "success" or of social impact?

Recognition is the best fuel for work. Without recognition or feedback I would likely die. Our work is always in a dialogue and always wants to be confronted with the outside. We don't do anything that shouldn't be noticed by the public – that's an important element.

A real big success would be – I think in the future – if we could stay as we are, not being incorporated by the system. We always feel like walking a tightrope because we are also involved with politics or the economy, with different circles outside of the art context. Our art must also take place outside of the art context. It can't hide behind walls where it would be hermetically closed off or devaluated merely as art by being depicted as exotic. It doesn't need to be art for either us as protagonists nor for our recipients. Most important is how people experience our art, how they cultivate it and integrate it in an organic way into their daily lives. What I call a success is, when humans experience some added value that is more than art, when what seems to be fiction is becoming a reality.

Maybe it's necessary to redefine the art concept in future, and to widen it so you could fit in again?

For us the best form of art is the art that isn't conceived as art, that is hidden and just emerges without the question whether it's art or not. I find

the art question obsolete if not boring. One can and should stumble over art. Mostly it's suddenly real art, just when one doesn't think of art but has a suspicion anyways.

My vision is that the "Atelier for Special Tasks" is regarded as an instrument, like other instruments of a city, a municipal office, for example. The difference is that there are artists behind our institution. I would even prefer to not call myself an artist, but "someone who is solving special tasks." I would find it cool if art would be much more integrated into daily affairs, municipal affairs, cantonal affairs, administrative questions, and if society would realize that art can accomplish something. We already work towards that: to be regarded as co-thinkers and co-workers in a city. Meanwhile it happens that we are seen as contrarians; sometimes for something we didn't know about. We are sitting at a desk and co-think; we spend our creativity, empty our heads. I find that interesting, because I'm not selling something but somebody is interested in our way of thinking.

For example: We had an engagement in Aachen where a European forum launched a symposium for the creative economy. What can art accomplish for the economy? Let's find solutions with the weapons of art. That would be almost a revolution in society. As artists we can act out certain liberties by playing independently on new stages of everyday life where nobody else would dare to play. For example: The federal council of Switzerland contains seven councils – I would plead in favor of an eighth council that would stir up the Federal Council from the inside; like a court jester as a critical thinker – somebody that is able to reconsider the world from a different perspective.

If I were to be the Federal Council I would commit every citizen to act idealistically once a month and document it as well. They could enact an ordinance: "every day an unusual deed". If it would come to that, that it would be normal in society to think creatively, independent from the system – so much would change!

Teaching represents a small but not negligible part of your activities. How do you envision the possibility and quality of future teaching systems in their task, to bring out the creative potential of humans?

Frank and I naturally have some kind of a vision: The core idea of the "Zero Star Hotel" was the "Zero Star Spirit" concept. That concept can certainly be adapted to other spheres. We could for example initiate a Zero Star University. We have been contemplating this for a while to try to think that way, to implant it into society. A University were one teaches in an entirely different way than in contemporary universities. That takes time; we can't just skip five steps. We have to move with the times, and art is often one or two steps ahead.

A Zero Star University would be interesting insofar as it unites kindred spirits, be it artists or people from different spheres who want to liberate what was thwarted by the rigid structures of a school. Bureaucracy is the worst enemy of art: it is pressed into a form that doesn't allow free thinking. Maybe it's necessary to adopt some entirely absurd

To us the best art form is the one that isn't conceived as art

measures to restructure art schools from the inside. One could for example rotate responsibilities, so a student is not only student but also a room cleaner or sometimes a teacher, or a principal. Like a machine that inevitably creates, organizes, plans novelties through the individual or the incidental – that actually initiates chaos. Finally something will come out of it that could be the innovative element to further education and teaching. There is nothing more boring than to regurgitate again and again what one has been taught. It's about unsettling oneself time and again. It's our concept to demolish such structures – with relish.

We developed a concept for a curriculum with the title "Art-onomist". It derives from established professions like economist, and it is the attempt to integrate different professions into a new interdisciplinary profession of the arts. Art-onomist is a profession that intervenes directly into society by addressing current issues from different spheres of life with artful strategies. The concept is very exciting to us and we are convinced that the future world has to create such professions. Because the educational system at universities is often outdated and sclerotic. It's not even a utopian dream but in my opinion a necessary process that the free spirit of art merges with theories from different spheres. That's my vision for modern teaching and education.

What can a human – who is reading this text, but has maybe never been really in touch with his or her own creative potential – do today to make this day special?

It would be a good exercise to not walk the usual way home from A to B but take a different route, through backyards, across soccer fields, across the yard behind the bakery, over the fence – one will somehow arrive at home. That is already enough for someone to stimulate his creativity, because he comes in contact with people that he wouldn't meet otherwise since he may have to explain himself and ask if it's ok to cross the yard anyways. Imagine he is on his way through a living room and the old lady in there might say: "Oh, I don't mind at all. I'm actually happy to have some company." Creativity arises if I only move in an unusual way.

Frank and Patrik Riklin, twin brothers born 1973 in St. Gallen, Switzerland, finished apprenticeships as architectural draftsmen, before they took up their studies in arts: Frank Riklin at the HGK in Zürich, Patrik Riklin at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Frankfurt/Main and at the Universität der Künste in Berlin, Germany. The two artists have worked since 1999 as Atelier für Sonderaufgaben [Atelier for Special Tasks], initiating projects such as the Friends & Hosts Bar, 2002, The Foundation for Unusual Communities, 2003, The Smallest Summit Meeting of the World, 2002-2005, and the Zero Star Hotel, opened in 2009. Among their newer works are: Quatschmobil, public art project, 2014, Rescue flies in Deppendorf, action, 2012, Adjournalment of Mels, Kultursommer Mels, 2010, Action 2.29/Rheinuferpassage, intervention, 2008, City Phone, installation in public space, 2007, Coco & Chiaro, installation, 2007, One hour of Lifetime, action, videoinstallation, 1999-2000. In 2004 the Atelier for Special Tasks received the International Lake Constance Cultural Award and the Award for the Promotion of Art in the City of St. Gallen.

Publications: Parcitypate: Art and Urban Space, 2009. Day after Day, Kunsthalle Fribourg, 2007. Das kleinste Gipfeltreffen der Welt [The Smallest Summit Meeting of the World], Neue Kunsthalle St. Gallen, 2006.

www.sonderaufgaben.ch
www.null-stern-hotel.ch

The point is to
unsettle oneself
time and again

Do-it-yourself action

04 | HOLD

Michael Borowski



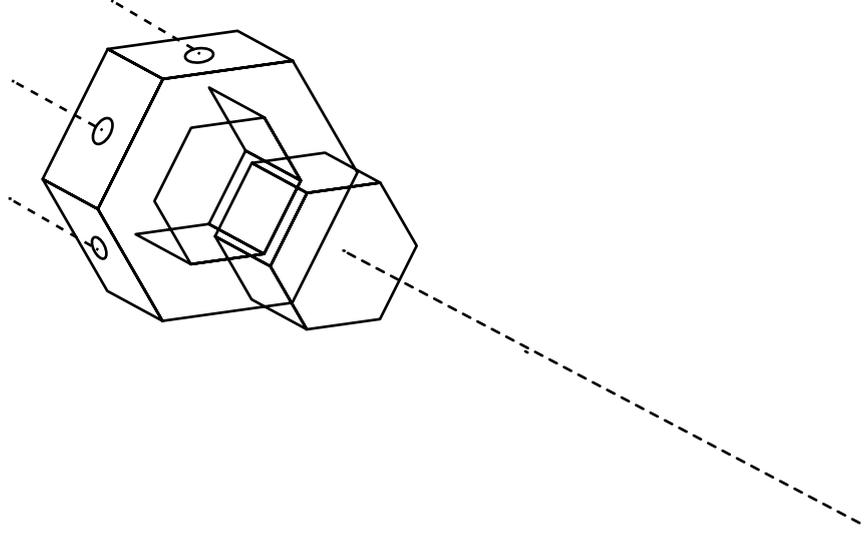
Home is more than a geographic location or architectural structure. It is an emotional and ideological place. It is familiar but not static. It can be lost or found. Home is performed, at times alone but often with others. It is relational. This can unsettle the idea of home as a fixed space but, much like utopia, home is powerful when it exists on the horizon. It is not yet inhabited, but something to move towards. Positioned here, it is fueled by desire and imagination.

As an artist, I use this desire and longing for home in building fantastical adaptations of domestic items. These objects provide ways of performing home with others. I hesitate to say these objects have utopian aspirations, but perhaps like all design they direct a user towards something on the horizon.

As technology develops, there is often an underlying assumption that increased self-reliance is improvement. Consider the wealth of information now available in the palm of a smart phone. And if one feels like communicating, Siri is always available. The objects I build are based on familiar household items. Instead of encouraging self-sufficiency, my devices require multiple participants and cooperative action, to function. They interrupt the tendency towards independence, often with humorous and awkward results. Efficiency is not paramount, but rather a sense of mutual accomplishment and belonging. By using these objects of interdependence, participants create a space of home, momentarily, through a shared moment of intimacy with others.

Michael Borowski received an MFA from the University of Michigan in 2011. He has exhibited work in galleries and non-traditional venues in the US, Canada and Europe, and has been included in the public art and performance festival **Art in Odd Places** in 2011. He was part of **Est-Nord-Est**, residence d'artistes in St. Jean-Port-Joli, Quebec, Canada in 2012, and of **FIG-MENT** in 2013. He currently lives and works in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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06 | PRIVATE SPACE - PUBLIC SPACE

Asta Nykänen



Asta Nykänen, Project "Private Space - Public Space", Aalto University, School of Art & Design, Helsinki, Finland, 2009, J. Stiegele



Asta Nykänen
Private Space - Public Space
Umbrella, shower curtain
Detail

Asta Nykänen studied art and art education at the School of Art & Design, Aalto University, Helsinki. She now works as an artist in Helsinki.

07 | WHO WILL BUILD THE ARCH FOR US NOW?

Mike Davis

The basis of an ecologically sustainable city is not necessarily particularly eco-friendly urban planning or new technologies, but much more one giving priority to common wealth over personal wealth. [...]

Because our planet is perfectly capable of providing a home for all of its inhabitants if we are ready to base our society on democratic community principles instead of individual and private consumption.

Common wealth [...] offers an alternative to a high living standard on the base of a material, carnivalesque society [...]

I am, therefore, of the opinion that solely by returning to an explicit utopian mindset we can obtain clarity around the minimum requirements for the preservation of human solidarity in the face of the different planetary crises.

Excerpt from a speech by Mike Davis at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University/Munich receiving the Cultural award of the Munich University society. 2008

http://www.unigesellschaft.de/pdf/talk_davis_de.pdf

Mike Davis was born in Fontana, CA, USA and lives in San Diego, CA. He has worked numerous jobs, among others as a truck driver and in a slaughterhouse. He joined the Communist Party in the 1960's and ran their local bookstore. Afterwards he studied history at UCLA and Irish history in London, Belfast and Edinburgh. He has taught History since 2002 at the University of California, Irvine. As a sociologist and historian he focuses on social structures and urban development in California. He is the author of the internationally recognized **City of Quartz**, a social history of the city of Los Angeles that is considered a classic of social science.

In 1998 Mike Davis was awarded a **MacArthur Fellowship** and was a fellow of the **Getty Center**, California. In 2008 he received the **Cultural award of the University Society of Munich**.

Publications: *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, 1990. *The Monster at Our Door: The Global Thread of Avian Flu*, 2005. *Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Working Class*, 2006. *Buda's Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb*, 2007. *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*, 2001.

08 | COME HELL OR HIGH WATER

Osman Khan



Come hell or high water
2013

There's no place like home, there's no place like home,
there's no place like home..."
Dorothy, *The Wizard of Oz*

Yes Dorothy, there is no place like home, no place like home sweet home... There is no place like home because home **is** a no place; it is a symbol, an implied space, a feeling, an idea, its definition ambiguous, its recognition absolute. Home is a conception where respite, security and comfort are realized. Even the etymology of the word points to utopic sensibilities [from the Old English *hām* used equally to mean house, village, region or country]. However home is more than just shelter, it is as T. S. Eliot states, "where one starts from." It is identity, and being. Home, while seemingly situated ["home is where the heart is"], is, destination not location.

Consequently if home exists as a psychological construct then the house arguably is its physical praxis. The house provides the home materiality; it gives it location and place. The corporeal body to home's soul. As Gerry Smith and Jo Croft point out in *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture*, "although protection from the elements would remain its [the house's] primary function, it could not have been long before the dwelling [...] became an arena for more complex human practices." The house achieves homeness through use, through the communal rituals performed inside it, through the detritus of living that collects in its nooks and halls, and as Bachelard adds "of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed", it is through domestic affections that the built dwelling is transformed from simply being a house to becoming a home.

However, conflation of house and home does more than strip the house of its mere use-value as shelter [stripped of its commodity character by means of possession]. By adding the psychological dimensions of homeness, the house becomes an extension of the self and extends the limits of the personal, furnishing the house with the same privileges given to the body. The effect of which produces new associations in understanding of public [dangerous and foreign] and private [controlled and safe] space. [Even punk rockers The Clash find themselves pining for their safe European home after a particularly alienating and intimidating trip to Jamaica on *Safe European Home, Give 'Em Enough Rope*, 1978, Columbia/Epic Records]. The home manifested as house becomes personal and personalized, its acquisition paramount to obtaining domestic harmony; the ethos of the American dream itself is encased in ideas of home or more accurately house ownership, a proxy for achieving the promised prosperity. Self-fulfillment manifested in material acquisition.

It is precisely this sheltered domestic condition, Anthony Vidler suggests, that the Freudian uncanny [Freud explains the uncanny "as related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror," and posits in opposition



Installation
Detail

to the sublime and beautiful] has, "found its metaphorical home in [...] the house, haunted or not, that pretends to afford the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror." This bourgeois anxiety [a dread perhaps shared by all utopic conditions] that the house/home, the bastion that maintains domestic bliss can at any moment be transgressed, be violated, and lost. Its safety and sanctity profaned by what lies beyond its wall, be it disaster or malice. It is no wonder then so many horror stories erupt in the house.

Returning briefly to the *Wizard of Oz*, we find its story begins with a disruption of that sanctity, manifested in a tornado that literally tears open Dorothy's sheltered reality and tossing her "over the rainbow". Yes Dorothy you're not in Kansas anymore.

Sadly, this is not just a narrative foil for fictions. The contemporary condition replays the above narrative over and over again, the new realities of global warming and climate change [Katrina, Sandy, Fukushima and so many others, it would seem that we should all get used to wading in water], the failures of social, economic and political systems manifest as recessions, depressions and wars [Detroit, Palestine, to name but a few]. The numerous destroyed and abandoned houses left dotting the landscapes dark monuments to dystopic times.

The installation "Come Hell or High Water" explores the domestic uncanny as aesthetic performance. Where the physical damages to the house reveal the larger social and psychological anxiety of our contemporary condition.

For further discussion
of references made in
the text, please see
recommendations:
Bookbox, Page 446

The installation setup was as follows:

A 8ft x 6ft x 6ft vitrine initially showcases a section of an intact living room [a proxy for the whole house], a simulacrum of a typical middle American house [the color of the room and carpet was based on the best selling paint and best selling carpet from Home Depot, the furniture and other items from Ikea, local Craigslist and thrift stores]. The room is flooded and drained periodically. The flooding [timing and amount] is determined through a heuristic algorithm that takes into account global tidal patterns, regional meteorological forecasts and CO₂ levels in the exhibition space. The effect of the simulated deluge is allowed to wreck havoc onto the room, its entropic performance on display for all to see.

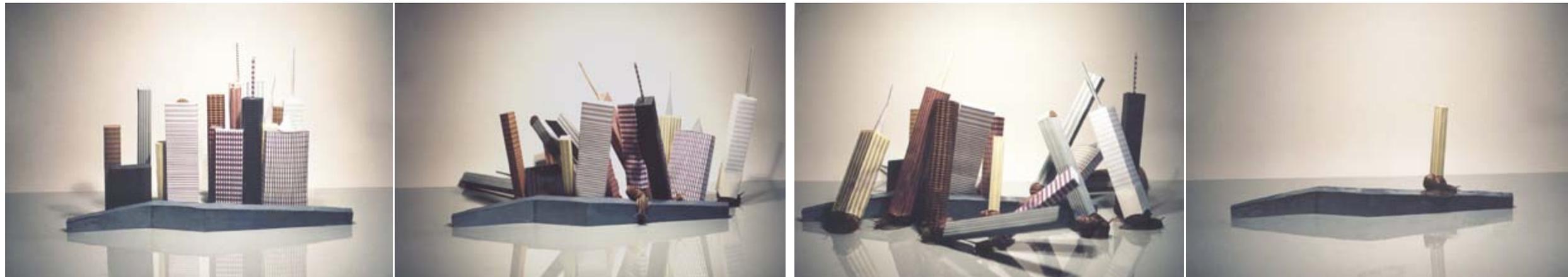
The title of the work, "Come hell or high water" – plastered in gold foil letters on the underside of a side table, sporadically exposes itself, bobbing up every now and then in the water – can be read beyond its intended pun in either two ways: cynically as a pathetic gusto now drowned in its own hubris; or as heroic prophecy, even with the room destroyed, memories washed away, the house fallen, for the imperishable existence of home, as Dorothy herself discovers before clicking her heels, "I never really lost it to begin with!"

Osman Khan is interested in constructing artifacts and experiences for social criticism and aesthetic expression. His work plays and subverts the materiality behind themes of identity, home/land, social and public space through participatory and performative installations and site-specific interventions. Khan was born in Pakistan and grew up in New York City. He received a Bachelor of Science from Columbia University. He completed his MFA at UCLA in 2004. He is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan, Stamps School of Art & Design. His work has been shown at MOCAD, Shanghai Biennale, L.A. Louver, Witte de With, Centre for Contemporary Art, Ars Electronica, O.K. Center for Contemporary Art. He is a recipient of an Art Matters grant, Ars Electronica's Award of Distinction and The Arctic Circle Residency, 2009.

www.osmankhan.com

09 | SKYLINE

Juliane Stiegele



Skyline
Video, 12min, silent
Stills

Skyscrapers made of paper were attached on top of the shell of 22 Burgundy snails and arranged as a skyline with a familiar appearance. From that point on, the animals determined the course of events. They naturally were not interested in keeping the buildings in an upright position and created new constellations according to their own social structures. They crawled on top of each other or were just asleep. The ensemble gradually disintegrated in slow motion and the animals left the experimental arrangement behind.

The real time event lasted 3:46 h.

Skyline originated from a series of art works where human organizational structures were left to different kinds of animals to see how they would deal with it – and to learn from them.

The hottest place in hell is reserved for those
who try to stay neutral in times of crisis.

Dante Alighieri, J.F. Kennedy