

# NEW OBSERVATIONS

105

GUEST EDITOR:  
*Paul Dickerson*

## Incarnations The Trappings of Scale

*Dan Walsh  
Jennifer Bolande  
Thomas Zimmer  
Jason Rhoades  
Richard Milazzo  
Moirá Dryer  
Craig Kalpakjian  
& Susan Goldman  
Polly Apfelbaum  
Julio Galan  
Marilyn Houlberg  
Saul Ostrow  
Paul Bloodgood  
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Elaine Tin Nyo  
Serge Spitzer  
James Hyde  
Eric Bainbridge  
Carl Andre  
Via & Pina Lewandowsky  
Lisa Hein  
Glen Seator  
Frank Gillette  
Rachel Harrison  
Colin DeLand  
Agnes Denes  
Vik Muniz  
David Humphrey  
David Lindberg  
Mike Metz  
Cary Liebowitz  
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THE MAGAZINE THAT LETS THE ARTISTS  
SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.

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# Incarnations

## The Trappings of Scale



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Paul Dickerson

# INCARNATIONS: THE TRAPPINGS OF SCALE



DAN WALSH Drawings, 1994

**I**ncarnations - *The Trappings of Scale* got its start when I realized that there is one great dichotomy which cuts across categories and dimensions, can be scaled up or down, is impartial to whether it is sentient or non-sentient: the equation of Development to Evolution. The more I considered it, the more I realized that it must be a very basic dichotomy because when it is held against other dichotomies it has the ability to force them to assimilate (a good measure of primacy). Form/Content, Subject/Object, Concept/Percept, Mind/Matter, Image/Substance, Ambiguity/Tautology, Rhetoric/Medium, Signifier/Signified etc.

The dichotomy of Development and Evolution forces a kind of "time" into the picture: taking the *oppositions* and making them *aspects* of each other by representing a chain of consecutive states between them. The paradigm/model of the Development and Evolution dualism outlines a structural explanation for the "expanded field" of formal perception. It brings along with it the fundamental issues of categorization, the content of selective procedures, and is aligned with the somewhat recent acceptance that the building blocks of perception, language, and thinking are constructed as aspects from the same body-based operational systems (a proof for the absence of any true conceptual art).

Evolution is the *history* made of selections of selections. There are many different theories for the way it functions in the worlds of Physics, Geology, Biology, etc. Interestingly, it allows for the reading or representation of its "codes" with or without a subject. Depending on the information available, products of Evolution allow themselves to be "read"; and "represent" what it is that they are designed for, their M.O. is constructed by the content (as close as we get to an absolute one) of selections - all selections being governed and biased by the histories of previous selections.

Development is the mode/procedure that makes things. It has a plan which either precedes it or is coextensive with it, from one angle, it is Evolution at a different scale, or may act as Evolution itself. It is always just one *version*. Both Development and Evolution account for source, category, transformation, and for the myriad of structures which pass between them which represent and give their information in percentiles, tradeoffs, and generalizations.

Incarnate, of course, means to be made in the flesh, materially manifested, condensate or concrete. All artists must participate in the limitations of their various "mediums" (broadly defined) and forms - or "dead" forms - because the components which make up art are ultimately constructed for representation whether we admit the subject or not.

On the other hand, Incarnations (plural), has a completely different premise or M.O. It brings with it the expanded field, the equivalence of changes of kind to changes of degree. By its nature the word wants to go up against the staid version of categorization/selection in an "art world" where heterogeneity and pluralism are given coverage when

their meaningful practice is seldom and has a long history anyway. Incarnations suggests a dissolution of the rhetorics of permutation or juxtaposition - an arena where attitude or affect is often thought to be enough to satisfy the requirement for art/meaning as if what a thing means is extractable from or more important than what it is. Incarnations points away from the idea/imagistic use of the language of perception towards its mediumistic and experiential use.

Trappings is *flip* and means the spoils of capture, the apparatus, and the decorative trimmings on the edges or contours of things, but also means horse harness. Its use here is to signify those real structural forms which allow for the transitions of forms, their contexts, their operational interrelationships with other processes, aspects, dimensions; an armature of inter-connectedness without designation. Scale is the subject of *Trappings of Scale*. It's a word which lost its procedural origin, meaning literally the activity of climbing as in *ladders or stairs* (changing levels). Scale at some point came to stand for the ladder or stairs itself. Once fallen it came to mean measurement (index), size and relativity.

I wish to call for a new vernacular. Some words need to be resuscitated, others expanded, others invented. The word Scale has vast implications and should be rebuilt more in line with its origins and understood as participating in transformation of all kinds. Scale needs to be redefined as the relationship between internal relations and their consecutive connection to external relations and envelope. It is a *mode* that participates in shifts of passage, dimension, and category/selection. Limited only by acts of convention, it is free from comparison to a relative standard other than the object or subject which is being considered and its consecutive extrapolation in the expanded field. When a form changes in a scalar way, it changes by degree, magnitude, or amplitude, yet in at least one sense remains the same until it is "read" from another point of view or is recontextualized.

I hope that *Incarnations - the Trappings of Scale* will help resuscitate the subject of the perception of art (a real thing of the real world). I'm convinced that it is *the language*, the only one capable of passing consecutively from the making of art, to the "reading" and experiencing of it, to its memory and on to its history and back again. It shows itself to be the medium which assimilates the presumed discord between conceptuality and formality.

Taking the language of perception in this way shows artist, artifact, and art history in a sequence. Since the language of perception allows for the reading

of "design" in an artist and artifact, it allows for its assessment by its schematic procedure of source or means, to M.O. and path, to "goal," to particular end. This kind of aggregate comparative charting of the contents of an artifact is a kind of historical archaeology.

Ordinary things like magazines are complex beasts, so is art and artists' oeuvres. They are structurally made up in much the way that any organism is made up: complex, evolutionary, inter-symbiotic, intra-symbiotic, inter/intra-structural. Artists scale up seminal ideas, production is timely, timed or timeless, resources are cached. The body of an artist's work is as involved with temporal matters, Evolution and morphology, categorical etymology, as it is with meaning or artifice.

To demonstrate this theme I have tried to find far flung examples of the same idea: Richard Milazzo's concrete musings on tautology via a walk in a Parisian cemetery; Vik Muniz's deceptive art and non-fictional account of the *Death of an Actor*; Frank Gillette's *Q & A* essay that puts art out on the low/high screen; Elaine Tin Nyo's complex memorial recipe; Saul Ostrow's art essay that turns itself into a form of the subject that it engages while it is engaging it; Agnes Denes's map projections from isometric to isotropic space; Eric Bainbridge's scalar and materially shifted re-incarnated real/fake sculpture; Polly Apfelbaum's kaliedoscopic collage/drawing; Craig Kalpakjian's and Susan Goldman's pointless labyrinth, to name but a few of the contributions.

I would like this, the #105 issue of *New Observations*, to be taken at face value first, which might mean literally, as if *image* were everything. Take in the cover page, the column of

contributors, the layout, essays, fonts, images, the overall "package" of the magazine. At this glancing appreciation or read, it might fail to satisfy those interested in a deep or complex Structural, or Lacanian view. This way of looking at it would be in accord with Frank Stella's often misquoted aphorism, "What you see, is what you see."

But, *New Observations* deserves better than to be taken at face value alone. There is a history to it, and the contributors of each of the included projects have theirs, and besides we can't "see" or "read" anything without time, and once it is allowed you get the run of the gamut of its expanded field of Developments and Evolutions.

*New Observations* is a fourteen-year-old project founded by the painter and conceptual artist Lucio Pozzi. It may be a very clever conceptual "piece" by



JENNIFER BOLANDE IN THE BASEMENT THE UNIVERSAL ELEVATOR COMPANY, 1994

## Ezra Pound's first bouffant



1924

that artist. *New Observations* could be seen as a self structuring periodic vehicle/host for arts related magazine experiments. Its operational procedure and design charter makes hosts of the hosts, agents of the hosts and so on. At this juncture, Lucio is getting me as his latest vehicle/agent for the continuance of his "picce." I don't mind, because I am using #105 as my host. Then there are the symbiotic relationships to my contributors, theirs to #105, etc. There are too many overlays, coextensions and inner relationships to say where the heart of #105 begins or ends. The question becomes moot.

All that is known or experienced is by the convention of categorization/selection - the cut - as it operates with memory in a consecutive time. Categories/selections are accessed and formed by contrast and degree of disparity, they provide a series that runs from memory through to *history* and *is history* all along. The conventions of category/selection occur in different ways at different levels of perception. At lower levels they are hard wired a-priori archetypal; at higher levels they are formed by the tendencies of an individual's "experience," at still higher levels they are formed by the various levels of culture and the popular imagination, etc.

The suggestion that there is an empiricism to perception and conception can be made, but for it to be *understood* we would have to allow for its complete enveloping structure, its contingencies and the extended histories of categorization/selection, Development/Evolution.

Classify  
combs by the  
number of their teeth

-Duchamp circa 1918

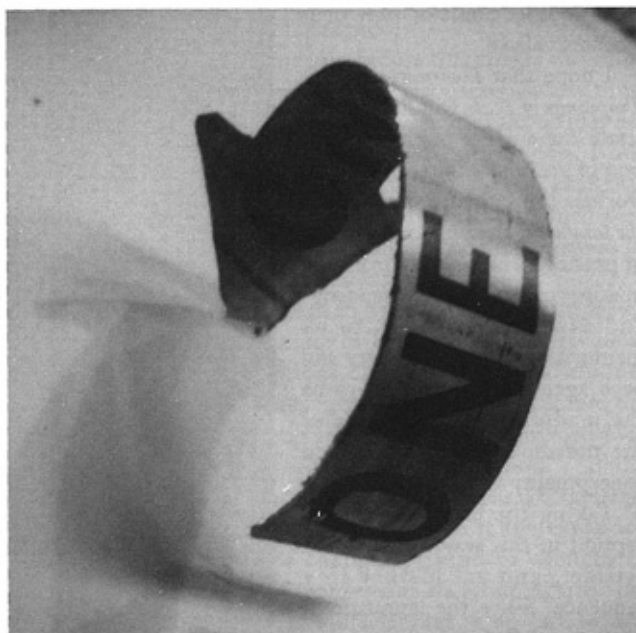
"The eye cannot for a moment remain in a particular state determined by the object it looks upon. On the contrary, it is forced to a sort of opposition, which, in contrasting extreme with extreme, intermediate degree with intermediate degree, at the same time combines these opposite impressions, and thus ever tends to be whole, whether the impressions are successive, or simultaneous and confined to one image."

Goethe

Goethe shows that even when one considers a *fixed object* we perceive constant change. The object is an out of register extrapolation, an empirical generalization in real consecutive time, even "objective seeing" is an "as-if." Categorization, even at the most basic level, is a focused blur made by conventions. Forms are the representation of the emulation of their Development.

That there is only a formal lexicon that is meaningful for the "languages" of perception/experience, Development, Evolution, transformation - in their various versions - and that this formal lexicon *is* history and yet is non-sentient, participates in time, yet disavows "time" can be a cumbersome pill to swallow and doesn't make the burden on the subject any easier. It certainly doesn't help quantify Art. Many questions become moot. I think that if it has a valuable lesson this lesson comes by forcing us to give up and surrender our constant attempts to judge the representations of the world, and take them for what they are, with a new priority of appreciation for what that can be. Evolution is a prediction backwards. We can get another animal altogether with out having to change any spots.

Paul Dickerson is a sculptor who lives and works in NYC.



PAUL DICKERSON *Way One*, 1995