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Miwon Kwon and Helen Molesworth

## *Documents Magazine*

1992–2004

*Documents*, a now defunct magazine created by Helen Molesworth, Miwon Kwon, Margaret Sundell, Chris Hoover, and James Marcovitz, ran for twenty-three issues, produced between 1992 and 2004 in New York City. Within that period, the publication carved out a unique and rigorous model of interdisciplinary engagement with contemporary art and the broader social and cultural field. *Fillip* heard about this publication through art historian, critic, and curator Julian Meyers, who has contributed to both magazines. Although *Documents* is well-known and appreciated within specialized circles, particularly in New York, our decision to spotlight *Documents* has much to do with how exceedingly difficult it is to find; it has almost no trace online or in library archives, and so its contents have been largely lost to subsequent generations.

Our focus on *Documents* is spread out between *Fillip*'s print and online platforms: conversations with Miwon Kwon and Helen Molesworth appear in print alongside a partial reprint of *Documents* Issue 4/5's "Terror and Terrorism" survey (1994); a conversation with Margaret Sundell appears online alongside other selections from the "Terror and Terrorism" survey. These articles and artist projects have been scanned directly from the magazine, in order to highlight *Documents*' design in addition to its content.

Our heartfelt thanks to all the editors for their support in producing this feature, as well as to the "Terror and Terrorism" survey authors, who graciously granted permission to reproduce their work. Their enthusiasm about the project almost two decades later is a testament to the energy and interest *Documents* produced in its twelve-year existence.

Thanks are also due to Julian Myers, Johanna Burton, Ann Butler, David Senior, Liza Eurich, Noah Chasin, and Victoria Lum.

—Amy Zion

*Part One: Miwon Kwon*

Amy Zion – Not surprisingly, contemporary magazines are focusing on ideas and topics that *Documents* investigated less than ten years ago such as privacy, labour, taste, and feminism, among others. We'd like to excavate a small section of an early issue of *Documents* and invite its editors to provide perspectives on the project, as well as context for the excerpt. So, to begin, what stands out to you as *Documents*' legacy after its twelve-year run?

*Miwon Kwon* – I am most proud of certain structural things that we put into play. For instance, we invited artists to do projects specifically for the pages of *Documents*, and then commissioned multiple responses to the project. I think we might have been one of the first to present Gabriel Orozco's series of photographs, along with two responses, a letter to Orozco by Laura Hoptman and a piece I wrote about the difference between photographs as documentation and photographs as primary works of art.

In the beginning, we tried to think of *Documents* as a quarterly, but in reality it was almost more like an annual, with the early issues being much larger volumes than the later ones. In our first issue we started off with multiple reviews of *Bravo 20: The Bombing of the American West*, a photo project by Richard Misrach that incorporates a park proposal for the atomic testing grounds. The reviewers ranged from Claire Pentecost, an artist, to Andrew Ross, an American cultural studies professor, and myself. So, already in that selection and setup, we were taking a multidisciplinary outlook on the evaluation of an art project that, in itself, engaged several different disciplines. We also devoted enough pages to artists' work to fully represent a very complex project. It is of note that Claire responded with a fictional narrative inspired by Misrach's photos. This section on *Bravo 20* was followed by a conversation between Mark Dion and three of the editors (Helen, Jim, and myself). This issue also included what would become a regular feature in *Documents*, what we called a "survey." For the inaugural issue, the topic of the survey was "boredom," with nine respondents ranging from

artists to a psychoanalyst, to an art historian, an activist, etc.

*Zion* – I noticed throughout *Documents* that whenever a survey appears, it has the same introductory format: a title page with monochromatic, half-tone images that relate to or represent the topic surveyed. A column, appearing on the left-hand side, lists the names of respondents, and then a paragraph, written by the editor of that particular survey, contextualizes the survey along with a dictionary-like definition. Would you say this “survey” structure, which is included in the first issue and up to Issue 19, is representative of *Documents*’ larger ethos?

*Kwon* – Probably. The “Boredom” survey provided a structure we tried to follow in future issues, like in Issue 3, the survey topic was “Passing,” as in passing for somebody else, something else. . . . Issue 4/5, which came out as a double issue in 1994, had a survey on “Terror and Terrorism.”

*Zion* – So, earlier issues are more representative of your initial goals, to produce larger volumes centred around these surveys, which don’t become themes, but operate more as organizing principles for the issue, ideas that parallel projects by artists and writers could compliment?

*Kwon* – I definitely think so. By Issue 8, the initial conceptualization lost a little energy because of certain practical demands of trying to manage the size, or scale, of production. Conceptually, the first issues are more fully in line with our goals in my opinion.

*Zion* – Since *Documents* is so hard to track down, I haven’t seen a complete set yet, but I can see what you are talking about, that you were trying to create a more kaleidoscopic view on any given topic, exhibition, or artist’s practice. What initially inspired you to get together and create a magazine?

*Kwon* – There were five of us and we were all involved with the Whitney Independent Study Program although not at the same time. Initially, I believe it was Helen Molesworth and Christopher Hoover who started talking about making a

journal. They initiated conversations with a few people—James Marcovitz, who has since left the art world and works in the legal profession, was one of the first. Then, I believe I was the next person they approached. I am older than them and I had more publication experience, even at that point, as with design and printing. Then Margaret Sundell was the fifth person, and she had much more background in arts funding and the gallery world. I’m not certain if those were the reasons why we were invited, but we each brought different skills, different experiences, to the project.

One the one hand, we shared a desire for a venue or a forum for art-related discussions that were not bound to the commercial gallery structure. We thought most magazines were tied to this structure. On the other hand, we didn’t want to be locked into a theoretically exclusive, scholarly academic discourse that had a very limited audience. We believed there was a space in between the commercial and the overly academic in which very intelligent writing, unexpected, non-formulaic approaches to thinking about art practice and art interpretation could be brought forward. We were trying to make a publication we wanted to read.

We were also motivated by an understanding of art as “cultural work,” as a means to engage with fields and disciplines beyond art and as a means to impact culture in a broader way. We wanted to break existing categorical divisions in terms of the types of art and writing that were privileged in art publications. We further wanted to break perceived barriers between cultural zones of activity, meaning that commercial activity could be on par with high theory, that small film and architectural projects are as interesting and significant as an art exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. I suppose we were reflective of what has been called a postmodernist expansion of art discourse. But we tried to pursue this expansion with rigour; we were very conscious of the problems that accompanied a lot of interdisciplinary endeavours at the time. . . . the pluralist trap of the more the better and “anything and everything is equally viable.” So I do not actually feel comfortable with the term you used just now, “kaleidoscopic,” to describe what *Documents* tried to do.

For us, the purpose of having multiple views on a project or topic, for example, was a way to create really precise constellations and *not* simply to show that, wow, there are really diverse viewpoints. Or that no one has the final word. If we just did that, then it becomes simply entertainment. One just experiences an accumulation of different tastes, opinions—or something like that. Maybe the line is not that clear between what I am trying to describe as a very rigorous multiplicity versus pluralism, but we were going for the former not the latter. I think pluralism basically allows for many different positions to just coexist. What we wanted to do instead was to make them cross or contradict relationally, so that five or more voices, for instance, could actually interrogate each other obviously or indirectly in the pages of *Documents*.

*Zion* – Can you talk about a specific example? Are there any famous or successful “crosses” or “contradictions” that come to mind?

*Kwon* – I am looking at Issue 6, where we had an essay by Walt Odets, a clinical psychologist, about AIDS education, and then we had an artist’s project by Zoe Leonard about the body, in particular the broken body, the open body, which resonates with the AIDS piece, obviously. Then we had multiple reviews of Judith Butler’s book *Bodies That Matter* (1993), followed by a rather deadpan photo project by Tom Burr about public toilets in New York City, which could be taken as a study of an architectural type, a view onto a neglected urban space of private bodily management, as well as an investigation of “queer” social space. In the same issue we also had a very long survey featuring twelve responses to the topic of “habits,” particularly bodily habits. So the whole issue in some ways could be seen as a “body issue”—but we weren’t interested in the body as a theme per se because such themes can be just reductive product packaging. For me, the publication’s real substance emerged in between things, between the articles, projects, responses. Again, it was about creating a structure that allowed for that.

*Zion* – When I began researching *Documents*, I was able to search its content, since all the articles

have been entered into the Getty Research Index. However, you have to know what you’re looking for when you use this resource. There is no way to access this content digitally, as PDFs, for instance. Part of our interest in presenting *Documents* here is to bring attention to this issue; we want to find a way to make *Documents* accessible once again. It is important to us that the unique discussions and debates from this period do not disappear, since even just ten years later, the same topics continue to re-emerge and re-circulate. It’s almost as if my generation is left to reinvent the wheel again.

*Kwon* – When Helen contacted me about discussing *Documents* in *Fillip*, I began to think about getting a research assistant to generate scans and put PDFs online. . . . This might sound funny, but *Documents* was always a somewhat purposefully, quasi-dysfunctional project, so to enter institutional databases, to be approved by the Wilson cataloguing system, which judges what is appropriate for cataloguing. . . . we were somewhat ambivalent if not antagonistic to that entire system of knowledge management. *Documents* always remained an independent publication. We never became a MIT Press publication, for instance, and we never fully became a commercial publication like *Frieze*.

In fact, *Documents* and *Frieze* started at around the same time. We met with *Frieze*’s editors quite early on, because we thought they were potentially our British counterparts. But their interests were clearly to become a commercially viable and commercially successful publication, which they have become (not to mention the Frieze Art Fairs and other such activities). We never had such aspirations. One could say we were incompetent when it came to such ventures, or maybe uninterested. So we became something else and we did what we could until we folded. And when it folded, it needed to; it could not really be sustained after a certain point.

*Zion* – Yes, but it folded after more than ten years, which is a long time, is it not?

*Kwon* – Yes, but our issues came out inconsistently during that period and the magazine’s size changed as the editors’ lives changed. . . .

The project never really exceeded the editors' identities because we were never taken up by a publisher. For example, *Grey Room*, which started after us, was a MIT Press publication from the beginning, which means they have to follow MIT's schedule and working procedures, whereas *Documents*, as an independent publication, we could do what we wanted. We basically lived with both the freedom and the dysfunction that comes with not having a proper publisher behind you.

*Zion* – Was there an option to become institutionalized, or to get picked up by another press and continue?

*Kwon* – We pursued MIT Press at one point but they felt we were too similar to *October*, which I thought was ridiculous. They also had a production mandate, meaning we would have had to produce four issues a year, and they would have prescribed a way of working, with deadlines, and this and that. But if it was not going to be MIT Press we could not really imagine it being another academic press; we were not *Critical Inquiry*, or a publication like it. We were really just in between: we were not a popular publication, but we were not an academic publication either. This in-between-ness was both our identity and a point of pride, but it was also what made us fall through the cracks. I often say to students now that when you do truly interdisciplinary work, either the relevant disciplines will recognize themselves in your work, or none of them will recognize themselves in your work. That is the risk. *Documents* just did not fit the commercial structure or the academic structure.

*Zion* – Since you were not attached to a publisher, what was keeping you financially afloat?

*Kwon* – We applied for and received a few National Endowment for the Arts grants. We were not, however, primarily government funded. We were a really low-budget operation: with subscriptions, and one or two ads, we could put an issue out. And I guess part of the team felt proud of that, too. Of course, it would have been nice if someone had just given us a large sum of money to support what

we were doing, but when such a sum comes, it often has a lot of strings attached.

*Zion* – In retrospect, since printing and shipping make up the majority of a magazine's costs, had online publishing been a more common and appealing option, could you imagine *Documents* as an exclusively online publication? Or was there something about the printed form you would have held onto regardless of printing and shipping costs?

*Kwon* – In some ways you can see in the magazine an impulse toward the kinds of things one might see on the Web these days, in both our format and our goals. But even if it had been possible to be a Web publication, we were still in very deep "print mode." We were analogue, so when we did cut and paste it was literal. Digital technology is so embedded in our lives now you probably cannot really imagine a world without it, or the Internet in particular.

We were basically working in an era when email communication was just starting to become common between people. The editorial process was all through hardcopy; editing was done with pen on paper, design layouts were reviewed as printouts, not PDFs. If we had started twelve or fifteen years later, *Documents* might have been a much more sustainable project: to be independent, to have it be available online—perhaps we could have just forgotten about the printed magazine.

*Zion* – The Internet basically became widely used at the same time *Documents* was starting, and I'd like to know more about how the magazine was affected by the burgeoning technology of the early '90s. You even have a Web site listed (and a hotmail address), at least in the later issues, but it's not available anymore. There is absolutely no trace of the project on the Internet today, except for the Getty Research Index. "Documents" is a hard word to search for in Google and in even more specialized art journal databases and academic indexes such as EBSCO. It is next to impossible to find any digital trace of the project.

*Kwon* – Yes, I think of *Documents* as being both too early, in that it began just before digital culture

took real hold, and late, in that it didn't catch on to the wave once it arrived. The time frame of *Documents* spans the broader cultural transition of absorbing the digital into everyday life. One could put a positive spin on this, to think of *Documents* as asynchronous to the flows and demands of dominant cultural developments. One could think of it in terms of Walter Benjamin's notion of the "outmoded," that it was just not quite on time, or with the times, and precisely because so, it is of historical and potentially political significance. Frankly, this is one of *Documents*' values as a cultural specimen.

Also, you know about the reference to Georges Bataille's magazine *Documents*?

*Zion* – Yes. Helen was telling me that she learned of it in an art history seminar and she called you after class to tell you about the title?

*Kwon* – Yes, we were enthralled by Bataille's short-lived project, because it seemed like there was an affinity between our projects, across a long period of time. The way Bataille and others created that publication to introduce, for instance, black jazz music, surrealist photography, and writings about spit—that was definitely a model for us. And it was not as though we saw Bataille's *Documents* and then realized that is what we wanted to do. It was more like our ideas were affirmed in looking at the original. There are some people who still pronounce our publication with a French accent... people who are very attached to Bataille, I guess. But we insisted on being *Documents*, not *Documents* [with a French pronunciation].

*Zion* – Was *Documents*' design based off of Bataille's *Documents*?

*Kwon* – No, not exactly, although we found inspiration in it. The font that we chose for the title *Documents*, for instance, echoes the font used in the earlier *Documents*. The designers, Bethany Johns and Georgie Stout, helped us come up with a three-column grid template for all the pages. They were genius. Their design gave us a lot of flexibility, a template capable of accommodating artists' projects, essays with or without footnotes,

interviews, poetry, scripts, roundtables, etc. They also figured out a system of switching back and forth from sans serif and serif fonts to visually register multiple changes of voice.

Johns was a designer who was very active with museum publications at the time, and Stout was her assistant. Stout went on to become the head of the big design and branding firm in New York called 2 × 4. With their template we did the layout work ourselves. Chris and I did a lot of it because we knew how to use the design programs; we used QuarkXpress.

*Zion* – The design was also trying to address the problem you found with *Artforum* and *October*, which were both very hard to xerox and circulate?

*Kwon* – Yes, this may seem like a very minor issue, but we wanted something very easy to use. The overall size is just smaller than 8½ × 11. Easy to xerox. The page numbers appear at the bottom outside corner on each page, too, because we didn't want the reader to have to open the magazine all the way in order to see the page number. Also we used wide margins for essays.

*Zion* – This was for the reader to make notes directly on the magazine?

*Kwon* – Yes.

*Zion* – So, how do you feel now, having produced this independent, what you have called "outmoded," non-contemporary—

*Kwon* – [Laughs]

*Zion* – I mean this as a sincere compliment! It is obvious that that spirit shaped the structure and format of *Documents*. At the same time, it's ironic to think about how the content exists now, that it fails to circulate, and not as a result of some of those choices, but more as a consequence of the digital divide that we just discussed.

*Kwon* – I think there could be a second life to *Documents*, not to reinstate the publication, but to make back issues available digitally. We would

have to get rights from everybody who contributed, but imagining its second life on the Internet, potentially available to anyone for free, seems in spirit with *Documents*, and I think it could potentially have great value.

*Zion* – It is important to resuscitate the project because these topics are coming up again and again. For instance, *Texte zur Kunst* released an issue on “feminism,” which was a *Documents* survey topic in Issue 17, and in 2009 they did an issue on “taste,” also the topic of a *Documents* survey, but there would have been little chance that the editors could build on the knowledge from a decade prior, just because it’s so hard to find in America, let alone Europe. Of course, feminism is a large topic that should be explored and re-evaluated over and over, but if we were to do an issue on the topic, it would be important to access information produced in the ’90s, even just as a barometer for how things have changed, evolved, and become more complex.

But also, it’s important to have more models of non-commercial art publications that were heavily invested in discourse. *Documents* stated in its first editorial that it wasn’t interested in acting as a promotional tool; it is not glossy, and it has this very unique quality to it that I think is quite difficult to locate today in the contemporary field. Obviously, you are still engaged in contemporary art discourse as an art historian, writer, and curator, but do you feel like there is a legacy to *Documents* in contemporary publishing? Do you see contemporary publications taking up *Documents*’ mission, ideas, or structural concerns?

*Kwon* – I think some elements have been absorbed.

*Zion* – Like the roundtable structure?

*Kwon* – Yes. But people tend to focus more on content than innovative structures for writing and for dialogue. I think that what catches people’s attention are names and the subject matter more than the form or framework for the names or the subject matter. Or if they do notice, it’s usually not at a very deep level.

Perhaps *Documents* could be a model for another generation. I do think that changes in means of access, such as via the Internet, creates a different playing field. Our difficulty was never generating ideas or content or even production, it was always distribution. Part of that stemmed from engaging with large institutional organizations, like libraries, information processing organizations, academic presses, and the like. The digital condition could allow, at least in theory if not in practice, a way to bypass those structures.

*Zion* – We’ve encountered issues with these institutional structures with *Fillip*, which started soon after *Documents* ended. The first issue came out in 2005, and began as a black-and-white broadsheet, basically a large newspaper format, and it was next to impossible to get mainstream distribution as a printed project; mainstream distributors and stores considered it an “alternative” magazine, so in 2009 we changed our format mainly because we decided we wanted the ideas to reach a broader audience. Although most of our content is available online, it is hard to actually locate a divide. Rather, I’d characterize the situation as a continuum between the printed object and the online content. If *Documents* was available just online, the visibility, the circulation, and the types of audiences are still quite different than audiences who find things in bookstores, libraries, research institutions, and so on.

*Kwon* – I remember a colleague encouraging us to go online and to make everything available. But he considered online availability to be more or less publicity. He said really interested people, through knowing about the project online, would order a copy. That is how he conceptualized the value of online presence. I do not know what my position is, frankly, about analogue versus digital, the virtuality or the deterritorialized condition of things, versus embodied, placed materiality. These would have been, had we continued, questions for the editorial team. I think I am safe in saying Helen and I—I do not know about the other three editors—are Luddites or were when we were involved with *Documents* [laughs]. We like things that resist efficiency to a certain degree, that block

the flows that the current system supports or even encourages. We like the slowness of real books, the feel of real paper. . . . But I think the afterlife of *Documents*, which could be even a bigger life than the original, will inevitably have to be digital. It will be the virtual “ghost” of *Documents*. And inevitably something will get lost in that format.

*Zion* – Yes, but that is inevitable with any project documenting its own legacy. Earlier in the conversation you alluded to the fact that *Documents* began to lose momentum at the end. Could you describe the conditions in which it—

*Kwon* – Fell apart?

*Zion* – Yes, for lack of a softer term. . . .

*Kwon* – The original five of us maintained good communication and a collective sensibility, which shifted probably around the time that the issues began to look different—maybe around Issue 8? I can’t locate the exact time. Unlike a professional magazine, with proper staff positions that could be filled by different persons, positions with very clear-cut roles that mark out how each person fits into the bigger frame of production, we talked collectively about everything, we were engaged with all aspects of the project—that is how it started. There was no hierarchy. But at different times some of us did more work than others. There was a period when it felt like Helen and I were running the magazine. Our involvement also began to shift when our lives changed. Helen and I finished our PhDs, moved away from New York, and we had demands from jobs that took away our ability to focus and really be engaged in *Documents*. In a way, it was part of the individual members just growing older, growing up, growing into other institutional jobs that came with a pay cheque, and taking on other kinds of responsibilities and commitments, professional and personal. . . . that inevitably took away from the energy and focus on this project, which is really only made by people sitting around a table together. As our individual worlds shifted, perhaps our interests also were not collectively shared, our priorities changed, and so things became slightly out of sync. Helen became

a professor, and then a curator in Maryland. I got a job in Los Angeles. Whereas before, she and I lived in the same apartment building, able to not just talk but see each other every day, the very fact of the geographical distance meant the discussion, exchange, and work that had happened just naturally, because of proximity, could not happen anymore. For all the good feeling around deterritorialized possibilities of connection that many people have, I personally don’t buy it. With new professional lives with different relations to institutional contexts and demands, being in different places, different time zones, it became very hard to coordinate the work on *Documents*, or even make time for it. It was less a loss of faith and more the project’s practical manageability that led to its demise.

*Zion* – Can we go back to *Documents*’ specific goals and legacy—in Issue 21, one of your writers, Andrew Perchuk, characterizes *Documents* as a project focused on contemporary art and its methods. Did *Documents* have a specific methodological approach influenced by the Whitney program?

*Kwon* – No. The magazine reflects our educational formation for sure, and in the early 1990s it seemed as though studying art history, or writing respectable art criticism, required knowledge of psychoanalysis, structuralism, poststructuralism, Marxism, etc., . . . and I would say this is still the case today. We were of a moment when all those methods seemed relevant, necessary, and interesting, and we did not have to fight for one over the other. Even if the generation prior to us thought some of it was contradictory or incompatible, such as Marxism and psychoanalysis, we believed one could take all available resources in order to contend with cultural production and meaning. We were not really pushing for any particular method at all; there was not any kind of an agenda to which you’re referring in terms of methods.

This might clarify: in Issue 3, there is a cluster of material that focuses on the work of Jimmie Durham. I have an essay on his work and the work of James Luna, but then next to that is a conversation between Durham and Michael Taussig, a Columbia University professor of anthropology

and a bit of a maverick in the field. Taussig was dealing with issues of ethnography, colonization, and visual representation in his research and fieldwork—issues that resonate with Durham’s practice. So we put them in conversation. This, in a way, exceeds the specificity or discreteness of methods like psychoanalysis or Marxism; it is all there, but it is not overtly identifiable.

We were just very clear that Taussig and Durham meeting each other and talking to one another was going to be fantastic, and that enabling people to eavesdrop as readers on their talking and thinking aloud together was how we wanted to contribute to the discourse.

*Zion* – Although you do sort of feature artists in the publication, most of the issues don’t feature artwork on the cover, but towards the end there comes a break. Issues 17 and 18 just have bright, monochrome covers, and then artwork appears for the last few issues, beginning with Mel Bochner on 19 until Andrea Fraser, who appears as the final issue’s “cover girl.” Can you explain why these shifts (from having photographs on the cover, then monochromatic covers, then artwork) took place?

*Kwon* – We were keen on not featuring art on the cover for a long time. We wanted cultural images... from science, popular culture... , images that had odd and unexpected resonance with that issue’s content. I believe our shift to art images for the cover probably corresponded with the editors’ dissipation of energy, because our ideas for the cover really came from a think-tank scenario, and people coming forward with actual images that all of us could get excited about. But then there also came a moment when we felt that, if *Documents* was an art magazine, we should put art on the cover. Why are we resistant to putting art on the cover? Because we are resistant to being promotional devices? But maybe we *are* promotional devices? These conversations were ongoing. There was a moment when we also reflected on *October*’s policy about images of artworks in their publication. (I should state that all of us studied in different capacities with the various editors of *October* during the ISP years and beyond. I was a student of Hal Foster, as was Helen, and Rosalind Krauss was her teacher as well

as Margaret’s, so our relationship to *October* is not just intellectual, it is social and personal.)

Anyway, *October* had a policy about not putting art images in the magazine, or at least keeping it to a minimum, which might sound unreasonable given that it is a publication on *visual* art. (Of course, they only have text on the cover.) I think recently with new members on the editorial team this has loosened up quite a lot but ten to fifteen years ago, they wanted to make a statement that they were not in the business of promoting any artist, and that any image of an artwork is essentially an advertisement. Or at least I recall a discussion during one of their editorial meetings in which this was debated vigorously. This type of thinking has a strictness that may sound slightly ridiculous today, especially since *October* is tied to the commerce of art as are more overtly commercial publications, although to a lesser degree.

In any case, that debate over the image of an artwork and its status in the magazine was a consideration for us as well. By Issue 18 or 19, we thought, what is the big deal? Let’s put art on the cover, artworks that look good and are made by artists that are not geared primarily towards commercial success. That is how we began putting art on the cover.

*Zion* – So, what does it mean to end *Documents* with Andrea Fraser’s rear end?

*Kwon* – You mean why is Andrea Fraser’s ass on the final cover?

*Zion* – Yes. What sort of statement were you trying to make?

*Kwon* – That issue happened really late, maybe even a whole year separated it from the issue prior. I thought to end *Documents* with Fraser was great—it was almost perfect. Her practice had been at a meta level throughout the 1980s–90s, a meta-critique of the art world, of art institutions. In her interview with me in the issue, she demonstrates her exceptional capacity to evaluate her trajectory retrospectively and self-reflexively, and in the most articulate and personal way. In facing a situation in which after years of pursuing a

practice of critiquing art institutions to now being invited by those same institutions to provide “critique” as if yet another art genre, to become a service provider, as Fraser put it, she had to account for a lot. Her questions and observations about her own practice were relevant to and resonated with the magazine’s history and its relationship to institutions, too, I felt. Our refusal or inability to achieve institutional recognition, to maintain a position slightly outside of it all... We wanted to end without institutionalization, so we are going to end with the potential of being lost. Or, I should really say I, not we. That is where I was in 2004—I cannot speak for the other editors because they were really not that involved at that point. It was already lost to them; for some of them, it was lost many years prior to the actual ending.

*Zion* – Was it just you and Helen at that point?

*Kwon* – I would say it was just me at the end. Again, we were all in different cities by then and dealing with different lives, and life demands. Declaring Issue 23 as the last issue was my doing; I just decided it was not going to go forward. As I pursued the table of contents, having decided I was going to make the last issue myself, Helen heard about it. She was very upset that I had made a unilateral decision. But at that point, I felt none of the editors were really engaged anymore, not really. No one was taking care of anything related to *Documents*; it no longer occupied any of the editor’s lives in any significant way. We all needed to face the fact that it was over, so I simply took action on what was already a reality in my view... this was going to be the last issue. Helen didn’t hear about the decision directly from me so that probably made it worse. She contacted me and wanted at least to have an essay in the final issue, which was a piece on Eva Hesse.

*Zion* – In terms of editorial process, what was your stance towards developmental editing? Meaning, normally, did you go through several drafts with your writers? This is something we care about deeply at *Fillip*, and often surprises our writers since this is not a typical protocol in art magazines—at least now. One can find several publications that

don’t appear to even copyedit, much less push their writers to produce clear, well-researched articles.

*Kwon* – Some people think that is a point of pride, right?

*Zion* – Do they?

*Kwon* – Well, you know, that it enables a “free voice,” or something...

*Zion* – I suppose... but can you talk about your position towards developmental editing?

*Kwon* – We were rigorous, and some writers went through many rounds of editing. Each editor brought something to the table, whether it was an individual essay, or an idea for the survey. We would talk it all through. Then usually there would be a point person who would be responsible for seeing something through, from editorial content to dealing with procedural, logistical things. In the initial phase of the project, all of us read everything; it was not divided. I would say our editorial process was very strong... contributions went through “the machine.”

That is also why our production schedule was erratic and slow. We did not want to put something out there just because of a quarterly schedule. Why should we abide by that sort of rationalized calendar of production? We would rather put out good work that we all felt good about, an issue that really gelled, and sometimes that just took time.

*Zion* – So, what do you think about these publications that take what you called a “point of pride” in an author’s “free voice”? Is there a place for it alongside rigorously edited publications, or is it just laziness disguised as democracy?

*Kwon* – I think it is a fundamental misunderstanding of the democratic public sphere to think that all voices are equal. Democracy is about sustaining and nurturing difference, not leveling this difference into equalness. In America especially, there is a reticence to insist on standards and excellence. To do so often brings charges of elitism or inaccessibility. We often said that you don’t need a lot of

jargon to address complex ideas or concepts. But this did not mean that one should abandon rigorous and deep engagement with certain discourses that may be difficult but allow for more substantive understanding. Our critique of overly specialized or exclusive language was not in defense of sloppy thinking and sloppy writing. My position is that everyone has the capacity to communicate complex ideas in accessible language. Great writers are able to do that, and that was what *Documents* wanted to nurture, writing that was precise, accessible, and smart at the same time. If *Documents* was a forum that was just about showcasing different voices, willy nilly, no matter the quality, I would not have been interested.

Also writing is a very, very hard discipline; it is a craft and an art. The proliferation of possibilities for writing and distribution today—again this is a symptom of digital culture—has actually produced much worse writers and worse writing. And, the publishing world has become lazier and lazier about editing because it takes time. Most people who have editor titles at presses do not edit; they shop for authors.

Poorly edited texts create a culture that continuously lowers the bar for literacy. As a teacher, I've noticed that students tend to confuse having an opinion with having an argument, too. This is not to say that having an opinion cannot lead to something, but it often just ends there. Unfortunately, our cultural condition rewards speed and efficiency, and not durational, substantive reflective thinking. Artists are under this pressure, too. We are on the same production line.

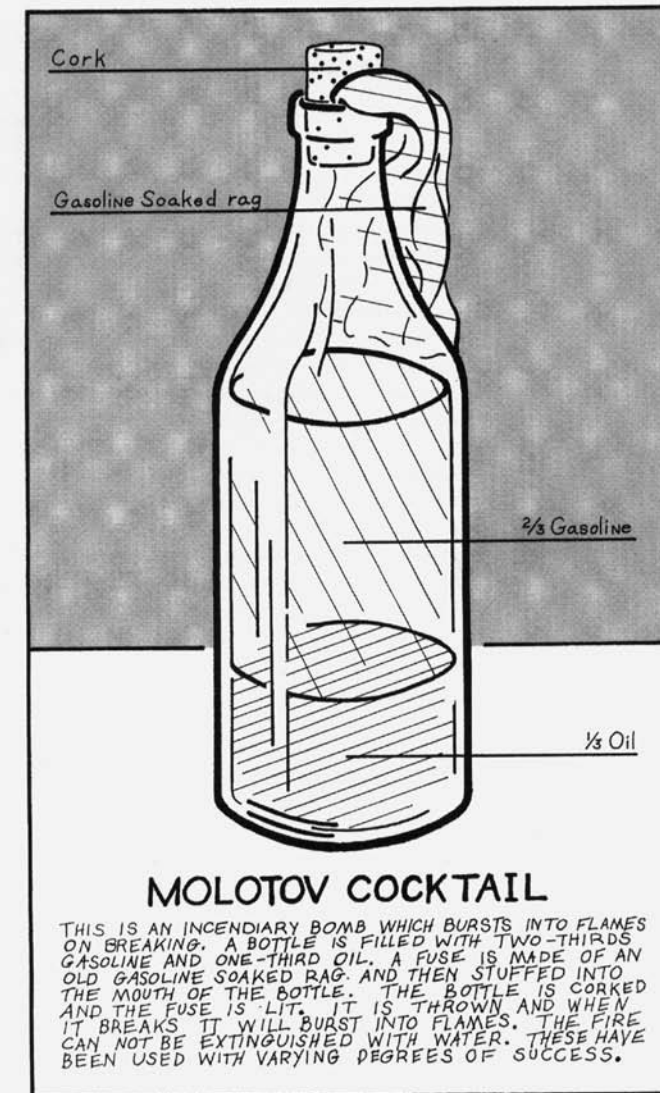
*Zion* – It's safe to assume there is a desire to combat the commercially driven, high-production impulse you just described. You mentioned that you, Helen, and Margaret, I believe, as well, began the project as graduate students, and not carrying the burden of professional obligations created a free space to produce *Documents*. But are these necessary conditions to create texts capable of making substantial contributions to discourse?

*Kwon* – I could only imagine a huge infrastructural change would create a situation in which

more substantial writing gets rewarded. It would mean a fundamental shift in our culture's values, which are not set up to provide the conditions for thoughtful work that could have deep and meaningful consequences. The cultural condition supports quicker, easier, and more superficial engagement. Certain conditions do indeed engender certain kinds of rigorous work to be done. These conditions aren't typically available to artists. Even the academy, which compared to the commercial, market-driven world, is only slightly better.

There are grants, such as the Andy Warhol Arts Writing Initiative, which is an exceptional program; it is a funding project with a deep understanding of the conditions that writers need: time, autonomy, and financial support to be able to devote enough mental space and energy to their projects.

One of *Documents*' editors, Margaret Sundell, is head of the Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation's writers' initiative, and I'm sure her empathy towards writers' practices came, in part, from her background at *Documents*. Margaret continues to be very engaged with writing and publications, but from a slightly different position now. I think it would not be wrong to say that the experience with making *Documents* has had a deep impact on the work that each of us currently do.



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**Gregory Green**

On June 23, 1993 in Potsdam, Germany, Uwe Boek was charged with disseminating subversive information and arrested under laws created by the German government in response to the wave of terrorism it experienced during the late 1970s. At the time, Boek was overseeing the production of a series of T-shirts accompanying the inaugural exhibition of the Kunstspeicher, the first contemporary art institution to open in the former Eastern Block. The exhibition, *Fontanelle Kunst in (x) Zwischenfallen*, which focused on social and political issues and included thirty-seven artists from around the globe, was intended as an aggressive introduction to contemporary political art.

One of the T-shirt designs being printed locally featured the art work *Molotov Cocktail* by Gregory Green. During production, an employee notified the police that the shop was printing instructions for manufacturing explosives. The police seized the shirts, the production film, and the original drawing, and arrested Uwe Boek. Three days later, they informed exhibition curator Christoph Tannert that an installation of simulated pipe and incendiary bombs, also by Gregory Green, would have to be removed if the opening was to take place that afternoon—despite the fact that police and explosive-sniffing dogs had inspected the installation only two days earlier, and had given the Kunstspeicher permission to include it in their show.

During the run of the exhibition, several letters were received by the local newspaper condemning one of the artist-designed billboards placed throughout the city of Potsdam as part of the exhibition. The work, again by Gregory Green, depicted a British-style book bomb with partial instructions for its fabrication. The local Bürgermeister (Mayor) defended the billboard as an example of the new freedoms to be enjoyed in the former East German city and encouraged the people of Potsdam to become more tolerant of that with which they were not familiar. However, shortly thereafter, the local police destroyed the billboard in the middle of the night. No explanation was given other than that it had been determined that the work in question was not Art. The following morning, the police instructed the Kunstspeicher to stop selling the exhibition catalogue, which included the *Molotov Cocktail* drawing. Christoph Tannert was arrested the following Monday.

Tannert and Boek were scheduled to appear in court in November 1993. The results of their appearance were not available at press time.

*Part Two: Helen Molesworth*

*Amy Zion* – When I spoke with Miwon Kwon, she mentioned that Rosalind Krauss had considered folding *October* magazine around the time that *Documents* began because she suspected that a new generation could continue their scholarly and political work. Miwon recalled that some people even joked that your journal should be named *November*. But *Documents* does not resemble *October*. Could you recount how *Documents* began and what its relationship to *October* was?

*Helen Molesworth* – I do not remember a moment when Rosalind was considering stopping *October*. The early conversations that I remember concerned our frustration with the dichotomy between *Artforum* and *October*, where *Artforum* seemed really market driven, and *October*, while we were reading it avidly, felt remote from a lot of what our own peers were beginning to do. Instead, we wanted a third term, and I think the third term was a very important idea for us at the time, too.

I was one of Rosalind's students at the City University of New York Graduate Center. I was going to graduate school part-time and was Ron Clark's secretary at the Whitney Independent Study Program, and there had been talk among a bunch of us around the Whitney ISP about starting a magazine. It was in Rosalind's class that I learned about Georges Bataille's *Documents*, which made us realize that we did not have to invent the third term, since it already existed. There was a model in place, and so we thought we could recover the name *Documents*, similar to how the *October* group had lifted *October* from Sergei Eisenstein.

Then Margaret Sundell and I went to see Rosalind in her loft to tell her we were starting a publication, basically to ask for her blessing; we did not want her in anyway to think that we were, in fact, trying to usurp her, or *October's* pride of place. I remember feeling like we were in a scene out of *The Godfather*—the wedding day scene, when everyone asks the Don for favours. She gave us her blessing, and told us something that has stayed with me for the rest of my career: "She who does the work gets her way."

I don't remember her considering stopping *October*. I would be flattered if this was the case, but we were never going to be *October*. We were not *Grey Room*, we did not come out of that mould. When *Grey Room* began I thought of it as another version of *October*. Even though I like *Grey Room*, its character formation—born of tenured professors—felt conventional to me. At *Documents* we had a certain ambivalence towards a purely academic life, which was influenced by the fact that two of the five editors, Chris Hoover and James Marcowitz, were not going to graduate school. We always had this other way of being, so to speak. We were really committed to artists, more so than either *October* or *Grey Room*. We wanted to publish artists' writing, we wanted to interview artists, we were interested in artists as equal practitioners of theory, which is something Miwon and I learned from Hal Foster at the Whitney program.

At the time, we were amongst the curatorial studies students who started to have an antagonistic relationship to the museum. Prior to that, there was a sense that the curatorial studies students had a sympathetic relationship to the museum and that they were professionalized subjects learning how to be curators. My year did not have that partly because of Hal; he really felt that exhibitions should not be thematic, nor should they be illustrative. Exhibitions should produce theory, not stage it. Curators should not approach artists and their practices to illustrate particular ideas, but that artwork produced a certain kind of knowledge and theory rather than merely reflecting it. That felt like a monumental shift. If that was true, it meant we were equal to artists—equal but different. That commitment to artists, in retrospect, is one of the things that differentiated *Documents* from *October* and ultimately from *Grey Room*.

*Zion* – Hal Foster's notion of producing theory appears to be enacted in *Documents*, for example, when you put Michael Taussig and Jimmie Durham into conversation.

*Molesworth* – Yes, exactly. We really thought that we were creating, again, this third zone where



people could meet around ideas that they were working on in common, in order to see what kind of conversation would emerge from crossing different apparatuses and ways of thinking.

*Zion* – Miwon used that same word, “crossing,” to describe how *Documents* paired specific voices so that they would engage with one another.

*Molesworth* – We definitely thought we were uniquely positioned to facilitate these kinds of conversations because of our commitment to artists, on the one hand, and our proximity to what we then called theory (without any quotes around it) on the other. We felt we could bring these two realms together. We were not interested in who was right and who was wrong, we were interested in this crossing over, that moment when things rub up against each other and that spark creates this other thing... a third term.

At the time I did not think there was a ready-made audience for *Documents*, but I believed that the magazine itself could engender a different kind of audience, a different kind of discursive space.

*Zion* – Developing that audience was really important, yet it’s sad that the discursive space you produced is relatively inaccessible, since *Documents* was published before it could have a significant Web presence, and, due to its cross-disciplinarity, did not fit into mainstream indexes such as Wilson Web and EBSCO. How did digital and Web formats encroach on the magazine, since this technology and publication emerged at the same time?

*Molesworth* – Honestly, I did not understand what was going to happen with the Internet. I remember thinking, “Who cares if you can look us up on the Internet, when you could just go to the library?” [laughter] The fact that *Documents* ran the risk of disappearing entirely because it was not digitized was a huge surprise to me.

*Zion* – Looking back at *Documents*, what are some of the most salient aspects of the project?

*Molesworth* – There are three things that we put forward as a program—although I am not sure we

necessarily could have articulated all of them as a program at the time—that are worth reiterating and insisting upon. I am referring to our relationship to interdisciplinarity, our relationship to what would become relational aesthetics, and our sense of the parity between artists and other cultural practitioners.

Our relationship to interdisciplinarity is best articulated in our first editorial statement in Issue 1. I still believe that interdisciplinarity only works when one occupies a disciplinary position. Or rather, I think that the vogue for interdisciplinarity, in the wake of what has happened in the twenty years since *Documents* began, has led to a lot of watered-down content, resulting from the lack of a disciplinary basis. For instance, this is one of my largest concerns about curatorial studies programs at the moment: that they have unhinged themselves from the discipline of art history. I do not think that curating is a discipline, I think it is a practice, and a practice without a discipline is a murky affair. *Documents* set out to model interdisciplinarity that was about different disciplines interacting with one another. But instead of saying it, we tried to do it. Sometimes I think that is why we “failed.” Had we stated explicitly that this was what we were doing, instead of just modeling it, perhaps it would have looked less naturalized; it would have registered as a mode of working, as a theoretical paradigm.

Very early on in the magazine’s history, Miwon and I went to one of the first big site-specific shows in Europe, held at the Unité d’Habitation in Firminy, France. We were really suspicious of the ideas that would become relational aesthetics in their early iteration, meaning, we were wary of the way people got helicoptered into places and landed for a week or a month to do “site-specific” work and then left. We were suspicious of certain kinds of social programs, or an art of “good intentions” and we published things to that effect, including an early conversation with Mark Dion in Issue 1/2 about his installations at American Fine Arts Company, New York, in which he classified plants while interacting with the public, as well as a really searching critique of Rirkrit Tiravanija’s early work, “Rirkrit Tiravanija’s Liability” by Janet Kraynak in Issue 13. There is also a whole

roundtable discussion in Issue 4/5 dedicated to site specificity.

At the time relational aesthetics had not yet been codified. When Nicolas Bourriaud first published *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) we knew we did not agree with his argument, but the text itself had not yet developed the traction it has now. It did not immediately sum up a zeitgeist; it accrued energy over several years and we resisted that energy over time. But again, no one ever wrote any prescriptive manifesto against relational aesthetics. And, this is because we were incredibly wary of the historical relationship between criticism and judgment.

*Zion* – Could you elaborate on this idea specifically?

*Molesworth* – We were very wary of establishing ourselves as critics who summed up the zeitgeist, and made declarations about what was bad or good, à la Michael Fried, à la Clement Greenberg, à la Rosalind Krauss... and, to a certain degree, à la Hal Foster. Although, for me Hal’s early work signalled the beginning of the way out; he would stage both arguments, and even though you could tell that he preferred one to the other, he would hold them in a dialectic. We were interested in whether or not we could write intelligently about what we did not like. Could we take it all seriously, could we be fair about it and not be exclusively partisan?

*Zion* – I imagine this is also why you didn’t just look specifically at fine art since the magazine also reviewed movies and television programs, and brought an equal amount of seriousness to each of these aspects of cultural production.

*Molesworth* – Yes.

*Zion* – This also relates back to that idea that you were equal to artists, you were not trying to position yourself in an authoritative role, as the person who peers down from a bench and judges people from above...

*Molesworth* – Right, we did not want to occupy the authoritative role of judging artists, and,

likewise we did not want the artists to trump us either! We did not believe that artistic intention determined the ultimate meaning of the work. We felt equal to artists. After all, this was a moment prior to our professionalization, when we were all living in SoHo or Williamsburg, and we all had two-bit jobs, and went to the same bars—artists were part of our circle of peers. Our professional lives profoundly altered who we were and what we did, and *Documents* happened at a point prior to that professionalization.

*Zion* – Can you track that professional evolution through the magazine? For instance, there is a significant difference between the earlier issues and those published later, especially after Issue 8. *Documents* moves from publishing larger issues with New York-based conversations and “surveys” to smaller issues with more single-authored exhibition and publication reviews from an expanded geographic scope.

*Molesworth* – Probably, although it has never occurred to me; I have never reviewed the magazine in that way. Curiously, when I am asked to give a lecture at a university or a college these days, I am routinely asked if I will meet with the art history students or the curatorial studies students in an informal group setting to talk about how I got to where I am professionally. I am always surprised by the request, partly because I am saddened by the burden of professionalization that young people currently operate under. I frequently talk about *Documents* in this context and I talk about how *Documents* was born at a bar from a group of friends. We wanted many things, but one of the things we wanted was an opportunity to keep hanging out and to hang out in a way that produced something, in the same way that people who form bands and people who make movies get together to make something. It was very intimate and it was really fun. We wanted to produce something that did not exist and we had this crazy sense (that I now realize is born of such privilege) that we could make it ourselves. We did not feel that we had to fit ourselves into a pre-existing matrix in order to have our intellectual and/or professional life, largely because when we made

*Documents* I do not think we imagined the professional lives we ended up having. At least I did not understand what was going to happen because we all had easy jobs at that time, like putting stamps on envelopes at a not-for-profit or working as an artist's assistant.

*Zion* – Do you think that the economic situation you describe is necessary in order to produce a project like *Documents*?

*Molesworth* – Well, the privilege I am referring to was not the privilege of idleness, because we were in school and we all had jobs. The privilege came from how much cheaper it was to live then, and how easy it was to get a job, combined with the idea that we thought we could make it ourselves if we wanted to. It was the privilege of living in a world that wasn't as tightly circumscribed in terms of the professionalization of the art world qua art world. The art world was still a place that was (in New York anyway) deeply immersed in the neighbourhood fabric of SoHo. That neighbourhood was changing into a place for fancy sofa purveyors and cool clothing stores, but it was still a neighbourhood. It was still where artists lived and worked, where people shopped and went to the post office. This seems so naive now, but I feel, in retrospect, those things had a huge impact on what we thought was possible. So too I feel like that sense of doing it yourself—that freedom—came from a mix of zine culture, punk, and ACT UP.

*Zion* – *Documents* began in 1992 and ended in 2004, so it spans a very significant period between the end of the Cold War and 9/11, when Internet use mainstreams, “identity politics” emerges, and the advent of new technologies such as digital printing revolutionize independent publishing. At the same time, publishing's accessibility arguably impacts writing. Could you discuss the role of developmental editing and the view that an editor is an unwanted authority figure over the writer? Do you believe that to have a democratic free space, you do not edit?

*Molesworth* – I learned how to write from being edited by Sheila Schwartz, who was the editor at

the Whitney Museum (and also Leo Steinberg's editor), and from Hal Foster, who had been an editor for years at *Art In America*. And, again, to speak to a pre-Internet or pre-digital age, editing back then meant that you handed in a twelve-point, courier, double-spaced, printed manuscript. Then you received—in red pencil or red pen depending on the confidence of the editor (Sheila Schwartz: red pencil, Hal Foster: red pen)—edited copy with reader's marks. They queried my word choices, rejigged my sentences. . . . It was extraordinary and I felt like I was in the hands of people who had a great skill, a skill I wanted. I wanted two skills: the skill of being a great writer *and* the skill of being a great editor. Editing seemed like magic to me, it meant being able to help someone say what they want to say in the best way they can say it. It was a profoundly empathetic relationship to a text. Being an editor meant not reading the text as a critic, but reading the text as if you were in some avatar-like way inhabiting it. That felt like an extraordinary thing to have done to oneself, and to also be able to do for others.

I read most art writing on the Web with one eye closed. It makes me cringe. I feel like I am being assaulted because most of it is so terribly written. It makes me feel old and cranky and curmudgeonly and ungenerous. I long for the days when I—and everyone else—was well edited.

*Zion* – I think editors get reduced to merely compiling or commissioning texts instead of forming or shaping them along with their writers. I had a conversation recently with someone who works at an art magazine in New York and they didn't seem to understand the difference between editing and copyediting. How is this possible and why has good editing become so rare?

*Molesworth* – I think email produced a totally different form of writing; it is a totally instrumentalized form of writing. When I first started using email the convention was that you wrote in all lowercase and that was okay because it was email. Now, so much happens through email (or even worse, texting), and the lack of any kind of formality around email discourse has really bottomed

out people's ability to write—my own included. I do not craft beautiful emails. How can you if you write two hundred per day?

*Zion* – Looking back over the project, what do you think the greatest legacy of *Documents* might be?

*Molesworth* – I have not thought about the legacy of *Documents*. For me, there are two moments of *Documents*: there is the part I was involved with and the part I was not involved with. Not being involved in *Documents* was painful for me and as a result I haven't really thought about it.

*Zion* – Can you talk about that shift between those two moments, or the circumstances that surrounded that shift?

*Molesworth* – When I became a full-time curator at the Baltimore Museum of Art I was thrust into a completely different form of professionalized life, and it was very hard for me to work on the magazine. At the end of my first year at the museum Miwon asked me to not be involved in the magazine anymore. She wanted to be the sole editor from Los Angeles. Even though I understood why she felt the way she did, it was very painful for me.

*Zion* – Miwon said she made a “unilateral decision” to end the magazine, without consulting the other editors, which caused problems as well.

*Molesworth* – Yes, she made two unilateral decisions: the first was to be the sole editor around 2001 and the second was to end the magazine without consulting the former editors.

I was not upset by her decision to end the magazine. Since she had chosen to be its only editor, she was free, at that point, to end it. I was upset, however, by the fact that I learned of her decision through a mutual friend.

At that point I let her know that I very much wanted to be a part of the final issue, to which she graciously consented. But, despite her inclusion of my short essay on Eva Hesse, for me, the damage of the “unilateral” was done, and my friendship with Miwon ended.

When you approached me about discussing *Documents*, I wrote to Miwon to say that the inevitable has occurred—people younger than us have discovered *Documents* and want to do something about it. I was surprised by how soon it had happened, only ten years. I was not prepared for that. It reminded me of when *Documents* “recovered” Mierle Laderman Ukeles, which was a gesture partly bound up in our resistance to what we thought was an amnesia about a lot of feminist practices that predated relational aesthetics.

We threw a launch party for Issue 10, which included the work of Ukeles, who was at that time the artist-in-residence for the sanitation department of the City of New York. When we were leaving the party, on the way down in the elevator, Ukeles turned to her husband and said, “I have been recycled.” I remember Miwon and I thought that was the perfect line, and it was exactly what we believed in. When I see Ukeles's work referred to as often as it is now, I feel like *Documents* played a pretty big role in its discursive recycling.

I have a question for you: What is it about *Documents* that you and your peers at *Fillip* are interested in? What is it that you want or need from it?

*Zion* – There are many reasons we pursued this project. For me, to look at *Documents* and revisit its topics while also seeing them recycled again and again in contemporary art publishing without any reference to *Documents* is depressing, especially since I work on a publication.

*Molesworth* – I, too, have seen those topics recycled again and again with no reference to *Documents*, so I figured we did not have a legacy. You can only see yourself not footnoted so many times. . . .

*Zion* – I guess it is about a desire to not let this history die. It is an attempt to reconnect *Documents* to larger chains of discussion in the art world—and perhaps beyond it. How you addressed the AIDS crisis with rigour and care, for instance, is something really important to document and reflect back on.

*Molesworth* – We were all shaped by the AIDS crisis in ways I did not understand at the time. It's only possible to see, in retrospect, the way in which my intellectual and political formation is completely shaped by that period—my political formation is unthinkable without the AIDS crisis and the attendant response on the part of ACT UP.

*Zion* – And, the AIDS crisis also had a relationship to small publishing, since alternative media played a significant role in addressing the apathy towards funding medical research and combating draconian political policies. Can you say more about the relationship between a publication's scale and its impact?

*Molesworth* – At the time, I believed in two seemingly contradictory things. On the one hand, I believed you had to work on the canon, because the canon was where the value was, and if you wanted to make an inroad you had to take on the “big guys.” So, I wrote a dissertation on Duchamp. I thought to really make change was to go to where the value was and interrupt the flow of value through that object. But then, the other way you worked was always and forever in the minor key. The artist Moyra Davey made me realize the importance of always looking at the small things and working in the margins—the importance of never imagining yourself at the centre. And when you found that you had been imagining yourself at the centre, ipso facto or unconsciously, your job was to get the fuck up and walk to the margin immediately, because the centre position is unfeminist, untenable, unradical, and “un-avant-garde.”

If one of the aims of the avant-garde was to broker a deal between art and life, one had to pay absolutely as much attention to life as to art. So, small magazines felt like part of this brokering. One could only address issues such as the AIDS crisis from a place of modesty. It never would have occurred to us, for instance, to print on glossy paper. We never even considered it because modesty was a value that the magazine held dear without necessarily even articulating it. We all had, to varying degrees, different experiences with punk, and we knew that a band like Flipper or the Germs, bands

that had no radio play, no traction, had changed everything. On the one hand, there is modesty and, on the other hand, there is the vanity of thinking that the smaller it is the more effective it is, the more worm-like it can be in a system.

When we made *Documents* we were also aware of the history of little magazines. We were really interested in *Wedge*, which was a magazine for aesthetic inquiry, made by Brian Wallis and Phil Mariani, starting in 1982, and we were interested in *Heresies*. . . .<sup>1</sup> We had all these other little publications in the back of our minds—other than this gorilla-like pairing of *Artforum* and *October*—we knew that history of independent and small press publishing and we wanted to be a part of it.

*Zion* – Do you think there are publications today that have taken on the project that *Documents* began?

*Molesworth* – I read things and I think that they are smart, and I think that there are great writers out there, but to my knowledge there is nothing like *Documents*.

*Zion* – Do you see *Documents'* crossing of voices, interdisciplinarity, and inclusion of unanticipated voices as an opposition to art magazines oriented more toward fashion or advertorial goals? Are there projects fulfilling that “third term” you mentioned earlier? Can you talk more about the “third term”?

*Molesworth* – It came out of reading Rosalind Krauss, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, and Homi Bhabba during the rise of queer theory and postcolonial studies, which destabilized this hitherto two-sided argument. When I was twenty-one and in the Whitney program, Hal told me that any argument with only two sides is not worth having. That really changed how I thought, because previously I thought there were right and wrong ideas or good and bad artists. The idea that any argument worth having had to have more than two sides was exciting—to me it felt like an epistemological break. It felt like postmodernism, not modernism.

*Zion* – Speaking of multisided structures, I should note that the multiple interviews regarding *Documents* were insisted upon by *Documents'* editors, first and foremost, rather than *Fillip's*, although we are extremely pleased by and support such insistence. In addition to interviews with you, Miwon, and Margaret Sundell, we are also reprinting an excerpt from Issue 4/5, from the survey on “Terror and Terrorism.” Could you provide some background on how this survey developed?

*Molesworth* – At that time, I was involved with the filmmaker Roddy Bogawa, who came out of a southern California punk scene. He was very interested in the possibility that the only way “to change the system” was through terrorism and cyberterrorism. He felt that there was no place you could stand “outside” of capitalism to critique the system. For him, terrorism was the last “viable” option to dismantle the military-industrial complex and its relationship to capitalism and patriarchy. At the time of the first attack on the World Trade Center, Miwon's brother, who was living in her apartment in Battery Park (she was living with me in Ithaca, New York), and Roddy, who was living in the West Village, were both very agitated by the attack. I have a feeling that is partly where that issue must have come from; it felt physically and psychologically close to us.

#### About the Authors

Miwon Kwon is faculty at UCLA where she teaches contemporary art history (post-1945). She was a founding co-editor and publisher of *Documents*, and serves on the advisory board of *October* magazine. She is the author of *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (MIT Press, 2002), as well as lengthy essays on the work of many contemporary artists.

Helen Molesworth is the Barbara Lee Chief Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) Boston, where she has organized one-person exhibitions and group exhibitions such as *This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s*. She is the author of numerous catalogue essays and her writing has appeared in publications such as *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, *Documents*, and *October*.

Amy Zion is Associate Editor at *Fillip*.

Notes begin on page 153.

perspective and history, see Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

33. The artist wrote: “to describe the Latin American situation with prevision, the closest thing would probably be one of those enormous rhizomic configurations that can go underground and span several (small) countries, popping up everywhere as what we visually identify as mushrooms. Each mushroom is seen as a single fruiting body, or whatever mushrooms are, but it is just one of many tips sprung from one entity that acts as fertile ground and a connecting web for all of them. There is no cause-effect link between the mushrooms; still, they are equal signs of the same thing.” Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 9.

#### Pages 94–102

James Langdon  
*A Eulogy for the Cutaway*

1. Inomoto was described thus in *Road & Track* magazine, October 1997.
2. Kevin Hulse, “The Automotive Artwork of Yoshihiro Inomoto,” *Automotive Illustration*, 2011, <http://fillip.ca/8poi>.
3. The *Superman* strip was syndicated, appearing in many US national newspapers.

#### Pages 104–23

Miwon Kwon and Helen Molesworth  
*Documents Magazine, 1992–2004*

1. *Heresies* was a feminist publication on art and politics, which produced twenty-seven issues between 1977 and 1993. All issues are available as PDFs, archived alongside other feminist projects at <http://fillip.ca/6np4>.