





'Loose Associations' lecture (2002–ongoing). It's a slide talk which skips freely from 'desire lines' used in urban planning through 'trauma lines' painted on hospital floors to the Barbican building in London, Gander's auntie Deva, the design of institutional meeting rooms, fake Robin Day chairs, the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection of fakes, the famous photograph of Christine Keeler astride an Arne Jacobsen chair, Homer Simpson imitating Keeler's pose, the film made to accompany Bob Dylan's song 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' on its release in 1965, the work of Gillian Wear- ing, the NatWest Tower in London, aerial photos, blue heritage plaques, Sherlock Holmes, Inspector Morse, Morse code and so on. There is some art for which you need to know a whole back-story in order to understand it. Gander recognizes that some back-stories need art in order to understand them.

This made me think about the centrality of language in his work. Not just the spoken or written word, but body language, film language, design language, the languages of dress, work, travel, collaboration, making, thinking and talking about art. Gander is interested in how language conceals as much as it reveals. In an interview between the artist and Stuart Bailey, published in their collaborative book on Gander's work *Appendix* (2003), Bailey observes that when Gander commissioned the designer John Morgan to create a poster for the artist's lecture 'On Camouflage' in 2001, Gander and Morgan 'both independently spelt "camouflage" wrong throughout the project, so the word was camouflaged too'.<sup>2</sup> (The misspelling of the word in the transcript and its correct usage everywhere else in the interview makes the printed quote doubly perplexing. Or should that be 'camouflaged'?) Might it be interesting to begin this article by asking how, if Gander were to write it, he might use language as camouflage?

Alter egos and fictional characters populate Gander's work – David Lange, Abbé Faria, Marie Aurory, Spencer Anthony – a family of surrogates allowing him to avoid the issue of having a stylistic signature. Maybe the writer's name at the top of the article could be a pseudonym? Or what if the piece were delegated to a jobbing writer? Wasn't Gander's video *Ghostwriter Subtext (Notes on Speaking and Listening)* (2006), in which a professional ghostwriter interviews Hans Ulrich Obrist and Rem Koolhaas after their 24-hour interview marathon at London's Serpentine Gallery, all about scrambling critical authority?

Inasmuch as the article details objects and art works that, presumably, are not in the same room as the one in which you are reading, could Gander use the article as part of another work? After all, a monographic essay spins yarns that are not necessarily immediately verifiable. For example, it could be an inventory of works whose existence is dependent on their description in the text. And who is to say what the role of the accompanying images is? Gander's work is littered with clues, puzzles and mysteries inviting further investigation. Are these illustrations simply straightforward documentation or full of sneaky sub-plots and visual MacGuffins?

With the exception of this sentence, does the article contain the word 'mitim' – a palindromic word invented by Gander and designed to be inserted, un-commented on, into newspapers, magazines, crosswords or everyday speech, and meaning 'a mythical word newly introduced into history as if it had always been there'?

It occurred to me that the taxonomic list of questions could lend a Ganderesque quality to my introduction: nods to classic Conceptualism in the form of lists, diagrams, indexes and other frameworks for information crop up time and again in his work. Gander folds the authority of knowledge systems in on themselves, asking his audience to think about how, in the slippage between language, its presentation and that which it signifies, there lies an issue of trust – a subject central to 'Heralded as the New Black'. In *Your Life in Four Acts*



*Alchemy box # 3*  
(She spoke in images like some new language)  
2008  
120x30x30 cm  
A corner wall mounted box made to the same dimensions of the work *Untitled - Blue and Yellow Painted Aluminium* 30 cm depth x 120cm height x 30cm width by Donald Judd from 1989, containing a series of objects from the collection of Ryan Gander. Made from one-way mirrored glass, meaning the spectator can't see in but the objects can see out and a rub down transfer text disclosing a description of the objects within.

**Although Ryan Gander employs the poker-faced formalism of Conceptual art, he uses it as a pane of precision-cut glass beneath which to press wildly allusive subject matter.**

– *Forward* (2008) ordinary tourist maps are reworked and reproduced to include streets long since demolished. The work short-circuits the trust we need in maps in order for them to function but also serves as a record of how cities change. In making each map (of which there are so far five: London, Sheffield, Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Birmingham) Gander has noticed how many streets have disappeared beneath civic developments such as the South Bank Centre in London or the Bullring shopping complex in Birmingham, and how a city such as Amsterdam barely changes at all while Rotterdam is hardly recognizable from its older self. *Oxidized Silver on Paper* (2008) is a photographic contact sheet that, according to the accompanying wall caption, depicts 'fifteen frames of super black paint developed by the National Physical Laboratory, Teddington, Britain'. However, as the title suggests, a contact sheet is just silver oxide on paper, and shows absolute black to be mere shades of grey. We have to believe Gander's words, not his camera.

A similar game of trust is played in his series of 'Alchemy boxes' (2007–ongoing). *Alchemy box # 3* (She

**Right:**

*A sheet of paper on which I was about to draw, as it slipped from my table and fell to the floor*

2008

Dimensions variable

One hundred 15 cm crystal balls dispersed around the floor of the gallery spaces, in which there is a laser etched suspended image of a sheet of blank paper, on which I was about to draw, as it slipped from my table and fell to the floor.

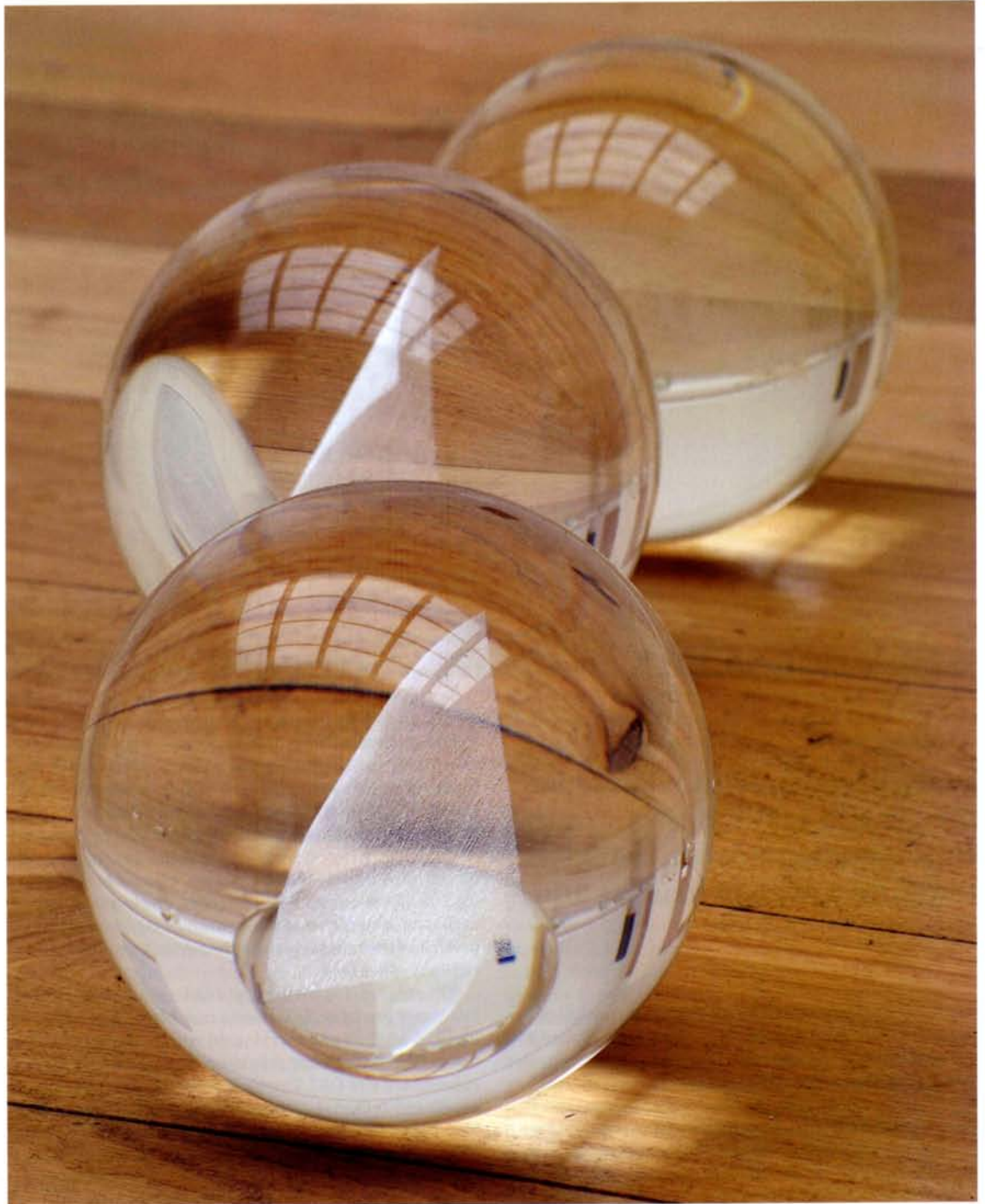
**Below:**

*Didactease Necklace*

2006

Dimensions variable

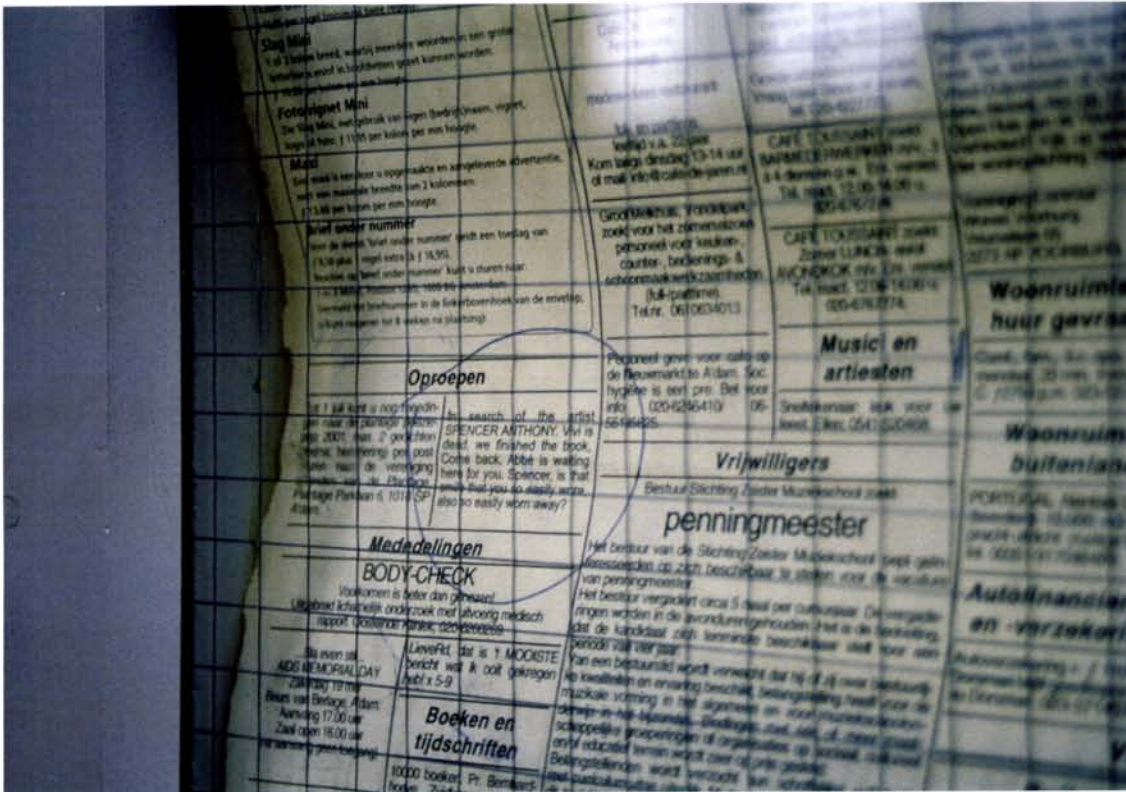
A Tiffany's sterling silver coin edge circular pendant and chain, engraved with a Didactease emblem and a small asterism. Placed as if discarded on the floor of the gallery or worn by the gallerist / incogitator. The Didactease emblem uses mathematical symbols to produce the sentence 'There exists only one definition for everything, everywhere at any one time'. The work is in two parts, being accompanied by the poster *Didactease Expanded*, 2006 which is to be hung in the gallery with normal straight steel pins.



*spoke in images like some new language*) (2008) is a wall-mounted unit constructed from one-way mirrored glass, to the same dimensions as Donald Judd's sculpture *Untitled - Blue and Yellow Painted Aluminium* (1989). (Gander has suggested that he chose the Judd because he thought it was so archetypically 'modern'-looking that he could almost imagine it being found in an illustrated children's storybook about art.<sup>3</sup>) Nearby, a text on the wall lists a large assortment of items that are supposedly inside the box: they include a book on body language, stolen from Shoreditch library, DVD sleeves for François Truffaut's film *Day for Night* (1973) and its original French-titled version *La Nuit américaine*, and a tube of 'Mystic Smoke from Finger Tips', a product that produces clouds of smoke at the click of a finger - more props for concealment. Recently Gander has begun to use the plinths that support other artists' work for his 'Alchemy boxes'. *Relic For A Living Man* (2008), exhibited in the Barbican Art Gallery's show 'Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art', uses the base of a Chris Burden vitrine to house its contents. Gander not only colonizes another artist's territory physically but invades it in other senses too; like

squatting tenants, his objects inhabit a physical space demarcated as having special market value, an outpost of land owned by a collector or commercial gallery. In a sense, the 'Alchemy boxes' are also about artistic intent and interpretation. The gesture of loading an object with unseen items says: 'Here is an object. I say it means these ten or 15 things. You may not be able to perceive them, but believe me, they're there.' Perhaps Gander's 'Alchemy boxes' suggest that the value of art exists only to be talked about. As Brian Eno once proposed in a conversation about whether value is intrinsic or merely conferred: 'Saying that cultural objects have value is like saying that telephones have conversations.'<sup>4</sup>

I wasn't entirely unhappy with Introduction Version Five, for it opened up a number of possible paths of thought. I nonetheless set it aside, since one of those paths led to the issue of appropriation, authorship and ownership, and thus a possible sixth option: writing about Gander using only examples of art works he has co-opted himself. I could have discussed *Enough To Start Over* (2006), for which Gander used a piece by Jonathan Monk, an artist whose work is built around having a



*Spencer, Forget About Good (detail)*  
2001  
Dimensions variable  
Plasterboard and timber partitioning walls were used to construct a white tiled and carpeted corridor and internal room. Intensely lit with white light, the inaccessible spaces were viewable through one of two landscape reinforced glass windows. The other window was covered by newspaper, in which an advert was placed under the 'calls for' column.

## Body, design and film language are central to Gander's thinking; the language of dress, work, play and travel; of making and thinking about art.

magpie eye for art history. Monk's original consists of a passport photograph of himself as a teenager, pinned to the wall through the eyes with teardrop earrings. Gander bought the piece, removed the earrings and sent them to his mother. *Enough To Start Over* exists as a passport photograph of the artist's mother wearing the earrings, rewiring Monk's biography into Gander's own. Then in 'Heralded as the New Black' there is a work entitled *She walked ahead, leading him through a blizzard of characters* (2008), which appears to be an unpainted wall. The description of the work tells us it is a 'Newly plastered wall under which is a printed 2000 word text commissioned from a ghostwriter by the artist Mario Garcia Torres and paid for by Ryan Gander.' *I took my eyes off your hands too soon* (2007) features a pair of photographs. To the left is *Kiev MC Arsat PCS 4.5/55 mm Shift Lens, Focal Length: 55mm, Aperture scale: 4.5 to 22, Focusing Scale: 0.3 m (0.98 ft) to infinity, Minimum Focusing distance: 1.2 feet (0.5 meters), Field of view: 69 degrees (with shift) 84 degrees (with shift), Number of Elements: Nine elements in seven groups, Filter size: 72 mm, Weight: 2 lbs, Serial Number 0051, Douglas M. Parker Studio, Glendale, California, January 27, 2007* (2007), by the US artist Christopher Williams. To the right is a photograph taken by Gander of Williams' print, compacting layers of meaning onto the already loaded original. Balanced precariously high above a doorway is *The Learning Tree (When acorns fall into the wrong hands)* (2008), a 'fabricated Albers tea glass containing oil and a fabricated Michael Craig-Martin shelf from the work *The Oak Tree, 1973*': canonical design and Conceptual art repurposed as slapstick gag. As far as the introduction to my article went, all this could have provided rich pickings. In buying a Williams or Monk – that is, making

a clear economic transaction in order to own the works, rather than, say, using an existent reproduced image of them – does this change the rules of the appropriation game? The items are in one sense Gander's property, and thus it's up to him how he uses or abuses them. However, as Gander is an artist whose work seems so eager to pull others into its circle of conversation, I took *The Learning Tree* ... as a warning that focusing on objects to the exclusion of the 'human interest' angle could result in a pratfall of the critic's own. So the seventh version swung right the other way.

'Oh my God: the invigilator! I can see a bloodstain, just above her knee. Is it from a nosebleed? Doesn't look like it. And she's still carrying on with her job! What a trooper. Well that's her pristine white Adidas tracksuit ruined. Are you OK? There's blood on your ... no, hang on, it's red ... thread ... embroidered ... in the shape of a bloodstain. Oh. And I suppose it's meant to be there, is it?' So my dramatization might have needed a little toning down, but this version addressed what the viewer's engagement might mean in today's slightly 'post-relational' art moment. Even without the bloodstain, the sight of gallery attendants clad head to toe in white tracksuits is going to put a spin on Gander's otherwise modest-looking work. An immediate reading of these modified track suits, *This Consequence* (2005), which are worn by gallery invigilators for 'Heralded as the New Black', is that they are like a clue or vital piece evidence discovered in a detective story. Pushing one's reading of the embroidered 'bloodstain' – oxymoronic in its deliberate articulation of chance or accident – leads to the darker question of how things we encounter in daily life can become normalized by familiarity or mass-manufacture. *This Consequence* is a projection of what could happen if a range of sportswear tailored with scars of violence subsequently became fashionable, ubiquitous and ultimately banal. (The work might take on an extra charge when exhibited at South London Gallery in Peckham, an area of London troubled by knife and gun crime.) Accessorizing *This Consequence* is the *Didactease Necklace* (2006), a silver Tiffany pendant also worn by one of the gallery invigilators, and which sports the 'Didactease logo': a graphically strong but scientifically shaggy assemblage of mathematical symbols which, when arranged in the correct order, should read: 'There is only one definition for everything, everywhere,

**Right:**  
*Enough To Start Over*  
 2006  
 5x4 cm  
 A passport photograph of the artist's mother wearing the earrings featured in the original work *To Tears* by Jonathan Monk, 2006, from the Collection of Ryan Gander. Pinned to the wall.

**Below:**  
*Your Life in Four Acts - Forward*  
 (detail)  
 2008  
 40x55 cm  
 A reconstructed map of Birmingham City Centre - usually made freely available by the tourist information office - reproduced here to include a number of streets existing pre-1911. Most of which mark locations where town planners have replaced the city's organic structure, with a formulaic interpretation of 'civic economy'. The maps are presented in a cardboard box near to a door of the gallery outside the exhibition space, and are available for the audience to take away.



at any one time.' It was tacky name chains that inspired Gander to make the necklace: the faint ludicrousness of wearing your name - your definition - around your neck. The pseudo-profundity of the 'Didactease' statement (even its name punctures its authority) ill fits the logical language in which it is constructed, emphasizing its pidgin-science character. Mathematicians have told Gander that his arrangement of symbols doesn't actually form the intended statement.

I became anxious that Introduction Version Seven was focusing too much on audience experience. But conditions of spectatorship are fundamental to Gander's interest in the relationship between creativity and belief. He is currently developing an animated film entitled *As It Presents Itself*, which will feature six Wallace and Gromit-style claymation characters based on curator Matthew Higgs, the artist's mother, Frances Gander, the comedian Spike Milligan, pioneers of cinema Auguste and Louis Lumière, and Morph - originally a claymation figure from the 1980s' British children's television art series *Take Hart*. (Another touchstone for Gander's work are the British television programmes of his childhood.) *As It Presents Itself* will be set in a theatre, where each character plays Scott Joplin's ragtime favourite 'The Entertainer' (1902) on the piano as though for an audition. A narrator's voice will ask questions such as 'Am I the

spectator? Or is that you? Who are the characters? Why have they all been brought together like this?' Here was another route into Gander's work: split the reading of it like a beam of light through a prism and see how it plays across a whole spectrum of viewpoints.

Despite their heavy ekphrasis, what were now eight alternative openings together seemed to refract Gander's work as though through a window made of irregular but tessellating glass shards. I thought of *A sheet of paper on which I was about to draw, as it slipped from my table and fell to the floor* (2008), which comprises 100 crystal balls, laser-etched to look as though a floating, blank piece of paper has been trapped in each one. Scattered throughout 'Heralded as the New Black', the spheres explicitly refer to closure of meaning and, in having to be tiptoed around in order to see the other works, serve as a constant reminder that there's never 'one definition for everything, anywhere, at any one time'. This is echoed in the appearance of Gander's fictional character David Lange in the video *Man on a Bridge (A Study of David Lange)* (2008). The scenario is simple: as a man crosses a bridge something just outside the camera frame catches his eye. He walks to the bridge parapet to peer over and, presumably, get a closer look. The film cuts. The action repeats. Gander asked the actor Roger Lloyd-Pack to play the part of Lange. Lloyd-Pack - a stalwart British actor famous for his hangdog expression as the character Trigger in the BBC television comedy series *Only Fools and Horses* (1981-2003) and for playing the role of Sherlock Holmes more times than anyone else - performs the action an astonishing 50 times, each with a slight variation of body language. Each of these interpretations could also be read as an out-take from the cutting-room floor, suggesting that somewhere there is a perfect take - or that perhaps there is no such thing as a 'right' version. Both *Man on a Bridge* and *A sheet of paper ...* may seem reliant on symbolism - the potential of a blank piece of paper, the bridge as a transition or link - but they essentially function on a structural level, in that their variation or multiplicity is itself an ode to possibility.

This seemed like a good place to begin.

Dan Fox is associate editor of *frieze*.

- 1 Brian Sholis, 'The Storyteller', to be published in the catalogue *Heralded as the New Black*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 2008
- 2 Ryan Gander and Stuart Bailey, *Appendix*, Artimo, Amsterdam, 2003, p. 126
- 3 Conversation with the author, April 2008
- 4 Brian Eno, *A Year with Swollen Appendices*, Faber and Faber, London, 1996, p. 81

