

SIEMON ALLEN
RETROSPECTIVES
2007

ARTIST AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE FLAT GALLERY IN DURBAN. ALLEN HAS EXHIBITED WIDELY AND IS CURRENTLY BUILDING AN ARCHIVE OF A HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA 'OUTSIDE OF ITSELF' THROUGH THE ORGANISATION FLAT INTERNATIONAL.

In these attempts to intellectualize it we finally came to the decision that the irrationality of this movement was its essential factor. We didn't know exactly against whom we should turn. But it was very important for us to find a target for our resentment. Now I believe that all creative people have a great resentment either against the country that they live in or against the civilization [or] the period of history that they live in. And we had this great hostility which we had turned first against the war and [then] against the imperial regime. But finally in Switzerland this kind of extreme hostility died down in a more comfortable atmosphere. We attacked the good Swiss people without any real justification. We attacked everyone in literature but still I was very much dissatisfied with it. So finally we generalized in such a way that we attacked conventionalism. The bourgeois was one of our main targets. But the bourgeois has been attacked so often that this couldn't satisfy me either. So I found out what is the bourgeois... and I made the sad discovery that we were all bourgeois.¹

Richard Huelsenbeck, in a 1959 interview, reflecting on his experiences with the Cabaret Voltaire and Dada. Huelsenbeck co-founded the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 with Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco and Hans Arp.

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In the past ten years so much has been buried as if it never happened. Visual art does not progress by having a good memory. And New York is the locus of some radical forgetting. You can reinvent the past, suitably disguised, if no one remembers it. Thus is originality, that patented fetish of the self, defined. What has been buried? One of the art community's conceivable noble efforts: the concerted move of a generation to question, through a matrix of styles, ideas, and quasi-movements, the context of its activity. Art used to be made for illusion; now it is made from illusions. In the sixties and seventies the attempt to dispense with illusions was dangerous and could not be tolerated for long. So the art industry has since devalued the effort. Illusions are back, contradictions tolerated, the art world's in its place and all's well with that world.²

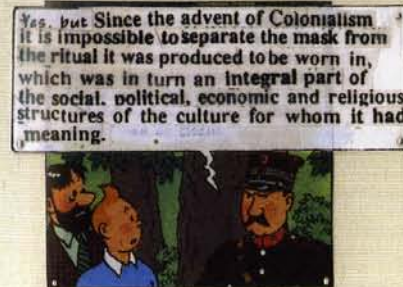
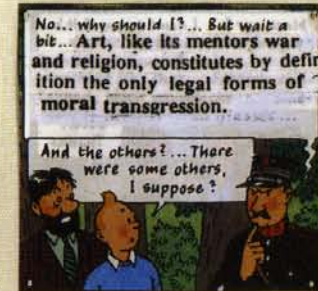
Brian O'Doherty, New York City, 1986. From the 'Afterword' for the Expanded Edition of *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. In this final and brief afterword, included only

in later editions of the book, O'Doherty reflects on the shifts in the visual arts during the period since the publication of his seminal essays on context and the exhibition space originally published in *Art Forum* in 1976.

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Siemon Allen, *Pictures and Words* (pen, paper, cut-up comics & text, correction fluid, cloth), 1998.

This image is an excerpted detail from the installation *Pictures and Words* which was exhibited as part of *Vita Art '98* at the Sandton Civic Gallery in Johannesburg. This body of work consisted of a series of détourned comics, newspapers and theory books presented in a self-contained room-like environment.



¹ Richard Huelsenbeck, 'Inventing Dada', interview, 1959. From the audio CD: *Futurism and Dada Reviewed*. Produced by James Neiss (Brussels: SUB ROSA, 1988).

² Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space - Expanded Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 109.