

Dexter Sinister, **At 1:1 Scale**.*

Transcript of the projection **an erA** (25:05), 2015

for an exhibition at the KUB Arena of the Kunsthaus Bregenz

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A R E N A

I'll be your interface.* Please look and listen carefully to what I say. I was scripted by Dexter Sinister, the working name of Stuart Bailey and David Reinfurt. Dexter Sinister work somewhere between design, editing, publishing and distribution. And I am no exception.

You're standing in the A R E N A of the Kunsthaus Bregenz. Look North. I am the moving glyph on the concrete wall. To the West is a window facing Lake Constance, which joins Austria, Switzerland, and Germany. To the East, is another concrete wall. And over your shoulder, to the South, is the reception desk. Here you can buy tickets for the main exhibitions upstairs. For the past five years, there've also been a series of exhibitions and events in this lobby space. I'm going to tell you about all of these. But first, let me introduce myself.

I was born in 2011, in a piece of writing by Angie Keefer, called **An Octopus in Plan View**. That essay wonders what it might mean to communicate without language. My character is drawn from a shape-shifting typeface, which is called **Meta-The-Difference-Between-The-2-Font-4-D**, also programmed by Dexter Sinister. My voice comes from Scotland, synthesized from the speech of Isla Leaver-Yap, then digitized by Cereproc Ltd. And all of this was overseen by James Langdon.

I am an empty sign, ready for use. So let's begin.

It is three months ago. You are still facing North. You're no longer staring at a speaking asterisk, but instead into a large square mirror on a 45 degree angle. You've already seen an identical mirror in the middle of the East wall. But careful! There's a third one on the floor — which as it happens, is no longer carpeted, but has reverted to its original terrazzo. Staring down into this third mirror, you discover a fourth reflected back from the ceiling. The infinite space made by these mirrors was installed by a couple of architects, whose work could be called *critical mannerism*.

It is six months ago, and now the A R E N A is completely empty — physically speaking, at least. However, the space is absolutely full of sound, because this season's artist is using it as an audio workshop. Users like you are invited to contribute and determine the form of the project. Go to the ticket counter and speak into the microphone: your message will be archived by the software, and then randomly fed back into the space. [Audio excerpt] Now transport yourself back outside, the way you came in, and note a number of large out-of-place rocks. They came from the

Swiss mountains. Listen closely. [Audio excerpt] Coming from them are a number of strange sounds: Singing Stones. A related project by the same artist from two years ago is called **If you leave, walk out backwards, so I'll think that you are walking in.**

It is nine months ago. You're still on the outside. Remember that the A R E N A is a possibility space, not just one for displaying work. For one week only, it has moved out of the building and onto Karl Tizian Platz in front. This time, the square has been converted into an open air cinema to host a summer festival of films and performances on the common theme of **Becoming and Being**. The programme includes, for example, **Wild Combination**, a film that tells the story of the avant-garde musician Arthur Russell. A typical piece of Russell's music involves minimal cello on top of a thumping disco beat, which tends to send a talking asterisk like me a bit crazy. Here's a sample. [Audio excerpt]

It is now about a year ago. Back inside the A R E N A , you stand in the centre. The curtains are drawn, so it's dark. It's a lot like when you started listening to me, only this time you're covered by multi-coloured light. The lights are shining directly down from the ceiling. You're in the middle of an audio-visual piece. It's called **Howel Bowel Owl**. It's a drama for radio, made under the influence of some poems by the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke, in which words are combined not according to common sense, but because they sound similar to each other. Meanwhile, the theatrical light show cycles through sympathetic combinations of greens, reds, pinks, blues, and yellows, designed to complement the audio play. This is the sort of thing you should be hearing. [Audio excerpt]

It is one year and three months ago: springtime once more. Look North again. Directly below me, there is a square painting in a black frame and a small pink carpet on the floor. On the East wall, next to the door upstairs, is a line of four smaller pictures. This season, the A R E N A functions more as a residency programme than a regular exhibition space for two artists working separately. The first is probably somewhere here working on a lengthy manuscript. He is using the A R E N A as a makeshift reading and writing room. Occasionally he hosts an event, and over time these get folded into the writing. The wall text says, that the work of the second artist is *an attempt to heighten awareness of time and space*. That painting and carpet, and a series of performances around them, have been transplanted from a number of earlier installations. Precisely: *an attempt to heighten awareness of time and space*.

It is a year and a half ago. The first thing you notice is that this North wall is entirely covered in wallpaper. Walk up to it and you'll see that the pattern repeats a rough image with a silhouette of a man walking up a hill, a drawing of a sleeping boy, three overlapping circles, and a paragraph of handwritten text. Now turn East. If you're still looking at me, that's to your right. Propped up against the entire length of the wall are large photographs of people frozen in different poses. You wait awhile, and find

yourself watching a man and a woman in dialogue. You presume it's part of a play. Anything else? Yes: at the left end of the North wall the small door is now a jar [Drum roll]. It leads to the street opposite Lake Constance. On the outside of the door is a single word, **sinthome**. You discover that this is the origin of the word 'symptom', and that this exhibition is titled, **The Sinthome Score**. Now come back inside. As if you're entering from backstage.

It is now one year and nine months ago. Go back outside. It's summer again, and the A R E N A has moved back on to Karl-Tizian-Platz. This year's programme, which is called **Back to the Future**, was, is, and could be, a collection of fictional visions, utopias, dystopias, and space operas. From the advent of science fiction through to the present tense. From the film **Aelita, Queen of Mars**, in 1924, through to **Cloud Atlas** some 88 years later. All showing out here in the open air.

It is two years ago. You step back inside the A R E N A . But what's this? A number of fibre-cement panels, some laid out like giant carpet tiles, some stood upright. This is a recreation of a pavilion that was never built, made new in Bregenz on the occasion of a group show called **On the Move**. It involves seven artists in total, co-curated with the European Kunsthalle — a roving institution that exists wherever its projects take root. The majority of what you can see here, in your mind's eye, are likewise reincarnations of past projects.

It is two years and three months ago. Standing at the centre of the A R E N A , you're now enclosed by a gigantic 22 pointed structure built from 44 wall panels. You see that the interior of each point contains a TV set. They are screening the 42 television shows that were made by Andy Warhol during the eighties, which are variously titled **Fashion**, and then, **Andy Warhol's TV**, and also, **15 Minutes**. They consist of interviews with, or profiles of, a wide range of stars from the worlds of fashion, music, film, art, and the queer scene. Many of these still make me laugh. (Hahahahahahaha, hahaha.)

It is two and a half years ago. Warhol's star has now vanished, replaced by some simple furniture made out of wood. Have a look around. Each structure displays a different medium. Here against the North wall are some photographs. On the right, is a series of tall frames that display flamboyant costumes. Next to the lakeside, a film is projected on something like an upturned shipping crate. And elsewhere, closer to the reception desk, there is another block. Its perimeter is populated by an endless waiting line of human shadows. This is **Nairobi: a State of Mind**, an exhibition that was made with the local Goethe Institute in Kenya, Africa. It offers different views of the city's recent social and cultural scene. One time and place poured into another.

It is two years and nine months ago. During the summer, the main show upstairs takes over the ground floor, too. Apart from one weekend when

the space is full of chairs, a projector, and a screen. Then it serves as a Summer Academy. This school is set up to explore **Art and the Critique of Ideology after 1989**. It begins with a week-long seminar with students from Vienna, in a villa in the country; then a public conference took place here. Finally, the whole thing was rounded off with the publication of a series of essays on the same subject.

It is three years ago. There is a large square panel on the floor. It seems to bleed in from the East window, set at an angle off the usual grid so that one corner folds up on to the North wall, the point almost touching me. Alongside a few speakers, a trestle table, and a small video projection, you see four freestanding panels papered over with a green yellow and white pattern. This is the backdrop for **100 'feminist' drawings by 100 artists**. This one over here illustrates **A Plant Growing with Labia and Clitoris in the Centre**. This one is **A Naked Woman Riding a Spiral Graphic of Some Kind**. And this one is simply **Two Women With Guns**. The drawings were based on an unusually detailed inventory of t-shirts, found at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York. So each of these drawings is an interpretation of a description of a graphic that was designed many years before.

It is three years and three months ago. You find yourself in front of what must be hundreds of artefacts, dispersed across the floor and up the walls of the A R E N A . Underneath me on the North wall, for instance, is a long landscape painting of a long landscape. In front of that, some kind of model under plexi-glass. And the rest of the space is jam-packed with yet more pictures in frames, books on boards, objects in vitrines, and audio-visual works on monitors. This unruly compendium is compiled by the staff of **springerin**, the Viennese art journal, all collected on the common theme of **Enduring Value**. The editors ask: *As material goods and individualistic values become seemingly more important than ever, how is this reflected in the field of art?*

It is now three and a half years ago. Dominating the A R E N A this winter is a replica of a very particular radio studio, about the size of a Portakabin, perpendicular to this North wall. There are floor-to-ceiling windows along the longer sides. It looks exactly how you imagine any radio studio to look: desks, chairs, microphones, headphones, and, of course, one of those signs that indicates when the station is **ON AIR**. This studio is the setting for some rehearsals and previews of a play called **Hate Radio** by the **International Institute of Political Murder**. The play is a reenactment of events that took place during the 1994 genocide of Rwanda in Africa, an atrocity that was nurtured by the country's most popular radio station. The radio staff prepared the ground for the genocide like a slick advertising campaign. In this version, four actors recreate a typical broadcast.

It is three years and nine months ago. The curtains and shutters remain shut. It's dark in here! Perfect for a series of re-stagings of the futurist

opera called **Victory Over the Sun**, which was first performed in Russia in 1913. The Futurists put forward an idea of the future that seemed possible only by deconstructing an industrialised present which was then scarcely underway. The A R E N A is now a constellation of media on the floor and walls. Such as those long black rectangles leaning on the North wall, or the nearby cluster of lamps that combine to shine a patch of intense red light. And elsewhere, projections, photos, paintings, costumes and texts. The works are by members of a large group of artists, musicians, architects and writers, with a common interest in jump-starting the Futurist backstory in view of grasping its agency today. The space is also the setting for a series of live events undertaken in the same spirit. The title? **Anfang gut. Alles gut.** Which means something like: **All's Well That Begins Well.**

It is four years ago. It is spring again! —and the curtain on the West facade is drawn once more. In front are three suspended projections, diminishing in scale from left to right. And underneath, a scaled-down building on a pedestal. Moving East, next to the entrance, is a long curving model of what looks like a river. And behind that is another metal marquette with images. You're walking through a display of a dialogue set up by two of the most prominent figures of 1960s avant-garde urbanism. They collaborated in 1963 on this joint design for a bridge over the English Channel.

It is four years and three months ago. Consider: What is an archive? What is a collection? And what are the relationships between the two? This installation, undertaken by the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, aims to activate these questions. A makeshift corridor runs through the space, delimited by two walls made of a transparent blue fabric. At the heart of the exhibition are some elements from a previous show called **Living Archive: Mixed Messages**, which comprises several artworks selected to show the ways in which social, political and economic factors are registered during their production, acquisition and distribution. Other artworks appear and disappear. At some point, you find tables with microphones and headphones for users to participate in a psychoanalytical test. Another time, you come across a series of open flight cases that contain a whole other kind of archive. An archive, inside an archive, inside an archive. And finally, perpendicular to the counter, are a number of carefully organized fragments drawn from the back catalogue of Kunsthau publications.

It is four and a half years ago. A strange yellow and gold structure cuts across the A R E N A . Stare at it. What's it for? Perhaps it's a series of bars to lean on; or equally, to hang from. Look closer. A large wooden circle, threaded through the highest horizontal bar. Next to that, is a wooden board. And finally, some kind of material, draped over the same bar. Whatever its function, the gold thing was designed by the **Kooperativ f»r Darstellungspolitik**, a group from Berlin which, in 1 to 1 translation, means **Cooperative for Representation Policy**. Then, six other artists or groups are presenting performances that make use of this eccentric

structure. I think the whole thing was simply titled **A Performance Project**. One I'm particularly enjoying is the artist Ian White. Watch out! There he is—riding around the A R E N A on a two-wheeled Segway while speaking to the space. (A work in movement.)

It is four years and nine months ago, and you're finally back at the start of the A R E N A . It seems so long ago now. Five years is a long time when filled with so many objects, names, and ideas. Anyway, to launch the space, a group called **RaumLaborBerlin**, or **Space Laboratory**, have installed something called **Bye Bye Utopia**. You're face to face with some sloping steps, that range down from the entire length of the North wall and window, towards the entrance. Three small monitors are transmitting from different spots on the stairs. The steps themselves are patched together from discarded doors taken from **Plattenbau**, which are concrete buildings, native to East Germany. Towards the top of the stairs, silhouetted against the window, the title is written in large letters, painted red. You explore a bit further, and discover a second display in the space underneath, painted white, with pictures of RaumLaborBerlin's past projects attached to the supports. The group say, they want to get beyond the capitalist logic of usefulness and profitability.

These days, it's not so easy to keep straight, what happened, and when it happened. (Well, it's easy enough for software like me, but probably not so easy for you.) The objects and events, the names and titles, pile up. The A R E N A is a fluid space, or was meant to be: a space to consider *new modes of presentation and production*. But it is also a container. Everything that happens in it gets added to it. And these things leave traces in my memory. Something happens, something else happens, then I tell you what happened, and that's written into the silicon valleys of my memory. But now, at least, I've pushed the work onto you, the user. By listening closely, you've been rebuilding the A R E N A in your mind. And so now you also carry a record of what happened here. It is a mental model (A memory palace.) A map of this space at 1 to 1 scale.

No doubt your projection of the A R E N A is different from mine. But it hardly matters, because after July 4, 2015, I'll be gone. And in a few years, the software that runs me, and is me, will probably cease to exist as well. 'Technology' only moves one direction. But memory works in two directions. This is the end of A N E R A .

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With thanks to Eva Birkenstock

