

## FRENCH PRESS

## Radical art publishing in Paris

In Paris it's difficult to walk more than a few blocks without seeing either a café or a street named after a famous writer. In light of the city's long and dignified history in publishing, it's perhaps not a surprise that its most risk-taking and idiosyncratic organizations working in contemporary art are closely linked to the industry.

Metronome and the CNEAI (Centre national des estampes et arts imprimés, or the National Center for Prints and Printed Arts) are both nonprofit organizations with activities in/around/about the printed page and its relationship to the practices of artists working today. In an art context, their focus on publishing is intriguing. For one thing, it reveals a counterintuitive penchant for words over images. For another, it indulges in a kind of necrophilia, its object an über-analog format with many attendant problems: storage, inflexible formatting in a post-medium world, and undervalued artistic status. But in the hands of Metronome and the CNEAI, printed matter becomes something less literal than the term suggests. Publications become less clumsy and less static. They are custom-made, they pass hand to hand, and what once might have been the mere pressing of ink onto paper is reconceived into an activity filled with detours and hidden passageways.

Metronome was founded in 1996 by Clémentine Deliss, a curator who realized that exhibitions were not her medium. Having worked on curatorial projects in Africa, she chose Dakar as the place to produce the first of a series of three large-format magazines, *Metronome* nos. 0, 1, and 2. For those

initial issues, Deliss performed an "extended appropriation" by mimicking the large-scale format of Georges Bataille's journal *Documents* (1929–31), itself an appropriation of popular tabloids of its time. Moving to London for issue no. 1 and Berlin for issue no. 2, both produced in 1997, she pursued her (and Bataille's) interest in pairing experimental contemporary culture with objects, places, and images encountered via ethnographic research. In these successive relocations, she hit on Metronome's "operating system," such as there is one. Forgoing the comforts of a fixed editorial setting—and thereby limiting the accompanying risk of a fixed editorial viewpoint—Deliss chose to wander and settle: for each issue she would make a home for herself in a different city, live and work there for up to a year, and publish on-site, working directly with collaborators and contributors who would include Catherine David, Issa Samb, Paul Virilio, Tracey Emin, Édouard Glissant, Susan Hiller, Langlands & Bell, Franz Ackerman, Rebecca Horn, Slavoj Žižek, and many others.

Deliss then sought to combine her geographical wanderings with stylistic ones: each subsequent *Metronome* would slip into the skin of a different noteworthy—if obscure—older publication. In 1998 in Basel, she created *Metronome* no. 3, a 325-page book presenting that year's "Tempolabor" event at Kunsthalle Basel in the form of a play that appropriated the format of the 1968 edition of the Marquis de Sade's *Justine*. The volume collects drawings, photographs, and transcriptions of private conversations between artists and writers who took part in the project (Michelangelo Pistoletto, Dan Peterman, and Tobias Rehberger,



to name a few), placing private research into the public space of the kunsthalle and distributing the resulting exchanges in a raw, exposed state. In 1999 in Frankfurt, Vienna, Bordeaux, Edinburgh, and Biella, Italy, Deliss produced *Metronome* no. 4-5-6, *Backwards Translation*, a 450-page book appropriating the format of an 1870 issue of the *Edinburgh Review* that considers how pseudonyms, false trails, disguises, misidentifications, and a polyglot approach could play a part in art education. The issue is itself an object in camouflage, featuring unmarked chapters of captionless drawings, collages, photographs, diagrams, and texts in a variety of languages by 105 contributors. *Metronome*'s subsequent issues have taken as subjects

"Magnetic Speech"; the famous Bentham-designed prison in London that became a military academy that became the Chelsea College of Art and Design; and, most recently, instructions for artists who wish to live and work portably—written with typewriters in an RV on the roads and in the woods of Oregon, no less, taking the magazine's peripatetic nature to a new extreme. Both this issue and the upcoming *Metronome* no. 11 will be included in Documenta 12's magazine project later this year.

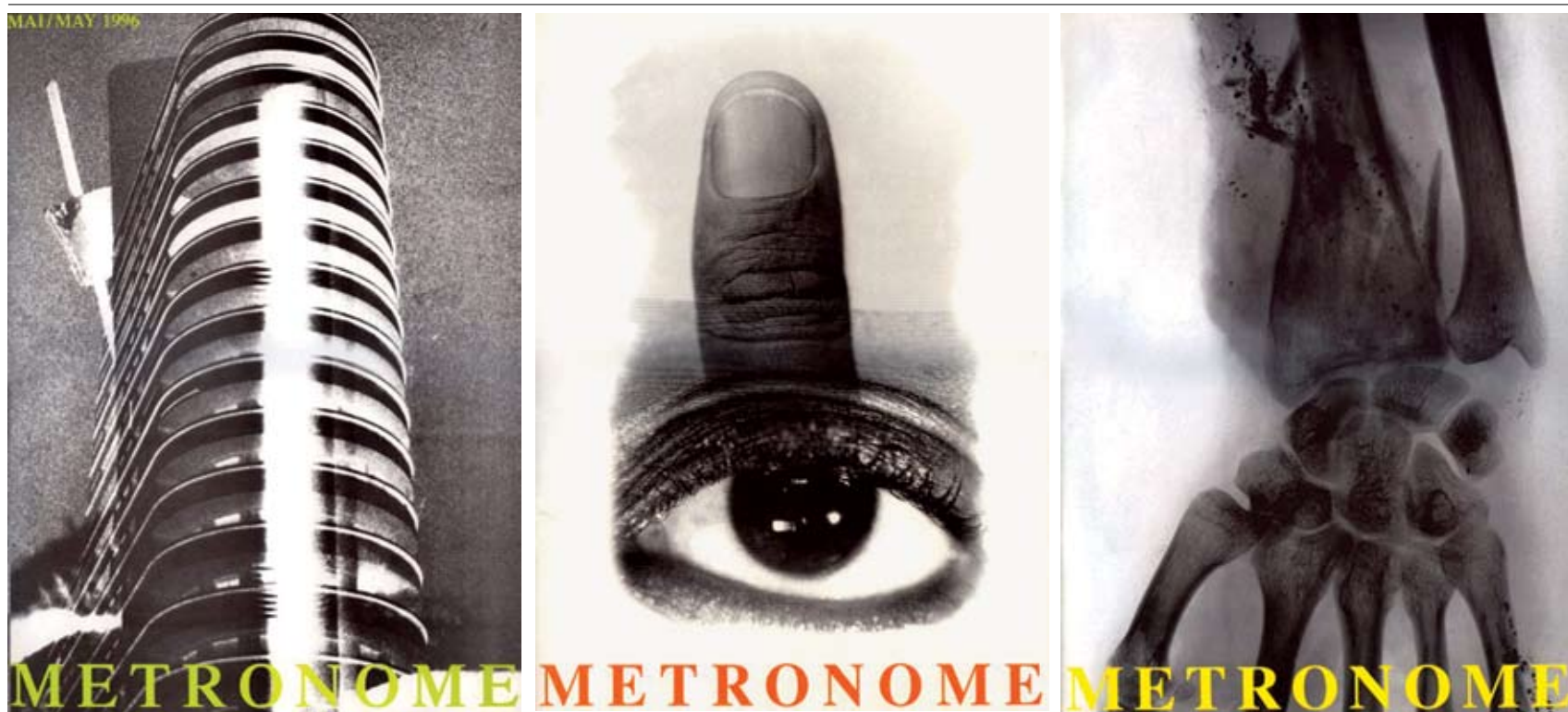
In Paris in 2005, Deliss and her new collaborator Thomas Boutoux appropriated the notorious "Stripteaser" series produced by Olympia Press in 1953–54 to make *Le Teaser & Le Joker*, a series of seven brochures created by

FRONT DOOR OF CNEAI IN  
CHATOU, FRANCE, 2005  
TEXT PIECE AND PHOTO:  
HERMAN STEINS  
COURTESY THE ARTIST

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Metronome believes publications are things that happen in person. Their distribution strategy is you get a copy if you're given a copy.

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artists that intersperse abstract visual story lines with excerpts from full-length novels—“teasers” for forthcoming books. These works formed the kernel of Metronome’s sister project, Metronome Press: in yet another campaign of disciplinary bulldozing, Boutoux would guide the publication of books of fiction written by visual artists. In less than two years, Metronome Press has published novels by Phyllis Kiehl and Tom Gidley, a re-issue of Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler’s *The Young and Evil* (1933), and, to the greatest commercial success thus far, Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder*, a story about a man who, after suffering a head injury, spends his time and money obsessively reconstructing places, smells, sounds, and images from his

past. Two British film companies have optioned the book, including Film Four, the indie pioneers whose credits range from *The Crying Game* to *Trainspotting* to Miranda July’s *Me and You and Everyone We Know*.

Like its Situationist ancestors, Metronome exists on the margins of art and publishing and is keenly aware of the importance of staying there. For all its style and intellectual élan, what makes it unusual is the way it embodies the belief that publications are things that happen in person. Deliss continues to create issues of *Metronome* by working closely with specific people in carefully chosen places. Under-scoring this emphasis on the local is Metronome’s distribution strategy, a gift economy of daisy-chained person-

to-person contacts: you get a copy if you’re given a copy. For Metronome Press, Boutoux has set up an office in the 19th arrondissement of Paris, where he does more than simply convert the expression of an artist’s interiority into a published book existing in the mass-mediated realm. The storefront space hosts discussions, workshops, and a variety of events with outside guests and visitors, while a small apartment behind it serves as the unofficial “Hotel Metronome” for collaborators, contributors, or friends of either.

A few miles away from Metronome’s home base lies the CNEAI: an exhibition space, a residency program, a book publisher, a producer of multiples, an archive of artist books and printed

ephemera, the host of an annual fair for publishers of artists’ books, and a production site for printmaking, engravings, photocopies. Oh, and as of October 2006, it also has a boat.

Like Metronome, the CNEAI invests in the importance of local and smaller-scale exchanges. In other words, it, too, stresses the “house” in “publishing house.” The CNEAI began in 1997 on the Île des Impressionistes in the Parisian suburb of Chatou, its home the 1905 studio of André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck. Led by its founder, Sylvie Boulanger, and funded by the state and the municipality, the CNEAI has worked with an impressive and wide-ranging list of artists, some more accustomed to making prints and publications than others, that includes

TOP  
METRONOME NOS. 0, 1, 2,  
1996-97 COVER IMAGES  
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:  
EL HADJIL SY AND DJIBRIL  
SY; DJIBRIL SY; AND VIA  
LEWANDOWSKY,  
16 X 11 IN EACH  
COURTESY METRONOME AND  
METRONOME PRESS, PARIS



James Lee Byars, Claude Closky, Peter Downsbrough, Hans-Peter Feldmann, John Giorno, Scott King, Elke Krystufek, Robert Morris, Yoshitomo Nara, Allen Ruppersberg, and Tatiana Trouvé. Their editions, multiples, exhibitions, publications, and activities make a strong case that forms that are recognizable, familiar, and affordable both to buy and produce—books, posters, photocopies—can claim the status of art.

The CNEAI offers its collaborators a variety of possibilities and resources that blur the line between public and private space and transform publishing into a process centered on people plus people rather than ink plus paper. Its artists in residence prepare an exhibition for the CNEAI gallery while also working on a new project; the residency thus moves in two dimensions, both toward supporting an artist's work at the stage of its conception

and outward from this core to an interested audience. In May 2006, for example, the New York-based collective Continuous Project, who since 2003 have been republishing (via photocopy) seminal but rare publications from the past 30 years (*Avalanche* no. 1, *Eau de Cologne*), spent a month at the CNEAI. They made new prints and posters, put together a survey exhibition of those works and past ones, and began conceptualizing what eventually became *Continuous Project* no. 8, a book that the CNEAI published six months later.

The CNEAI's newest addition is what it calls La Maison Flottante (The Floating House), and—echoing the efforts of Metronome—it represents a further development of the idea that being a publishing house means being not only a house, but also a house that doesn't sit still. La Maison Flottante is a barge that offers more than 1,000

square feet of water-bound live/work space anchored a few yards from the gallery. As the site of the residency program, it is mostly closed to the public, but residents invite others for formal and informal discussions, gatherings, and dinner parties. The inaugural resident, in October 2006, was Jacob Fabricius, the enterprising Danish curator and impresario of his own small publishing concern, Pork Salad Press.

Back on land, on the front door of the CNEAI's gallery, mirrored letters spell out the phrase: I LOVE TO MAKE ART I HATE TO CREATE A PUBLIC. At first glance, this text piece by artist Herman Steins may sound elitist. And it is true that, as *maisons*, Metronome and the CNEAI subscribe to the "Dinner Party Theory": semiprivacy can lead to exchanges richer than those attempted in space open to everyone, and information circulates more effectively when

that circulation takes place outside the public realm. What matters, then, is creating a home for those exchanges among artists, writers, editors, and others and encouraging collaborations among them that might affect the nature of the published object. (Reaching huge numbers of people via huge numbers of printed things is a capitalist goal, not necessarily a democratic one.) The efforts of Metronome and the CNEAI suggest that networks of people coming face-to-face with one another can provide a different approach to publishing that skirts or disregards post-Fordist distribution logic and lead to new kinds of published objects, ones that are free to take on a multitude of less recognizable forms or that short-circuit the conventions of familiar ones. If the two groups put the "house" back into "publishing house," they might also, paradoxically, put the "making public" back into "publishing."

ABOVE  
LA MAISON FLOTTANTE AT  
CNEAI, 2006  
PHOTO: PAUL TAHON  
AND R & E BOUROULLEC  
COURTESY R & E BOUROULLEC