

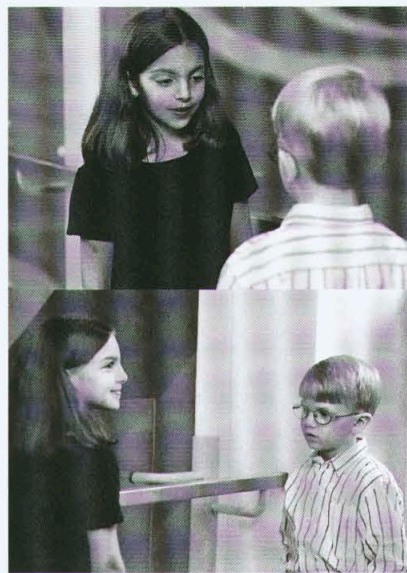
THE MATRIX EFFECT

CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI
MATRIX 142

September 23, 2000 – January 7, 2001
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art
Hartford, Connecticut

1842.
WADSWORTH ATHENEUM

*At first, nobody realized what
this dedication to new art and
ideas would mean, but today
there's no denying the uncanny
power of The Matrix Effect...*



ANDREA MILLER-KELLER: As one of the first participants, what do you remember about your 1975 MATRIX show?

SOL LEWITT: Very little! I think it was a wall drawing... The only thing I remember is doing the poster.

ANDREA: Today, as one of America's best known artists, your work is very familiar. Why do you think it was so difficult for many people to understand 25 years ago?

SOL: You have to ask the many people.

ANDREA: Well, on the other hand, what is your sense of why your early wall drawings were so important to artists, critics and curators?

SOL: Again, you have to ask them, because I have no idea.



ANDREA MILLER-KELLER: Your MATRIX exhibition included your first wall drawing. You used that hard-hitting quote from James Baldwin about African-American artists being painted into a corner by the expectations of the white art establishment. It was a brilliant piece!

GLENN LIGON: I think that wall drawing was successful because of the specificity of the text, and the context in which it was being shown.

ANDREA: What was significant about the show for you?



LOUISE LAWLER: I remember most fondly that when we went to the Tremaine's home, both you and my mother packed us sandwiches, like school lunch, including celery sticks in saran wrap.



ANDREA MILLER-KELLER: I was very excited about introducing you to them. I knew you would produce something extraordinary by working with their collection.

LOUISE: I was very nervous. I always am when I go to photograph. When Mr. Tremaine opened the door it was pretty overwhelming. He was tall and next to a large Lichtenstein painting, I think its called *Aloha*.

JIM ELLIOTT, Director of the Wadsworth Atheneum, 1966-1976.





ARTISTS, CRITTERS AND

NICHOLAS BAUME

EMILY HALL TREMAINE CURATOR OF CONTEMPORARY ART

*If I ever have to cast an acting role,
I want the wrong person for the part.
...it's more satisfying to get someone
who's perfectly wrong. Then you know
you've really got something.*

- Andy Warhol

Berlin-based Christian Jankowski is a problem artist. His problems are not, however, of the kind familiar to, say, formalist painting, with its “problems” of color and composition. Rather, he is interested in the creative potential of life’s awkward moments, embarrassing situations, mistakes, confusions and unexpected events. Jankowski’s work involves creating problems – which is, in fact, the title of a 1999 piece. *Create Problems* involved five real-life couples who were invited to act out on video a series of scripted sexual fantasies in a pornographic film studio. Before things go too far, however, the couples begin discussing their domestic problems, destroying the erotic ambience and landing all concerned back down to earth with a thud. A psychotherapist was engaged to provide a commentary on their relationship issues, which appears in a publication by the artist alongside “action” photographs of the couples.

Jankowski came to Hartford to plan his Matrix exhibition without preconceptions. He has often worked with video and photography, but also with installation, performance and text. His only brief for

Matrix was to create a new work. Initial ideas about exploring the relationship between insurance (Hartford’s traditional business) and risk (the business of innovative art) were abandoned as the artist became fascinated by the Wadsworth Atheneum’s own history – in particular that of its Matrix program. This year, Matrix celebrates its 25th anniversary. The 141-name-long roll call of artists to have preceded Jankowski is an impressive, even intimidating one for a young artist making his U.S. debut.

Jankowski decided to make the history of Matrix the starting point for his project. His concept was to make a video that would playfully collide two decidedly different narrative genres: historical documentary and fairytale. To that end, Jankowski set about gathering interviews with Matrix founder Jim Elliott (Director of the Wadsworth Atheneum from 1966-76) and between the long-time curator of Matrix, Andrea Miller-Keller (1975-1998) and some of the artists who had participated during her distinguished tenure. The participating artists are: Janine Antoni (1996), John Baldessari (1977), Dawoud Bey (1997), Christo and Jeanne-Claude (1978), Louise Lawler (1984), Sol LeWitt (1975), Glenn Ligon (1992), Adrian Piper (1980).

The artists were sent a series of questions particular to their Matrix exhibition, to which they responded in writing or by telephone. A script was devised based on

CURATORS



CREATE PROBLEMS 1999
COLOR PHOTOGRAPH

these interviews. Departing from conventional documentary form, none of the interviewees appear on camera. Rather, all the participants are played by children between the ages of seven and ten. Hence, *The Matrix Effect* – a supernatural transformation whereby commitment to new art and ideas stimulates a radical age reversal. Eternal youth is not the only “Matrix effect.” Surprising transformations occur as the sophisticated concepts and language of the artists are interpreted and spoken by the children. It is important to note that the performers, who are not professional



THE HUNT 1992
VIDEO STILL

child actors, were not asked to learn the script in advance. Instead, their lines were fed to them take by take. Again, Jankowski exploits the problems created by his scenario. In their earnest attempts to repeat complicated lines, the children often change them, opening a space between intended and stated meaning. “Critics,” for a moment, become “critters;” “contemporary” shifts to “contrary;” “historical” ends up “hysterical.” For the artist, these are not so much errors as new meanings generated by the creative potential of a moment’s confusion.

Comic incongruities and magical transformations are recurring motifs in Jankowski’s art. *The Hunt* 1992, one of his first works, is a performance documented on video. The artist declared, “For the duration of one week all products for daily consumption



DESPERATELY SEEKING ARTWORK 1997

COLOR PHOTOGRAPH

(e.g. groceries, toilet paper, etc.) are to be hunted with a bow and arrow in supermarkets.” This absurd instruction, followed rigorously, yielded often comical results. Much of this humor derives from the anachronistic combination of incompatible systems; the hunter-gatherer in the age of consumer capitalism. The work also evokes the pleasure of childhood play-acting. Yet a fundamental anxiety underlies this work as it suggests an identity crisis facing modern masculinity.

In *My Life as a Dove* 1996, the artist engaged a magician to transform him into a dove for the duration of the exhibition, and to then return him to normal. Jankowski was not seen in human form by family and friends for three weeks. The magical transformations took place in front of an audience and were taped on video. During the exhibition, visitors



TELEMISTICA 1999

VIDEO STILL

were invited to document Jankowski’s life as a dove with their own photographs. In taking literally the magician’s art and thus making it his own, Jankowski creates an allegory for both the aspiration to be “free as a bird” and its impossibility, as the dove remained confined to the gallery, dependent for food and water on the curator. Once again the work is performance-based, but this time, in collaboration with others: a professional magician and a dove. This interest in collaboration and in opening his creative process to chance and unpredictability is essential to Jankowski’s work.

The anxious nature of artistic creation itself is acutely expressed in *Desperately Seeking Artwork* 1997. The artist had been invited to participate in an important exhibition in Graz, which he visited to find inspiration for a new

piece. He notes, "I developed various artistic concepts which I later discarded because, upon closer consideration, they did not live up to my demands."

Running short of time, Jankowski turned to a psychiatrist to help him escape "this nightmare of confusion and despair."

The resulting therapy sessions led to the final work, a video of the therapist's concluding remarks and a related series of photographs. Here Jankowski adapts a prevalent theme in contemporary culture – the public "confession" of personal information.¹ As in all of his work, the artifice of the situation remains clear, preserving an ironic distance that frames a fictionalized "reality."

The sources of Jankowski's art are diverse, including a strong interest in improvisation that he developed as a musician before attending art school in Hamburg. His work also belongs in the tradition of Conceptual Art, where the idea for each piece generates its final form. He shares the classic conceptualist desire to detach the realization of his work from the exclusive control of his subjective decision-making. In contrast, however, to the classical strategies of serial composition and logical process, Jankowski invites the unpredictable mediation of human interaction. Instead of deploying industrial techniques of fabrication, he draws on existing cultural and social conditions to make the work. For example, *Telemistica* 1999, utilized

the services of Italian fortune tellers who offer call-in television tarot readings.

The artist called five different TV mystics with his most pressing questions about the new work he had to make for the Venice Biennale. The piece was edited from these TV readings recorded live on his hotel room VCR.

The Matrix Effect brings together many of Jankowski's themes.² It creates a series of "impossible" transformations that are nevertheless consistently pursued. The artists become children, the documentary becomes fiction, the historical becomes contemporary. Humor pervades the work as it once again masks an underlying performance anxiety. Like much of Jankowski's art, the work is self-reflexive, gaining complexity and layers of meaning as its narratives and meta-narratives intersect. It is simultaneously a mode of celebration and subversion. Jankowski's admiration and respect for the participating artists is heartfelt. At the same time, his work insists on the contingent nature of meaning and interpretation. It is, for Jankowski, only through acts of creative misunderstanding that we come to perceive the uncanny power of *The Matrix Effect*.

1 This was first done in the 1992 work *Shame Window*, where passers by were invited to publicly confess what they felt most ashamed of.

2 He first transformed adults into children for the video piece, *Museum of Contemporary Art 2097*, where the Hamburg museum director led a tour through the galleries set in the year 2097.

CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI

1968

Born in Göttingen

Lives and works in Berlin

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2000

"Christian Jankowski," DeAppel,
Amsterdam (cat.)

"Telecommunication," Galerie Meyer
Kainer, Vienna

1999

"Videosalon," Videodrome, Kopenhagen
"Paroles Sur Le Vif," Goethe Institut, Paris
"Telemistica," Kölnischer Kunstverein,
Köln

1998

"Videosalon," Klosterfelde, Hamburg

"Let's Get Physical/Digital,"
Klosterfelde, Berlin

"My First Book," Portikus, Frankfurt (cat.)

1997

"Let's Get Physical/Digital," Art Node,
Stockholm (cat.)

"Museum of Contemporary Art, 2097,"
Statement art forum, Berlin

1996

"My Life as a Dove," Klosterfelde, Berlin

1994

"The Safe Place," Friedensallee 12,
Hamburg

1992

"The Hunt," supermarkets/Friedensallee
12, Hamburg

"Shame Window" (Collaboration with
F.Restle), Friedensallee 12, Hamburg

Selected Group Exhibitions

2000

"National Gallery Prize,"
Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin

"New Life," Galerie für Zeitgenössische
Kunst, Leipzig

"The Hauser and Wirth Collection,"
Lokremise, St. Gallen

"Media Art 2000", St. Petersburg

"Model, Model...", Neuer Aachener
Kunstverein, Aachen

"Berlin – Inner Difference," Galerie
Krinzinger, Vienna

1999

"Above the Good and Evil," Paço das
Artes, São Paulo (cat.)

"Crash," ICA London (cat.)

"German Open 1999 – Contemporary Art
in Germany," Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
(cat.)

"The 20th Century," Kulturforum, Berlin
(cat.)

"Home & Away," Kunstverein Hannover,
Hannover (cat.)

"Chronos und Kairos," Museum
Fridericianum, Kassel (cat.)

"Talk Show. The Art of Communication in
the 90s," Haus der Kunst, Munich

"999," Centro d'Arte Contemporanea
Ticino, Bellinzona

"dapertutto," 48th Venice Biennale (cat.)

"Zoom. Views on Contemporary German
Art," Kunsthalle zu Kiel und Villa Merkel
(cat.)

"VISA," Galerie Johnen & Schöttle, Köln

1998

"Fast Forward - Body Check," Kunstverein
Hamburg, Hamburg

1997

"Zones of Disturbance," steirischer herbst,
Graz (cat.)

"l'autre," Biennale de Lyon (cat.)

"Enter: Artist/Audience/Institution,"
Kunstmuseum Luzern (cat.)

"punch in out," Kunsthaus Hamburg,
Hamburg (cat.)

The Matrix Effect

The Matrix Effect was realized with the collaboration of Andrea Miller-Keller and the following people who generously agreed to be interviewed: Janine Antoni, John Baldessari, Dawoud Bey, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Jim Elliott, Louise Lawler, Sol LeWitt, Glenn Ligon, Adrian Piper. Nothing would have been possible without their support.

Please note: their original interviews have been transformed by *The Matrix Effect*.

Starring: Erica Goldstein with Christian Daniel, Hayley DeBerry, Aidan Eastwood-Paticcio, Rose Faraci, John Fitzpatrick, Marisa Harris, Shawn Miller, Lester Joshua Primus, Benjamin Stepnowski, Aden Weisel. Supporting cast: Lauren Gilson, Nathan Hansen, Haley Rose, Briann Yearwood, and friends.

Video production by Motion Incorporated: Director of Photography, Glenn Orkin; Associate Producer, Ed McKeon; Location Audio, Michael Colangelo, Production Assistant, Maritza Ubides; Editor, Michael Colangelo; Music, Bruce Zimmerman.

Audio post production by Producers 2: Len Silberg, Charles Denler; Narrator, Lee Gordon.

Still photography: John Groo

Wadsworth Atheneum production team: Nicholas Baume, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art; Judy Kim, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art; Gretchen Dietrich, Director of Education and staff of The Martin Office of Museum Education.

The artist wishes to give special thanks to Andrea Miller-Keller, Nicholas Baume, Judy Kim, Gretchen Dietrich, John Groo, Renate Jankowski, Una Szeemann.

Works in the Exhibition

The Matrix Effect 2000
Video

The Matrix Effect: Artists' Portraits 2000
8 color photographs

Matrix Lecture

2 pm, Sunday, September 24, 2000
Christian Jankowski delivers an informal lecture on his work in The Hartford Courant Room.

Gallery Talks

12 noon, Tuesday, October 10, 2000
"Hysterical artwork from a contrary perspective"

Nicholas Baume, Emily Tremaine Hall
Curator of Contemporary Art

12 noon, Tuesday, November 28, 2000
"Christian Jankowski's *The Matrix Effect*"
Gretchen Dietrich, Director of Education

MATRIX 142 has been made possible by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, The Broad Art Foundation, Janice and Mickey Cartin; additional support from Philip Schonberger, Dina Plapler and Earl McMahon, Peter Hirschl and Lisa Silvestri, Goethe-Institut Boston.