



## Duck, Duck,

In 1968, the architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour conducted a study of American commercial vernacular architecture, such as strip malls, that had proliferated with the advent of highways and the rise of automobile travel throughout the 20th century. Bringing the same attention and analysis reserved for “high” Modernist design to these vernacular or novelty architectures, they coined the terms “duck” and “decorated shed” to designate two different phenomena. Contrary to the “decorated shed”, generic structures that telegraph their function via ornament and signage, ‘the duck is the special building that *is* a symbol’. The term comes from Big Duck, a large ferrocement structure built in 1931 on Long Island in the literal shape of the bird, with T-Ford headlights for eyes, by a duck farmer named Martin Maurer to sell eggs and poultry. With the duck, what you see is what you get. But what if what a building symbolized, or the interior of it anyway, was precisely the volatility and multiplicity of meaning?

From its exterior there's little to suggest New Jörg's current or former functions (though I've been told that in the courtyard, a faded mural bearing the name of the previous occupant, Jörg neu GmbH<sup>1</sup> remains). Inside, however, we encounter something more anatine: two rooms, accessible through independent street entrances and situated at varying heights, connected by some vitrines, a glass-paneled door, and a considerable drop. The viewer is offered a choice of spatial perspectives through which they may enter the exhibition, determined by where they are standing, which of the two texts they've happened to pick up first, etc<sup>2</sup>.

The duplexity of the space, its unstable/asymmetrical and flickering vantages, resonates with the artworks themselves. Construction materials, like metal and asphalt, are here reincarnated, rerouted, salvaged. Vertical beams are flipped sideways, the ground creeps toward the ceiling. Boundaries are laid down and broken;

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<sup>1</sup>Jörg neu GmbH are producers of high-grade machinery for metal work such as piccolo parallel pendulum saws, drilling apparati, angle benders, freeform benders, and other fabrication supports, such as roller tables, developed for the purpose of streamlining factory production.

<sup>2</sup>I'm reminded of a brilliant moment in Pilvi Takala's *The Trainee* (2008), in which she poses as an intern in the Helsinki offices of Deloitte who does no visible “work”, to the increasing distress of the other employees not in on the joke. While spending a day riding the elevator up and down, she is repeatedly questioned by other employees who've encountered her in the elevator multiple times. She tells them with a straight face that she is ‘thinking to a different rhythm’, ‘doing ‘brainwork in motion’, ‘seeing things from a new perspective’.

impermeable surfaces are made porous by touch and time. Infrastructure is turned to suprastructure, and meaning, whatever that is, balloons and collapses in on itself. Vision doubles. Speech breaks down. *SPIT*, *SPAT*, etc.

[While writing this] [I'm sorry] I can't stop thinking about ducks. How, contrary to the architectural denotation of something to be taken at face value, the word rather seems to suggest a doubling, or duplicity. For years it literally didn't occur to me when autocorrect changed my "fucking" modifiers to "ducking", that it could be referring<sup>3</sup> to the verb, *to duck*. Rather I'd imagine a little white bird with an orange beak sitting squarely within my frustrated text message. Ducking, like moving in anticipation of something that may or may not be flying towards your face, or, the act of bobbing up and down, being there and not there. In poker, 'ducks' means a pair of 2s. A canard is a hoax; a quack, a charlatan.



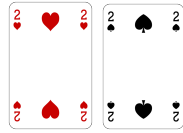
Ludwig Wittgenstein illustrated his theory of aspect seeing, or perspectivism, using the ambiguous illustration of a *duckrabbit*, which appears to you as one animal or the other depending on how you read it. Aspect seeing refers to the gap between the visual data the eye processes and the information about the image that we actually receive, which, he argues, is based far more on our conditioning, prejudice, and past experience, than on the 'objective reality' at hand. But there are multiple aspects to the object, multiple aspects of seeing, "seeing as", versus "seeing that" (the direct report of the visual data). With the duckrabbit, if you're looking at it one way, you aren't looking at it the other way (one only reads 'duck' in one sense). If you're nimble enough, you toggle between the two with ease. But there is always something else escaping your field of perception, hiding in plain sight.

The duckrabbit was a favorite of the elusive Lutz Bacher, appearing more than once within the artist's oeuvre. Bacher, a maven of the *portrait en creux*, the anti-portrait, made a career of funambulating between presence and absence, creating sculptures, images, videos, and installations that simultaneously illuminated and obliterated the

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<sup>3</sup> Of course autocorrect doesn't "refer" to anything when it selects words. It is an ambivalent articulator. In a recent episode of the Ezra Klein's podcast, AI specialist Gary Marcus describes the way that language networks, like ChatGPT, produce plausible sounding texts without any underlying understanding of what connects word A to word B. "Pastiche is not understanding, and understanding is important."

figure of the author presumed to be at the epicenter of each work. In some pieces, like *Huge Uterus* (1990), *Do You Love Me* (1994), or *In Memory of My Feelings* (1990), “she” is front and center, yet nowhere to be found. *Now you see me and you don't.*



A defining characteristic of the specter is its capacity to charge a space without occupying it, materially at least. The haunted space, not unlike the one you are standing in now, is flush with fictions. The residual aspects of each embodied perspective accrue like dust on the walls, morphing the contours of a space that we took to be concrete and unmoving. I'd say the artworks in this exhibition appeal to a similar negotiation of space; a concern with dissecting and circumscribing it with minimal physical intervention, inviting the viewer to help themselves to more than what they see. To not only see *that* and see *as*, but see *through*, as one stares down a ghost.

I began imagining the ghost of Jörg's past, Jörg der Ältere, floating overhead, or emerging from the gallery walls, to pay the exhibition a visit. In my fantasy he's struck with nostalgia and an inarticulate joy as he beholds the evolutionary trajectory between himself, a site of manufacturing industrial machinery for metal structure and factory appliances, and his descendent, a site of gathering and reflection upon objects that eschew functionality. With the infinite wisdom that comes with being a disembodied consciousness, Alter Jörg would know that the first cultural device or tool was likely a container and not a spear. That the civilization he was brought up to believe in, built upon the rhythms of Individualism, Industry and Progress, was just one of many fictions. Before leaving, he'd utter to the space, to the sculptures and images, and to us, *"I was of the generation that forced energy outward / you are of the one that brings energy home."*

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