



Hans Ulrich Obrist

It's now my great pleasure to introduce our next speaker, **Joseph Grigely**. Joseph is an artist, a writer, and he's the head of many archives, including part of mine. A very, very warm welcome to Joseph Grigely.

We were listening to Eve tell us about the Studs Terkel archive, and archives play a very important role in your work. I wanted to ask you to tell us a little bit about how that all began and your story with archives.



Joseph Grigely, *Exhibition Prosthetics* (London: Bedford Press Editions, 2010).

Hans Ulrich Obrist and Joseph Grigely on stage.

Joseph Grigely

Well the story with your archive goes back to 1995. I think, when we first met and you had already begun your publication projects. It struck me that they didn't quite fit into the normal scheme of what an art publication should be. They broke a lot of conventions, shall we say.

I said to you, "Please send your publications on a regular basis. I'll archive them, organize them." I remember the first two years, it was nice and easygoing. There would be one box with five publications, another box with ten publications. Then all of a sudden there were twenty. There were forty. There were sixty. There were a hundred and twenty. There were five hundred. There were fifteen hundred. There were twenty-two hundred. And we're still growing.

A big part of the project involves trying to understand how the art publication functions as a prosthesis, as an extension of an exhibition, and not simply a supplement. This was the basis for my book *Exhibition Prosthetics*, which also looks at the publication as an exhibition, and the way the publication works to take the exhibition somewhere the exhibition doesn't go.

And when we started this process, you already had other interesting archives. I remember particularly the archive of the late Gregory Battcock, which was actually the basis of an installation in the 2014 Whitney Biennial. That's another urgent book for all of you, if you haven't read it, *Oceans of Love: The Uncontainable Gregory Battcock*. It's really an archive that you saved. We're talking here about a very important archive of art history that would have disappeared without you bringing it back *in extremis*. Can you tell us about the saga of the Battcock archive, why it is so important, what we can learn from it?

The Battcock archive is not very well known, much as Battcock himself isn't that well known. He started off as a painter in the 1960s, and then became a critic and art historian. He earned a PhD at New York University.

It so happened I had a studio in Jersey City, New Jersey, in a large building that had originally been occupied by a moving and storage company. In the early 1990s they were evicted from the building. The artists who had studios in the building entered the space after the movers left. There were papers and books in boxes all over the space. And I saw the name Gregory Battcock and thought, "Wait a minute. Wasn't he a critic?" So a friend and I gathered up everything we could, enough to fill about seven or eight boxes, and discovered a little later that Battcock had been murdered in 1980. And right away it registered, that's something unusual. I mean how many art critics are worth murdering? How many have been murdered? So I did a lot of work trying to understand how the archive presented a cross-section of the art world of the 1970s. And like any archive, it contains answers to questions that basically haven't been asked before. It's a depository for the future. The real question for archives is how to make the material useful for people in the future, how to make it accessible, how to map it. The Whitney installation and the book on Battcock both attempt to address these questions of access and mapping.

Last night I went to your place and saw your many other archives, like the archive of your conversa-

tions, your many, many thousands of conversations. That archive has a lot of to do with the relation between written language and speech. Can you tell us a little bit about this extraordinary archive of your conversations?



Inside the Hans Ulrich Obrist Archive.

Well, the archive of conversations is pretty unusual in the sense that it's an archive of ordinariness. Since I am deaf, and can't lip-read well, everyday conversation is challenging. I mean lip-reading is so inefficient—when you say "vacuum," it looks like you're saying "fuck you." It's so easy to get things entirely wrong. So asking people to write things down helped avoid awkward, unpleasant situations.

At first I didn't know the importance of those little notes people were writing. But after a dinner with a friend when there were papers on the table, under the table, in the kitchen, on the couch, I thought I'd save them, and put them aside. One day I spread them on my studio floor and looked at them carefully. They weren't really writing in the usual sense. It was instead talking—on paper. It was perfectly ordinary conversation, things we don't normally write down. For me that's why this archive is significant. I think it was Yona Friedman who once said about archives, "They're just big waste paper baskets we never empty out."

Another archive within your collection is the amazing archive of fly fishing. We went fly fishing together this summer, and of course I didn't catch a fish because I don't know how to do it. But you're a world expert at fly fishing, and in your archive there are these amazing, amazing objects from fly fishing research and books. What's the connection between art and fly fishing?

Left to right: Aspen Art Museum Director Heidi Zuckerman, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Joseph Grigely, and Archive Intern Seth Stroblun.



That's a really good question. It's essentially about the flies themselves and their relationship to art. With fly-tying and art, basically you're using materials to make something else, and in the process you're making meaning. In the archive, both flies and fly-tying materials raise questions about process and methodology. We tend to think of art as being about the product and the exhibition. But what's often missing is a record of how things get made, how materials are transformed in the studio. This is where the archive becomes important: it contains the histories of making. Details otherwise unseen and unknown. It's about how fur and feathers and tinsel and thread combine on the space of a hook to create something that is other wise. So for me, getting inside of fly-tying reflects what goes on in the process of making art.

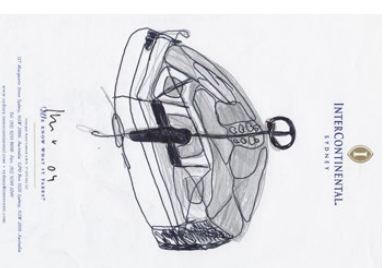
I wanted to ask you also about unrealized projects. Of course, there must be projects that have been too big to be realized or too small to be realized. The range of the unrealized is really wide—a project that has been forgotten, or lost public art commissions, or maybe other projects that were censored. Or, as my friend Doris Lessing always said, the projects one maybe doesn't dare to do, a kind of self-censorship. There are many, many reasons why a project can be unrealized, and I wanted to ask you to tell us about some of your unrealized projects, or maybe unrealized archives.

I'm thinking of one particular project that I did that was never realized as a public art project. To give a little bit of context, I'm often asked who my favorite artist is and I frequently respond, "Thurgood Marshall." And people look perplexed and say, "Thurgood Marshall? But he was a lawyer and Supreme Court justice. How can he be so important as an artist?" The answer is in how he did seemingly impossible things, like trying to get people in *Brown v. Board of Education* to see a fundamental human issue in a very different way. In a certain sense, that's what a lot of us try to do as artists—get people to see and imagine the world in a fundamentally different way. His work inspired me to do a project that isn't well known at all. It's called *United States of America v. GPH Management*. This was related to the Gramercy International Art Fair, held at the Gramercy Park Hotel, which had very inaccessible conditions for people with disabilities. The challenge

As a last question, we've been looking at images of the archive. If some of our visitors here today, if some of our participants in the marathon, want to visit the archive, how does one visit the archive at the School of the Art Institute?

was to get the Department of Justice to take on the case and sue the hotel, and for me it was a fifteen-year journey from beginning to end. It wasn't done specifically as an art project, but for me the unrealized aspect of it is to get it recognized as an art project. Activism can be many different things, and I am most interested when it asserts itself legislatively and legally, especially in relation to disability.

We have a website—huobrist.org—which represents and shows the various activities we're doing in the archive. And there's contact information there. If anyone would like to visit your archive, they can go to the website, contact me, and set up an appointment and see twenty-five years of publications and publication projects. Right now we have an exhibition of your hotel drawings up. A lot of people don't know you make drawings, but this is one of the secrets that we found when digging deep, a box filled with hundreds of your drawings.



Hans Ulrich Obrist, from the *Hotel Drawing* series.

You're going to see another clip now of Studs Terkel. And just as a matter of transition, I wanted to ask you, Joseph, to tell us what Studs means for you.

I was looking at the quotation you showed earlier—when you first asked Studs Terkel for advice and he said, "Listen. Listen to people. Listen to the silence." That was a beautiful comment. Maybe because there's a world in the silence. To be honest, I really don't know Studs's work. I've never heard him, I've been deaf for fifty-one years. But that quotation really registers for me—the importance of the pause, the silence.

Amazing, Joseph. Thank you so, so much. Big applause for Joseph Grigely.