

I cannot, for the life of me, think of what you call that little overlapping area at the intersection of two or more circles.

When Christoph Keller first asked Steve Hanson of China Art Objects if I could participate in the *Circles* exhibition, lecture and/or catalogue, I was in the middle of trying to compile a chronology of Hanson's now defunct band Mythter at the request of a local art magazine that was planning a music issue. It seemed to be a very fitting concurrence, allowing me to approach the concept of circles somewhat anachronistically. I admit, I thought I could kill two birds with one stone.¹ While trying to piece together a brief history of Mythter, I was struck by how difficult it was to actually obtain reliable information of what happened, and when, and where. I thought of how handy it would be if they had kept tidy records of all their performances; the band didn't exactly maintain a CV the way I was in the habit of doing. I felt a bit embarrassed (maybe even ashamed) about the hyper-documentation that goes without question for visual artists. As a librarian, Steve was in a position to watch wave after wave, after wave, of art students transmogrify. When Steve, a long-time collaborator in many creative endeavors, first entered my studio as a gallerist and asked me what I was up to the entire scaffolding of my career (i.e. my resumé) became entirely immaterial. You see, Steve and I go way back – not *that* way back – but one could say we go back at least ten 'generations' of fine-arts graduates – if you count every third graduating class as its own generation.

I began noting, in manic fashion, every inter-relation over the past ten years. This included, but was not limited to, trivia such as Steve semi-dating Beck's girlfriend, or my boyfriend at the time becoming Mythter's drummer. These tended to suggest a plethora of circular associations such as the presence of Mythter's drummer's mustache dumfounding Gavin Brown during a performance at a Pae White & Jorge Pardo show at Friedrich Petzel Gallery. This was on account of Gavin's interest in Nirvana, particularly the story of how they kicked out their first drummer simply because he wore a mustache, which meant, of course, that his mustachioed view of the world had no place in Nirvana.

Over the past ten years, Hanson and I have written music together and before that I even

participated in some Mythter performances. There's one in particular that pains me to remember yet might have allegorical potential. A Lurhing Augustine Hetzler gallery once existed in the Los Angeles area. Tim Neuger worked there and the gallery showed Jorge Pardo. In fact, the Pardo works first shown there factor heavily into a recent reading of '90s art which we'll get to later. Anyway, when the gallery closed down they had a party. I think Jorge built a big plywood stage where Mythter was to perform in front of a Diana Thater video projection of galloping horses and/or sunflowers. My part was to dance on stage with a hard hat and cordless drill. I didn't have any apprehension I just got up there and did it, along with another equally shameless young woman who worked at the Art Center library. Myther had t-shirts made to commemorate the dissolution and retreat from Los Angeles of Lurhing Augustine Hetzler. I danced on stage not unlike a stripper, wearing one of those shirts, and no bra.

However, 'The soul circumscribeth all things'

In Karlsruhe, as we were preparing to give our talk, Mark Von Schlegell brought up Ralph Waldo Emerson and his essay entitled 'Circles'. A spirited, in-eloquent, if not inarticulate, discussion followed, the gist of which was best inferred by curt, economical, and perhaps too ridiculous to quote, mutual affirmatives. I believe we may have been heading in the direction of what Emerson termed 'the over-soul.' In any event, when it was time to go onstage I had lost the passionate train of thought, probably because I was prepared to disavow connected-ness. My plan was to liberate myself from the belief that mapping alliances is key in understanding the broader meaning and implications of concurrent art practices. I've had some experience with this unspoken supportiveness used as premise for an art show. I didn't attempt to make sense of the grouping of artists in the *Circles* exhibition, nor did I ruminate extemporaneously on why a re-reading of Emerson seemed so appropriate, and promising. I wanted to share my aforementioned experience with the audience and speak about a 1997 exhibition I did with Sharon Lockhart

¹ Though I never completed the band's chronology, I did, ultimately end up killing two birds with this one stone; as this piece shares a few paragraphs with my column '10SNE1?', which for the reader accustomed to deciphering personalized license plates means Tennis Anyone?

and Laura Owens. The gallery representing Lockhart mounted the exhibition in the hopes of unearthing something about the way we influenced and/or supported each others' work. Our collaboration efforts were awkward as we had to come to terms with the fact that we didn't necessarily have any reason to collaborate if it wasn't for the exhibition. It's hard to say, but, in the end, the show drastically reshaped our friendship.

Emerson also wrote an essay called 'Friendship'. I have since read it, and the way he describes connecting with a friend sounds a lot like your run of the mill studio visit in art school, only for him an intellectually inspiring friend comes along once in a great while. He says that, faced with the prospect of a one to one meeting with a 'commended stranger', we rise to the occasion of new friends and 'talk better than we are wont.' Our nimbler fancies surprise us, even our memories are better 'and our dumb devil has taken leave for the time.'² The non-stop, pan-intimacy of the art community poses some difficulties which may cause some confusion between shared ideological principles and just plain companionship. At some point there is just one opportunity too many to make a friend and after a while it gets hard to see the trees for the forest. Too many soups spoil the cooks, if you know what I mean. Several months after I attempted to reflect on my exhibition with Lockhart and Owens, the exhibition resurfaced in a surprisingly big way in a catalogue essay by Lane Relyea for the exhibition *Public Offerings*. In it he writes '...hints have been made at the central importance of friendships among artists.' Somberly, he admits 'few would argue that [the art world] is sustained by a healthy metaphysics or even shared communal values. Rather, it's linked up by more physical and arbitrary circumstances...dominated on the micro-level by the chance encounters of art school enrollment...'³ He also implies, with disappointment, that friendships opt for reticence, refusing to compromise their private value even though, paradoxically, the public value of its constituents is what make a 'publicly pledged camaraderie' press-release- and art-catalogue-essay worthy in the first place. 'Much

of what usually gets considered as having only circumstantial relevance to art-making – career moves, connections, side jobs, fleeting liaisons, off-hand remarks – all the prosaic residue and local distractions artists and other denizens of this world might experience and chat about – has been enfolded within the art itself.'⁴

'...this cultural pessimism that seems to oppress everyone is always shifted onto someone else's shoulders; and plainly put, man as culture-consumer is, in an insidious way, dissatisfied with man as culture-producer...Just take a moment to leaf through the news and reviews...and you will truly be amazed at how many deeply moving, prophetic, greatest, deepest, and very great masters appear over the course of a few months. ... A few weeks later hardly anyone can still remember the unforgettable impression they made. ... All such judgements derive from diverse circles hermetically closed off to each other.'⁵

In *The Gay Science*, written while re-reading Emerson, Nietzsche refers to philosophy as the incisive household of the soul. What would it take for an artist to untangle his web of professional associations that obscure the fundamental enthusiasm of his art? A trip to Walden pond perhaps? If you were to leave your circle – exit the proverbial loop – could you, as Nietzsche says, 'become who you are'? What I'm drunk-driving at here is that the dizzying proliferation of arbitrary characters, with whom we, as art professionals, are expected to perpetually connect, makes it incredibly difficult to gain perspective or take advantage of the creature comforts offered us by such a wide and noble circumference.

2 Ralph Waldo Emerson 'Friendship', 1841

3 Lane Relyea, 'LA-Based and Superstructure' *Public Offerings*, MOCA, 2001, p.252

4 Ibid. p.262

5 Robert Musil 'Surrounded by Poets and Thinkers' *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, Eridanos Press, 1987, p.74