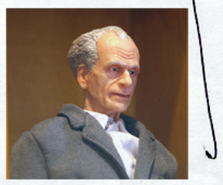
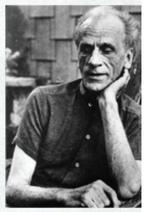
Celestial Navigation also provoked the kinds of speculations that might make anyone nervous – Snicker, it might be interesting for you to know, was Cornell's nickname for ~~his brother~~ Robert. For us, it's just one of many word games that Cornell played in his lifetime and as a spirit.

17

karl - unpopular did it as a lark
adam - affinity for birds?
karl - tapping in the nails and he's sneering
paula - conflict about work for a commission
karl - sitting in the room somebody gonna come see him
adam - hugo gallery
clyde - conventional expectations
karl - band of followers, he couldn't produce what they wanted.
snickering when he put it together
clyde snickered over everything. it's like teasing.
second guess
me what are you angling for?
valerie - take away the joy.....trying to know everything snicker
for you





And it suggests compellingly that the spirit medium is a translator and interpreter of a text which IS the spirit in question.

So the Joseph Cornell as philosophical text which emerges is a collaboration between the dead and the living, between us and Cornell and the mediums, between the most important of collaborators: the art work and its viewer. The seance is an allegory for history, maybe even for art history.

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~~clyde: I was a mollusk, I didn't progress~~
~~valerie: strange? refrain, sustain, detain, etc.~~

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SPIRIT AS TEXT

For us the notion of a spirit medium as a transalator and interpreter of a text which is the spirit in question, seems a compelling metaphor. A medium may receive images, or words, or dates or names, which he or she then

In some ways this original text is related to art historical notions of finding the motivation for work of art in the personal life of the artist.

OPPOSITE: Chris Kubick & Anne Walsh ABOVE: Allan deSouza

A Discourse Concerning the Practice of Art

ALLAN DESOUZA TALKS TO CHRIS KUBICK & ANNE WALSH OF ARCHIVE

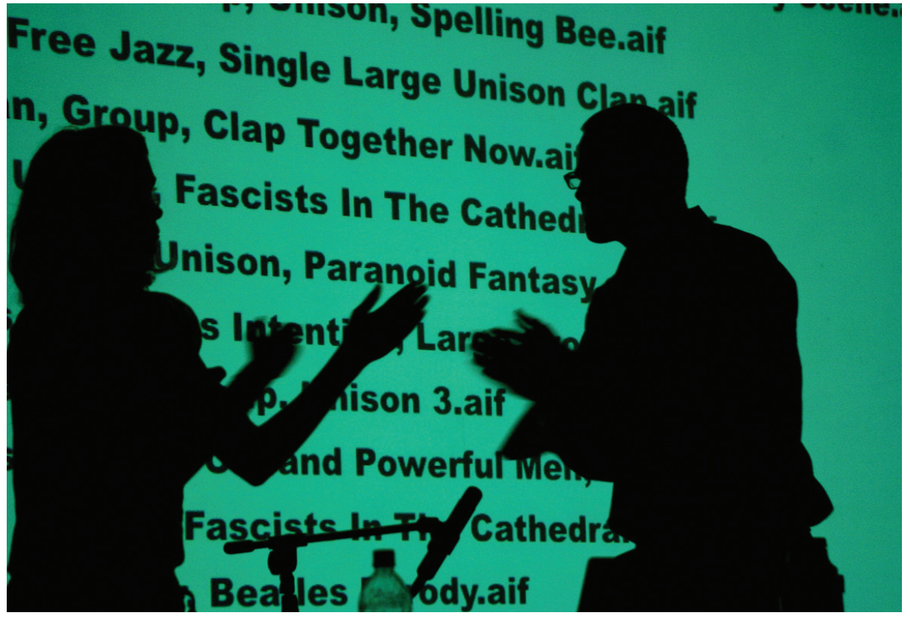
Allan deSouza's photographic and sculptural works examine issues of architecture, the body, dislocation, landscape, memory, vision, and the formation of racial, sexual, and colonial identities. His artwork has been exhibited internationally, and his fiction and critical writings have appeared in various journals and anthologies. Artists Chris Kubick and Anne Walsh work together collaboratively under the name ARCHIVE utilizing a variety of formats and tools including performance lectures, spoken-word CDs, video games, exhibitions, and works on paper. Their projects have been exhibited (and broadcast) throughout the world.

Allan deSouza: I've just completed a text piece for an exhibition in Toronto. It's written in graphite directly on a 9 x 20-foot wall. It suggests newspaper columns, landscapes, seascapes, buildings, and also the Union Jack. It includes three intersecting narratives about a historical character, Sidi Mubarak Bombay, or just Bombay, who was a guide for British explorers such as Richard Burton, John Speke, David Livingstone, and others. Two other narratives are fictional accounts of my father's migration from Bombay—now known as Mumbai—(the city) to East Africa, and my migration from East Africa to England—"the masters' home" that Bombay (the man) desired to visit but died before he could. Although there is logic to my sequencing of the text panels, there are a number of possible ways the viewer can navigate them, each way producing a different narrative sequence in terms of historical time.

In that description/recall of a figure from the past, and intertwining it with more familial histories (though there is no claim made by me to truth), I wonder what overlaps there are with your projects? I can think of many, but wonder what your thoughts are.

Anne Walsh: Some of what echoes through your work and ours is the tension between an abundance of description in the face of an absent referent. What would one see if one could see the thing that's missing? Or hear if one could hear it? Or what would one hear if one were never to have read the words describing the sound? What is the shape of absence?

You mention a "description/recall of a figure from the past, and intertwining it with more familial histories" as something we've both worked at, in different ways. I agree, although I think the family part hasn't been present in my work with Chris so much as it has in my video work. I'm so interested in what sort of physical vocabularies families produce as part of their communication habits. How the particular production of meaningful albeit nonverbal language, or "expression" (which is related closely to body language), is passed along through families, sometimes even genetically, but also between families and



other institutions, such as television, movies, schools, even the state. Working with Chris, we've been recording our encounters with figures of the historical past that are present in some mediated form—a statue, a professional reenactor, a spirit invoked by a spirit medium…

Recently we were invited by the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia to participate in an exhibition titled *21st Century Abe,* in celebration of Lincoln's bicentennial this year, and with the goal of showing the Lincoln collections of the museum to an audience of young people from the late teens to twenties. So we've embarked on a series of short videos that begin at the monuments to Lincoln in Mexico, and the monuments to Benito Juarez that are here in this country. (These monuments were all swaps between the two countries in the 1960s—seemingly an effect of the cold war, the emerging Organization of American States [OAS], and the two countries' desires to prop up each other's capitalist identities.)

AD: Considering the idea of "the shape of absence," I can't help going back to my own photographs of airports from the *Threshold* series (in itself, a compulsive restaging or a return of sorts to a "first encounter"). The photographs depict empty or perhaps emptied spaces. The absence here, as also in your work, is of the human body. Or rather its "absence" is waiting; being brought back into visibility and hearing. It never went away, only merged into the walls.

ABOVE: Allan deSouza OPPOSITE: Chris Kubick & Anne Walsh

AW: This reminds me of one understanding of the "ghost" that Chris and I arrived at through our work with spirit mediums, asking them to provide us access to the spirits of certain dead artists so we could speak with them. The spirit seemed to us like a kind of text that mediums were particularly sensitive to reading and speaking. We concluded that the professional medium's spoken word performances had to be understood as an allegory for history as a narrative form. It seemed like there were so many parallels between these narrative forms: revelation and secrecy; discovery and covering up; inventing and reinventing. There is still so much to figure out about this though—I'm still really unsure what kind of voice it is that produces those texts: *What* is the spirit voice?

Chris Kubick: The interesting thing is that we're all dealing with decentered narratives, in our own ways. We're hinting at narratives and in fact phenomenological aspects of reality with our texts, but ultimately filtering them all through what is in some ways a very wide and fractured lens, this idea of an archive or a collection, which provides a subtext, and also turns each line of text into an example or perhaps even a specimen. Because of this, each text provokes questions not only about the relation of the text to a sound or experience, but also about the relationship between that specimen and the larger collection. Who made these collections, and why? What do these sound effect titles mean when taken together? Allan's decentering is similar but a little different, in that there are distant modes of discourse at play in the writing, for example, artist, historian, and colonist. Are these unique voices or just unique *foci*?

AD: I'm taken by your mention of a common interest in decentered narratives. I think so too. And I think that decentering occurs in (at least) two ways. One, that the subjects have been already decentered, and that we might be engaged in bringing them back to some kind of attention; and two, constructing histories that are intentionally decentered. Let me try to clarify the latter: If engaged in a process of historicizing our subjects (which I think we are), then it's not simply a matter of creating an alternative version or narrative, but also a matter of contesting existing narratives as well as revealing the fragility and fallibility of the historicizing process itself. And one way to do that is to construct histories that might be intentionally decentered, elusive, contested. Or, as you say, intriguing, dodging, activating, rather than signed, sealed, and delivered.

Also, I'm intrigued by your use of knowledge technologies for producing histories. I've been having other conversations about obsolete technologies, such as analog TV, vinyl records, land lines, photographic film, cassettes, and so on, and our nostalgia for them and the histories and forms of knowledge that might be lost along with them. What we might fear losing is partly our knowledge of ourselves, of our experiences of watching, listening, who we were with, and where—in short, our memories as they were formed *through* those technologies. I don't want to hold on to them out of fear of loss, nor do I want to prioritize them as purer conduits for experience, but I am interested in the production of the self through different technologies, and that's one of the attractions for me about your work.

CK: Part of what I love about sound effects is that they're sounds that aren't actually sounds. Or, while they are sounds, they're sounds accompanied by an extra little word—"effect"—which clarifies and suggests a *complicatedness* and a fakeness. And actually, they're sounds that are accompanied by lots of words, all of the descriptions that those sounds evoke. Often in fact, the titles or descriptions of sound effects have several different wildly divergent accompanying images or ideas attached to them. Even very specific sounds, which evoke very specific things, can become other things through simple forms of suggestion.

What they're doing is similar to what Allan is doing in his photographs; they're subtly drawing our attention to the framing mechanisms at play, a focus on or interest in shifts in scale, which is ultimately for me one of the more interesting aspects of both photography and phonography. I'm thinking in particular of the cities photographs and also of the *Divine* series, where there's a sublime kind of joke at work that draws attention to the process (the transformation of scale), nicely undermines it, and for me creates a kind of pulsing tension—it's big, no it's small, no it's big. These photographs leave me questioning the thingness of things. Which is what I like, more than anything or any thing.

I find myself thinking more and more about my work as writing, or perhaps as the writing of a person who fundamentally mistrusts language. I recently was talking to some folks who know my work pretty well and mentioned the word *narrative*, and they were taken aback, partially I'm sure because *narrative* is sort of a dirty word these days (like, for the past 50 years—in terms of sound and music I would say that's a sentiment that's even stronger). That's probably the underlying attraction of sound effects, which are a bit like flexible words, because even when sound effects have no texts associated with them—I'm

thinking here of sound effects experienced in the wild, in their natural environment, at the multiplex, or even more so in radio plays—the way that we know them as sound effects, is that they tell a little sonic story.

AW: I, too, think the question about the word *narrative* in contemporary art discourse is interesting—how the word itself often seems overused, but in the work under discussion I recognize a bias against what one might call storytelling in art—to the extent that one of the effects of "globalizing" a certain European-modernist aesthetic is the diminution of storytelling altogether. This is a question in my mind—not a statement so much as a suspicion. What's paradoxical is that while the "narrative impulse" may have been banished to works on the outer edges of the European-modernist art clubs, the *selling* of an artist always relies on a good biography, a juicy life story.

This leads me to think a bit about works in which something more recognizable as "storytelling" *is* present, and how that narrative impulse is framed by art discourse. What interests me is that a certain kind of narrative drive is sometimes construed as one of the hallmarks of the "outsider" artist—that is, something like a compulsive or neurotic or perhaps slightly schizoid storyline in the artist's head drives his or her visual work, as distinct from stories that could be read as having critical and allegorical functions.

Does one have to be literally *crazy* to tell a story, to commit to a character, or not know the difference between crazy and art, as in the case of someone like Andy Kaufman, who stayed in character even off stage? Does this situation suggest a *denial* of the frame? Is it a suggestion that the frame is irrelevant and the story exists regardless? It's interesting to see storytelling being reclaimed, at least curatorially, as a "strategy." In other words, narrative is OK as long as it's "highly stylized."

AD: I also constantly use the term *narrative,* and with a broader understanding of it to the extent where everything contains or is narrative. Let me clarify this broader use: The frames (the gallery, the wall, the lens, the CD, the book, the screen, the plinth, the discourse, the "field," etc.) through which we encounter something are already narrative (and historicizing) devices. All our experience—including bodily experiences such as "love," fear, anxiety, and so on—is mediated by those kinds of devices and discourses. Where we encounter something, how, what languages it operates within, what forms it uses—I think of all these as framing narratives. And Euro-modernism's denial of narrative is a kind of fallacy. Like its lie of "universalism": The idea that one can transcend narrative or those mediations is a pretense, whether or not it is a desirable or necessary pretense.

I think the three of us share a suspicion of language's potential for a certain kind of finality and closure. We've seen that form of usage from the petty authority of the art critic to the demagoguery of the politician; the "with us or against us" use of language that allows no nuance, no discussion—language as control. No wonder we're suspicious. And no wonder we're interested in examining language before it comes into being, whether its form is aural, visual, or linguistic.

Is scale one of the tools of that examination? The zoom in, the zoom out, the amplification, the muting (and mutating), the calling into question what it is we think we hear, see, understand?

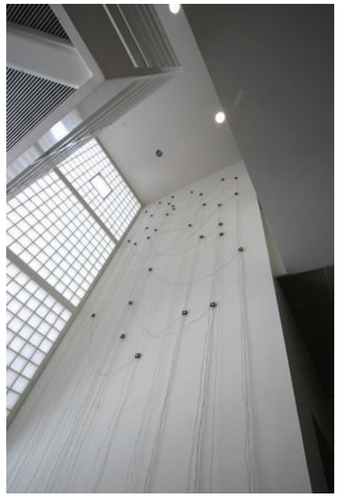
> I'm completely in sympathy with feeling the pressure that as an artist one has to produce "new" work, and also sensing that there are already too many photographs in the world.

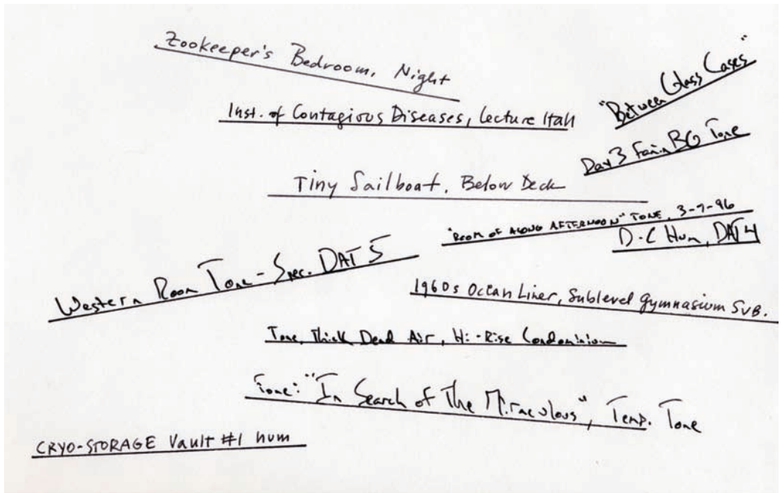
Chris, you mentioned "a sublime kind of joke that draws attention to the process...." I think of the joke and laughter as devices that generate language or that can bring something—often otherwise unspoken or unspeakable—into language. I try to use a joke that's played not on the viewer or the listener, but on itself, with an invitation to be heard/viewed.

Any more thoughts on jokes? I think of your work as funny, that there's a joke being played, but a serious one or at least one that leads us to serious consequences.

CK: I almost tend to think of jokes, like art, as having a life of their own; good jokes aren't played by people or on people, rather, they just *are*. In other words, I truly tend to follow the idea that good works of art—and good jokes—are not

OPPOSITE: Allan deSouza ABOVE: Chris Kubick & Anne Walsh





made by any person, but shared conversations, performances, experiences that develop. But thanks for picking up on that, because *joke* is in fact almost the wrong word. The thing I'm trying to talk about can be a sublime experience, a sentimental one, a theoretical one, or a meaningless one. Ultimately, though, it's always a *slippery* experience, whether it's any of those things or all of those things.

AW: I was once asked: "Why is your work funny?" And I wondered how does one answer that question honestly? My first thought was an arrogant one: Because *I'm* funny. How could I possibly keep that out of my work? Frankly, it's still the best and only answer I have to the question. Yet, why have I been so reluctant to at least pose that question to myself in a way that I won't dismiss as naïve and fundamentally misunderstanding of the relationship between an artist and his or her work? Why don't I want to think about it? Maybe it's one of the few things I take as a given about what I do, because it happens without my having to work at it. Still, I think humor is a kind of stylistic device that's both natural and personal. It holds people, maybe helps them stay with the work, and it disarms me as the artist (though of what weapon I'm not sure). Perhaps it disarms the viewer of some suspicion about having the wool pulled over his or her eyes by a work that's formally kind of sober, and therefore withholding pleasure. Does it add a kind of riotousness to the very reductive forms we use?

AD: As with you, humor is central to my work, but I also don't know quite how to talk about it, and I wish I had a broader vocabulary for types of jokes. I agree with you, Chris, that what I/we do is not quite a "joke" either. I've described my working method in the past as an agreement with the viewer that there's a joke being played (the artwork playing a joke on its own process of coming into being—what Anne referred to as the self-reflexive joke), and to then proceed with this agreement to see where it takes us. And my intent is to get to something that isn't or wasn't previously funny. But that explanation is not enough for me, even though I've given something like it in artist's talks.

I think humor reveals the tightrope that we constantly tread. One slip and the result is either tragedy or slapstick. It's that closeness to falling that is constantly shadowed by humor. Is that a reason for humor's necessity, as a tool for releasing tension and for grasping the meaning that is generated in that release?

CK: I think you're right to talk about framing as a narrative device, and I agree with the invocation of the "always already" framed universe. And I think that the various attempts to renounce frames, renounce the textual dimension of all kinds of work, basically has to do with the desire to be seen as telling the truth, to be seen as truthful, serious, and, if possible, to be seen as a person whose credibility isn't undermined by emotional responses.

AD: Yes, but that relationship to truth is also used in an anthropological way in which "Others" are expected to tell the "truth" of themselves or of their "own culture." My refusal to do that, and to avoid that fixity, then leads me to emphasize the framing devices that might otherwise be so naturalized as to appear to be "truth."

Having said that, I am interested in my work as being not autobiography (or truth telling), but as a form of ethnography, as a focus on or my relationship to culture and how I might be located by and within it. In his essay "The Artist as Ethnographer?" Hal Foster dismisses this as confession or as a retreat into essentialism. But I think he's being simplistic in that he doesn't credit those "ethnic" artists with critical faculties to navigate through the "confessional" or the "essentialist," even if they choose to use these as tactics rather than mindlessly falling into them. In my case, I use the "confessional" mode deliberately within strategies of fiction, or to examine the role of experience as a form of knowledge acquisition. I don't think I privilege personal experience over other kinds of knowledge. And I don't portray "my" culture (how could one ever know where that begins and ends), but examine specific aspects of culture in general. And my interest in ethnography is not only that in past times I might have been the object of study, but whether as a discipline it suggests a structure or methodology for the examination of one's own placement within culture. I'm interested in the position not of being an outsider and therefore of placing myself in any kind of polar opposition, but of being already implicated. To me, that's a more productive site from which to conduct an ethnographic study.

AW: What's really tricky is pulling off this practice where one's subjectivity as an observer-participant is necessarily recognized within the work, but is not *the* subject of the work, insofar as the work involves a look outward at what's in the world. I used to think of myself as somehow deficient in creative imagination because my art isn't one of invention, but rather one of condensation or extraction. I realized that everything I need to make art already exists, and that my aesthetic interventions and inventions occur at the level of framing, timing, editing, directing, and re-recreating.

AD: I'm completely in sympathy with feeling the pressure that as an artist one has to produce "new" work, and also sensing that there are already too many photographs in the world, that everything is being photographed—and, as a photographer, whether I want to simply add to that mass. I haven't given up taking photographs, but I do try to intervene in the viewer's relationship to the photograph.

www.doublearchive.com
www.annewalshjunior.org

ABOVE: Chris Kubick & Anne Walsh