Seeing Trans for the Trees:
Rhizomatic Curatorial Frameworks and the *Visualizing TRANS* Exhibition

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"Always a Middle," or, an Adventure in Transcribing a Story of Trans

A bicycle does not often function with two flat tires and dismantled handlebars, but for myself and the seven co-curators of *Visualizing TRANS*, fifty bikes in this condition served as a meaningful introduction to our curatorial project of mapping trans movements and identities.[1] Working on the site of a highly industrialized space and former iron foundry at the Kupfer Center in Madison, Wisconsin, each curator accompanied a single bike through the extensive warehouse, returning alone or in a tandem of conversation to the front of the building where another dismantled bike waited to be transported. In our rhythmic clearing of the space for exhibition, we set into motion yet another transformation in the building's history. For our physical curatorial labor joined that of the manual and creative workers who had come before us in the space, memories of whom remained in the building's details. We negotiated the Center's elements, walking under hanging gantry cranes now immobile, stepping over train tracks and under countless I-beams, past large bay doors and stacked boxes storing goods waiting for shipping. We strained our necks to see the system of pulleys and ropes strung from the high ceiling, ready to harness performers from a local dance troupe for an event that would precede our exhibition's opening. The bikes revealed another aspect of the Center's character, as the building provides storage for neighborhood charities that include Dane County's Wheels for Winners.[2]

Our unconventional bike treks traced the Kupfer Center's multiple historical and physical transformations. The site already contained elements of our curatorial endeavor, evident in a single hanging chair that would play a role in Kate Hewson and Marina Kelly's performance and installation *Resident Alien*. (figs.1-2) As an exhibition venue, this was no white cube. The Center promised to facilitate our curatorial labor by providing a malleable space for multiple creative and intellectual movements—precisely the space that trans demands.

Malleability. Iron. Ironworking. Carrie Roy's Krumkake photographs greeted the viewer upon entering the Kupfer Center. The central image reveals a close-up of an old iron pan that bears the marks of its Norwegian origins and subsequent migration to the Midwestern United States. (fig.3) The delicate pastry contrasts with its heavy iron pan, and these solid objects of transnational and transcultural movements introduce the visitor to the ironworking factory and the Visualizing TRANS *exhibition.*

Organized to coincide with and complement the TRANS: Visual Culture Conference at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in October 2006, *Visualizing TRANS* was an interdisciplinary exhibition of work by over forty artists, scholars, and students—ranging from local to international—whose work explored and articulated the diverse applications of the prefix "trans-". Prominent themes included transgender, transculture, transnation, transsensory, transhistory, biological transformations, and the

many intersections of each. The "transcurators" (as we dubbed ourselves throughout the project) were a group of current and former graduate students and artists from diverse fields who each have a vested interest in visual culture studies and the potentials for an exhibition that would take trans as its theme. In addition to myself, these transcurators were Tamar Brown (Ph.D. candidate in Communication Arts, UW-Madison), Heidi Ganshaw (M.F.A., Cranbrook Academy), Chele Isaac (M.F.A. candidate, UW-Madison), Megan Katz (M.F.A. candidate, UW-Madison), Emily Pfotenhauer (M.A. in Art History and Material Culture, UW-Madison), Sara Schneckloth (M.F.A., UW-Madison), and Beth Zinsli (Ph.D. student in Art History, UW-Madison). Our collaboration provided the intellectual and practical resources that were required to mount the exhibition, and also insured flexibility and multiplicity of curatorial vision—an aspect that proved vital to our theme's demands.

From the very beginning of the project, we wanted to approach the exhibition's curatorial model and environment with an acute sense of self-consciousness. We were interested in our theme's potentials to determine the shape or system of the curatorial model. To this end, the transcurators looked to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theorization of the rhizome.[3] Like the dynamic prefix trans-, the rhizome's physical and conceptual nature describes an open system that accounts for multiplicity and nomadic movements between and among seemingly distinctive practices and modes of thought. For instance, a rhizome is solely composed of "lines of flight," rather than notable points along a linear continuum.[4] A rhizomatic structure has no clear beginnings or endings, but rather encompasses multiple points of entry and articulation. This system works against

centralized, or what Deleuze and Guattari call "aborescent" or "rooted", tree-like modes of thought.

In his valuable work on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, Brian Massumi defines an open system as a way of describing the world using "fractal attractors," or fractured points of convergence that do not claim to provide a totalizing vision of what the system represents.[5] The rhizome epitomizes this open system, which Massumi links to the "space of the nomad": an open-ended, "smooth space" in which "one can rise up at any point and move to any other."[6] From the inception of the curatorial project, the curators envisioned that trans—due to its multiplicity of expressions and forms—would require an open conceptual model like the one that Deleuze and Guattari propose in the rhizome. Translating this theory to curatorial practice, we decided to work against a centralized model where trans serves as a pivotal moment or statement around which the curator constructs meaning. Rather, the transcurators envisioned a curatorial framework that would be similar to a distributed network model with multiple pathways and focal points that determine the structure of the system, which then flexibly adapts according to the amount of information that it contains.[7] Further, we recognized the potential of trans to rhizomatically adapt a distributed network which would lead, for instance, to dead ends, broken lines, or returns.

> *Kurt Weston's photographs explore the permeable yet intangible*
> *frustrations of the artist's blindness, conveying these feelings to the viewer*
> *through black and white distorted close-ups of figures pressing against the*
> *clear picture plane. The water that traces and marks the experience is*

ultimately unable to provide the clarity for which the subjects yearn

(fig.4). In the Kupfer Center's front room, these photographs are installed

opposite Heidi Ganshaw's Untitled (Bradley Pool)*, where neat, white,*

hexagonal bathroom tiles trace a pattern across the rusted basin of the

room's sink (fig.5). The works are linked by allusions to the potentials and

remnants of water, yet their juxtaposition establishes a space of ambiguity

that cannot be easily or authoritatively mapped by the curator.

This paper and the exhibition it describes are both experiments in trans thinking

and doing. I will evaluate the *Visualizing TRANS* exhibition and its curatorial model and

practice with the goal of formulating a response to this central question: did *Visualizing*

TRANS provide the open system and desired curatorial model required by trans, and if

not, what were its limitations? To answer this question, I will first define the exhibition's

conceptual dimensions by contextualizing scholarly efforts to visualize trans movements

and extending them to describe the understanding of trans that informed the exhibition's

curatorial processes and goals. I will utilize the rhizome as defined by Deleuze and

Guattari and apply its characteristics to the exhibition project. I will then address the

ways in which the rhizome was implemented into the gallery space—closely linking the

art objects, the viewers, and the exhibition venue. Additionally, I will analyze the

exhibition's curatorial model against some fundamental criticisms associated with other

recent efforts at remaking the traditionally centralized efforts of the curator, namely the

debates conducted during and in the wake of the "Curating, Immateriality, Systems"

conference at the Tate Modern in 2005 organized by Joasia Krysa.[8] These steps will

allow me to measure the success of *Visualizing TRANS* in its efforts to use Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome to create and enact the open system that its curators envisioned.

Like the academic conference that took trans as its theme and intellectual challenge, the curatorial team recognized the exhibition as an opportunity to engage in a collaborative venture where process, artwork, pattern of organization, and venue all worked together to provide a place where trans movements could be visualized and respected. In a place and time where many subject positions and art practices rely on or self-identify as trans, *Visualizing TRANS* presented a new trial in bridging forms of flexible and hybrid thinking with similar, non-linear structures in curatorial practice.

In an effort to retain contact with the physical exhibition project and its process throughout this paper, I will periodically turn (as in a temporal return to the show's space and time, and/or literal turn in subject matter to illustrate my discussion) to its art objects, its circumstances, or its environment. My hope is that you will join me on the journey that the bicycles instigated; that we can move rhizomatically through the processes of exhibition and paper, tracing various lines of flight, to see trans for the trees.

Some Definitions and Problems: Visualizing Trans

Dr. Jill H. Casid's graduate seminar entitled "Visual Transculture" at the University of Wisconsin-Madison during the fall semester of 2006 brought together students from a variety of academic disciplines and creative practices who grappled each week with central questions of definition, conception, and application: What is transculture? Where is transculture? How is it distinguished from similar terms and ideas such as mestizaje, hybridity, mélange, and créolité? And how can we account for its

historical, geographical and bodily applications? While the class debated these issues, one thing was clear: the trans in "transculture" has multiple meanings and potentials, and it demands a variety of theoretical and practical applications that adapt and change according to its geographic, temporal, and linguistic locations.

Always promising movement, trans is often invoked to describe the spaces between, through, or across seemingly stable categories of knowledge. It can also point to those bodies or practices that cross borders—whether between nations, cultures, genders, temporalities, or biological forms. Trans can indicate a movement beyond, as in "transcendence," or it can describe the real world violence that often comes with border crossings. By their dynamic nature, trans objects, bodies, and ideas defy neat compartmentalization while denying any fixed placement in linear narrative structures.

Conceptualizing the "in-between" has been a significant concern for many theoreticians of trans manifestations. In an essay articulating the inadequacies of transcultural theoretical models like syncretism, hybridity, mestizo, and mélange, Serge Gruzinski describes the difficulty of conceptualizing cultural mixing and heterogeneous multiplicity. He attributes our confusion to "simple intellectual habits which favor monolithic ensembles over 'in-between' spaces" and laments the vital bodies that are omitted in these simplistic viewing habits, saying:

> This way of viewing things stultifies and impoverishes reality by eliminating all kinds of elements that play crucial roles: not only the exchanges and intersections between the two worlds, but also the groups and individuals who act as go-betweens, as intermediaries, who move between the large blocks that we are happy to identify. In reality, these intermediate spaces have played a key role in history…[9]

Gruzinski's estimation of the problem in this passage conceives of trans as spaces and bodies between large points; trans as an identifiable and marginalized space of the "in-

between." In order to effectively visualize trans, I argue that we must take up the

challenge that trans poses to linear structures of knowledge. I make this conceptual move

by extending Gruzinski's description of the importance of the "in-between" to those outer

entities that the space seems to mediate. This directs us instead to the revisionist

potentials of trans to remake those dominant narratives that dictate the original placement

of the trans prefix for liminal or seemingly indeterminate spaces.

Other scholars have considered trans for its potentials to remap the dominant

conceptual terrain that conceives of trans as a unique set of spaces in-between or apart

from supposedly non-trans entities. In their articulation of a "polycentric aesthetics" in

the visual arts, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam describe artistic manifestations that

deconstruct dominant narratives to reveal instead the hybrid, mutually informing, and

often transtemporal nature of cultural practice that is *always* present, even in canonical

milestones of European history.[10] Moreover, they contend that the real meaning of the art

object lies in its connectivity, advocating that art is "born *between* individuals and

communities and cultures in the process of dialogic interaction."[11] For an exhibition of

objects that visualize trans, it is this model of hybridity and meaning through

interconnectivity that maps the terrain rather than a linear model that locates trans in the

gaps between major narrative points.

Connectivity maps the terrain. A large "T" is formed in the negative space

of a hangar in the Kupfer Center's exterior yard ("T"-for-trans, fig.6). As

the viewer sees this "T," she stands under a flight path and alongside

heavily traveled train and bike routes. It is a transitory space, witness to

multiple passings of people and goods on their way to both global and

local sites, yet solid in its materials and rooted in its community.

The revisionist potential of trans served as an important guiding factor for the *Visualizing TRANS* exhibition. When the transcurators held our initial meetings, we quickly decided to work as a larger curatorial team and tackle trans as a broadly defined subject, rather than attempting to parse out "transgender" from "transnational" from "transhistorical" for separate exhibitions. Such an organizational structure would have relegated trans to particular spaces easily distinguished from each other and from a perceived heteronormative public sphere (e.g. "transgender" from "gender," "transculture" from "culture"). This distribution would have reproduced a cultural model where trans complements dominant narrative structures by happily existing in the "in-between" where mixing supposedly only occurs. This is not to say that we did not recognize or value the practices or meanings of trans that are potentially or often wildly divergent in their ability to signify or enact different meanings in various contexts.[12] Rather, we wanted to work with a larger conceptual field in order to pose questions about how curatorial frameworks map or narrate cultural interactions and how these frameworks reproduce dominant narrative structures for readers and audiences. Our conception of trans was therefore not essentialist; on the contrary, our use of the rhizome ensured that fundamental differences between the applications of trans could manifest and be set in active dialogue with other works in the exhibition. Departing from the geographically and conceptually restrictive understanding of trans that reproduces its marginality, and looking towards Sue Golding (Johnny de Philo)'s method of "nomadic

skin" storytelling,[13] the transcurators envisioned a space where multiply-interconnected trans manifestations would map a different conceptual terrain, giving an exhibition form to the cultural model theorized by Shohat and Stam. Valuing trans not as mere spaces of the "in-between," but as valid points of departure and of integral connections in their own right emphasizes Nicholas Mirzoeff's unsettling statement that "all culture is transculture."[14]

How then do we visualize trans in an art exhibition—that very format that so often creates and reinforces dominant cultural binaries and narratives? Rather than working as fixed points in a structured narrative, trans needs a space in which it can move horizontally in the ways that Shohat and Stam describe, or nomadically in the ways that Golding imagines. Trans requires a curatorial model that does not separate the dynamic practice of its art objects from their contextual ground. In this respect, our conception of trans relates to new media art projects that are intimately linked and often wholly constituted by networks of people and information.

Many curatorial ventures of new media, both in museums and on the Internet, have recognized the need for distributed curatorial models or modes of display that reflect the production and conception of its subjects within systems of collaboration. Ron Wakkary articulates this aspect of the subject-curator relationship in new media shows in his critique of the *Avatar* exhibition at Stockholm's Moderna Museet in 1998. Wakkary convincingly argues against the placement of new media work (in this specific case, the multiply-signifying "Avatar" theme) within a centralized "museum model."[15] Wakkary describes the museum model as a vertical structure that culminates in a "pinnacle moment." Such an organizational method limits or bans any non-linear movements,

which can be damning in an exhibition where a subject like "Avatar" or trans relies on

multiple forms of connections and networks for its vitality.[16] Wakkery's conception of

the museum model in my estimation functions similarly to what Deleuze and Guattari

propose in their discussion of aborescent systems, which impose taprooted lineages on

discursive subjects. Our belief that the exhibition's form should be closely linked to its

content was an integral part of our project's planning, location, and implementation.

However, as I will address below in my analysis of the exhibition and as many critics of

alternative curatorial frameworks have convincingly argued, the easy alignment of

traditional curatorial frameworks with authoritative control versus decentralized,

"progressive" models that promise freedom of movement presents a problematic and

false dichotomy. An overview of the extent to which new or alternative curatorial modes

engage with questions of identity and institutional power remain outside the scope of this

paper.[17] Nevertheless, my analysis of *Visualizing TRANS* may provide a case study for

this type of larger project.

From Conceptual to Curatorial Toolbox: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's Rhizome as
Exhibition Model

At its key structuring principle, the rhizome is a theoretical model that values and

insists on multiplicity. Deleuze and Guattari take their cue from the botanical category of

the rhizome: a group of plants that have no singular roots of origin, but rather exist and

grow through multiple connections that continually produce new spillages and

dimensions. When followed, these routes/spillages form "lines of flight" that constitute

the plant's reality. The rhizome works against what Deleuze and Guattari call the "root

book" or the "root-tree image" that operates on the "law of reflection," imitating the

world and replicating its binary structures rather than continuously making potential

connections across and through established modes of thought.[18] They qualify the "root-

tree" formula as "the most classical and well-reflected, oldest, and weariest kind of

thought," where multiplicity is understood as secondary roots that support a "pivotal

taproot."[19] South African artist, curator, and scholar Gavin Jantjes has importantly

applied Deleuze and Guattari's description of linear-minded aborescent systems to

Eurocentric cultural and historical models wherein European lineage is "taprooted" in

ancient Greece and Rome, proceeding linearly to postmodernism.[20] The resulting

narrative structure often troublingly suggests that, for example, African art production

supported European modernism, rather than having constituted or been a vital line in its

existence.[21]

A rhizomatic structure reflects a model where interconnectivity and multiplicity

create meaning. To this end, a rhizome has no fixed points, but only lines. There are no

beginnings or endings to its growths or connections, but "always a middle" that allows

for multiple points of entry and diverse movements. A rhizome is not measured by

distinguishable units, but has exponentially increasing dimensions determined by the

amount of connections that are present and set in motion.[22] In his work on Deleuzian

philosophy, John Rajchman describes how the philosophy's emphasis on connectivity

will attract certain kinds of thinkers, reading therein the model's potentials to remake

dominant narrative structures. He says:

> It is unlikely to work for those minds that are already settled, already
> classified, armed with the now increasingly useless maps of
> "postmodernism," "poststructuralism" or the old continental-analytic
> divide. It is for those whose minds or identities are not already made
> up...It tries to work with zones that are precisely not completely

determined or localizing, where things may go off in unforeseen directions
or work in unregulated ways…[23]

The rhizome and its emphasis on connectivity provide an open system in both its physical nature and the processes of its making, leaving open the possibilities for new entities that may emerge from its work. Rajchman's passage also describes the transcurators as a team, who from the outset were interested in using the exhibition and its model to express and explore our own conceptions of historical and cultural interactions.

Beyond merely defining the rhizome and how it accounts for multiplicity, Deleuze and Guattari understand that one's relationship to the rhizome is active. They describe and advocate our own efforts at making the multiple by purposefully working against merely (and perhaps easily) locating ourselves and our cultural productions as points along and within the linear systems that seemingly predate our birth. *Visualizing TRANS* takes Deleuze and Guattari's instructions to heart; namely the dictum "the multiple must be made," because it is in these infinite connections that nations, genders, cultures, and art objects are constituted.[24]

The multiple must be made. This idea is applicable to the Kupfer Center's residues of ironworking, our own curatorial labor, and the work of the exhibition's visitors. In the small gallery space at the front of the Kupfer Center sits a broken furnace with its manufacturer's name legibly on its surface: T R A N E (fig.7). This detail did not escape Jill Casid, who noted its play on trans, a reference to the trains both real and imagined that interact with the exhibition space, and its application to the

curatorial labor of training viewers to forge and make connections

through their own labors of looking.[25] The rhizome gamecard:
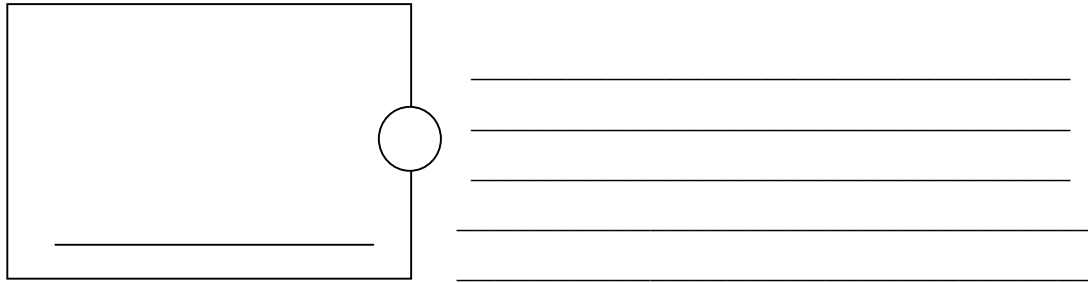
YOUR IDEA   THE PIECES CONNECTED TO YOUR IDEA

YOU _____YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS _____

A notable comparison for another distributed network model is rhizome.org.[26]

Also taking its cue and conceptual inspiration from Deleuzian philosophy, rhizome.org

provides an online community for technologically-interested artists, curators, and new

media forms. The site hosts information postings and articles (e.g. Wakkary's, considered

above) as well as virtual exhibitions of new media art. By its nature, rhizome.org

functions as a networked model, but there are several key differences between the site

and the *Visualizing TRANS* exhibition. Inke Arns and Jacob Lillemose correctly

characterize online venues like rhizome.org as curatorial-facilitators or hosts, rather than

as institutions or entities that curate new media works according to a decentralized

model.[27] Further, Arns and Lillemose call for a new vocabulary to describe ventures like

rhizome.org. They argue against the site's curatorial capacities and qualify the venture

instead as moderator or facilitator.[28] While the *Visualizing TRANS* project looked to the

same organizational philosophy as rhizome.org and shared many of the same principles

in terms of valuing network structures for their intimate relationships to art objects,

rhizome.org takes the open model to an entirely virtual level that *Visualizing TRANS* was

not interested in imitating. The diversity of these manifestations of rhizomatic trials and

application is a testimony to the philosophy's lasting influence, such that the debate

continues over Michel Foucault's claim that the twentieth century would one day be

known as Deleuzian.[29]

How then do we evaluate the exhibition's successes in adhering to its stated goals

of using a decentralized model to articulate trans? The issue is not one of diametric

opposites—an "open" versus "closed" model, where "open" is equated with absolute

freedom and "closed" with absolute curatorial control. In the introduction to the

publication following the 2005 conference at the Tate Modern, "Curating, Immateriality,

Systems," Joasia Krysa outlines the measures of control, or protocols asserted through

managerial systems, that still govern distributed networks despite their decentralization of

power.[30] The issue of absolutely open or closed systems is implicit in Massumi's reading

of Deleuze and Guattari as well, where various systems are "always an approximation" of

wholly controlled or wholly fractured systems, which are themselves "mythical."[31]

After reading Krysa and Massumi, I understand that our criteria for measuring

decentralized curatorial models should not be whether a model is strictly "open," or

"closed," but rather the degree to which that system was modulated, as well as the degree

to which this modulation allowed for the movement required by its subject matter. In

Visualizing TRANS, the transcurators encountered a number of circumstances where the

rhizome's open system presented impracticalities for the exhibition project. Our working

process thus revealed the ways in which our venture was in fact highly mediated and required our own efforts to channel through, adapt, and amend the rhizome as a conceptual model in order to make it feasible for practical application.

Felling the Tree, Surfing the Rhizome: Trans Visualized

Over forty works comprised the exhibition's checklist, ranging from photographs to works on paper to performances to film and video installations. The artists were selected from a pool of approximately 160 submissions, and represent contingencies both international and local, including work by Bob Paris (*Signal*, exhibited in the 1997 Whitney Biennial), Fred Lonidier (*N.A.F.T.A. Not a Fair Trade for All*, fig.8), Ryan Burghard (*After the Bough Breaks, the Yoke of the Perennial Everyman*, an MFA graduate from Madison, fig.9), and an animated short entitled *Transylvania* by the Art Club (fig.10), a group of Madison-area fourth graders led by local artist Abby Shotwell (who also installed *Confetti Tracks*).[32]

In taking trans as its theme and informing principle, the exhibition's curatorial method, selection of artworks, and exhibition venue looked to the open system that the rhizome provides, valuing the multiple interpretations and experiences of supposedly solid organizational structures like gender, nation, human sensory perception, and the boundaries between the arts and sciences. To achieve this conception of trans within the gallery space, each aspect of the curatorial project was closely linked to the others and to various components of trans. For instance, Doug Rosenburg's projection *Farmwork (Landscape)* (fig.11) opened a trans space by its placement in the Kupfer Center. With both projector and screen hung from the rafters, the piece greeted viewers with slow-

moving images of horses grazing among tall grasses, bringing a large, serenely quiet, natural space into the industrial surroundings of the exhibition venue. While both projection and site articulated different and compelling trans qualities prior to their meeting, their joint exhibition exemplifies the tightly aligned yet fluid connections between artwork and venue.

The curatorial conception of trans also informed the selection of artwork, but the rhizome as a networked organizational structure was not implemented in our juried selection of the pieces to be exhibited. By this I mean that the actual selection of artworks did not follow a distributed model, but rather a more traditionally centralized process, where the curatorial group debated each entry and determined selection based on the quality of the work and the degree to which it presented diverse and often multiple trans movements. Like rhizome.org's networked model, a rhizomatic selection might have involved input from the artists themselves, perhaps even from disparate geographical locations. Moreover, the selection process exemplifies one of Arns and Lillemose's provocative criticisms of open curatorial systems, which they say become

> problematic as soon as openness is not merely only observed as a structure of certain phenomena (as a kind of diagnosis), but is handled as a qualitative prerequisite: things have to have open structures in order to be good or positive.[33]

Indeed, the objects under consideration for exhibition were judged according to their degree and characteristics of trans-ness—an aspect that was included in our general call for proposals that was posted, among other places, on rhizome.org. This particular placement of our call, in addition to its stated desire for trans work that crosses multiple disciplinary boundaries, ensured that we would receive a certain kind of group of submissions that worked with our conceptions of trans. On this level of selection,

Visualizing TRANS did not look to an open model of organization but rather worked from a predetermined set of criteria based on its subject matter.

While we may read Arns and Lillemose's criticism as a fundamental challenge to the exhibition's claims to an open system, I want to suggest that the selection of work was actually a vital and practical step in curating our subject matter. Trans in our case required a close connection between the artwork and the Kupfer Center venue, and in this respect required what Deleuze and Guattari term a "General"[34] (in our case multiple curatorial minds) to structure the selection of artwork so that the rhizome could feasibly be implemented with these objects in the venue. While the theory's most exciting potentials are arguably that rhizomatic connections could be asserted with any objects, processes, or ideas, *Visualizing TRANS* required a traditionally structured juried exhibition in order to meet the practical requirements of our project and the open system that we envisioned for the space.

Having multiple curators ensured that we did not fall into the trap of another one of Arns and Lillemose's concerns for alternative curatorial models. That is, that dedication to a network scheme could feasibly sacrifice the quality of work to be exhibited.[35] Some members of the curatorial team had a larger investment in the rhizome as organizational structure than others, and I found myself arguing for some pieces that were rhizomatic but that feasibly would not work within the context of the Kupfer Center. For instance, an artist proposed a pristinely-painted piece that was meant to lie on the ground and invite visitors to walk on it, tracing its brightly colored registers and the various components that made up the artist's diverse background. While asserting trans identities in compelling ways, the piece did not make it into the exhibition due to the raw

nature of the space, as the work would have become too dirty to manage in the Kupfer

Center. The curatorial collaboration in this sense ensured the practicality and feasibility

of the *Visualizing TRANS* project, and also provided a crucial multiplicity of voices.

The industrial quality of the exhibition venue determined the layout in other

interesting, often frustrating ways. One of the Kupfer Center's most appealing features is

the proliferation of electrical outlets throughout the building, each labeled in scotch tape

with its vital signs as "HOT" or "DEAD." (fig.12) As a result of this delicate electrical

situation, certain works were placed with regards to where they could be lit and

functional without throwing a fuse in the power system. Once placed, artworks had to

remain situated and "plugged in" to their respective outlets, disallowing for any

flexibility of physical movement once the show opened. In this sense, trans was limited to

what the Kupfer Center would allow, and worked against an open model for exhibiting

the art works. The degree to which the Center determined the placement of work was not

apparent to the viewers however, and the Kupfer Center's raw, industrial qualities largely

benefited the artworks and the exhibition as a whole.

While artwork and space worked together to articulate trans, Sara Schneckloth's

Rhizome demonstrated the multiplicity of the exhibition theme by inviting the viewer to

participate in determining narrative connections. A co-curator of *Visualizing TRANS* and

a practicing artist, Schneckloth's work explores the material implications of Deleuze and

Guattari's "body without organs," through large and small scale images of imagined,

abstract landscapes.[36] In *Rhizome*, Schneckloth wanted to provide a tool through which

the exhibition and its artwork could be mapped within the lived environment, both on-site

at the Kupfer Center and in the broader context that visitors brought to the site. To this

end, she used various materials to simulate a map of the exhibition space onto four large

and highly textured pieces of foam core. (fig.13) Each piece in the exhibition was

represented on the map by a pin and label marked with the artist's name and abbreviated

title of their work. Visitors were given gamecards (pictured above) that asked them to

chart connections between people, places, or ideas—be they personal or shared— and the

pieces in the exhibition. Schneckloth then charted these connections on the map

throughout the course of *Visualizing TRANS*. For example, one viewer used the idea of

"feeling restricted" to connect three pieces: Mark Harvey's *Tony and His Mirror* (a video

that follows the trials of 'Tony,' who transforms his body using cardboard boxes, fig.14),

Stephanie Liner's *Gibbosity* (a live performance that models the artist's clothing for

women that contain attachments related to gender roles, fig.15), and Kate Hewson and

Marina Kelly's *Resident Alien* (a performance and installation that explores the artists'

personal experiences of diasporic identity, fig.2). Schneckloth mapped the connector,

"feeling restricted", outside the representative map of the gallery space, and then used red

yarn to attach the three pieces to that connection and to each other. With multiple

connections, patterns began to emerge, revealing the multiplicity of trans manifestations.

Schneckloth's rhizomatic connections highlighted Hewson and Kelly's *Resident Alien* as

a political entity as well as a piece that could evoke more personalized responses.

Throughout the run of the exhibition, a physical rhizome emerged and was made material

in Schneckloth's project. The piece's construction provided a tangible site in which the

connections articulated by its participants could constitute new narratives that were

traceable on the site of the gallery space.

Rhizome also addressed key practical issues of translating Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome into a real, workable exercise in multiplicity. For instance, the structure of the map relied on points, which worked against Deleuze and Guattari's dictum that the rhizome be constructed of "only lines." Furthermore, while the transcurators looked to *Rhizome* to physically provide the networked system that we had envisioned, the project encountered challenges that Schneckloth could not map. Some viewers refused the logic of project and wanted to map a concept like "serene" to each piece in the show. In a similar vein, some viewers wanted to comment on the exhibition as a whole, and *Rhizome*, in its physical manifestation, was unable to map these larger connections (although the virtual components of the exhibition did provide this space, as I argue below). One participant presented a real challenge to *Rhizome* as an open system, wanting to map connections between literal spaces that were not represented in the map's points. The viewer's larger concept was "unspoken violence," which he located not in a tangible link between two art objects, but in the *space* between Alan Marcus's *Beautiful Dachau* and Marina Kelly and Kate Hewson's *Resident Alien*. Additionally, the viewer wanted to chart that same link between the picnic table that provided snacks for the exhibition opening and Schneckloth's *Rhizome* project itself, but both locations were unaccounted for on *Rhizome*'s map.

While trans was a structured criterion for selection, Schneckloth's *Rhizome* provided the opportunity to realize the open system of connectivity within the gallery space. That system itself encountered challenges to its mapping abilities that simply were not practical according to its design, leading us to grapple with the issue of whether the physical manifestation of the rhizome in the gallery space actually did provide the desired

open system required by trans. However, if we consider trans as a set of dynamic

processes and not a fixed entity, then Schneckloth's *Rhizome* becomes a part of that

process of articulation. If we were to revisit *Visualizing TRANS* through another

curatorial installment, the mapping project would find ways to adapt and account for its

potential problems, ready again to encounter new challenges presented to its system by

expanding to become reconstituted and reterritorialized according to its new subjects or

themes. When considered more broadly, *Rhizome* articulates trans in its constantly

changing dimensions, which becomes stagnant when confined to the week-long run of

Visualizing TRANS. Overall, the curatorial goal of involving viewers in the narrative-

making process of trans was achieved through Schneckloth's *Rhizome*, which in turn

worked with the networked system in ways that we had not anticipated, surfacing through

the various challenges that the viewers presented.

The exhibition also realized the rhizome in its virtual capacities through a website

that hosted an online blog.[37] Each piece was represented by a photograph and brief

description, utilizing the features of our host, Typepad, to provide easily navigable links

to artist biographies and visitor comments. The curatorial team matched the artworks

with scholars, students, and other artists based on the general interests of our participants,

soliciting their comments to initiate the dialogue surrounding each piece and the

exhibition as a whole. The transcurators made deliberate pairings that were

interdisciplinary, so that trans movements were further enacted in the process of who

wrote about which piece. For example, Richard Busby, who was then a graduate student

in medieval studies and art history at UW-Madison, wrote about Leigh Ann Hallberg's

Four Humours installation (fig.16), bringing his temporally-specific studies to a

contemporary art exhibition—a venue in which he may not normally participate. In addition, Busby's comments built on the transhistorical aspects of Hallberg's work, highlighting its medieval context that also blurred the boundaries between medicine and art practice, and in this way brought further trans considerations to the exhibition through his blog comments. The exhibition's website thus served as a place where viewer, exhibition, venue, artist, and curator could make connections and engage in an active dialogue about the artworks and the exhibition as a whole. The website has also outlived the short week that *Visualizing TRANS* was open to the public, and conversations continue long after its closing. One year later, visitors continue to post new comments, and in December 2006 the site averaged 51.67 viewers per day, with 30% of that figure as returning visitors and the other 70% as new viewers of the exhibition.[38]

While most museum institutions have a high number of resources devoted to various online exhibition components, often including blogs, Arns and Lillemose discuss how these virtual components of exhibitions often reinforce the museum's authority by providing information rather than an artistic experience.[39] Additionally, they criticize exhibition bloggers for using that venue to draw attention to themselves, which in their estimation functions similarly to traditional curators.[40] The website and blog for *Visualizing TRANS* works against these key criticisms by providing a decentralized site for dialogue about the exhibition and its work; indeed, with the exception of the layout and financial aspects of the website, the curators are largely absent from the discussion. However, there are ways in which the website could be improved in terms of its allowing access for the viewer to experiment with the connections that Schneckloth's *Rhizome* facilitated in the gallery space: perhaps by allowing viewers to curate their own trans

exhibitions among the works in the show, and then inviting feedback from artists and visitors to these online ventures. Ideally, the *Visualizing TRANS* website would utilize its virtual form to provide more of an open system in which new mappings could be articulated and remade, rather than serving only as a site of interdisciplinary dialogue. Given the time and resources, the website may still realize this vision.

In our efforts to visualize a dynamically networked and flexible trans, the curatorial team for *Visualizing TRANS* worked through our own version of a curatorial model that was sufficiently open to account for the multiplicity of trans processes and identities while at the same time mediated in ways that produced a challenging exhibition of a diverse array of artwork in an industrial space. After analyzing our subject matter, our implementations of the rhizome, and critiquing the exhibition's efforts to "visualize trans," and given the show's successful reception, a question for a future extension of this project might be to pursue the extent to which trans or other multiply-signifying subjects actually require a complete remaking of traditional curatorial practice. Indeed, the curators and exhibition venue mediated trans in ways that often seemed to work in its favor, including the selection and criteria for artwork and the exhibition layout. Furthermore, the mediated nature of our networked system did not relegate trans to linear movements, falling into Deleuze and Guattari's indictment of "aborescent"-minded thinking, but instead allowed for a multiplicity of trans processes and ideas and thus achieving one key goal of the exhibition project.

As the exhibition came down and the transcurators returned the broken bikes to the Kupfer Center's front room, the residues of our curatorial labors reemerged as scraps of materials on the ground or evidence of nails in the walls, plywood covering open

windows, and steel beams propped against the building's surfaces. *Visualizing TRANS*

provided an appropriate, creative use for the Kupfer Center just prior to its closure for

renovation. Taking our cue from the building's history of transforming ironworking

materials and its transitory location, the transcurators adapted a highly theoretical set of

tools in order to trace the site's multiple "lines of flight," articulating ways of seeing trans

for the trees.

Figure 1: Early installation view of *Visualizing TRANS* at the Kupfer Center (Ironworks).
    Madison, WI, October 2006

Figure 2: Performance view, Kate Hewson and Marina Kelly, *Resident Alien*, 2006

Figure 3: Carry Roy, *Krumkake*, 2005-06

Figure 4: Kurt Weston, *Blind Vision*, 2004-06

Figure 5: Heidi Ganshaw, *Untitled (Bradley Pool)*, 2006

Figure 6: Exterior view, Kupfer Center. Madison, WI

Figure 7: Installation view, Leigh Ann Hallberg's *The Four Humours* with TRANE
    furnace.

Figure 8: Fred Lonidier, *N.A.F.T.A. Not a Fair Trade for All*, 2001

Figure 9: Ryan Burghard, *After the Bough Breaks, the Yoke of the Perennial Everyman*, installation view, 2005-06

Figure 10: Madison Art Club, *Transylvania*, 2006.

Figure 11: Installation view, Doug Rosenburg's *Farmwork (Landscape)*.

Figure 12: Vital signs on a Kupfer Center electrical outlet.
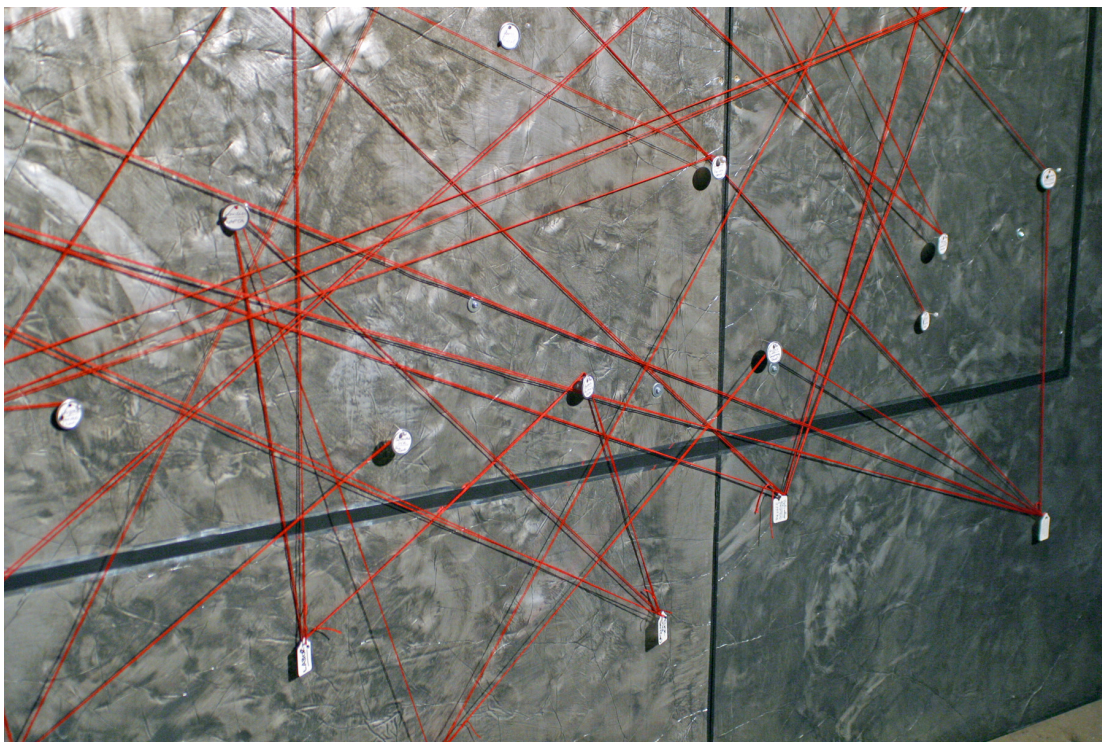
Figure 13: Detail from Sara Schneckloth, *Rhizome*, 2006

Figure 14: Still from Mark Harvey, *Tony and his Mirror*: *Transformer Remix*, 2004.

Figure 15: Stephanie Liner, *Gibbosity*, 2006
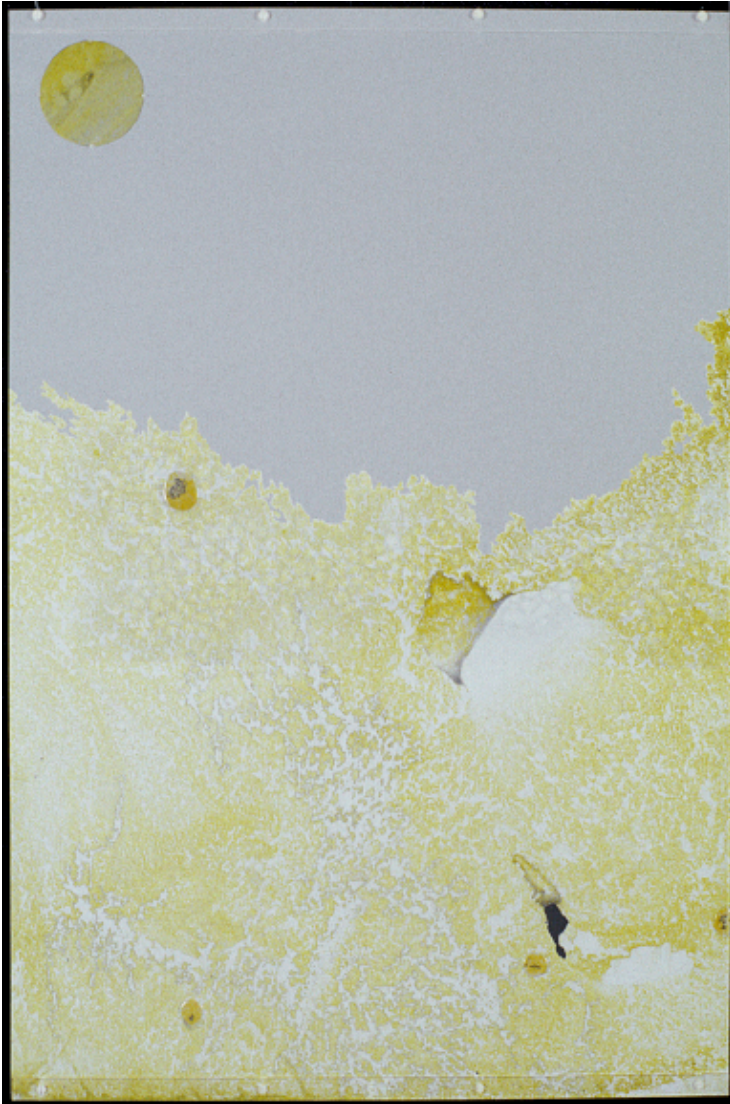
Figure 16: Leigh Ann Hallberg, *Yellow Bile*, from *The Four Humours*, oil and mixed
        media on polyester, 2003

Art images courtesy the artists.
Exhibition images courtesy Tyler Robbins.

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[1] Throughout this project, trans will be treated without quotation marks or capitalization. I make exceptions
when I refer to the exhibition title, its concurrent conference, or when I explicitly call trans a prefix
("trans-"). While I foreground the multiplicity and incompatibility of trans manifestations in my description
of the exhibition's theme, this paper is not concerned with articulating all of the different theorizations of
trans, including trans as an embodied practice (although this was certainly a compelling component of
some of the exhibition's objects). For more on trans, and specifically, how to write about trans as embodied
practice, see "Jacob Hale's Rules for Non-Trans Writing about Trans," at
http://sandystone.com/hale.rules.html.

[2] Wheels for Winners is a nonprofit organization based in Wisconsin's Dane County: http://www.wheelsforwinners.org. At the time of this writing, the Kupfer Center has undertaken an extensive renovation and will emerge as the Atwood Community Center. *Visualizing TRANS* was the final exhibition in the building before its restoration (or "renovation"?).

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction: Rhizome," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota UP, 1987), 3-25.

[4] Ibid., 20-1.

[5] Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 1992), 66-8.

[6] Ibid, 6.

[7] See page 1 of Inke Arns & Jacob Lillemose's article for diagrams of centralized, decentralized, and distributed network models: http://www.projects.v2.nl/~arns/Texts/Media/ArticleforArgos-Arns-Lillemose.pdf

[8] Conference at Tate Modern, June 4, 2005. Joasia Krysa, ed., *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in The Age of Network Systems* (New York: Autonomedia, 2006).

[9] Serge Gruzinski, "Mélange and Mestizo," in *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization*, trans. Deke Dusinbere (New York: Routledge, 2002), 22.

[10] Ella Shohat & Robert Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture: Towards a Polycentric Aesthetics," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 39. Shohat's larger body of academic work asserts the multiplicity of cultural forms that are always present, providing radical re-visions of dominant cultural and historical narratives. See also *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) and *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (edited with Stam) (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[11] Ibid, 56.

[12] For examples of the varied and often conflicting usages of trans, refer to scholarship in the wake of Fernando Ortiz's theorization of transculture in *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), including Mikhail Epstein, Gerardo Mosquera, Fernando Cornil, Silvia Spitta, or Mark Millington (to name only a few) Can you include some titles here?.

[13] Sue Golding [Johnny de Philo], "Nomadic Codes: Skin, Taste, Burn; or, For the Scholarly Inclined: Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction [Apologies to Benjamin]," in *Re-Verberations: Tactics of Resistance, Forms of Agency in Trans/cultural Practices*, ed. Jean Fisher (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Akademie, 2000), 57-63.

[14] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Transculture: From Kongo to Congo," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 159.

[15] Ron Wakkary, "Handbook for Rapid Travelers—'Avatar'," Nov. 16, 1998, http://rhizome.org/thread.rhiz?thread=276&page=1#1293

[16] Ibid., 2.

[17] A larger inquiry about curatorial strategies and institutional power would necessarily have to contend with criticisms such as those from Inke Arns and Jacob Lillemose, in order to avoid any easy dichotomy between traditional models that reproduce authoritative power to map identities and alternative or progressive exhibition strategies that allow for freedom of movement. We need only to perform a cursory look at exhibition history to reveal numerous ventures that defy this categorization. For instance, the following traditionally-curated shows have presented real challenges to institutional power: *Figures of Thinking: Convergences in Contemporary Cultures* (multiple sites; organized by Vicky A. Clark and Sandhini Poddar), *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994* (organized by Okwui Enzewor), the 1993 Whitney Biennial (organized by Elisabeth Sussman), or any example of Fred Wilson's museum-based installations, to only name a tiny number of examples. In addition, curatorial models can employ alternative strategies while simultaneously reproducing institutional power (e.g. the thematic organization of the Tate Modern and Centre Pompidou's permanent collections versus a "traditional" chronological model established by the Museum of Modern Art). The curatorial framework that an exhibition might pursue, and how that framework relates to its content, is not so easily politically aligned to the right or left.

[18] Deleuze and Guattari, 5.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Gavin Jantjes, "Mapping Difference," in *Views of Difference: Different Views of Art*, ed. Catherine King (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 25-39. Jantjes is personally and professionally invested in the potentials for art exhibitions to remake dominant 'taproot' narratives, evident in his own curatorial work and writing.

[21] See Jantjes's own acclaimed painting *Untitled*, from 1989 at www.iniva.org/archive/person/63.

[22] Deleuze and Guattari, 20.

[23] John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 5-6.

[24] Deleuze and Guattari, 6.

[25] Jill Casid, comments at the *Visualizing TRANS* exhibition dialogue, Kupfer Center, Madison, WI, 22 October 2006.

[26] www.rhizome.org

[27] Inke Arns and Jacob Lillemose, "'It's Contemporary Art, Stupid': Curating Computer-based Art out of the Ghetto," in *Argos Festival*, eds. Anke Buxmann and Frie Depraetere, (Brussels: Argoseditions, 2005), 136-145. Also reprinted at http://www.projects.v2.nl/~arns/Texts/Media/ArticleforArgos-Arns-Lillemose.pdf, 4.

[28] Ibid. I would amend Arns and Lillemose's characterization of rhizome.org in light of the organization's non-profit business model. Administratively, rhizome.org is housed within the New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York, NY), has varying levels of membership, and conducts an annual fundraising campaign. This administrative aspect clouds any clear distinction between "curatorial facilitators" and more "traditional" curatorial organizations.

[29] Ian Buchanan, *A Deleuzian Century?* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

[30] Joasia Krysa, "Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems," in *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in The Age of Network Systems* (New York: Autonomedia, 2006), 16.

[31] Massumi, 67-8.

[32] The full version of the Madison Art Club's short video *Transylvania* is posted online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8RggK4doqQ&eurl=http://abbysartclub.blogspot.com/2006_10_01_archive.html

[33] Arns and Lillemose, 6.

[34] Deleuze and Guattari, 21. "…the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states…"

[35] Arns and Lillemose, 7.

[36] www.saraschneckloth.com/

[37] http://trans.typepad.com

[38] Megan Katz, Email correspondence on December 3, 2006.

[39] Arns and Lillemose, 3.

[40] Ibid., 5.