Hans-Ulrich Obrist: It's always difficult to begin! Yesterday we were recording an interview with Abalos Herreros, and he said that we should just talk about beginnings and ends. Perhaps to begin with today we could talk about your book. You work with books not in a secondary way, but as a significant form in themselves. Could you tell me about the role of books for you? What was the very first book that you made?

Stefan Brüggemann: My very first book was Gasoline, which is a book I made about Mexico City, charting all the bridges from the north to the south. I took photographs of each bridge I came across.

HUO: When was this?

SB: 1995. I made just one copy.

HUO: An edition of one!

SB: Yes, and it was photocopied and stapled very simply. That was my first idea.

HUO: And where did the idea come from?

SB: I think my first inroad into artists' books was Ruscha, and that was the first time that I realised it offered a different platform for doing art.

HUO: It's amazing that the books of Ed Ruscha still resonate almost four decades since the first one was made. It's influenced generations of people. I interviewed Robert Venturi last year and he said that Learning from Las Vegas was inspired by Ed Ruscha. Could you tell me why Ruscha's work was a trigger for you?

SB: A few years ago Jonathan Monk did a painting of Ed Ruscha. In a way, these platforms for being able to present things in different ways are becoming more interesting than ever. Using the platform of the book makes it an art object, and something transportable. I'm interested by the 'portable museum', and things that you can take anywhere. Books are not site-specific – they become part of the life of the reader. Books enter the home. And they don't need installation. There is a part of my work that is very site-specific, but the book means that my work is also non-site specific.

HUO: In the '60s there were a lot of people that made artists' books, but few seem to have had the influence of Ruscha. Was it Ruscha's interest in the city that particularly attracted you? What is it about his books that resonates so much?

SB: I think it's the simplicity of his books. It works architecturally, as a document and as a book, changing the narrative of book reading. That is what has influenced me and others – it's the idea of making and reading books in a

different way. Simplicity is attractive. They become like travel guides, in which you go back and forth between the pages, like a ping-pong narrative.

HUO: And how did the bridge project evolve from there? You started to exhibit at around the same time too – was there a relationship between the two?

SB: I think it's part of the same thing – the two activities run parallel to each other. I wouldn't like to separate it into exhibitions and books, because for me they are the same thing. The second book was called Intellectual Disaster. It was an easy way to pull all my work together.

HUO: And in which year was this?

SB: 2000.

HUO: So there was a large gap between the first and second books?

SB: Yes. The problem with books is that you need someone to publish them. When I did the first one, there was just this one photocopy. Then you have the illusion of having mass production, and it takes time. That's the only thing I don't like about books: the production of books. It's like making a movie – you have to start working with lots of people, putting things together. It takes time to work in group situations.

HUO: So you do not enjoy the lack of autonomy?

SB: My work sometimes addresses simple production methods, but when you come to do a book, you need a production team, designers, sponsorship and so on. It becomes more complicated, and waiting can be frustrating.

HUO: The second book is bigger and while it is not necessarily a retrospective, it is a collection of documents. Was it the intention to give an overview of sorts?

SB: The work is very text based. For me it was a challenge to do a book of texts. It's very hard to decide where to situate text and photography and that which is in between. I think, for example, that conversation is a way of avoiding writing, but at the same time you are still writing. So it's a question of doing a textbook; when I was doing the first book I was very inspired by typical state educational books – thick and with lots of texts and images, with cheap quality paper.

HUO: And what about the title?

SB: I like book titles a lot. I always like to stay at the beginning. The title can say a lot about what's going to happen, so Intellectual Disaster came fairly early on in the process. Firstly I was going to call it Intellectual Entertainment! But then I

decided that Intellectual Disaster sounds more chaotic and has more relevance for me and my work.

HUO: Titles play a big role in your work, how do you find or come up with them? Do you make lists like Kippenberger?

SB: I like to make lists of titles as a way to help define situations and clarify the work.

HUO: What will this next book be called?

SB: It will be called Capitalism and Schizophrenia. It might have been called Getting and Spending or Unproductivism.

HUO: It seems that some titles choose themselves while others do not. And there must be many unused titles

SB: Yes, and there is a piece I have been working on called Show Titles – I have a hundred titles and the list grows every day. It's an invention of concepts and ideas. Sometimes I use my own titles for my works, and on other occasions, curators and writers use my titles for other projects. There was a show in Germany about Mexican art. The title was Zebra Crossing, which was something that I picked up when I was in London walking around the streets.

HUO: It would be good if you can come up with a title for this interview.

SB: We'll see later on. Perhaps something about situations of talking and not writing.

HUO: Earlier you mentioned different ways of speaking. What exactly did you mean by that? Would you consider an exhibition as a way of speaking, or a book as a way of speaking?

SB: Ways of speaking have different platforms.

HUO: That's a good title, Ways of Speaking.

SB: It could be our title! Some titles come from things I hear and I know instantly that they are suitable. The thing I've noticed is that you can always change the way you speak – there aren't any rules about it. It might be an exhibition, a conference, a book, a postcard, an action or whatever. It is interesting how you can challenge these things, so you're always inventing new ways of speaking.

HUO: I'd like for a moment to come back to your second book before coming on to the new book, future books and many other things. In your work you often use found documents, such as things that you use from magazines – I was wondering how far this is a systematic or non-systematic approach to the notion of archives? Gerhard Richter's Atlas had a very open structure whereby things

that inspire him entered the atlas. It goes from loose strands to the completely obsessive categorisation of people such as Gilbert and George. How do you see yourself in relation to archives?

SB: I think it's a question of editing. You're always trying to edit the world. It's a constant impossibility because there's always lots of footage and you can never finish editing it. It's a little bit about this illusion and this frustration at the same time – trying to edit the world. That's a problem for art as well, for it is constantly in the process of editing. In my case I think it's a very chaotic process. I like structure so you could describe it as an archive, but that would be a misinterpretation of an archive because it doesn't really have a straightforward taxonomy as with some other artists. It's strange that we are constantly editing things.

HUO: We could talk about the parallel practice of editing. That's another good title.

SB: Yes, that's a good one. Let's call it that. Then we'll have to edit it, which will mean looking at techniques and styles of editing. Artists like editing in different ways.

HUO: Or non-editing.

SB: I don't think that non-editing exists.

HUO: Why's that?

SB: You always miss something. There is always an illusion of reality, but it is never real. Everything becomes fiction and fiction is editing. At the end, there are no real things. In my work I think trying to edit all the pictures in magazines – that's the kind of illusion.

HUO: This idea of editing in your work offers both a possibility and an impossibility, rather like Flaubert's notion.

SB: Yes, and I like the idea of pages – my format for life is based on pages. Every time I work I make a big series of what I call notes. These are always pages. They could be on A4 paper, a page from a magazine or whatever. It's always very difficult to separate the notes from the work, so the notes often become the work, and yet at the same time the work can never be finished. So it's a very traumatic thing to be in my studio with all these sheets of paper, writings and sketches, and having to decide what is a note and what is not a note. I always try to frame everything and it becomes an obsessive kind of archive. Then sometimes you have to destroy things.

HUO: So one could say that an editor's work is never done. In terms of archives, I am also interested to learn more about the way in which you work and your studio. How systematic is your archive, what role does the Internet play, would you describe it as a post-studio practice and so forth?

SB: I think it's a very instantaneous practice. Sometimes I tear things out of magazines, or I might be at the theatre or a friend's house and see something there that might be useful. Then I put these cuttings on blank pages in my studio. I think it's an obsession that is based on a need for information. Perhaps it is very superficial information, but it is information all the same. I don't keep the magazines though. I tear out the things I want and then throw them away. I don't hoard in that sense

HUO: It's an instant archive. That's another good title.

SB: Yes, and you know, I really don't like to keep things. That's a really strange idea for me. I just like to have them as art. Things catch my attention for an instant and I very rarely go back to a collection.

HUO: So there is no archive of the things that you don't use?

SB: I only cut out what I use. This is also a problem of editing in that I destroy everything else. I don't like to have things in my studio that aren't finished. Once it's in the studio it has to be finished and there can be no leftovers. The idea of leftovers is also very interesting for me.

HUO: For the purpose of the readers, I'd like to point out how early it is! We are in Madrid during ARCO in the month of February. It's kind of chilly. We're in the breakfast room at the Hotel Nacional. It's still dark. We're drinking mountains of coffee and hot chocolate. Anyway, back to the notion of leftovers!

Pedro Reyes: Well his house is certainly almost empty.

HUO: Could you tell me about your house?

SB: Well I try to keep it empty, but there's always something there that you have to throw away. I'm always looking for something to throw away. It's all a question of how you get things and how you get rid of them. It's impossible to have nothing in a space.

HUO: And how do you see the notion of the studio? In the '60s Buren wrote about the idea of 'post-studio' practice, and he was one of the first artists to publish endless lists of his trips or to talk of the aeroplane or hotel room as

being the studio. In our generation travelling has increased much more. So I was wondering how you see the studio and travel in relation to your work?

SB: I think the idea of 'the studio' has been lost. The studio is portable, but there is always a space that you go back to and where you can sit at your desk. That is the real studio – the place where you sit down and bring all your information together. The computer is like a studio now, but there is always a place where you put the computer in which it fits perfectly and where you can concentrate properly. That might be for just ten minutes in a month, but it is still a special place, and that is where the studio comes into its own.

HUO: So you've got an empty house with a computer in!

SB: And a desk! That's very important for the studio – a desk, some sheets of paper, and then there's the matter of emptying the space.

HUO: A film director once described it as 'the fighting of entropy'. But to come back to the topic of source material, could you tell me more about the content and nature of the source material?

SB: Last year I was obsessed with fashion magazines. Many of them were published in London, Paris and New York, and some from Japan. I often refer back to the '60s and the ideas of conceptual art, especially consciousness and time, such as with On Kawara. Fashion magazines very much have this notion

of time. It's like having an exact time in space. They change very fast. The first time I thought about fashion magazines was for the piece by Dan Graham – there was an image of a woman in a book, and I think that really attracts you to the work.

HUO: And am I right in thinking that you are hoping to work on a project with On Kawara?

SB: I don't know if it's going to happen, but I hope so. I would like to make an On Kawara straight line in time and try to destroy that line. I'd like to find a timeless attitude towards time and something that becomes timeless.

HUO: And how would you envisage breaking the line?

SB: The project's in its very early stages. Style always takes time. For something to become stylish is very difficult.

PR: Stefan is well known for being a fashion victim, so he is definitely very concerned about style.

SB: We could make a list of possible titles for this interview, and people can choose their favourite.

HUO: Or perhaps they could choose their own title – a do-it-yourself title.

SB: Or a 'having a choice' title.

HUO: A multiple-choice title. As well as fashion magazines, what other kinds of sources do you use?

SB: I use philosophy books and art catalogues, things people give me. I very much like the idea of recycling and finding recycled things. It's like when you go to an office and there's always a pile of papers that have been photocopied but they weren't needed so they use the other side as scrap paper. I like such random situations in which you don't realise what you're picking up. And then you start finding connections between the things that you find. You're sitting there in the studio with all these things and you try to make a story. Suddenly it becomes a storyboard. I'm very interested in storyboards.

HUO: Both in your books and in your exhibitions.

SB: In the exhibition you saw there was a storyboard project. I like the idea of never completing a project. It's always about trying to see the process and working with storyboards.

HUO: You mentioned philosophy books as another kind of source material – are there particular philosophers whose work interests you? Everything is about lists today – it's very George Perec.

SB: I don't know what it's called in French, but in Spanish it's called Pensar/Classificar…

HUO: Penser/Classer. I love that book.

SB: And also lots of old books on philosophy, such as Derrida. I have recently been reading Deleuze. Perhaps they have become a cliché for our generation. What do you think?

HUO: It's interesting. At the moment there seems to be a shift towards Italy. The great French philosophers have all died. Derrida now says that he is the last one. Each time another great philosopher dies, Derrida writes 'now I am definitely the last one'! So it seems to be moving to Italy, with Toni Negri, Giorgio Agamban, Paolo Vierno. There's also a rediscovery of Lyotard at the moment. He became a cliché for a while but has been resurrected. And you also use art catalogues?

SB: It seems that these days art catalogues are the way that you see shows. I don't have a big collection of catalogues, but I have used some from the '60s,

from abstract expressionism through to Laboratorium! Sometimes you mix them up with art or fashion magazines. I like it when the boundaries begin to fade.

HUO: Another great title! It's like Blondie's *Fade Away* and *Radiate*.

SB: Our list of titles is growing! I also like artists' books. I like the Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large book by Rem [Koolhaas]. Lists always have lists. It's like Microsoft Windows – there's always window upon window and file within folder within folder.

HUO: It's like the russian Matriushka doll – the doll within the doll within the doll. When I started to work with de Appel at the beginning of the '90s, one of my first activities was to work with Kasper Koenig, the famous German curator. I was in deep shock because he used to receive all these catalogues everyday and he would just rip them apart, taking out the pages he was interested in! We all do that on a regular basis with magazines, but it still remains a taboo with books. You said you rip out pages from catalogues, which is not dissimilar.

SB: And I also photocopy a lot. A book certainly commands more respect than a magazine.

HUO: This interview is perhaps going to be used as a preface for the book, so perhaps you are inviting the reader to rip it up?

SB: That's right, don't keep hold of this book! Treat it as a magazine! When we look at books, mentally we're tearing it apart. It's really strange how you try to edit a new book when you see another book – you criticise it and are never satisfied with it. A book often mentally disappoints you, though often it is quite the opposite and you are inspired and motivated by what you read. That can be a direct influence on the next work that I make.

HUO: Has the Internet changed the way you work?

SB: I don't think so. I'm not convinced the Internet has really defined its own structure of working yet. In some ways it has become a failure. It is so immaterial in a way. The book is still an object. I don't necessarily like objects, but they are certainly easier to read than a web page. I don't think the Internet has been used as it needs to be yet. Do you get a lot of information from the Internet?

HUO: No. For me the main function of the Internet (apart from email) is to order books on Amazon.

SB: So it's more like a service for you.

HUO: Yes, and paradoxically, I have been buying many more books since the Internet came to prominence. On Amazon you can find books that you can't always find in a bookshop.

SB: But you go back to the book.

HUO: It's nice to order books online. Sometimes you receive something you weren't expecting. I ordered a big monograph on Peter Cook, and instead I got a monograph of a famous children's illustrator also called Peter Cook. I ordered a book about Robin Day, the famous British designer, but the book I have is about the television broadcaster Robin Day instead. So I have a new shelf devoted to the wrong books that I have been sent from Amazon! But let's come back to your books. What have you been doing between your second book and your current project?

SB: There have been many projects in between but they have mostly been unrealised books. They stay at the point of storyboards. Some years ago I started trying to make a film. What I did was tear pages out of a magazine and try to make a storyboard. The story was not that important, but I wanted to use the same poses in the film that the models had in the fashion shoots. Then it became like a book, in black and white. I started shooting the film and I realised

that it was much better in the form that it was already. One of them was realised, but I was not happy with it.

HUO: This leads to the only question that I ask in all the interviews that I do, which is a question about unrealised projects. Could you tell me about a project that you have always wanted to do but have not yet realised?

SB: I think you wake up everyday with a new idea or project. The biggest unrealised project I'd like to do is a feature film on 35mm. That's a dream I have, but one that I would never like to come into being. Also right now I'm working on something else called Video Notes and Video Diary, which involve taking my camera to many different places and recording them. I get home and can see things that I've done that day. I'm not too sure if I ever want to show that.

HUO: So your current project is your third published book, in which this interview features. Could you tell me more about your plans for the book?

SB: Well it's probably going to be called Capitalism and Schizophrenia. It's being made through many collaborations, and attempts to put my work into a framework. I like books that have lots of connections. It's a way of concentrating information and channelling a specific editing of the world. So for this book several people are collaborating, all in different ways. That's another thing about

books – they try to explain things; they're about explanations. When you do a book or a catalogue, you're trying to explain yourself to the world. So I thought that maybe the explanations should come from other people, through collaboration but also through their own work, and not just me trying to speak. So it's a question of putting things together and editing. That combination of things makes a statement. The book is not a documentary. It's very much about the present. Even if it lasts only ten days, that's fine. Otherwise it becomes like a document and a part of the past.

HUO: And will the book be in colour or black and white? A lot of your work is in black and white. In the early '90s Felix Gonzales-Torres said that the only way to still catch people's attention is with black and white. There is a great book about the Spanish artist Pablo Palazuelo who wrote a book on geometry and vision, and in his interview with Kevin Powell, he is asked: 'You have used black and white on numerous occasions – do you give them alchemical or symbolical values beyond the fact that they serve as evident polar opposition? I also recall remarks by Klein and Escher in relation to these two counter tensions: Klein said that an artist tends to move towards reduction, towards black and white, when he has something urgent and ready to say. In other words, he tended to do so when he was looking for an effective cutting edge. Escher's description was more poetic, and he said that it was at night when white showed up against the background and day when black figures showed up against the white. He

was referring to its double potential within the same work. At root, he is not far away from Klein who saw both colours as protagonists. You have said that the infinite mixes of black and white are useful to you. In what sense did you mean this?' And Palazuelo answers 'Actually, I have used black and white because this highly expressive contrast of energy attracts me. With the question of capturing the pupils' extremes, the maximum tension, the most intense light and the most profound darkness, it is hardly necessary to say that symbolic echoes or alchemical ones occur almost immediately in this sense. I tend to agree with Klein that the painter reduces his palette to an extreme polarity when he is searching for a way to say something urgent or radical more effectively; it is between night and day when the sea begins its metamorphosis'. So I am curious to hear your thoughts about black and white.

SB: There are the issues of form and composition, but in my case it is more a matter of economics. Black and white is cheaper to make. And for me that's very interesting. Also when I use colour, it is not a photograph that I'm producing. It's not just about economy; it's also about production. Having colour pages is more expensive. It's more about meaning and less about form. I think black and white gives me that solution. In this book, there will perhaps be two or three pages in colour in the middle of the book, just for a break, though I'm not too sure. Something I wrote the other day was: 'to be political it has to look nice', and it was a kind of reaction to Documenta in that political issues become

style also. It's very confusing when you have ideas such as information becoming style. I don't know if that is destructive for information, or perhaps the other way round.

HUO: That's a great final comment.

PR: Can I just ask why your work is so a-topical? It isn't something that you can locate geographically. It seems that the work is nurtured from the media, but it has very few sources from the real world or your immediate experiences of the context in which you live. To what extent do you connect with your experiences of living in Mexico or in other places?

SB: Maybe the answer is that our generation, (and perhaps it is a consequence of globalisation), has become international and global. It is a question of orientation within a third world city. And I think that I am a result of that. Sometimes it comes from a misunderstanding of information.

PR: The notion of misunderstandings makes me think of the issue of spelling in your work – often there are orthographic errors. Are these intentional?

SB: When you write with a pen, you often make mistakes, and then you reread it. I have a phrase about it: the event of writing being an event of reading. Sometimes it's very instantaneous. There are always mistakes and failures in

my work. I don't like perfect works. I think it's good to be vulnerable. It's always a place of contradiction and danger.

HUO: Well it has been great to talk with Stefan Bruggemann in February 2003 in the Hotel Nacional. The interview has taken fifty-five minutes and seven seconds. It is six degrees outside. As with Windows and Russian dolls, we have also had an interview within the interview.

PR: And we are just a block away from La Cuesta del Moijer, which is a very interesting corner of the city for buying second hand books.

HUO: And as Lawrence Weiner once said: 'books furnish a room'.