

# talking towers

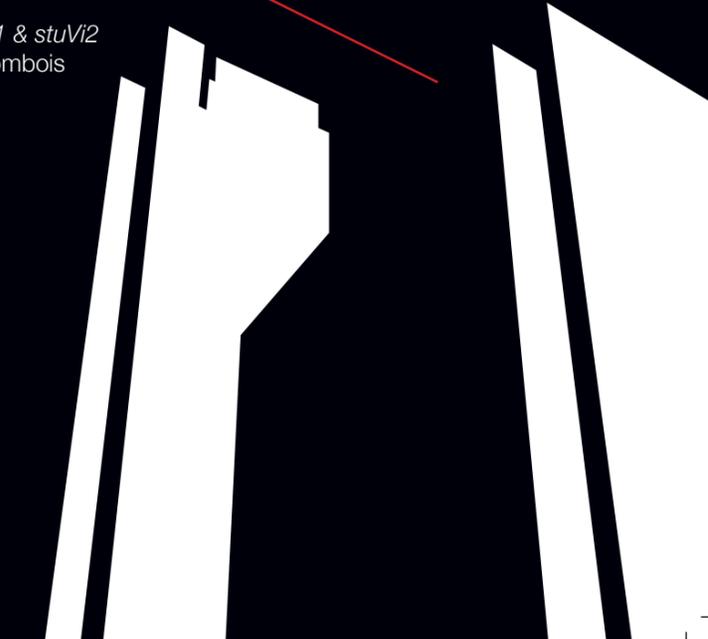
uboc No.1 & stuVi2  
Florian Dombois



Boston, October 2013

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*uboc No. 1 & stuVi2* is a temporary public artwork created by the artist Florian Dombois, curated by Mary Sherman, for TransCultural Exchange's 2013 Conference on *International Opportunities in the Arts: Engaging Minds*. The piece uses a highly visible red laser to connect two towers, Boston University's School of Law — Josep Lluís Sert's modernist icon, nicknamed by the students as the ugliest building on campus (*uboc No. 1*) — and a new dormitory, Student Village 2 (*stuVi2*). The laser functions as a range finder, which measures the distance — the architectural and

geophysical dialog — between the two and, in real time, projects their movements onto a small screen.

It is an elegant metaphor, the perfect Conference centerpiece. Situated at a unique crossroads, the laser stretches across the only juncture in America where all the most common modes of transportation and ways in which people are brought together converge: It spans a major interstate (I-90), busy flight pattern (Logan Airport's), waterway (the Charles River), railroad line (Amtrak and the local commuter rail) and auto and pedestrian bridge (the Boston University Bridge). As such, it is an ideal reflection of the Conference's convening of people from around the globe, united by their belief in the power of art.

The laser links the towers, which are more than half a mile apart. Their

foundations are tied to the same shifting tectonic plates that make up the Earth's elastic crust. Locally, they are buffeted by the same surrounding traffic and winds. Consequently, they move sometimes closer, sometimes further apart. They share much in common; yet, like between us all, a distance remains.

The buildings chosen for Dombois' *uboc No. 1 & stuVi2* also share similar physical attributes — most notably, their roof and profile. One, though, is designed by a star architect, older and clearly of a previous generation. The other is designed by an architectural firm, clad in shiny, new materials, more contemporary and unmistakably ambivalent in its relationship to its elder. Despite *stuVi2*'s

commanding height and placement, its mimicry of the School of Law's profile reflects the same fear, reflected with longing to break away from its roots that its inhabitants and, at times, all of us must feel towards our own individual and collective pasts.

The projected 'conversation' between the two structures is crucial to the piece's meaning. Dombois encourages us to view the work as more than a spectacle. The laser visually binds the buildings into a singular form; the projection, though, reveals something less rigid, another mode of being — one that does not overpower, merge or subsume the other into a new formation. *uboc No. 1 & stuVi2* touches upon the

heart of what it means to be human — the necessity of flexibility and exchange. It presents a fluid give-and-take reciprocity, an ever-evolving basis for a more enduring connection.

Of course, one could also talk here about the color red for the laser — a reference, perhaps, to Boston University's brand, a lifeline or, even, love. . . . But, as with all things that touch us deeply, its eloquence can never be parsed and summed. The work is both the same and different for us all. Its message is not dogmatic, insistent or overbearing. Rather, it is profoundly articulate, engaging and open-ended. *uboc No. 1 & stuVi2* presents a marvelous co-existence that parallels TransCultural

Exchange's core mission, which is to create a greater understanding of world cultures — one that recognizes, celebrates and explores the differences between us, what we share in common and how we can respectfully nurture those various needs.

TransCultural Exchange is deeply indebted to the artist Florian Dombois for providing us with such a resonant work for this special occasion — a moment when people from so many disparate backgrounds have traveled both near and far to be together.

Mary Sherman  
October 2013

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**Artist's Biography**

Florian Dombois is an artist who studied geophysics and philosophy in Berlin, Kiel and Hawaii. From 2003 to 2011 he was a professor at the Bern University of the Arts (Switzerland), where he founded the "Institute Y" for transdisciplinary exchange between the arts in research and teaching. He currently serves as a professor at the Zürich University of the Arts and is also a visiting professor at the Collegium Helveticum, ETH Zürich. Additionally, he has held teaching positions in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States.

Dombois has shown widely, both nationally and internationally, including solo and group shows at the Kunsthalle Bern, Kunstmuseum Bern, Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur, ZKM Karlsruhe, Museum Ludwig Koblenz, Fundació Suñol (Barcelona), Riga Art Space and CIC Cairo. In 2010 he received the German Sound Art Prize. His work is also the subject of the Kunsthalle Bern monograph *Florian Dombois: What Are the Places of Danger? Works 1999-2009*, (Berlin: argobooks, 2010).

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Executive Director  
TransCultural Exchange

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