

FUSE

MAGAZINE

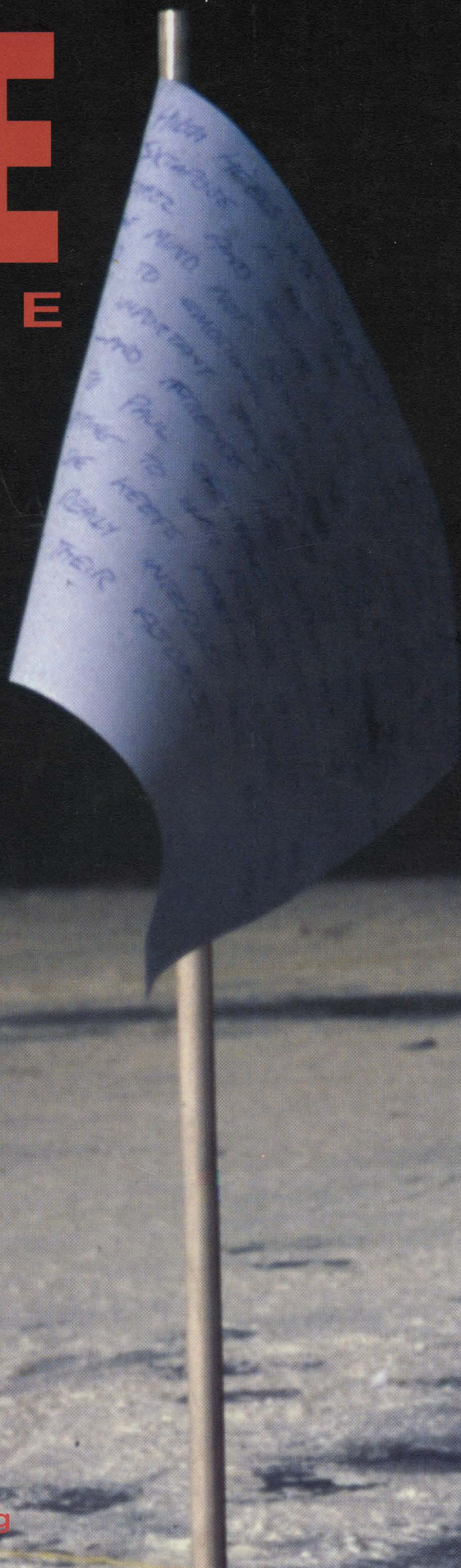


Craig Buckley on
Portable Architectures

tobias c. van Veen on
"Rave" "Culture"

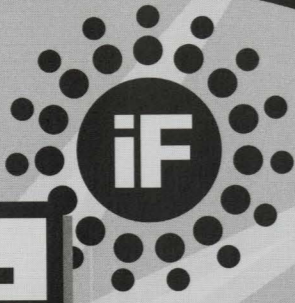
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Inés Katzenstein and
Olga Kopenkina on the
presentations and
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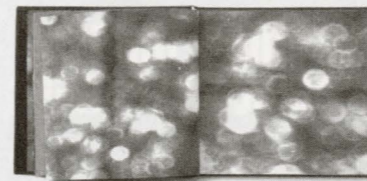
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Short Fuse Artist Project

Cover Image: *Room + Board* (Liverpool installation), BFO projects, 2001.
Installation/performance. Courtesy: Mitch Robertson.

FUSE MAGAZINE

Volume 26 Number 1 February 2003

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editorial

In times of global crisis — and impending war, driven needlessly forward by the superpower to our south, seems to count — time itself becomes of utmost importance. The rhetoric of immediate action seems to provide not just the sense of urgency that governments employ to push through measures that would be recognized as absurd at any other time, but also the sense of psychological relief that civilians desire to allay doubts and fears about who's really right, and whose life is really worth "fighting" for.

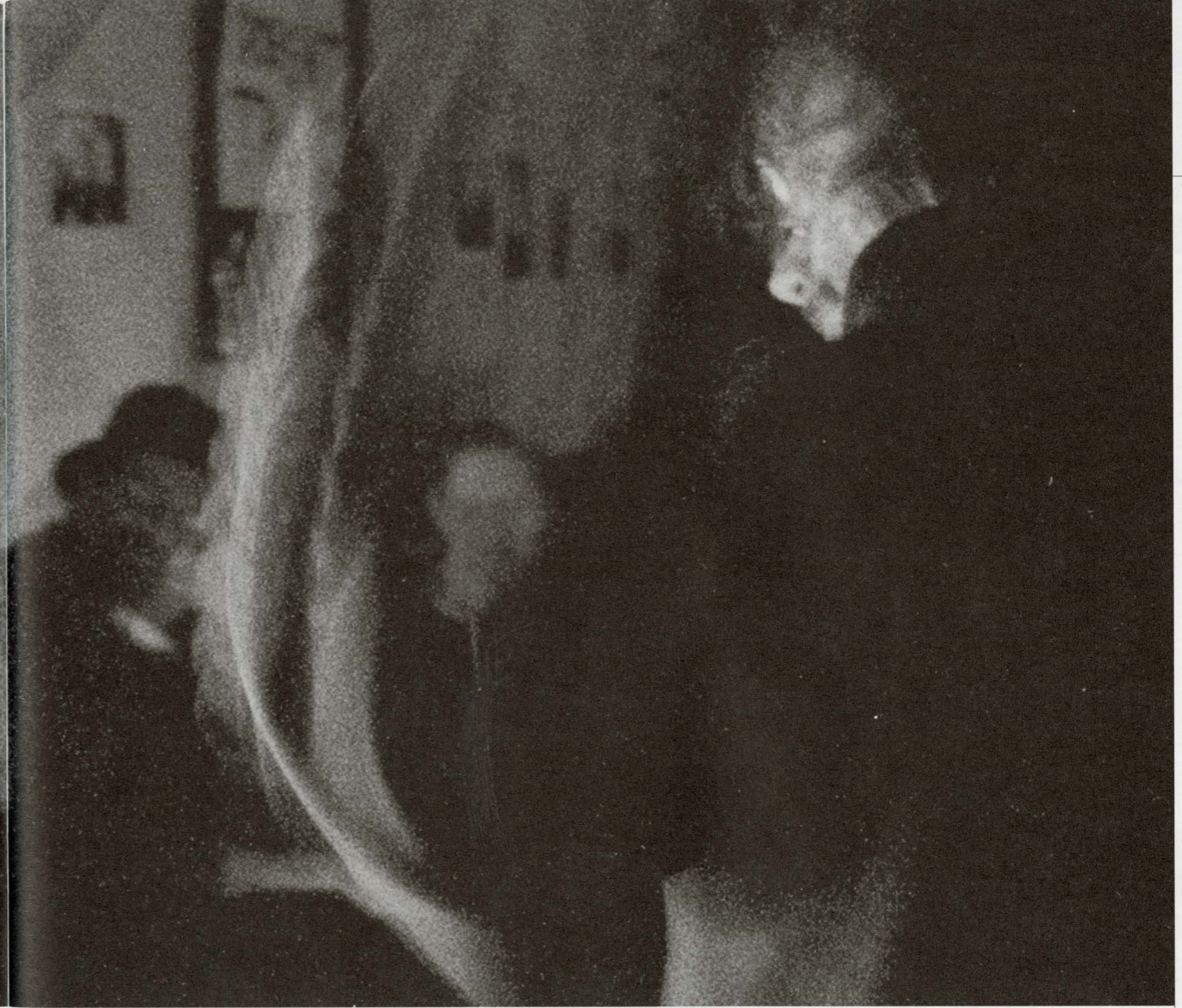
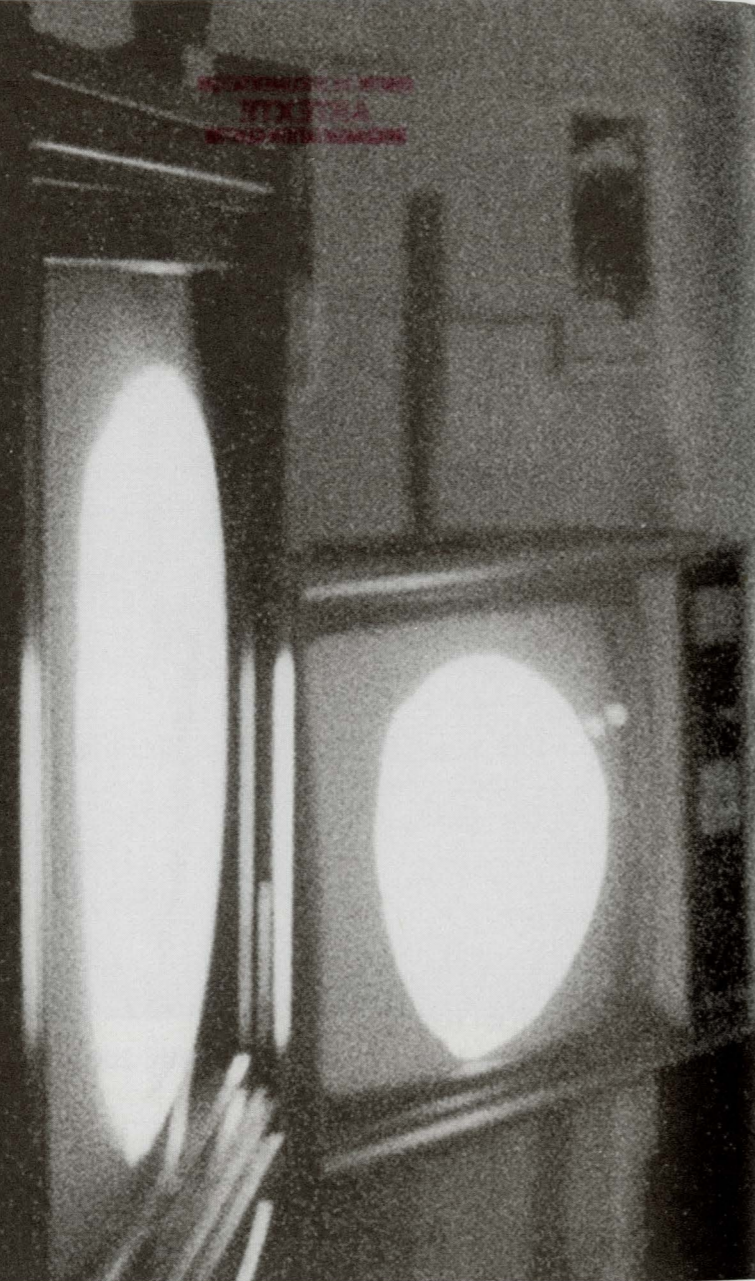


Image courtesy: tobias c. van Veen, see pg 30

In his book *The Psychology of War: Comprehending its Mystique and its Madness*, Lawrence LeShan provides an itinerary that marks how differently we perceive reality in times of war and times of peace. These distinctions include assertions that in wartime cosmic forces are invoked to support the moral imperative to war, and that we find ourselves in times that are different from all others that will change the meaning of the past and the course of the future.

Such rhetorical inevitabilities are used in part to further entrench the exigency of the rat-race lifestyle, even for those of us who don't consider ourselves rats. Scheduling provides a sense

of direction, of purpose. When we believe that time is a force bigger than ourselves, we drive ourselves harder, faster, trying to conquer our teeming morasses. In becoming slaves to time, we release ourselves from criticality, slip into regularization, regularity. Permanence can seem so permanent, and so attractive.

But some of the things that we think of as temporally fixed can be challenged in those very terms, and are, within these very pages. The temporariness of architecture, which in its solidity, by its very nature, seems so permanent, is addressed here in a feature by Craig Buckley. Raves, which seem so fluid and fleeting, are made more solid in their discursive commitment

to text by tobias c. van Veen. Documenta, a veritable institution that seems to exist even in the span of years between its incarnations, is brought under the scrutiny of our contributors. Likewise, it is no coincidence that several of our reviews consider works that are time-based.

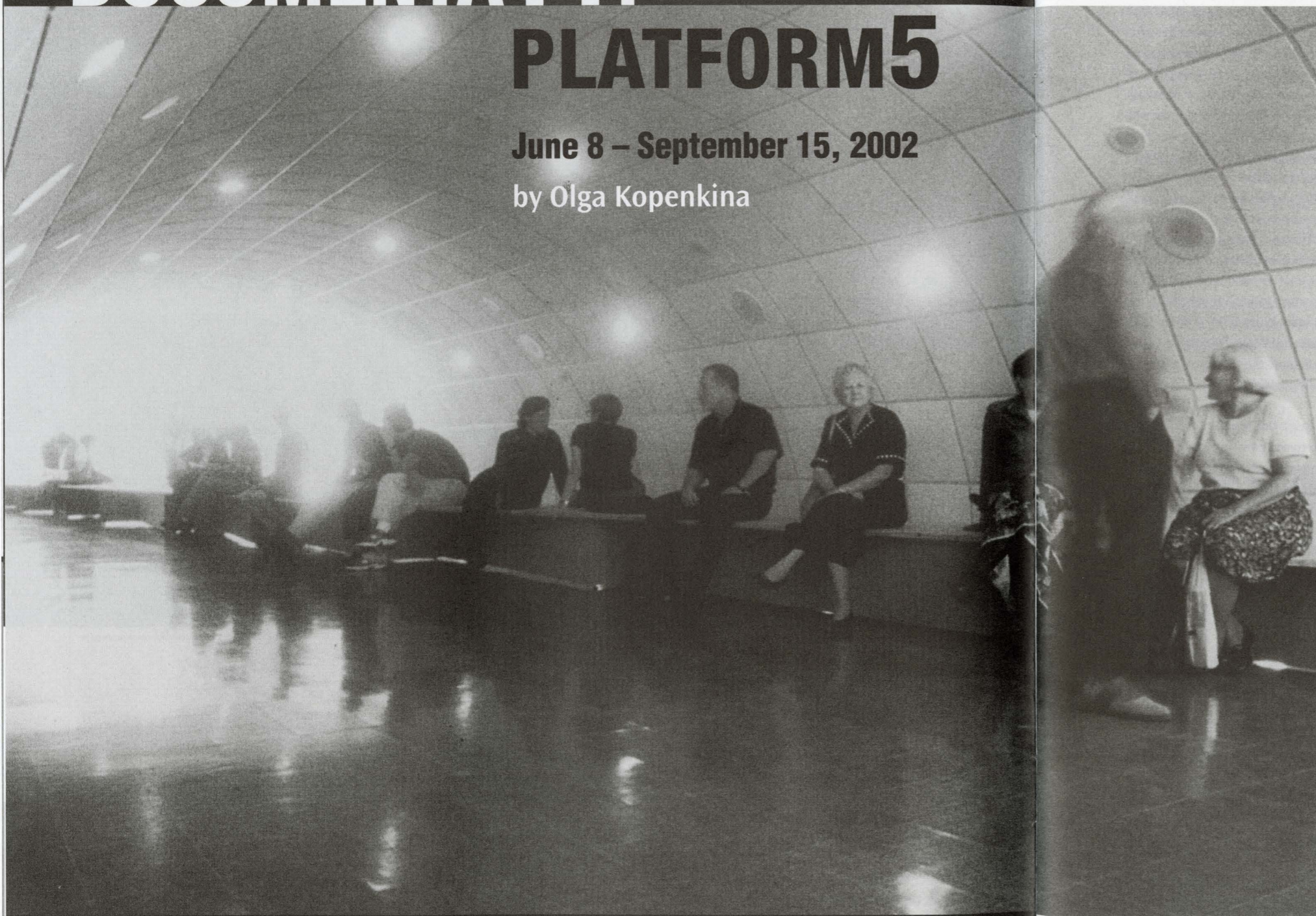
If the printing of text seems to fix sets of ideas, then let us reaffirm that those ideas are being set *right now, for now*. It allows for the examination of things that are important because they are current, for the flux of those things with changes of time and the growth of knowledge. Don't tie your identity to your daytimer. Change is not just inevitable but desirable, and is what we should aspire to create.

- the Editorial Committee

DOCUMENTA 11: PLATFORM 5

June 8 – September 15, 2002

by Olga Kopenkina



Spec, Simparch (in collaboration with Kevin Drumm), 2001, installation. Photo: Documenta11 Platform5 exhibition catalogue.

Documenta11 was both a compelling intellectual project and an homage to the historical significance of this institution. The curatorial intention was quite remarkable, attempting to give the selected artworks the opportunity to unfold their statements, both spatially and temporally. The works of 116 artists with seventy-nine newly created projects filling four large spaces in Kassel, a number of outdoor installations as well as works in progress evolving over the course of the exhibition, made Documenta11 the most ambitious project in its history.

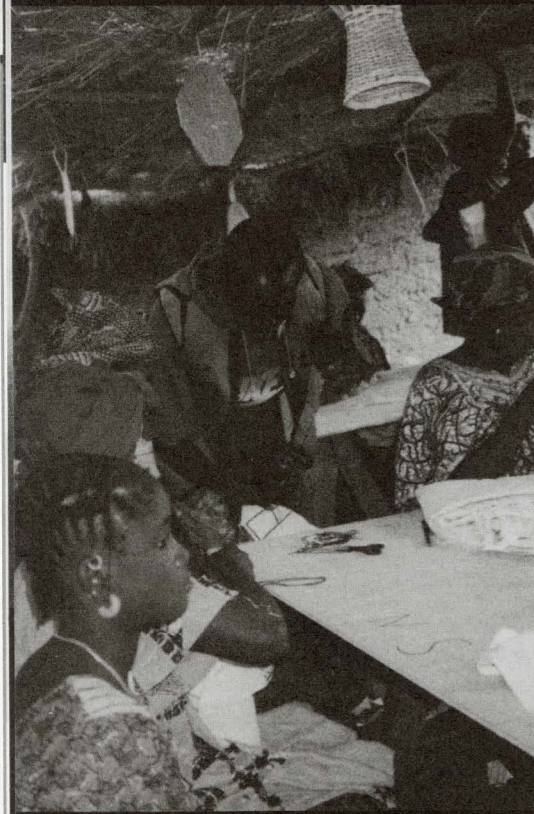
The proclaimed agenda to extend spatial and temporal terms beyond the traditional hundred days of previous years marked a different strategy on the part of Documenta11's organizing team (artistic director Okwui Enwezor and co-curators Sarat Maharaj, Ute Meta Bauer, Octavio Zaya, Mark Nash, Susanne Ghez and Carlos Basualdo). This mandate was executed through the broader context of the exhibition among five "Platforms," a series of public discussions, conferences, workshops, books and film and video programs, taking place in different cities all over the globe, involving local communities in discussions about the possibilities and problematics of art in relation to politics and society. The program included:

Platform1 "Democracy Unrealized," Platform2 "Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation," Platform3 "Creolite and Creolization," Platform4 "Under Siege: Four African cities — Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos," and Platform5 "Exhibition."

The decision to present the final exhibition of Documenta11 as Platform5, separated in time and location from the other platforms, was equally significant in provoking the feeling that art at Documenta11 was deliberately isolated from discussion. The result was an oversized, overly complete and museological project wherein there seemed no place for interaction or intervention on the part of the public. It has been a commonly expressed and not entirely inaccurate opinion that most of the works exhibited in Documenta11 do not circulate within the global art market, but were selected as a reflection of the institutionalized concerns of particular cultural and political groups in the name of "postcolonial studies." Nevertheless, the position of the curatorial team becomes quite elusive in relation to this: the team was not so concerned with the analysis of the consequences of world colonization, but rather, they were drawn to certain "constellations of moments," which the Documenta curatorial team commissioned as *representations* of the state of postcolonialism and globalization. While the exhibition catalogue is not erroneous in its account of the postcolonial state of the world as an entity that is impossible to embrace in its discontinuity, fragmentation and "temporal pluralities," its thesis that, nevertheless, postcoloniality can be articulated by the efforts of experimental cultures emerging from within the postcolonial "site" does little to acknowledge that the selections of the curatorial team produce a logic and a narrative about this postcolonial condition. In spite of curatorial claims to represent the counternormative nature of the postcolonial, the exhibition itself did not really reflect current tendencies in experimental art and art activism but instead, put a strong focus on image and image making. Although a good part of the film and video works in the exhibition pushed standards and formats in video-art production (the length of Jeff Geys'



Les Ateliers d'Hamdallaye 96, Huit Facettes, 1996, photo documentation. Photo: Documenta11 Platform5 exhibition catalogue.



Les Ateliers d'Hamdallaye 96, Huit Facettes, 1996, photo documentation. Photo: Documenta11 Platform5 exhibition catalogue.

film is more than sixty hours, Craigie Horsefield's is ten hours, Ulrike Ottinger's is six), the exhibition in general has surrendered to the temptation to aestheticize the postcolonial subject by flattening it into images, that, while compelling, do little to move beyond the requirements of traditional museum displays.

In spite of a scarcity in the presentation of art engaged in the complexities around current political debates, Documenta11 included projects that bordered on sociological research (the Urbonas from Lithuania), social work (Le Groupe Amos from Democratic Republic of Congo, Huit Facettes from Senegal) or intellectual and scientific networking (RAQS Media Collective from India, Multiplicity from Italy). Gediminas and Nomeda Urbonas' work *Transaction* introduced an archive of Lithuanian films, which feature remarkable female characters cherished by the Soviet society — the archive is based on interviews with women in the streets as well as prominent sociologists in Vilnius, investigating female stereotypes in Soviet cinema. Another aspect of the project was the video record introducing material from the artists' archive to local psychiatrists who, through the analysis of the female roles, formulate and deconstruct the Soviet mentality. At the same time, their work on deconstruction has somehow created a new stereotype of Soviet Lithuania as a sort of "pre-Freudian nation" with the use of Western values as a measurement system. Quite successful were the projects introduced by the groups RAQS Media Collective from New Delhi and Multiplicity from Italy. Derived from the ongoing philosophical and sociopolitical discussions initiated by this group on the internet and through a series of conferences, RAQS Media Collective's *Coordinates of Everyday Life — Delhi*, invited users to simulate the experience of the contemporary urban condition and use freeware to manipulate and create their own versions of the city. In doing so, they demonstrated the potential of an artwork to create a public space free from cultural hierarchies and the bureaucracies of copyright, and were able to link international debates about the future of the public sphere to local discussions on the politics of urban environments in contemporary India. Multiplicity's research pro-

ject resulted in the installation *ID: A Journey Through the Solid Sea*, consisting of a set of video monitors relaying the story of the "ghost ship," a Maltese fishing boat overloaded with 283 Pakistani, Indian and Cingalese refugees that mysteriously sank in the Mediterranean on its way to Italy. The story is told through documentary interviews and testimonials from such disparate sources as the families of those who were lost at sea, the captain of the sunken ship, the authorities who denied the incident and the fishermen who found the clothing and identification of victims in their nets. The circular positioning of the personalities and perspectives of those whose lives were touched by this incident both revealed the manipulation of information media by the local authorities, who attempted to keep the incident out of the press, and pointed to a more global political dysfunction in terms of the conditions in which migrant populations live and the absence of their protection or individual rights.

But in most cases, Documenta11 did not stray far from the conventional strategies of using images and representations to reveal postcolonial trauma resulting from such conditions as the inequities found in African cities, the suffering of the colonized and of immigrant minorities who, when given the space and opportunity, narrate their own experiences as those of victims, a characteristic which in Platform1 theorist Slavoj Žižek ironically attributes to the failure of the neoliberalist notion of "multiculturalism." Another exception to this criticism, however, can be found in the installation of Georges Adéagbo (Benin/France) called *Explorer and Explorers Confronting the History of Exploration!... The Theater of the World*. It features a room packed with information matter: fragments of newspapers, books and magazines found by Adéagbo in his native town Cotonou, as well as paintings and sculptures that he commissioned in Benin. These highly arbitrary interpretations of global hierarchies and histories of the western world from the viewpoint of the former colonized avoid the tropes of victimhood of Western expectations. Another remarkable work was *Game Station*, the autobiographical project of Pascale Marthine Tayou of Cameroon. This work is composed of a

number of monitors playing images of street life in Tayou's native city of Yaoundé complemented by headphones transmitting incomprehensible sounds from radio frequencies around the world. *Game Station* parodied the notion of global village with its romantic poverty of desolate districts, waste materials and vigorous street life.

For certain, Documenta11's theoretical framework was informed by the concept of *multitude* introduced in the book *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and referenced by other speakers on Documenta's Platform1, "Democracy Unrealized," in Berlin and Vienna. Documenta11's multitude included multiple voices, differing narratives, the stories "we tell ourselves about ourselves" with "the ultimate goal of ethics... to guarantee the neutral space in which this multitude of narratives can peacefully coexist, in which everyone, from ethnic to sexual minorities, will have the right and possibility to tell his/her story."



Park Fiction — The desires will leave the apartment and walk along the street. Park Fiction, 1999-2002, 16mm film. Photo: Documenta11 Platform5 exhibition catalogue.



Park Fiction — The desires will leave the apartment and walk along the street, Park Fiction, 1999-2002. 16mm film. Photo: Documenta11 Platform5 exhibition catalogue.

PARK FICTION 3 1/2 - WIR PLANEN WEITER!
AUFTRAKTVERANSTALTUNG AM FREITAG, DEM DREIZEHNTEN OKTOBER:
PARKS & POLITIK

Es geht um den Park am Pinnerberg, die arbeitslosen Fotostudioassistenten, Urbanisten und interkulturellen Aktivistinnen Anja Cavallini, Nils Malmsten, Thomas Ottmann, Cathy Sibone & Christopher Schäfer treten an mit Theorien, Data, Videos, Recherchen und Spekulationen zu Parks im Verhältnis zu Politik.

Sie werden Plakate und Gerae liefern, um dem all...
Lind Coblenz eine Skulptur...
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Lind erst den Tag...

Park Fiction — The desires will leave the apartment and walk along the street, Park Fiction, 1999-2002. 16mm film. Photo: Documenta11 Platform5 exhibition catalogue.

However, while attempting to skew the divide between "curating" and "curated" cultures² and create a "neutral space" for this multitude, Documenta's organizers, in their desire to correspond to the current political debates, present and position a very narrow discussion on the current political crisis in the Middle East. *From/To* by American-Palestinian artist Fareed Armaly is itself quite an interesting piece of institutional critique that juxtaposes two modes of representation of Palestine and Palestinians: conventional Westernized historical and geographical cinema, from one side, and the films of Palestinian independent filmmaker Rashid Masharawi, made during the recent Israeli occupation of Palestine, from another. The inclusion of the work of a Palestinian filmmaker in Armaly's piece occupies a rather standard function within a particular ideological framework. Here, the delicate autobiographical works of Rashid Masharawi come to exemplify "curated culture," wrapped in the paradigm of victim/perpetrator imposed by Armaly.

Taking the critiques of neoliberalism and permanence by Hardt and Negri to heart, however, Documenta11 did make attempts to address art works that perforate the social sphere and enter public space, while refusing the old neoliberal practice of site-specific projects and monuments. These so-called community-based projects, evidenced in Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* and an installation by Park Fiction, were the subjects of the most heated public debates and endless visitor curiosity. *Bataille Monument* was a sculptural model made out of trashed industrial material and a textual/visual archive on Georges Bataille that was integrated by Hirschhorn into a marginalized local community in one of the districts of Kassel. Park Fiction is the name of the long lasting struggle of the artists group from Hamburg, together with the people from the local community, against commercialization of the little park in their neighborhood. Both projects present an arena for a holy war with neoliberalism and indeed with much of the Documenta exhibition itself. They question the notion of the politics of people's participation in artworks, which can be seen as central to neoliberalism ideology, exposing the social and economic problematics of such art

practices. Was the minimum wage salary of € 7 per hour, for example, enough for the formerly unemployed workers who Hirschhorn found in this poor neighborhood of Kassel, to build, organize and sustain his *Bataille Monument*? What constituted the value of this project — the participation of people from the working-class community, or the artist's fascination with Bataille? Who benefits in general — the artist, or this community in Kassel? Can people participate without the ability to understand and speak for the project itself? By contrast, Park Fiction's project, the representation of a community's long lasting and successful fight with city investors for a little park in the poor harbour area in Hamburg, offered the spirit of old Marxist political struggle as the only remaining strategy for encouraging people to participate in their future. Park Fiction artists, for example, developed various tools through which members of the public could articulate their wishes for the park, including a "wish line," a wish archive, a clay modeling office as well as questionnaires: in short, a substantial collection of public dreams for the park. Typically, Hirschhorn's project for Documenta11 has been regarded as a perfect example of art obliterating dichotomies such as low and high, local and international, marginal and central in its occupation of a "real" site, engaging with "real" people in the city, while Park Fiction, the project which has been conceived and developed in the actual urban environment, was limited to a nice display of documentation at the Documenta Hall, the interior of which was designed as a unified space for the variety of other "ongoing projects."

The American duo Simparch, in their well-presented skateboarding project *Free Basin*, introduced the alternative energy in the creation of an artwork and the activation of people's participation, perfectly bringing together art viewers and skateboarders from all over the world. The work reconciled low and high on the level of physical body and the kind of sport and street activity which is emblematic for discussions about democracy.

The most painful questions raised about participation in Documenta, however, were around the qualifications for being legiti-

mately "postcolonial," and why those without these particular characteristics had little chance to be involved in the exhibition.³ Why, for instance, was South America included in this discourse while the states of most countries on that continent, on their latest course of economic and political crisis, are better defined as colonial? What is one to make of Russia, which was not included in this Documenta, or the previous, remaining marginalized as the "too-early/too-late" fellow in the big club of selected postcolonial subjects? But the most pressing question in this discussion is one that is aptly put by Kobena Mercer: What happens once you are included?⁴ What is the canon you are meant to represent and who is given the right to speak for whom?

In spite of the problematics of selection and participation, however, the films of Chantal Akerman and Ulrike Ottinger in Documenta seem to provide a model for the unfixed and open-ended postcoloniality idealized in the concept of multitude. Both Akerman and Ottinger practice a kind of postcolonial travel in their attempts to connect the past with the present of those countries and places that have experienced violence as a part of local politics, or those which have recently undergone political transformation. In *East*, there is the slow movement of Akerman's camera on people in the gray light waiting for the bus in Russia. In *From the Other Side*, the same camera lingers on refugees awaiting entrance to a forbidden territory at the Mexican border. In *South East Passage*, Ottinger takes a contemplative trip to the "otherland" of Eastern Europe. These presentations defined postcolonial space as that of unresolved debates, as infinite as the desert on the Mexican-US border.

Leaving the subjects of Documenta11 mostly unresolved and open, one can nevertheless see the institution's petrified frameworks as balancing on the verge of two polar possibilities: to become a domain for interdisciplinary and intercultural networking, or to convert its own potential into fashionable radicalism and an easily digested ideological supplement.

Notes:

1. Slavoj Zizek, "The Prospects of Radical Politics Today," *Documenta11_Platform1* "Democracy Unrealized" (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 69).
2. Okwui Enwezor's reference to Gerardo Mosquera's division between those he calls "curating cultures" and those others who are "curated cultures." Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in *Documenta11_Catalogue*. (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 46).
3. See, for instance, the discussion of Ekaterina Dyogot and Margaret Dikovitskaya on the ARTMargins.com website about whether Russia is qualified for postcolonial discourse.
4. Kobena Mercer, Reviews on Documenta11, *Frieze*, September, 2002.

Olga Kopenkina is an independent curator and critic from Belarus currently based in New York. She is a correspondent for Moscow Art Magazine and was granted a scholarship by the IFA to take part in the Documenta11_Education Project.



Speer, Simparch (in collaboration with Kevin Drumm), 2001, installation. Photo: Documenta11 Platform5 exhibition catalogue.

Documenting a Documentary Documenta:

Documenta 11 through its repercussions in the North American Press

by Inés Katzenstein

It is almost unnecessary to stress the importance of the discursive afterlife of a show like Documenta. Even now, with an increasingly mobile art crowd and a growing cultural tourist international class, only a few people in the art world actually see the exhibition held every five years in the provincial city of Kassel. And yet everybody seems to have an opinion about what has become an important barometer for contemporary art.

The discursive existence of Documenta basically depends upon circulation of the show's

curatorial statements, talk among friends, and specialized written criticism. And this written criticism is what we all suppose to be a rather influential type of discourse in shaping the dominant trends and ideas of the years that follow the exhibition. My goal for this text is to try to see Documenta 11 through its North American reviews, a task that is especially appealing when we are talking about a show that proposed, from its inception, important changes in its historical structure, and that was theoretical to the point of being labeled by more than one critic as "academic."

The level of discursivity that gave origin to this eleventh edition of Documenta was quite impressive. The event included a strong political framework developed by a rather theoretical team of curators, some of them straightforward academics. Four conferences, or "platforms," preceded the show in Kassel, discussing major themes in contemporary politics. The conception of the final exhibition, as co-curator Carlos Basualdo put it, was promised to be "from non-hegemonic conditions of production." Nevertheless, its repercussions in the North American press have been surprisingly non-polemical, not very theoretical and fairly warm.

In order to introduce the situation let me synthesize some of the most common criticism of the show. The absence of "beauty," "humour" and "imagination" in Documenta 11 was the most common critique expressed by reviewers, particularly those published in the United States. The show in Kassel was widely considered too inclined toward "content," and the reviews deride the lack of sensuality, colour, and psychological perspective as opposed to sociological or historical perspectives, which they deemed to have dominated the event. Perhaps Thomas McEvilley, in his article for *Frieze*, was referring to this same inclination toward content when he noted that this was the "least arty Documenta yet" in which "virtually none of the art looked commercial in the sense of prettified older works that seem destined to line some dealers' pockets."

What about Documenta 11 provoked such criticism? The prevalence of documentary genres and formats was the main concern. The sober tone of the show was defined by the "neutrality" radiating from quasi-journalistic photography, video interviews and compilations of images from recent historical events and diverse modes of archival accumulation of information. Needless to say, these formats that investigate history, actuality and memory from a realistic and materialistic perspective have historically circulated outside the domains of the art museum or relegated to be minor art practices, as has traditionally happened with some kinds of "artistic" photography documenting the life of the oppressed in different

parts of the globe. (Alternately such practices have been relegated to natural science or history museums as a type of anthropological, ethnographic or "scientific" study.) All the critics of the exhibition noted this new status acquired by the documentary. In reference to the video and film programming, it is indeed surprising to read that almost none of the writers reviewing the exhibition gave precise descriptions about the specific kind of documentary that was prevalent in this show. Only Linda Nochlin in *Artforum* interestingly stated that, "Many of these works function in the documentary mode but transcend and expand it, making it into a kind of hybrid that appeals not only to curiosity, a quest for specific information about some topic, but to imagination, political consciousness, and unconscious fears and desires." This is an extremely important comment in order to understand that what most of the art critics characterized as "documentary" was not simply a group of TV-style film and video — linear and utterly didactic in its pedagogy — but rather, this group of work utilized more personal, complex, and poetic perspectives to approach the so-called "real." To give you an example of this genre, one of the most cited examples of "interesting documentary" was Steve McQueen's "Western Deep," a film on the working conditions of a South African gold mine, with an implicit critique of the exploitive discipline of the miners. The film is a polished combination of documentary and aesthetic approaches, emphasizing the almost abstract darkness and sounds of the mine, and the ritualistic, seemingly choreographed discipline of the workers. Other videos perhaps more related to classic documentary genres, such as Chantal Akerman's compilation of testimonies and patrol scenes from the Mexican-American border, managed to organize the material in ways that added meaning to the sheer information within the films — in Akerman's case, the material was framed by a particular, simultaneous screening of interviews and images on a large accumulation of monitors.

From the mainstream press, one of the critics who questioned the fundamentals of the documentary genre was Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times*. He stated:

"Many of these works function in the documentary mode but transcend and expand it, making it into a kind of hybrid that appeals not only to curiosity, a quest for specific information about some topic, but to imagination, political consciousness, and unconscious fears and desires."

Linda Nochlin, *Artforum*

“some of the artists associated with the art world’s gradual embrace of globalism during the ’90s appear to be a bit stuck.”

Kobena Mercer, *Frieze*

respect, with good reason, it seems Botar would have liked to see more “artworks” produced within systems of values different from the US and Europeans (not so much the “activities” of African groups but the artworks of African artists working within the limits of their own artistic paradigms). He wrote: “Our specific notion of ‘art,’ at least the kind that is shown at venues such as Documenta and the Venice Biennale, is Western to the core, and is either little known or unsupported in much of the world.” In the context of this Documenta, to point critically to both the limits of “our” notion of art, and the risks of the anthropological gaze, is crucial. Nevertheless, at the same time, this vision runs the risk of implying the existence of a radical “other”; cultures that lie uncontaminated outside of Westernism, an outside that, as we know, is rapidly disappearing.

In *Frieze*, Kobena Mercer points to the concrete limitations of the geopolitical agenda of the exhibition. He says that, taking into account that twenty years have passed “since writers such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak first defined the field of post-colonial studies,” the ambition of the exhibition in “redressing the past exclusions carried out by Westernism” is a sign of how far behind the visual arts are regarding these themes. Believing that inclusivity has become the rule and not the exception, Mercer highlights the show’s complacency toward the big names of the international biennial circuit (Shirin Neshat, Mona Hatoum, Alfredo Jaar, all of whom, he writes, “uphold what is by now a fairly conventional conception of global *mélange*”) and, referring to Yinka Shonibare and Glenn Ligon, the way “some of the artists associated with the art world’s gradual embrace of globalism during the ’90s appear to be a bit stuck.”

Along these same lines, Thomas McEvelley made a history of the progressive recognition of non-Western cultures by the contemporary art mainstream in order to state “there is nothing exactly

new about organizing a show about post-colonial issues.” This critic’s way to “walk the walk” of the show, as he puts it, is to control the quotas of internationalism and gender with a carefulness that, if not ironic, cannot be anything but uninteresting and bureaucratic. After tallying his numbers, McEvelley’s conclusion is that in this Documenta there are still a majority of artists coming from the US and Europe (noted as well by Botar), and that the percentages of women leave a lot to say, at least to his American standards. He says that thirty-five percent of women “might seem OK” for a “European institution still evolving” such as Documenta. But he complains: “Instead we got 20% again.”

Reading such criticism, one could surmise that the very weight of the theoretical frame of Documenta11 ended up devouring a possible recognition of its supposed radicalism. One could even say that the theoretical sophistication of the show ended up inhibiting critics who typically engage in a kind of “immanent criticism” of the artwork, rather than comment on political statements, transdisciplinary projects and post-colonial issues. Along these lines, we could say that by devoting itself to something different from autonomous art practices, by proposing to be a marker of the “location of culture” instead of the location of “art,” this Documenta expanded its ambitions at the same time as it renounced its historical function of offering a diagnosis of the state of the art world. While one might not need to be a cultural theorist in order to provide an interesting critique of Documenta11, the deliberate shift in the role of the exhibition that this event presented seems to have effected a crisis for conventional art criticism.

Inés Katzenstein is an Argentine art critic and curator currently based in New York City. She is producing three anthologies of Latin American art and criticism for the international program of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The show’s goal, Mr. Enwezor has said, is knowledge through art (one artist described the works here as “epistemological machines”), which is not the same thing as art. Nobody here seems to care about the difference. People complain that contemporary art is too full of irony. But the presumption throughout this Documenta seems to be that a camera, simply aimed at something, tells the truth the more cameras the better, as if a profusion of views through the lenses weren’t also bound to be biased, like all points of view. The lack of irony (or is it naïveté?) surprised me.

Kimmelman’s need to distinguish between that which is art and that which is not is a typical defensive strategy in times of change. This same idea of Documenta11 as being primarily an information-based event instead of an art event was also implied by Kim Levin of New York’s *Village Voice*, who closed her review by inviting the reader to “receive this Documenta as the proclamation of a state of emergency. It’s going to be a hard act to follow. And given the current events transpiring on our planet, it’s really not fair to blame the messenger for the dire news.”

The emphasis on the realism of “the document” that Okwui Ewesor’s curatorial approach implied was baptized by *ArtForum* critic James Meyer as “New Media Social Realism,” a kind of closed genre or paradigm whose theme would be globalization and its discontents; and the media, “film and video projection.” Interestingly, this exhibition’s political accent on information, on a global and social scale rather than the aesthetic, the psychological, the sexual or the individual, provoked certain American art critics to point to the show as being particularly conservative. James Mayer characterizes the event as a “bizarrely heteronormative experience” and Matthew Higgs calls it a “pessimistic, curiously conservative, repressed and at times censorious exhibition” since it was “unable or unwilling to go beyond meekly acknowledging the persistent presence of global traumas ... [these] stunned mirrors [the documentary photograph] — like images of

Time or *Newsweek* — appear mute.” But would every project not manifesting an evident acknowledgement of struggles at the level of the individual voice be considered conservative? Is the current return from micropolitics (the politics of identity) to macropolitics (the politics of the global) a conservative shift? Is there a way to integrate the lessons of identity politics with a new macro approach to politics?

Without doubt, the most generalized reaction to the exhibition was the total rejection of the viewing conditions determined by the predominance of time-based media such as video and film. Taking into account the increasing commonality of this complaint about the presentation of contemporary exhibitions, it says a great deal more about the resistance of the audience to adapt to the drastically changing formats and demands of artistic production than it does about the specific curatorial design of Documenta11. Encountering the exhibition was in fact quite an interesting viewing experience. Walking from one black box to the next, taking a seat in each viewing room, was an exhausting exercise. However, comparing this experience with the physical and phenomenological demands required by, for example, a painting show of the same dimensions, the intensive viewing of Documenta’s time-based work was an absorptive experience, almost hypnotizing, as if one had spent the entire day in a movie theater.

Perhaps the most promising yet ultimately unfulfilling responses to this Documenta were those that attempted to critically approach the way the exhibition finally delivered its pronouncements regarding the question of globalization and post-colonialism. Unfortunately, most of this criticism ended up approaching the issues from a “numeric” point of view. In *Border Crossings*, Olivier A.I. Botar noted that comparatively few artworks originated from outside the metropolitan art centers. He also pointed out that among those artists actually living in Africa and Asia, the show featured mostly documentation of community activism and not artworks in the traditional sense. What is of interest in this comment is the tacit idea that at the end, when the exhibition looks at non-Western cultures, an anthropological perspective remains. In this

“receive this Documenta as the proclamation of a state of emergency. It’s going to be a hard act to follow. And given the current events transpiring on our planet, it’s really not fair to blame the messenger for the dire news.”

Kim Levin, *Village Voice*

Artists Project

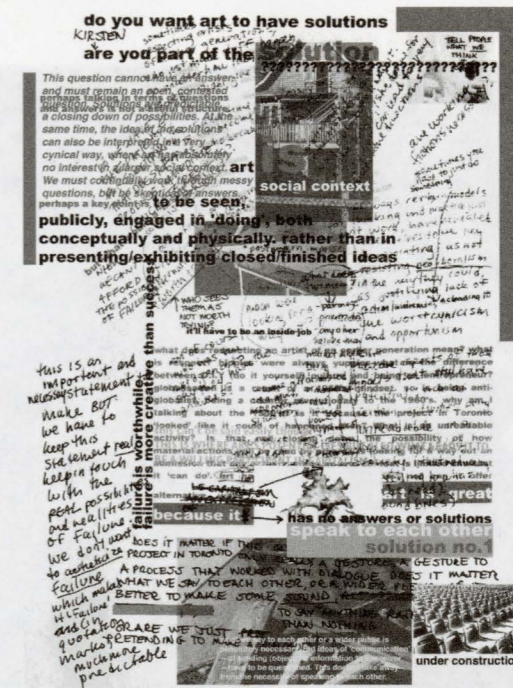
by Kirsten Forkert and otiose

This project took the form of a writing/drawing exchange between artists Kirsten Forkert and John Dummett, approximately one month after their collaborative project *LOOKOUT* at Ne Plus Ultra in Toronto, September 2002. *LOOKOUT* took place over a seventy-two-hour period. The work involved various activities: installation, text, discussion, actions and interventions into the surrounding neighbourhood. The gallery space was open to the public approximately four hours a day. Notes from discussion (both between the artists and with visitors) were written and layered on the gallery wall in a process of continuous “assembly” and “disassembly.” The work responded to the site of Ne Plus Ultra, a project space run in Toronto’s Queen West gallery district by artist Tiff Isza, nestled among galleries, trendy boutiques, condo developments and the Queen Street Mental Health Centre. Our responses were motivated by the activities, contradictions and social

tensions in the area, including the relationship between artistic development and gentrification, the very commercial nature of the artist-initiated activity in this area of Toronto and the uncritical championing of young artists and curators for their development of Toronto’s new, hip arts district in local art and mainstream press. In our exploration of these tensions, we attempted to articulate a process of thinking and negotiation that was public, participatory and visible.

The exchange that resulted from *LOOKOUT* took as a starting point some of the lingering and messy questions uncovered by the project. On a broad level, the relationship of art to social change and the nature of communication as collaborative exchange. More specifically related to the gallery’s situation in the Queen West gallery district, other questions lingered, including: What does it mean that artist-initiated culture in this area of the city is commercially focused? What

kinds of conventions of artistic production and exhibition are normalized by this orientation? How do members of the local community in Parkdale respond to the gentrification that is inevitably associated with the relocation of commercial galleries to this area? How do these differ from other storefront galleries in Toronto and elsewhere that attempt to engage actively with their social and political contexts? Is the entrepreneurial, youthful, artist-initiated, DIY, next-new-thing spirit that is celebrated in relation to the development of this area of Queen West all that different from that of the loft and boutique owners on the strip? How do these celebrations reflect on the history of artist-run activity in Canada? How do these developments both result from decreases in government funding for the arts seen in recent years and support directives toward revenue generation among arts organizations? What is the relationship between these shifts in policy and neoliberal ideologies, including market populism?

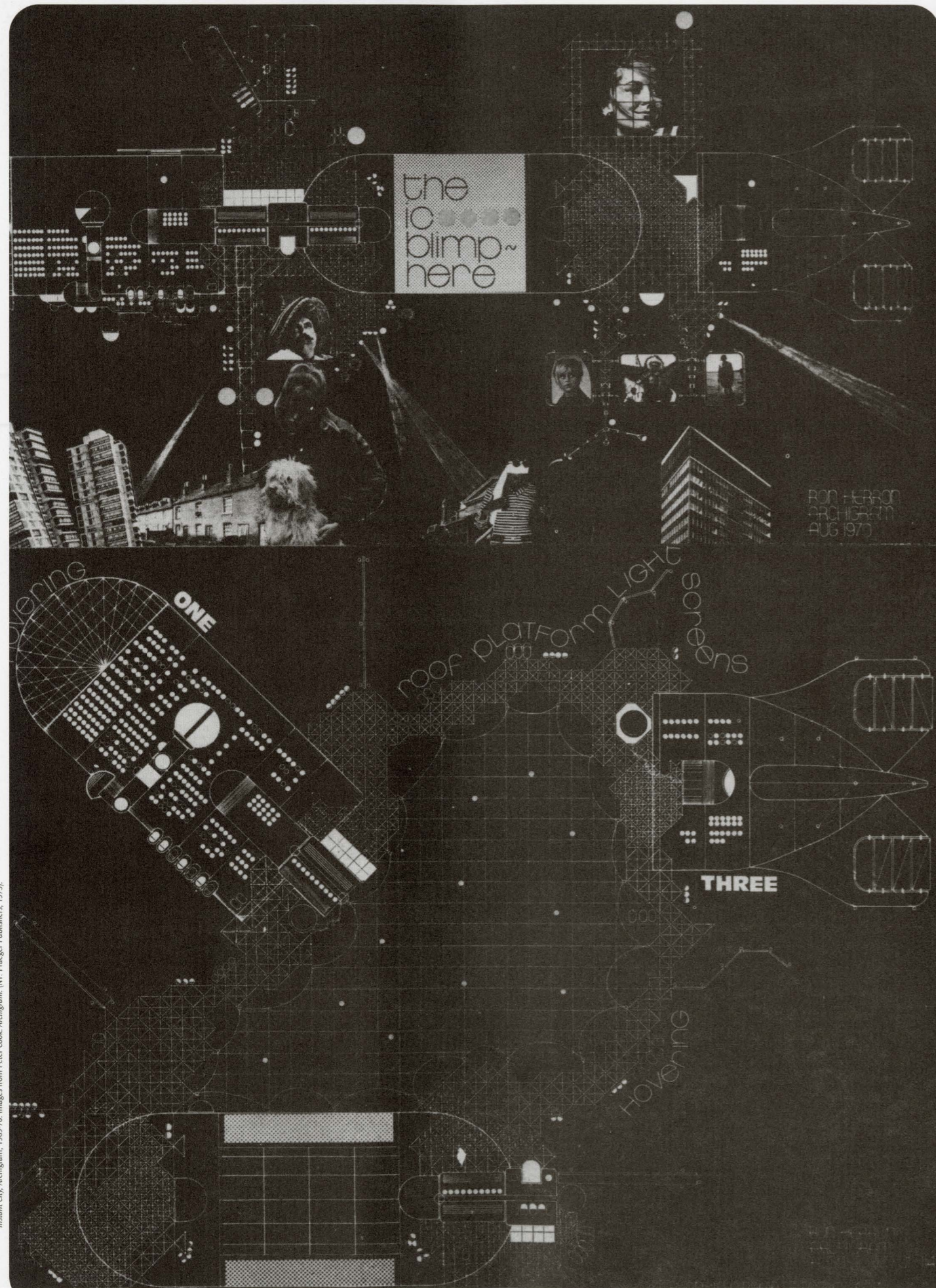


Lookout, Kirsten Forkert and otiose, 2002, digital image. See back cover for colour reproduction.

In response to these questions, and dislocated from any particular site of production, notes were written on paper, scanned and emailed back and forth as JPEGs. We avoided a linear “question/response” format, as we felt the obligations of keeping the discussion “on track” would close down the possibilities of what a response could be. Instead, the conversation took a form that was akin to being in a crowd of people all talking at once. This enabled the exchanged material, whether it was text or image or mark-making, to behave less as a question or answer and more like a series of coordinates that map out a territory for debate. As the page/map went through many iterations of scanning, printing and emailing, the later material is more legible than the initial statements and texts, most of which became obscured, creating a topography where only glimpses of its process or history are apparent.

Kirsten Forkert is a Vancouver-based artist with works in installation, performance and text. She has presented her work across Canada. Her practice, which is often site-specific, investigates relationships between publics and larger social and economic structures as they play out in urban space.

Working under the name “otiose,” John Dummett has been active in the field of installation and performance art internationally since 1997, with projects for Y2 Artists Outlet (Toronto 2000), the International Urban Festival (Zagreb, Croatia 2001), the Spaces Gallery (Cleveland, USA 2002) and recently at the Diskurs02 Festival, (Giessen, Germany 2002). otiose projects publicly investigate how public space is shaped by contradictory interests, and aim to explore the possibilities of civic and public space.



Instant City, Archigram, 1969-70. Images from Peter Cook, Archigram. (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1973).

Addressing Infrastructure:

Portable initiatives, collapsible forms.

by Craig Buckley

One of the most exciting developments of the last decade has been the blossoming and sometimes dysfunctional infatuation between the worlds of art and architecture. As artists and art collectives have launched themselves into this hybrid field, an increasing number are creating structures specifically designed to be portable. Some of the most visible forms have been architecture-vehicle hybrids, a field that has produced a tremendous range of experimentation. Such structures-on-wheels have become platforms capable of supporting anything from new systems for living/working to venues for exhibition and social interaction to new forms of public sculpture.

Given that artists are engaging with portable architectures in so many different and opposing ways — running a gamut that stretches between modest activist interventions to custom-crafted luxury vehicles — it is important to ask how these different

projects can be situated in terms of contemporary and historical struggles to redefine the relationships between mobility, technology and place.

One place to begin might be the wheel itself. As one of the most mythologized inventions of humankind, we remain ever fixated upon its potentials. A number of artists, however, are exploring small-scale, collapsible architectures that have forsaken this central device. Accordingly, these works seem to indicate a subtle, but significant, shift in emphasis. Less focused on travel across space, they address existing structures and networks, finding new ways to engage often overlooked features of the world around us. The infrastructures they address range from the traditional services providing buildings with water, air, climate control and electricity to more recent networks for communication and the transfer of digital information.

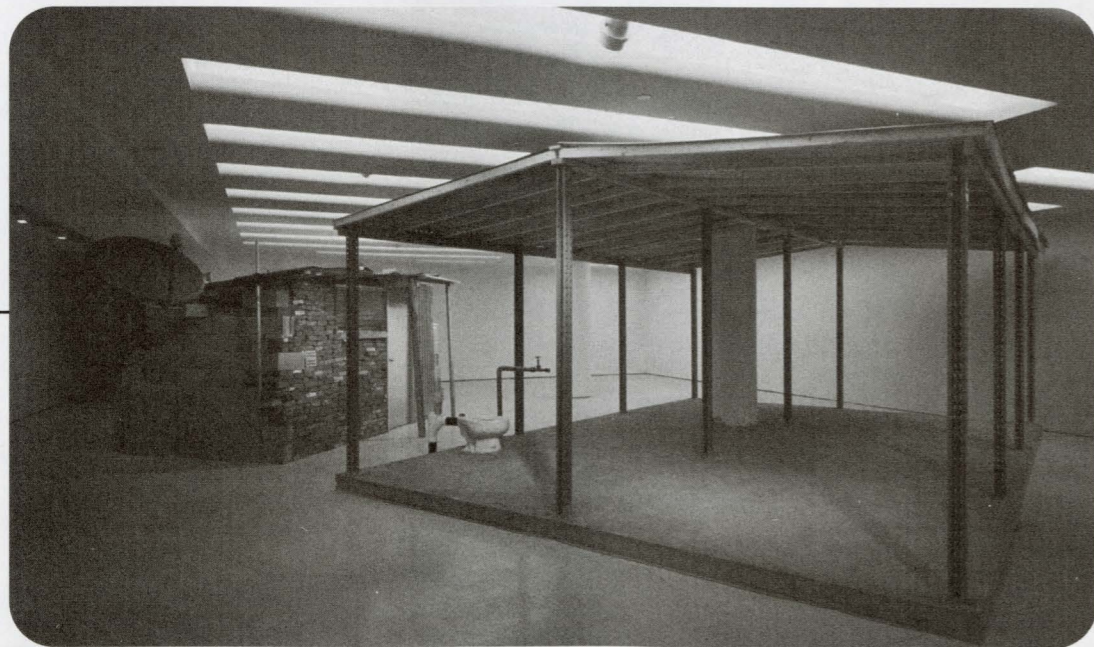
The work of Marjetica Potrc (Slovenia), Michael Rakowitz (United States), BFO Projects (international) and the Arnait Video Collective (Canada) are four very different initiatives that connect portable architectures with infrastructure, raising questions about the way these networks function. Responding to very different situations, their projects create specific and often unpredictable

results. In some cases these deliberately work against existing structures to produce new relations, events or environments. In all cases the structures are inseparable from the processes they put into motion, illuminating the ways in which questions of architecture and infrastructure are always tied to social relations. These practices raise questions about the way infrastructure relates spaces that we assume to be separate. Tubes, pipes, wires and waves have a way of weaving themselves through walls and floors, exceeding the separating functions that architecture organizes. It is an excess that shapes the environment we live in as much as the buildings we inhabit.

Slovenian artist and architect Marjetica Potrc has often been described as an urban anthropologist. Her work involves research into individually initiated building projects found around the globe. From Belfast betting offices housed in shipping containers to shantytowns in Sao Paulo to gated communities in Israel, Potrc examines forms of building that are produced and directed by their inhabitants rather than by architects or public planners. Developed out of a multitude of private interests, these new spatial arrangements, she argues, are the success stories of today's cities. A key aspect in their development has often been tied to ways of exploiting and extending infrastructures (from services to communications). In one facet of her practice Potrc uses the gallery as a staging site, transplanting effective forms of self-initiated structure into the space of the museum. With *Kagiso: Skeleton house* (2000), for example, Potrc presented a core unit, a basic infrastructure system provided by the South African government, consisting of a platform, roof, skeleton structure and plumbing system. Using this structure as a platform, dwellers are able to construct homes that meet their needs and means. Next to the transplanted skeleton house, Potrc constructed a ramshackle structure out of materials from a local home depot. Juxtaposing the prefabricated

skeleton house with construction materials gathered from home depot the work raises difficult questions. On one hand it suggests that despite the surface prevalence of "do it yourself" strategies, deep inequities persist. On the other, it highlights significant transformations in the ways that shanties and favelas are regarded within urbanism. As a prefabricated unit based on construction strategies originating in a shanty environment, the skeleton house takes something that was one seen as a problem to be "solved" and transforms it into a potential "solution." As a model for subsidized housing, the skeleton house provides access to basic services while allowing inhabitants to design their living space. Complete with a satellite dish, Potrc's improvised shanty structure raises further questions about the importance of access to networks of mass communication, questioning whether this amenity has become as basic a need as water, heat and shelter.

Claiming a "non-judgmental" approach that is equally interested in the shanty and the gated community, Potrc explicitly denies that her work is about social critique. Rather, she sees herself as celebrating the initiatives individuals use to bypass official structures and directly shape the environment to their needs. Such politics are further complicated by questions of context and institution. *Kagiso: Skeleton House*, for instance, appeared in the Guggenheim Museum to celebrate Potrc's receipt of the 2000 Hugo Boss award. Potrc's non-judgmental ethos can certainly be accused of failing to address the larger political and economic relationships at work in the sites she researches. It also fails to address the project's relationship to the interests of art institutions and corporate prize structures that would seek to become a home for these initiatives. While conclusions might be easily arrived at (perhaps too easily), dismissing the work on this account risks overlooking the complex implications of such individual initiatives in the world's cities. Exhibition is one facet of a practice anchored in a larger field of research. Potrc's current



Skeleton House, Marjetica Potrc, 2001, building material. Photo: Ellen Labenski. Courtesy: Max Protetch Gallery.

web project, *Urban Independent*, for example, brings together five initiatives from around the world and asks their creators to elaborate on the diverse nature of their catalysts, contexts and communities (<http://www.creativetime.org/consumingplaces/potrc/index.html>). As part of her collaboration with Creative Time (who host the *Urban Independent* web site), Potrc recently organized a workshop that brought together a number of groups to strategize about individual initiatives within New York City. Fraught as it undoubtedly is, assessing the politics of Potrc's gestures requires an analysis of her larger practice and the relationships produced by her appropriation, displacement, research and representation of the initiatives that she examines.

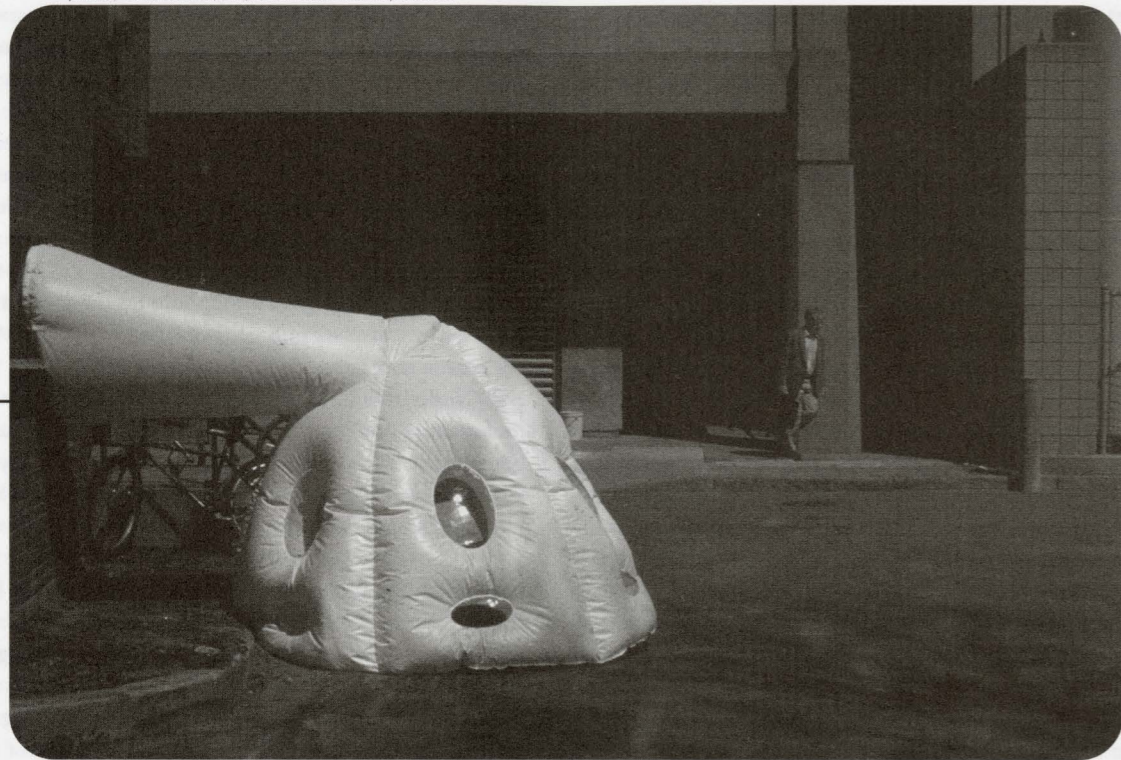
The work of New York-based artist Michael Rakowitz also addresses infrastructure, often exploiting a building's HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning) system. Begun in 1997, the paraSITE project is a series of portable structures made from lightweight plastics designed to provide temporary shelter in an urban context (<http://www.possibleutopia.com/mike/>). Constructed with a budget of around five dollars, each shelter attaches to a building's outtake duct and captures a flow of air that inflates its double-membrane walls, a feature that retains heat while keeping the exhaust air separate from the user. The impetus for paraSITE partly came from Rakowitz' study of portable Bedouin structures while completing a residency program in Jordan and partly from conversations initiated with a homeless person upon return to the United States. After these initial conversations, a prototype was constructed and presented to a group of homeless men. This development process began to generate and direct the project's form. Issues of visibility and security came to the fore. The group rejected an initial structure made from black trash bags and opted to use white and translucent plastics, materials that provide high visibility and do not carry such negative connotations. As a form of visibility it

contests widespread programs designed to push homeless individuals and communities out of supposedly public spaces and into locations where they are invisible. Such visibility garnered media attention in New York City, attracting new users to the project. This visibility also meant that the project came under greater scrutiny for violating the city's anti-tent laws, laws that were more stringently enforced by Mayor Giuliani's campaign to "clean up" New York. In response, Michael McGee collaborated with Rakowitz to produce a structure that measured less than thirty-two feet and consequently fell within a loophole in the city's anti-tent law. Ticketed by New York police for violation of the law, McGee fought the case in court and, on the basis of his design, won. In this sense, paraSITE is symbolic of a strategy as much as it is a shelter. While not architecture in a legal or technical sense, the structure's parasitic connection to existing buildings magnifies the dynamics surrounding homelessness. Drawing attention to relationships of exclusion and dependence traced by architecture, paraSITE did not just comment on such a social divide, it extruded a new space within these relationships, both the legal space of the loophole and the physical space of dwelling. ParaSITE doesn't fall comfortably within the art world's institutions of exhibition (though it has been exhibited), nor is it comfortably situated within state or municipal attempts to "solve" the homeless crisis. Recognizing that there is no prototypical homeless person but a multiplicity of homeless situations, there can be no unitary "solution" to the problem. To date, Rakowitz has been involved in the production of over thirty structures. Unlike Potrc's case studies, Rakowitz' shelters are not prefabricated but are made in collaboration with users who contact the artist and want to participate in the project. Thus in design and materials, the paraSITE is less a proprietary object whose condition of display and use are controlled by the artist than an idea to be co-opted, taken up, modified, passed on and even discarded according to the needs and situations of different users.



paraSITE, Michael Rakowitz, 1998, various materials. Courtesy: the artist.

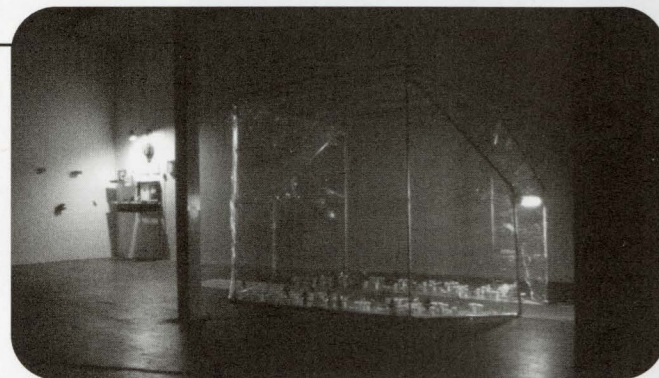
paraSITE, Michael Rakowitz, 1998, various materials. Courtesy: the artist.



Room + Board, an ongoing venture of the BFO collective, uses similarly low-cost, compact materials and deploys them to complicate the social and structural relationships surrounding exhibitions. BFO takes its name from a military term for the runway debris found during aircraft inspections (bits fallen off) and refers to the shifting nature of the collective, whose make up include artist Mitch Robertson, an anonymous member of the KIT curatorial collective and a changing roster of invited guests. Room + Board is a travelling project that invites host galleries to create a hostile environment within which BFO participants must construct ephemeral protective structures using only the components contained in a standard carry-on bag. The group encourages hostile environments composed from immaterial and often overlooked environmental factors ranging from temperature, light, smell or sound to less tangible elements such as the psychology and involvement of the audience. Arriving at the host space unaware of what they will be walking into, the BFO artists are called upon to

realize structures that respond directly to conditions and events beyond their control.

At the inaugural event, staged at STATIC in Liverpool, the home gallery recognized this dynamic and deftly manipulated the situation. Prior to the exhibition the directors circulated offensive emails that they claimed were written by the BFO artists. Exploiting the infrastructures of communication with misinformation, STATIC created conflicting expectations within the institution's audience. The matter was further complicated as the artists were deliberately invited an hour before the audience. Not being aware of this gambit, the artists were under the impression that no one was showing up to their event. A single cameraperson appeared to be the sole attendee, capturing video footage of the artists. In response a small, opaque enclosure made from packing tape and flexible poles was constructed while an elaborate map of Antarctica was traced out in white flour across the gallery's floor,



paraSITE, Michael Rakowitz, 1998, various materials. Courtesy: the artist.

complete with small standing flags marking off significant locations. As the misinformed visitors began to arrive, STATIC projected the cameraperson's footage of construction process on the gallery wall. As the evening progressed, BFO attached hostile messages to the flags, which became relay stations also used by visitors to send responses. As messages can only be read by one or two people at a time, the play of rumour and misinformation again became crucial in constructing the audience. While this offensive was occurring, audience members were invited into the temporary structure for drinks and socializing on a more intimate scale. This second gesture complicates the first, exploiting the mixture of curiosity and apprehension that the show had generated. Here, portable architecture inverted the relationship, guest-host, allowing the visitor to extend hospitality from his temporary domain.

In the end, the project seems less about finding new ways to create enemies than about seeing what happens when circuits are deliberately reversed. BFO's projects prevent the host gallery from doing what we expect it to: neutrally offer space to visiting artists. Displaced from their default position, the gallery must occupy its own territory, a shift that tests the relations that make up a gallery. As a web of artists, cultural workers, board members, critics, sponsors, audience and community members, BFO uses intrusion and spontaneity to confuse the oppositions — between guest and visitor, performer and audience, collaborator and rival — that organize these relations. As such, the power vested in the gallery threshold, a space traced both by its architecture and its infrastructures, can no longer appear as neutral and becomes a staging ground where amorphous social entities coalesce, shift and redefine themselves.

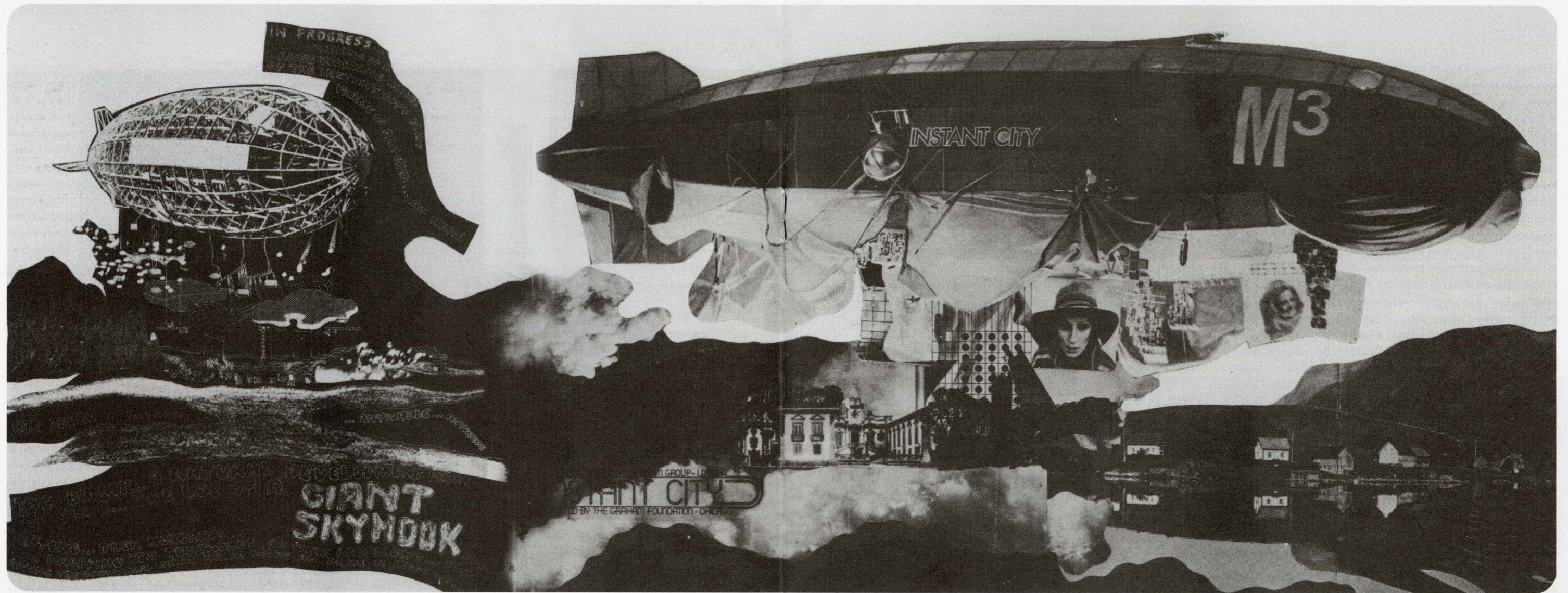
An innovative adaptation of electronic infrastructure lies at the core of the Nunatinnit Nomadic Media Lab organized by the Arnait Video Collective (AVC), an Igloolik-based group of videomakers committed to adding Inuit women's voices to the debates shaping contemporary life in Arctic Canada. The media lab is a collapsible dome tent that can be transported and pitched at hunting camps and other sites located at significant remove from the community. Powered by a generator and containing digital video equipment, computer editing facilities and satellite phones, the media lab allows participants to create, edit and upload materials directly from the tundra to a media-streaming website. In August

2001, the AVC mounted "Live from the Tundra," an inaugural project that allowed participants to create diaries of their experiences, tell oral histories and communicate in an online forum with internet users connected to the website (www.nunatinnit.net). Seizing the potential latent in de-territorialized communication infrastructures, the AVC uses these technologies to facilitate a territorialized, mobile architecture that supports the collective's own needs and practices. Most communities in the Arctic were created through a state-directed process of settlement, a historical event that decisively changed people's relationship to the land and the practices of subsistence related to it. One of the collective's stated goals is to maintain a presence upon the land, a place where many of the traditional skills and knowledge of Inuit life are put directly to use. The backdrop of the Eastern Arctic is one of intense change, where services, infrastructures and architectures are increasingly centralized, both in existing settlements and in the new territorial capital of Iqaluit. By allowing the video process to be engaged with camp-based activities rather than those of the settlement, the AVC's media lab contests this trend. By using the internet, AVC retains control over the distribution of their work, bypassing institutions like the IBC (Inuit Broadcasting Corporation) and the CBC, institutions centred in Iqaluit and Toronto respectively. Like earlier projects, the Nunatinnit Mobile Media Lab is equal part structure and social experiment; a space designed to facilitate a range of social functions from fishing to video-editing, storytelling to web casting. Located at the intersection of a number of worlds, the AVC's media lab asserts older forms of mapping within newer ones, using the infrastructure of communication to counter some of the forces of centralization so often tied to it. It also breaks down the perceived incompatibility between technological change and traditional culture, proving that traditional patterns of activity are not necessarily antithetical to technological change.

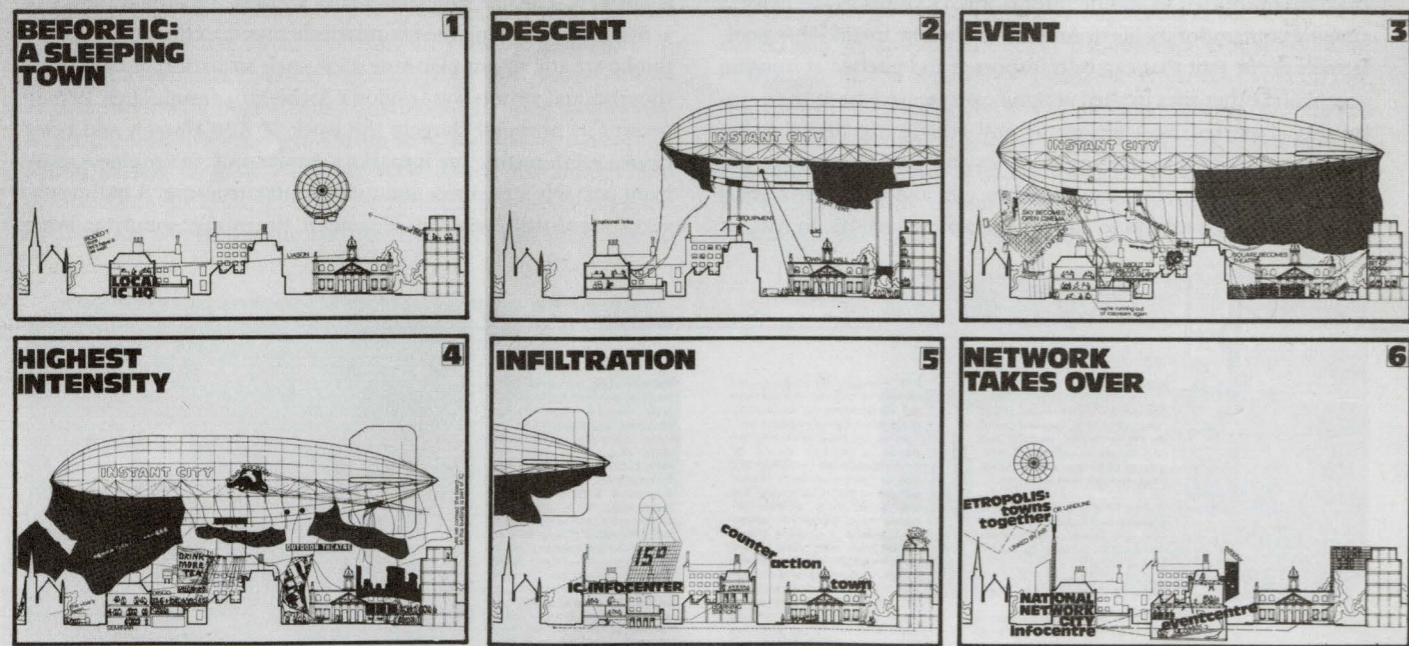
The use of portable architectures exhibited in these four practices is not new. The late nineteen-sixties witnessed a similar frenzy of activity hotspotting the boundaries between architecture, design, public art and urban planning. One such affiliation of architects, theorists and writers was London's Archigram group. Their 1969-70 *Instant City* proposal (largely the work of Ron Herron and Peter Cook) is interesting for it marks a similar shift in emphasis away from portable structures and toward infrastructure. A bid to subvert the cultural centrality of London, the project sought to bring



Image from www.nunatinnit.net website.



Instant City, Archigram.



Instant City, Archigram.

the city to the country, allowing people to enjoy metropolitan events without having to enter urban space. Small towns and villages were to be enveloped by a travelling metropolis composed of trailers, lightweight structures, audio-visual display systems, entertainment facilities, electric lights and even an airship. Events were coordinated by the local community in collaboration with the *Instant City* agency, an open-ended hybrid of education and entertainment. The overarching goal of the project was to establish a

network that these different localities could take over and use: each centre feeding parts of the *Instant City* program to be experienced by communities down the line.

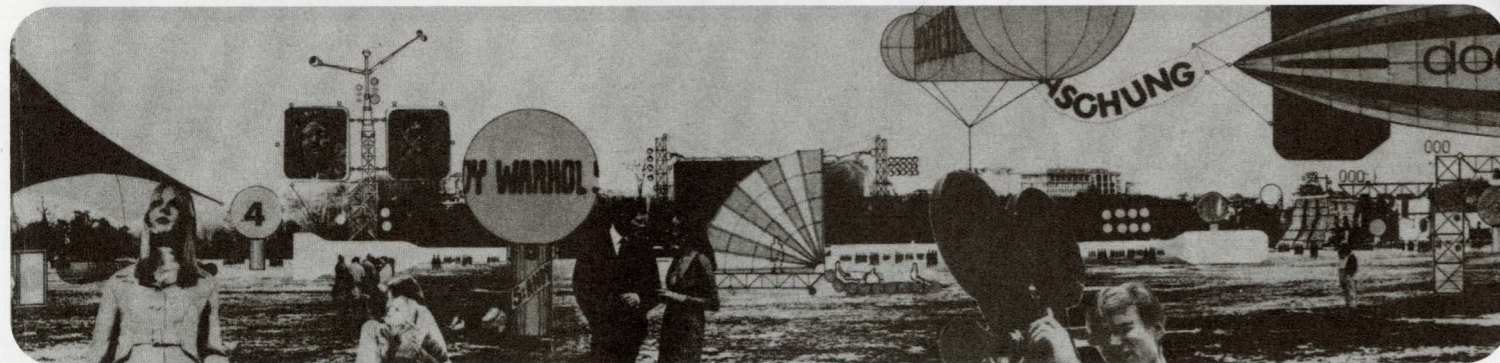
On the one hand, Archigram's structures cut against the grain of massive centralization. Engaged with the buildings, markets, clubs and festivals specific to smaller towns, *Instant City* tried to imagine how new forms of architecture might help transform these

familiar sites into a platform for new and spontaneous environments. On the other hand, *Instant City's* form of community risks reinforcing escapist and isolationist fantasies. Against their own best intentions, the project also risks levelling out both the complexity of urban situations (by assuming they could be transportable as spectacle) and, in smaller locales, reinforcing the feeling of never having, nor perhaps wanting, to leave the safety of home. Yet the concept of a network community, at once local and dispersed, lucidly anticipates our present condition, where different localities are increasingly defined by their links to (or isolation from) global networks. From our own vantage point it is clear that a network has been established, not through a community focused architectural intervention as imagined by Archigram, but by the infrastructures provided by the internet (originally developed in the context of the cold-war military defence), global finance and mass media. Despite claims that this network might finally enable the "global village" touted by Marshall McLuhan, it has largely served to re-map centralization, entwining smaller centres (such as those Archigram sought to address) within a network dominated, today more than ever, by a handful of the world's megacities. From today's vantage point, Archigram's *Instant City* needs to be productively inverted. It is no longer a question of bringing the metropolis to marginal centres (this kind of hegemony operates well enough by itself, an outcome Archigram failed to take into account), but rather of how temporary architectures and infrastructural networks might create linkages between alternative practices in an increasingly homogenous global network.

As a travelling architecture *Instant City* was on such a grandiose scale that it became impractical, even alienating in the face of the com-

munity it sought to engage. This may be why *Instant City* was never realized as a built proposition. But this failure was not without promise. The dissolution of *Instant City* was the basis for Archigram's later projects. The focus shifted away from travel toward a subtler infrastructure composed not of airships and gantries but of leech trucks (covertly servicing off buildings) and log-plugs (for wiring televisions by the banks of quiet rivers). Whether in the form of a network, a temporary environment or a log-plug, social function remains the key issue. For many groups in the late sixties, the appeal of portable architectures was that they couldn't exist without a group of people to construct, transport, use and dismantle them. Such portable structures (often pneumatic and collapsible in form) were more intimately linked to forms of social practice than were traditional architectural constructions. Re-engaging a link between architecture and social practice became a strategy for engaging the shape and texture of public space against the forces of municipal and state planning. In this their work anticipates more recent projects that have sought to address infrastructure in direct, localized and experimental ways.

In the end, one cannot easily separate the creation of new social practices and relationships from new approaches to architectural form. If it is through social practices that the meanings and uses of architecture are rearticulated, shifted or unmade, then it is not surprising that temporary architectures are playing a greater role in the work of artists that seek to contest existing structures. Nonetheless, it is far from clear how such a shift will be articulated. These projects do, however, provide models where design, construction and use become part of an inseparable practice. The small scale of these temporary and portable projects allows them



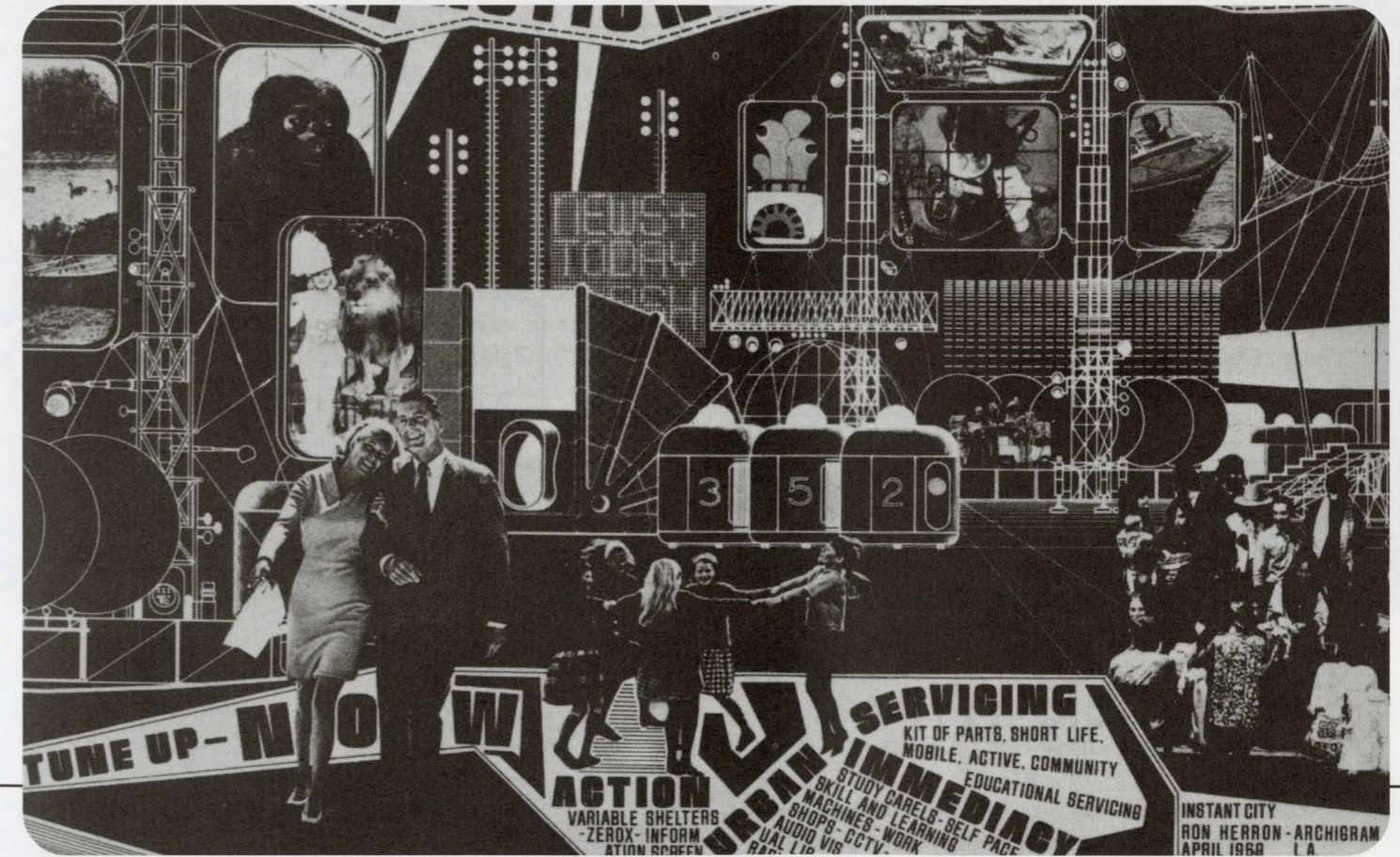
Instant City, Archigram.

to remain focussed on process as opposed to production. Within these processes failure is not a flaw to be avoided at all costs, but a key event that allows a project to develop and assume new formations. The dissolution of initial ideas, whether it be in the case of Archigram's *Instant City* project, the work of Michael Rakowitz or the Nunatinnit Nomadic Media Lab, remains indispensable: a point at which social practices come to shape architectural form. It remains to be seen how the interest in portable architectures will be played out in the art world and beyond; certainly artists can't afford to be unaware of the ways that hegemonic systems foster alternative spaces in order to incorporate them into a dominant framework. As such, the most important part of these projects is not only the final form of the structures, but the way these initiatives provide space, both conceptual and actual, for bringing together usually isolated initiatives into uniquely collaborative, critical and evolving conversations.

References:

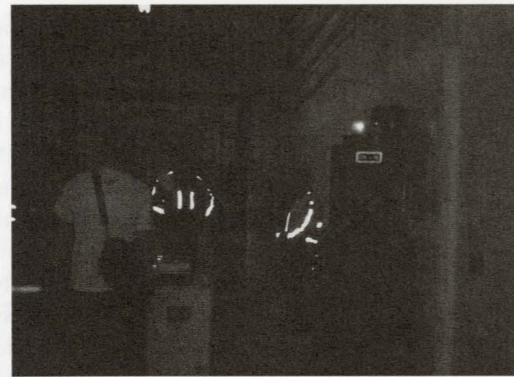
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Instant City, Archigram.

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It's Not A Rave,

Officer

tobias c. van Veen



All images this article courtesy the author.

/TRACK 1. // [<ST> MANIFESTO 1: SONIC FICTIONS]

It is 4am and the sun is dawning. On a public beach within site of the city, torches burn atop speakers and faintly glowing red spotlights still illuminate in the remaining shadows the long and graceful red banners that drape coniferous trees. The banners bear the graphic symbols of the event: a record, an alien DJ, a dark red eye. Sounds of a foreign and stripped techno pound decibels through transient space between forest and city...ears of sound... Tonight, the event has not been busted, the secretive, bandana-clad organizers not dragged off into police vans, leaving you searching for keys and sobriety in a mad dash to illegally parked cars or flights down the beach on uncertain feet. No, tonight is peaceful, the Zone's boundaries perpetuating just long enough to allow the last track and a self-closure on the periphery of society's mediasphere. Perhaps it is as early as 1995 or as late as 1998, here on the liminal coast of the Pacific Ocean and the City of Vancouver.

/TRACK 2 //

That rave culture has been associated with rebellious pop culture, with carnival, with ecstasy (both the drug and the experience), if not a transcendental escape from a commodity culture — this is common enough. That rave culture has been the site of an elaboration of theoretical flights of autonomy put into practice is somewhat less common. And that rave culture engaged a moment of not only vulgar *praxis*, whatever its theory, but an affirmative mix of rhythms, a scratching beyond the surface of an atmosphere of carnival — as if “rave” were simply reducible to a long and continuous historical chain of “festivities of the people” in a Western tradition — but to the persistent repetition of sonic sociality, in what amounts to an erasure of “rave” and “culture” — well, that’s an *event*.

A similar sonic event, a few weeks later. It is 2:30am and the police have arrived in force. Truncheons and pepper spray. Above the trailhead are waiting paddy wagons. The organizers are standing back and surveying the moment. The needles screech to a halt. Rewind, a memory flash, a warehouse just a few weeks ago, where a bust became violent: police storm, breaking cameras, fingers, and the law. Ravers publicly strip-searched, decks destroyed and beatings behind this industrial structure of cement and metal.

Tonight there is a strange turn in the air. An organizer is talking to the constable. There is a pause in the proceedings. “It’s not a rave,” says the green-and-red fatigued DJ. “It’s performance art.” She says this clearly with the tone of one who is taking a measured stand.

The constable is stunned. “But you’re dancing!” he says. “No we’re not,” says the organizer, absolutely pokerfaced. “We’re *performing bodily expression*. What is dancing?” The constable, flabbergasted, wiggles his arms in exasperation. “Now, that’s dancing!” says the organizer.

Surprisingly, perhaps caught slightly off guard, the party — performance? — is broken up peacefully. But not before the constable tells the participants in an exasperated voice: “Why don’t you just go to the big legal rave happening next week at UBC?!”

The raver needs no introduction to Foucault’s body of power, for it is already incorporated into and performed by the body that refuses the corporate dance, that measured and commodified

march, every step a sell-out shuffle. The corporate connections between a Legalized Rave Experience™ and the police — a complicity to contain the steps of “subculture” — is a skipping record to the raver. The crashing of the corporate ball, in what amounts to an infusion of punch in the two-step, a *re-trait* or *gait* in the resistant body, is an exit to an unlikely and if not uncanny “autonomy”: *Art*. Spinning the album of art is a defense and an offense; it occupies one played-out space as it flees another. Here, in the moment *where* a body verges, in a single gesture, art, politics and an aurality that has apparently already been delimited as “rave” “culture,” the contemporary conceptualizations of the trinity — art, music, politics and its negative supplement, “rave” — collapse not into indistinguishability but into a dance that takes place before the first step into the social.

And yet — the caveat — never new and always verging, the very dangers the gesture attempts to escape. Such is the nature of what we may call, after Deleuze and Guattari, a line of flight, where “it is always *on* the most deterritorialized element that reterritorialization takes place.”¹ Hardt and Negri make the point that it is Empire itself that is the most deterritorialized.² And there, at the moment of daring, is the possibility for the war machine and its turn: creativity on the one hand, fascism on the other. It’s always a gamble, a risk. What draws us to consider the work of <ST> is the spinning of this danger through sonic practice and thought in a mixing of cultural movements and questions of microfascism — and not only in what Hakim Bey calls “cop culture”³ but “*in*” the actual and virtual sonic spaces of the rave,⁴ in what amounts to a sampling of the ghost in the machine, a scratching of the sonic power of incorporated *phonos*.

...and someone hands you this piece of paper, similar to the simple flyer that brought you here tonight.

:: (I N F O R M) A T I O N ::

... it says. Then: "<ST>." "<ST>" must be heard as a graphic symbol. It is written as such: "<ST>." The <ST> Manifesto, dated 1994 to 1999 reads:

<ST> is nondefinable: past definition. In a non-world of hyperinformation where the Now is the Past and where the Past cannot be defined, out-of-context, an historical anomaly, <ST> does not define itself in this state of flux. <ST>

<Side> projects: mission (o1): produce techno and experimental focused concept-events mainly in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Events are sonically focused upon experimentation and pushing the boundaries of what is defined as "musik."

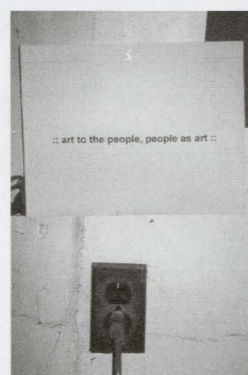
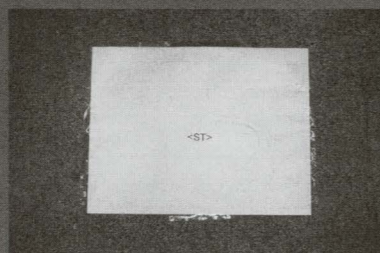
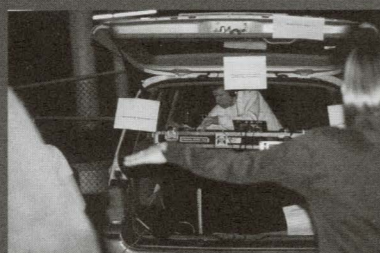
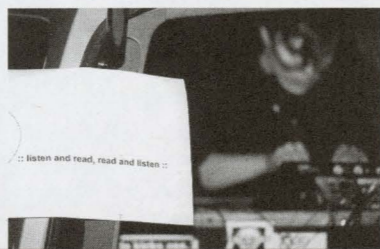
["musik" here being spelled, perhaps we might conjecture after the influence of Windsor, Ontario's minimal techno guru, Plastikman, aka Richie Hawtin, with a "k."]

"music" [note the "c"]: arcane definition

(militant) techno are/is not the only focus (eye-stract); the sounds range from drum n'bass to dub to minimal to abstract noise to ambient to !>@. 'e'vents are designed with a focus and a vision in mind. <ST> try to envelop the par/tic/ipant in a full habitat of audio, visual, tactile and olfactory stimulation.

If participant-driven experience does not make you think, sweat, cry, laugh or be left in a general disarray of confusion-malfunctions, mission (ob/sub)jectives have not been sufficiently assigned. we have not done our job.

<ST> is not a "rave" (denies)
we do not want to be bound by those restrictions.



.. / TRACK 2. //
[<ST> ON IN PARTIBUS]

Now we are inside. The event is called "In Partibus," "in the land of the heathens." From the warehouse walls drape long, red banners — more directly is the microfascism of rave culture re-presented in its brutality this evening. The walls are wrapped completely in black plastic dotted only by signs that say: "Warning: Conundrum." Lighting is present only as a single red spotlight and strobe. There is something evil in the corner, a figure, barely lit, what is this — a demonic-looking papier-mâché model and later, there are members of <ST> in the darkness moving as foreign beings, wearing biological decontamination suits, ancient masks of animals, their half-naked bodies becoming-animals at the heart of the most dangerous of gatherings, the dance ritual, but all that is lit now is the flashing strobe, and there is little choice but to submit to relentless and repetitive "mindfuck music" — for these are the minimalistic, futuristic, aggressive yet soulful beats of screaming pounding nothingness of Detroit Hard Techno. Absent is the predictable breakdown of beats into an Ecstasy-laden lull of "cheesy" synthesizer refrains, no, this sound succumbs to forceful somnolence, sound that cracks the black speakers with a whip, until one by one, the participants are forced to exhaustion, heads cradled by bassbins pounding now still bodies, and finally, with the cracking of a dawn, a stripped sound takes over the system: singular and solitary is minimal techno, maniacal in its silent space between beats. From submission to nothingness, rave is pushed by <ST> into a parody of itself where no-body is able to move, never mind laugh.

A raver's relation to masochism: not something that is often talked of in rave culture. In masochism we approach rave's dangerous dance with a sonic fascism, an aural passion for abolition, an obliteration by sound, a sacrifice to the speaker. <ST> played this relation between the DJ and the dancer as an abuse of power. The DJ's position as spinning sonic narratives amounts to an aural history, physically interpreted by the body. At points, attempts were made to push this sonic response to the limit, to see how far a dancing body becomes its relentless beats, embraces a militancy, becomes-intense in what can be seen as a dangerous escape. Seen from experience: the warehouse littered at 7am with the passed-out bodies of



fallen dancers. The warehouse a battlefield. The potential for a following that operates through rules of engagement, of worship, of homage to a sonic deity, all the elements of a powerful microfascism that betray Don Juan's final warning: death.⁶ Whereas Castaneda's Don Juan sees the final fear as inertia, Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation views death as a passion for abolition. All the paradoxes of a tiredness only for life.⁷ And here, with the raver, the drugs pushing — "but so many things can be drugs," say Deleuze and Guattari⁸ — life through a dance with passion, in the uncanny pursuit of a "living" beyond the confines of everyday life itself, here life is reconstituted at an intense level, where "living" becomes, in its own encounters with sonic virtuality, more real than real, and yet, in its actuality, a draining event, an inertia, a tiredness. And where capitalism deterritorializes — in its actuality as the rave economy, projected virtually as utopic gathering — it operates on a similar line, in fact, it assembles the line itself; here, where intensity is raised in life, so is its spectre of sonic exchange value.

— a contentious assertion for those who consider rave culture to be merely a celebration, a happy and usually innocent, although with all the usual pitfalls of youth, Ecstasy-induced carnival. Perhaps it is carnival — but played out on a different sound-system. *Come vale*: throwing of the flesh. Bakhtin's reading, although much invoked in the context of rave culture, needs to be (re)considered along the lines for its potential insurgency, where those in carnival escape, become-other, escape that return of the carnival to the established order, for it is a question of that laughter that escapes while the carnival dances on, and the failing inertia before this laughter is reached that silences the speakers.



<ST>

[TRAINWRECK TRACK:
SPEAKING, SCRATCHING]

And yet we are told that rave culture has no voice; it is pure dance, pure movement. Kim Cascone implies that rave and dance cultures are part of the "spectacle." Thus, rave fails to possess or transmit "real" "aura" or "authenticity" — rave is just another component of pop music. As if "rave" ever desired "aura" or "authenticity!" — whether it is the "produced demand" of the spectacle or the authentic acousmatic experience tied to so-called "real" performance that Cascone desires. (And as if rave never, on the sly, dropped spectacle's punch bowl with a little something special while spectacle had its back turned, mixing as it was with its high-art chums). Or, we hear that techno is music without vocals, and therefore lacks speech, and ultimately, meaning. For apparently not only can techno not clear its throat, *it has nothing to say, anyway*: those drug-addled riddles of the Ecstasy-experience, mumbling platitudes to amphetamines and embracing a love that exists only during the high are nothing but the lost diatribes of a commodity culture or the archetypes of a carnival.... Even in Michel Gaillot's post-structuralist account in *Techno: An Artistic and Political Laboratory of the Present* is the movement's apparent non-vocal hedonism asserted as if it were a joyous celebration of the death of the speaking-subject — in what amounts to a silencing of an alternative speaking-machine, if not the question itself and of the subject: a gag order, a silence and a negation of the affirmative that leaves no breath for the transform-scratched "yes yes."

Gaillot says that "If only because it has no words or text (the voice as pure sonority), being purely instrumental or electronic, techno does not constitute a music that delivers or propounds a message."¹⁰ Gaillot quickly footnotes his comment on voice as pure sonority, as obviously there are vocals in many forms of electronic music. However, Gaillot says, "when they can be heard, they are mostly present as just another instrument, valued only for their musicality, to the point where sometimes *one cannot even understand what they mean*" (emphasis added). What Gaillot is trying to draw is a distinction between the obvious centrality of voice in, for example, most rock and folk music, and the lack of such distinction to the voice in various forms of electronic music. Yet the lack of voice means much more for Gaillot than an aesthetic displacement. It assumes the iterability of *voice*, of *speech* in the first place, re-writing

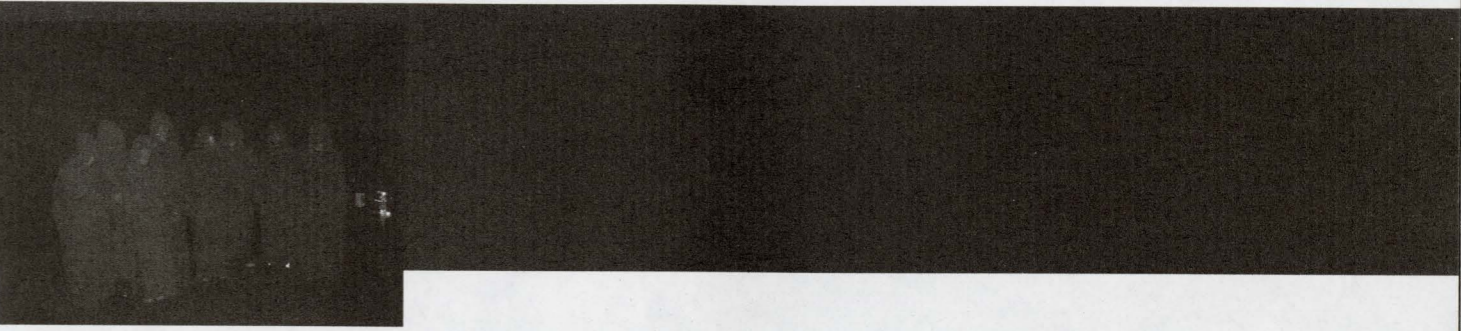


the collapse of medium into message through a requirement that iterability, in its strict delimitation as clear comprehension if not definability, must speak for both meaning *and* message if we are to witness their double collapse into the non-speech of techno that apparently brings us the positive escape from subjectivity. Apparently this is different from other forms of music, for according to Gaillot, the voice is not "a support for reflexivity and discursivity" but rather for its own "suspension or suppression; it is not a vehicle or medium for messages." *In electronic music, the voice speaks nothing, it means nothing, and its supposed absence, and absence of meaning, also means nothing. Yet, this is a negatively defined affirmative.* And it lacks a positive account of the raver — not the *subject*, but the *raver*. The negative subject of sound amounts to an imperative: do not listen for or to the voice or its peculiar absence, its uncanny rhythms of meaning. Do not dance meaningfully.

What becomes of the voice then in the great house chorus, "I wanna feel the music, I need the release," or "Everybody dance to the music?" Or, how about:

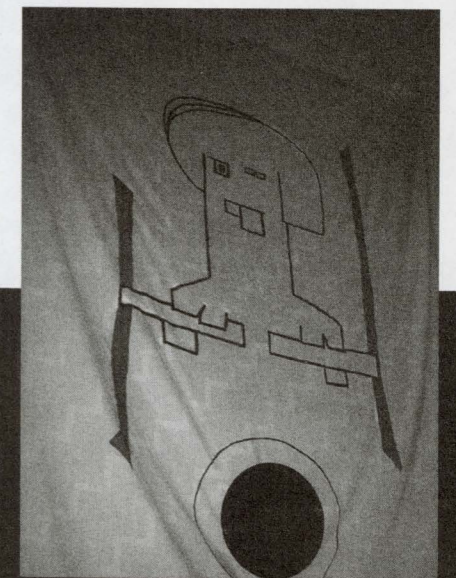
In the beginning there was Jack and Jack had a Groove. Jack bawled and declared "Let there be house." And House Music was born. I am, you see, I am the Creator and this is my House... Once you enter my House it then becomes our House and our House music."

Shall we write that off as hallucinating the home of the hospitable Heidegger?



ANOTHER EVENT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

Tonight you are in a parking garage in the downtown eastside of Vancouver, a massive complex formerly tied to the now-abandoned Woodward's building. Power has been thieved from plugs, sound system and turntables hauled with a caravan of minivans. A nomadic trek from a house party to an occupation of a parking garage. Slogans are pasted to poles that read: "art to the people :: people as art," "listen and read, read and listen," "P.M. = Police Mandate," "resistance is futile and everything," "a pocket of resistance is better than a shirt of false dreams," "stop and listen to the machine emanating from the speakers." A long spool of paper is unravelled to draw upon and banners are hung from the pipes. A few hundred gather here, frightening away the security, to dance in the heart of a city closed to cultural celebration, mapping a music machine. What narrative do we scratch from the sampled event?



Gaillot posits a speculation that underlines his argument: "It is almost as if techno were taking as far as it will go what Deleuze and Guattari say of music, namely that it is 'first of all a deterritorialization of that voice, which becomes less and less language.'" But this does not amount to silence. John Cage knew well that there is no actual silence — there is always sound. One cannot simply propose the most extreme deterritorialization of voice, for it is here that deterritorialization reinscribes its return as the simple yet dangerous negation. To hear the voice of techno as speaking only as a component in the music machine, one organ among many on the deterritorialized body of sound, requires an attentive ear to the transformations of language. We do not respond to the techno-voice as a *dialogue*; we begin to hear differently, to hear the *other sounds* and the *sounds of the other*.

Gaillot denies the very possibility that he desires when he says that techno and its culture have nothing to say in the first place. "Unlike rock music, for example," he says, "the techno movement was not based on any political presuppositions." As it has no voice and



nothing to say, it likewise carries no ideology, says Gaillot, and indeed, it lacks even the prospect of new meanings "capable of renewing the configurations of contemporary community." Dare I say that, for Gaillot, techno has become transcendental, above and beyond all relations to the *polis*?

A quick sampling of sound bytes will remix what I see as a hasty exclusion of the *potentiality of a voicing* as a machinic component that plugs into the transmuted turntable's political entanglements. *The potentiality of a voicing* should not be confused with a statement of clear enunciation from a speaking-subject or community of subjects. To do so is to negate the voice completely and to simply celebrate its position in the machine rather than partaking of where that machine plugs into others. That a fantasy of transcendentalism, a fantasy of complete separation from the logocentrism of voice — if not a clean break from Western metaphysical traditions

of art and culture, as we can see in Gaillot — is as much a part of this voicing as its supposed presence outside of techno can be witnessed in rave "culture's" easy adoption of transcendental wet dreams such as PLUR: Peace Love Unity Respect.

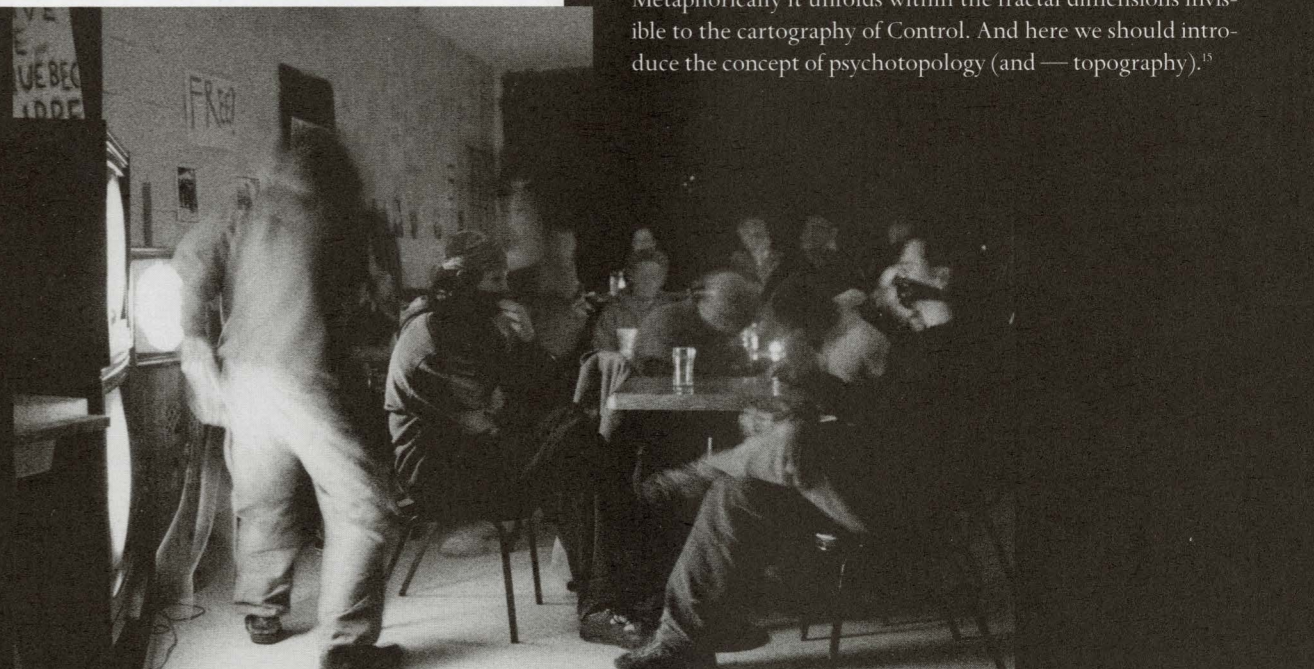
We must therefore keep in mind two events that are commonly bracketed in contemporary academic analyses of rave culture.

The Afro-American and Afro-German resistance mythology of Detroit Techno posits itself in a contradictory position to "black history" through its invisibility and collapse of racial music boundaries, a mission directive that broadcasts the collapse of high-art law that considers rhythm a lower form or a supplement at the same time that Afro-Traditions sampled yet shrugged off. A turn to the posthuman through the futurist narratives of both the Assault DJ and the offworld producer, "and in sync with this

posthuman perspective comes Black Atlantic Futurism," says Kodwo Eshun in *More Brilliant Than The Sun*.¹³ By focusing upon Detroit Techno in an attempt to understand the Black Atlantic roots of rave culture at the same time that the dangers of black militancy were foregrounded, <ST> combatted elements that totalized "rave" culture as "just pop music," or as *lacking* "voice."

2. The positing of the Temporary Autonomous Zone, or TAZ, by Sufi anarchist Hakim Bey as a pragmatic and psychotopological crack that possibly bleeds liminal space, both off the map of cop culture and the mediasphere on the one hand, and high-art performance on the other. The TAZ was investigated by rave collectives including Spiral Tribe in the UK, Transcendence in Toronto, and <ST> in Vancouver.¹⁴ These movements did not die, but rather gave rise to mobile sonic action, including Reclaim The Streets. The TAZ also forms part of the milieu that drove anti-performance artists The KLF. "So," says Bey,

revolution is closed, but insurgency is open. [...] And — the map is closed, but the autonomous zone is open. Metaphorically it unfolds within the fractal dimensions invisible to the cartography of Control. And here we should introduce the concept of psychotopology (and — topography).¹⁵



"Psychotopology," explains Bey in his thieving of the concept from the Situationist International, "is the art of *dowsing* for potential TAZs." Although psychotopology cannot "control" territory — "because it is *virtually identical* with its territory" (emphasis added) — it can "suggest" spaces, temporalities, "(geographic, social, cultural, imaginal) with potential to flower as autonomous zones." With <ST>, we can outline a *drift* through differing occupational spaces, both inside and outside, as an actualised gesture of virtual dowsing that engages not only autonomous space, but the moments where the TAZ perhaps always *fails to become, even virtually, identical to itself*. It is this *affirmative failure* that leaves open the possibility of excess or what remains; the TAZ, contrary to Bey, is not identical to "itself." The slip-scratch of failed identity — the failed subject, *the raver*, not the negative subject — propels <ST> just one step further, and ahead of both law and the imploding tangents of rave culture. We find not "the" voice of rave culture, or even "a" voice — or to switch records, we find neither the signifier nor signified of rave culture.¹⁶



as if there were a secret semiotics of <ST> or "rave culture." Rather, we encounter a failure of the TAZ to become itself *as such*, leaving open its lines of escape. At such a limit, there is an engagement with what Kodwo Eshun calls "Sonic Fiction."¹⁷ We are not here to put music in its place; we are not here to rescue music with theory; we are here to dowsing its virtual remains as the site of a ruinous collapse, and to counter the prevailing closed discourses that seek to imprison the virtual ruins in an archive that equates history with the negation of affirmative failure.

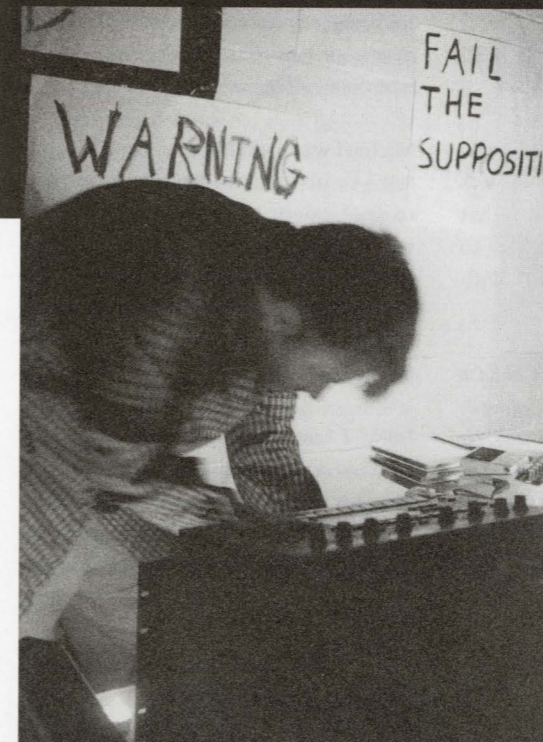
<ST> strove to encounter the TAZ and Detroit Techno resistance in several key events, including:

a)Musikal Resistance, MayDay 2000, which created an indeterminate space between activism and performance art, rave culture and music event, as <ST> members dressed in full anarchist street

warfare gear occupied a Marxist coffee shop, sandbagging its doors, blacking out its windows, and covering the walls in posters and slogans and camouflage netting. What actually happened is as diverse as the accounts of Cage's infamous Black Mountain Event:¹⁸ a 5-hour transactive performance, including skits that bordered the humorous and the schizophrenic, from DIY Dogma and Revolutionaries Anonymous to manifesto readings and ritual chanting of slogans, surveillance upon passing traffic and audience members, abstract sonic surrealist readings assembled from secret messages handed out to the audience, sporadic and experimental DJ sets, live breakcore and noise, feedback video performance art ... agitations that culminated in a complete destruction of the situation. Imagine the immersion of the finale as <ST> members, dressed in white chemical warfare suits, ripped down posters from the walls, handed out everything from the event to the audience, noise blaring from the speakers, bright halogen bulbs suddenly illuminated upon the stunned crowd. The entire assemblage was distributed in a fury until the <ST> members fled, leaving the audience temporally and spatially dislocated.

b)The final event of <ST>, The Phoenix Ritual in 2001, which dissolved the collective through a ritual incantation of a deconstructed magick based upon the automatic magickal writings of Austin O. Spare. Dressed in druidic robes, and carving circles of paradox through the fallowed earth at the Phoenix Festival — a Pacific Northwest version of Burning Man — <ST> *deseminated* its solitary trajectory through a deconstruction of the passion for destruction, in the process, destroying its selves, its collectivity, its identity, its integrity and its cohesion through the ritual broadcast of chaos.¹⁹

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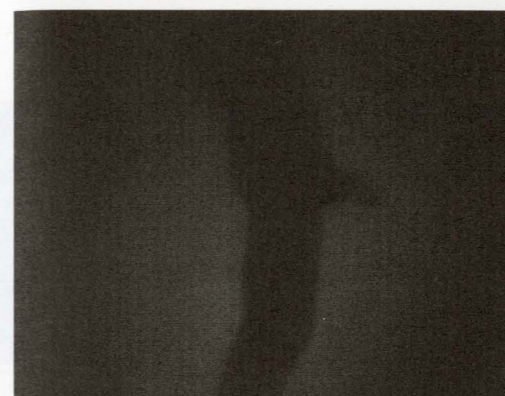
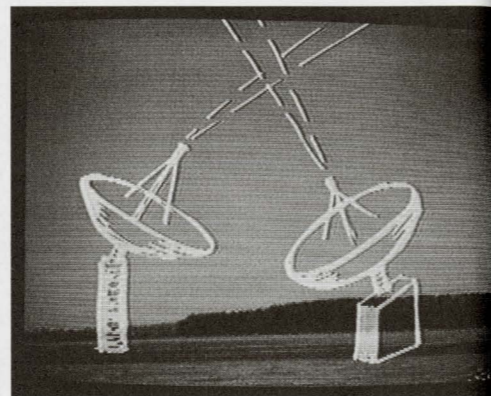
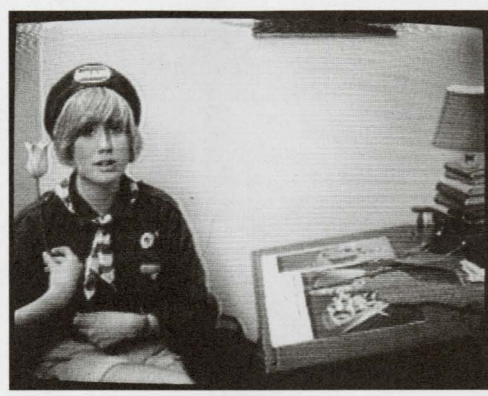


tobias c. van Veen is a writer, sound/net remixer and DJ. He is currently studying communications at McGill University, Montreal. <http://www.quadrantcrossing.org>.

Fine Print

"It's Not A Rave, Officer" excerpted from "It's Not A Rave, Officer, It's Performance Art: Art as Defense from the Law and as Offense to Society in the Break-In Era of Rave Culture," presented at UAAC 2002, Calgary.

1. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1987) p. 224.
2. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001)
3. Hakim Bey, T.A.Z.: *The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991) p. 90.
4. The virtual are in reciprocal presupposition to the thing's "actuality, [which] is its duration as a process." (37) See Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. (Cambridge: Swerve/MIT P, 1999)
5. When inserted in HTML code — the significance of the Internet in the rise, organisation, dissemination, and representation, if not the *virtual actuality* of groups such as <ST> (and "virtual" here plays between the sense in which the Internet is both archive and promise, in its failed linkage as much as its repository) cannot be covered here — "<ST>" does not appear on the webpage, for the "<" ">" brackets denote code. The web browser, finding no appropriate code in the brackets, simply dismisses the characters. Hence, often in web documents that inscribe <ST>, the *name itself is absent*. *Technology effaces its presence automatically* unless an effort is made to re-code "<ST>" with the proper HTML denotations for triangular brackets. This remains to be spoken of in greater detail in conjunction with the strategies, deceptions, understandings and uses, expressions and covert-operations, of tactical media.
6. Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. (New York: Washington Square Press, 1998)
7. *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 229
8. *ibid.*, 227
9. "Laptop Music-Counterfeiting Aura in the Age of Infinite Reproduction." *Parachute* 107 (2002): 53-59. p. 58. "Since many of the current musicians have come to electronic music through their involvement in the spectacle-oriented sub-cultures of DJ and dance music, the codes are transferred [those of "pop spectacle-TV] to serve as a safe and familiar framework in which to operate" (58). Besides bracketing the involvement of post-African musical traditions of composition, performance, participation, and audience-as-if they had nothing to do with DJ or dance culture — Cascone also equates *all reception of music that involves participation, such as dancing, as "spectacle"* and therefore *only a symptom of product-demand* produced by an economy of pop music. Therefore it is *not authentic and nor does it have aura*. Clear distinctions between "pop music" and "subcultural music," "aura/authenticity" and "counterfeit aura" construct Cascone's reading of contemporary "post-digital" music that ultimately reduces itself to a sender-receiver telematics. That such a one-to-one telematics of "authentic" identification and representation, of aura and counterfeit, is irreconcilable to a supposed investment in Deleuze and Guattarian considerations of networked-sound and an essentially rhizomatic "aesthetics of failure" is dealt with elsewhere (see "Laptops & Loops: The Advent of New Forms of Experimentation and the Question of Technology in Experimental Music and Performance," Paper delivered at UAAC 2002 Annual Conference).
10. Michel Gaillot. *Multiple Meaning: Techno, An Artistic and Political Laboratory of the Present*. Trans. Warren Niesluchowski. (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, n.d.) p.17.
11. From the track *Fingers Inc. featuring Chuck Roberts*. Quoted in Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*. (London: Quartet, 1999) p.98.
12. *Multiple Meaning*, p.17. All quotes from Gaillot *ibid.*
13. *More Brilliant Than the Sun*, p.-005
14. As also noted in Europe by Geert Lovink in *Dark Fiber*, especially "An Early History of 1990s Cyberculture (1999)" and "An Insider's Guide to Tactical Media (2001)." *Dark Fiber*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002)
15. TAZ, p.103
16. "As long as the theoretical *power* implications of media music remain unthought, it appears that one will continue to endow music with *meaning* — as in the interminable theorizations equating pop with rebellion — to see it as a signifier of a force that is actualized in it, whether as an expression of a subject's truth, or as the collective subversive force of social groups" (my italics, 25). In Achim Szepanski, "Digital Music and Media Theory," *Parachute* 107 (2002): 24-27.
17. *More Brilliant Than The Sun*, p.-003
18. See Douglas Kahn's account in *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) p.262. It is both the randomness of the happening and its subsequent conflicting and varied reportage that characterises both the Black Mountain and <ST> events.
19. "Deseminated." Sonic meme = seme. "Deseminate" echoes sonic dissemination. This whole chamber of seme-antics is explored in writings currently being readied for publication.



Stills from various video productions of Michael Balser. Top row, from left to right: *Survival of the Delirious* [w/ A. Fabo] (1988), *Astraturf* (1986), *Survival of the Delirious*, *Astraturf*, *An Evening with Richard Locke* (1992). Bottom row, left and right, *Positive Men* (1995).

Michael Balser (1952 - 2002)

by Sharon Switzer



The other day I was feeling nostalgic and so began looking through letters that my mother had written over the years. Then I realized that it was really Michael I was missing. I can't stop hearing his hilariously bitchy quips, and his amazingly insightful pronouncements about nearly everything (everything that mattered, anyway). We knew each other for over ten years, but I have no letters from him, hardly even any email. And yet he was one of my best friends. So I try to take stock of what he has left me.

Michael Balser was an artist, writer and curator working in digital media. He was largely known for his work in video that ranges from experimental narrative to documentary and collaborations with artists and community groups.

Michael and I started working in digital media at the same time (1995), and we were constantly trading tips as we both learned these new tools. He loved to push the software as far as it could go, to see what the filters and plugins could do for him. He wanted to make them perform on a personal level, and still let them do their "pre-packaged" thing. He reveled in the constructedness of it all.

And although my interest and response to those same tools radically opposed his, Michael was always positive about my work, and so generous with his time and his support.

It is difficult to believe that many of Michael's last video projects were made without funding. Yet, despite this, he always managed to produce professional-quality work, and to pay those who assisted him.

Michael took care of me when horrible things happened, or when I didn't know how to cope. His contagious humour, and the ubiquitous shot of scotch, made me realize that I could get through it, whatever it was. Michael always felt far more suspicion toward the world than I, and yet never stopped investing in it. Never stopped believing that the contributions he could make were worthwhile. As cliché as it may sound, Michael helped me to believe in myself (or, at least, in my work).

Michael was proud of his own contributions to his community and his ability to spot talent among younger artists while continuing to value often overlooked senior artists. He showed his appreciation of these artists in his many carefully curated programs that he produced for V Tape.

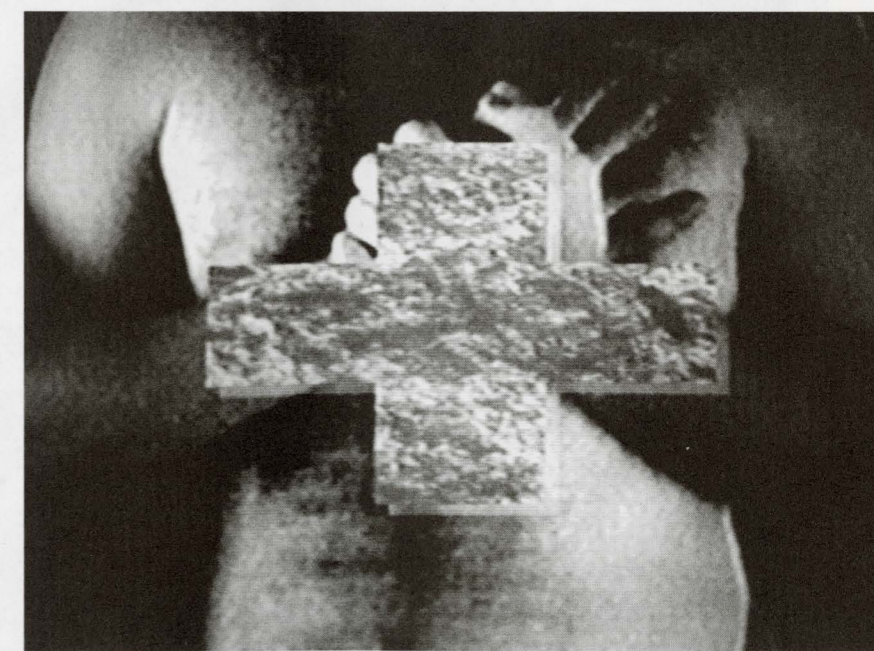
Lately, I have been wishing that I were not an adult, and that someone could just make it all better (whatever my worry happens to be at the time). And then I think about Michael, determined to finish his last tape, knowing he was very sick and that his time was limited. I understand now how

important his writing had become to him. Michael needed to explain about how stupid the world seemed to him, so he crafted his own brand of very smart and biting satire in order to convince us all. And, although he was still producing videos, his recent tapes seem to have been propelled by his writing, which he worked at constantly. I think this is how Michael dealt with being an adult, with having to keep going, when all you want to do is hide under your blanket and play.

In 2001 he completed *Rocket Science* for LoFi Sci-Fi at the Images Festival in Toronto and a collaborative DVD projection, *The Motion of Light in Water*, made with Andy Fabo for Sir Wilfred Grenfell Gallery in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland. In 2000, Michael Balser co-produced *Flashback* with Ed Sinclair and *Convergence* with Andy Fabo. He also published numerous articles and satirical works about contemporary media in *FUSE*, *Point of View*, *Lola* and *Metro*.

Now, Michael wasn't a misanthrope by any means. He gathered around him the most interesting and varied group of friends I have ever seen. I know they all loved him, as he was dedicated to each and every one of them. He believed in them, he even cooked for them, but just as importantly, he loved to laugh at the absurdity of the world with them. And I, for one, feel truly honoured to have been part of his life.

Michael Balser died at home in Toronto on Friday evening, October 4, 2002, surrounded by friends. The cause was HIV-related renal failure.



Sharon Switzer is a digital and video installation artist whose work explores the intersection of technology and memory. She presently teaches contemporary media at various institutions of higher learning. Switzer is based in Toronto, and exhibits her work both near and far.

How to look out the window: Gillian Wearing and Paul Wong at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Gillian Wearing: A Trilogy, July 13 - October 27, Vancouver Art Gallery

Paul Wong: From the Collection, July 13 - October 27, Vancouver Art Gallery

review by Terence Dick

When observing nihilistic behaviour in our fellow man, it is best to...

- a) turn away
- b) stare unflinchingly
- c) intervene
- d) make art

There is a body in the gallery. The body stinks. It could be dead or it could be drunk but it stinks nonetheless and it doesn't belong. Yet someone has put it here and now we, the gallerygoers, must navigate it, try to find the best way to pass by it from one gallery to the next, from one floor to the next. It is so inconveniently placed in our way, as if someone wanted us to see it, taunting us with this inappropriate obstacle. One could not just ignore it because it is so undeniably there. Lying there on the floor, in the way, all one can do is politely acknowledge its presence, nod in its direction, tut-tut, or lean over and examine the body, feign concern, spend some time with it to at least give the impression of a social conscience. But there are others, employees perhaps, who will deal with this. Police will come, if the body is dead, and if it is not, then security guards will come and wake the person and put him back on the street or hand him over to social workers who will enroll him in a rehabilitation program or bring him to a halfway house. Presumably, there are ways of dealing with this problem.

And yet maybe it's all a clever ruse on the part of the gallery, the curators, the artists. Maybe it's a charade of a real situation (an inert man), taken out of context, inserted into the gallery and thus made unfamiliar, so that our normal recourse (ignore, avoid, forget) is not an option.



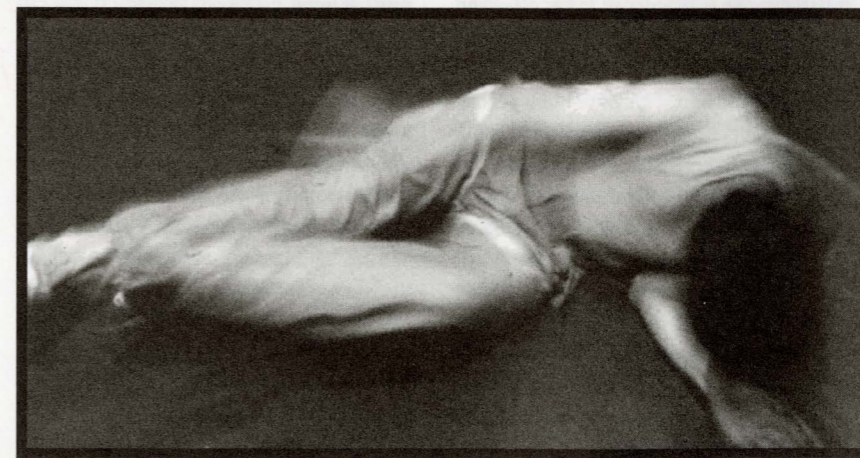
Murder Research (detail), Paul Wong and Kenneth Fletcher, 1977, c-type photos and text panels, potomechanical transfers, and video. Collection and Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

Because this is a place of contemplation where one is supposed to pay attention, to identify and commune with what comes before them. And isn't it odd that one would come upon a swaggering drunk, or a man pissing his own pants, or some inexplicable violence, or a dead body? And what is one to make of that?

So one comes upon a body in the gallery. Being polite, one does not make a scene, does not alert the security guard, does not even acknowledge the body to the others in the gallery. But one takes a moment to look at this person....

.... *The artist Paul Wong lays dead in the street. He saw himself from his bedroom window and proceeded to photograph his body as the police arrived, conducted their investigation and left, taking his body with them. Wong and his collaborator Kenneth Fletcher, who was not yet dead at the time, then assembled these photographs along with descriptions of the murder scene (for it was a murder), crime statistics, facts about the victim (who was not in fact, Paul Wong, but a Native man), witness testimony, newspaper clippings and literary quotes. Under the title *Murder Research (1977)*, this material was presented as a book and displayed in art galleries as a series of wall panels.*

.... *The artist Gillian Wearing collapsed, dead drunk, in her studio. Her collapse was filmed against a clean white backdrop and projected across three larger than life screens. She invited a group of South London street drinkers to her studio and proceeded to film them with an unwavering, dispassionate eye in various states of incapacitated inebriation as they lashed out at one another, as they tried to stand or walk or put on a shirt, as they collapsed and pissed themselves. She then edited the footage into a beautiful three-channel video reminiscent of Gap ads or Warhol screen tests or performance-art documents and called it *Drunk (1999)*. She did not appear in the video. The Vancouver Art Gallery bought it and waited two years for the right time to exhibit it.*

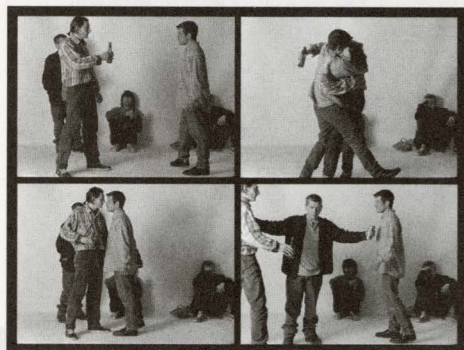
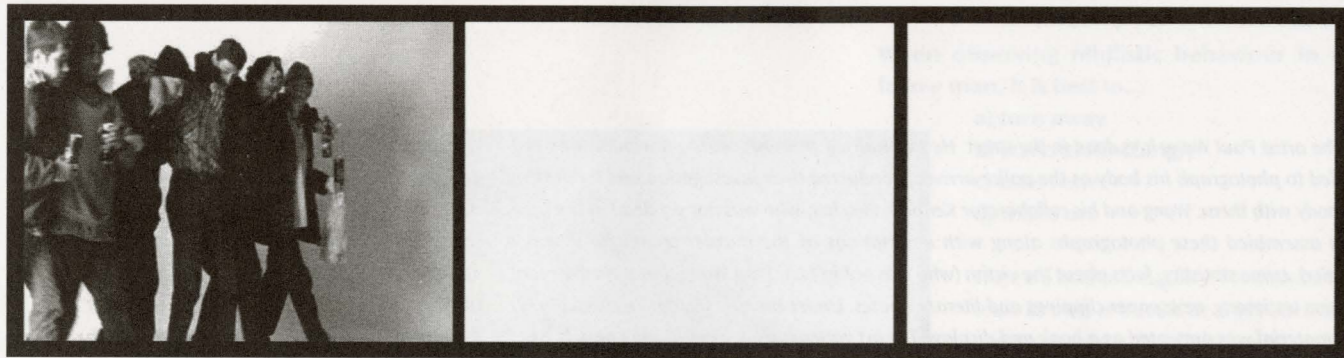


In ten sity (detail), Paul Wong, 1978, 5 channel video installation, silver prints, text, architectural construction. Collection and Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

Wong and Wearing's found bodies appear in art galleries but are located in the real world, that is, the street. They are viewed through a parallel set of identifications that define social realist art and generate its affective power. The first identification begins with the artist who instead of turning away from the world, be it beautiful, banal or barbaric, chooses to look and empathize with what and who is out there. Representing this experience in an artwork leads to the second, overlapping identification, which happens in the gallery between viewer and subject.

Wong's empathic appropriation of the murdered man beside his house leads to an investigation that attempts to account for the brute fact of this body in the snow, seen in photograph after photograph, by providing particular details of the events leading up to his death, criminal statistics and socio-cultural commentary on the act of murder. Standing beside the artist, looking out his bedroom window, the viewer shares in the work Wong has done to make sense of this senseless crime.

With Wearing's work a third identification is foregrounded. In viewing *Drunk*, one is hard-pressed not to mistake difficulties with the subject for difficulties with the piece. Apart from her decidedly impersonal backdrop and stationary cameras, Wearing's only appearance in the video, the only place she shows her hand, is in the editing. And that too is largely formal, balancing wavering drunks on opposite screens,



All images this page: *Drunk* (details), Gillian Wearing, 1999, 3 DVD projected installation (B+W). Collection and Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery.

framing bursts of action centre screen, crossing rhythmically back and forth across the triptych. As if the artist turned her cameras on and left the studio, one is abandoned to her collection of drunks without any guidelines for response. How is one supposed to react to these isolated incidents of pathos and nihilism? How does one judge the work that frames these incidents? In the feigned absence of the artist, one slides from the insecurity of the viewer, questioning one's motives and demanding some resolution, to questioning the intentions of the artist, uncertain as to where she stands in relation to these people in her studio. Wearing can't be exploiting her subjects because they are street drunks; she has merely recorded their already public displays of intoxication for posterity. Wearing can't simply be serving the voyeuristic tendencies of the privileged gallerygoers; she is in fact inveigling her gallery-bound audience to

face the exact social ills they do their best to avoid in the street. And yet there is a profound discomfort in not knowing the artist's intentions with her living, breathing subjects.

Whereas Wong stands by us and provides some comfort in context, Wearing abandons us and we are left behind her cameras, in her studio, with her guests. In doing this she cleverly passes her doubt and anxiety and sympathy and distaste on to the shoulders of the viewer; a doubt and anxiety and sympathy and distaste that is then carried into the world.

When documenting nihilistic behaviour in our fellow man, one should...

- a) provide context
- b) provide beverages

Terence Dick is a writer living in Toronto.

Baltic Interventions

by Bill Leeming

Baltic, a resurrected flour mill-cum-art museum, finally opened its doors to the public July 12, in Gateshead, on the banks of the River Tyne in the North of England. Ten years ago Gateshead Council decided that arts and culture provided a key to a regeneration strategy which included a new tilting bridge (£22 million, or CAD\$56 million), a new music centre designed by Sir Norman Foster (£70 million, or CAD\$173 million), and outdoor sculptures, most notably Anthony Gormley's fifty-four-metre wingspan *Angel of the North* (1997). To some observers, it follows Manchester's Lowry as the latest ray of sunshine in a torrent of architectural glory raining down on British art institutions after the long cultural winter brought about by Thatcherism. To others, Baltic is simply the latest make-over for New Labour's limp culture industry.



Baltic. Photo: the author.

Let us not forget that arts and culture have long been viewed in the UK as a kind of life raft upon which to set about saving the country's decaying industrial cities. After Margaret Thatcher swept to power in 1979, the radical right pushed through monetarist policies that resulted in a downsizing of the manufacturing sector in favour of service industries. Under the banner of "value for money," however, it was made perfectly clear that future growth of the arts would henceforth be met from the private sector. Arts administration simultaneously became a marketing exercise and a post-secondary degree subject. Arts administrators no longer saw the provision of art to the public as a moral duty. They abandoned the nineteenth century arts policies that linked "civilization" and "culture," as well as programmes to "educate" and "instruct," in order to nurture the "cultural health" of the masses. In order to curry favour with the state, they recast themselves as literal captains of the arts industry, focusing on the

market by way of spectator events and tourism. In 1982, the Conservatives lumped the "arts" with "heritage," "sport," "film" and "tourism" in the department of national heritage. In 1997, New Labour renamed this arrangement the department of culture, media and sport. This is what has guided the regeneration of the Mersey waterfront and the planned redevelopment of Liverpool as the "Bilbao of Britain." Similar cultural facelifts have occurred in other cities of the North — Sheffield, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester. Contemporary city plans now accommodate the renovation and building of galleries and theatres alongside new construction on sports stadiums, indoor shopping complexes and historic properties.

It might appear churlish not to ask whether these policies have improved public access to the arts. It is certainly the case that Tony Blair's



Baltic. Photo: the author.

government has reduced pressures on museums and galleries to charge admission fees, thus restoring the long-standing tradition of free museum entry in Britain, curtailed by the Conservatives in the 1980s. Since 2000, admission to many major museums has become free again, and attendance has skyrocketed with an average annual increase of ninety-six percent. But freer access to the arts is not all that matters. There are corresponding questions about whether the quality of the experience is enhanced. In the absence of dealers and local commercial markets, this doesn't appear to be about enhancing the culture of the North. So-called Brit Art originates in the south. The London scene has bred a kind of spectacular work that fits the international art market well enough, but which may not suit northern audiences. Northerners appear to be attracted by exhibitions that represent local life rather than the cosmopolitanism of the south. They seem to want art that reflects the authority of regionally dominant cultural themes. At least, this is the impression one gets from watching and listening to local visitors to Baltic.

Gateshead's Baltic is best approached from the Newcastle side of the River Tyne, crossing the new Millennium Bridge. If you cross the Tyne Bridge, and follow Oakwellgate to South Shore Road, you quickly encounter telltale signs of economic failure and what J. B. Priestly once dismissed as a town that appeared to have been invented by "an enemy of the human race." But little remains of the original Baltic Flour Mills, a grain warehouse disused since the 1950s and left to stand, dark and foreboding, on the south bank. The mills have been transformed by a £46 million (CAD \$173 million) makeover, and, in July, locals and tourists alike were greeted with a huge exterior mural featuring Japanese performance artist Tatsumi Orimoto — with bread tied to his head and arms — draped around the shoulders of an apparently bemused woman with a shopping bag (actually his mother who has Alzheimer's disease). A procession of "breadmen," along with a two-day bread-making performance by artist Anne Bjerger Hansen, culminating each afternoon with the distribution of bags of freshly baked bread, heralded the transformation of the flour mill into what its director, Sune Nordgren, has called an "art factory bringing artists from all over the world to the North East of England, to exhibit and work in-residence in Baltic." In the words of the architect, Dominic Williams, the building is still primarily a store, but its stores have changed from flour to art.

On a busy day, Baltic sounds like a factory as the sound of shoes striking metal echoes up and down the staircases. The inaugural exhibits included things one might expect; a pastiche of neoconservative versions of postmodernism. Julian Opie's giant drawings were reminiscent of Gormley's monumental, faceless figures. They were drawn on windows, walls and floors with the same vinyl tape used in school gymnasiums. Children ran around the studio following the lines on the floor, only to be stopped in amazement before gigantic stylized genitals. Visitors were quite delighted by Jaume Plensa's nine pairs of large gongs and mallets suspended from the studio ceiling (*Installation*, 1998-2002). Each pair was labeled with the polarities of eighteenth-century natural philosophy: air-earth, chaos-saliva, semen-blood, etc.,

supplemented with plastic benches imprinted with excerpts from Blake's *The Proverbs of Hell*. Audience participation was invited, but participants who struck the gongs too vigorously were accosted by gallery staff. Viewers showed less enthusiasm for Carsten Höller's cage of 186 cold-cathode tubes, *Neon Circle* (2001). Each tube rapidly turned on and off, giving the impression of a spinning wheel. But you had to get on your knees to obtain the full effect.

Newcastle-born artists Jane and Louise Wilson's 35mm film installation *Dreamtime* (2001), documenting the launch of the International Space Rocket at Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, was breathtaking. American artist Chris Burden received high praise with his scale model of Tyne Bridge in Meccano and Erector Set parts. Burden's *Tyne Bridge* (2002) is one-twentieth of the size of the original, and painted to match the real thing — which is visible through the glazed west facade of the gallery. Not only were viewers greatly enthused about the model, they pored over the pattern drawings and source manuals from Meccano (circa 1919). In contrast, disappointment was clearly visible on the faces of gallerygoers viewing Alec Finlay's two collaborative projects, *Football Haiku* (2001) and *Labanotation: the Archie Gemmill Goal* (2001). The latter piece featured Rudolf Laban's system of notation ("Labanotation"), which facilitates the recording, analysis, and re-enactment of episodes of motion. This was used to break down and sequence Archie Gemmill's physical movements during the winning goal in the 1978 Scotland vs Holland World Cup game. The motion scores were subsequently choreographed and workshopped with dancers and school children. The photographs of dancer Andy Howitt on display at Baltic, however, failed to convey any vitality or enthusiasm, appearing somehow austere and disconnected from the local fascination with "footie." Howitt's re-enactment of Gemmill's air-punch, for instance, looked more like the fascist salute of a sculpture by Josef Thorak or Arno Breker than the victory dance of a beloved sports star.

The relative success of each piece can be determined by consideration of a holistic vision of individual and cultural integration at the local

level. The overall effect was certainly in keeping with the state's prime directive for the arts to be driven in the direction of whatever a mass electorate demands, or rather is thought to demand. But it seems to me more important questions are raised about the thorny relationships underlying cultural inclusion, social identity and community.

Some useful lessons can be drawn from a comparison with Manchester's Lowry. In contrast to Baltic, the Lowry Centre in Salford Quays — consisting of galleries, theatres, shops, restaurants and bars — eschews what may be perceived as the pernicious elitism of high culture. Built at a cost of £96-million (CAD\$138 million), the complex was partially funded by Britain's national lottery and other agencies such as Salford University, North West Water and the European Regional Development Fund. The galleries feature a permanent collection of over 300 paintings and drawings by Laurence Stephen Lowry, who depicted life in the industrial districts of Manchester and Salford until his death in 1976. Largely an untutored artist, Lowry's romanticized view of the industrial North promulgated ideas of traditional British communities struggling on in the face of social change. These ideas, of course, emerged with the Artists International Association and the Euston Road School of the 1930s. Raymond Williams's notion of "knowable communities" enters here, the notion of constellations of local solidarity and strategically localized actions functioning as a counterforce to the destructive effects of war and modernization.

There is no question that Manchester and the surrounding districts were terribly affected by the decline of regional manufacturing industries and by massive rebuilding strategies in the decades following 1945. Indeed, by 1980 there remained a mere 600 companies out of the several thousand that had been based in the region during the war. Unemployment levels increased in increments and the people fared badly during the periods of recession since 1980. But there are changes aside from the economics that need to be considered here. I would argue that the idea of a singular community orientation became a reification. I am thinking specifically about the richness of

cultural diversity that came with postwar immigration. In Greater Manchester today, nearly eight percent of families include individuals born in a Commonwealth country. The mix is decidedly multicultural with a presence visibly seen in community living patterns. Most of Manchester's West Indian households, for example, live in the Moss Side area. Longsight, by comparison, has the largest concentration of Asian families. Each successive influx of immigration from outside of the region has created a distinctive cultural base. As such, new challenges have arisen to what has "traditionally" suppressed or devalued the communities of *others*. A new dynamic relationship of contradiction and combination now informs a field of possible strategies for confronting issues of cultural inclusion, social identity and community.

Placed side by side in the context of cultural diversity, the goals and ambitions of the Lowry and Baltic are separable on at least two levels: The first pertains to the proliferation of pluralist views of a contemporary, "globalizing" culture, the second to the separation of "contemporary" culture from "traditional" culture. As distinct from earlier times, contemporary cultural production may appear to have, first, incorporated a single, totalizing definition of culture to express its "worldliness," and, second, a disaggregating effect, having passed a threshold (*limen*) that detaches and separates it from the communality (*gemeinschaft*) of earlier cultural production. Indeed, the openness, contextual nature and eventful processes that inform the notion of a shared cultural experience have fostered, under the auspices of Blair and company, a sense of a progressively tighter figuration with increasingly rapid flows of money, public resources and cultural goods. Barriers that once seemed to separate cultures and communities now seem penetrable as, increasingly, cultural goods pass from one site to another. These cultural goods, at one time regarded as strange, distant or even exotic, now can be made to fit in local circumstances — and are even desirable. Cultural consumption in the UK appears to operate in an even and yet somehow differentiated playing field, not needing a live connection with a particular community but rather,



The Lowry at Salford Quays. Photo: the author.

a sense of communal life in the progress of which we are implicated. Thus, an American artist, divested of the connection with Arnoldian high culture, can replicate a local landmark like the Tyne Bridge in Meccano pieces and apparently close cultural distance between nations. Therein, however, lies a major stumbling block.

Clearly the discourse changes when the consumer of cultural productions is regarded in terms of community and ceases to be defined solely in terms of economic relations. The problem, I believe, runs deeper than simply biasing cultural production and distribution toward one group, or excluding others. It strikes at core matters of conceptualization. Even

when not recognized or acknowledged, questions of degrees of cultural inclusion, as well as of cultural significance, all depend upon some notion of totality and the interpretation of the relations of parts to wholes. But parsimonious local solidarity and strategically localized action, in the context of national heritage, can bring so-called worldliness back together with the cultural narcissism against which it was marshalled. There remains the risk of attaching primary importance to particular types of ordered social existence.

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Stan Douglas, *Suspiria* at Documenta11

8 June - 15 September 2002
by Warren Crichlow

Suspiria, Stan Douglas's film-based site-specific installation for Documenta11, offers a mutating flow of narrative fragments derived from stories collected by Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm. Driven by the central trope of enchantment in late capitalism gone awry, the work's macabre scenarios randomly unfolded over the one hundred days of Documenta11, extending and reworking the Grimms's nineteenth-century project. The pedagogical hopes at stake in their folklore and philology frame and inform Douglas's conceptualization of the paradoxes that fuel individual and collective conduct in contemporary life. As Douglas wryly notes, the stories were meant to "instruct a bourgeois subject who could — with a combination of guile and good fortune — defeat a giant, outwit a gnome, marry a princess or build a nation."

While these oblique elements of the *Fairy Tales* might provide the impetus, motor and entry point for the work, signature Douglas technique and preoccupations prevail. Stylistic markers such as the layering of multiple references to the televised image, narrative experimentation culled from literature and adroit commentary on modernism's utopian aspirations are all fully in play. Familiar Douglas-isms abound, spanning from the self-reflexive combination of obsolete and new media technologies as both subject and object of inquiry to medium — specific ruminations on the unrealized potential of modern innovations like Technicolor. Mining disparate archives of popular culture and the history of critical ideas, Douglas nods to Dario Argento's 1977 cult horror flick *Suspiria*, from which the installation derives its title, look and sound, as well as Karl Marx's *Capital*, whose spectrological idiom laces the work's script.

Although the Canadian's international art-world status drew anticipated enthusiasm leading up to Platform5 of Documenta11, the project's recognizable methods and concerns might account for the work's lukewarm critical reception. One critic found *Suspiria* erudite but felt it rehearsed an established style, while another acknowledged creative production values but was indifferent to the project's underlying idea. Coached in a general critique of the pervasive presence of the established art circuit's sobriety and familiarity at Documenta11, esteemed British critic Kobena Mercer felt *Suspiria* was "the artist doing Douglas by numbers." While international art world insiders (no matter how recent the crossover from outsider status) generally receive the gloves-off approach, in this case the charge of trademark reliance requires a response that only closer scrutiny of the installation can answer.



Untitled, Stan Douglas, 2002, c-print. Courtesy: the artist and David Zwirner Gallery.



Suspiria, Stan Douglas, 2002, video stills from installation. Courtesy: the artist and David Zwirner Gallery.

I must admit bewilderment upon viewing *Suspiria* in Kassel's Museum Fridericianum. Curatorial practice at Documenta11 offered little to prepare the eye for this new work — one simply proceeded into the darkened exhibition space with anticipation. In typical Douglas fashion, the work is site specific, the images are multi-generated and derive from several sources, here live-feed and CD-ROM, and it entails variation and permutation. A live-feed black and white projection appropriated from the corridors of the Herkules Oktagon monument, located in Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe, an eighteenth century ruin just outside Kassel, sets the stage. This initial site, now a quaint garden-tourist area sprinkled with eighteenth-century architectural follies, recalls a past of feudal fiefdoms, a reminder that the enlightenment quest for a German nation-state was indeed recent. Appropriately, the Grimms's chronicled the villagers' tales within these specific environs. Decidedly contemporary studio-recorded "scenelets," based on the Grimms's *Tales*, are superimposed over the surveillance-like broadcast of the ruin.

Their combination makes the pre-recorded "scenelets" of the tales appear to bleed through the corridor walls where "characters" take on saturated Technicolor as they emerge from the black-and-white live-feed background into the live foreground setting. (This effect immediately references Dario Argento's *Suspiria*, but it also points to 1960s innovations in colour television and beyond to cinema's pre-history, the eighteenth-century phantasmagoria.) Dressed in relaxed attire, perhaps approximating a Vancouver style, actors perform Grimm-inspired snippets of narrativized confrontations in the style of a television drama. Each scenario concludes with an unanswered riddle, an obstacle to overcome or tales of duplicity or other parables of fate and the uncanny, as the over-saturated figures recede back into the corridor walls, with the real-time pans of Herkules's empty gray corridor space remaining.

Random permutations of these phantasmagoric scenarios appear and disappear continuously, interspersed with a sound landscape of eerie synthesized sound and electronic progressive

rock riffs on nursery rhymes. Voiceovers convey much of each scene's action, and in segues between segments, a storyteller pronounces allusions extracted from volume one of *Capital*: "the value of a thing is expressed in a series of different things."

Initially, this intricate work of ironic and counter-factual imaging may seem reminiscent of previous Douglas film/video projects, where the doubling of projection effects prevail. The melancholic split-screen of *Der Sandman* (1995), the Mobius strip structure of *Win, Place, Show* (1998) and the double-side screen strategies of *Hors-champs* (1992) and *Le Detroit* (2000) easily come to mind. These and other works articulate an emphatic and ongoing contemplation of the "storm" Walter Benjamin described as "progress." For me, the extraordinariness of *Suspiria* neither resides solely in its presentation of the perilously complex threads of history, woven together and problematized, nor the computer pyrotechnics that deliver the visual flow in such daunting execution. In this work of ugly beauty, a well-hewn critical practice is not merely repeated but significantly extended. Indeed, *Suspiria* offers a humorous and sobering encounter with the phantasmagorical nature of our democratic present: from cinema's pre-history, evinced in the doubly "otherworldly" and scientific origins of the phantasmagoria apparatus itself, to the way we continue to sell our labour power "like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but — "a hiding" (Marx).

Archaeological in subject, *Suspiria* reminds that fairy tales, unlike myths, are distilled out of the syntactic materials of everyday life; they endure in the public imaginary like benign daydreams or fantasies of happy endings — such as victory over exploitation and oppression. Transformed as they are retold across generations and globalized world contexts, these stories symbolically demonstrate the possibility of overcoming frustrations engendered by the social structures of governmentality we inhabit. We return to haunted experience again and again in order to occupy "once upon a time," and we end up imagining the ever illusory "happily ever after" that we so desperately seek.

Warren Crichlow teaches in the faculty of education at York University. His essay on Stan Douglas's *Le Detroit* project is forthcoming in *Cultural Studies*—Critical Methodologies.

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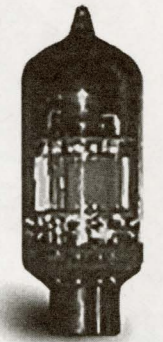
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Short Fuse

by Tamara Stone

As part of the fourth annual 7a 11d performance art festival in Toronto, Halifax-based artist Bruce Barber performed *Diddly Squat* (three performances about money). I attended the third of these performances. The event began with the artist in an orange jumpsuit emblazoned with the phrase "Artist doing 30 hours of community service." Bearing a small galvanized bucket, Barber moved through the audience encouraging people to smell the container's contents. Apparently the contents of the bucket were the product of his first performance, thirty hours of community service spent scraping gum off the sidewalks on Queen Street West. Presumably Barber's act is a reference to the sentencing of convicts to perform community service. I am unclear as to where the critical statement lies in this performance. Simply reproducing the pointlessness and banality of forced community service just seems to keep Barber divorced from any community he may want to represent. Further, what does collecting gum have to do with the social statements Barber may be trying to make in the rest of the performance?

Barber's second performance involved the artist declaring a vacant building in Toronto as a site for squatters by marking it with the symbol of the "international sign of the squat." I wonder how many of the homeless people of Toronto have done enough international socializing to recognize that sign. Barber's logic here struck me as academic and inconsistent. He appears to be concerned with the "issue" of homelessness but utterly unconcerned with the humanity of the homeless individuals he is essentially exploiting in the name of his work. Did he consider the ramifications of his actions? How

did he make his selection of vacant building? Did he break into the property himself to make sure that it was structurally sound and safe enough to withstand the influx of people he was inviting in? It is all very well for him to dedicate a squat site here in Toronto, there is no question that visibility and advocacy are important elements in the fight for positive change on the housing issue. If his concern is to house individuals, however, does it make sense to put up a sign that is essentially a target on their door in a city like Toronto where the law has recently shown hostility toward squatters? Where will he be when the occupants of his declared squat are being escorted away by the police? I doubt if Bruce Barber will be among the people here to defend them.

Finally Barber asked how many in the audience were property owners and challenged any one of us to take home a copy of the international squat sign and put it up on our building, thereby agreeing to feed and house homeless people for a period of one month. He offered to do the same at his home if he found a volunteer. Skip Arnold, a performance artist from LA, was quite enthusiastic about the proposition and after some hesitation, Barber allowed him to be the bearer of the squat.

If Barber had been considering the humanity of the people he is using to make his statement here he would have had to acknowledge that the homeless, like anyone else, are a mixed bag of individuals with a whole range of traits and personalities. I try to imagine myself indiscriminately inviting people into my home in Parkdale (one of the few neighborhoods yet to be gentrified in downtown Toronto), and the idea seems ridiculous. But I guess Barber will be at home in Halifax getting to know his guests — those would be the guests he said he is willing to feed and house for one month. What happens at the end of that month? Who knows? The performance will be over. Perhaps he'll send a copy of the video documentation. "No fixed address," right?

Tamara Stone is an artist living in Toronto. Her work focuses on interactive sculpture and installation.



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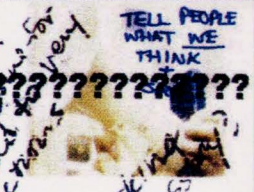


do you want art to have solutions
are you part of the solution

This question cannot have an answer and must remain an open, contested question. Solutions are predictable and answers is not a useful structure a closing down of possibilities. At the same time, the idea of no solutions can also be interpreted in a very cynical way, where art has absolutely no interest in a larger social context. We must continually work through messy questions, but be skeptical of answers, perhaps a key point is to be seen,

is
social context

publicly, engaged in 'doing', both conceptually and physically. rather than in presenting/exhibiting closed/finished ideas



this is an important statement and necessary statement
make BUT we have to keep this statement real help in touch with the REAL possibilities of failure. we don't want to aestheticize failure which makes it 'failure' and in 900 faton marks of pretending to be much more predictable

failure is more creative than success

WHO SEES THEM AS NOT WORTH TRYING?
it'll have to be an inside job

what does 'respecting an artist of an earlier generation mean? what is respect? hippies were always yuppies what is the difference between the two? (do it yourself culture and being an entrepreneur?) globalization is a term of a 1990s mindset. so is being anti-globalist being a counter-revolutionary to the 1960's. why am I talking about the 1990's? is it because the project in Toronto 'looked' like it could of happened then? What is an unrepeatable activity? is that not closing down the possibility of how material actions will be read by others as looking for a way out an admission that any other work is an art context is limited to what it 'can do'. art has alternative ways



because it

has no answers or solutions
speak to each other
solution no.1

DOES IT MATTER IF THIS BE ONLY REALLY A GESTURE, A GESTURE TO A PROCESS THAT WORKED WITH DIALOGUE DOES IT MATTER WHAT WE SAY TO EACH OTHER, OR A WIDER PDS BETTER TO MAKE SOME SOUND AS

ARE WE JUST AS TO SAY ANYTHING, RATHER THAN NOTHING
who we say to each other or a wider public is absolutely necessary. But ideas of 'communication' — of sending (objective) information to a receiver — have to be questioned. This doesn't take away from the necessity of speaking to each other.



under construction