# INTRODUCTION

**Space and Desire**
By Thea Brejzek

To link space with desire might just be stating the obvious. Etymologically, desire points us to the stars, to heavenly bodies, to unobtainable places (desire, from *desiderare*, middle latin *sidus – star, constellation, heavenly body*). The topos of Arcadia, as invoked in antique bucolic literature and Renaissance and Baroque pastoral literature and paintings, promises the fulfilment of desire in an ideal but heavily schematised inhabitable landscape. In philosophical thought, however, desire, while constituting a central role, has predominantly been regarded as originating from a negative outset and resulting in a negative outcome. That, what is desired can never be obtained, desire cannot be fulfilled. By desiring *the other*, that other is lost forever (Lacan 1982). Rather than viewing desire as a *desire for* that stems from a lack, Emanuel Levinas' philosophy of the *encounter with the other* posits desire as affirmative. Desire originates in the relationship with the other, it is intersubjective and relational. Desire or: the idea of desire for Levinas, as centrally inscribed into his philosophy of ethics opens us up to infinity (Levinas 1969).

In contrast, poststructuralisms most pop-representative, Baudrillard, locates contemporary desire entirely in the service of spectacle, commerce and media. His refusal to 'speak of desire other than ironically' and his view of desire as 'belonging to the age of the subject' (Baudrillard 1995) reminds us that in the hypercapitalist late twentieth and early twenty-first century, desire is as much part of an economically driven seduction machine as it is an inherent human faculty or urge (Freud 1961). Consequently, much of contemporary artistic praxis challenges the notion of desire as an apolitical topos of subjectivist escapism, focusing rather on contrasting the transgressive potential of desire (Dollimore 1991) with its constructions as these serve to maintain an institutional and political status quo (see Foucault 1988-90).

Looking to locate the *other*, the *elsewhere*, the *manquè* and the *infinite* in artists' propositions of spatial organization, of models, architectures and sets, it is sceno-graphy in its contemporary reading that can provide specific, if transdisciplinary methods and strategies in the conceptualizations and constructions of staged spaces of desire.

Contemporary scenography operates far beyond the theatre in all those areas of spatial design that have inscribed onto them elements of the mise en scène, of narrativity, transformativity and mediality. Scenography is understood here as a practice that utilizes transdisciplinary strategies in the design of performative spaces at the interface of theatre, media, architecture and installation. With the emphasis on the performative, the processual and the constructed, formerly separate genres of spatial design merge toward staged gestures of spatiality. Spaces that are thus conceptualized, constructed and realized derive from a transdisciplinary design strategy and are hybrids that cannot be assigned anymore as belonging to a single genre. wIn this reading, the scenographer emerges not as the spatial organizer of scripted narratives but rather as the author of constructed situations and as an agent of interaction and communication.

Contemporary scenography operates with technologies of simulation, interactivity and immersion and strives to evaluate these as to their potentialities for user-participation and (critical) artistic intent. It operates with new formulations of the traditional model and the model box as containers for the construction of desire through the manipulation of landscape, through methods of assemblage and the genre of installation. Here, as in the miniaturization of technological objects, the miniaturization of nature, its conceptual and skillful manipulation and subsequent interpretation as (artificial) city and/or landscape produces an unsettling effect that might help to explain the growing attraction for visual artists to engage with the scenographers basic tool for the visualization of space and time. In the model box, the spectator takes on an ideal viewing position and, not unlike in the *Wunderkammer* of the late Renaissance and Baroque is invited to marvel at the (natural) wonders collected and arranged. Scenographic techniques and strategies prove paramount in the construction of the spaces of desire past and present: scale, perspective, materiality / mediality infuse a sense of potentiality into the predominantly static arrangements of the object / model box. Its *otherness* however, prevents touch and its physical borders clearly separate its constructed perfection and stillness from the unruliness of the world surrounding it. The model's performative quality only unfolds in its dialogue with the viewers desire to manipulate and play out its inherent narrative proposition. It is here that the model, as the theatre, comes into focus as an alternate reality.

Since the early 1990s, however, theatre praxis has undergone a major paradigmatic shift in its relationship toward authenticity, liveness and mediatisation. Documentary practices, the wide inclusion of media technologies and the internet are aligning the artifice of performance with the fragmented and disassociated faculties of urban existence. Internationally, scenographers, performers and directors are experimenting in urban intervention, digital performance and mixed media formats, thus extending the black box of the theatre toward multiple spaces of action, participation and commentary. Singular, illusionary spaces of desire, formerly the domain of the proscenium stage are replaced by multiple territories of seduction, disillusionment and critique in a spatial articulation of what Baudrillard identified as the triumph of the object(s) over the subject and the consequential defeat of the subject (Baudrillard 2000 / 1983).

This collection of artistic and academic research positions aims to identify scenographic approaches to the spatial embodiment and choreography of desire in performative spaces of virtual and actual domains within their socio-political contexts. A scenographic approach to the desire-machines and the stages of their constructions characterizes the original visual essays by renowned visual artists Mariele Neudecker, Michael Ashkin, Wafa Hourani, Hans Op de Beeck and Olaf Nicolai while the scholars` essays written for this volume carefully and passionately trace historical and contemporary phenomena of staged space in theatre, art and media.

**The Gap** | Renowned US-American theatre scholar and former General Commissioner of the Prague Quadrennial for Performance Design and Space (PQ) Arnold Aronson, locates in his chapter *Desire and Décor: Fragmentary Scenography and the Power of Absence* a metonymical structure (referring to Lacan's dichotomy between the Signifier and the Thing as the basis for desire), in the scenographic visual-linguistic vocabulary of Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig's early twentieth century theatre spaces. Both Appia and Craig challenged the stable scenographic visual and object identities that had been formulaically filled by their naturalistic predecessors, thus positing the stage itself as a proposition to be completed by the spectators desire.

With recourse to Adolphe Appias study site at Hellerau, Germany in 1911, UK scholar and artist Simon Donger's chapter *Oblique Intimacies – The Scenographic Body's Ethics of Desire*, links early experiments in multiperspectivalism (e.g. Lois Fuller and, again, E.G. Craig) to the actionist performance art of the 1960s and 1970s with a focus on the transgressive faculties of the scenographic body's ethics of desire in the formulation

of an environmental and responsible organism (see Levinas 1961).

The productive notion of *the gap* as introduced by Arnold Aronson, is taken up by the Artistic Director of the Prague Quadrennial (PQ), Sodja Lotker as she battles with the dilemma of how to exhibit scenography. Lotker identifies the perceived *gap* between expressive forms of the visual and the performing arts rather as the core of scenography and, not unlike Simon Donger's extrapolation of the scenographic body, she posits the theatre as the ultimate place of transgression. In her current conceptual work for the next edition of the PQ in mid-2011, Lotker actively supports collaborations between scenographers, theatre and visual artists in the construction of the Quadrennials *Intersection* landscape, a decentralised array of performative spaces that oscillate between intimacy and spectacle as the two poles in the territories of human desire.

In a both scholarly and passionate appeal for the destabilization of architecture, not unlike the stumbling and stuttering of the system of language (Deleuze 1997), New Zealand academic, architect and sceno-grapher Dorita Hannah introduces her practice-based research into *sceno-architecture*, a practice concerned with the construction of ephemeral and fleeting performative spaces. Citing her collaborative project *Building Babel* as the processual architectural unfolding of an unstable space suited to the unstable ground of performance, Hannah strongly advocates (with Nietzsche's writings on the Apollonian edifice of the system of architecture) against the monolithic, modernist parameters of traditional theatre architecture. Juxtaposing a theatrical will-to-destruction with the architectural will-to-creation, she recalls Derrida's famous essay on Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. Derrida says 'There is no theatre in the world today which fulfills Artaud's desire' (Derrida 1978: 248).

**Staging Silence** | In contrast to Hannahs plaidoyer for deconstruction, fragmentation and instability, Hans Op de Beeck's video stills, taken from his video work of the same title, suggest stillness, perfection and the chilling threat of the manipulation of spatial situations and emotions, all housed in the scenographers model box of promises.

The slim hands of puppeteers are seen in his models of silhouette-lit black and white office interiors. The hands reposition chairs, they lift tables and they are seen as in a moving motion painting a model landscape. In the final image of the series, the model box is seen in its entirety, an artificial yet self-contained miniature world with its own lighting system and screens to play out scenarios over time. In constructing a lone world of manipulative hands, of dead trees and of lifeless backlit corporate offices, the Belgium artists scenographies equally evoke and negate the presence of the performer.

**Fatal Strategies** | UK academic and designer Greer Crawley contributes with Fatal Strategies, (Baudrillard 1990 / 1983) a central piece of her research into *the theatre of war*, into camouflage, decoy and deception. Extensive historical research into the allies' manipulation of landscape and the model stagings of combat is refracted through the positions of contemporary installation praxis as it is taken up by the four artists Mariele Neudecker, Wafa Hourani, Michael Ashkin and Hans Op de Beeck in indivdual visual essays. Their art works, some of which were created specifically for this volume and are published here for the first time, are contextualized in an interdisciplinary discourse on perception, illusion and the socio-political construction of desire through a set of scenographic strategies.

Palaestinian artist Wafa Hourani has chosen photographs from his installation *Qalandia 2047* for this publication. Qalandia is a Palaestinian refugee camp, established in 1948. A politically strategic art work, Hourani's model of Qalandia incorporates photographs taken in the camp. Electric lights shine through the tiny windows of the makeshift buildings, sounds from within the houses can be heard, curvy antennae mounted on the tin roofs highlight the camp's isolation from the world – the model is alive. It is a mirror to the world and a mirror to the Palaestinian people. In Hourani's work, desire, while subjugated to power in the Foucaultian sense is also its rebellious mirror.

US-American artist Michael Ashkin contributes an original new work for this publication. *Long Branch* is the story of a failed beachfront development scheme in New Jersey, told through media clippings and Ashkin's series of austere black and white photographs. Ashkin shows how personal and market-driven desires of homeownership are entwined in the political carousel of development permits and the levelling of existing homes and nature. Ashkin's case study Long Beach takes the form of the juxtaposition of a bleak landscape of half-finished houses and dug-up soil with personal accounts of the failed dreams of beachfront living and tabloid-style promises of a carefree existence and is driven by his analytical view on the effects of property speculation on landscape, individual and society at large.

Aerial views of war planes suggest a stillness and expectancy that Greer Crawley in her text on the UK-German artist Mariele Neudecker's photo series *The Air is One Vast Library* connects to the construction of desire through a carefully revised relationship between subject and object.

In her visual essay, a new work created for this publication, Neudecker paints over the shapes of the historical fighter planes, thus rendering them ambiguous to the eye of the spectator and constructing a scenographic scenario of both promise and intent. Objects of destruction, they linger in the timeless quality of the photograph and they resemble the shape of islands, calmly seen from a bird's eye perspective. With names such as *Hunting Percival Pemproke 1*, *De-Havilland Comet C MK 4C* and *2C*, *Consolidated Liberator V11* and *Lockheed C 130K Hercules*, however, our perception of the objects changes sharply. Now, they loom threateningly above the islands and the sea below, frozen in the very moment before they drop their deadly cargo.

In five *Movements*, another work created for this volume and published here for the first time, the German conceptual artist Olaf Nicolai presents the process of photography from concept to directions given by a photographer to his subject, *Good... Come... Stop... Again...*, from shot specifications to shot selection. Composed from descriptive words and verbal orders or stage directions given, Nicolai's *Movements* circle around an object of desire, without ever reaching it, the essence of it lost in the search for it. Whether it is the longing for *re-unification* in a Lacanian understanding of the recognition of the initial and irrefutable loss (of the mother) remains open to interpretations of this work. Its final two lines, however, *Pacing... No Trace* point toward an infinite set of actions without (re)solution.

**Virtual Territories** | Investigating the spatial faculties of virtual spaces and artists' motivations and limitations in constructing them, this last section of chapters looks at the scenographies of data space in both virtual and actual domains.

A desire to engage with the urban environment is identified by German academic and co-editor of this volume, Thea Brejzek as the central motivation for flash mob activities, whose scenographies are designed collaboratively in social networks.

In her view, the city propagates disengagement rather than engagement and the renewned interest of artist in urban intervention stems from a desire (closely related to the lack – of place, of engagement) to transgress the normative urban scenography of the everyday. She concludes, however, that beyond opening up discussions about the multiple new social *mise en scènes* created by new technologies, the flash mob is yet to be filled with (critical) intent.

German media artist and academic Wolfgang Muench provides a critical account of the misreadings of Marshall Mc Luhan's early media theory and points out the sometimes naive desires of media artists in their beliefs of media arts forming its own culture. In this chapter, Muench interrogates praxis examples from the performing arts and new media arts as to their articulation of desire, both as an institutional critique and social experiment.

In *Desire for Virtual Space: The Technological Imaginary* in 1990s Media Art, Simon Penny, US academic and one of the pioneers of interactive media art form the mid-1980s onwards, reviews the genres laborious journey between technological limitations and miscommunications between artists and engineers in the realizations of imagined spaces in both practice and theory. He pits the desire for the digital physicalization of 'the virtual' against the promise of 'virtual space', phenomena he now locates in central issues of ubiquity as this technology nests the virtual into the physically lived 'real'.

The Australian academic, artist and co-editor of this volume, Lawrence Wallen's current research is concerned with the identification of a *grammar of space*, here understood as a set of spatial configurations or rules. His photographs of the desert landscapes on the abandoned embankments of the old Ghan railway line in central Australia retrace the routes of the settlers of the late nineteenth century. Wallen's images of the empty landscapes are as much historical evocations of desire and hope as they are contemporary contemplations on the romantic desire for the unspectacular of the desert.

Spaces, objects and the representation of desire in scenographical praxis and theory fall into one topos of observation, manipulation and critique of desire in the interplay of socio-political realities and artistic imagination in this volume. Scenographic strategies in the representation of the invisible and imagined, the virtual and the actual prove to operate within a contemporary interdisciplinary discourse that is informed by the praxis and theory of theatre, architecture, media and exhibition. As shown here, all spatial articulation of desire articulates the potentiality of desire itself: it is incomplete and grasping for, and it is oriented toward the open and infinite, both promising and fatal.





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**Monitoring Scenography 1–3:**

*Power, Truth and Desire*

In the succession to *Monitoring Scenography 1: Space and Power (2008) and Monitoring Scenography 2: Space and Truth (2009), Monitoring Scenography 3: Space and Desire (2010)* constitues the third volume in a series of publications that pioneers an extended notion of scenography that is conducted within a practice-theory discourse. The series is authored and commissioned by the PhD Programme Scenography, a practice-informed research programme in a cooperation between the Institute of Design and Technology (idt), Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) and the Institute of Theatre, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna.

The triad of annual symposia with the overriding title *Monitoring Scenography* between 2007 and 2010 and subsequent publications foremost served as a programmatic structure and framework in which to develop a theoretical reference system for a discipline that operates intrinsically across the spatial design disciplines, yet is rarely represented in contemporary discourses on space (see Brejzek et al 2009).

In the first volume, *Monitoring Scenography 1: Space and Power / Raum und Macht*, published in October 2008, chapter contributions based on the symposium of the same name the year before, questioned, discussed and postulated the roles of authors / artists engaged in the discourse on and the design of hybrid spaces. The collection of scholarly and visual essays comprised transdisciplinary perspectives in regard to the navigation, interaction and communication in distributed power systems in staged spaces in media, theatre, architecture and exhibition practices. Again, contributions to the second volume in the series, *Monitoring Scenography 2: Space and Truth /Raum und Wahrheit*, published in October 2009, were based on papers and artists presentations from the 2008 symposium of the same name. Academic chapters and artistic positions in the form of visual essays responded to Baudrillard's proposition that 'an event is not entirely true or false, but rather oscillates between one, two or three octaves of truth' (Baudrillard 1995). Juxtaposing Baudrillard's 'fractal truth' with an assumed notion of truth inherent in all artistic practices, artists and academics aimed to address this virulent contradiction in their contributions by referring to the (contemporary) *micro-intervals*, rather than the *octaves of truth*, as suggested by Baudrillard in the mid1990s. As in the first volume, contributing disciplines ranged from philosophy, architectural history, cultural anthropology, human geography to art history, musicology, theatre studies, new media art practice and theory, to the visual arts and photography, with the majority of authors fluent in more than one genre.

Illusion, simulation, immersion and appropriation were identified as among the central design strategies in contemporary (spatial) practice in scenographies of the theatre, architecture and art – with complex relationships toward truth / reality, representation and mimesis.

The current volume, *Monitoring Scenography 3: Space and Desire* concludes the first series on scenography by the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) and its publishing year, 2011, marks the first doctorate candidates concluding their PhD studies in our practice-informed programme.

Plans are now underway to publish individual PhD theory dissertations with practice-as-research components, that are currently authored within in the Doctorate Programme Scenography.

*The Editors*
*Zurich, December 2010*

# LANDSCAPES OF DESIRE

Lawrence Wallen

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# THE SCENOGRAPHIC BODY


| Arnold Aronson | Simon Donger | Sodja Zupanc Lotker | Dorita Hannah |
|---|---|---|---|
| Desire and Décor | Oblique Intimacies | Prague Quadrennial at the Intersection Nostalgia for Desire or: Perverted by Theatre as Well as Some Gaps | Building Babel: Making Architecture Tremble |

# DESIRE AND DÉCOR

**Fragmentary Scenography and the Power of Absence**

By Arnold Aronson

**Abstract** | At the turn of the twentieth century scenographers such as Appia and Craig challenged the dominance of Naturalism and illusionist design with atmospheric or abstract décor. However, another form of design soon emerged that seemingly combined elements of both approaches, the fragmentary stage which suggested recognizable environments but remained visually incomplete. The implicit lack created by the selective absence of scenic elements resulted in an emotional engagement on the part of the spectator. This response, when examined through the ideas of Hegel and Lacan, can be understood as desire. *'In this matter of the visible, everything is a trap ...'* (LACAN 1981: 83)

Historically, stage design can generally be classified in three broad categories: the architectural stage in which the physical architecture of the stage itself functions as the décor as in the ancient Greek theatre, the seventeenth century French theatre, or the Noh stage; the emblematic stage which may resemble the architectural but in which locale and perhaps dramatic themes are suggested by means of symbolic, iconic, or metaphoric elements such as those found on the Tudor-Stuart stage or in much medieval theatre; and the illusionistic stage in which painting, carpentry, props and the like are employed to disguise the stage in order to create the illusion of another place. It is the last of these categories that came to dominate European and American stages beginning in the late eighteenth century. The emergence of domestic and bourgeois drama, *comédie larmoyant*, and similar genres, as well as an antiquarian emphasis on historical accuracy, led to an increasingly realistic scenography, manifested through meticulous depictions of the physical environment, often importing 'real' objects (furniture, household items, even, memorably, actual sides of beef) onto the stage, as well as painted scenery that simulated a specific locale. All was done in an attempt at total illusionism. In the visual linguistics of Naturalist scenography the signifier and the signified were often one and the same. By the latter half of the nineteeenth century the stage attempted to become nothing less than a simulacrum of the real world (or in some cases, a literal evocation of a fantasy world). The trend was so dominant that it spread beyond melodrama and Naturalist dramas to productions of classical tragedy, opera, and ballet. Even Richard Wagner, despite his revolutionary transformation of operatic form and theatre architecture, maintained an almost laughably literal décor on the Festspielhaus stage at Bayreuth.

The Symbolist movement, of course, was a reaction against Naturalism, and scenographers such as Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, Georg Fuchs, and others, developed a new scenography as an embodiment of the Symbolist project. By replacing scenographic literalism with a more evocative, suggestive, atmospheric, and even abstract design, these visionary artists ultimately transformed the entire approach to stage design at the beginning of the twentieth century. Particularly in his work with Emile Jacques-Dalcroze at Hellerau, Appia eliminated the scenic stage which had dominated western theatre since the Renaissance in favor of a flexible space with a stage created entirely from platforms, steps, curtains, and light. 'Our present stage scenery,' he proclaimed, 'is entirely the slave of painting – scene painting – which pretends to create for us the illusion of reality. But this illusion is in itself an illusion, for the presence of the actor contradicts it' (Appia in Beacham 1989: 101). Naturalist illusionism was replaced by a minimalist stage that announced itself as a stage, not a fictional locale. For Appia, it was the presence of the corporeal human figure that gave the lie to the falsity of the illusionistic stage. While the stage at Hellerau bore some resemblance to the architectural stage, Appia's designs for Wagnerian operas and other





FIG.1

dramatic work could best be described as atmospheric. Though related to the emblematic stage, Appian décor created a more total and evocative environment. 'We shall no longer try to give the illusion of a forest,' Appia declared in an essay on *Wagner's Siegfried*, 'but the illusion of a man in the atmosphere of a forest' (Appia in Beacham 1989: 106).

This dichotomy between the stage as illusionistic replica of the external world and an abstract stage qua stage as a theatrical environment in which the fully dimensional human actor was at the centre, of course, persists to the present day with abundant examples of each. However, there quickly emerged a sort of middle ground, an amalgam of Appian Symbolism and literal Naturalism. It was a metonymic scenography in which fragmentary elements suggested a more complete and precise environment without the detailed specificity of the Naturalist stage – a referential design that pointed to an identifiable locale without resorting to absolute illusion. Thus, a suspended window frame or isolated door, furniture arranged as if in a realistic room but without the walls or other signifiers of a room, a fragment of wall floating in air, a tree, a Gothic arch perhaps, sometimes in combination, sometimes alone, evoked a whole world. Variations on this schema have been the most prevalent form of design in the twentieth century, particularly for plays with any sort of realistic basis, and it continues into the twenty-first. This is not quite the same thing as the emblematic stages of, say, Tudor London. Shakespeare's audiences presumably understood the stage as a malleable, infinitely transformable theatrical environment: 'all the world's a stage' and the stage – the Globe, after all – is all the world. The stage floor, the tiring house wall with its doors, the pillars, and the heavens functioned as a framework that delineated an ever-changing theatrical space and time that was discrete from the quotidian world of the spectators.

What began to emerge in the twentieth century was something different that cannot be fully understood or explained in the context of Symbolism. The new, hybrid scenography had a greater specificity; neither abstract nor amorphous, it depended upon the fragmentary quotation of reality (or its illusionistic representation) and thus required the spectator to complete an image or to see an implied image that is suggested by the careful arrangement of scenographic elements. Lee Simonson, for example, one of the major figures of the New Stagecraft in the United States, typically created sets with simplified (essentialized might be a better word) and fragmentary scenery, often isolated like an island in the midst of the stage, as in Goat Song. | **FIG.1** THEATRE GUILD PRODUCTION OF FRANZ WERFEL'S GOAT SONG, 1926.

While these designs were usually intended to create a fairly specific locale, the isolation of the scenic unit on the stage – the stage functioned as a kind of moat around the set while the false proscenium

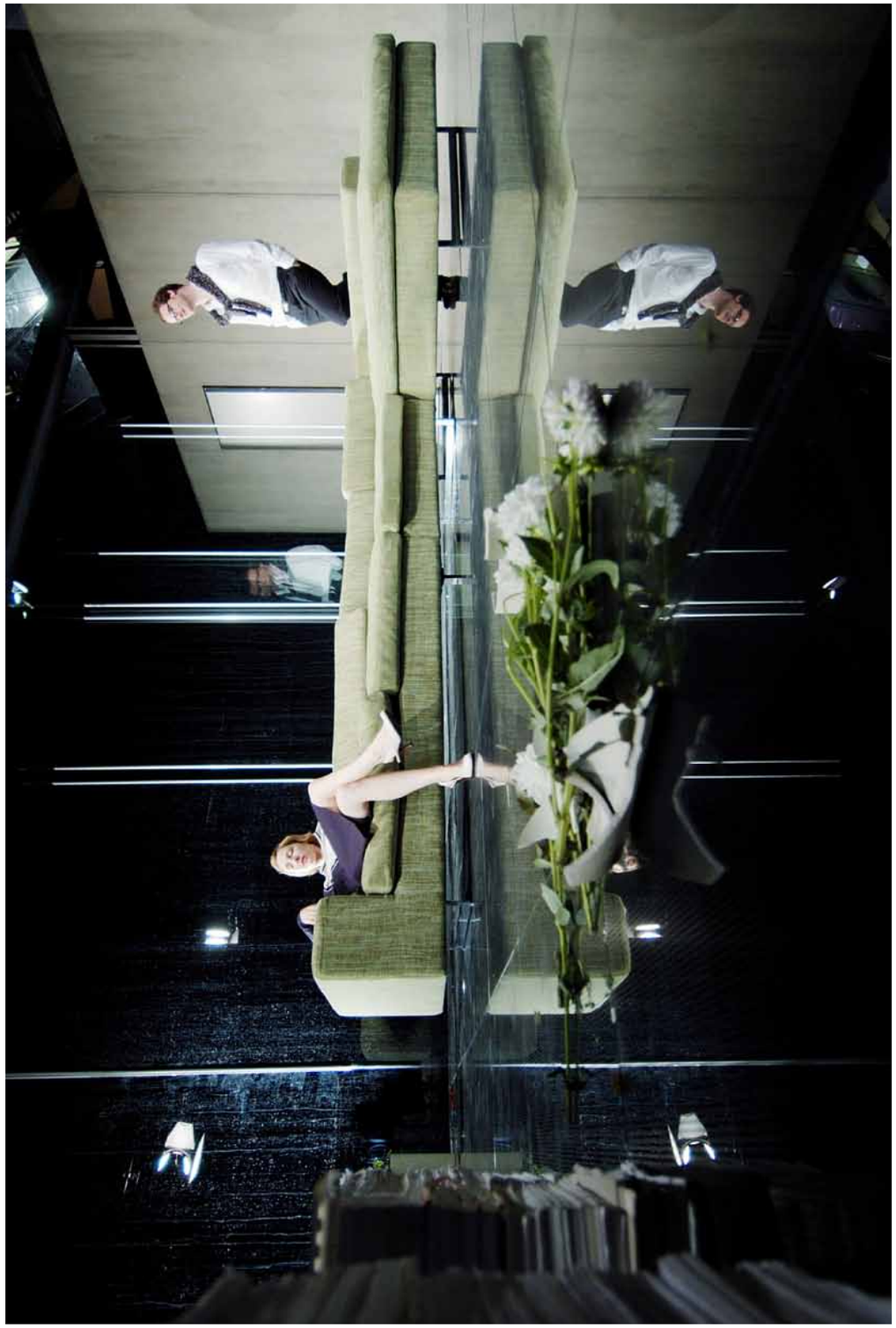


FIG. 2





and the cyclorama foregrounded the structure as design – was a constant reminder for the audience that this was theatre. The design was not an imitation of reality but rather an indexical sign system pointing toward a knowable reality. A more contemporary example might be seen in Thomas Ostermeier's 2005 production of *Hedda Gabler*, designed by Jan Pappelbaum, initially done at the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin (Fig 2). Here, too, a house, modeled after Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House (itself almost fragmentary in its openness), sat isolated in the midst of the stage – in this case on a revolving platform – 'like a well-mounted diamond that catches and holds your eye as it revolves on a bed of black velvet in a jeweler's window,' to quote the New York Times review of the New York production (Isherwood 2006). | FIG 2 HEDDA GABLER, SCHAUBÜHNE BERLIN, 2005.

The house was stylish, and its ability to rotate enhanced a three-dimensional aspect which gave it a greater reality than the Simonson example above. Yet its elevated position, surrounded by open stage, foregrounded its theatricality.

In fact, the relation of the décor to the frame of the stage is a significant element differentiating the fragmentary design from its predecessors. From the Baroque era onward, the proscenium arch framed the stage, identifying it as a discrete locale architecturally distinct from the spectator space. The scenery within the frame, whether painted perspective flats or three-dimensional rooms with real furniture, created a complete picture totally ensconced within the frame. But in the examples above, it is the stage itself that is foregrounded by the proscenium (or other framing device) and the stage, in turn, frames the décor.

**Desire** | The question is why, following the nearly total rejection by Appia, Craig, *et al.* of the illustrative illusionism of the nineteenth century stage, did their new abstract / atmospheric approach not become the norm? Why did the pendulum swing back, as it were, but only part way? I would like to suggest that the missing components of the fragmentary setting – those elements which are *lacking*; those parts of the décor that would, if present, complete the scenic space with specific totality – create a condition of *desire* within the spectator, a desire for that which is not present. This desire for completion creates a strong force that pulls the spectator into the visio-spatial realm of the play in a way that neither Naturalist totality and specificity nor its opposite, the abstract or atmospheric stage, is fully capable of doing.

Desire, of course, is a subject that has engaged philosophy since Plato, and the investigations by numerous philosophers could be usefully applied to the examination of scenographic reception. But Hegel's notion of apprehension, particularly in regard to the idea of the observer as consumer, and Jacques Lacan's focus on that which is absent *(manqué)* and his articulation of the gaze, seem especially relevant.

In his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel described the fundamental relationship between perception ('apprehension') and desire. *The lowest mode of apprehension... is purely sensuous apprehension. The mind, however, does not rest in the mere apprehension of external things by sight and hearing, it makes them objects for its own inner nature, which then is itself impelled in a correspondingly sensuous form to realize itself in the things, and relates itself to them as desire.* (Hegel 1993: 41)

Despite the multiple levels on which theatre may be experienced and understood, I would argue that the fundamental mode of apprehension' is visual. The spectator consumes the images and responds – perhaps subconsciously – to colour, form, space, texture,

spatial rhythms, etc. which in turn informs the understanding of the content of the performance. The objects of performance are in what Hegel calls an 'appetitive' relationship to the spectator. The spectator takes a seat within the theatre, awaiting the theatrical repast.

It is not insignificant that Hegel presented his lectures on aesthetics in the early part of the nineteenth century, a time when, as art historian Jonathan Crary has noted, the whole concept of visuality was changing. Citing Guy Debord's claim that spectacle 'elevate[s] the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch' (Debord in Crary 1992: 19), Crary states that *the dissociation of touch from sight occurs within a pervasive "separation of the senses" [...] The loss of touch as a conceptual component of vision meant the unloosening of the eye from the network of referentiality incarnated in tactility and its subjective relation to perceived space. This autonomization of sight [...] was a historical condition for the rebuilding of an observer fitted for the tasks of "spectacular" consumption.* (Crary 1992: 27)

While neither Debord nor Crary was using spectacle in its strictly theatrical sense, the idea of the consumer distanced from the objects of consumption, able to observe only with the eye ('the most easily deceived' sense notes Debord), is germane to the concept of desire as presented by Hegel.

Deprived of touch or the direct experience of space, the theatre spectator views the objects on the stage and translates them into analogous, even identical, objects in the experiential world. Painted wood may be read as marble; papier-mâché is perceived as textured stone; and of course the canvas walls and scenic elements of the nineteenth century box set are understood as a room. The spectator establishes a relation to those objects and to the world which they seem to suggest and this process carries (impels) the viewer into the (often fictive) world of the stage. 'Desire' Hegel continues, 'requires for itself not merely the superficial appearance of external things, but themselves in their concrete sensuous existence' (Hegel 1993: 41). If we look at the nineteenth century theatre through this lens – an admittedly narrow and perhaps prosaic reading of Hegel – we see a collection of objects on the stage, a semiotic system that signifies a locale. The signifiers may be the actual objects (e.g. a functional table or chair; a teacup), a simulacrum (for instance a door that functions yet is not made with the same solidity or materials of a real door), or illusionistic signifiers such as the painted perspective of the Baroque stage. Such scenery creates a point of identification for the audience and allows a means of entry into the world of the play: That furniture is just like mine; I have a similar dress; this reminds me of the parlor in my house, etc. In the case of the Naturalist stage it may create a literal, if banal, desire: I wish I lived in such a house; I wish I had clothes like that. But the distance created by the frame of the stage, whether actual, as in the proscenium, or implied, means that the objects on the stage and the world which they create are ultimately unattainable, beyond reach.

Desire in its literal form is perhaps nowhere better demonstrated than in the story told by Pliny the Elder about the competition between the Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasios to see who could paint the greater illusion. Zeuxis painted a picture of grapes so realistic that birds attempted to pick them. He then went to the house of Parrhasios where there was a curtain on the wall apparently hiding Parrhasios's entry in the competition. Zeuxis asked him to pull back the curtain so he could see the painting. Parrhasios thus won the competition because it was the curtain itself that was a painted illusion. This is illusion as *trompe-l'oeil* and it is analogous to the scenic techniques that emerged





in the Renaissance. The use of single-point perspective created an illusion in which the stage appeared to be a spatial extension of the auditorium. It suggested that if one could cross the threshold of the proscenium it would be possible to continue into the space beyond. The image itself, of course, was not an extension of the auditorium; it was most often an idealized and frequently allegorical landscape or architectural environment which, no doubt, triggered the literal sense of desire – a longing to enter into the world that was depicted. The use of angled perspective as it developed in the eighteenth century ruptured the direct visual correlation of stage space and spectator space, but in the monumental images it allowed, it created a potentially more potent sense of desire.

For the most part, however, literal desire is not what has engaged most philosophers. For both Hegel and Lacan – though in significantly different ways – desire is formulated in relation to an absence or lack (*manqué* to use Lacan's word), a desire for something that is not there. In the prosaic examples above, desire functions on the level of 'I want', or 'I wish I had'. But this is a desire that is easily fulfilled. Because desire, for Lacan, is always desire *for* something else, desire for the Other ('desire comes from the Other'),[1] it results in a series of diachronic deferrals. If we obtain the object of desire, it is no longer an other, and therefore no longer a possible object of desire. This, as I will explain further, is why the realist-Naturalist set is antithetical to desire.

Sociologist Anthony O'Shea provides a concise comparison of desire for Hegel and Lacan: *From Hegel the concept of desire as 'desire-for' has developed up to a point where Lacan figures it as an unfulfillable drive of the human unconscious but remains couched in negative terms. These negative connotations cover over a potential essentialist concept of the human condition: we are human because we desire. Our essence for Hegel is grounded in a nostalgia for Absolute Knowledge [...] for Lacan our subconscious. Philosophies of affirmative desire attempt to question this essentialism, at least in part, by placing desire beyond us, whilst still arguing that it helps to constitute the human condition.* (O'Shea 2002: 929)

**The Signifier and the Thing** | It is important to point out the difference between the illusionistic nature of the painted set that is dependent upon perspective painting, Serlian wings, and the like, and the illusion of the box set and its equivalents which employ actual objects or their substitutes (e.g. canvas flats for real walls) in which painting may enhance the illusion but is not the primary force in creating the illusion. In the Renaissance-Baroque scenography, that which is represented is, in fact, absent – lacking, if you will. The painted flats create an illusion through referential imagery of a world which exists only in the imagination. So while there is a certain totality to the illusion, a kind of literal reality, it creates desire by pointing to something which is not there – which, in fact, cannot be there. The nineteenth century setting, on the other hand, with its walls, doors, windows, bric-a-brac, furniture, and so forth is not only a representation, but the thing in itself. More precisely perhaps, the totality and completeness of the illusion of a room, in these cases, is dependent upon the use of the actual objects. (This technique was most fully employed by such directors as André Antoine, David Belasco, and Konstantin Stanislavsky). Lacan, in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* noted that Freud used two words for 'the thing': *die Sache* and *das Ding*. Lacan identifies the former as the representation of a thing in the symbolic order but refers to the latter as 'dumb reality.'(Lacan 1992: 55). For Lacan, the dichotomy between the signifier and the

Thing becomes the basis for desire. It is a metonymical structure. As scholar Alenka Zupanˇic explains, 'Desire incarnates the very split, or gap, between the signifying order and the Real' (Zupančič 2003: 175).

Borrowing Lacan's analysis, we might describe the Naturalist set as 'dumb reality'. Realist / Naturalist scenography presents the spectator with an already completed image / structure / environment (a scenographic *das Ding*). There is nothing lacking, nothing absent, and without this lack there is no possibility of desire. If, returning to Hegel, we think of the interaction of the spectator and the stage as appetitive, then the realistic or Naturalistic set creates a satiated audience. Lacan, in a sense, combines these concepts. He draws a distinction between the eye (which sees), and the gaze (in which the thing seen looks back at the observer, which 'makes us beings who are looked at' (Lacan 1981: 75) and uses the technique of *trompe-l'oeil* to make his point. *Trompe-l'oeil* he states, is 'a triumph of the gaze over the eye' (Lacan 1981: 103). Thus, describing the relation of a painting to an observer, Lacan posits that the painter *gives something for the eye to feed on, but he invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one's weapons. This is the pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting. Something is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, something that involves the abandonment, the laying down, of the gaze*.' (Lacan 1981: 101)

Illusionistic décor provides something for the eye to feed on; it is not the gaze in the Lacanian sense. By providing such a totalizing environment with nothing lacking the spectator is pacified, not engaged. Desire is absent. This is really the root of Chekhov's discontent with Stanislavsky's staging. The Moscow Art Theatre productions aimed at a totally Naturalist illusion whereas Chekhov's plays were more properly seen as Symbolist and his stage directions pointed toward a more suggestive, even atmospheric design. Just as Chekhov's characters constantly yearn for that which they do not have, Chekhov's stage directions suggest a physical environment that lacks completion, that constantly points toward something beyond. [2]

The abstract stage, and to an extent the atmospheric stage championed by Craig and Appia, also eliminates desire, though in a somewhat different way than its Naturalist counterparts. In the steps and platforms of Appia's theatre, the screens of Gordon Craig, the relief stage of Georg Fuchs, or, more recently, the bare or nearly bare stages of some postmodern scenography, nothing is lacking in the sense that there is no reference outside the stage itself. We are meant to see the stage as stage, or the stage as theatrical – not illusionistic – environment. Although such design may function on a metaphorical level, it does not operate metonymically, it is not pointing to another reality, it does not stand for something else. The entire stage is presented to us; it is complete – its own dumb reality. Once again, with the absence of lack, as it were, there can be no desire.

**The Fragmentary Stage** | The fragmentary stage, on the other hand, is an embodiment of 'lack'; it is predicated upon a spectator's desire for completion. We are presented with fragments of reality but not the totality of illusion. The spectator is asked, encouraged, even required to complete the image. This may seem to resemble the gestalt principle of closure in which the mind fills in gaps in contour lines in order to complete familiar shapes, but closure tends to depend upon other gestalt principles such as symmetry and continuity. While some fragmentary settings can be seen as incomplete structures whose gaps may be easily filled (if one were to concentrate solely on the framework of the house in Pappelbaum's Hedda mentioned above, for





instance, it might be possible to imagine the complete house, particularly if one were familiar with the actual house that served as the inspiration), most such settings actually defy logical and total completion. But it is precisely that quality of unfulfillable completion that creates a degree of tension through disorientation and, therefore, desire. What is the precise shape of the room or other indicated space? Is there a logical or consistent ground plan? What is the relation of one component to another or of the actors to the decor? The emphasis upon what is missing creates a state of desire – a tension between the inherent theatricality of such décor and the apparent reality to which it refers. The spectator is engaged in the act of completion, or attempted completion. Complacency or satiation is difficult, if not impossible.

Lacan designated the object which causes desire as 'objet a ' [3]. Slavoj Žižek explains that *Object a is not what we desire, what we are after, but rather that which sets our desire in motion, the formal frame that confers consistency on our desire. Desire is of course metonymical, it shifts from one object to another; through all its displacements, however, desire nonetheless retains a minimum of formal consistency, a set of fantasmatic features which, when encountered in a positive object, insures that we will come to desire this object. Object a, as the cause of desire, is nothing but this formal frame of consistency.* (Žižek 1997)

The realistic and illusionistic stage presents what we desire; there is no lack. It does not set desire in motion but rather it creates immediate satiation and complacency. There is pleasure to be found in this relationship, but not necessarily an active engagement. The abstract and atmospheric stage minimizes or eliminates the object (unless one sees the stage itself as an object); there is nothing to set desire in motion. It does, nonetheless, foreground the stage, thus creating the possibility of a dialogue between the spectator and the performance. Fragmentary scenography, however, valorizes the theatricality of the stage while presenting metonymical objects that refer to an external reality – or fantasy. This triggers the mechanism of desire. At the same time, the immanent sense of framing that accompanies this theatricality creates a degree of distance which prevents the object of desire from being fully obtained. The spectator is engaged without the possibility of satiation. And therein lies the ongoing appeal of fragmentary scenography.

There are, of course, always other factors at work in the scenographic reception process. Something as basic as pleasure in the aesthetics of the décor – one thinks of the colorful palettes of Bakst or Benois in their designs for the Ballets Russes – or the sheer delight in technology, such as the magical scene changes of the Baroque stage, engage the spectator on a sensuous level. But aesthetics and technology are most often used in the service of illusion or illustration and create awe, not desire. And this feeling of awe is why audiences are prone to applauding the revelation of detailed realism or the wonder of a technological device – a response that seems to reinforce Kant's contention that such emotional responses undermine aesthetic judgment.

There is at least one other significant category of scenographic practice that emerged in the twentieth century that must be addressed and that, of course, is Brecht's model of Epic Theatre. At first glance Brecht, too, seems to present a version of the fragmentary stage, but it employs a different structure, a different vocabulary, if you will, than the fragmentary stage which is an essentialized mode of representation. Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* creates a dialectic between the signifier and the signified, separating one from the other and thus calling attention to the difference between the two and the very mechanism of signification.

Caspar Neher's props and scenic pieces might be lovingly selected from the real world, yet they reside within a theatricalized void; Karl von Appen's cartoonish landscapes or cityscapes are placed against a neutral cyclorama (as is, famously, Mother Courage's wagon). The reality of the objects and referential images of the Brechtian stage emerges not from embeddedness within a Naturalist environment but in their opposition to the non-signifying background.[4] A perhaps surprising correlation to Lacan may be seen in Lacan's assertion that 'the signifier as such is constituted of oppositional structures whose emergence profoundly modifies the human world' (Lacan in Carney 2005: 88ff). Elsewhere he states that 'in the scopic field, everything is articulated between two terms that act in an antinomic way – on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them'(Lacan 1981: 109).[5] Naturalist, fragmentary, and atmospheric scenography all engender differing modes or degrees of desire because they reside within a framework – a stage – that does not allow itself to acknowledge the spectator; we see the image, but we do not imagine that it is seeing us. The Brechtian stage, by creating a dialectical opposition and recognizing the unique individuality of each component, assumes implicitly, if not explicitly, the presence of an audience and, in fact, requires one for its very existence. The Brechtian stage, furthermore, is not fragmentary. Though seemingly lacking those visual elements that would create a totality, it is composed of indexical elements (not necessarily metonymical) that are complete in and of themselves though residing within a relational system on the stage. Because of the totality of each object or image, one cannot speak of that which is lacking. In fact, epic scenography contains not only that which is present but that which is not present, just as the alienated acting of the Brechtian performer makes us equally aware of what the actor is not doing as of what is being done. Epic scenography resists desire. The intention is not to engage us in the completion of an image, but to provide us with the information necessary to judge the actions of the characters.

In identifying the forces at work in these different approaches to design I am not trying to create a hierarchy or to elevate one form over another. I am merely seeking to identify the differing means of attraction that each type of décor engenders. Because a significant portion of Western drama in the twentieth century has one foot in the specificity of realism, but the other in realm of interior emotional, spiritual, and psychological space, fragmentary design has proved to be an apt solution to the visual and spatial demands of such theatre. Ultimately, however, I believe that all scenography is fragmentary and all scenography creates a state of desire. The illusionistic stage attempts to mask anything that will interfere with illusion; its apparent opposite, the so-called empty space which is a framed void carved out of otherwise occupied environment through which we move, inevitably calls attention to that which is lacking. Wagner at Bayreuth intended that the audience would project itself from the quotidian space of the auditorium into the ideal world of the stage – an action that can be seen as a manifestation of desire. But one does not need Wagner's mystic chasm to achieve this act of psychic projection. Every stage is a framed space and thus exists in opposition to the space of the spectator; the act of spectatorship is an act of projection from one space to the other and might thus be seen as an act of desire.





**Endnotes**

1 **Jacques Lacan** (2003), Du 'Trieb' de Freud et du désir du psychanalyste, in Néstor Braunstein, Desire and jouissance in the teachings of . The Cambridge Companion to Lacan, Jean-Michel Rabaté, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 107. See also Slavoj Žižek, Some Politically Incorrect Reflections on Violence in& Related Matters France at http://www.lacan.com/zizfrance1.htm.

2 See **Arnold Aronson** (2000), The Scenography of Chekhov, in The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov, Vera Gottlieb and Paul Allain, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 134-148.

3 **Lacan** posited two categories, objet petit a (the unattainable object or cause of desire) and Le grand Autre (the realm of the symbolic), each designated by a small or capital a (from autre / Autre or other / 0ther). But many writers, including Žižek, refer simply to 'object a' (although Lacan actually wished that the term objet not be translated).

4 See **Sean Carney** (2005), Brecht and Critical Theory: Dialectics and Contemporary Aesthetics, New York: Routledge, 88ff.

5 **Lacan**, Four Concepts of Psycho-Analysis 109.

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**List of Figures**

**Figure 1:** Theatre Guild production of Franz Werfel's Goat Song, 1926, set design by Lee Simonson. Courtesy Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

**Figure 2:** Hedda Gabler by Thomas Ostermeier, Schaubühne Berlin, 2005. Photograph by Arno Declair

# OBLIQUE INTIMACIES

**The Scenographic Body's Ethics of Desire**

By Simon Donger

*Have you ever been in love and had the feeling that the street before you suddenly expands, that houses grow, sing, lose themselves, and it seems to you that the street darkens drastically, levitates, and becomes transformed into a cloud?* (Craig in Baugh 2005: 126)

**Abstract** | Striking parallels upsurge between events happening in white cube galleries and the emergent black-box theatre of 1960s Europe. This essay seeks to unveil an understanding of those parallels according to a renewal of spatial design beyond mere architectural precepts, breaching away from perspective and proposing instead a bodily space or 'bodied spatiality': a 'phenomenal space, governed by the body and its spatial concerns, a non-Cartesian field of habitation which undermines the stance of objectivity and in which the categories of subject and object gives way to a relationship of mutual implication' (Garner 1994: 4). This essay strives to articulate the continuing anticipatory position of scenography with respect to the constitution of a bodily space paradigmatically substantiated in the black-box environment. More importantly, the work intends to inquire philosophically into such a spatio-corporeal dimension of phenomenon as one that disentangles normative conceptions of 'perception and the constitution of meaning, objects and their appearances, subjectivity and otherness, presence and absence, body and world' (Garner 1994: 3). In particular, it will argue that bodily spaces compel the sensory and cognitive renovation of the body into the formation of an environmental organism: a *scenographic body* where space and body cannot be apprehended and conceived separately but as an orgasmic entity that propels unsettled, oblique, affects and an ethics of desire.

This essay considers historical and conceptual frameworks part of a contextual research in which I have engaged with the re-appraisal of twentieth century's scenography beyond theatre, within broader fields of spatial design such as visual arts and architecture. However, here I will focus on the intersection of scenography and visual arts to demonstrate a part of the contextual research that underlines on-going practical research I am conducting and will present at the end of the essay.

**Black Cubes and White Boxes** | The emergence of black-boxes in the late 1950s had been pre-empted in scenography in various speculative and realized forms, most of which had been concerned with white cubes. Adolphe Appia's *Festspielhaus* or 'study site' (Appia in Baugh 2005: 61), built in 1911 in Hellerau, Germany, was the materialization of an immersive borderlessness of what he called a 'living space' where 'a moment of living art with no one viewing it except the performers themselves exists fully, and with more dignity than when reflected in the eyes of passive onlookers' (Appia in Beacham 1993: 162). The white cube 'study site' used broad washes of white light to permeate audience and stage alike. | FIG.1 ADOLPHE APPIA, FESTPIELHAUS HELLERAU, ORPHEUS SETTING, 1912.

Appia's environment had an influential impact from its onset. Having visited the 'study site' in 1913, British theatre director Harley Granville-Barker claimed in 1914 that 'what is really needed is a great white box' (Granville-Barker in Dymkowski 1986: 77). In the 1910s, in London, Granville-Barker directed a series of Shakespearean plays at the Savoy Theatre with radical set designs that made use of curtains where 'patterns suggest walls': a 'new hieroglyphic language of scenery' (Granville-Barker in Dymkowski 1986: 78) which compelled drastic architectural modifications applied to the stage, such as extending it into the auditorium to create proximity and immersion between stage and audiences. Like some of his contemporaries, Barker



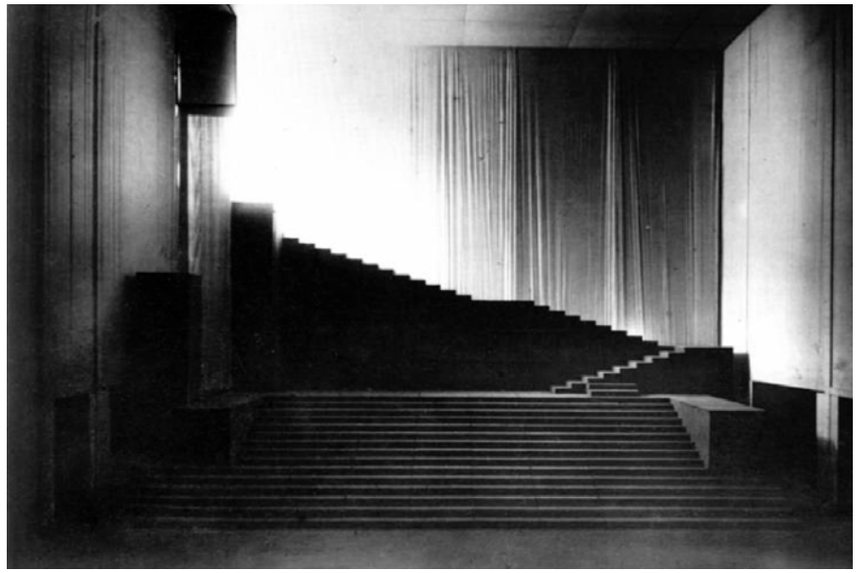


FIG.1

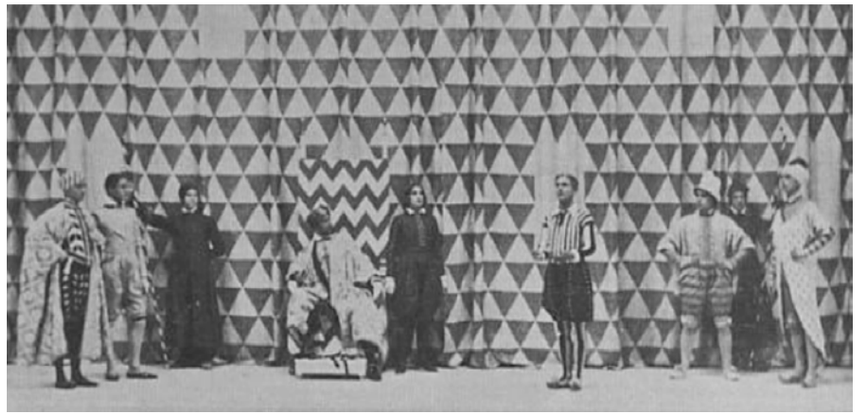


FIG.2

hinted at the immersive cave-like environment of the soon-to-come black-box while disrupting its own insideness for the outside: 'we set our scenes in a shell [...] something that will not tie us too rigidly indoors or out' (Granville-Barker in Dymkowski 1986: 7-8). Stage design was developing multiperspectival tactics of sensory experiences, relinquishing the hierarchical hinge of the singular vantage point of perspective, so that 'our attempt at focusing must give way to the vacant all-embracing stare' (Ehrenzweig in Morris 1969: 881). FIG.2 HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER, TWELFTH NIGHT, 1912.

Specifically, scenery was disengaged from solid, static, painted flats and re-assigned to the volatility of curtains. This can be seen even before Barker and Appia, in the cabaret works of American dancer Loïe Fuller. Fuller's performances also got rid of painted flat scenery to rely on extensive draperies, and the electric lighting of 'magic lanterns' (slide shows). The advancements Fuller made in set and costume design she patented in 1894. Projecting light and slides onto draped silk costumes, sometimes white (*Fire Dance*, 1895; *Ballet of Light*, 1908), sometimes black (*Firmament & Night*, 1896) Fuller was also concerned with scenic materials such as mirrors and glass which responsiveness to light further advanced drapery's own diffracting relation to lighting. Fuller's scenery enabled the space to reflect and incorporate drapery and its performed movement: in a sense, she could drape space as much as herself bringing the space on a par with the vaporously clothed body of the performer.

Through the multiperspectivalism of the visual field, the sensory phenomenon no longer establishes a unilateral agency, or one-way interaction, between space and body. Rather, spatial and bodily matters



FIG. 3

overlap and affect one another. The folds of the costume are activated by the body, fragmenting the volume of space directly surrounding the performing body. At the same time, the space's material constitution allows it to unfold the visual gloom further and throughout the entire volume of the stage. This second layer of fragmentation is to some extent indirect presenting a space and a body seemingly animated by drapery's contingent deployment. But in actual fact, drapery is altered by the body, further distorted by spatial conditions which, in return, commingle with the body's direct impact, back and forth. Significantly here, the performer must adjust her propioceptive skills to the disorientation she brings upon herself (bodily movement and their extensions through the costume) as well as to the disorienting effects further advanced by the space. In this way, the scenographic space does not only respond to her presence but she also must respond to space, even react and play with the additional, extended and augmented, gloom: a multilateral interaction replaces the unilateral responsiveness of the scenographic tradition. | FIG. 3 LOÏE FULLER, THE GHEISHA AND THE CAVALIER, 1901.

Historically running alongside Appia, Granville-Barker and Fuller, Edward Gordon Craig equally employed drapery and curtains as a starting point to formulating multiperspectivalism and two-way interaction towards another speculative delineation of the black-box. Craig quickly renovated the use of curtains through his conception of mobile 'screens' he patented in 1910: 'the object of my invention is to provide a device which shall present the aesthetic advantages of the plain curtain but shall further be capable of a multitude of effects which although not intended to produce an illusion shall nevertheless assist the imagination of the spectator by suggestion'. Rather than breaking completely away from the tradition, Craig distorted it: 'My device is further intended to combine the artistic variety and mechanical advantages of painted scenery with the portable nature of the curtain' (Craig in Baugh, Carver & Fergusson 1999). Indeed, *painting* was achieved, as in Fuller's work, by means of electric lighting projected onto the screens.

Craig's screens and Appia's study site both revolved around lighting to compel the '1000 shapes' (Craig in Innes 1998: 142), or 'limitless infinity' (Baugh 2005: 111), afforded by another scenic innovation contemporaneous with both practitioners. In 1907, fashion and lighting designer Mariano Fortuny patented two apparently dissimilar structures: the theatrical cyclorama dome ('cupola') and the 'delphos' dress (a pleated, trailing, Greek-inspired piece of clothing). Both of these are material attempts at diffracting lighting's effect upon surfaces, liquefying spatial and bodily materialities and borders alike. While the cyclorama was quick in appearing in theatres throughout Europe, Craig's screens constituted an advanced devolution of a cycloramic spatiality linked to his visionary speculation of what would later be called the black-box. In his seminal book *On the Art of Theatre* (1911), Craig speculated over developing Semper's 'Asphaleia System [which] at the turn of the century, made it possible to raise sections of the stage floor to form platforms of various heights [that] could even be tilted or rotated' (Innes 1998: 181). Craig envisioned the augmentation of 'deep wells, open spaces, steps, platforms or partitions' (Innes 1998: 177) by forecasting the Asphaleia System beyond the floor: 'each section of the floor can rise and fall at will by mechanical means; each section of the roof can descend or ascend, echoing as it were the movement of the floor; each side can as it were fold and unfold at all parts and can be moved at will' (Craig in Innes 1998: 178). Craig's speculative vision delineated the foundational elements of the black-box:







FIG. 4

'the floor seems to be an absence – the roof a void [...] slow shapes [...] continue to arise in endless numbers [...] until there stand before us vast columns of shapes, all single yet all united – none resting' (Craig in Innes 1998: 181). As such, Craig augmented the cycloramic 'loss of the ordering and framing ability of perspective [...] of fixed spectatorial and authorial viewpoints that offer a 'scale' on the world beyond' (Baugh 2005: 218). And although highly scenic, Craig's vision of a materially flexible space originated in the innovations of lighting technologies that presented greater potentials to affect the variability of spatial perception, what Appia called 'living light': *Comfortable seats have been provided in semidarkness, to encourage a state of total passivity [...] overturning this passivity... light, no longer forced to illuminate the painted flats, can radiate, carrying form into space, filling it with living colour and the limitless variations of an ever-changing atmosphere'* (Appia in Baugh 2005: 109)

And just as Fuller's body was propelled into significant sensory and physical challenges by the very scenic devices she employed, Craig formulated a physical language for the performer's body based on the critical bodily incorporation of the puppet's uncanny kinetic presence he named 'Über-marionette': 'up sprang portraits with flushed faces, eyes which bulged, mouths which leered, fingers itching to come out of their frames, wrists which exposed the pulse' (Craig 1911: 260). Craig wanted his screens to be pushed by performers onstage, while performers would embody their semi-rigid kinesis, therein establishing a correlation between scenic and bodily presences. In effect, the performing tactic of the Über-marionette enforced this correlation even before, or without, actually touching or handling scenery: it required embodying 'form break[ing] into panic' (Craig 1911: 260). The multiperspectival animation of space and body enabled to hinge them together according to a multilateral and borderless interaction in which vision was unrested, disoriented and turned against its traditional predicaments of clarity and ordering. As a result, cognitive acts onstage were shifted away from representational hermeneutics towards a much less certain scheme of cognition: 'the dematerialization of architectural surfaces into projection screens signals the reversibility of what had been established figure / ground relations [towards] the oblivion of a cognitive periphery' (Crary 2001: 366) and 'by this means suggestion, not representation, is relied on and nevertheless variety is obtainable' (Craig in Baugh, Carver & Fergusson 1999). FIG. 4 EDWARD GORDON CRAIG, WOODCUT PRINT FOR KING LEAR, 1920.

Spatio-corporeal phenomena unfolded according to the advancement of electric modulation of light's particles and waves in Craig's speculative black-box and Appia's actual white cube, were subsequently explored by Bauhaus artists in Germany. There again, the entire theatre-house was speculatively re-considered in multiperspectival terms. Architect Walter Gropius' famously unrealized *Total Theatre Project* (1926) conceived of a spherical theatre-house merging various pre-existing forms of stages, and entirely covered with projections screens from within (surrounding stage and auditorium all around). Gropius' project reflected Bauhaus theatre's conceptual concern with the notion of *Raumempfindung* or 'felt volume': 'a space filled with a soft pliable substance' (Schlemmer in Goldberg 2001:

104). Felt volume is integral to other speculative Bauhaus theatre-houses such as Frederick Kiesler's *Endless Theatre* (1924).

In its realized form, felt volume is exemplified in the scenographic works of László Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Schlemmer, head of the Bauhaus stage, who owed a clear inheritance to Craig's screens: 'we have constructed simple flats of wood and white canvas which can be slid back and forth on a series of parallel tracks and can be used as screens for light projection' (Schlemmer in Baugh 2005: 124). Schlemmer, like Moholy-Nagy, used electric lighting and projections to engineer 'thousand-eyed' (Moholy-Nagy in Goldberg 2001: 117) scenographic phenomena. The 'ACTION OF LIGHT [needed to be] equal to that of all other theatre media' (Moholy-Nagy in Baugh 2005: 124). And, again, the body had to be put 'on an equal footing with the other formative media' (Moholy-Nagy in Carlson 1993: 353): body and light became intrinsically woven. Schlemmer dressed his performers with reflective materials and surfaces that captured light and diffracted the body's normative physical agency. Moholy-Nagy on the other hand sided with lighting itself and produced his famous *Light Prop* (1922-30): 'I dreamed of light machines by which it would be possible, by hand or automatic / mechanical means, to throw light visions into the atmosphere, into large spaces and onto screens with unusual qualities, onto mist, gas and cloud' (Moholy-Nagy in Albertová 2008: 54). Constructed yet never implemented onstage, *Light Prop* was intended to be positioned visibly on the stage to operate as a kinetic light source and as a performative bodied presence.

The apparent fusion of body, object, machine, light and space was geared towards a self-obliterating phenomenal movement, nurturing the visual incompletion of the stage. Thus, it should not be confused with the idealistically seamless fusion of the Wagnerian total work of art *(Gesamtkunstwerk)*. Indeed, 'what we need is not the *"Gesamtkunstwerk"* alongside and separated from which life flows by, but a synthesis of all the vital impulses spontaneously forming itself into the all-embracing *Gesamtwerk* (life) which abolishes all isolation' (Moholy-Nagy 1967: 17).

**The Scenographic Body** | The Bauhaus movement managed to realize more of their speculations than Craig did. But much of their work remained unfulfilled nonetheless, and it is not until the 1950s that their most radical and unrealized ideas would come into realized fruitions via the emergence of black-box theatres. In 1958, Josef Svoboda presented his black-box-based *Polyekran* at Brussels Universal Expo on behalf of his company Laterna Magika. The work evolves, as with all work by Svoboda, from his knowledge of, and desire to further advance, ideas by Craig, Appia and Bauhaus practitioners. In Polyekran, Svoboda created a projection screen-based cycloramic spatiality which, although only located onstage, invested the entire vertical and horizontal volume of stage space. Svoboda was most conspicuous about the rapprochement between body and space in his scenographies: he wrote about the scenographic space as a 'psycho-plastic space': an 'abstract [...] undefined', yet 'transformable and kinetic', spatiality 'that continuously form and dissolve' (Svoboda in Burian 1971: 79) like 'the ebb and flow [or] the pulse of the [...] action' (Burian 1971: 80). Svoboda was particularly influenced by Craig's volition to achieve a *'scene which has a changeable nature. This scene also has what I call a face. This face expresses... Its shape perceives the light, and in as much as the light changes its position and makes certain other changes, and inasmuch as the scene itself alters its position – the two acting in concert as in a duet, figuring it out together as in a dance'* (Craig in Baugh 2005: 125)





The psycho-plastic, or bodied, space of scenography was, in Svoboda's words, due to the 'possibilities of the void' of the black-box (Svoboda in Baugh 2005: 87). To Svoboda, the enactive nurturing of the void is a cultivation of an incomplete 'polyscenicness: an expression of a free and many-sided time-space operation [...] breaking up the linear continuity of theatre action' (Svoboda in Giesekam 2007: 53). This, in turn, required of bodies to physically adjust to the multiperspectival complications: 'I always try to be sure that the actor is aware of the space in which he moves. That means that the space is designed not only to be seen front on, from the auditorium, but to be experienced as a total environment for the actor, who senses it physically, like warmth or wind.' (Svoboda in Albertová 2008: 49)

Still in 1958, in Paris, Yves Klein organised at the Iris Clert Gallery the exhibition *The Void*, also called *The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility*. Klein emptied the gallery leaving only an empty cabinet, a white curtain and painting all surfaces white. Klein further curtained the gallery's large windows with blue fabrics and served blue cocktails on the opening night. Although quite static, the exhibition of a space designed to be as empty as possible is clearly paired with an immersive concern towards the audience body. The blue that blocks the window and would suggest an exhibition of monochromatic paintings in blue as Klein was known for is in fact missing from the gallery's walls but found in the cocktails and thus absorbed by audiences. Klein's blue is resonant of the sky's infinity and while the gallery's emptiness goes a certain way towards such effect its whiteness also, paradoxically, augments its contained limitedness. Like Svoboda's, Klein's 'void' is not the absence of all things: 'having rejected nothingness, I discovered the void' (Klein in Nechvatal 1999: 367).

Klein exemplifies radical changes occuring in galleries' white cubes where performance, immersion and interaction come to shape the audience's experience in most intimate ways. Performance artist Gina Pane for instance, advocated the visceral dismantling of the gallery space by ways of immersing audiences into fragmentary and multiperspectival spatio-corporeal fields. In *Azione Sentimentale* (1973), Pane used various media throughout multiple rooms of the Galleria Diagramma in Milan to perpetrate cuts of her bodied enactive presence (live or photographically mediated) within itself as much as within the gallery's space. Although we confront the production of one action, it is unfolded in space through a syntaxic and fragmentary multiplication. In one room, Pane's arms become roses' stems but where the thorns are seemingly turned upside down, perforating inwardly the arm (the stem) rather than the outside. Yet, Pane is dressed in white, overlapping with the gallery's white surfaces, which in return are soiled (as the white outfit) by the blood spilling from her body. To a larger extent, the live and mediated doubling of Pane's presence throughout the gallery's rooms suggests an embodied perforation outwardly, of the architectural container. The sensitivity of body parts that are spaced out is spread over the entire gallery's space, spacing it out all the same. Body parts, like spatial bits, are given voices unheard of before, and in which the viewer's body is effectively invited to attend to and join in the polyphonic deconstruction.

In her analysis of Pane's work, Anne Tronche identifies Pane's practice as the deployment of 'the scenographic body': a spatio-corporeal entity premised on the question of 'how can one give voice to that which has no voice?' (Tronche 1997: 41). Concerned with pain, cutting and wounding her own body as well as its surrounding, Pane's art, in Tronche's account, is an iterative process of splitting and spacing oneself out through



FIG. 5







FIG. 6

environmental procedures that grasp the viewers within the cuts, splitting him or her accordingly. | FIG. 5 GINA PANE, AZIONE SENTIMENTALE, 1973.

Spatio-corporeal immersion can be said to originate from light in black-boxes, and from the physical body in galleries. In all cases, it relies upon the creation of a diffracted spatial incompletion. This is equally admonished in artworks which place the viewer in literal interaction with the artwork, thereby hinging the process of spatial diffraction. Nam June Paik's *Random Access* (1963) required of its audience to interact in a way that affected the gallery's walls and highlighted their permeability. In *Tap Touch Cinema* (1968) Valie Export turned her bare bust into a black-box only accessible by hands of the pedestrians she encountered in the streets of Vienna: the space of the white cube is pushed towards the interactive, speculative and haptic darkness of the black-box. This is similarly blatant in the emergence of video art installations that require plunging galleries into darkness. In Aldo Tambellini's *Black Zero* (1965-8) abstract white spiralling shapes are projected and overlapped as an attempt at *sculpting* and modulating the darkness of the space. Modulations of white light, of the visually legible, are paired with modulations of blackness, shadows and the quasi imperceptible to an equal measure. In Anthony McCall's *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) filmic projection is spliced and propelled into the three-dimensional volume of space, in the form of a cone which can be penetrated by the viewer. The light volume of the cone is delineated by a membrane of light that also contains a cone of darkness. This becomes a space to inhabit but only partially: as the cone is broken by the entry of the body, the body is equally split into dark and light regions. Light does no longer reveal or highlight the body but fractures bodily presence. Walls must dissolve to give way to spatio-corporeal phenomena. Svoboda pursued this dissolution until the end of his career, employing evolving technologies such as digital projections (in *Graffiti*, 2002) used to create a 'virtual wall onstage [...] to walk through' (Svoboda in Albertová 2008: 220). As a result, the spatio-corporeal field gives voice to that which is not a singular and contained entity but a restless and polyphonic dialogue of bodily and spatial matters. | FIG. 6 JOSEF SVOBODA, GRAFFITI, 2002.

**Posthuman Intimacy** | The cycloramic spatio-corporeality unfolded in theatre and subsequently in visual arts offered spaces no longer as mere extensions of the body, and bodies no longer seen as products of their environments. Instead, space and body are produced as co-extensive and dialogic specular phenomena. Katherine Hayles' Posthuman theory enables advancing an understanding of this two-way interactive and disturbing scheme. Following Marshall McLuhan's claim of a 'dis / connection advanced in the logic of the prosthesis' (McLuhan in Foster 1996: 221), Hayles positions the Posthuman according to the simultaneous connectedness and disconnectedness of the body and its technological apparatus. Resulting from this multilateral prosthetic dynamism, the Posthuman offers 'no clear line between those who act and those who are acted upon' (Hayles 1999: 217).

Representation and meaning are broken down consequently producing 'flickering signifiers, whose transient patterns evoke and embody [...] the context of no context' (Hayles 1999: 47). The scenographic black-box can be seen as the ground zero of context inasmuch as it is a space 'oriented in terms of a body that exists [...] as its originating site, its zero point' (Garner 1994: 4). In that sense, any 'embodied I' is not an 'embodied *eye*' but the slippery and 'complex positionality' (Garner 1994: 4) of an 'intersubjectified' (Garner 1994: 3) black-out. Perceptually then, bodied spatiality

constitutes a 'disappeared aesthetics [...] which cannot not visualize, and which persistently and defiantly approaches its potentiality to not visualize, to forget, to be rendered blind [:] an attenuation of the visual and, simultaneously, a persistence of the visual in the midst of imperceptibility', a 'visuality [that] is something other than merely the difference between the visible and the invisible' (Ricco 2002: 41).

Romeo & Claudia Castellucci (Societas Raffaello Sanzio, from here on referred as SRS) have formulated their own theoretical framework to account for a disappeared aesthetics of scenography. SRS conceives of what they call the *'theatrical hand'* distinct from the *'military hand'* and the *'artistic hand'* (Castellucci 2001: 25; present author's translation) that are 'prey[s] of a cultural universe imbued with the military and religious coalition' (Castellucci 2001: 30; present author's translation): lacking 'power', 'oxygen', 'joy' and the 'sense of intimacy' (Castellucci 2001: 28; present author's translation). SRS's *theatrical hand* makes use, in the first instance, of the military and artistic hands: they initiate the scenography by conceiving of the most beautiful images possible (the artistic hand), they then go on to decant / abstract (military hand) those images not by simplifying them and deleting their peripheral residues, but quite the contrary, cancelling out the core of the images so that they can only be experienced through their traces, their 'phenomenologically felt' (Castellucci 2001: 31; present author's translation) vestiges which are all that is left onstage.

Much of those traces are imparted onto the volume and surfaces of the stage as well as on the almost always semi-materialized *fourth wall* of the proscenium arch theatres they often utilize. SRS places all sorts of transparent, translucid, reflective and opaque surfaces and objects across the bordering line of the proscenium arch, therein making the membrane that interfaces audience and performers texturally dense. But the fourth wall's material demarcation is simultaneously evanescent (self-disruptive) and precluding clarity of vision on the rest of the stage. The volume behind the now visible fourth wall is disturbed, rubbing off corners, dissolving the other borders, and producing a cycloramic spatio-corporeality insofar as the cyclorama has been moved to the forefront.

Surfaces become depths, depths become surfaces: tangibility is questionable. Tactile incongruities follow visual inconsistencies and uncertainties. This 'textural perception [has the] intrinsically interactive properties that James J. Gibson called "affordances"' (Sedgwick 2003: 13) whereby visual perception is a function of tactile perception and thus the visual field strives to titillate touch and our multi-sensory-motor skills are reset in an unresolved arrangement: 'return[ing] perception to the fullness of its encounter with its environment' (Garner 1994: 1). The traces of the images that have been destroyed linger onstage, carrying with them the traces of signifiers and signifieds that have disappeared. In fact, 'conceptual signifieds are not only absent, their absence itself is [...] signified' (Counsell in McKinney 2009: 161) in the visual gaps and the phenomenal incompletion of the scenographic image. SRS calls this cognitive disturbance the 'negation of representation in representation' which 'seems to extract precisely from the real, that is always disappointing, the supremacy of experience.' (Castellucci 2001: 97; present author's translation). In their work, this is not another holistic 'style [or] synthesis' but the 'result of intimacy: not the situation of our insertion into the world, but of the world's insertion into us.' (Castellucci 2001: 32; present author's translation). In this way, the sceno-*graphic* writing of space and bodies is two-fold: a processual, or procedural, 'undoing of writing in writing [which is] in turn undone by the





FIG.7

touch of the Outside' (Ricco 2002: 58) of the live event following the process of creation. Thus, before the scenographer enables 'grafting ourselves onto the world that surrounds us and opening this world within us' (Cache in Harris 2006: 42), he or she must invoke this phenomenal paradox as a disruption of his or her own bodied and cognitive make-up, now opened to speculations. | FIG.7 ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, PARADISO, 2009.

Cycloramic spatio-corporeality requires the scenographer to embody, pre-emptively and speculatively, a 'space reckoned starting from me as the zero point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it.' (Merleau-Ponty in Iles 2001: 72). By precluding the stability of a divisive visual field and animating the dis / connected restlessness of an affordant, or haptic, sensory field, the scenographic body (speculatively embodied in the scenographer, and projectively substantiated on stage) establishes the Posthuman conditions of a prosthetic co-extensiveness between body and space. Influencing Hayles' Posthuman theory, cybernetic theorist Francisco Varela has proposed 'autopoiesis' as a detailed explanation of such a critical body-environment dis / connected co-extension, or 'structural coupling' (Varela 1992: 336). To Varela, body and environment constitute an 'incarnated coupling by sensing and acting' (Varela in Hayles 1999: 157). In this spatio-corporeal coupling, the body negotiates its way through the environment according to two perceptual modes: a homeostatic and connected mode learnt by habit and which constitutes 'readiness-for-action' (Varela in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 135); and sensory actions that are disconnected, 'breakdowns [prone to catalyse] new modes of behaving' (Varela in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 328). In 'the moment *during a breakdown*' (Varela in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 329) the body's enactive response is 'shaping a world into significance [as it is] transform[ing] itself through emergent behaviour' (Hayles 1999: 223): just as 'the relationship between the actor and "this thing" ["scenery" or "props", can be] as inseparable as the guillotine' (Kantor 1961: 212).

Varela affirms that such an autopoietic contact 'actualizes the birth of the concrete' (Varela in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 329) since it follows the evolutionary path of earth, modulating between reiterated and disrupted cycles of events that slowly, but surely, mutate forms and diversity: a pulse that is not found under a 'law of repetition [or] recurrence [but, quite the contrary] this pulse involves the constant threat of interruption' (Krauss in Foster 1988: 67), it is 'not a good form, not a good gestalt [but] on / off on / off on / off [...] the oscillating presence and absence of contact' (Krauss in Foster 1988: 66). In Varela's account, the autopoietic relation body-environment is constitutive of the body-



FIG. 8

organism found within highly technological prosthetic situations (not a natural body-organism). The scenographic body is such a profoundly artificially enhanced bodied spatiality, which mixed-media conditions permits 'rejecting an organic notion of the integrated artwork [and thus] work[ing] against any residual belief in the body politic as an organic metaphor of naturally legitimated super- and sub- ordination' (Jay 2003: 172).

To conceive of a 'bodily space [as] the product of the double investment of the body by space [...] and the investment of space by the body' (Gil in Hansen 2002: 9) is an inherent counter-position to any hierarchical genesis of the body vis-à-vis space. It unleashes the 'ambiguity and variability of the body's modes of givenness' (Garner 1994: 5) as well as of space's modes of formations beyond the stability of forms. The crisis of vision produces a 'seeing that can no longer interpret,"' a 'shortcircuiting of the role of vision, such that the affective body is *literally* compelled to "space the void."' (Hansen 2002: 22) and exercise *the body's infralinguistic capacity to convert force into affect [which] explains how spacing can be understood as a dynamic operation of framing that manages to avoid grounding: an on-going embodied framing of space not as given in this or that form, but as processural* (Hansen 2002: 21)

Bodily space is a 'wearable space': 'a production of space from the standpoint of the body in which the body in effect forges an analogy where none preexists' (Hansen 2002: 21). As such, the autopoietic intimacy of this two-way mutability is opposed, as SRS suggests, to pre-established unilateral and normative codes of intimate relationality (military, religious, cultural). Cutting across those security systems of self-presence, Posthuman intimacy is a critically oblique and challenging 'intimacy with a process of becoming, not with a person' (Bersani & Phillips 2008: 114), in which the very opposition between sameness and difference becomes irrelevant as a structuring category of being' (Bersani & Phillips 2008: 86). Instead, the body is entangled in 'a non-dialectical double refusal that is "no-longer-being" and "not-yet-being" at once' (Ricco 2002: 41): a 'vertiginous tension between forward propulsion and objectival inertness' (Garner 1994: 9).

**Spacing the Void: Personal Praxis** | Those historical and conceptual frameworks have informed, in turn, the development of philosophical considerations pertaining to sensual phenomena, critical intimacies and cognitive collapse. Through practice, I seek to question, and hopefully answer: how far can vision be shortcircuited and haptic, tactile, perception be augmented as a result? Is there a limit to it? What exactly happens to a body no longer functioning on the primary basis of vision i.e. what is a haptically deployed body? How does the scenographer investigate, pre-emptively and speculatively, the intimate challenges at play in the scenographic body? How does he or she embody the multiperspectival positionality of bodied spatiality? How does he or she embody the black-box, and its syntaxic black-out, as part of a process of creation that is later on imparted onto an audience?

Having identified how the qualities of the scenographic body are initiated within the scenographer's process, even before their substantiations to an audience, the first (and on-going) phase of this practical research thus required from me to engage with a speculative practice of processual design: a proto-processual generative trajectory. As a lighting designer, and having identified the importance of electric lighting in the avant-gardes works discussed above, I undertook to focus 'the relation of light to [the] scene [...] akin to that of the bow of the violin, or of the pen to the paper' (Craig in Baugh 2005: 124). Following the Bauhaus' fusional incompletion of body, space and light, the





relation of light to space had to be hinged by the body as being a bow or pen. My practical research has so far developed a system of lighting founded on such principles but making use of current technologies of light and projection which are no longer merely electric but rather electronic and digital.

In collaboration with computer programmers / coders and digital developers, I have created a lighting apparatus reliant upon digital projectors and computer interfacing. This apparatus enables a tight two-way interaction between body and light that can more commonly be understood as *intelligent*. At its threshold, *Cycloramic Lighting*, is an autonomous system with a simple task: light is emitted from the digital projector whenever movement occurs in space, and only projected onto that which moves. When a body or an object stops moving, the light particles thrown onto it fade out. In stillness, one is immersed in darkness. One can only start apprehending some visual content as one moves or attends to something moving. As a result, the visual grasp of something is always, and only, the visual perception of kinesis and thus of the blur of shifting forms. No literally settled, stable, form can be optically grasped. Technically, *Cycloramic Lighting* is generated by a complex apparatus of computerized and algorhythmic interfacing of movement recognition and lighting projection. | FIG. 8 SIMON DONGER, CYCLORAMIC LIGHTING, (VIDEO STILL) 2009.

Indeed, the shortcircuiting of vision in *Cycloramic Lighting* compelled a radically haptic perception. Immersed in darkness, one becomes quickly aware that any singular movement of any body part will trigger lighting to appear on those very parts. One becomes a lighting board whereby every little bit of body surface is a switch, a button, and thus where the hand that was extended into the pen is now felt throughout the body: the body-as-hand in return impels a sensitivization of all bodily parts to the level of the hand's sensitivity. As one becomes critically aware of one's physical kinesis when moving, not moving is equally challenging for any shiver or slight bodily vibration activates the projection of shards of light. Thus one becomes aware that stillness is not a simple matter: complete stillness (not triggering any light) emerges as a need to calm down, almost bring to a halt, all internal, visceral activity, for the palpitation of organs (if too strong) will animate the flesh and skin slightly enough to activate light. Stillness becomes, like movement, a precise effort and control of one's entire body, inside out. (Figure 8)

*Cycloramic Lighting* also includes additional functions which enables it to unfold in less directly responsive ways. The system is currently developed further using algorhythms from clouds trailing so that once light is responsively triggered by movement and follows it tightly, it can also trail in any direction regardless of the direction of the body. Part of the lighting then is intelligent in terms of responsiveness, and part of it is intelligent in autonomous terms, and it is in this twofold deployment that it animates a two-way responsiveness from the body: the body can affect directly the light by means of a heightened awareness of one's body and motion, as well as engage with the light's trailing by adjusting to it an letting itself be further affected by light. In this two-way affective relationship, the body comes to reconsider its own material deployment in space in fragmentary and dizzying terms. It must awaken broader, unknown, aspects of its organic physicality. *Cycloramic Lighting* is thus a trigger for the mutation of bodily sensory-motor skills, and as one slowly adapts to the perceptual breakdowns and renovates one's habits, the lighting's trailing can be complicated so as to further accentuate compulsive stillness and distributed tactile sensitivity throughout the body. It is along those lines of affect and their

nurturing that this experimental practice is currently elaborated.

The phenomenal experience of *Cycloramic Lighting* articulated certain understandings found in contemporary philosophies concerned with the corporeality of sensual and sensory challenges. While those could have been disentangled on the basis of the historical research I undertook, the practical research taken in parallel provides a more conspicuous domain from which to expose certain philosophies. In particular, it led me to explore the theories of Emmanuel Levinas, Alphonso Lingis and Jean-Luc Nancy. In all three philosophers, no ontological assumption about the body-organism is made. Rather it is conceived in a critical and deregulating response to the body-politic, with a primary level of disjunction found in intimacy. Lingis' 'erotogenic' approach to corporeality is one of the 'pleasurable torment' (Lingis in Grosz 1995: 195) of a constant, and shifting, exchange of forms (and their evolving distortions) that grounds the alterity of self-other reciprocal relationality: "to sense something is to be sensitive to something, to feel a contact with it, to be affected by it" (Lingis 1986: 59), a 'level of sensation [that] would be the original locus of openness upon things, or contact with them" (Lingis 1986: 59). Cognitively, this is 'the most basic level [,] of intelligibility' (Lingis 1977: 37-63) where embodiment is a 'being inessential [...] an insubstantiality that does not contain its own resources but knows them only in the exposure to another' (Lingis in Rapaport 1994: 267). To Lingis, body-'Organisms [are] not [...] integrated sets of functions [but constitute] the anorganic body; the *orgasmic* body' (Lingis in Boundas and Olkowski 1994: 290): 'caressing hands not gathering information or uncovering secrets, belly and flanks and thighs in a contact that apprehends and holds onto nothing' (Lingis 1994: 222).

Lingis' 'voluptuous desire [which] fragments and dissolves the unity and utility of the organic body and the stabilized body-image' (Grosz 1995: 195) has ethical ramification in alterity in a similar fashion to Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of ethics. Levinas' conception of corporeality is equally pervaded by the speculative disturbance of incorporating the other in oneself: another critical 'caress [that] consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes its form toward a future never future enough' (Levinas 1969: 257). Self and other are entrenched in a 'relation without relation' (Levinas 1969: 79): 'to be in contact is neither to invest the other and annul his alterity, nor to suppress myself in the other' (Levinas 1998: 86). However, a 'defecting or defeat of the ego's identity' (Levinas 1998: 15) is required to enable the ethical alterity of taking 'responsibility for another' (Levinas 1998: 43). In Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy, a similar relational reciprocity is predicated upon a body or 'flesh that is *touched-touching*' (Derrida 2005: 100), and thus where 'the body is neither "signifier" nor "signified". It is exposing / exposed' (Nancy 2006: 24-5): a *'self-touching-you'* that is 'where the self is as indispensable as you' (Derrida 2005: 291)

Those philosophers have found discursive ways to account for a 'carnal experience [that] is uncertain [and] undirected' (Grosz 1995: 195) as the enrichment of sensory and sensuous bodily life. And such intimate corporeality can only be established at the heuristic cost of deflated subjectivities whereby 'narcissism would then find in the granite of things but a surface that would refer to men the echoes and reflections of their humanity' (Levinas 1998: 81). To the scenographer, engaging with the affects and alterity of such a spatio-corporeal revolution demands to address the threshold of the *scenographic body's* ethics of desire: a question of how can one give non-human form to that which has human form?





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# THE PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL AT THE INTERSECTION

**Nostalgia for Desire or: Perverted by Theatre as Well as Some Gaps**

By Sodja Zupanc Lotker

**Abstract** | The Prague Quadrennial (PQ), the largest international scenography exhibition, began in the Czech Republic in 1967. For the past decade, the Prague Quadrennial has been searching for a new *modus vivendi*, since it has lost one of its main aims – to gather artists from the East and West during the Cold War era. As the Artistic Director of the PQ, I see a revitalization of this major event in connection with what is at the core of scenography – the relationship between the visual and the performing arts. I am currently tracing contemporary relationships of fine arts to theatre and am proposing a curated event that will explore this relationship in an interactive installation-performance, called *Intersection*, at the PQ 2011. This chapter investigates curatorial development in the recent history of the Prague Quadrennial and discusses the relationship of fine art and theatre in current practice.

**I. The Prague Quadrennial** | The Prague Quadrennial is an international scenography exhibition that has been in existence in Prague since 1967. This event consists of exhibitions and live events presenting work in stage, costume, sound, and lighting design, as well as other performance design disciplines and theatre architecture made in the preceding four to six years. The exhibition is divided into three competitive sections: the Section of Nations and Regions – professional scenography work, the Student Section – work by students created at universities and academies, and the Architecture Section – theatre architecture and space for performance exhibition. The sections are divided into expositions of individual countries and regions. These expositions are curated, organized, and financed by organizations and institutions, artists, curators, and theorists from the individual countries. Seventy-three countries were represented at the last edition of the Prague Quadrennial in 2007.

The PQ occurs over ten days every four years, usually during the month of June. [1] Over the course of its history it has taken place in several different spaces in Prague including cultural center spaces and fairgrounds, and has, in recent years, been known to take place at the landmark Industrial Palace of the Exhibition Grounds in Prague. Unfortunately, the left wing of this art nouveau fairground building was burned to the ground in October 2008. For this reason two of the main sections will take place in the functionalist building of the National Gallery in Prague in 2011, the 12th edition of the PQ. [2]

Researching the history of the Prague Quadrennial as an event is a complex task as there is very little written about it. *Kronika Pražského quadriennale / Chronicles of the Prague Quadrennial* (2007) by Jarmila Gabrielová is a history of the organizational side of the event and is extremely informative when, for instance, it touches on the organizational challenges during communism. However, it does not describe artistic or curatorial intentions, or individual projects





and exhibitions. *The Mirror of the World* (1995) by Věra Ptáčková is a critical overview of work exhibited at the Prague Quadrennial between 1967 and 1991, as is *A Mirror of World Theatre II* (2001) by Bíková et al. which describes work exhibited at PQ '95 and PQ '99. Both of these publications focus on work exhibited in the individual exhibitions and thus create fragments of a history of theatre scenography, but they do not explore the artistic direction of the event itself. The main reason for this might be that, until recently, the PQ relied mainly on work presented in the 'national' expositions and did not attempt to have its own artistic character.

As yet, there is no source that describes the history of the curatorial background of this major international scenography exhibition, of the shifts that were made in the raison *d'être* of the exhibition and its artistic foci and directions over the course of its history. Such a study would be of inconceivable value for my work as Artistic Director of the Prague Quadrennial at a time when the Prague Quadrennial is attempting major changes, creating its own artistic features, and presenting its own curated exhibitions and live events.

This chapter describes the historical, cultural and political background of the PQ and discusses current issues – the contemporary *intersections* (places in time where choices have to be made) where the Prague Quadrennial now finds itself. This chapter is conceptualized as a curator's scrapbook and will connect diverse ideas and questions quite loosely in an attempt to present the scope of issues connected to the Prague Quadrennial and its 2011 focus project, the *Intersection*, rather than giving firm, if theoretical solutions.

**II. The Prague Quadrennial's Past** | The very beginnings of the Prague Quadrennial are tightly connected to the visual arts Bienal de São Paulo (Biennale of Visual Art). Scenography was represented for the first time in the 4th edition of the Bienal de São Paulo in 1957. For the 1959 edition, the curators were invited to present scenography as a discipline equal to the visual arts in their expositions.

New practices were rising in the theatre in the Czech Republic, which was going through a liberal phase of communism during the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, with stage directors such as Otomar Krejča, Alfréd Radok, and Jan Grossman, who had begun to use visual and spatial aspects as important theatrical elements. This environment made room for experimentation in scenography, which led, for instance, to the creation of Josef Svoboda's polyecran, a multiple-screen projection that was the key dramaturgical element of a number of performances of that time. At the Bienal de São Paulo 1959, the Czech exposition presenting scenography won the Best Foreign Exposition award and architect František Troster won the Golden Medal for Best Foreign Scenographer. In 1961 the same award was given to Josef Svoboda and subsequently in 1963 to scenographer Jiří Trnka.

The success of the Czech expositions inspired the organizers of the Bienal de São Paulo to want to create a counterpart in Europe and present the whole Bienal in Prague. This idea proved to be organizationally impossible to do and it was decided that a smaller version of the Bienal should be created in Prague, focusing on scenography. The first Prague Quadrennial took place in Prague in 1967.

The second Prague Quadrennial, in 1971, took place during the time of the strongest communist 'normalization' era [3] and it was organized under extremely difficult conditions. At that time, for example, each international telephone call at the time had to be officially approved by the Theatre Institute Director and it took days and sometimes weeks for the paperwork to go through the system. There was very little artistic

freedom allowed until the Velvet Revolution [4] in 1989. Nevertheless, throughout the 1970's and 1980's the Prague Quadrennial was one of the rare places in the world where artists from the East and West could meet, and it presented some of most progressive work in scenography from around the world. The reasons why the Czechoslovakian Communist government tolerated the exchange with foreign artists at that time are yet to be researched. One of the likely reasons was that, at the time, scenography was considered an unimportant discipline. The main reason was likely that the Quadrennial always was an event of the Ministry of Culture, organizationally led by one of the biggest state theatre institutions, the Theatre Institute, and was as such under direct guard of the state.

The importance of the Prague Quadrennial was such that at the time it led, for instance, to the establishment of OISTAT, the International Organization of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians. [5] The fact that in 1979 it was possible to give the Golden Triga, – the main award of the Quadrennial – to the exposition of Great Britain in the midst of the political 'normalization' and the Cold War was rather miraculous.

After the fall of communism in 1989, the Prague Quadrennial lost an important feature – being the social gathering point of the world's theatre practitioners – and it took some time to realize that it would have to change direction. The very existence of the event as a gathering point was not enough.

The fast development of media and telecommunications at the very end of the twentieth century deepened the crisis. Artists and experts from East and West could travel anywhere to work in other countries, but they could also simply go to the Internet and find information and pictures about their colleague's work.

The act of organizing a large number of countries to exhibit their work was not enough – a deeper curatorial and artistic focus and direction was needed. Thus, during the 1990's, when the post-communist world was preoccupied with its newly gained freedom, the Prague Quadrennial was going through a crisis. In 1999 the first hints of a new artistic direction appeared in the form of two projects, *Le Campement* and the *LightLab*. *Le Campement*, an accompanying theatre festival, was an encampment of two tents and one cottage as well as a number of trailers and other mobile architecture from of the Industrial Palace where the Prague Quadrennial traditionally took place. This project showed new theatre trends and practices mainly from the Czech Republic and France, including progressive theatre work from the Forman Brothers, Théâtre du Radeau and choreographer Maguy Marin, which was curated by Pavel Storek. The *LightLab* project was a working space for lighting design with performance, workshops, and presentations that introduced lighting design to the PQ for the first time. This project was led by Czech scenographer and educator Tomas Zizka.

This was the first time that the Prague Quadrennial included a curated program of live performances and a curated program of discussions and workshops. Nevertheless, creating a theatre festival within the Quadrennial proved not to be an ideal way to rejuvenate the event. The theatre festival was not connected to the roots of the event, which lies in the scenography exhibitions of the national curators. The PQ did not look for solutions on how or why to exhibit scenography, but simply created another event that could exist on its own. What it did show was that the Quadrennial should not exist without some form of live events, and presenting of scenography in the context of live performance.

In the 10th edition of the Quadrennial in 2003, *The Heart of the Prague Quadrennial* project – an interactive installation / performance and a living architectural space – was an attempt to present live events in





an exhibition setting. The project took up over 1.800 m² of the Central Hall of the Industrial Palace. It presented over thirty international theatre groups and artists working with the five human senses for twenty-five days, thus creating an on-going performance experience in an exhibition setting from morning to night. The project focused on presenting an experimental, edgy side of contemporary theatre and included the work of the Akhe Group from Russia, Carol Brown from the United Kingdom, the Mau Company from Samoa, Kyzyl Traktor from Kazachstan, Doug Fitch and Mimi Oka from the US, and Monkey's Wedding from South Africa, among others. *The Heart of PQ* was led by Tomas Zizka and the main architect of the event was Dorita Hannah from New Zealand. [6]

This ambitious project was on the verge of sociological experimentation of the coexistence of different theatre 'tribes'. It won the hearts of most experimental theatre spectators, some of whom kept coming back, making it their home. The project, however, did fail to connect to the core spectatorship of the Quadrennial, the *National Curators* and average visitors. It was simply too experimental and 'unclear'; it required interaction, curiosity, and patience from the audience. Unfortunately, for its extreme experimental nature it was considered an accompanying project to the event and not the *heart* of the event, as was intended. Though at first it seemed that the project did not reach its goals, the Quadrennial 2007 solidified the long-term impact that the project had, in both the content of the exhibitions and in ways of exhibiting.

In 2003, another important PQ project was created for the first time – the *Scenofest* – a project for further education of students and young artists, including workshops, presentations, and performances. Scenofest was co-organized by OISTAT and created and curated by British scenographer and educator Pamela Howard. In 2007 the Scenofest project was enlarged and made into the main focus of the event, with over 5,000 students attending the workshops and other events. The aim was to focus on the future of scenography rather than the exploration of the current state.

The Prague Quadrennial 2007 also included performances in public spaces in the centre of Prague. The idea was to explore public space as scenography and look for new spaces and audiences for performance. Work was presented from a variety of disciplines and artists, including Lucy Orta, William Pope, Pat Oleszko, Alistair MacLennan, Angie Hiesl, Tomáš Ruller, Jana Preková, and many others. All of these projects were aimed at reconnecting the Quadrennial to theatre events and live events, as well as to a larger variety of theatre professions and new audience members.

The most influential change made for the 2007 edition was that one of original sections, the Thematic Section, was abandoned. Traditionally, the Thematic Section had been organized and curated by the National Curators. Every edition of the PQ proposed a different theme to the National Curators. For example, past themes included Mozart, Chekhov, and Shakespeare. These themes were considered limiting, focusing only on mainstream theatre genres, and were culturally western. In 2004 the PQ team, led by General Commissioner and US-American theatre scholar Arnold Aronson, with the consultation of researcher and curator, Marie Bílková, decided to propose a very different approach. The National Curators were invited to propose their own theme within the National Section and to present strong curatorial concepts, thereby presenting issues connected to theatre that were unique and important in their country at the time. This was revolutionary for the National Sections, which usually included retrospective or salon-type expositions that included many artists and many works that were very loosely connected.

In 2008 the event title, 'Prague Quadrennial International Exhibition of Scenography and Theatre Architecture' was changed to 'Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space' – a title proposed by Arnold Aronson. The change was made for two reasons: first, to abandon the limiting word *exhibition* – as the Quadrennial was becoming a more complex event - and second, to promote the word *performance*. This helped to open the event for inclusion of more performance disciplines and genres beyond traditionally exhibited scenography work in opera, dance, and drama in set, costume, lighting, and sound design.

**III. The Prague Quadrennial Gaps** | The Prague Quadrennial, as an event, is built on certain dualities, paradoxes of a sort that I will refer to here as gaps – gaps as in empty spaces between things; spaces to be crossed or filled. These gaps are also the main focus of my research connected to the event and are, in my opinion, crucial for the future of the PQ.

The first gap is the very issue of exhibiting scenography. Scenography, especially scenography for drama, opera, and dance, can never be exhibited as a whole – as the art piece itself. What is exhibited is usually documentation – photos, videos, sketches, or models – working materials, which could be considered art pieces but are usually originally created only as a tool to develop the actual art pieces.

Even if we manage to find a gallery large enough to fit the whole set, we will still come across a major problem. The set was made for a certain script, certain light, and certain bodies dressed in costume. Scenography is part of the totality of a performance, and the relationships of its individual elements (acting, scenography, costume, light, etc.). So unlike the visual arts, where the piece of art itself can be exhibited, scenography represented within an exhibition needs different curatorial strategies, since it has to be taken out of its original context.

Individual elements of performance design are created for live performance and lose their totality when taken out of context of the other elements. For instance, a certain colour is used with a specific light in mind, or a specific material is chosen with a certain distance from the viewer in mind, both of which would be lost in an exhibition environment. More to the point, every scenography is made with a strong dimension of time in mind within a script or a narrative. Scenography gains 'life' in the duration of a performance. It becomes a living thing with multiple faces, a series of spaces, places, themes, and moods that are directly connected to the overall dramaturgy of the performance; a composition taking place not only in space but also in time.

In exhibiting scenography, all of the above-mentioned elements that create context are lost and new elements have to be found in order to recreate old or create new contexts and meaning. New *here and now*, as well as new audiences, have to be addressed. Tim Etchell's talks about this recreation when describing what action performer, Wendy Houston, did at the conference on documentation and performance, which was organized by Lancaster University and the Centre for Performance Research. The example comes from the context of dance, but it is a good illustration for the idea of finding new meanings in re-representing elements of performance, essentially in the documentation of a performance: *Wendy Houston (DV8) begins by moving in the space – the half formed gestures of some dance that she hasn't yet made, a jumble of phrases that she will dance in the future but which for now are only a body's way of thinking aloud. As she moves she talks - [...] Without explanation she asks for the audience to call out years – anything from 1959 to the present day. After some time the calls begin. As they call she responds – changing the pattern of what she's doing, associating, recollecting, adding new moves and remembrances, new energies, still talking as she goes. Audience: 1983 Houston (still moving): It was kinda like and I remember I had to do this and had to fall and uhhh (knocks the breathe from herself, falling) and uhh I [...] It's compelling because here the document is a body remembering itself and a voice describing itself.* (Etchells 1999: 71–76)

Exhibiting scenography opposes what is the most valuable, special, and specific for theatre and performance – that it is temporary. Performances are made to be done at a specific place and a specific time, for a specific audience. As performance takes place it is being 'born' and is 'dying' at the same time. This fragility, the constant reinvention, recreation, and self-destruction, is what is so unique to the performing arts as well as scenography. This aspect was borrowed by the visual artists when creating the happenings in the 60's, and later on became one of the main features of contemporary arts in live art, performance art, and body art. The paradox of exhibiting (and documenting) performance is especially visible in connection to the visual artists' performance disciplines. The happenings of the 1960's were created as a rebellion against the consumer world in which art could be sold. They were created as ephemeral, ungraspable works of art that never became a product to be owned.

**IV. Scenography as a discipline between visual arts and theatre / Theatre as a dirty word** | The second gap the Prague Quadrennial is connected to is the fact that scenography is a discipline in-between the visual arts and theatre. It is studied at theatre, visual, and design schools. Unfortunately, scenographers are traditionally considered visual artists working for theatre people. The Prague Quadrennial aims to look at scenography and scenographers not as a service to directors, but as equal artistic *co-creators* of the totality of performance as well as being artists in their own right and *authors* of scenographic, installation, and performance projects. The exploration of this gap includes a look at the historically long relationship between the visual and performing arts and artists. The words of American visual arts critic Michael Fried about theatre come as a shock to theatre people and describe this complex relationship in its most extreme view: In his 1967 essay *Art and Objecthood*, art critic Michael Fried established as his central thesis *'"theater's profound hostility to the arts: theater and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture) but with art as such." Art was being "corrupted or perverted by theater." Theater threatened art through its "sense of temporality" and, even worse, "theater has an audience – it exists for one – in a way the other arts do not." Fried tied the audience to the creation of the subject / object relationship in the experience of art, which was like "being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another person." The purported horror of theater and its human presence, temporal dimension, and dialectical subject / object relationship were thus, according to Fried, the "negation of art."'* (Fried in Evans and Young 2008: 1)

My use of a secondary quote serves a purpose: I first came across Michael Fried's ideas through the reading of the curatorial statement by Franklin Evans and Paul David Young for their 2008 exhibition *Perverted by Theatre*. This exhibition at Apex Art gallery in New York presented visual art works that included existing *for one* and *working the presence of the spectator*, and thus, in a way, defended theatricality.

Theatre's traditions of *existing for one* and *the presence of audience* are one of the main, but not the

only reasons that a conflict exists with the visual arts as well as with philosophy. There has been deep antagonism toward *non-authenticity* and representational aspects connected with theatre since Plato. Theatre is mimetic. It is about *role playing* and creating *'as if' situations* that are considered to mirror the fakery of systems of society and people's characters. The same mimesis is considered by theatre makers to be the tool with which to reach deeper truths and create complex metaphors. Negative connotations of displaying the human body on stage have for centuries been theatre's curse, thereby connecting actors and other theatre makers to the lowest rank in human hierarchy: next to prostitutes and criminals.

The modernist age, especially during the twentieth century, intensified such a hostility with its obsession with authenticity and realism. Theatrical *spectacles* as a major totalitarian political instrument, not only a fascist and communist movement, have further strengthened the distrust of theatre methods.

The singleness of the gaze in the traditional theatre constellation is also often criticized both by visual artists as well as theatre makers themselves. This criticism looks upon the spectator as being 'locked' both in space and time to watching and listening to a narrative (usually) told from a single point of view. A number of contemporary theatre artists now invent new strategies to make the encounter with the audience more complex by creating new relationships with regard to time and space, as well as creating interactive performances in which the audiences become the co-creators of the work and in that sense become equal in the dialogue, thus creating new performance frames both spatially and mentally.

The relationship of visual arts to theatre throughout the twentieth century was intense, hostile as well as mutually inspirational. Performativity, or live action, became one of the main features of visual arts during the last century, including Dada and Futurist interventions and scandals, Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* of 1922, action painting, the happenings and performances of the 1960s, body, durational, and performance art of the 1970s and 1980s in the US, and later live art in the UK as well as the relational aesthetics of more recent years. Performances created by visual artists during the twentieth century did not necessarily become theatre; they mainly became *non-dramatic* events, theatre without theatre, by using the temporary and fragility of theatre and avoiding theatricality and theatrical illusions.

Theatre itself also went through many changes during the twentieth century, and visual artists and scenographers were some of the most important influences of that change. With the influence of Craig, Appia, Artaud, Kantor, and Witkiewitz, theatre has moved away from the dramatic, narrative, realistic, and psychological: *At the heart of acting are perhaps not so much the transmission of meanings but the archaic pleasure / fear (Angst / Lust) of play, of metamorphosis as such [...] Theatre is transformation at all levels, metamorphosis, and it is worth taking to heart the insight of theatre anthropology that under the conventional scheme of action there is the more general structure of transformation. This explains why abandoning the model of "mimesis of action" by no means leads to the end of theatre.* (Lehmann 1996: 77)

In this new, post-dramatic theatre of metamorphosis, no longer mainly based on the dramatic text, scenography unfolds toward a *visual dramaturgy* – often the core of the performance - where dialogue is no longer the main tool of communication.

Artists such as Salvador Dalì and Paul Klee created scenography and puppets for theatre. Picasso wrote surrealist plays. But the most important influence on contemporary theatre came from artists who





were from the visual arts and architecture worlds and were fine theatre artists in their own right, including Tadeusz Kantor, Robert Wilson, and Romeo Castellucci. These artists are some of the most important creators of contemporary theatre in which the text, the play, the narrative, and the dramatic dialogue are not the spine of the performance. By strengthening the visual aspect of performance, among other things, they have created a new complete performance in which all elements, verbal, sonic, visual, spatial, and gesticular, are equal narrators of the script.

**V. Theatre as a metaphor / Theatre as Ultimate Desire; the Ultimate Transgressive Place** | The past decade has seen a number of large-scale visual arts exhibitions concerned with performativity and theatricality. *World as a Stage* (2008) curated by J. Morgan and C. Wood for the Tate modern Gallery in London presented some of the most important artists of the younger generation who showed a 'willingness to reintroduce elements of narrative, figuration, theatre' (Wood 2007: 25) using performance as a tool for researching and imagining new social arrangements. *Teatro Sin Teatro / Theatre Without Theatre* (2007) curated by Bernard Blistène and Yann Chateigné for the Museu d'Art Contemporani in Barcelona explored influences of theatrical language on the non-dramatic performances of visual artists. The previously mentioned exhibition *Perverted by Theatre* at Apex Art in New York in 2008 presented art objects, pictures, and paintings in their mode of *existing for one* and *being there for the audience*.

Other exhibitions include In *Praise of Shadow* (2008) curated by Paolo Colombo for the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. In Praise of Shadow was inspired by Karagöz - traditional Turkish shadow puppetry - and presented work by William Kentridge, Jockum Nordström, and Kara Walker. *The World as Stage* (2009) curated by Solvej Helweg Ovesen at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein explored performativity in everyday life, and *Little Theatre of Gestures* (2009) curated by Nikola Dietrich for the Museum für Gegenwartskunst explored the theatricality of objects and bodies, both staged in time and active in daily life.

Acting, make-up, auditoriums, and characters have all become metaphors for contemporary social and psychological issues in the works of visual artists Rita McBride, Tom Burr, and Catherine Sullivan. In Markus Schinwald's work, giant puppets became metaphors for our inability to influence things. Schinwald also researched opposite themes in *A Stage Matrix* (2007) where – in an interactive scenography exhibition including indefinite spatial variations – he made the audience the co-creator of space. Ulla von Brandenburg, a scenographer and visual artist with a deep sense of theatrical space, combined and created harmonies between the spectator's space, the architectural space, and the performance space in the video, *Singspiel* (2009). Nathaniel Mellors, in his project *Giantbum* (2009), created a parallel world of theatre, film and art gallery in his desire to explore words and their performativity.

The same desire to explore words and what they can do influenced some of the most important Czech contemporary visual artists to work in the theatre, because in theatre words come to life. Jan Mančuška has written and directed plays for both theatrical and site-specific spaces. Josef Bolf has written a play for puppets as well as designed a set for *The House of Bernarda Alba* (2009), and Michal Pěchouček has written and directed plays and performed in a number of experimental theatre performances, primarily at the Alfred ve Dvoře theatre and the Meetfactory art space.

Jessica Morgan, curator of *The World as Stage* at the Tate Modern, says, *The World as Stage highlights*

*the plight of the individual in this spectacularised society, offering the dramatized and staged as a potential critique, rehearsal or analysis of our search for an understanding of our place and position in the world.* (Morgan 2007:7)

However, the need to explore theatre in visual arts goes beyond this. Many of these artists do not simply critique and they do not put themselves in the role of the *outsider*. They are insiders exploring from within, combining their critiques with a deeper *insiders´ understanding of* things. This understanding is particularly visible in the work of the post-communist generation of Polish artists, such as Artur Zmijwski, Pawel Althamer, and Katarzyna Koyzra. Artur Zmijewski says, *I don't feel a vocation for saving and reforming the world. To the contrary, I closely watch its mistakes, which greatly stimulate my art [...] Searching for the essence of this attitude I prefer [...] to refer to a sense of contempt for the forces ruling the world, and to that spiritual state, of high intellectual and artistic quality, I believe, in which we decide to acknowledge the existence of evil when we had earlier rejected the too easy notion of goodness and the too conventional one of beauty.* (Zmijewski Wien 2005: 24)

Theatre, with its red curtains, proscenium stage, role-playing, intermissions, prologues, and epilogues, appears not only as something to be critiqued, but also as something that should be entered. The theatre, a space of desire, seems to be the ultimate space of transgression, a predisposed space of failure. It is a forbidden and forgotten gap in the art world; possibly the last place of freedom for visual artists struggling with the hermetic art world dictated by the art market. Entering this gap, this space of desire, brings with it a certain feeling of nostalgia. Many of the above mentioned visual artists create theatre with its nineteenth century elements, the same nineteenth century theatre that was criticized in the first place: classical marionettes, red curtains, operas, plays with dialogue and characters, etc. But by using these elements as tools to create a metaphor, their meaning is revitalized.

In *Isola Bella* (2007 / 2008), a video work by Danica Dakić, a Bosnian born visual artist, forty residents of a care home for the mentally and physically handicapped in Pazarić, Bosnia became the protagonists. Panoramic wallpapers became their set, waiting room chairs became their auditorium and Victorian paper masks became their 'identities'. The residents did not speak a pre-scribed text, and did not perform roles. The theatrical setting helped the handicapped residents loose their feelings of shame and fear (since it was just role playing) and talk more about themselves and their experiences. The setting also helped the audience watch. Theatricality, in this situation, was not a tool for deception, but became a tool – like court fools in the Middle Ages – for uncovering sometimes painful truths. Danica Dakić is currently exploring *Role-Taking, Role-Making* (Generali Foundation, Vienna 2010) not only as a contemporary issue of identity but in a determinist, tragic sense: that our prescribed character is our destiny.

Theatre as a metaphor, as often represented in the visual arts today, obviously does not only posit a critique of theatre, of the role playing and the pretty sets. Has contemporary theatre become a kind of a 'no man's land'? Is this space of desire only desired because it is not desired by most and is vacant and free? Or is there a deeper need / nostalgia for theatre? For what reason? Nostalgia for narrative? Nostalgia for metaphor? Where does this need for role-playing, illusions, and naïveté come from?

The Romanian philosopher Cioran wrote in the last century: *What will be the physiognomy of painting, of poetry of music, in a hundred years? No one can tell. As after the fall of Athens, of Rome, a long pause will intervene, caused by the exhaustion of means of expression, as well as but the exhaustion of consciousness itself. Humanity to rejoin the past, must invent a second naïveté, without which the arts can never begin again.* (Cioran in Read 2008: 14)





Is the theatre, the 'last human venue' as Alan Read calls it (Read 2008), a venue of naïveté, which has been so despised for a long time? And is naïveté needed for engagement with arts and with other humans?

**VI. Intersection** | The *Intersection: Intimacy and Spectacle* project will be the core project of the Prague Quadrennial 2011. It is a complex project with a series of introductory symposia and post-PQ events and a main installation. This installation will take place in a semi-public pizzetta in between the National Theatre and the Laterna Magika theatre in Prague, important spaces in the history of Czech, as well as world theatre. It will consist of thirty *white cubes / black boxes*.

They will be built to explore the idea of an ideal gallery and an ideal theatre space. They will be very small in size – a maximum of 4 m x 4 m – and together will create one architectural body, one utopian, multifunctioning space for the installation / performance. The Intersection space will also be a gathering space with a bar and a cinema, thus having a double life, the inner *artistic* life and the outer *social* life.

The inside of the boxes will house thirty performance projects working with notions of *spectacle* and *intimacy* from different theatrical and visual art fields including, theatre, dance, installation art, video art, fashion, photography, performance art, pop, and wordplay, among others. The artistic projects presented in the boxes and in the cinema will be selected to challenge the idea of disciplines within contemporary performance. It will look into performance as an anti-disciplinary activity present in many human art and life activities.

*Intersection* will both play with the question of how to exhibit scenography as well as with the issues of the relationship between visual arts and theatre today. Besides the complex relationship between visual art and theatre and performance, one of the main themes of the project will include space and its existence as a co-creator of the relationship between audience / spectator and performance / piece of art. *Intersection* will look at both the 'intimacy' and 'spectacle' sides of this relationship as well as at the psychological and sociological role of the audience.

Both gaps, the *impossibility of exhibiting scenography* and the *relationship between theatre and visual arts*, have been crucial to the history of the Prague Quadrennial and its very beginnings connected to the Bienal de São Paulo. The study and engagement of these gaps are also vital to the ongoing development of the Prague Quadrennial.

Its future lies in the need to engage and connect within performance as well as within the event, and the desire to do the impossible – to exhibit the unexhibitable.

## Endnotes

1 Prior to 2007 the Quadrennial usually lasted more than two weeks: in 1999, 20 days and in 2003, 17 days.

2 www.pq.cz

3 'Normalization' is the official title for 'cleanups' within the communist party, including censorship and dissolution of a number of political and other interest groups. Additional repressive measures took place throughout the 1970's and 1980's after the Prague Spring invasion in 1968, during which there was a strong Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia.

4 The Velvet Revolution was a non-violent revolt in Czechoslovakia that overthrew the Communist government in 1989.

5 The Organisation Internationale des Scénographes, Techniciens et Architectes de Théâtre was established in 1968.

6 In the past I have acted as Programming Director for The Heart of the PQ project.

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Little Theatre of Gestures, Dietrich N., Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, May 16 – August 15, 2009.

# BUILDING BABEL

**Making Architecture Tremble**

By Dorita Hannah

**Abstract** | 'Building Babel' considers what it means to 'make architecture tremble'. This refers to Elizabeth Grosz's reformulation of the Deleuzean call to make language tremble in order to transform building from static object to dynamic action, thereby rendering architecture and its discursive field more temporal, mobile and volatile. Such an emphasis on undermining architectural fixity in favour of spatial performativity echoes provocations made last century by Europe's historical avant-garde, who aimed to undermine the stability and containability of spaces designed for performance. Their theatrical will-to-destruction, which challenged modernism's architectural will-to-creation, was prefigured in Friedrich Nietzsche's first publication, *Die Geburt der Tragödie / The Birth of Tragedy* (1872): a treatise that, in challenging Apollonian vision with the excesses of a Dionysian sensorium, undermined the firm foundations of classicism upon which architectural and theatrical histories were founded. This unstable ground is revealed in Edward Albee's tragicomedy *The Goat, or, Who is Sylvia?* (2003): a play that introduces bestial desire as a means of enacting the failure of building and master builder, causing both language and architecture to tremble. The chapter – accompanied by images of a sceno-architecture designed by the author for the 2003 Prague Quadrennial – concludes by positing the Tower of Babel as a powerful trope that productively destabilizes architecture in order to create alternative modes of housing and un-housing performance.

**Event-Space** | As a scenographer and theatre architect, one of my ongoing projects has been to develop Bernard Tschumi's notion of *event-space*,[1] bridging performance and architectural theory, in order to consider architectural performativity generally and performance space specifically. My design practice has utilized what I call 'sceno-architecture' – fleeting constructions in exhibitions and events – as embodied spatiotemporal research to propose alternative models for housing and staging performance. In 2003 I worked on an international project for the Prague Quadrennial (a four-yearly global exposition on scenography and theatre architecture), called *SRDCE: The Heart of PQ,* where the inevitable challenges of inter-cultural communication got me thinking about the Tower of Babel, not only as a site of mis-translation, but as a productive model for a misbehaving architecture that reveals an intrinsic desire for spatial destabilization through mis-performance.

*SRDCE: The Heart of PQ* was a site-specific installation – referred to as a 'Performance Landscape for the Senses' – that involved a two-year process working with a range of performers from different countries and continents to create a labyrinthine environment, composed of a series of towers set within undulating timber platforms, which displayed performance space and design as presentational rather than representational: as a live communal experience. The project was on one hand, a utopian idea fated to fail and, on the other hand, a dystopian experiment where failure was productive. Differing languages, cultural practices and spatial conventions led to misinterpretations during the process and the production. Like the mythical city of Babel it proved an unsustainable dream, resulting in confusion, tension and the pervasive threat of collapse. Yet within this provisional environment, negotiating between architecture and scenography, resides the promise of architecture's inability to behave with propriety and the performing body's inability to be securely contained. | ALL FIGURES

Like *The Heart of PQ*, which forms a visual text for this chapter, I will construct an argument that the inherently spaced-out body in performance (that of the singular performer and collective audience) is matched by architecture's inevitable failure, which opens up possibilities for seeing space as an intricate event that vacillates between safe refuge and existential vacuum. The place they cohere is a paradoxical space, both material and immaterial, where pleasure and terror can coexist: a space of metaphorical and literal trembling. Perhaps within this space of desire and its continual foreclosure lies the elusive transformative element that bridges between the 'I' and the 'Other'.

**Making architecture Tremble** | *In Architecture from the Outside,* contemporary philosopher Elizabeth Grosz throws down a challenge for architects to unsettle architecture and make it 'if not stutter, then tremble' (Grosz 2000: 93).[2] While this challenge renders architecture performative, it also disturbs the discipline's traditional focus on 'high performance', where any faltering and agitation is to be avoided at all costs and where the proposition of failure has high political, economic and legal stakes that tend to be couched in terms of health and safety. Unlike the ephemeral and volatile acts of theatrical performance, architecture has long been associated with the qualities of cohesion, endurance and fixity; a legacy that reached its apotheosis mid-last century with the Modern Movement's utopian desire to create a unified stability through spatial homogeneity and scientific rationality, despite the evidence that the time of architecture was no longer detained as a petrified and timeless present. While theatre addressed the pervading psychosis and revolutionary fervour by literally playing it out, architecture reacted by attempting to make whole that which was shattered and establishing utopian ideals that had little place for the ideals of the theatrical avant-garde. As performance became more visceral, architecture became more disembodied. As art movements split into multiple groups, architecture tended to focus on the steady progress of its own modernism and the universal philosophy of a developing 'international style.'

Yet even as the Modern Movement sought to industrialize, control and harmonize space, the avant-garde wished to radically undermine it, celebrating the sacrificial body dancing amid the debris. This transformation of architecture from a disciplinary machine to an open-ended volatile form of space-in-action was what Antonin Artaud sought in his quest for a Theatre of Cruelty, not just as art form but also as built form. Georges Bataille's notion of the *informe* (formless) – 'a term that serves to bring things down in the world' – further challenged the built form and architecture's will to make the world safe and sound (Bataille 1985: 31). Such a theatrical will-to-destruction – standing in opposition to an architectural will-to-creation – was prefigured by Friedrich Nietzsche, whose 1872 treatise, *Die Geburt der Tragödie / The Birth of Tragedy*, embodied the violent transition into a new century by calling for a return to the intoxication and excesses of ancient Dionysian rites in Greek performance in order to compensate an overemphasis on Apollonian form and vision.

It is Nietzsche who informs the argument in this chapter, structured not only around how building fails us, but how an architect's mis-performance reveals the unstable ground architecture has always depended on. Edward Albee's play *The Goat, or, Who is Sylvia?* (2003) – in which an architect at the height of his career enacts a fall through his bestial desire – is central to my discussion on the possibilities of destabilizing architecture in order to create alternative modes of housing and unhousing performance.

**Nietzsche's Architect(ure)** | In 1881 Nietzsche wrote on architecture: *If we desired and dared an architecture corresponding to the nature of our soul (we are too*

*cowardly for it!) – our model would have to be the labyrinth!* (1997:104)

Seven years later in *Götzendämmerung / Twilight of the Idols* he 'sounded out' legendary characters and iconic figures, including the architect, who occupies the same section as the artist. However, the artist as actor, mime, dancer, musician and poet – once one and the same figure, combining Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies – is separate from the architect, portrayed as a wilful character implicated in the construction and expression of history's powers: *The architect represents neither a Dionysian nor an Apollonian state: here it is the great act of will, the will that moves mountains, the frenzy of the great will which aspires to art. The most powerful human beings have always inspired architects; the architect has always been under the spell of power. Architecture is a kind of eloquence of power in forms – now persuading, even flattering, now only commanding* (Nietzsche 1954: 520).

Although Nietzsche was mindful of architecture's potential, as a form of power, to mediate between the creative and destructive forces upon which his philosophy was built, the Nietzschean architect (working for the status quo) forecloses on Nietzschean architecture (working against the status quo), just as modernist architects struggled to achieve avant-garde event-spaces. Through advocating a return to the choric space of the ancient Greek Theatre he desired to undermine the monumental form of the multilevel bourgeois theatre with its framed proscenium stage by introducing what Una Chaudhuri calls a 'rule of disorder' (Chuadhuri 1995: 21).

Stefan Zweig (1993: 455) wrote of Nietzsche 'his drama was played to a finish before empty seats'. Yet modernism's philosopher of crisis took centre stage in calling for a radical reworking of the space of the event. His own stage was neither centred nor framed before a baroque or even modernist auditorium. Nietzsche's alter ego, the madman in the marketplace who declares God's death and therefore the end of mimetic representation, occupies what Derrida names 'the space of dis-traction' (1986: 336). As *'the one who is spacy, or spaced out,'* he cannot be housed and is obliged to wander (Derrida 1996: 336). Like Dionysus, Nietzsche came to shatter form. Replacing perspectival construction with the multiplicity of perspectivism, he wished to transform the 'herd' into a reflective community that is no longer dominated by a singular totalizing reality but could occupy and create multiple realities with varying interpretations of existence. Rather than distant viewers in the theatron they were choric participants in the *agora;* those wanderers who strayed from the proper site of theatre, once held in suspicion by Plato.

Nietzsche deliberately critiqued the Apollonian 'architectonics' of Doric art, which denied the natural instincts and savage excesses of the Dionysian festival, 'that horrible mixture of sensuality and cruelty' (Nietzsche 2000:39). Through the performance of the Dionysian dithyramb, a visceral and ecstatic dancing body undermined architectonic control, causing astonishment in the Apollonian Greek 'mingled with the shuddering suspicion that all this was not so very alien to him after all, in fact, that it was only his Apollonian consciousness which, like a veil, hid his Dionysian world from his vision' (Nietzsche 2000: 41). The communal shudder that trespasses on consciousness is a visceral experience, underscoring how the Dionysian exceeds vision, just as the dance exceeds space. The ecstatic sensorium of the performing body displaces the more static ocularcentricism of architecture, undermining its stability with Zarathustra's 'dancing-mad feet' (Nietzsche 1966: 224). As Mark Wigley contends of Nietzsche's dance, it 'disrupts the spatial regime by locating something aspatial within it' (Wigley 1995: 159). The dance contains a phantasmatic promise of theatre's virtuality that troubles architecture's secure spatiality.





The inherent excesses of performance – exposed by Nietzsche in laughter and play as well as in the dance – mobilized 'things' as multiple and eventual, and weakened the basis upon which thought itself had previously been constructed. In *The Architecture of Deconstruction*, Wigley names this philosophical instability the 'edifice complex' where metaphysics, as a sound structure erected on secure foundations and stable ground, is threatened because the ground is no longer considered stable (Wigley 1995: 7-9). Nietzsche created a new philosophical space seen by Heidegger as ungrounding ground, opening up and revealing the metaphysical void (Wigley 1995: 62). In aligning philosophy with architecture we can see that Nietzsche's thought destabilized built form by weakening its structures and questioning its abiding qualities of strength and durability.

Nietzsche's reconciliation of Dionysian and Apollonian forces therefore constituted a revolutionary spatial event that was also aspatial. It required more than tearing down the physical and metaphorical veil-as-curtain that separated the distanced viewing place of the *theatron* from the participatory space of the *chorus*. The Apollonian culture was an artistic structure that must be leveled 'stone by stone' to make visible the foundations upon which it rests (Nietzsche 2000: 41).[3] Dismantling this cultural edifice also reveals the ever-present pit beyond the visible; 'the terror and horror of existence' covered over by the Apollonian dream structure. Nietzsche wished to undermine architecture's supposed rationality, stability and disciplinary imperative; revealing its cracks and crevices and, eventually, that ever-present abyss, over and within which theatre could constructively play.

This architectural undermining is encapsulated in an early twenty-first century play that addresses theatre's ancient origins in order to enact the fall of the heroic architect and his monumental architectures.

**Exposing The Pit** | *This is a goat! You're having an affair with a goat! You're fucking a goat!* (Albee 2003: 23)

The first scene of Edward Albee's 2002 play *The Goat, or, Who is Sylvia?* introduces the central character, Martin Gray: a 50-year-old architect at the height of his career. As a globally recognized practitioner, he has won the coveted Pritzker Prize, architecture's highest international award (often referred to as 'the Nobel Prize of architecture'), and has also been commissioned to design the 'World City.' Gray is truly a Nietzschean architect; he is powerful and monolithic, persuasive and cajoling; he designs not only the gorgeous home, in which we find him, but entire cities. Flushed with success he is being interviewed for television in a space that aesthetically reflects his exceptional talent, taste and accomplishments. However, he soon reveals a fatal



flaw – the architect has fallen deeply and sexually in love with a goat.

The play's first act is an unnerving comedy, unravelling Gray's downfall as he confesses (off-camera) to his best friend, who is conducting the interview, how, when looking for a piece of land to build a country retreat, he saw and became besotted with the animal he calls Sylvia. Comedy shifts to drama in the second act after his dark secret is revealed to Stevie, his wife of 25 years, who insists on hearing the details of the affair while she proceeds to annihilate the immaculately arranged room and its precious collection of objects. The third and final act is pure tragedy as Martin sits amid the ruins, contemplating his fall only to be further devastated by the entry of Stevie with the slain corpse of his ruminant lover – a dead goat.

Recalling Nietzsche's formulation in *The Birth of Tragedy,* the tragicomedy of *The Goat* brings together the Apollonian plastic art of architecture with the Dionysian excesses of forbidden lust in performance, simultaneously exposing and bridging the rift between the two disciplines. In 2003 the play was published with an added subtitle, *Notes toward a definition of tragedy.* Evoking the goat-song of the Dionysian dithyramb – an ecstatic choral hymn performed around the sacrificial altar – the play returns us to the ancient setting of western drama where tragedy began. Here, where the bestial world presses hard on the human world, threatening a relapse into animal existence, the 'tragic hero' is traditionally a *scapegoat* – exiled from the human herd and punished for our own unacted desires. S/he becomes a sacrifice, a form of purification that expels the unclean, improper, alien and excessive, 'appeasing the forces that rule the world and keeping at bay the fears they inspire in us' (Poole 2005: 51).

We are therefore invited to inhabit the *choros* of Nietzsche's formulation: the space of shared ritual encounter, (between *theatron* and *skene*) centred on the victim/offering whose sacrifice brings together the 'sacred' and the 'profane' as distinct and interpenetrating worlds. As a space of sacralisation and desacralisation the choros is also the site of purification and slaughter. Through the ephemerality of both living matter and the artwork we are confronted with tragedy within which lies the spectacular and abiding catastrophe that endures beyond its moment – a moment of rupture that reveals how something is irreparably broken. The architect searching for a site to build his utopic idyll (an escape from the 'steel and stone' of the 'World City') set off a chain of events that stripped him of his once dependable role as rational creator and building scientist. Instead of utopia he found a goat and a love beyond good and evil, 'beyond the rules' as he acknowledges (Albee 2003: 98). As a result his house becomes a broken ideal, a zone of destruction, which, after its precious contents are annihilated and his lover slain, renders the architecture an austere mausoleum – a modern temple befitting the tragic sacrifice.

Together with our protagonist, the once heroic architect and world builder, we are forced to confront





the void through the unnatural. His bestial act opens up the abyss of the unmentionable into which he falls. This is reiterated by his son, Billy, in the last act, who claims that while his father was masquerading as ideal family man and master-builder he was 'underneath the house, down in the cellar, digging a pit so deep!, so wide!, so... HUGE!... we'll all fall in and... never... be able... to... climb... out... again – no matter how much we want to, how hard we try' (Albee 2003: 101-102). Gray's heroic achievements, coupled with calamity threaten the dissolution of home, family, career and status. The abyss under the house also reveals the ungrounded ground of utopian modernism, undermining the ideals of middle-class family life and sound architecture. This also exposes the inherent weaknesses in the very space where the play is staged.

As a cautionary tale *The Goat* brings the master of abstract space, who seeks escape in the absolute space of a utopian elsewhere, face to face with the abject space of his catastrophic desires. However Albee's play also represents the persistence of the well-made play in the well-made theatre, which the historical avant-garde attempted to undermine and destroy over the previous hundred years. But what if, in the final image of the architect confronted with the sacrifice amid his debris, we were to find ourselves with him in the wreckage of the house that is the theatre itself? What if all that remained was the exposed modernist auditorium, stripped of its accoutrements, revealing its machinery – its entries and exits, technical bridges, floor traps, winches and control systems – simultaneously exposing and uniting performers and audience? What if the tragedy that was the fall of the architect enacted the fall of modernist theatre architecture, restoring the space of the event to that of the ancient sacrifice, reflecting its viscerality in the spectre of the slain beast, hoisted and dripping by the butcher-priestess-wife at the point where stage meets auditorium? As a scenographer this would be my approach to staging Albee's play: an exposition of not only the disciplinary reality of the space that contains the event, but also its relationship to the ancient *skene, theatron, deus ex machina* and sacrificial *altar,* brutally sutured back together by the *choric* space of embodied experience and participation. This restores the theatre to its complex status as secular temple, fantastical machine and house of terror. Acknowledging the active role architecture plays in the dramatic event can enhance the theatrical experience through the spatiotemporal forces that many theatre practitioners would rather render still, silent and in the dark.

**Building Babel** | The Modern Movement attempted, through its faith in instrumental rationality, to build a secure world over a fractured abyss exposed by Nietzsche whose proclamation of God's death undermined the ground of philosophy, theatre and architecture. Nietzsche maintained the necessity for art to recuperate this threat through the aesthetic act by 'looking boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature' (Nietzsche 2000: 59). As a monolithic practice, architectural modernism upheld an ontology of stasis, resisting the 'play' of spatial dynamics in favour of abstract, fixed identities of pure form that foreclosed on multiple and resistant performances demanded by the avant-garde.

The major difference between the architectural Modern Movement and the theatrical avant-garde was a seemingly incompatible opposition of a will-to-construction against the will-to-destruction, although within a Nietzschean formulation a resolution between the two – as Apollonian versus Dionysian – is the necessary ingredient to a communal joyfulness combating

the alienation of modernity. Unlike the artist (as destroyer), the architect (as creator) could not afford to adopt the role of tragic victim-hero, immolating herself / himself to an art of the future (Poggioli 1968: 67-68). However the architectural avant-garde was linked to its theatrical counterpart by a creative will that was predicated on the desire to obliterate history and establish a clean slate from which to valiantly build something out of the ruins as the utopian *tabula rasa*. This can be seen in Albee's architect Martin Gray, who is prepared to design an entire new city for a global world. However, Gray's downfall reveals the flaws in this utopian mission and the impossibility of creating or maintaining a sound and totalizing universe. He is left amid the ruins of his ideals that expose the ever-present pit and history's layers *en abyme*.

In his seminal study on Bataille's writings, *Against Architecture,* French academic Denis Hollier comments that the symbolic order is unable to re-appropriate for itself the heterogeneous void that confronts it (Hollier 1989: 122). Nevertheless, in the ruination of this modernist ideal inherited from the Enlightenment lies the condition of possibility for an architecture no longer predicated on the creation and maintenance of a secure world, carefully constructed to negate death.

Rather than dismantle the Apollonian structure 'stone by stone,' Nietzsche's goal becomes subtler, more playful and disquieting: to undermine it just enough to unsettle those who continue to occupy it. This is the 'inspired shudder' of avant-garde performance, designed to disturb body, ground and building in order to expose the impossibility of secure ground – and therefore firm foundations – for philosophy, theatre and architecture. Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1978: 10) saw in this destabilization a greater 'play of the structure,' which more profoundly affects the bodies it both houses and un-houses. As Wigley writes: *To make a building tremble is precisely not to collapse it by subjecting it to some external force, but to explore it from within, even to consolidate the structure, imitating its very gesture, faithfully repeating its operations but in a way that exposes its limits, opening up its structure or, rather finding the openings that are already there, the concealed points of weakness* (Wigley 1995: 42).

The open, spatial network that negotiates between the labyrinth, the abyss and the unstable, floating structure is akin to the unfinished mythical Tower of Babel; an incomplete construction that discloses its visible structures. According to Wigley the tower is the figure of philosophy, the figure of deconstruction and the figure of architecture itself (Wigley 1995: 23). The Tower of Babel is commonly associated with a confusion of tongues: God's punishment on the sons of Noah for attempting to build a unified global culture and an indestructible tower after the Great Flood. This unfinished edifice questions not only issues of translatability but the very ground upon which it is erected. Heir to failure, it stands in for the instability of communication and structural weakness. This seems even more pertinent in a time when towers designed to withstand attack, and representing the global centre of virtual capitalism, are reduced to a disintegrating spectacle of steel, glass, concrete and flesh.

The Tower of Babel marked the failure of a totalizing language and the resulting confusion is reminiscent of Artaud's call for dissonance, dispersion and discontinuity in performance space. The accompanying collapse of the commanding overview of the phallic tower (and its attendant associations with singularity, stability and endurance) reduced the structure to a convoluted labyrinth where vision is no longer privileged. As a three-dimensional spatial network operating above and below ground, it offers a range of border





conditions and in-between zones for creative encounter. Because the structure floats, shudders and sways, we are aware of its fourth dimension, bringing a more dynamic architectural temporality into play. As space-in-flux it also challenges the stasis and passivity of performance space as hermetically sealed and neutral container.

The Canadian philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi writes: 'What is pertinent about an event-space is not its boundedness, but what elements it lets pass, according to what criteria, at what rate, and to what effect' (Massumi 2002: 85). For Spanish architect and author Ignaci Solà-Morales this is achieved by 'weak architecture'; a utilization of the fleeting, vestigial and ephemeral, to construct a new type of monumentality 'bound up with the lingering resonance of poetry after it has been heard, with the recollection of architecture after it has been seen' (1997: 71). Solà-Morales refers to the tendency for architectural modernism to foreclose on chance by attempting to create itineraries of control. In order for architecture to be transformed into an event, the aleatory and temporal, as found in the aesthetic event, must be admitted: 'This is the strength of weakness; that strength which art and architecture are capable of producing precisely when they adopt a posture that is not aggressive and dominating, but tangential and weak' (Solà-Morales 1997: 71).

This move against coherent structures both fragments and integrates the community, continually opening it up to its outside, which is both figurative (as 'other') and physical (as landscape). Babel provides a spatial model that has the potential to address issues avoided by modernism's utopic discourse and celebrated by the historical avant-garde; issues of performance's inherent relationship with danger, difficulty and failure. Undermining built form and language, Babel spatially realigns the historical avant-garde with the postmodern condition: navigating between fleeting acts of performance and the architectures that work to simultaneously house and un-house them.

## Endnotes

1 Although Bernard Tschumi's specific mention of this term is not prevalent in his texts, K. Michael Hays has cited him as its progenitor in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, 216. In an interview with *Manifold Magazine*, Hays states 'the term 'event-space' belongs to Tschumi.' Hays, Postcriticality.

2 Here Grosz is referring to Deleuze and Guattari's demand, in *What is Philosophy?*, to make 'language stutter, or tremble, or scream, or even sing.' Words that operate as a language of sensations, work beyond the symbolic and the signifying and are therefore rendered performative.

3 This gesture was designed to fundamentally weaken rather than annihilate architecture.

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## List of Figures

SRDCE: *The Heart of PQ – A Performance Landscape fort he Senses*. A site-specific sceno-architectural installation for the Prague Quadrennial 2003 produced by the Czech Theatre Institute.
Designed by SCAPE @ Massey (Dorita Hannah, Sven Mehzoud and Lee Gibson with Osamu Okamura)

Images by Ratislav Juhas and SCAPE @ Massey (Design Studio for Social, Cultural & Performance Environments)

# STAGING SILENCE

Hans Op de Beeck

# STAGING SILENCE

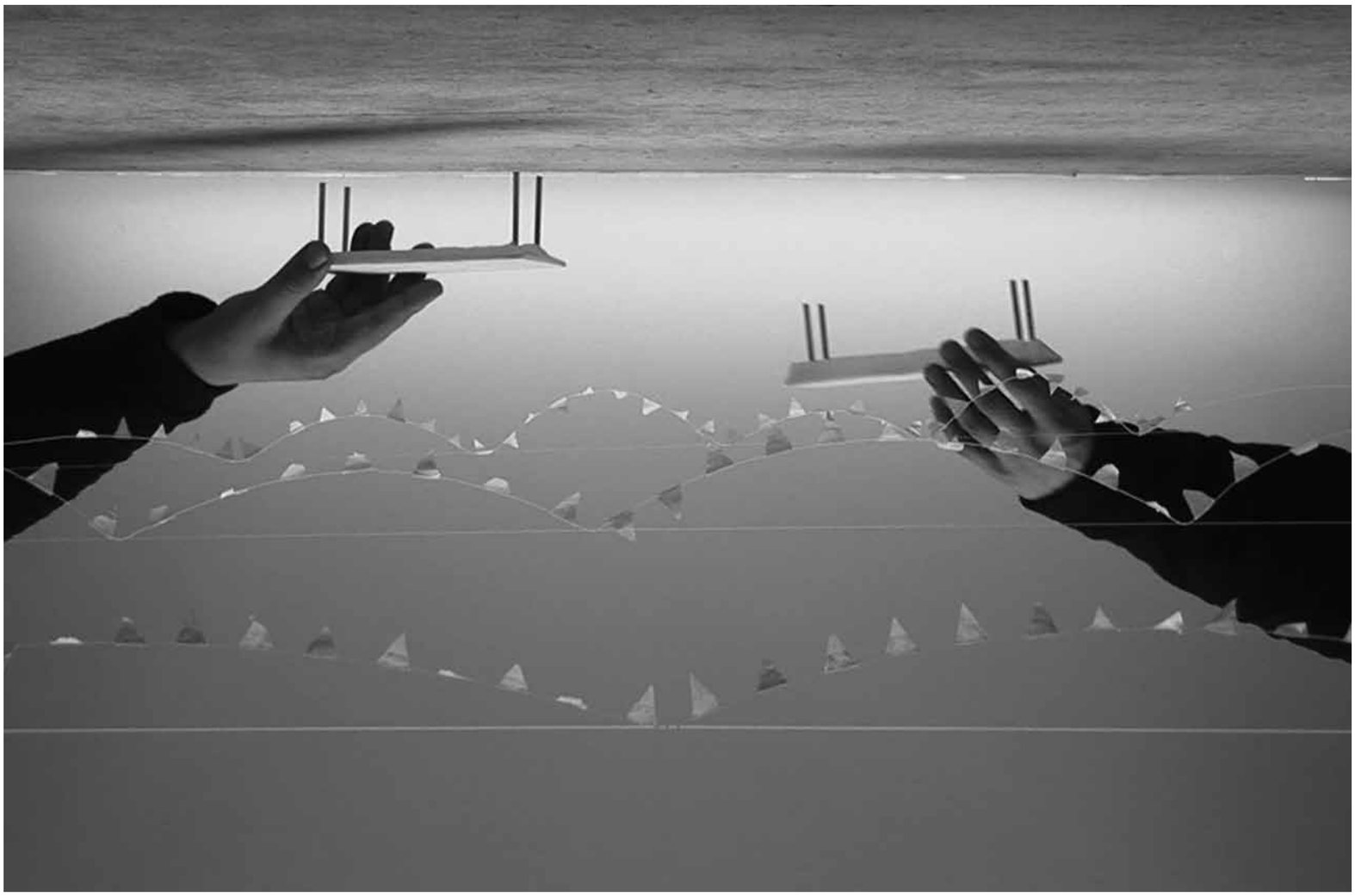
By Hans Op de Beeck

The video work *Staging Silence* (2009) is based around abstract, archetypal settings that lingered in the memory of the artist as the common denominator of the many similar public places he has experienced. The video images themselves are both ridiculous and serious, just like the eclectic mix of pictures in our minds. The decision to film in black and white heightens this ambiguity: the improvised nature of the video invokes the legacy of slapstick, as well as the insidious suspense and latent derailment of film noir.

The title refers to the staging of such dormant decors where, in the absence of people, the spectator can project himself as the lone protagonist. Memory images are disproportionate mixtures of concrete information and fantasies, and in this film they materialize before the spectator's eyes through anonymous tinkering and improvising hands. Arms appear and disappear at random, manipulating banal objects, scale representations and artificial lighting into alienating yet recognizable locations. These places are no more or less than animated decors for possible stories, evocative visual propositions to the spectator. The film is accompanied by a score, which, inspired by the images themselves, has been composed and performed by composer-musician Serge Lacroix.





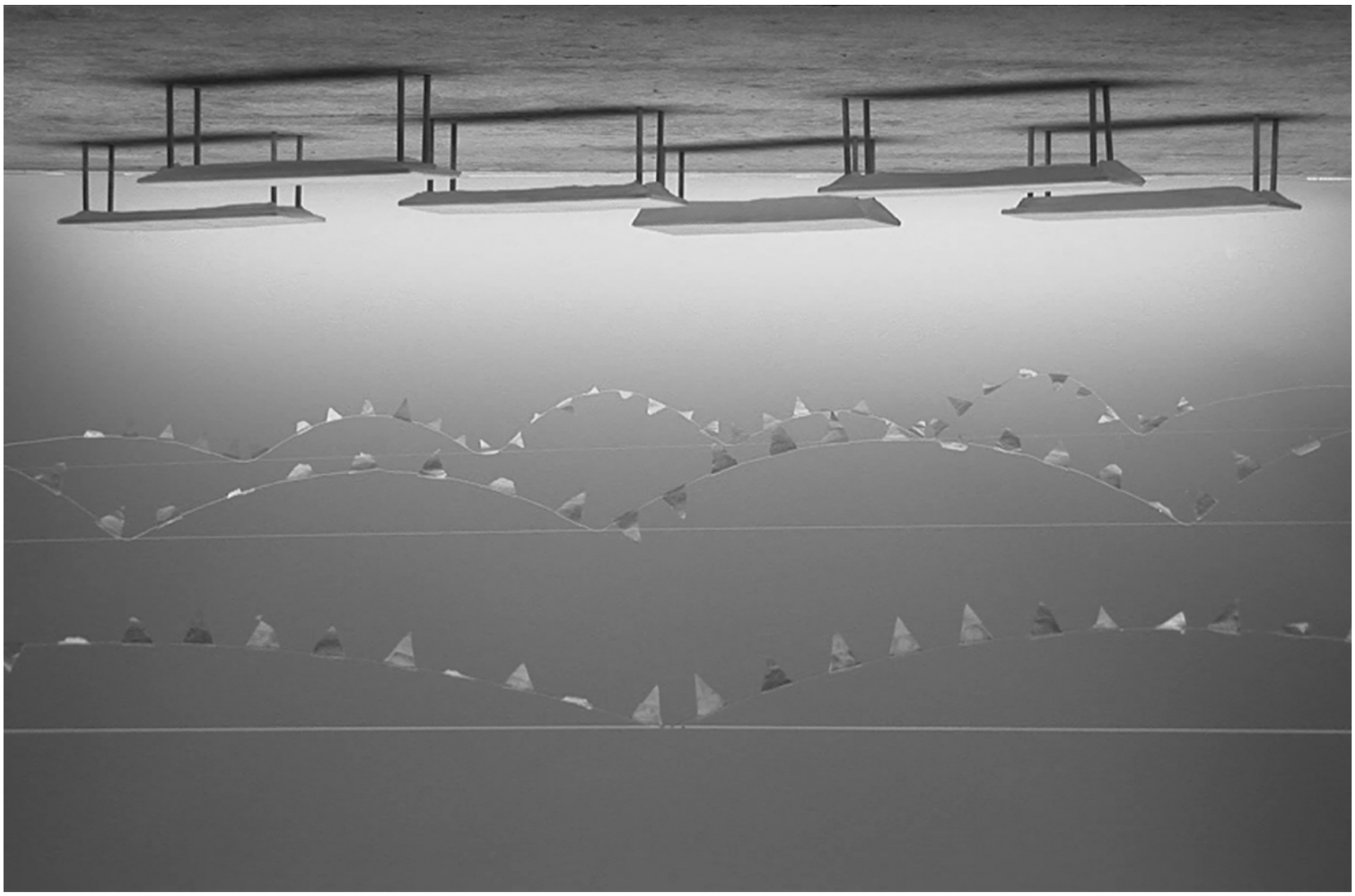
















**STAGING SILENCE** (VIDEO STILLS)
FULL HD VIDEO TRANSFERRED TO BLU-RAY DISC,
BLACK-AND-WHITE, SOUND
22 MINUTES (16:9 ASPECT RATIO)

Courtesy Galleria Continua, San Gimignano –
Beijing – Le Moulin;
Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna; Xavier Hufkens, Brussels;
Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York;
Galerie Ron Mandos, Rotterdam – Amsterdam

**Image credits**
Copyright photos: Studio Hans Op de Beeck

# FATAL STRATEGIES

| Greer Crawley | Wafa Hourani | Michael Ashkin | Mariele Neudecker |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fatal Strategies | Qalandia 1948–2087 | Long Branch | The Air is One Vast Library |
| Seduction Chaff | Qalandia 2047 | | |

# FATAL STRATEGIES

By Greer Crawley

*The analysis of miniature objects and of secrecy converges round questions of what can be seen, by whom and in what circumstances. It may also manifest itself in the form of what is conceived as exceptional sightedness.* (Mack 2007: 119)

**Abstract** | My research is located in the *theatre of war* and is concerned with the military use of terrain models, camouflage and decoys to create strategic scenarios. This study forms the context for an exploration of the deployment of similar scenographic strategies in contemporary artistic practice. Drawing on my research into the use of simulation and deception in the target landscapes of modern military conflict, I discuss how artists are representing the distortions, disinformation, the cartographic omissions, the *black worlds*, and the silences of erasure and re-location; annihilation and elimination.

By addressing the myths and narratives of disclosure, secrecy and invisibility, their projects present a challenge to the ascendancy of military procedures and work to reclaim the *real*.

*For something to be meaningful, there has to be a scene, and for there to be a scene, there has to be an illusion, a minimum of the real, which carries you off, seduces or revolts you. Without this properly aesthetic dimension, mythical, ludic, there is not even a political scene where something can happen.* (Baudrillard 1999: 1)

The Palestinian artist Wafa Hourani's work represents the scenographic and often fatal strategies for staging the political. Through the optical and metaphorical forms of his models dioramas the political scene is set and the narratives of appearances and disappearances,inclusion and exclusion, observation and control are told. His work illustrates the Baudrillardian illusion – the tiny distance that makes 'the real play with its own reality' (Baudrillard 1999: 173).

Hourani speaking of his installation Qalandia 2047 has said: *My artworks are politically strategic. I fixed the mirror on the wall from the Palestinian side as a suggestion for a new political party, the Mirror Party that appears in the future in Palestine after Fatah and Hamas. This kind of complex conflict needs long term projects and strategic way of thinking. Each Palestinian needs a mirror so that they can see themselves.* (Hourani 2009)

Qalandia is the story of a refugee camp established in 1948. It tells how the airport nearby changed from Qalandia airport to a military zone and then there was a checkpoint and then the separation wall. Originally working as a documentary filmmaker, Hourani stopped 'filming reality' and began to think how to use the details he had been recording inside the images in another scenario. He decided to make Qalandia 2047 as a model using the photographic images from the camp. By inserting the 'real images' into the model, Hourani created a representation of a world within a world.

Susan Stewart notes in *On Longing* how in the tableau 'we see the essential theatricality of all miniatures; the miniature becomes a stage on which we project, by means of association or intertextuality, a deliberately framed series of actions' (Stewart 1993: 54). Qalandia demonstrates Stewart's observation: *That the world of things can open itself to re veal a secret life; this is the daydream of the microscope: the daydream of life inside life, of significance multiplied infinitely within significance. The state of arrested life we see in the tableau [...] always bears the hesitation of a beginning.* (Stewart 1993: 54)

In Hourani's models, the viewer walks pass the checkpoint and the wall, listening to the sound inside the houses with the antennas on the top, peering into the three colourful future gardens – Fish Garden – Stone Garden – Flower Garden. The city is built from people and real-life situations. The decision about what and when to include a particular feature is carefully considered. 'The mirror came after there was a wall to hang it on [...]. The gardens came after there was no space to build gardens in the refuge camps. The antennas are how they received information' (Hourani 2009). Hourani incorporated more and more details to be sure that the audience could 'feel' the camp and understand his message to think about the future of this place. It cultivates our empathy and according to the philosopher Robert Vischer, it is through empathy that we have the ability to 'think' oneself into the object: *When I observe a stationary object, I can without difficulty place myself within its inner structure, at its centre of gravity I can think my way into it, mediate its size with my own, stretch and expand, bend and confine myself to it.* (Vischer 1983 / 1994: 89-123)

Hourani's city resonates with the 'enigmatic situations' the architect Stephen Parcell attributes to the diorama. In its metaphoric architecture, Parcell says: *We may imagine our own immersion in these situations: different vital states (coma, paralysis, ecstasy, death), different social situations (imprisonment, quarantine, stardom, freedom), different atmospheric conditions (liquid, gas, intense cold, vacuum), and different temporal conditions (slow motion, ancestry, deja vu).* (Parcell 1996: 198)

In Qalandia, the lights and sounds give a sense of duration and time passing. Unlike other architectural representations which are designed for visual consumption and are inanimate and devoid of haptic experiences, Hourani provides us with the sensual evidence of presence. We study his models closely, exploring with our eyes but also through our ears; seeking out aural and visual details. Ralph Rugoff writes in *Homeopathic Strategies* how: *tiny artworks force us to draw closer and this forward movement parallels a mental process; the more closely we examine minute details, the less we notice the gulf in size that separates us. The act of paying attention is in itself a kind of magnifying glass [...] this charges our experience of the object, imbuing it with an almost hallucinatory acuity.* (Rugoff 1997: 14)

Event filled works like Qalandia reveal so much more than location. They have a spatio-temporal consciousness lacking in more supposedly 'sophisticated' maps. But as Paul Carter argues if such mappings exist at all in mainstream consciousness it is 'as aesthetic toys, art objects, the mythic residue of collective dreams' (Carter 2009: 17). The toy model with its associations of craft, nostalgia, and infantile desires of control is commonly perceived as an enclosed world set apart from the 'real' – a diminutive elsewhere. Stewart, however, gives us a more generous interpretation of the toy's purpose and meaning. She describes how the toy is 'a device for fantasy, a point of beginning for narrative. To toy with something is to manipulate it, to try it out within sets of contexts'. By her definition, Hourani's toy world is 'a miniaturised real world in which the relationship between materiality and meaning are tested' (Stewart 1993: 58).

Wafa Hourani employs the strategies of humour that the philosopher Simon Critchley recommends in dealing with 'tragic fate'. According to Critchley, 'In the absence of Aristotelian happiness, in a world where happiness has been reduced to the maximum satisfaction of transient inclinations, it is in practices like humour that we find an experience of non-delusory, non-desultory and non-heroic sublimation' (Critchley 2007: 82). Through the use of humour Hourani's models perform an important and powerful critical function. They charm and amuse us with their joyous and exotic depictions of life elsewhere but we go away disturbed by the presence of the 'other' and the realisation that there is this place somewhere.

These models are not the sophisticated uninhabited architectural presentations used to promote a developer's or a politician's utopian visions that are more frequently dystopian in their omissions. In contrast, Qalandia is a shambolic construct full of colour and presence. As the writer J. B. Jackson noted in *The Necessity of Ruins: This is how we should think of landscapes: not merely how they look, how they conform to an aesthetic ideal, but how they satisfy elementary needs: the need for sharing some of those sensory experiences in a familiar place: popular songs, popular dishes, a special kind of weather supposedly found nowhere else, a special kind of sport or game, played only here in this spot. These things remind us that we belong – or used to belong – to a specific place: a country, a town, a neighbourhood. [...] above all a landscape should contain the kind of spatial organization which fosters such experiences and relationships; spaces for coming together, to celebrate, spaces for solitude, spaces that never change and are always as memory depicted them.* (Jackson 1980: 16)

J. B. Jackson was drawing on his experiences in combat intelligence during World War II, and was specifically referring to the military landscape which he felt could provide an example for post-war planning. For Jackson 'the military landscape revealed two aspects of humanity: Those urgent, unremitting efforts to establish communications, the trailing wires and signs and symbols and coloured lights, foreshadowed our present groping for new kinds of community'(Jackson 1980: 17). But he went on to warn that the other aspect – the desire for territory and power would continue to 'mutilate' the environment. Writing twenty years later, the cultural geographer, Denis Cosgrove, found that the modern landscape has already adopted the 'spatial divisions, uniform vision and exclusionary practices' of the military landscape (Cosgrove 2000: 262). The threat of terrorism and global warfare has extended the combat zone; the garden itself has become strategic as the war of terror is fought in homes and backyards of the enemy. As the human geographer and social scientist, Nigel Thrift observes 'The image of the complete battle separate from the civilian life around it, is antiquated, unreal [...] *elsewheres* increasingly do not exist' (Thrift 2007: 263).

When the military project their desire onto a landscape they introduce violent transformations, changing citizenship into estrangement. The architect and philosopher, Rubió Ignasi Solà-Morales has argued that through the violence of war, the urban landscape becomes a terrain vague and 'the strange, the indescribable, and the uninhabitable are brought to the surface' (Solà-Morales 1995: 123). Qalandia 'attempts to name what cannot be classified'. As Paul Carter has argued, names like this both 'mark a presence and its absence, they both order the chaos and admit it'. For Carter, such names should be understood as 'compressed poems' or 'compacted myths' (Carter 2009: 25). Carl Schmitt wrote in *The Nomos of the Earth* (1953) that 'Who dictates the law of the land, gets to name the land' (Mendieta 2004: 9). According to the sociologist Mitchell Dean, Schmitt usage of the word nomos means more than its usual translation as traditional or customary law. The action and process of *nomos* is given by the Greek verb nemein meaning to take, to allot and to assign, which in turn is the root of the German words, nehmen and Name. Schmitt himself uses the term Landnahme meaning *'land-taking'* or *'land-appropriation'* to capture this primary sense of the term. For Schmitt, Nomos is a "fence-word": it creates territory, defines locality, marks places, separates backyards and defines households. (Dean 2006: 4)

Dean points out that from Schmitt's perspective, when political thought 'becomes "a-topical", that is, as something whose ideal lies nowhere, or, even more strongly, which is driven by a Utopia, a "notplace", the abstract universal individual is not simply a deterritorialized individual but a disoriented one' (Dean 2006: 7). It is our position as outsiders excluded from the systems of power and activity that Solà-Morales claims 'constitutes both a physical expression of our fear and insecurity and our expectation of the other, the alternative, the utopian, the future' (Solà-Morales 1995: 121).

The cultural geographer Kevin Robins observes in *Into the Image* 'The utopian destination is imagined in terms of a place that is beyond disappointment and disillusion, and the utopian desire is to be in unity, at one, with such an environment.'

But he goes on to ask; 'What is this desire that constantly seeks the "other" of any place (and which cannot be satisfied by any real place)?' Is it the desire for transcendence – to create an ideal new order or a flight from reality? (Robins 1996: 16) Robins suggests that it is the latter. For him it is an inability 'to come to terms with the condition of situated and placed existence: an unwillingness to confront and deal with difficulty and disappointment, a reluctance to acknowledge and accept the limits and constraints of real situations' (Robins 1996: 16). The utopian model can encourage this dislocated view. The detached spectator is situated at a distance and as Smith points out in his discussion of spatial displacement this 'Olympian position rewards its spectator with the pleasures of detachment and the personal inconsequence of all that they survey' (Smith 1993: 79). This is not, however, Hourani's position. By positioning his models at a height that does not privilege the overview, he allows the spectator to become engaged with the spaces at eye level. Coming 'face-to face' with the occupants of these houses, the viewer experiences moments of recognition and identification. This is the view hidden from the military observers who rely on the ability to survey the terrain from a high vantage point. Their (mis) understanding of the 'ground truth' [1] is based on 'topographical command and control' methods which require an elevated position (Weizman 2006: 166).

The cultural theorists, Ryan Bishop and John Phillips in *The Slow and the Blind* tell us that in its earliest manifestation, the *skopos* (from the ancient Greek target) was one who watches out for and is the guardian for the community, a kind of *epi-scopus* or overseer [...] later the word *skopos* became associated with the military and referred to a spy or scout who seeks out and marks the target [...] an intelligence gatherer and surveyor of the battlefield. Bishop and Phillips conclude that 'In these senses, then, the *scopic* can both mark and target, as well as merge into the episcopal functions of governance and an overseeing of the nation and its interests' (Bishop / Philips 2010: 21). Hourani has taken on the role of the *skopos* as *epi-scopus* and through his narrative constructions is challenging the militaristic initiatives that attempt to bring about erasure. He is demonstrating through the model the scopic conditions of surveillance and resistance.

Hourani has set no time limit on development of his projects. In theory, Qalandia could be endlessly modified. Although he refers to photographs and his direct experience of the locations represented, the mimetic relationship between the model and its referents is selective. The challenge for Hourani is to create a fictional world which can persuade the viewer of its validity as a location. At the same time, his projects resist the norms of cartographic representation what Massey calls 'the claims to singularity, stability and closure' (Massey 2005: 109). They are ongoing stories. It is through metaphorical and mythological speculations that these models make visible the 'real'. In Carl Schmitt's 'political mythology of world order,' it is the

poetic, mythic and symbolic elements – as opposed to more rationalized forms of discourse – which help make the world thinkable, map-able, and thus form conditions of certain forms of 'global' political action (Dean 2006: 1).

The architect and author, Eyal Weizman observed in *Temporary Facts, Flexible Lines* how during the war of 1948 the land registry maps of the West Bank were used to plan attacks against the Palestinian villages 'they were initially conceived to serve, and helped the process that erased them from the ground only a few years after they were first recorded on paper' (Weizman 2006: 161). Paul Carter calls this annihilation of space, a 'spatial sleight of hand' a 'geographical conjuring trick', which 'erases from collective memory [...] every trace of elsewhere in either time or space' (Carter 2009: 17). These are the gaps in representation – the erasures, the blind spots on the maps that Hourani addresses in his work. He constructs a strategic and scenographic response to the militaristic occupation and determination of space by re-imagining the territory. Through his actions – acted out in the staged space, they engage in what Leach describes as the 'transitory and fluid discourse of territorialisation' (Leach 2006: 181). Qalandia is an imaginative demonstration of the 'politics of desire' and the possibilities of place making. Hourani's models project into the future and address what might be. They are discursive and speculative representations of elsewheres that are no longer nowhere.





**Endnotes**

1 Ground truth is defined as the actual or 'true' battlefield situation. It serves as the basis of comparison for what the subject perceives the situation to be. 'Toward a Methodology for Evaluating the Impact of Situation Awareness on Unit Effectiveness of Dismounted Infantrymen', C. Blackwell and E.S. Redden, U.S. Army Research Laboratory, Ft. Benning, GA, 2000

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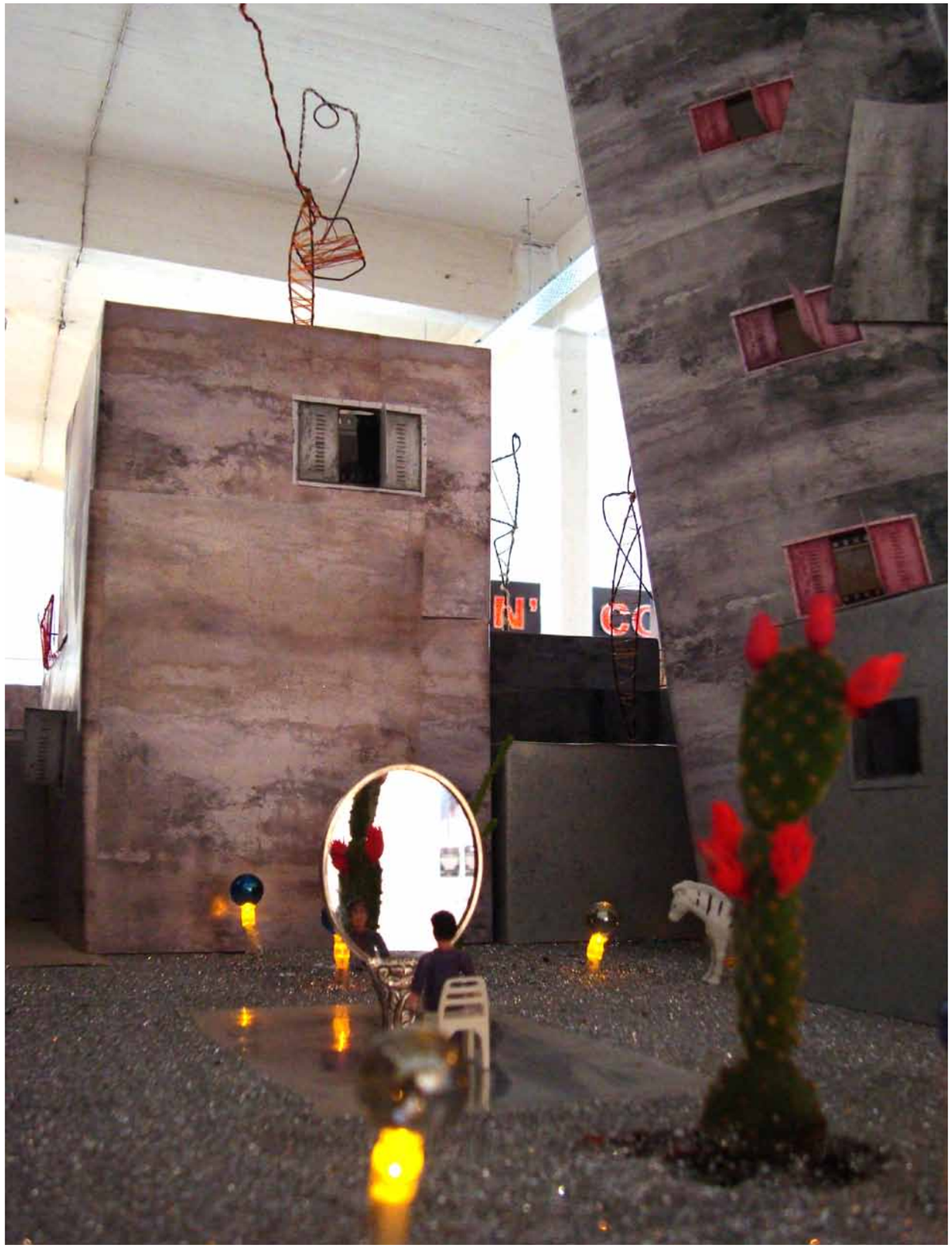
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# QALANDIA 2067

By Wafa Hourani





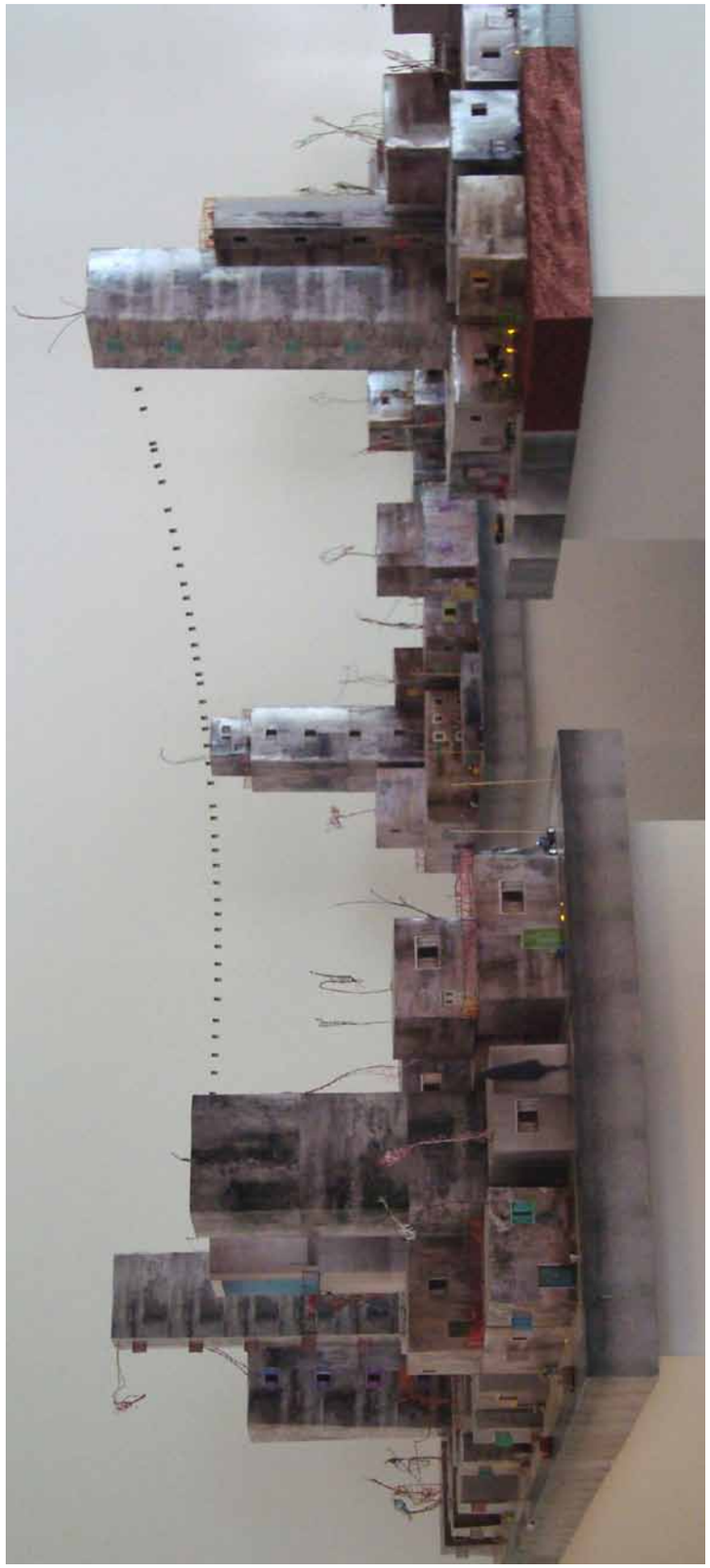
















# LONG BRANCH

By Michael Ashkin



**Long Branch residents in the phase II area of the Beachfront North redevelopment zone are not happy**

In September 1943, Joseph Torrisi, a young airman in the Army Air Corps, came home on leave to Long Branch and fell in love with a beautiful beachfront cottage at 78 Ocean Terrace. He returned to duty in Europe but never came home again, dying in fierce combat in defense of our freedom. Not long after, his stricken father bought 78 Ocean Terrace as a tribute to his son's heroism and his dream for the family. More than 60 years later, Torrisi's younger sister, Rose LaRosa, now an 80-year-old widow, still lives there. But not for long, if Long Branch has its way.

If one looks at these two second-storey windows (ignoring a third one to the left) aligned above the triple windows on the first floor, the configuration takes on the appearance of a face baring its teeth. One notices this by chance, when the photograph is partially obscured by another lying over it.

**Ms. Calvin tells us about her personal experience with Mr. Liu. How for 5 decades "Jimmy" was operating businesses in the Long Branch area. It tells of how he held out on the waterfront through the bad times especially the 90's when no one came to the shore here. She talks about a man who came to the shores of America at 21 with no money and a lot of dreams. A man who was dedicated to the Long Branch Water Front even when no one else was.**

**Then she indicts Adam Schneider: "Instead, Mayor Schneider and his smug little band of marionettes, litigiously forced Mr. Liu to relinquish his concessions (his life) for the sake of specious 'eminent domain'. Mr. Liu, wanting to be a part of the new redevelopment, offered everything viable, including a plan he constructed to further enrich the beach sector. Bur Mr. Schneider denied access to his private club of outside developers."**

**No one really knows why Adam Schneider dealt Jimmy Liu such a hard deal. The push to condemn and demolish the beach property which operated a number of businesses was a quick and merciless assault on the well conditioned buildings which also was home for some of the Liu children. It leaves open a very important question or two. The first being the possibility of the Liu family file a wrongful death action if it can be proven medically that such an event was culpable in the demise of Mr. Liu.**

His street has been blocked by trucks that prevented his garbage from being picked up, his sidewalks have been broken, his road is covered in dirt, and his water was shut off without warning from 10:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. on Nov. 20. "They have no concern for us," Bellucci said, "I am a mile from work and they are going to make me move away from the ocean."

This time the city is getting more than impressive housing . . . facades ranging in different light colors within the same color family enlivened by private entrances







**Resources and Services**
**Capital Markets Center**

**Industry News**
**Developer News**
**Broker News**
**Area Reviews**
**Executive Q&A**

**Office**
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**REIT Updates**
**Investors**
**Capital Markets**

**Property Management**
**Corporate Real Estate**
**Technology**
**Tax Issues**

Long Branch's era of splendor lasted only until the early 1920's, and its decline as a major seashore resort was gradual but steady. Eventually, laws forbidding gambling stopped the flow of money on the card and dice tables which in turn, stopped the rich and famous from visiting the town in the Summer. Storms eroded it's beaches and other communities along the Jersey shore were more attractive to summer visitors. By the late 1960's, elements of organized crime allegedly settled into town and some gangland murders seriously tarnished the resorts image. Urban blight, in the form of run-down buildings and shabby streets, along with problems associated with too many people on welfare tarnished its image even further. Long Branch once boasted the longest pier on the Jersey coast, which was built in 1902, from which visitors could fish all day long, all year round, However, the pier burned down in the 1980's.

Alone now on the empty block, the house sits on a three-foot-high concrete foundation. No plantings obscure the cement, only some late-summer pigweed. Two waist-high spruces, however, frame the steps. Near the left one stands a municipal lamppost, which, though about six feet from the house, appears as to be touching the vinyl siding. In front of the sidewalk a littered strip of crabgrass stretches in both directions along the four-lane boulevard. The traffic light is a hundred yards to the left, and cars and trucks brake, accelerate, or shift, as they always have, directly before the front door.

**Now, a public-private partnership is betting that Long Branch can shine again — and not just in summer. The partnership is planning a $70 million redevelopment project called Pier Village that will bring new housing and 100,000 sq. ft. of retail and restaurants to a 16-acre beachfront site. Ground was broken on Pier Village last spring, and completion is expected in 2004.**

**Why bet so heavily on a town that has been down so long?**







**Letters**
**Editorials**
**Retail Traffic**
**Industry Associations**
**Archives**
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**Online Obituary Submission**

**If so than the heavy hand of Adam Schneider's redevelopment plans came down so hard on a common and frail man to the point of not just exclusion, but extinction. If this event causes Schneider any political fall out, we most like will see a flurry of spinners working out a plan to soften the blow. Could be "Pier" Village may be renamed "Liu" Village.**

Other famous people who visited Long Branch include the Astors, Fiskes, Goulds, Biddles, and Drexels, high liver Diamond Jim Brady, General Winfield Scott, actors Edwin Booth, Lillie Langtry, and Lillian Russell, painter Winslow Homer, and writers Bret Harte and Robert Louis Stevenson. Beside Grant, seven other Presidents also visited Long Branch, including Chester A. Arthur, Rutherford Hayes, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley, Woodrow Wilson and James Garfield. Garfield was a frequent visitor, and after an attempt on his life he was brought here in the hope the sea air would help him recover. In fact, a half-mile railroad spur from the main line to a cottage was built so his journey could be more comfortable.

**K. Hovnanian, which has a subsidiary, Matzel and Mumford, already in a partnership with the Applied Companies, Hoboken, to develop Beachfront North, has submitted a plan calling for 357 units in five buildings which would be four- and six-stories high.**

**That plan calls for using the city's history of presidents who have vacationed here as its theme.**

**I for one know what it is like to be dealt with by an adamant local government to the point of utter frustration and failing stamina. I myself have a fight going on over civil liberties and the right to use property, I know what the high cost of defending the precious freedoms and rights given to the citizens of this Great Nation.**

"I never felt," said Schneider, "that the opponents had a leg up. They (challengers) never understood the issues and I did my best to ignore them throughout the campaign."

**'We're asking the court to declare once and for all that the developers have a right to come before the Planning Board before they acquire all of the property and or (the property) is condemned."**

**"It is serving the best interest of the citizens to accelerate the process," he said.**







At the recent ground-breaking ceremony of the 25-acre Pier Village redevelopment project, Gov. James E. McGreevey, supporting the project said, "Adam has been tenacious. He doesn't understand the meaning of the word no, and he has fought for Long Branch. The standard Adam set is the gold-mark standard for the rest of the state."

State agencies have supported redevelopment plans by investing $11.2 million toward the development of Pier Village as well as other money from agencies such as CREDA (Casino Reinvestment Development Authority) and the department of transportation to reconstruct Ocean Boulevard.

**Local Volunteers join Katrina Relief Effort**
**End Emminent Domain Abuse!**
**A Better Way to Divorce**
**Carriage House Doors**
**It's That Time of Year Again**
**Relief is Just a Phone Call Away**
**Building a Solid Foundation for Your Child's Future**
**Is your pool cover safe?**

The old neighborhoods leveled to the last tree. All the existing streets gone. Tabula rasa, as if even the names of the streets disgusted them. The debris pushed into huge mounds and trucked away. Only the orange subsoil and a few pieces of rubble. Impatiently awaiting the sod.

**While on the phone MacCloud said he spotted six city police cars and a locksmith van outside his home.**

**There were no officers in sight: they were already in the home after the locksmith picked the lock so they could gain entry.**

**Hayes said this was done because MacCloud, who has a hearing problem, did not respond to the officers' knocking.**

**Rose, who also was in the house, said he went downstairs when he heard Shadow, a black shepherd, yelping. According to Rose, the animal control officers had snared Shadow who had been lying on the landing of the stairs.**

**When Rose shouted to MacCloud, "They're taking Shadow," MacCloud immediately hung up on his lawyer and ran down the stairs, but, he said, he didn't get very far because the six officers were waiting for him.**

**Rose was the first to get down the stairs and said he held his hands up because an officer had his gun drawn.**

**MacCloud identified the officer with his gun drawn as Sgt. Fernando Sanders, and said he noticed that other officers had their holsters unsnapped.**







Sanders denies that he had his gun drawn.

**the homeowner is possibly mentally disturbed, very upset and irate because of the eviction from his home of 23 years.**

At no point did I take my weapon out.

**he blesses his enemies in spite of an uphill battle.**

**Bless you, Mr. Grant. You belong to the truly human community, everywhere.**

Within weeks the opulent (upgraded word for "luxurious") display unit is open among the sea of studs. Laughable really, because you can see from the unfinished units that the stone façade is pulled from boxes labeled "manufactured stone" and glued directly to the chipboard. But nobody seems to care. The units go up so fast that any moment of embarrassment will be short-lived.

Already each weekend, couples in Audis and Explorers arrive to get their tour – something to do after brunch. At first sales are slow, but as fewer units remain, the pace quickens.

Soon the sales office in the nearby trailer will be carted off along with the Portosans, and an eternal peace will settle over the complex.

**According to Hayes, animal control personnel were brought in as a precaution for the officers. "The dog has already gone after one person from the Applied Companies," he said.**

**MacCloud said that is untrue. "Shadow has never bitten anyone nor has he gone after anyone. He is old and partially paralyzed."**

**MacCloud said he was enraged by the treatment of his dog.**

**"When I saw my dog they had him pushed into the ground with the stick loop," said MacCloud. "I told them to let my dog go."**

**MacCloud said that the animal control officers said to him, "You didn't tell me that your dog was hit (by a car)," referring to the fact that the dog's hind legs were paralyzed.**

**MacCloud said he responded by saying, "He was not hit, he is sick with a nerve condition."**

**. . . he said the conditions at the motel were less than favorable. "When we opened the door, the odor took your breath away and there were bugs in the room," he said**.







**He also was offered a room at the Crystal Brook Motel, Route 35, Eatontown.**

"Our vision is different

"It was so bad that the go-go bar had to close

"An area of town that people were afraid to walk through during the day is gone now. It's going to be nice

**City Attorney James Aaron said after the meeting he has "no idea what the redevelopers will do with the money they are requesting."**

**Flat and featureless, deprived of forests and farming, hopelessly abused and re-abused, the land has become the invisible support upon which objects are placed in order to be replaced. New Jersey is the land where adjectives conspire with verbs to bulldoze what remains of nouns. A land lost to the language of real estate.**

**First Word**
**Financing Today**
**Money & Real Estate**
**Tax Notes**
**Washington Wire**
**Last Word**

**Giordano said the city's oceanfront now generates only 4 percent of the city's property taxes. Once the area is fully developed, city officials expect that figure to rise to 30 percent.**

**"That shows how grossly underutilized the city's main asset is," he said.**

**"What we're trying to create for people is a very, very nice place to live. If we do that, we've done our job," Schneider said.**

"When three officers entered they did have their guns drawn at their sides — fingers were not on the trigger — for the safety of the officers and other individuals assisting in the eviction," Sanders said.

The mayoral opponent, retired Leutenant Colonel Avery W. Grant opposes the redevelopment as is. "I am about the people and promise to listen and do." He maintains that the redevelopment plan should include family amusement areas, a pier and visitor accommodations "to make Long Branch a destination where people come to spend their money and create jobs."







**The second more dubious question would be; "Why was Mr. Liu excluded?" Maybe Mr. Liu didn't vote for Adam Schneider, maybe he was too close to people opposed to The Mayor. Maybe Jimmy Liu was not offering pay offs to the decision makers who approve the developers? One would have to completely view all the possibilities here if one were going to do the memory of Mr. Liu any justice what so ever.**

Woolley said he cannot recall for the past 60 years a neighborhood in that area, that it has always been run down

**The Bluffs**

**An incomparable oceanfront setting lays the backdrop for an exciting new community offering Seashore styled townhomes residences a resort like atmosphere and a convenient Monmouth County location on the famed Jersey shore The Bluffs at Beachfront North will feature 104 exciting townhomes with spacious three story designs offering from 1,900 to over 3,300 square feet of well planned living space two and three bedrooms and one and two car garages Residents will enjoy a desirable resort like lifestyle associated with oceanfront living as well as a number of private onsite amenities including a clubhouse and swimming pool in addition an eclectic mix of shops restaurants and entertainment activities will be located in a pedestrian friendly village atmosphere just steps from the community**

**From the $400,000's to over $1 Million**

**I am in a unique position with this pitch and it is definitely a slider. No one ever really hits a home run with a tricky pitch heading towards his bat, no matter how skilled a home run hitter he may be. However, I can stand at the plate here for I have experienced "The Wrath of Kahn". In a manner of speaking.**

**The Grand Resorts**

**A magnificent oceanfront location is the backdrop for an exciting new community offering Seashore styled residences a resort-like atmosphere and a convenient Monmouth County location on the famed Jersey shore The Grand Resorts at Beachfront North is a collection of 179 condominium residences boasting 1,100 to over 2,000 square feet of living space with one two and three bedrooms and underground parking with elevator access Residents will enjoy the fantastic resort style lifestyle associated with oceanfront living as well as a number of private onsite amenities including a clubhouse and swimming pool in addition an eclectic mix of shops restaurants and entertainment activities will be located in Pier Village a pedestrian friendly village atmosphere just steps from the community**

**From $300,000's to over $750,000**

**"It's not easy to lose your home, and we don't want anyone to think we don't have a heart, but we made a commitment to redevelopment in May 1996 and cannot go back on that now," said council President Mary Jane Celli in explaining her vote.**







City codes prohibit rooming houses, and the city allowed properties to become overgrown with weeds and lawns that went uncut

"Code enforcement was enforced fully," said Woolley. "But no amount of code enforcement could change the state of the neighborhood

**In this neighborhood the police are everywhere. They penetrate the space, cars creeping down alleys, speeding down avenues. Lights and sirens from all directions, slamming doors, blocking streets at the slightest incident. Watch them puff out their chests (even the women) as they exit the car. Their amateurish and exaggerated zeal is comical, though it is precisely this that makes it terrifying.**

**It's not about money**
**In my back yard I can do cartwheels if I like**

"We pampered and babied our home. There was a lot of sweat and tears put in

"The appraisal done for the city excluded the fact that we were in such close proximity to the beach," Fred Strahlendorf said.

**The issue of survival is solemn. Politicians and "redevelopers" are gambling with people's lives as though they are chips. Worse, Russian roulette. Whose home will get the bullet next? Just as they are bulldozing the homes of the Palestinians and the homes of the New Orleanians. Conclusion: them is us.**

The bagpipes played "Amazing Grace" - so befitting the marchers in their black shirts of protest. Black, the color of mourning and the infinite universe. The color Johnny Cash always wore for the prisoners. Respect for the people, so restrained and dignified

The bungalows were often purchased by landlords who rented to low-income residents who couldn't even afford to use the beach because they couldn't afford to buy a seasonal badge. An area of town that people were afraid to walk through during the day is gone now. It's going to be nice

**According to the city clerk's office, three candidates have submitted petitions challenging current council members Anthony Giordano, John "Fazz" Zambrano, Dr. Mary Jane Celli, David G. Brown and Michael DeStefano.**

**Those candidates are David J. Pizzo, Marilyn Schwertberger and Harold "Pudgy" Cooper.**







**He was born in China, traveled to America, worked and lived in Long Branch. Jimmy Liu died September 29th. I will miss him, so will others.**

Remaining residents express alarm that police officers have at times descended on their neighbors' vacant houses and stormed inside with weapons drawn. A police spokesman explains that there is no need for concern and that both the police and fire departments have been utilizing the vacated residences for training purposes.

Applied Development Company creates outstanding homes and communities that naturally attract the most discerning residents. From design and construction to marketing and management, Applied delivers the absolute finest in quality, service and creativity. A premier builder. A Gold Coast tradition. Applied Development Company is New Jersey's most innovative master builder, owner, and management company. Creative thinking and commitment to the highest standards have earned us a stellar reputation.

**The upside potential is almost off the charts**

A smallish tree emerging from the honeysuckle just beyond where the bulldozer has been shut down for the day. This tree will be gone tomorrow, the first and last human thought to have registered its presence will be that of the equipment operator considering where best to position the blade to level it.

**The least of all concerns.**

"Seems to have worked out rather well for them."

Designed by Nathan Townes-Anderson







Michael Ashkin



# SEDUCTION CHAFF

By Greer Crawley

*What makes you exist is not the force of your desire but the play of the world and seduction; it is the passion of playing and being played, it is the passion of illusion and appearance, it is that which comes from elsewhere.* (Baudrillard 1999: 1)

*The decoy can be used in the seduction, distraction, confusion and signature management roles.* (Bishop 2010: 162)

For Baudrillard, the order of seduction is 'the order of secrecy (which) exists only through provocation. Provocation is an attempt to make something visible that should perhaps guard its secret; nothingness is where secrecy happens, the place where things lose their meaning, their identity' (Baudrillard & Nouvel 2002: 16). This is the military's *black world* – the 'unofficial' location of secret weapons and experimental bases; the legal nowhere where laws do not apply and things can be done in secret (Palgen 2007: 247). Military stealth depends on the iconographic power of the symbol and the ambiguities of the metaphor for its effectiveness. The architectural theorist, Neil Leach has defined camouflage as 'a mode of symbolization [...] which encapsulates various visual strategies that have evolved as a knowing manipulation of the use of images' (Leach 2006: 240).

The British-German artist Mariele Neudecker operates through the strategies of seduction. The perceiving subject is drawn in progressively by the slow seductive unfolding of the object of desire. This is the methodology of camouflage. In both art and camouflage, ambiguous, provocative forms are produced through metaphorical manoeuvres; the transformation of one thing into two or two into one and the exploitation of the instability of perception. Merleau-Ponty wrote in *Eye and Mind: When through the water's thickness I see the tiling at the bottom of the pool, I do not see it despite the water and the reflections there; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight [...] then I would cease to see it as it is and where it is – which is to say, beyond any identical, specific place. I cannot say that the water itself, the aqueous power, the syrupy and shimmering element – is in space; all this is not somewhere else either, but it is not in the pool. It inhabits it, is materialized there, yet it is not contained there; and if I raise my eyes toward the screen of cypresses where the web of reflections is playing, I cannot gainsay that the water visits it too or at least sends into it, upon it, its active, living essence. This internal animation, this radiation of the visible, is what the painter seeks under the name of depth, space, and colour.* (Merlaeu-Ponty in Baldwin 2004: 313)

Merleau-Ponty describes a scenography similar to that created by the wartime camoufleur. Surfaces and forms are broken and refracted. The structure of the optic array is blurred or masked. The spatial and temporal structure of light is distorted or displaced. The design historian, Roy Behrens has observed how in Gestalt theory, the salience of a figure is largely dependent on two conditions: first the degree of contrast between figure and ground, and second the extent to which the figure is structurally cohesive within its own borders. He says that *camouflage is typically the subversion of one or both of these conditions: by high similarity between figure and ground (blending camouflage), or high difference within the confines of the figure alone (dazzle camouflage). Often, the most effective camouflage is a combined use of blending and dazzle (called coincident disruption).* (Behrens 2002: 117)

For Merleau-Ponty, the structure of vision involves the simultaneous experience of immersion and detachment. This is comparable to the distancing effect that Paul Virilio says is created 'by the telescopic lenses and the stereoscopic glasses of military photo-analysis, in a medium which seems aqueous, glass-like, with all its phenomena of refraction and diffraction' (Virilio 1989: 74). Illusion, distortion, reflection are the optical strategies of art and camouflage. They are 'the constitutive lenses through which seeing, being and desire are animated' (Lyndenberg 2005: 5). In their analysis of the relationship between Modernist aesthetics and contemporary military technology, the cultural historians Ryan Bishop and John Philips suggest that 'the delays, the experimental distortions, the disjunctions and the consistent destruction of expectations of continuity and coherence associated with art practices' are also evident in military procedures (Bishop / Phillips 2010: 5). The act of military deception like the art of creation involves the processes of dissimulation and simulation. Barton Whaley, the military theorist has identified their modes of operation. In dissimulation the real is concealed through masking, repackaging and dazzling while in simulation, the false is revealed through mimicking, decoying or imitating (Whaley 1982: 183). The artists / camoufleurs adopt the mirrors, masks and other devices of theatrical illusion and stage magic to stage their simulations. As Merleau Ponty observed: 'Mirrors are instruments of a universal magic that converts things into spectacle, spectacle into things [...] Artists have often mused upon mirrors because beneath this "mechanical trick", they recognized [...] the metamorphosis of seeing' (Merlaeu-Ponty in Baldwin 2004: 300). The military like the artists exploit all the possibilities of the 'mechanical trick' in creating and interpreting reflected information or feedback.

During World War II, aluminium foil windows or chaff were dropped in their thousands on bombing raids over Europe. The dense and minute elements functioned in its mass as mirrors. The reflections from the chaff blinded the radar – covering the aircraft. It was almost impossible to pick out the real aircraft from the echoes from the chaff. Today in electronic warfare, radar reflecting chaff is still used as decoy – to seduce the final attack to close the window of opportunity. 'A seduction chaff cloud is fired after the missile radar has acquired the target. The chaff cloud causes the radar to switch its tracking lock to the cloud and is then carried away from the target by the wind' (Adamy 2002: 56). The pieces of metal foil falling through the air form a cloud of false echoes, vibrating images, misleading resonances. They create a bright return on a radar scope that masks any activity. The sensor will indicate that something is present but will give no indication of its nature.

It is the cloud of chaff in *The Air Is One Vast Library* that can be taken as our point of departure in the analysis of Mariele Neudecker's work. As Hubert Damisch in *A Theory of Cloud* observed: 'if the psychology of imagination can only learn from images that are in the process of deformation, it will be agreed that this most amorphous of objects must be one of the most valued oneiric theme' (Damisch 2002: 18). Damisch describes how 'on a conceptual level, a "cloud" possesses the powers of a material in which any kind of figure may appear and then vanish'(Damisch 2002: 31).

The cloud provides the material for the myth of the magician's cloak. Such a mythical garment surrounds the F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter plane which in promotional literature, is described as wearing a *cloak of invisibility*. The surface of the airplane is covered with facets that are arranged so as to scatter radar energy. The F-117 first flew in June 1981 but the Air Force denied the existence of the aircraft until 1988, when a grainy photograph was released to the public. The architectural theorist, Mark Dorrian suggests that the electromagnetic profile of the aircraft which is 'calibrated according to its representation in the mirror,

or in this case, upon the radar screen' creates its anamorphic form (Dorrian 2001: 199). Jurgis Baltrusaitis in his key text *Anamorphoses ou Thamumaturgus Opticus* observed that anamorphosis [1] 'proceeds by means of the inversion of elements and functions. Instead of a progressive reduction to their visible limits, it is a distension, a projection of forms beyond themselves, produced so that, from a determinate point of view, they are corrected: a destruction for restoration, an evasion that implies a return' (Baltrusaitis 1984: 38). However, Dorrian argues that unlike in traditional catoptric anamorphosis where the form is recovered in the mirror, the contemporary anamorph disappears into the radar screen and although it may seem to have disintegrated it has 'in truth merely been transformed' (Dorrian 2001: 201).

The name of the F117 adds to the subterfuge. It is referred to either as a fighter, bomber or 'demonstrator' depending on the symbolic role it is intended to play in the imagination of its user and target. Its description like its form has to be ambiguous. As Virilio points out 'stealth equipment can only function if its existence is clouded with uncertainty' (Virilio 1989: 4). Bishop and Phillips in their analysis of the connection between radar and infrared detection systems and vision, describe how a *missile sees through its artificial prosthetic sights, a ghostly doppelganger of its target and is fooled into missing it. It may look as though the eye can see the difference between the real target and its doppelganger, while the missile sees only the decoy. As a result, the guided-missile mistakes the infrared simulacrum for the target and misses its designated objective.* (Bishop / Phillips 2010: 163)

The strategies of both the contemporary anamorph and the cloud operate scenographically through *mimesis* and *fantasia*. These conditions of perception and the workings of the imagination have long been the focus of experiment and speculation. The writer and mythographer, Marina Warner tells us how in the seventeenth century, the scholar, Athanasius Kircher concluded from his studies of physical laws and optics that the conventions of perception were less stable than they appear. In the second book of *Ars Magna*, Kircher suggested that the cause of illusions was 'the material radiation of phantasy, apprehending external things through vehement imagination' (Warner 2006: 140). The *fata morgana* [2] was for Kirchner one such illusion. As a scientist and alchemist, he sought to discover both physical and metaphysical explanations for this remarkable phenomenon that had become the subject of myth and legend as well as speculation and experiment (Warner, 2006: 140). This complex illusion which resembles in many ways the anamorph is created through the atmospheric conditions of reflection, refraction and inversion but is perceived through the radiation of the imagination.

In the fog of war, these cloudy spectres haunt the battlefields. In World War I, numerous accounts were given of strange apparitions that hovered above the trenches. In August 1914, *The Angels of Mons* appeared in a luminous clouds to veil the soldiers in mist to give them cover, and defend them with bow and arrow against the Germans. Virilio has described how in the 'derealisation' of battle –'ghosts of enemy pilots served to confirm that they had been shot down, and ghostly radar images, voices and echoes came through on the screens, radios and sonars' (Virilio 1989: 76).

Despite the increased field of vision in contemporary war-space, there is still less visibility and more phantasms, clouds and chaff. The question is what happens to perception when the information is inadequate? James Gibson the psychologist and philosopher, says that it 'seems to be that the perceptual system hunts; it tries to find meaning, to make sense from what little information it can get' (Gibson 1966: 303).





Gibson served in World War II and during his time in the service he directed the U.S. Air Force Research Unit in Aviation Psychology. In the Army, Gibson developed tests used to screen potential pilots and the resulting observation lead to extensive experimental studies of visual perception. His findings showed that when the information is masked or hidden in camouflage, a search is made over the whole array. If detection still fails, the system hunts more widely in space and longer in time. It tests for what remains invariant over time, trying out different perspectives. Gibson says that in the search for meaning, the perceptual system seeks clarity 'the insight that reveals the permanence underlying the change' (Gibson 1966: 304).

Among the causes of deficient perception that Gibson identifies is the blurring of the optic array. 'The fragile information with which we so confidently get about in the world is wholly at the mercy of atmospheric conditions. The nature of this information is such that it is physically weakened by blur' (Gibson 1966: 291). The loss of visual structure can occur in varying degrees: in moderate haze, the fine structure or texture of the array is progressively lost with aerial perspective. In a heavier fog, as the projection of linear rays are dispersed and scattered, the coarse structure may disappear. When this occurs, Gibson says the determination of the presence of features in the landscape, their size and distance, become extremely complex which can present difficulties for the measurement of visibility in aviation. 'It is very hard to determine whether or not there is enough structure in the manifold of perspectives in the air mass to enable a pilot to see what he needs to see.' Gibson continues by suggesting that 'the ultimate degree of blur is found in a homogeneous optic array, that is, one with no structure at all. This is what a fog of the highest density presents to an eye' (Gibson 1966: 291).

In 1927 on his record breaking flight across the Atlantic, Charles Lindbergh experienced the visual and mental turbulence presented by the loss of visual structure. 'shut in by the fog, the impression of movement ceases, and I seem to be just hanging in space-unrelated to any point of reference'. He describes being deceived in the 'chargeless, opaque mist' by mirages 'How can it all be fog [...] how can I distinguish land from air [...] I see surf on the beaches and trees in the forest, yet my reason tells me it all is fog!' (Lindbergh 1953: 374)

For the 1929 radio production of Bertolt Brecht's cantata *The Lindbergh Flight*, the stage was divided into two halves: *The Radio* – the ensemble, chorus and speakers and *The Listener* – the singer who was the voice of Lindbergh. The aviator's journey was recreated with the chorus singing the parts of the atmospheric conditions; snow, fog, darkness and the Fog sang: 'I am a phantom. Reckon with my presence, you will get to know me, I am the fog. For now the phantom is becoming real. I obscure your vision, I am the fog!' (Brecht 1940)

In an atmospheric or environmental *whiteout* [3] although energy is present, structure is absent. Gibson shows us that while the undifferentiated light might suggest emptiness to the observer this information is false; the aerial or terrestrial terrain with its potential obstacles still exist although it seems to have vanished.

Similarly, *blackout* [4] is another case where nothing is visible. However, *blackout* unlike *whiteout* provides no information about the world because energy is absent (Gibson 1966: 293). Patrick Deer in his study of British war culture lists the range of associations the *blackout* acquired in World War II. As well as being an air-raid precaution, it also meant the suppression of information, the loss of radio signals and was commonly used to describe such psychological conditions as the loss of memory. It also came to mean 'the temporary

blindness suffered by pilots in sharp turns during the combat, a symptom which German pilots called "the curtain" '(Deer 2009: 110).

In the twentieth century warfare, the introduction of radar, short wave radio, the extensive use of camouflage and decoys meant that obscuration was widespread. Smoke screens were devised to hide targets from enemy attack as well as from cameras of reconnaissance aircraft. Ursula Powys-Lybbe who was an officer in the Allied Central Interpretation Unit, has described the white smoke as a 'deliquescent substance emitted into the air, due to the condensation of water vapour round a nucleus of this substance' (Powys-Lybbe 1983: 86). The 'deliquescent substance' of the camouflage was often confused with 'real' meteorological conditions. From the perspective of the pilot and interpreter they might be natural phenomena or deceptive screens raised and lowered in front of the target. In the struggle to see, the pilots and interpreters turned the lens of their cameras and stereoscopes onto the camouflaged forms in an attempt to decipher the hidden secrets and codes. One of the most effective photo-intelligence techniques was the use of comparative photographs which would allow a photo interpreter to detect changes. Colonel Roy Stanley, in his analysis of photo-reconnaissance in World War II, wrote that 'a detailed understanding of what is happening, however, was made more difficult when *signatures*[5] are muddled, covered or obscured by disguise' (Stanley 1998: 15).

Trying to penetrate the smokescreens the interpreter adopted the point of view of the stereoscope as the only position from which to make sense of the image. However, while the aerial reconnaissance camera and stereoscope appeared to be 'all-seeing', it could not create a field of unlimited visibility and comprehension. The interpreters were transfixed by what was concealed and believed that there existed behind the cloud / the chaff a presence that was somehow more real. This is Baudrillardian seduction. It involves a strategy of appearances; the 'mastery of apparitions and disappearances' (Baudrillard 1999: 173). Baudrillard believes that 'for something really to appear, surging up to the reign of appearances, there must be seduction. For something to really disappear, to resolve into its appearance, there must be a ceremony of metamorphosis' (Baudrillard, 1999: 175). It is one of the magician's secrets that 'everything real is ready, indeed, immediately inclined to disappear – as soon as something appears, it can only disappear'(Baudrillard, 1999: 165). Drawing a comparison between magic and camouflage, Roy Behrens has explained how *In magic performances, a thing appears where nothing was. Or, where something was only a moment ago, there is suddenly nothing; one thing becomes some other thing, or exchanges places with another. That which is solid and heavy becomes insubstantial and weightless. The impenetrable becomes penetrable; the inanimate animate. The mental becomes physical; the physical mental. As long as an attribute can be defined and identified, the opportunity exists for the magic trick, or camouflage strategy to counteract that attribute.* (Behrens, 2002: 165)

*The Air is One Vast Library* is a camoufleur's archive; an inventory of appearances and disappearances; of objects lost and found. Neudecker demonstrates how the seductive illusions of secrecy operate. Her images suggest the occurrence of some unexplained event. Are the planes disintegrating or reforming? The fragments appear to be coalescing or dispersing in a swirl of matter in what might be explosions of chaff. Like the reconnaissance photographs of thermal electro-optical signatures, the frames are crowded with echoes and reflections. The aviators and airplanes appear to have been lost in action leaving behind mysterious traces of data circulating in the ether. Writing of their experiments with GPS geographical positioning systems, Jeremy Hight and Alexander van Dijk suggest that the *ghost* of a flight trajectory 'hangs in space as a series of plotted points as well as an event' (Hight / Divjk 2006). The reflecting mirrors of the satellites would track the journeys of missing planes and capture and store the memories of these events for future replay. This event-filled airspace is what the author Salman Rushdie has identified 'as one of the defining locations of the century the place of movement and of war, the planet-shrinker and power-vacuum, most insecure and transitory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic' (Rushdie, 1988: 5). For Gaston Bachelard, when we are 'faced with this world of changing forms in which the will to see goes beyond passive vision, our imaginary desire is attached to an imaginary form filled with imaginary matter (Bachelard 1988: 186)

We long to see. Neudecker however, is a specialist in the aerial imagination. She experiments with matter to create a thick magma – a suspension of cloudy particles. The scenic dissolves and layers of transformation create an optical subterfuge. The artist as camoufleur practises the particularly creative and strategic art form of 'maskirovka.'[6] Her grainy photographs and anamorphic forms are radar reflectors, smokescreens. The thick overpainting with *Tipp-ex* – the literal *white out*[7] of the images suggests the censorship of classified military documents. There is a loss of structure and optic array. Neudecker acts on the photographs to destabilize the original representation. Paul Carter in reference to the practice of official whitewash, argues that 'to erase is to destroy by additional covering [...] and, once the lines condemned to disappear are covered up, there is a space ready for a new text' (Carter 2009: 39). The artist / camoufleur inscribes the blank ground, the tabula rasa, with fresh unfamiliar signatures. In these newly devised presentations, we imagine encrypted messages and try to comprehend and detect their significance. As the ethnographer John Mack observed: *The world of the secret is not a world of what is, but of what might be. It has an edge: those who have access to secrets may be privy to ambiguous potentially dangerous knowledge. Those who are not in on particular secrets are forever unsure whether what they do not know is significant.* (Mack 2007: 119)

In the build up to the war in Iraq in February 2002, Donald H. Rumsfeld, then Secretary of the U.S. Department of Defence made the following case for the bombing of civilians: *As we know, there are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know There are known unknowns. That is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know.* (Rumsfeld 2002)

To create the illusion of visibility, the military strategist constructs a screen of disinformation, contradiction and confusion.

*To earn our trust, the illusionist patiently and methodically confirms what we think we know; he satisfies our every expectation and dispels our doubts, one by one. As in any successful seduction, we the seduced must believe we are in control. We must feel confident that what we see aligns with what we know.* (McKeith 2006: 26)

But in reality we are denied the strategic view. We find ourselves like the wartime fighter and bomber crews caught in 'a visionless present' (Deer 2009: 84). Without vision or visibility we cannot determine the coordinates of our position. While Neudecker's interventions suggest the emergence of previously hidden patterns and secret correspondences, it is the work of the camoufleur. Her strategy is to reveal through camouflage the prevailing invisibility of the military world and show us that we are still blinded by chaff.

## Endnotes

1 Anamorphosis: a perspective technique used to give a distorted image of the subject represented in a picture when seen from the usual viewpoint, but if viewed from a particular angle, or reflected in a curved mirror, the distortion disappears and the image in the picture appears normal. Derived from the Greek word meaning "to transform," the term anamorphosis was first employed in the 17th century, although this technique had been one of the more curious by-products of the discovery of perspective in the 14th and 15th centuries, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2010.

2 The fata morgana is a complex illusion which resembles in many ways the anamorph 'The sun's rays, hitting the surface of the sea and the layers of air turn them into all infinite recession of mirrors, multiplying and inverting reflections; these reflections, turned upside down and superimposed on one another.' (Warner, M. 2006. Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media into the 21st Century, Oxford, Oxford University Press: 97).

3 Whiteout – (Also called milky weather). An atmospheric optical phenomenon in which the observer appears to be engulfed in a uniformly white glow. Neither shadows, horizon, nor clouds are discernible; sense of depth and orientation is lost; only very dark, nearby objects can be seen. This phenomenon is experienced in the air as well as on the ground. Glossary American Meteorological Society, 2000.

4 Blackout. The concealment or extinguishment of lights that might be visible to enemy aircraft during an air raid; The sudden extinguishment of all stage lights in a theatre to indicate the passage of time or to mark the end of an act or scene; A temporary loss of memory or consciousness;
A suppression, as of news, by censorship. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.

5 Signature covers the distinctive features of phenomena, equipment, or objects as they are sensed by the reconnaissance instrument(s). The signature is used to recognize the phenomenon, equipment, or object once its distinctive features are detected. Interagency OPSEC Support Staff (IOSS) (May 1996), 'Section 2, Intelligence Collection Activities and Disciplines' in Operations Security Intelligence Threat Handbook.

6 Russian маскировка (maskiróvka), (military, especially regarding Soviet warfare). A set of procedures designed to confuse, mislead, and camouflage oneself from the enemy.
It encompasses: camouflage, concealment, deception, imitation, disinformation, secrecy, security, feints, diversions, and simulation. Well disciplined, extensive and creative deception plans are integrated into all Soviet operations. Smith,Charles L. 'Soviet Maskirovka' in Air and Power Journal, Vol. II, No. 1 (Spring 1988): 28-39.

7 White-out noun: a quick-drying fluid, typically white, applied with a small brush to a piece of paper so as to cover typed or written errors and make a blank surface for corrections. Origin: < Wite-Out, a trademark for such fluid, prob. infl. by whiteout; transitive verb: to cover with this fluid. Webster's New World College Dictionary (2010), Wiley Publishing, Inc., Cleveland, Ohio.

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# QALANDIA 1948–2087

By Wafa Hourani

**1948** | Israelis took over Palestine and ethnically cleansed hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns. Palestinian refugees were forced to settle in many camps in the surrounding region. Qalandia camp was located in a piece of land between North Jerusalem and South Ramallah became home to thousands of refugees. (Qalandia was named after a nearby airport by the same name.)

**1967** | The Israelis occupied the rest of Palestine, and Qalandia airport became a lonely military zone, except for the fact that it was located at the entrance of Ramallah, where many visitors from Jerusalem passed.

**1987** | The first Intifada erupted and the airport became a line of confrontation between Qalandia's residents and Israeli soldiers.

**2001** | The second Intifada broke out. The Israelis built a massive checkpoint next to the airport which overshadows the camp. Qalandia checkpoint became the main crossing between Northern and Southern Palestine.

**2003** | The Israelis built the notorious apartheid WALL to exclude the Palestinian population in the occupied West Bank. Qalandia became even more isolated from its surroundings by giant concrete blocks.

**2005** | Yasser Arafat died in a hospital in France and the Palestinian people are left to fill the void left behind by this icon of their national liberation struggle.

**2016** | A Palestinian from the camp by the name of Abu Jamil missed the sea and the fish so much, he dug a pool beside his home and brought a golden fish to swim in it. People in the camp say that Abu Jamil brought us the sea. The fish loved the camp so much, she got used to the people visiting her laying in the sun and having barbecues in her pond.
Soon Abu Jamil's golden fish became a local attraction for the refugees.

**2019** | After many years of living in what became an overcrowded open air prison, the Palestinian Mirror Party (PMP) decided to cover the WALL with mirrors to create the illusion of more space and seeing their reflection everywhere, people began to wonder how they got in there.

**2020** | Qalandia School changed its name to Impossible School. And the students closed the basketball rings. No goals in the game.

**2023** | An Israeli company for tourism built near the checkpoint a discothèque bar with an aquarium and one golden fish. They called it Checkpoint Bar to encourage trippy-political tourism.

**2025** | Palestine made the Guinness Book of World Records for the biggest mirror in the world that caused many tourists to come and visit Palestine.

**2028** | Checking in the checkpoint changed from palm scanning to an audiovisual-check. As you look into the blue light you say Weehaa.

**2030** | The Israelis fixed laser lights on the holes of the WALL to tighten security. The Palestinians were furious as the holes were meant to help remove the WALL, not to fix laser points in it.

**2033** | The Palestinians start talking about the revolution again. They build the STONE GARDEN for the 50th commemoration of the first popular Intifada in 1987.



**2037** | The Fish died, all the camp cried and said the fish died, the sea died. They took out the water and buried the fish and called it the FISH TOMB. Then the visits changed from picnics, singing and dancing to a Martyr's memorial, where flowers are laid and silence kept.

**2044** | The Palestinians improved their economic situation after a complete boycott of Israeli products. This prompted many investors to move from Dubai to Ramallah.

**2047** | The Palestinians built a garden in the camp and called it the "Flower Garden". It became a romantic space for young and old lovers from the camp.

**2049** | Students at Qalandia School opened their basketball rings but they made it very big.

**2052** | Palestinians refuse to say "weehaa" while passing the checkpoint.

**2058** | The Israeli government shut down the Mirror Party offices in Jerusalem as the police launch a campaign against anyone possessing a mirror.

**2060** | The Israeli company for tourism changed the golden fish in the Checkpoint Bar to shark fish to provide more adventure for the tourists.

**2061** | The Mirror Party reopened their office in Jerusalem.

**2063** | Palestinians use the mirrors on the wall as an electricity power plant.

**2067** | Three candidates from the Mirror Party won seats in the Israeli parliament.

**2069** | The Mirror Party celebrated their 50th Anniversary by creating "The Mirror Garden" – a garden with a big hand mirror where people can look at themselves that came with removing the lasers lights from the WALL after the International Criminal Court rules in their favor.

**2072** | Students at Qalandia School made their basketball rings smaller to match the size of the ball exactly, for more precise aims.

**2075** | Cinema Dunia opened along with the Qala Modern – the first modern museum in Qalandia.

**2081** | Someone from Jerusalem buys the Checkpoint Bar from the Israeli tourism company that owns it and converts it to AL Ajami Restaurant - Bar, featuring five golden fish in the aquarium.

**2085** | The new Israeli government removed Qalandia checkpoint. The Palestinians kept the mike left behind and change the checkpoint to Speechpoint, a free speech area where people can say or sing what they like.

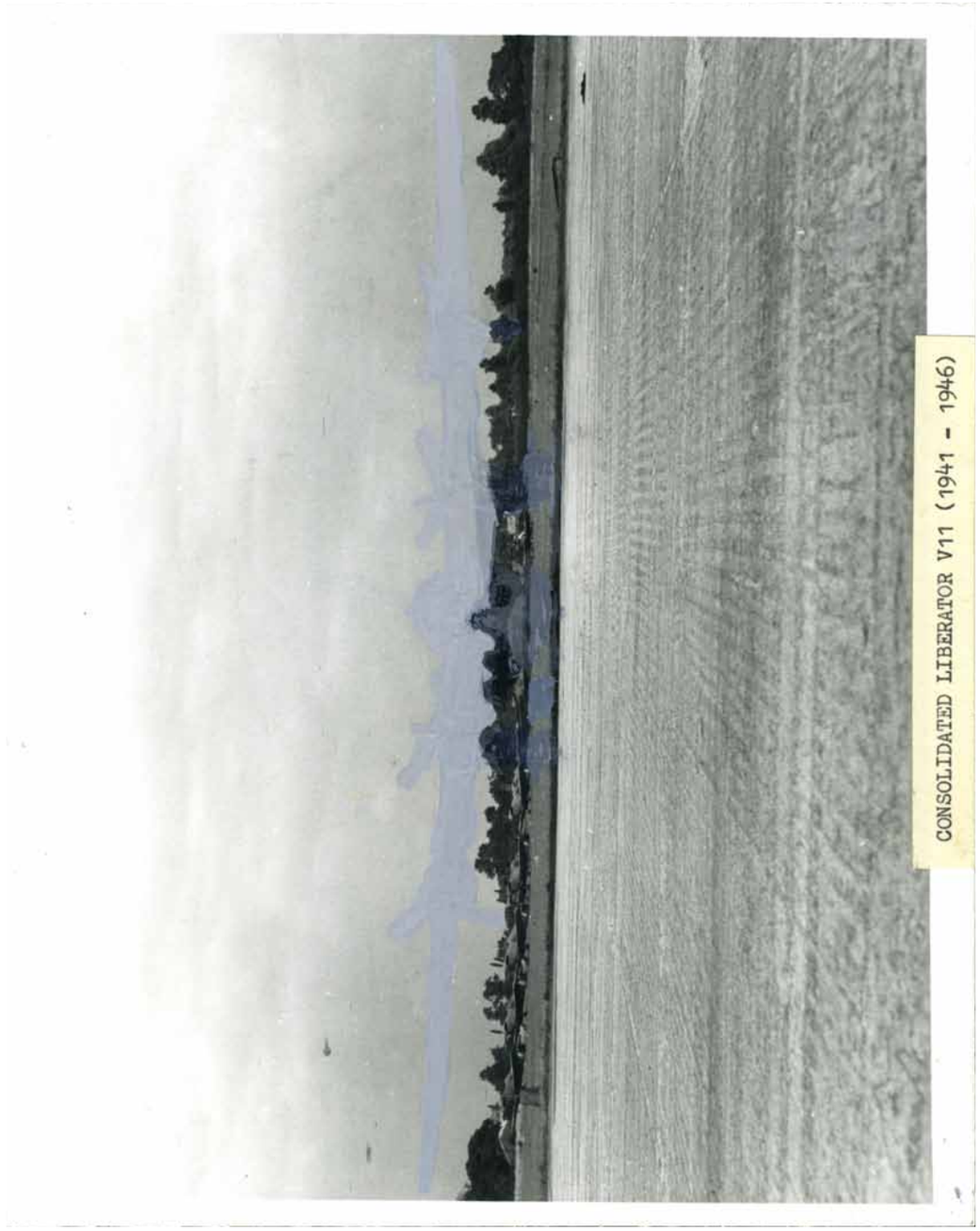
**2087** | One hundred years after the First Intifada, Qalandia's residents celebrated in the Stone Garden after the Mirror Party's historic agreement with the new Israeli government, which gives the Palestinian the 1967 lands (the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem) along with the right of return for all refugees.
They remove the cement from the wall and fix mirrors on the other side.
For some it becomes known as the Mirror Wall, while I call it Maya Wall.

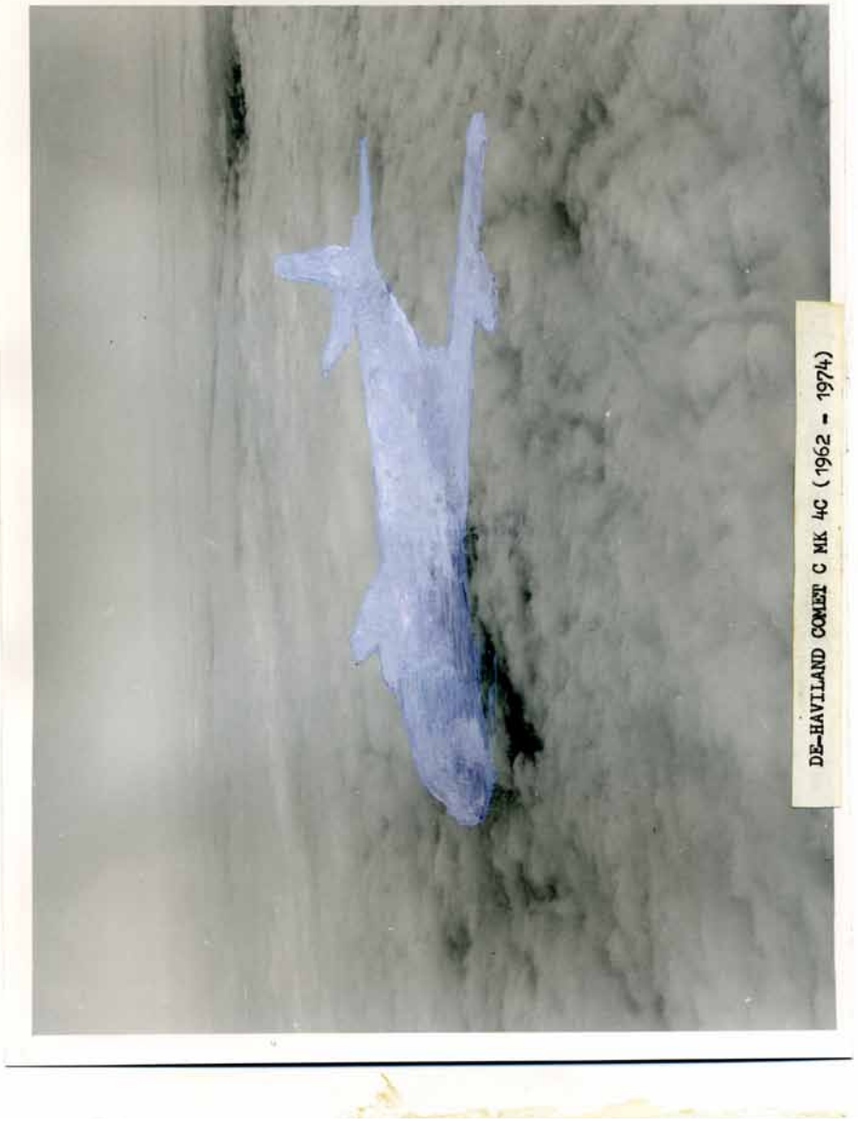
*Wafa Hourani*
*Photolife 2009*

# THE AIR IS ONE VAST LIBRARY

By Mariele Neudecker

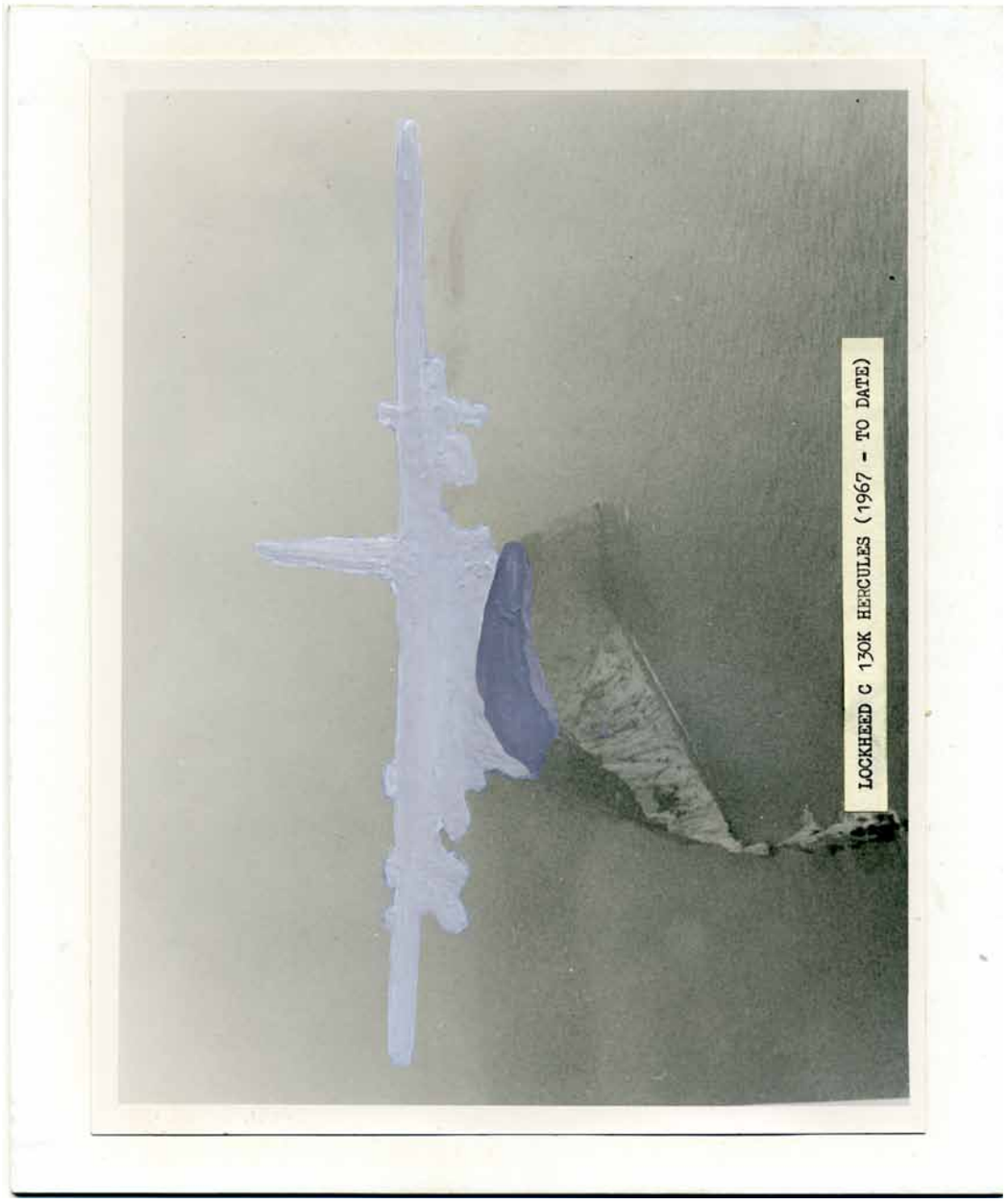






DE-HAVILAND COMET C MK 4C (1962 - 1974)





LOCKHEED C 130K HERCULES (1967 - TO DATE)



HUNTING PERCIVAL PEMBROKE C 1 (1956 TO DATE)



DE-HAVILAND COMET C MK 2(1956 - 1967)

# MOVEMENTS

Olaf Nicolai

Olaf Nicolai
MOVEMENTS

**1**

One and
Three

Out and
Breath

Stop
Between

Regular
Slow

Steady
Rhythm

Slower
Normal

Switch
On

Fade
Up

**2**

Speak
Fade

Begin
Repeat

All
Eyes

All
Sides

Image
Voice

**3**

Good
Come

Start
Again

Not
Come

Good
Start

Stop
Again

Yes
Not

Not
Again

Start
Come

**4**

High and
Low

General
View

Low
Distinct

Little
Remote

Audible
Rhythmic

Medium
Shot

Near
Shot

Regular
Movement

**5** Circular
Shadow

Start
With A

Then B
And C

Turn
Replace

Right about
Left about

All
Combinations

Complete
Courses

Pacing
No Trace

# VIRTUAL TERRITORIES


| Thea Brejzek | Wolfgang Muench | Simon Penny |
|---|---|---|
| From Social Network to Urban Intervention: On the Scenographies of Flash Mobs and Urban Swarms | No\|w\|here: Scenographies for *SomePlaceElse* | Desire for Virtual Space: The Technological Imaginary in 1990s Media Art |

# FROM SOCIAL NETWORK TO URBAN INTERVENTION

**On the Scenographies of Flash Mobs and Urban Swarms**

By Thea Brejzek

**Abstract** | The urban scenographies created and inhabited by flash mobs are participatory, temporary and ephemeral. They are designed in online communities and social networks and it is argued here that the *grammar* of the social network provides the model for the flash mob's spatial figure and scenography. And while digital scenography is usually associated with an image-producing process, its spatial faculties become legible if virtual communities and networks are looked upon as social, scenographic spaces.

It is further proposed that a potential for artistic intent and social critique inherently exists in the flash mob's appropriation of the city as a scenographic, performative space. Where the consumerist city and its uphold depend on the perpetuation of eternal mobility, flash mob scenographies form an orchestrated spatial figure of resistance. Relating examples of mob practice (New York 2003, London 2007 and Munich 2009) to spatial and critical theory (de Certeau, Debord), it is argued that the desire to engage with the city forms the central motivation for flash mob activities.

However, whether self-organized or commercially hijacked, the artistic language and agency of realized flash mobs so far appear largely repetitive, unimaginative and underdeveloped. This article can thus be read as a plaidoyer for contemporary performative, participatory and scenographic practices to critically engage with the flash mob genre in a proposed shift towards urban commentary and critique.

**Staging the City** | Contemporary scenography operates far beyond the theatre in all those areas of spatial design that have inscribed onto them elements of the *mise en scène,* of narrativity, transformativity and mediality. Scenography is understood here as a practice that utilizes transdisciplinary strategies in the design of performative spaces at the interface of theatre, media, architecture and installation. With the emphasis on the performative, the processual and the constructed, formerly separate genres of spatial design merge towards staged gestures of spatiality (see Brejzek et al. 2008a, 2008b, 2009).

Spaces that are thus conceptualized, constructed and realized derive from a transdisciplinary design strategy and are hybrids that cannot be assigned anymore as belonging to a single genre. In this reading, the scenographer emerges not as the spatial organizer of scripted narratives but as the author of constructed situations and as an agent of interaction and communication. As a recent form of public performative event and cultural practice, the flash mob operates in a long tradition of urban interventions. It appropriates the city as a dynamic *mise en scène,* creating an ever-changing scenography of architecture, passers-by and flash mob activists.

The city as a site for performance and intervention has been an important focus of artistic, cultural and political practices from Dada to Fluxus and Happening, to the Situationist International (SI) as well as to contemporary post dramatic and documentary forms of theatre. Looking upon the post-industrial city as a stage and laboratory, theatre and performance artists, architects and designers have since been actively seeking to provoke a critical dialogue between the built environment and its inhabitants by inserting (mostly) temporary nodes of irritation into pedestrian and transport trajectories. Such interdisciplinary urban interventions (see, for example, Lehmann 2009) have the capacity to open up public space to alternative uses and to refract the existing axis of viewing. By staging public space, urban interventionist scenography carries the potential to highlight spatial politics and to communicate social agency.

It is in this context of scenographic practice, or *action,* that the scenographies of flash mobs, conceptualized and designed in online communities and social networks, are of interest in this reflection on participatory artistic and commercial urban strategies. Furthermore, by positing *the digital* not only as specific media but also as an all-pervasive cultural technique in its mobile (ubiquitous) application, a link is made between the organizational and communication structure ('grammar') of the social network and the distributed, temporary scenography it evokes in the form of flash mobs and urban swarms.

Since 2003, stunned commuters, shoppers, sales staff and politicians internationally have been confronted unexpectedly with flocks of seemingly unrelated people congregating in the central business districts (CBDs) from Leipzig to Teheran, London to Munich. Performing nonsensical actions, shouting slogans or applauding in unison in obviously timed sequences, the individuals tend to disperse shortly after their action has taken place without as much as a word to each other.

Termed flash mobs by their self-appointed founder Bill Wasik, Senior Editor of Harper's Magazine in 2003, these brief collective actions are organized via communication forms utilized in virtual / online communities such as Twitter, Facebook, chain emails and mobile phones. Widely discussed as a new cultural phenomenon and as a physicalization of 'viral culture' (Wasik 2009: 5) in the mass media and numerous blogs, flash mobs denote the participation and spatial organization of large numbers of people in absurdist, cultural and political actions in the CBDs of cities worldwide. They operate in a predominantly locally driven fashion in response to online invitations to specific actions by (anonymous) individuals or artist's groups. Initiated by Wasik as an inherently media-critical and self-reflective art project; he describes in *And Then There's This. How Stories Live And Die In Viral Culture* (Viking: 2009) his first flash mob or 'nanostory' (Wasik 2009: 5) as his reaction to the media coverage of a 2003 court case by a New Jersey high school student. Wasik analysed the media coverage of the case, in particular the student's sudden media presence, its sudden surgence and its sudden and predictable decline after a few months.

Naming it a *nanostory* for its apparent substance, narrative and implosion by the media, Wasik decided to construct his own nanostory by utilizing the Internet as his distribution medium. Wanting to design an event, a 'short lived sensation that attracts incredible attention' (Wasik 2009: 6), Wasik wrote an email to 63 friends and acquaintances: *You are invited to take a part in MOB, the project that creates an inexplicable mob of people in New York City for ten minutes or less. Please forward this to other people you know who might like to join.* (Wasik 2009: 5)

Concealing his own identity and driven by boredom of himself and the world as he repeatedly claims in *And Then There's This* (Viking: 2009), Wasik gave precise directions, choreographic and directorial statements and descriptions, movements and actions in the mail. While the mob itself might be inexplicable as

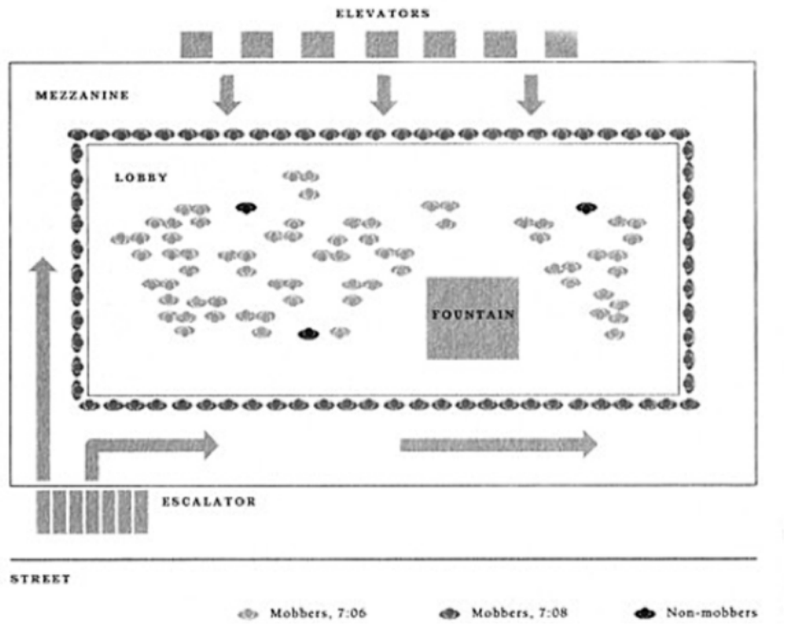



FIG.1

he states, he had thoroughly planned, designed and choreographed the mob's spatial figure and the parameters of the mob event.

Furthermore, he claims that in defying both authorship and identifiable message, Wasik's conceptual statement is reminiscent of early 1960s happenings that were built upon participatory strategies. In his 1966 essay, *Notes on the Elimination of the Audience* (Abrams: 1966), US-American conceptual artist Allan Kaprow called for the convergence of performer and viewer to *participants* of the performative event. While initially confined to interventions within the gallery space, the event should be life-like and Kaprow outlined several exceptions to the 'rule' of the elimination of the passive viewer: *A Happening may be scored for just watching. Persons will do nothing else. They will watch things, each other, possibly actions not performed by themselves, such as a bus stopping to pick up commuters. This would not take place in a theatre or arena, but anywhere else.* (Kaprow 1966: 198)

In Wasik's third mob, *Mob 3* in the lobby of the New York Grand Hyatt, two groups of mobbers did exactly that, entering the hotel lobby at ground level and at the gallery mezzanine level respectively. Positioning themselves at the gallery balustrade and looking down, the first group did nothing but observe the second group that had positioned itself amidst hotel guests on the ground level. The ground level group did nothing but observe the group at gallery level (see Figure 1). In complete silence and concentration, the two groups stared at each other. After several minutes of stillness, they applauded each other for a set time and dispersed in a choreographed motion.

*Mob 3*, unrehearsed and minimal in its anonymously distributed online stage directions and choreographic figures, did, in fact, achieve a high degree of self-reflexivity (the *pure scene* – the mob observing itself) by constructing a tightly controlled and highly charged performative space. Spectators and actors in one, the two groups of mobbers enacted a choreographed performative action with a set beginning and set end in a public space. Its cast comprised anonymous participants drawn from an online community and its physical body interrupted, spotlighted and irritated the relentless 'passing-through spaces' that characterise contemporary urbanity.

Its temporary scenography in the Grand Hyatt was modelled on the communication systems of a social network (join, comment / participate, disperse) and its ubiquitous virtual space. Intrinsically and by its sheer physicality, Wasik's flash mob formed a spatial figure of resistance (stillness as provocation) within the social context of the busy hotel lobby.

While Wasik's mobs were clearly and explicitly labelled as art projects by him as early as 2003, they had not been placed in an art context but rather in the hub of commercial activities and networking (a department store, a hotel lobby). Moreover, while their language



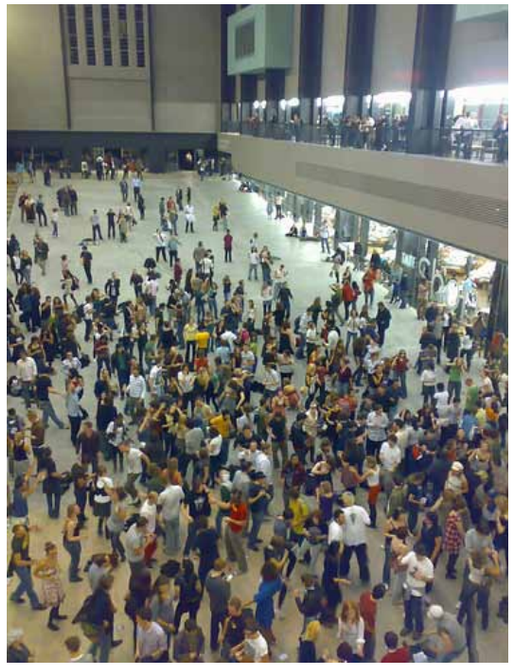


FIG.2

was minimal but succinct, with carefully chosen locations, immaculate timing and exact choreographies, the flash mobs that followed Wasik's demonstrated no intent, no strategy, no position we had not already seen in his New York mobs. | FIG.1 MOB 3 GRAND HYATT, NEW YORK (WASIK 2009: 34).

Four years later, in October 2007, a mob formed in the Turbine Hall of the London Tate Modern, performing a silent disco, a form of mobile clubbing that may happen at multiple sites communicated via Twitter, blogs and mobile phones (Figure 2). In the Turbine Hall, more than 200 people followed the Twitter call to turn up and dance to their favourite sounds over their MP3 players and earphones. After some minutes and without anything spoken between the dancers, they simultaneously dispersed and rode up the elevators into the wide galleries of the Tate Modern or straight back into the city of London. As in Wasik's Grand Hyatt mob, the silent disco dancers performed for each other while they could be seen from the gallery level above and thus invariably collectively produced a performance for the gallery visitors. By placing themselves into a gallery venue though, they formed an 'anxious object' (Rosenberg 1964) – an art object or performative action that is framed as art by its context. Again, the shifting and unstable scenography of simultaneously connected and isolated dancing bodies had been conceptualized and designed in the virtual domain of a participatory but fleeting community. | FIG.2 FLASH MOB DANCING AT LONDON TATE MODERN, OCTOBER 2007.

Silent dancing in London, flash mob pillow fights in Sydney or suddenly erupting applause on an inner city square in Vienna: while predominantly playful in character, the spaces that flash mobbers inhabit in outdoor and indoor pockets of inner city space invariably take on political agency through the appropriation of public space by a large number of networked individuals.

In the introduction to *Situations. Documents of Contemporary Art* (Whitechapel: 2009), editor, curator and academic Claire Doherty provocatively pits the empty 'stunts' of flash mobs against 'tactical practices' by artists working in the public domain and wishing to engage critically with the city through the design and construction of performative spaces (Doherty 2009: 16–17). The essentially unauthored user-generated flash mob, however, continues to flirt with the politics of space, but it may quite possibly be its undecided agenda that constitutes its greatest future potential for exactly the critical engagement Doherty calls for.

In contrast to 'fun' flash mobs, smart mobs – thus coined by the US American psychologist and virtual reality theorist Howard Rheingold – are purpose-driven – transporting political messages or communicating media and consumer critique (Rheingold 2003). According to Rheingold, smart mobs are 'ad hoc social networks, which are the results of individuals using personal communication technologies to coordinate collective action' (www.smartmobs.com).

Organized via Twitter and mobile phones, thousands of anti-government protesters collected on the streets of Teheran from 2003 onwards forming, what is generally referred to as some of the first political flash mobs, or, according to Rheingold, a smart mob. Widely quoted in the mass media as an example of the influential potential of ubiquitous media with user-generated



FIG.3

content for political and cultural empowerment, formerly basic behavioural and location directions (such as meeting place, time, directions of entering and leaving the event area) are becoming more intricate with the use of hand-held PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) with mobile Internet access and widely available GPS systems.

Utilizing swarm principles derived from flocks of birds or shoals of fish for the first time in a designated performative event, the recent flash mob *Moment of Starlings* (www.die-urbanauten.de) for the opening of the Munich Theatre Festival *Spielart* in November 2009 configured itself as an urban swarm. Via an open call on the Internet and Twitter, participants were invited to organize themselves in a dedicated inner city Munich area according to the three main principles of a bird swarm.

In 1986, the US-American computer scientist Craig Reynolds developed a procedural simulation model of flocking (www.red3d.com/cwr/boids/). The model built from the steering software BOIDS differentiates three distinct steering behaviours: Separation (steer to avoid crowding local flockmates), Alignment (steer towards the average heading of local lockmates), and Cohesion (steer to move towards the average position of local flockmates). [1]

Participants of *Moment of Starlings* were given timed and synchronized swarming directions (separation / alignment / cohesion) over their mobile phones and were able to place live commentary on Twitter from within the swarm about their actions and impressions. Supported by the founder of *Improv Everywhere*, Charlie Todd, the figure behind the cult improvisational event *Frozen Grand Central* in New Yorks Central Station in January 2008 (http://improveverywhere.com), the *Urbanauten* – a group of young Munich Urban researchers – constructed a highly visible collective staging through participants' continuous swarming movements:

*Moment of Starlings >>> SMS an 11832. We will soon swarm out in the city. Our inspiration is the intelligent starlings in their swarms. One hears us softly beating our wings before we come together to form magnificent swarms in public spaces. The Flash Mob started in New York and from there it conquered the world. These real happenings in urban spaces are organized in the virtual realms of the Net. The Urbanauts develop together with the participants the "Flash Mob" principle, based on research on swarms; with new mobile communication technologies it has been developed further into a radically new, "pervasive game" for the city. Follow the white rabbit! Register to participate by text message. The city is our playground. Participants become actors in a playful urban experiment, and, in a flash, they take over spaces in the city. The collective of the advanced Flash Mob makes decisions by text messages or via Twitter. This makes it more stabile (sic) and more mobile. It easily flows around the gray men of the system. In addition, it reacts in real time to the unexpected.* (www.blog.urbanaut.org / happenings)

Oscillating between virtual choreography and real-time action, between a dynamic, live *mise en scène* and its virtual directors, *Moment of Starlings* is another example for a self-reflective urban scenographic figure. Unlike Wasik's *Grand Hyatt Mob*, however, this urban swarm was able to document itself during the action both visually and by audio commentary using sophisticated handheld technology. It constituted a heterogeneous scenographic body that was constantly forming and re-forming and that addressed both individual and communities of spectators. *Starlings'* participants playfully appropriated urban space, while communicating with each other and with their online audience.

Distributed by ubiquitous media, Flickr, Twitter and Facebook, flash mobs and urban swarms create temporary, situated user-generated scenographic practices

FIG.3 MOMENTS OF STARLING, MUNICH, NOVEMBER 2009





as an embodiment of what Wasik provocatively calls 'viral culture' (Wasik: 2009). Based on principles of digital interactivity and online participation, and by appropriating urban sites of transit and consumerism, the 'viral' culture, or the 'contagious media' in Wasik's words, was able to spread fast and develop a cult following without as yet developing an agenda that moves beyond ideas of participation and entertainment in an interplay between *online* and *real life*.

The unstable scenographies created by Wasik's mobs and the silent disco mobs (much in fashion and identical in character all over Europe in the last few years) constituted *mise en scènes* concerned with the transmission and convergence of digital media, elements of transformativity and narrativity. It is, however, with the rise and use of ubiquitous, handheld technologies as in *Moments of Starling* that a self-reflexive narrative can unfold that allows for complex and multiple sites of performance and reflection in performative urban interventions.

**The Grammar of Ubiquity** | With the advance of virtual communities and social networks, a surge in networked social activities has imploded our concept of space as a solid, Euclidean entity. Ubiquitous technologies relocate social space into mixed reality domains and the social playgrounds of the global city are overlaid with an almost infinite mesh of potential contact points, of virtual fora for leisure and for work.

'To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper', says the French philosopher and spatial theorist Michel de Certeau in his seminal essay *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In the city, 'a universe of rented spaces' (Certeau 1984: 103), pedestrians criss-cross the city, inscribing their multiple and ever-changing trajectories of relentless mobility. The urban fabric of the postmodern city is designed to include and to exclude individuals through physical architectures, zonings and diverse surveillance systems. The city invites passing through and it discourages lingering. Its inhabitants have become 'interlocutors in permanent traffic', and the 'old agglomeration disappears in the intense acceleration of telecommunications, in order to give rise to a new type of concentration: the concentration of a domiciliation without domiciles' (Virilio 1984: 385). The city propagates disengagement rather than engagement and the renewed interest of individual artists and artists groups in urban intervention stems from a desire (closely related to the lack – of place, of engagement) to transgress the normative urban scenography of the everyday. In the urban interventionist works of *Rimini Protokoll* (Berlin), in Spencer Tunick's mass installations of nude persons or in the numerous sitespecific works of the UK group of artists *Forced Entertainment* and the Berlin and Nottingham-based *Gob Squad* – temporary, participatory performative events are set in urban centres, often involving digital media as a means of connecting multiple venues and spaces.

The grammar of ubiquity allows for the swift, efficient and creative communication between anonymous users and it fulfils its virtual potentialities in the act of crossing over into real-life collective action. Understood here as an essentially transgressive act that stems from the desire to overcome the lack of place and to halt the eternal mobility of the postmodern metropolis, the flash mob is seen to operate as the physical articulation of a social network. It transgresses the virtual community by moving into the real and it transgresses the urban grammar by its stillness where eternal mobility is regarded as structural to the upkeep of the consumerist city.

The flash mobs participatory character, however, makes it attractive to commercial applications, and,

utilizing people's desire to do 'something extraordinary, something that elicits media attention' (Wasik 2009), Telekom Germany put a call for participation on their website for an upcoming flash mob (or rather, smart mob) singing Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' in the Leipzig Central Train Station (http://telekom-news.dsl-flatrate-angebote.de). The date, November 2009, was chosen to coincide closely with the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. A purely commercial event, Telekom invested the mob with extensive emotive content using the vocal excerpt from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Telekom then enlisted the popular British opera singer Paul Potts to suddenly appear from within the crowd to sing the solo. | **FIG.4**
TELEKOM GERMANY FLASH MOB, LEIPZIG CENTRAL STATION, NOVEMBER 2009.

In contrast to a non-commercial flash mob's self-governing and selforganizing faculty and resulting non-hierarchical spatial figure, Telekom's venture was authored, designed by the marketing department and PR-driven by the engagement of a *star*. As a direct consequence, the spatial figure of the Leipzig smart mob was markedly different to Wasik's comparatively anarchic 'pure scene' in the Grand Hyatt. Stifled by the rigid adaptation of traditional concert scenography (still backdrop, soloist surrounded by an anonymous chorus mass and an identifiable audience), the mob turned into an accompanying chorus. From the non-hierarchical online registration to join the mob to is actual realization as a PR exercise, the scenographic figure displayed in Leipzig exhibited a clear hierarchy, with a primary focus of attention (opera star), secondary focus (flash mob singers) and supporting periphery (passers-by). With the intervention (the soloist), the process of translation (from virtual network to urban scenography) was hijacked, resulting in a conventional concert scenography.

**Figures of Resistance** | While digital scenography is usually associated with an image-producing process, its spatial faculties become legible if virtual communities and networks are looked upon as social, scenographic spaces. The virtual space of the virtual community operates due to a grammar of ubiquity – allowing for infinite entrances and exits into the network while encouraging multiple strands of behaviour. The network itself is dynamic and able to adjust in size, volume, number and velocity of activities according to the number and behaviour of its active players. User-generated content, non-hierarchical swarm behaviour (flocking) and a constantly shifting number of participants characterise the virtual community, the social network and its dynamic spatial patterns. Its distributed presence is articulated through ubiquitous technology. The flash mob – organized, directed and designed through online virtual communities and social network – is able to translate the concept of ubiquity into a physical form. In its dynamic structure and in its ability to suddenly surge and disappear again, the flash mob embodies the grammar of the virtual community. It proposes group behaviour against individual urban trajectories – flocking, congregation and dispersion against an urban rhythm punctured by the 'Stop' and 'Go' of traffic lights. In a 'production of presence' (Gumbrecht 2001: 65), the mob stages selected nodes in the city with its architecture and its pedestrians providing the shifting backdrop to the virtually designed scenography of bodies. Its transgressive character lies in the collective construction and inhabitation of an urban performative space.

As an autonomous, anonymous mass, the flash mob remains conscious of its own virtual home: at any moment, it may disperse, leaving behind just a trace, a shadow-memory in the passers-by who are resuming and continuing their blind navigations of the city.





**FIG.3**



The flash mob entry of the *Webster's New Millennium Dictionary of English* reads as 'a group of people who organize on the Internet and then quickly assemble in a public place, do something bizarre, and disperse.' Intrinsically, the mob has no other message than its sheer and unexpected physicality. Temporary, ephemeral and potentially overwhelming, the mob engages with the city as a collective drawn together, defying authorship, narrative and protagonists. In the continuing urbanization of society, the mob ruptures the urban mesh for a brief moment by its stillness, thus transforming the public space into a pervasive scenography of physical presence and virtual communication. As spatial figures of resistance, the mob and its sub forms invite new modes of spectatorship into the city. Between participant and spectator, between the individual participant and the dynamic spatial figure of the mob, shifting relationships of viewing, observing and commenting emerge, framing a fragile urban space. The participatory qualities of the mob point towards a genre that hinges between event culture, political and artistic activism. The spaces created in the scenographies of flash mobs and their politically, socially or culturally inclined sub groups are boundless and participation is both limited and defined by an individual's access to technology. With its ability for sudden actions, a moment of irritation is evoked by a seemingly anonymous flock of people performing actions usually in unison, timed and improvised.

Dancing and singing flash mobs usually elicit applause from passers-by who find themselves transformed into a community of spectators, into members of an audience. While the passers-by observe the mob, its individual members observe themselves and each other as well as the entire activity of the mob by transmitting live-feeds to Twitter and commenting over mobile phones by SMS and conversation. Even though flash mobs constitute a user-generated performative event rather than a designated performance or a spontaneous but authored happening, the modes of spectatorship do not differ fundamentally between the two forms of spectacle for the passer-by. Could it be that Jacques Rancières 'emancipated spectator' (Rancière 2004) can be found on both sides of the mob? Rancière's notion of 'spectacle performed by acting bodies in front of a collective audience' (Rancière 2004: 5) seems at first a rather traditional notion of performance and certainly would seem to exclude the kind of urban interventions discussed here. Can accidental passers-by be grouped together as a collective audience? Rather: can any audience ever constitute a collective audience?

*Artists, just as researchers, build the stage where the manifestation and the effect of their competences become dubious as they frame the story of a new adventure in a new idiom. The effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated. It calls for spectators who are active as interpreters, who try to invent their own translation in order to appropriate the story for themselves and make their own story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators* (Ranciere 2004: 18).

Storytellers (in the mob action) as well as translators (in the online reflections on the mob), mob participants are both performers and audience, shifting between the virtual and the physical domain. From within the spatial figure of the mob, its participants may comment on their participation in real time – thus providing a self-reflective strand and communicating the action to the online social network. Its distributed mode of spectatorship between 'distant inquiry' and 'vital embodiment' (Ranciere 2004: 3); between physical action and virtual commentary; and its authorship within a social network locates the flash mob as a contemporary phenomenon of a digitally designed

scenography that infiltrates the body of the city. Fast to appear, to form a spatial figure and to disperse, the flash mob invites a different view on the 'universe of rented spaces', to use de Certeau's terminology that is so apt in describing a dislocated and alienating urban fabric. In its 'construction of situations' (Debord 1958), the flash mob and its subsidiary forms do resemble the urban laboratories of the Situationist International (SI), if only in their potentiality for the activation and participation of large numbers of people.

Collectively prepared and organized, the SI's activities were designated as a critique of the capitalist *spectacle*, as its co-founder Guy Debord outlines in *Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation: The construction of situations begins beyond the ruins of the modern spectacle. It is easy to see how much the very principle of the spectacle – non-intervention – is linked to the alienation of the old world. Conversely, the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectators' psychological identification with the hero so as to draw them into activity [...]. The situation is thus designed to be lived by its constructors. The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing 'public' must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, 'livers,' must steadily increase.* (Debord 1958: online edition)

The critical engagement with the city lies at the core of the SI's activities as a way of uncovering the capitalist mechanisms of exploitation and alienation; and Debord calls for a 'unitary urbanism' (Debord 1957: online edition) with yet to be developed situationist techniques to see the city anew. However, it is the potential of the flash mob's artistic, cultural and political agency, rather than its actualized events, that connects it to Debord's 1960s Paris and Kaprow's 1960s New York. In today's social space, the flash mob constitutes an urban intervention based on the non-hierarchical digital grammar of virtual communities. Its temporary scenography of still or moving bodies alters the perception of the urban everyday and makes the system of urbanity 'stutter' (Deleuze 1994: 23), if only for a moment. Even in their predominantly *fun*- manifestations, flash mobs, smart mobs and urban swarms temporarily unsettle the seamless functioning of contemporary urban consumerist choreographies as spatial figures of resistance that require circumnavigation, pausing, spectating.

Beyond opening up discussions about the multiple new social *mise en scènes* created by new technologies, the flash mob is yet to be filled with (critical) intent. Where its temporary, shifting scenography irritates and disturbs the seamless functioning of the urban fabric, it may be seen as an inherent critique of current spatial politics. So far, however, it has failed to convince other than by its sheer physicality, sudden appearance (flocking), basic action and sudden dispersion. The flash mob / urban swarm has not yet become the focus of artists engaged in urban intervention and / or media even though the flash mob's popularity is considerable (judged by the hundreds of participants at each of the aforementioned events) and media attention is guaranteed.

It remains to be seen whether (media) artists and scenographers will take up the challenge to engage with the flash mob genre and its potential for collectively produced and distributed performative events especially with regard to a critical engagement with the city. While its founder, Wasik, certainly succeeded in creating 'an art project consisting of *pure scene* – meaning the scene would be the entire point of the work, and indeed would itself constitute the work' (Wasik 2009: 23), a *critical* staging of the city that embraces the real and the virtual domain is still not much more than a theoretical proposition.





## Endnotes

1 Recent research at the ICST / ZHdK and the University of Zurich has led to the development of an Interactive Swarm Orchestra (ISO) and the team is at present working towards the building of 'immersive spaces where users can interact physically interact with the swarm.' (http://swarms.cc)

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**Figure 1:** *Mob 3 Grand Hyatt*, New York (Wasik 2009: 34)

**Figure 2:** *Flash mob dancing at London Tate Modern*, October 2007. Photograph by Ollie O'Brien. Source: http://farm3.static.flickr.com / 2296 / 1555820122_8ac7f76a47.jpg (accessed 17 / 12 / 10)

**Figure 3:** *Moments of Starling*, Munich, November 2009, Photograph by Andreas Sturm (Süddeutsche Zeitung). Source: http://jetzt.sueddeutsche.de / texte / anzeigen / 489892 (accessed 17 / 12 / 10)

# NOWHERE

**Scenographies for SomePlaceElse**

By Wolfgang Muench

*Virtual Spaces are most often not true spaces but collections of separate objects*. Lev Manovich

**Abstract** | Despite Manovich's claim that there is 'no space in cyberspace' (Manovich, 2001: 253), spatial metaphors and representations are omnipresent in digital technology. Blessed with unreliable machinery, unfocussed theoretical discourses and unprecedented opportunities, twentieth century media art struggled with a coherent concept of space for a post-industrialised, post-modern modernity. The scenographies for dataspace, located in a digital nowhere between nineteenth-century panoramas and Marshall McLuhan's famous catch phrase 'The Medium is the Message' failed to connect with early twentieth century developments in real-world avant-garde theatre, and its significant interfaces with spatial art practices, happenings and performances of the 1960s. This paper reviews spatial approaches during the colonisation of virtual reality within the context of diverse cultural and artistic trajectories, and argues that scenographies for dataspace were regarded only as *quantité negotiable* in the realm of digital technology.

**1.** | In view of the fact that one should regard cyberspace 'as a space only in the most mathematical sense', as Simon Penny suggested in his 1996 *Realities of the Virtual* (Penny, 1996: 129), it is to some extent surprising that visual artists' encounters with machinery that consists basically of a massive array of Boolean calculators and a wide range of peripherals, interconnected through various text-based communication protocols, almost inevitably resulted in the creation of *un-real* spaces. The relatively short history of Digital Media Art saw 'Chat *Rooms*' as early as the 1970s, 'Multi User *Dungeons*' in the 1980s, complete 'Digital *Cities*' in the 1990s, and a phantasmagoria of spatial artworks that immersed the audience into computer-generated imaginary worlds. Such immersive environments, capable of responding to the user's physical action through a variety of input sensors, formed a significant part of what emerged in the 1990s as the global, although rather short-lived, phenomenon of Interactive Art. They displayed ever-new mutations of the technology-based Virtual Reality rhetoric that dates back to the early 1960s when Morton Heilig introduced his pre-computer multimodal machine *Sensorama*[1], Figure 1, and the late 1960s when Myron Krueger presented the first computer-controlled interactive artwork *Glowflow*[2]. | FIG.1 SENSORAMA, MORTON HEILIG, 1962

The desire to re-construct reality using digital technologies is less surprising once contextualised within the larger 'desire for simulation over the real, for the spectacular, the simulated, [that] has always been carried as far as the available technology would allow', which Simon Penny attributed especially to western culture (Penny, 1994: 234). His remarks, made with the advent of the triumphant advance of digital technology, suggest a perpetuation of the long tradition of performative and fine arts practices concerned with spatial representation and re-creation during the set-up of the parallel universe of dataspace with all its digital inventories. The artists' desire to generate some sort of alternative to known reality within the realm of artistic practice is by no means unique to art works related to Virtual Reality, although the immense hype related to the unprecedented and revolutionary promises, prospects and potential ascribed to digital technology, started in the 1960s by its evangelist Marshall McLuhan, often evoked a different anticipation.

But as always in revolutionary times, traditions tend to present themselves as a rather complex topic. So with hindsight it is understandable that the accompanying academic discourse for the emerging new



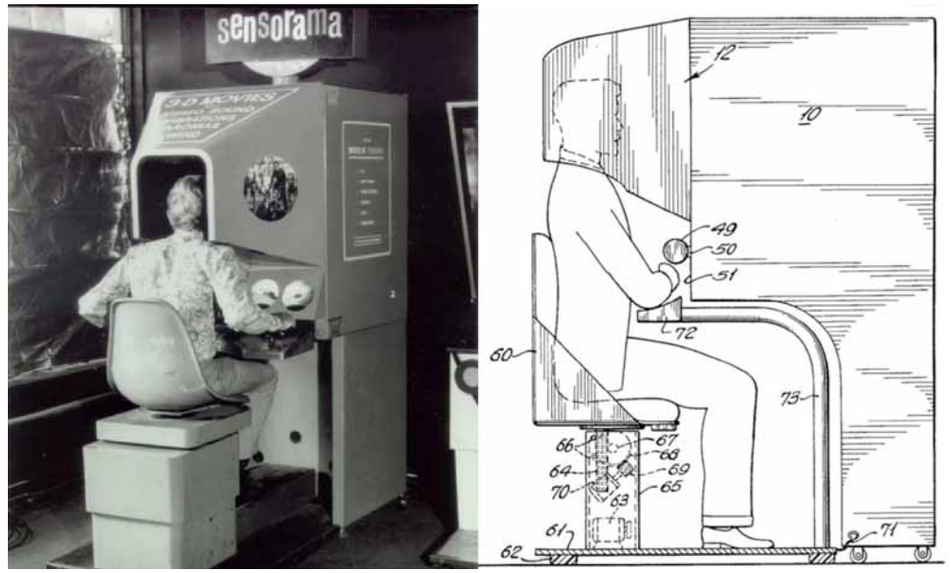



FIG.1

art form that deployed digital technology, non-linear narrative structures, and to some degree artificial life and artificial intelligence algorithms, was fragmented at best and largely unable to keep pace with the rapid development of technologies, as Simon Penny argues in more detail elsewhere in this publication (Penny 2010). It started off with the initial mistake of locating this discourse predominantly within the field of visual arts, despite its reliance on performative elements, thus disconnecting the novel art form in its early stages in the 1990s from the cultural expertise and experiences concerned with spectacle, space and audience already residing in performing arts. In subsequent years the waters were further muddied by the reverberations from McLuhan's theories of technological determinism, that advocated the detachment of technology from transmitted content, thus leading to the valuing of amazing technological solutions over (old-fashioned) artistic content.

Both the lack of theoretical underpinning, and the mismatch between discourse and reality in media art, left a few fundamental issues related to *Immersive Environments* largely unresolved: the definition of a new role for the artist, who contributed only a skeleton framework for an art piece, leaving the generation of final content to human-computer interaction; the definition of a new role for the audience, whose members were now expected to simultaneously fulfil the dual roles of observers and co-creators of the artwork; and the definition of a new scenography for the integration of real and virtual space in such hybrid spatial environments. A scenography corresponding to the n-dimensional mathematical reality in which space has lost all absolute qualities. Mathematical space is nothing more than a variable, its manifestation in digital environments just another quantity subject to the finesse of software designers.

One is tempted to assume that the prospect of leaving behind all physical constraints in the definition of a space for an emerging art form that transformed the audience from passive viewers or semi-active participants with a scripted reality to active *immersants* into a virtual reality would have generated a serious interest in involving scenographers in the process. However, the spectacle that has unfolded in dataspace since the early 1960s conceded only marginal importance to the legacy of the *art* of spatial design. The subject of spatial representation in a mathematical space was in theory a matter of philosophical contemplation, and in practice overwhelmingly subject to technical feasibility (Penny 2010: in this publication). It had nothing to do with scenography.

It was a mathematical problem after all, an engineering problem, and a computer science problem. It was a meta-physical problem in the best sense of the term, since it not only provided a way to transcend the doctrine of reality in long-winded theory, but also to create an alternate reality since it offered a visual representation of a construct of ideas, including all kinds of sensory experiences through immersive spaces and force-feedback systems. It was a military problem, since a significant portion of early research in these

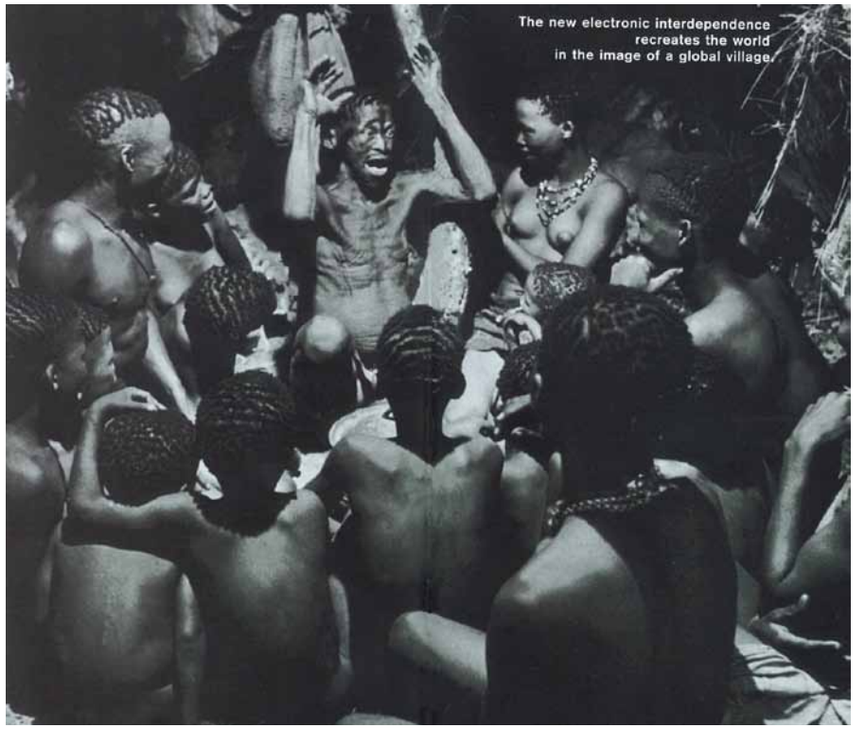



FIG. 2

technologies happened under the umbrella of the US defence agency, and it was a commercial problem once this research was continued with significant funding from large companies, or was relocated entirely into their research labs. It was a societal problem, since it became very clear even in the early stages of the information society that the emerging communication technologies would have massive impacts on society. And it was a cultural problem, since these technologies provided an early taste of globalization on an individual and personal level by interconnecting different cultures on the emerging technical platform of a novel cultural commodity, that inherited cultural values from the western hemisphere, where they had been largely invented.

It was, however, not a problem of spatial design. It initiated no desire for a further development of an expanded notion of scenography for virtual worlds, but overwhelmingly the *Desire for Codes*, as Japanese media artist Seiko Mikami interestingly entitled her latest interactive artwork at YCAM Yamaguchi Centre for Arts and Media in 2010. The definition and implementation of *mise-en-scenes* for the digital theatre were largely left to the, often semi-reasonable, activities of software engineers in the realm of cultural production. Their main objective was to push technological boundaries even if this came at the expense of artistic finesse, as Florian Rötzer, philosopher, journalist, curator and co-founder of *TELEPOLIS*, the award winning online magazine for net-culture, observed as early as 1991 (Rötzer 1991).

**2.** | The mismatch between emerging Interactive Art and established fine arts institutions did not go unnoticed. Peter Weibel, while re-positioning the Linz' ARS ELECTRONICA from a festival for digital music to arguably the most important international forum for visual digital arts in the late 1980s and early 1990s, postulated that art produced with technological media would be in many aspects a radically different art form what preceded it. He regarded the existing theoretical discourse to be incapable of providing an appropriate analysis of media art (see Weibel 1991), a verdict that left media art pretty much in an artistic-theoretical nowhere land.

Hans Peter Schwarz, founding Director of the Media Museum at the ZKM | Centre for Art and Media, described at length the serious challenges faced and 'pioneer work' required in attempting to integrate the 'explosive charge of digital communication media' into the institution museum. Notably, he mentioned this in the publication on occasion of the ZKM Media Museum's opening in 1997 (Schwarz & Zentrum für Kunst und





Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, 1997: 11ff). As it turned out, the institution *museum* did not explode, but media art was institutionalised, leading to what Armin Medosch labelled *High Media Art*, the establishment of a 'certain type of media art... as the leading paradigm', whose 'digital aesthetics... was compatible with the black cube inside the white cube of the museum' (Medosch 2005: 35).

For less museum-compatible types of media art, pursuing more the trajectory of happenings and performative events, it became increasingly difficult to compete with the normative power of highly funded specialised institutions. Indeed, the renowned British art group *Blast Theory*, experimenting with live multimedia performances within the emerging club culture since the beginning of the 1990s, acknowledged that their work's 'relationship with live art and performance became less apparent' from 1999 onwards. Incidentally, this was the year when they presented *Desert Rain*, a large-scale installation, performance and game using virtual reality, at the ZKM Karlsruhe. Only in recent years has there been a marked recognition of the importance of the group's thinking about performativity, presence and site specificity (see Blast Theory, 2009). The appearances of the Austro-German artist collective Van Gogh TV in media festivals and exhibitions has declined significantly since the middle of the 1990s, and their projects were subsequently transferred to online platforms such as *youtube* and *Facebook*. *Van Gogh TV* created interactive projects for radio, television and online multi-user systems since 1986, deploying 'radical multi-framing of images, and multi-layering of inputs' from a patchwork of 'incoming information: faxes, text messages, videos, pictures, sounds, noises and voices' (Dudesek 2008). Its 1992 Documenta IX project *Piazza Virtuale*, a one hundred day, hybrid, user generated, and rather chaotic media happening in the global communication space marked a pioneering cornerstone for the simultaneous presence of a large number of users in an electronic space.

It is not without irony that works like *Piazza Virtuale*, which displayed qualities closely related to Marshall McLuhan's notion of *allatonceness*, were often perceived as interactive, user-generated cacophony by an academic discourse that otherwise was relatively relaxed about contextualising media art within the theories of McLuhan. Rötzer observed as early as 1991 that McLuhan's catchphrase *The Medium is the Message*, that emphasised the formative power of media technology for the constitution of media content, had apparently already been introduced to the realm of media art as a given (see Rötzer 1991: 30f).

With his 1964 *Understanding Media* (McLuhan 2001), McLuhan provided a widely discussed forecast of the future impact of emerging electronic communication technologies on our post-industrialised society. Mass media technologies would expose mankind to a constant and massive flow of instantaneous, simultaneous and interrelated information from various communication channels. It would necessitate a new mode of information perception, reception and processing, from a slow, linear-successive, logical practice of data classification to instant pattern recognition in a novel mediated reality, defined by a montage-style concurrency of disparate fragments. This new reality would recreate the acoustic space of primordial societies, in which the information media would permeate all areas of private, social, economic and political life, interconnecting formerly distant spaces, subjects and individuals in the mediated close proximity of a *Global Village*, (Figure 2). | FIG. 2 MARSHALL MCLUHAN: THE NEW ELECTRONIC INTERDEPENDENCE RECREATES THE WORLD IN THE IMAGE OF A GLOBAL VILLAGE, ILLUSTRATION FROM 'THE MEDIUM IS THE MASSAGE', 1967

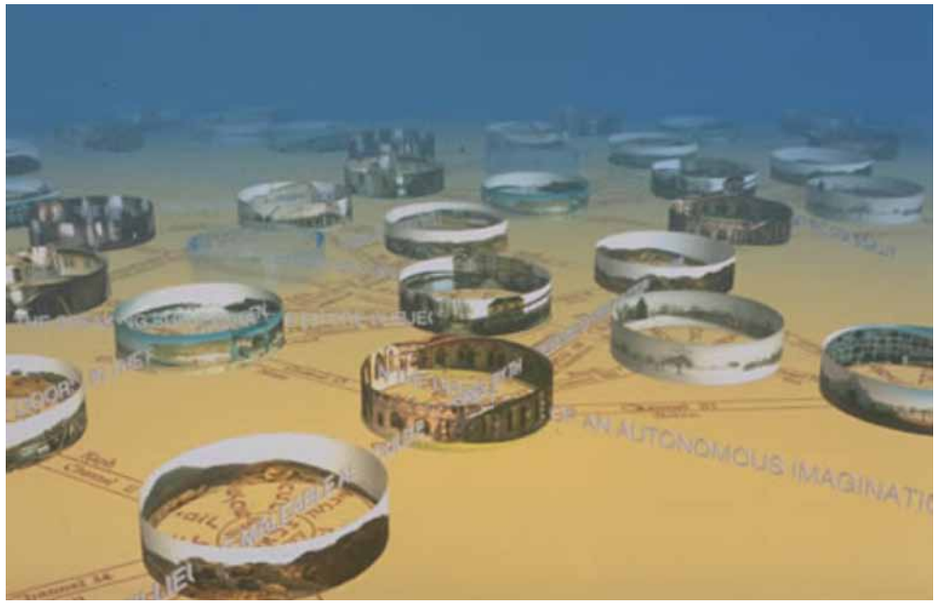


FIG.3

McLuhan thus assumed a leading role in the constitution of what Armin Medosch described as *Technological Determinism in Media Art*, a line of argument that emphasised a focus on technological advances for the formation of media art (Medosch, 2005). And despite a brief decline of his reputation after his death in 1980, not least because the world was 'still working in a medium that the decedent had pronounced obsolete' (Lapham, 2001: XI), he advanced to become mass media's celebrated *Guru*.

He is arguably also the most over-quoted and under-read author in the comparatively short history of printed matter on subjects of media technology. Under-read in the sense that even McLuhan himself joked that no one actually read McLuhan, and if people read anything, it would likely be not much more than the title of the first chapter of *Understanding Media: The Medium is the Message* (Levinson, 1999: 36). Over-quoted in the sense that his writing style, which already met the 'specifications of the epistemology that he ascribes to the electronic media – non-linear, repetitive, discontinuous, intuitive, proceeding by analogy instead of sequential argument' (Lapham, 2001: XI), was open to semi-substantiated referencing to fragmented parts of his theories. To such an extent, that Lewis Lapham, in his introduction to the 2001 MIT edition of *Understanding Media*, had the courtesy to include the warning that only 'few of the people who explicated his text fully understood what it was that he was trying to say' (Lapham, 2001: X).

The conveniently fragmented understanding of his theoretical approaches led to the appearance of bits and pieces extracted from his books in various texts on media art concerned with the exhilarating prospects of data-processing machines that could produce sensory effects, connectivity and instantaneous long-distance communication to all remaining niches of the globe. However, McLuhan has always been a rather misplaced person in the discourse on media art. It slipped media art's immediate attention that his publications were not concerned with artistic practice deploying new media technology, which renders the sustained presence of McLuhan's texts within the academic discourse on media art rather surprising. McLuhan's writings addressed the meta-level of the impact of global media technology on society. Any application of these theories to the micro-cosmos of artistic practice presented, to say the least, a challenging concept.

**3.** | One of the most defining characteristics of technology-based virtual reality with respect to scenography that distinguishes it from performance art is the reversed viewing direction in digital worlds. Immersive environments place the audience centre-stage, and make it look from the inside out where the topography of dataspace, a site filled with the sound and fury of technological surprises, unfolded. The scenographies of dataspace were not concerned with theatrical representation of the real world on a stage, but with visualising a virtual world that surrounds the stage. The



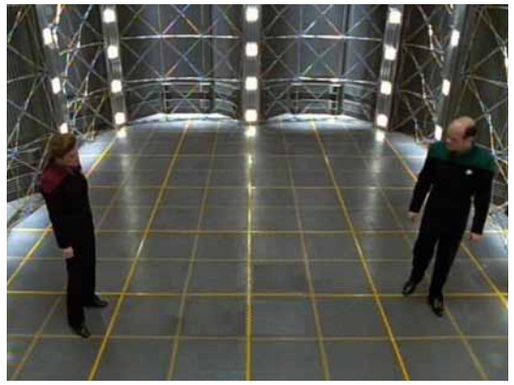


FIG.4

art-historical point of reference for Virtual Reality is the Panorama, not the theatre stage. Oliver Grau, in his 2003 *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Grau, 2003) describes the painted illusionism of panoramas in the context of the historical development of immersive art in detail.

Robert Barker patented the panorama, a 360-degree circular painting surrounding an elevated central viewing platform in 1789. Despite its huge popularity in the early nineteenth century, it was relegated to a niche existence within visual arts before the end of the century, and was eventually eclipsed by the illusionist qualities of emerging cinema's moving pictures. Post-cinematic technologies resurrected the panoramic image in commercial applications such as *Quicktime Virtual Reality (QTVR)*, introduced by Apple in 1994, as well as in media art with works such as Michael Naimark's 1995 *Be Now Here* or Jeffrey Shaw's 1995 *Place – a user's manula*, (Figure 3). The set-up of these virtual reality installations was similar to Barker's patent, with a viewer's platform in the center of a circular screen, onto which pre-recorded panoramic photos or video footage were projected. The user could use a simple interface in the center of the stage to navigate the panorama of moving pictures (Naimark), or navigate in a larger virtual space constituted by eleven cylinders, that displayed panoramic still photography of various locations, which were connected through a diagram composed of the Sephirothic *Tree of Life*. | FIG.3 JEFFREY SHAW, PLACE – A USER'S MANUAL, 1995

The physical setting of a circular screen, or a dome as in Shaw's 1993 *EVE Extended Virtual Environment*, was however of no further importance for virtual reality. It is the very essence of all virtual reality environments to follow the model of a sphere, with the audience placed in the centre, a set-up that refers to the physical notion of a spherical field of vision. The sphere's imagined inner boundaries served as the fundamental computational points of reference for the visualisation of data, no matter whether this mathematical sphere actually materialised in the real world or not, for example in *Head Mounted Displays*, created by Ivan Sutherland in 1967 at Harvard University after his time at DARPA, the research agency of the US Department of Defence.

All such environments relied on massive, centralized, state-of-the-art computer power for the generation of virtual realities, even though the technologies used for these environments were (and still are) light-years away from incorporating the holy grail of virtuality: a sophisticated, full-blown artificial intelligence system that could transform *simulated illusion into generated illusion*, capable of independently interacting with any kind of user input.

Such a technological system existed, although not in science, but in fiction. Janet Murray, in her 1997 *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, describes its features in the context of interactive narratives: *First introduced on Star Trek: The Next Generation in 1987, the holodeck consists of an empty black cube covered in white gridlines upon which a computer can project elaborate simulations combining holography with magnetic force fields and energy-to-matter conversions. The result is an illusory world [...] that looks and behaves like the actual world. The Holodeck is a universal fantasy machine, open to individual programming: a vision of the computer as a kind of storytelling genie in the lamp'* (Murray 1997: 15). | FIG.4 HOLODECK, STAR TREK – THE NEXT GENERATION, FIRST BROADCASTED IN 1987

The *Cave Automatic Virtual Environment*, developed in 1992 at University of Illinois Chicago, inherited a striking resemblance to this fantasy machine, although the Holodeck's holographic generation of three-dimensional illusion had to be replaced by stereoscopic images due to technological shortcomings. The artists'



FIG. 5

access to this highly complex and expensive technology was only through a few specialised institutions such as ARS Electronica, which could firstly afford such technology, and would secondly allow artists to use it. Artworks created for the CAVE (see Figure 5) formulated a spatial paradigm in which the *illusionary and simulated* space in continuation of real space was replaced by an *algorithmic and interactively created* space, which largely disrespected physical space. | FIG. 5 KOGLER, P. / ARS ELECTRONICA FUTURELAB, CAVE (APPLICATION), 1999

The scenographies for this dataspace were located somewhere between fantasy and abstraction, but their content did not matter particularly. Their first and foremost raison d'être was to be located *some place else* from this reality, and not to serve as representations of anything from this world.

But digital technology lives up to its infamous unpredictability one more time. Shaw's 2008 work *UNMAKEABLELOVE* (Figure 6), developed with Sarah Kenderdine and inspired by Samuel Beckett's 1972 *The Lost Ones*, reversed the reversed viewing direction again. Shaw and Kenderdine used a technological infrastructure consisting of *a five-meter diameter hexagonal construction with six rear-projected screens and stereoscopic 3D viewing using twelve projectors, passive Polaroid filters and glasses. [It ...] offers a physically immersive three-dimensional space of representation that constitutes an augmentation and amalgamation of real and virtual realities* (Shaw & Kenderdine, 2008). FIG. 6 JEFFREY SHAW & SARAH KENDERDINE, UNMAKEABLELOVE, 2008

With this work, Virtual Reality is back to its origins in the realm of theatre, where Antonin Artaud combined the two contrasting terms into one idiom in his 1938 *The Alchemical Theatre* (Artaud, 1958: 50), and to Kiesler's 1924 utopist architectural design for the stage of modern theatre, the *Raumbuehne*.

**4.** | A comprehensive critical history of the scenographies for dataspace has yet to be published, but it might prove to be an impossible task due to the very nature of the subject under investigation. The ephemeral, user generated, fluidly changing virtual worlds defy easy depiction and documentation in print or time-based media. Any increase in the complexity of algorithms designed to generate the machine's response to user behaviour, which were more often than not regarded as a benchmark for quality of the artwork, adds to this phenomenon. In a perfect virtual world, every user would experience his or her unique encounter with the visual potential offered by the technical implementation of an artistic idea, ridiculing every attempt to provide an adequate portrayal of these visual worlds. Unless, however, it would be presented in the form of a narrative, describing the sensory impacts of immersive environments on the audience more from the viewpoint of a novelist than a media theorist. For obvious reasons, this option was not at hand, although frequent references in early media theory to fiction such as Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner* or Gibson's 1984 cyberpunk novel *Neoromancer* are noteworthy in this respect (Klepper, Mayer, & Schneck 1996: 220ff).

The approach more compatible with common practice in art theory was, apart from contextualising the work within a larger media theoretical discourse, to emphasise the specific formal aspects of the artwork, in particular those related to the technological and material conditions of the aesthetic process. As for the production part of the artwork, there weren't many alternatives available for the artists anyway. The never-ending struggle with an ever-changing technology just didn't allow for much contemplation on artistic content, while trying to solve multifarious unexpected obstacles in the realisation process (Penny 2010: In this publication). As for the critical reception of the artwork,





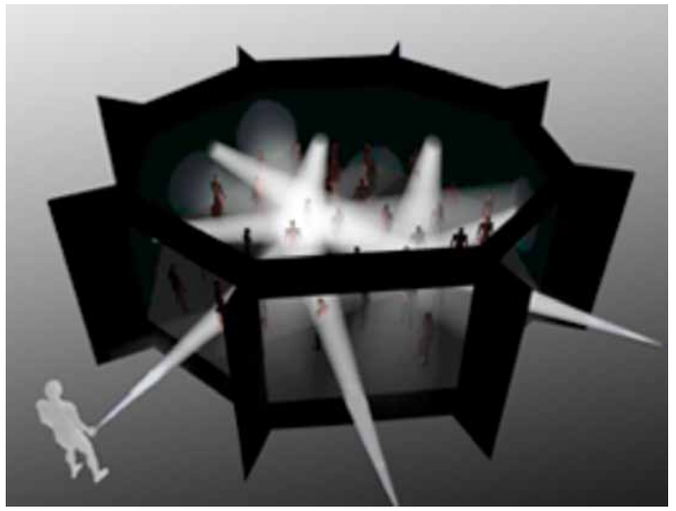


FIG. 6

the focus on formal qualities is evident in almost every review of such works, whether published in catalogues or anthologies.

One key example might be Stephen Wilson's discussion of Luc Courchesne's subtle work *Landscape One*, awarded the Grand Prize at the 1997 Biennale of Tokyo's NTT InterCommunication Center. *Landscape One* is an immersive interactive installation in which the user can contact, communicate and interact with virtual characters appearing in the scenery of a garden. In his 2002 anthology *Information Arts*, Wilson points to the 'photorealistic 360-degree' representation of a garden, the usage of 'voice or touch' for human-computer interaction, the importance of communicative and interactive elements for 'gaining access to all parts of the event', and the specific response of the system once the user could 'convince a [virtual] character to lead them somewhere'. He ends the short paragraph, illustrated with a blurry, low-resolution image in black and white, with: *The experience is about communication / discommunication between people, with movements through space as manifestation of its nature; successful forms of communication will offer visitors more varied inroads into more remote places* (Wilson 2002: 801f).

His review gives little more than a brief overview of the technical and operational details of the art piece, as well as the main theoretical concerns embedded in the work. More content related aspects of the work, indicating details of the landscape in general, or what kinds of virtual characters actually populate the digital garden, or what 'successful forms of communication' could possibly mean, are not further mentioned. Information concerning the scenography of the landscape is missing entirely, although this landscape is obviously important enough to define the title of the work.

Wilson is not alone: Steve Dixon, author of the 2007 *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theatre, Dance, Performing Art, and Installation*, only adds that the work is a 'rich, panoramic four screen space', and that Courchesne's work 'uses aspects of navigational interactivity, for example, menu options and multiple choice questions, and combines them with highly conversational modes' (Dixon, 2007: 588). Jean Gagnon, former Executive Director of the renowned Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology in Montréal, and author of the article on *Landscape One* on the Foundation's website, apart from highlighting that the work consists of a 'network of four computers with touchplates, microphones and body detectors, four videodisc players, video projectors, and screens', described at least some non-technology related details: The work displays video footage captured at Mount-Royal park in Montréal, the characters 'seem free to roam the landscape', while the visitor, who 'cannot do so [free roaming] without being guided by one of [the characters]', is located 'in the centre of a panoramic landscape, [and] watches the unfolding scenes of a public garden, recorded over a period of 24 hours'. He also makes the effort to contextualise the work within art history, indicating that Courchesne spoke 'of the links between his work and painting', and back-references *Landscape One*, although with no further explanation, to Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (1863), only to hastily revert back to the 'experience in dialogic communication... between people whose movements through space seem to reveal their personality' (Gagnon, 2000).

Luc Courchesne himself does not reveal many details on content or aesthetics either. He starts the description of his own work on his website with a detailed account of the technology used. The further text covers essentially the same technical details as in the above-mentioned reviews, although he specifies that the 'four walls of a space are "painted", with video projectors, into a single photo realistic 360º landscape'. And he refers briefly and rather cryptically to spatial aspects of the work, in explicating that 'because real visitors are using virtual characters to steer their way through space, the nature of visitor's relationship to the character will define the space – physical or metaphorical – that can be accessed' (Courchesne, 2010). In addition, a short video clip is provided, presumably showing a brief sequence of the single channel video footage, not the 360-degree projection, at least indicating that the characters are actually real human beings, recorded on video in a real park. However, this is already an assumption, since it is nowhere explicitly mentioned. A couple of still images give not more than a rough impression of the visitor's experience inside the installation. | FIG.7 LUC COURCHESNE, LANDSCAPE ONE, 1997

Even a relatively short while after the realisation of the artwork, and only a few years after the work was last shown in public (2004, according to the artists' website), the attempt to find out details of the visual aesthetics used for the creation of the immersive environments is comparable to a media archaeological excavation. But to be clear here: this is no critique of Luc Courchesne. He is an extraordinary artist, who created some of the most appealing works of media art, displaying a highly sensitive understanding of digital media technology and its deployment for artworks. Nor is it a critique of Wilson, Dixon or Gagnon. It could be anyone; the list is easily extendible.

Apparently, neither artist nor theorists were further interested in discussing the content of media art works, let alone issues of spatial design and scenography of the virtual space that was generated, defined, altered, explored, navigated, and / or experienced by immersants through various activities inside a defined real space. The amount of nonchalance in disrespecting the aesthetics of digitally created worlds in the making, critical reception and documentation of immersive environments, after all a rather essential element in such artworks, is truly astounding. But it is a direct effect of a critical discourse, in which 'art historians were notably absent' (Penny 2010: In this publication), that oscillated between techno-aesthetics, techno-optimism and techno-determinism. Left in discursive nowhere land, artists introduced 'an element of self-referentiality' into their works of media art, in that 'they are not just 'using' a medium but also questioning and challenging its boundaries; [trying] to make implicit or explicit statements about properties of media technologies', as Medosch noted (Medosch 2005: 25). The discourse on media art was trapped in a media-technological formalism that valued technical ingenuity in the realisation of the artwork far more highly than artistic content and aesthetics resulting from this ingenuity.

However, this again is not unique to media art. The modernist approach to re-evaluate the materialistic or medial qualities in artistic expression, resulting in a shift from content-driven aesthetics to formal aesthetics in art production and reception, is arguably a common feature in emerging art forms, as Norbert Schmitz describes in great detail in his 2001 *Medialität als ästhetische Strategie der Moderne. Zur Diskursgeschichte der Medienkunst*. Most avant-garde art movements would partly seek legitimation for their radical claims through emphasising the change in the technical conditions and framework for artistic production at



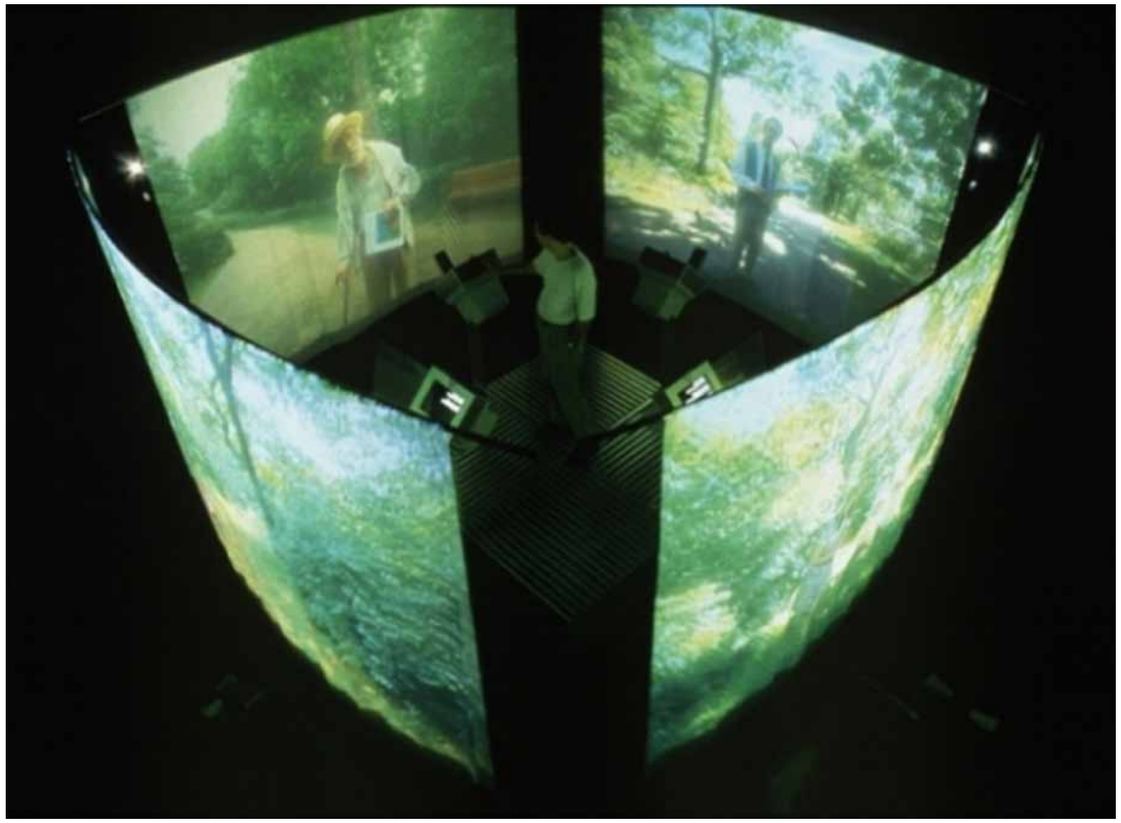


FIG.7

the time. He further suggests that *The Medium is the Message* should first and foremost be regarded as formal aesthetics *dernier-cri*. (Schmitz, 2001: 118ff).

**5.** | I do not mean to imply that the formal-aesthetic scenographies for dataspace disregarded its target audience's desires. Far from this, the target audience was even more indifferent than the critical discourse towards the idea of developing culturally specific conventions of representation in digital media, or a non-technology related semiosphere for virtual spaces, in the extended tradition of visual arts. The blurry frontiers of emerging media art allowed for the formation of a highly diverse community of digital insiders, that was well interconnected through digital communication and network tools, and that gathered several times throughout the year at specialised international festivals and conferences like ARS Electronica in Linz, ZKM Multimediale in Karlsruhe, or IAMAS Intermediale in Ogaki. It comprised of practitioners and theorists from a smorgasbord of more or less related professions such as visual arts, video and film, computer science, engineering, robotics, artificial intelligence and artificial life research, along with a 'smattering of musicians and composers, dancers, theatre directors, architects, graphic and industrial designers, media activists and others' (Penny 2010: In this publication).

The basic requirement for being accepted into this community was the ability to problematise and communicate highly complex topics related to digital technology, the vernacular was techno-talk, if not programming language. In this context, Benedict Anderson's line of argument, that emphasises the role of language in modern nation building (Anderson 1991), offers an interesting further hint to the mysterious success of this *imagined community* of disparate cyberspace immigrants in detaching itself almost entirely from aesthetic experiences normally expected from an artwork (see Penny 1995a). The novel aesthetics of dataspace were rooted in the community's appreciation of the immaterial beauty of bits and bytes as elementary and universal symbols of digital technology, and their convenient and intrinsic callousness towards any meaning, that allowed them to carry every meaning in

digital environments (Rötzer 1991: 28). The scenographies of dataspace were designed in a concerted action of the digital nation to meet the desire for gazing at the technological future.

In that, the combined efforts of artists, scientists, and researchers were quite successful, and the significance of artworks experimenting with digital technologies, especially in areas of human-computer interfaces, networked communication and the representation of space and content in digital environments, for the advance of technology at the end of the twentieth century should not be undervalued. However, the contributions of all these rather costly efforts to the advancement of art into the twenty-first century turned out to be less impressive, despite a small number of interactive artworks that might continue their presence in the public of specialised institutions, as long as these institutions and the used technologies will survive. The unfocussed discourse on Interactive Art was not able to assure a sustainable future for this art genre. Similar to the examples of the brief history of photography and film as means for artistic production, the allure that came with the self-representation of the novel technical media could only fascinate the audience for a short while. With digital media's baffling potential for simulation, representation and re-creation increasingly becoming a matter of course, it is also more and more absorbed into a pragmatic daily life culture (Schmitz 2001: 120).

The concept of Virtual Reality, that relied on massive centralised computer power for the generation of its unreal wonderlands, mutated into the decentralised model of mobile and ubiquitous computing, easily available for a large population as small and affordable commodities of all kind. It is, as a side note, interesting that the field of robotics and artificial intelligence experienced this paradigm shift some 30 years earlier, when the researchers' tremendous optimism in centralised top-down systems could not meet the expectations raised in public and sponsors, and a bottom-up strategy was introduced that oriented itself more towards the intelligence of cockroaches than human beings. Intelligent, independent vacuum cleaners are a daily life testimony of this paradigm shift, and Valentino Braitenberg's essay *Vehicles, Experiments in Synthetic Psychology* still makes delightful reading (Braitenberg 1984).

Decentralised ubiquitous computing created a highly complex dataspace, whose internal structures became largely un-analysable from the outside, by interconnecting a large number of comparatively simple inventions like Apple's *iPhone* through relatively low-level communication processes. This technical framework essentially reflects Braitenberg's 'law of uphill analysis and downhill invention' (Braitenberg 1984: 20). It was not only able to deliver a surprising amount of highflying proposals concerned with communicative, locative and distributive aspects of digital technology discussed at international conferences 20 years ago in the realm of media art. It also established a 'fundamentally new cultural situation', as Lev Manovich observed in his 2008 *Software takes Command* with respect to the Web 2.0 phenomenon of *social networks* of all sorts (Manovich, 2008: 136).

The *cockroach paradigm* of ubiquitous computing marks a significant disruption in the brief history of scenographies for dataspace. The technological reality produced by the omnipresence, internationalisation and interconnectivity of mobile digital devices and software applications at the beginning of the twenty-first century transcended the metaphor of Virtual Reality beyond the notion of space. Dataspace in its latest appearance remains highly immersive, although not in a strict physical sense, for it has abandoned all references to illusion, simulation, continuation or





re-creation of real space. This dataspace is defined not as *space*, but as *data*. The audience has finally escaped the darkened black boxes of theatre and cinema spaces and the white boxes of exhibition halls, and traded its state of *immobilisation* (Manovich, 2001: 108ff) in front of a proscenium, frame, canvas or screen with a communicative cultural interface responsive to real world environments as it moves along with its user.

Unquestionably, to account for the digital activities of millions of users as artistic expressions would imply an utterly unreasonable extension of Joseph Beuys' already stretched *extended definition of art*. Nonetheless, in a rather unexpected manner, ubiquitous computing finally lived up to the last millennium's anticipation that media technology would 'grow cultural contexts' (Penny, 1995b: 69), and develop a 'cultural language in its own right' (Manovich, 2001: 71), although it had first to escape the academic discourse on digital technologies and the institutionalised arena of media art. Manovich's 2001 demand that 'new media calls for a new stage in media theory whose beginnings can be traced back to the revolutionary works of Harold Innis in the 1950s and Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s' (Manovich, 2001: 48) appears to be still current. Although, rather unsurprisingly regarding the non-art related background of the two cited authors, it bears more significance now that the digital avant-garde operates in a less art-related environment.

**6.** | The scenographies for dataspace since the 1990s suffered from triple ephemerae. Firstly, it is by definition close to impossible to document interactive, user-generated digital spatial designs, since they are supposed to respond differently to each user. Introducing the equivalent to the already established profession of a theatre photographer into the world of media art might have been able to mitigate this dilemma, though. However, and secondly, no one was really interested in a reasonable documentation of these scenographies, since content was far less in focus than technological excitement. A complete read of McLuhan's *Understanding Media* as the basic precondition for a solid understanding that his theories cannot, by any means, serve as a user's manual for the creation of media art, might have mitigated the predominance of formal aesthetics in the discourse on digital media art. It might even have facilitated the development of a different artistic practice with digital technologies that would have incorporated more performative art features, providing a more prominent role for scenographers in the creation of dataspace. Thirdly, mise-en-scenes disappeared entirely from dataspace. The present decentralised system of ubiquitous computing has managed not only to re-define dataspace, but also to disengage itself entirely from any references to the art of spatial design. This new dataspace requires, if any at all, a scenography of pure information. But as always when purity enters the frame, it may well just prelude the emergence of a new aesthetic concept.

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**Figure 4:** Publisher Unknown (1987), Holodeck. Star Trek – The Next Generation: Internet download: http: //niniane.blogspot.com / 2008 / 10 / ill-recreate-encountering-gates.html

**Figure 5:** Kogler, P. / Ars Electronica Futurelab (1999), Cave (Application): Publisher Unknown. Internet download: http: //www.flickr.com / photos / ars-electronica / 4345239257 /

**Figure 6:** Shaw, J., & Kenderdine, S. (2008), UNMAKEABLELOVE: The Artist Website: http: //unmakeablelove.org /

**Figure 7:** Courchesne, L. (1997), Landscape One: The artist website: http: // www.courchel.net / #

# DESIRE FOR VIRTUAL SPACE

**The Technological Imaginary in 1990s Media Art**

By Simon Penny

**Abstract** | This chapter discusses technological and discursive developments in the interdisciplinary historical trajectory of theory and practice of digital cultures in the 1990s, specifically around the notion of virtuality and the transition to the paradigm of ubiquitous computing. However hazy, the ideas of 'the virtual' and of 'virtuality' were central structuring concepts for 1990s media art theory and practice. It is argued here that the concept of 'the virtual' was the product of an incomplete and rapidly changing technological constellation. The problematics of 'the virtual' were intensified by an incomplete technological understanding among many of the first generation of artists and theorists in digital cultural practices. A general long-term and largely uninterrogated commitment to Cartesian Dualism complemented these shortcomings to produce a heady and confusing discursive mix. Through this period, problems around human-computer interaction (HCI) are shown to be persistent, and attributable in part to the prevailing cognitivist paradigm (part of the uninterrogated philosophical baggage) and its influence both on technological development per se and the rhetorics surrounding it. It is argued that media arts research, as a hybrid of traditional embodied arts sensibilities and the abstractions of computing, was uniquely positioned to identify these problems and model solutions, and did so generally in advance of academic and commercial sectors.

**Framing 1990's Media Art** | The 1990s decade was definitive and formative for digital art precisely because the technology was new and in rapid transition, and the imaginations and aspirations of artists - fuelled no doubt by sci-fi, as well as by mathematical and technological metaphors, outstripped both the available technology and theoretical contexts. [1] Typical of this confusion was the clustering of metaphors of space, travel and 'navigation', both in immersive environments (virtual reality) and in network-based practices (world wide web) as is evidenced by the Microsoft web slogan 'where do you want to go today'. In many areas in media arts discourse, its interdisciplinarity produced and still produces debates around what sometimes transpire to be silly misunderstandings of terminology – this of course can be quite generative, as in the case of 'virtual space'. For artists, 'space' refers to tangible experiential space, but also to perspectival representational space. VR permitted the quasi-inhabitation of an animated perspectival space, which combined these two, and was thus inexorably attractive to visual artists. In physics and mathematics, 'space' refers to often-multidimensional abstract conceptual spaces (this metaphoric deployment is seldom recognized as such). VR provided a bridging of immaterial abstract mathematical 'space' and bodily experiential space. The construction and 'navigation' of architectonic virtual environments in which the disembodied eye 'travelled' – often at dizzying speeds in a virtual 'phantom ride' – provided a titillating sensorial experience of this reified liminal space.

The notion of virtuality (in the sense of immersive VR) was, I suggest, largely the product of speculation by an imaginative but not technically well-versed community upon a computational technology with insufficient and incomplete hooks into the time / space humans customarily inhabit. This led to the sensation that there was a place we could look into but only rather falteringly 'be' in. In fact, there was no 'there' there, as Gertrude Stein famously said about Oakland California in the 1930s.

I have observed previously that the explosively experimental nature of the period was reminiscent of the proto-cinematic period of the late nineteenth century, when the confluence of precision manufacturing of metals and optics, and photographic chemistry provided a context of a kind of cultural pre-cambrian explosion. [2] Like that evolutionary period, the pre-cinematic moment was followed by a technological mass extinction. What survived was (obviously) cinema. Other genres of semi-immersive image spectacles (stereoscopy, dioramas and image environments) went extinct or clung on in tiny niches, in some cases to be resuscitated in new technological contexts. I argue here that for digital media the 1990s was similar, and that by the year 2000, 'survivor forms' had emerged. A decade later they were dominant - most conspicuously, multi-user gaming *World of Warcraft* and net-based social media phenomena like *Facebook* and *Second Life*. [3] The historical lineage of these forms of digital cultural practice has been obscured. Over two decades the socio-economic location of digital media practices has shifted from marginal grassroots media art collectives, obscure hybrid art studio / research labs and rarefied international conferences and festivals to profitable Silicon Valley media corporations. In that shift, the formative role and significance of 1990s media art research has largely gone without note, but in the aesthetic and technological research and development of the 1990s, one can find the precursors to these new forms.

To trace in detail the development of techniques, forms and approaches through 1990s media art into increasingly commercialised contexts and commodified forms over two decades is a huge (and important) historical project, far beyond the scope of the present paper. [4] My goal here is more modest: to describe the technological and discursive context of the period, in order to lay a groundwork in which to discuss the notion of virtuality. This idea was an axis around which the discourse the community seemed to orbit, not without much consternation. It is important to frame this discussion with an explanation of the technological as well as the discursive context, as it is easy to forget the rapidity and profundity of change in the tools / media available to artists.

**Technology Raw and Cooked** | Because artistic research in this context was integrally tied to emerging technologies, because they have matured rapidly, and because we have become rapidly naturalized to newer technologies, we tend to forget how comparatively primitive the tools and systems were. Any discussion of the history of media-technological discourses relevant to the matter in hand would be of little worth without establishing the context of those discussions. It is worthwhile, therefore, to remind ourselves of the technological context at the beginning of the 1990s. Without going into laborious historical detail, here is a technological snapshot.

In 1990, the IBM PC was not yet a decade old and MS-DOS was the dominant OS. [5] As computing moved out of the research lab and into the office, the school and the home, it was boom-time for the desktop PC and the computer industry. Desktop publishing was all the rage but on-screen display of typefaces was still tricky. Programming was to most people arcane, and the concept of software 'packages' was novel. The graphical user interface, as a commodity, was in its infancy, WYSIWYG was in debate. Desktop multimedia was titillating and the concept of 'interactivity' was a huge thrill. [6] Computer graphics was hot: ray-traced still-frames of teapots were not yet a cliché. Processors were so slow and RAM so expensive that one would leave a computer to work overnight to render a single 3D graphic frame in NTSC resolution (640 x 480). The Commodore Amiga was regarded as the most advanced home / studio graphics / multimedia platform. Digital video editing was only possible on special purpose high-end professional machines (such as Quantel

paintbox) backed up by rooms of hardware supported by full time technicians. While usenet was a decade old, the internet was just emerging from its defense research / academic gestation. Email was raw text via clunky command line interfaces. [7] Real-time multi-user online environments were rare. [8] Tim Berners Lee proposed the world wide web in 1991. It was not available until 1993. The first web browser (Mosaic) was released in he same year. In wireless telephony, pagers were all the rage, mobile phones were briefcase-sized. [9]

By the end of the decade, high-resolution real-time 3D graphics had become a regular part of the desktop, digital video editing became viable on desktop machines, and the World Wide Web had brought forth diverse resources and practices.

**The Minefield of Media Arts** | Much of the work of the 1990s was characterized by a kind of techno-formalism, an exploration of possible modalities of practice. If technological components and procedures were a new 'palette', then the exploration of the formal qualities of these, and the integration of these into a new artistic language was the major task of the period. We might describe such work as media formalism. In order to understand the work of media artists of this period, it is crucial to recognise that their aspirations were constrained by the half-baked nature of the technologies at their disposal, so engagement was often at a basic level of electronic engineering: the behaviour of a specific class of sensor, a particular strategy for realtime 3D modeling, or a motor control technique. Necessity being the mother of invention, this selfsame technological paucity gave rise to a drive to develop technologies that one imagined *ought to be* possible and to create a context in which the development of sophisticated technological devices was necessarily part and parcel of creative practice. [10]

Some artists were lucky enough to have access to or affiliations with bona fide research labs and research budgets. Others were not so fortunate, and for many artists, the experience of coming face to face with deep computer hardware engineering was not unlike running full-tilt into a concrete wall. The experience of engaging with the world of code was more like stepping off a cliff into a weightless world without up or down. These were worlds that an art-school education gave one no preparation for. And yet, like fools rushing in where angels feared to tread, artists waded into the field, took stock of capabilities, dreamed new possibilities and set about to build new technologies with which to realize those dreams. Many artists were therefore obliged to define specific engineering R+D projects as an integral component of a larger techno-aesthetico-theoretic project, and thereby found themselves trying to do engineering on an art budget, outside of the normal support structures of development grants, research labs and technicians – a situation which gave rise to staggering can-do invention, improvisation and innovation, as well as confusion, frustration and disappointment, in roughly equal measure.

**Conceptual and Technological Babushka Dolls** | Here is revealed a fundamental and double problematic of 1990s digital art practice. Some part of artistic practice assumes mastery of tools, enabling a creative flow: ready-to-hand as opposed to present-at-hand. The rapid change of technology meant that the tools were almost always present-at-hand. If fluency with tools and media is a characteristic of virtuosity, then this rug was continually pulled from under practitioners feet. The technology changed rapidly, and 'elementary' technological components were quickly subsumed into more complex assemblages. This technological and conceptual chunking-up happened at a rapid





rate, and the new chunks became basic, if temporary technological building blocks, with their own formal qualities and dynamics. We might say this chunking-up happened three or four times in the decade. As artists were concerned at the outset with understanding and conceptualising the capabilities of the new tools, and many projects were concerned with an exegesis of the aesthetico-formal qualities of these technologies. But these elementary formal elements were rapidly rendered invisible or incomprehensible by the technical and conceptual chunking-up. Working as an artist in that context was like trying to stand vertical in a rushing river. [11] At the time, critical discourse among practitioners was constantly preoccupied with these issues, exploring what pursuing artistic practice meant amid such contingency and provisionality. The less practically engaged theorists, critics and curators (and employers) remained blithely unaware of such dilemmas. This disjunction regularly produced confusion and misunderstanding. [12]

As if the rapidly changing technology were not itself adequate erasure, a second order effect of this change was the problem of preservation and 'migration'. While we can enjoy great paintings hundreds of years old, there are few media artworks a decade old that are still functioning, as this demands regular migration of the work across storage and computational platforms, languages, coding environments and operating systems. Such an ongoing effort is and was beyond the means of most media artists – who were busy simply trying to produce new work - to say nothing of the frustrations of committing to a platform that transpired to be a technological cul-de-sac or commercial backwater. The notion of 'migration' is itself predicated on a clean separation of information content from materiality, a paradigm. This might lend itself to banking records because they are already enfolded in such an informational paradigm, but it becomes more problematic and less viable in cases of artworks whose materiality is fundamental to their nature. Migration process may in fact render the work meaningless if that meaning were closely related to the qualities of a particular platform or technology, as many of the periods were. As a result, the majority of the works of the decade must be considered ephemeral, only surviving in photographic, video and textual documentation.

The question of materiality is therefore fundamental to the rendering of the history of the period. Some members of the community fully subscribed to the rhetoric of the computationalist hardware / software divide, while others maintained a more or less well resolved commitment to embodiment or nostalgia for materiality. I contend that the digital arts community in the 1990s was a crucible in which the deep cultural implications of the 'information revolution' were modelled and debated. [13]

These then were some of the key aspects of the context of media arts practice in the 1990s.A decade or two later, the context is very different. Not only has the performance of hardware and software advanced by orders of magnitude, but entirely novel modalities have become common-place: capabilities that were the stuff of science fiction in 1990 are in the pockets of school children in 2010.

**What is Virtuality?** | It was in this technological context, as new users were grappling with fundamentals of the new and not particularly user-friendly technology (How do you switch it on? Where did my file go?) that the spectre of virtual reality loomed into the cultural imagination, propelled by sometimes giddy panegyric from the likes of Timothy Leary, Jaron Lanier and Howard Rheingold. [14] From the late 1980s, the notion of 'the virtual' and its relation to the various, and rather

heterogeneous array of technologies which were lumped into the conversation was generative of a vast output of media theory – much of which became rapidly anachronistic.

At the time, 'virtuality' might have referred to: immersive interactive 3D stereoscopic display, the internet and related technologies of high-speed long-distance communication or telematics involving fibre-optics, servers and internet protocols, (though what at the time distinguished telematics in its digital mode from the telephone was far from clear); or the accumulation of 'databodies' – cross related financial, medical and judicial (etc) records in large scale corporate, institutional and governmental databases. Reference to virtual reality may have involved any of these, or any combination, with or without the addition of various other media, including television, radio, telephone, fax, even movies, photographs and novels. [15]

No less a figure than Jeffrey Shaw, at the time director of the Institute for Image Media at the ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie), characterized his work as the exploration of 'the modalities of the virtual'. But what was this 'virtual'? In Shaw's case, and I would argue, in the case of many artists of the period, what was termed 'the virtual' was navigable 3D visual environments, real time synthetic perspectival representations, ie, the precursors of *Second Life* and *World of Warcraft*. But the substantial work of these artists - which went largely unremarked in the hysteria of virtuality - was the development of 'intuitive' bodily interfaces to such worlds. This was certainly the case with Jeffrey Shaw's *Legible City*, as it was with other paradigmatic works such as David Rokeby's *Very Nervous System*. Indeed, it would not be difficult to produce a revisionist history of the work of many artists previously grouped under the descriptor 'virtual'- including such artists such as Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Perry Hoberman, Char Davies, as well as Shaw, Rokeby, Krueger and others – which emphasized the centrality of embodied interaction in their work. As desktop screen / keyboard interfaces to net and web-based forms became dominant, the importance of this research into embodied interaction was obscured. The value of such interfaces has more recent been recognized in the commercial world, as is evidenced by the success of the wii. There was an overwhelming desire among artists to make that, which is truly virtual – the immateriality of computational data and processes – amenable to lived sensori-motoric reality. Perhaps this is why the work of the period was not just technically but also intellectually challenging, to the makers as well as to its audience – it collapses the Cartesian Dualism which structures both the technology and our general cultural paradigm.

**Where did 'the Virtual' go? (it was here a minute ago).**

And yet this desire to make ephemeral worlds amenable to lived sensori-motoric reality is precisely the project of ubiquitous computing. The ubiquitous computing paradigm, as it has been promulgated over the recent decade is, according to my analysis, little but the completion of the previously incomplete technology. That is, 'the virtual' has been overlayed upon and subsumed into the 'real' by virtue of embodied interfaces and (wireless) data distribution. We now live in what used to be called 'augmented' and 'mixed realities'. The transition from the period of virtuality to the period of ubiquity was a result of the maturation of interface technologies missing from the technological palette of the 1990s, thus the discourses of technological 'virtuality' during the 1990s are attributable in large part to incomplete technology. In the interim, a variety of technologies linking the dataworld with the lived physical world have emerged. Small and large





scale sensing and tracking technologies such as MEMS accelerometers, machine vision, laserscanners, GPS, RFID, and mobile communications technologies have been developed and deployed. This has had the effect of nesting 'the virtual' back into the lived physical world. This belated integration of data with the world has caused 'the virtual' to evaporate. 'The virtual' has thus become doubly virtual, revealing it to be a panic around an explosive and messy technological transition period. [16]

**Interdisciplinarity and Communities of Discourse**

While the world of code and computer engineering was a daunting unknown to most artists, the complex world of aesthetics and art discourses was equally disorienting to those coming in from engineering and the still-young discipline of computer science. Those coming from the academic world of cinema / media studies were at a double disadvantage having limited experience with both artistic and engineering practice. Such intersections characterised the free-floating interdisciplinarity of the period, and there was a certain thrill in the unbounded nature of it. This territory attracted characters who were undaunted by such a lawless frontier (and like any Wild West, it had its cowboys).

It was these people who went on to build new college programs, new degrees, new conferences, new venues, new journals, around what increasingly (and regrettably) became known as media arts.

The field was characterised by the rather murky confluence of several separate communities of discourse. One community, emerging largely from cinema and media studies, was built around the cultural imaginary of VR, fueled by sci-fi literature and media. Given the general lack of basic technological grounding amongst many theorists and pundits, this created a conception of the technology that was not supported by the technology itself. As Matthew Kirschenbaum quipped at the time 'if the devil is in the details, Media Studies has been positively angelic'. [17] Some such conversations were far fetched and the more extreme now seem positively bizarre. A different community, arising largely from computer graphic and HCI professionals, focused on the trials of real R+D work. Technical researchers would from time to time admit a commitment to aspects of the cultural imaginary - the star-trek holodeck was a favourite mythic image. The various circuits connecting technological innovation, popular imagination and philosophical underpinnings are multifarious and regress infinitely. Something of the science-wars was definitely at work here. Humanists made snide conjectures regarding the unconscious motivations for VR, as a technological fantasy world full of (controllable) imaginary friends for socially challenged engineers. Meantime technologists dismissed incomprehensible references to French post-structuralist theory as annoyances that got in the way of the pragmatic task of making things work. [18] The very necessary interdisciplinary meetings at the intersection of these different discursive communities – ostensibly about the same thing, or at least bearing the same name – were thus a quagmire, which only the most clear-headed were able to navigate without falling victim to phantasms.

Artists comprised the third community, and their motivations and goals were often incomprehensible to the technical community. [19] Art historians were notably absent, nor did computer science researchers play a significant role, and for similar reasons – their professional paradigms tended to render the concerns of such artists trivial or incomprehensible. The most relevant aspect of computer science - computer graphics research - remained steadfastly technical in its concerns and when it did reference 'the arts' it was generally



FIG.1

with such naiveté that it was unaware that its terms of reference were a century out of date. As a memorable but typical example, I well recall the statement made by a leading computer graphics research scientist from IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Centre in the mid 1980's, that the goal of computer graphics is to produce an image indistinguishable from a colour photograph. This statement is not remarkable because it was unusual – quite the contrary, it was taken to be a familiar and unremarkable statement of motivating drives for the research program of computer graphics. What is significant is that I was probably the only person in that particular (computer science department) audience who was appalled by the cultural / historical naiveté of that remark, implying as it did, a host of uninterrogated assumptions. As if a colour photograph was a transparently accurate and complete model of the real world and not the implementation of certain very specific optical and representational conventions – themselves cultural products intimately tied to the very particular qualities of renaissance humanism and enlightenment rationalism – implemented in a particular technology of glass, metal and photo-chemicals. As if a colour photograph is representative of vision as human experience. Or as if the goal of 'art' was to emulate the condition of the colour photograph, an assumption that is historically completely topsy-turvy. Artists usually regarded 'art' projects by such researchers as pitiably naïve, in the same way that computer scientists were often dismayed by the limited technical understanding of such artists. [20]

**Media Art Research, Before and After Virtuality** | The 1990s saw an explosion of interactive art R+D, along with an explosion of discourse, catalysed by the increasing availability of and familiarity with domestic and prosumer computer based media technologies and by the force of the marketing rhetoric of the rapidly expanding computer industry – the construction of the 'information revolution,' the burgeoning rhetoric of virtuality and related historical fictions. But interactive art R+D did not suddenly materialize from nowhere. It was informed by the previous thirty years of 'art and technology', installation art, performance art and video art, and more broadly by traditions of open intellectual inquiry and interdisciplinarity in the arts.

The goals and preoccupations of the explosion of interactive art of the 1990's centred on the creative potential of the technology. As such there was much concern about the capabilities and constraints of emerging computational media technologies and the relation with existing / traditional art practices. Those that most intensively engaged with those issues were visual artists, film and video makers, along with a smattering of musicians and composers, dancers, theatre directors, architects, graphic and industrial designers, media activists and others. Questions of narrative and embodiment were central. These questions were structured







FIG.2

around the three most (artistically) significant aspects of the new technology – real time computation and its capacity to support interactivity as well as real time graphics, data storage and search, and networking. For artists, trained to work with spatiality, materiality and embodiment, the challenge of grappling with such intangibles probably contributed to the 'spectre of virtuality' – an idea whose very incoherence led to a vigorous and inventive, if chaotic, arts-issue motivated R+D program.

Consider the two historically significant early cases mentioned above: Jeffrey Shaw's *'Legible City'* (1989), (Figure 1) and David Rokeby's *'Very Nervous System'* (1988). Shaw came to the work from prior practice in 'expanded cinema', which deployed film as components of installations, performances and 'happenings'. Rokeby came from a visual arts background. *'Legible City'* employed a bicycle interface to allow a user to navigate through a realtime 3D virtual world. The deployment of the bicycle interface was both technologically parsimonious and socioculturally savvy. Bodily literacy with this device is almost universal. The device reduced the complex diversity of human locomotion to two variables (forward speed and turning angle) trivially amenable to digitisation. The interface thus gathered salient and useful input data in an easily manageable form. The relationship between the users' understanding of their actions and the result presented in the screen was comprehensible without training – a key requirement of interactive art. | FIG.1 LEGIBLE CITY, JEFFREY SHAW.

'Very Nervous System' brilliantly condensed potentially intractable live camera data into a highly reduced dataflow processable by a very limited machine – an Apple IIe(!). The fact that Rokeby was able to do real time machine vision on such a machine was itself a laudable achievement, the fact that the system made intuitive sense to untrained, naïve users attests to his perceptive understanding of the nature of embodied human perception. The key to these economies was the notion of temporal dynamics – Rokeby reasoned (explicitly or implicitly) that (machine) awareness of (bodily) change could be deployed as interaction control, without any ponderous frame-by-frame analysis or object / scene / gesture recognition. [21] Much academic machine vision research has been impeded by an obsession with framewise analysis because it lacked this fundamental insight. Myron Krueger, a pioneer in machine vision based interactive art, trod similar ground fifteen years earlier with his *Videoplace (1969 / 70),* Figure 2, works, which suffered the plight of all such visionary work that occurs before its time – it was incomprehensible for lack of (discursive) context. While such works were framed by the contemporary discourse of virtuality, they often centred on questions of interaction and are very relevant to research in the 'ubiquitous' paradigm. | FIG.2 VIDEOPLACE [22], MYRON KRUEGER.

**An autobiographical interlude** | Through the 1990s I was an active participant in the development of these sensor-based embodied interactive art forms (see endnote 22). The goals of my own art practice, research and development through the 1990s were critically motivated and informed by a history of embodied and situated art practice, (and worked against the grain of conventional research). Coming from a background in situated and embodied practices of sculpture, performance and installation, I was never excited by the rhetoric of fantastic immersion, nor by the stereo-visual spectacle. My previous art practice brought to my design of robotic and interactive systems an intuitive understanding of the role of embodiment and bodily movement in the engagement of spatialised aesthetic projects and an equally visceral awareness of the ways that experiences



FIG. 3

are built from the sum and interaction of diverse and multimodal components: the physical placement of components with respect to the scale of the body and range of movement; the effect of ambient light and ambient acoustics; the sensorial and associative qualities of specific materials. It was this sculptors sense of the task of crafting the totality of a sensorial and sensori-motoric experience that permitted me a rather different set of insights into the task of interaction design, and at the same time, gave me zero-tolerance for media artworks which presented the work on a desktop computer, seemingly oblivious to the way that the posture demanded of the user, the physical appearance of the machine and its associations with the workplace and utterly framed the work in a way which was as aesthetically overwhelming as it was uninterrogated.

The focus of my artistic practice was on the bodily experience of the 'user' and the construction of a fluid relation between bodily dynamics and technological effects. This research began in earnest in 1989, with the commencement of an autonomous robotic artwork, *Petit Mal*, Figure 3, whose sole purpose was to engage visitors in large scale bodily interaction – a dance. | **FIG. 3** PETIT MAL, SIMON PENNY, 1995.

I pursued these concerns in the mid-1990s with the development of *Fugitive*, a machine vision, driven motion-controlled digital video installation in a 10m circular room (ZKM 1996-7) and later with *Traces* (Figure 4), which involved the development of a custom real time volumetric machine vision system for deployment in the CAVE (Ars Electronica 1999). [23] These and related works pursued the creation of an aesthetically rich fully embodied experience which users could and would interact with utterly intuitively. There were no manual input devices, no strap-on sensors, no codified interaction procedures and no pre-use training sessions. The systems were crafted to respond instantly to the normal bodily behaviour of users within the interaction space. [24] | **FIG. 4** BODY ELECTRIC, TRACES, SIMON PENNY AND MALCOLM MACIVER, 2002–3 [25]

Contrary to much of the conventional VR / media art of the 1990s which represented or depicted in a manner consistent with conventional (pre-computational) static and linear narrative forms, works like *Fugitive* and *Traces* were centrally concerned with the users awareness of their ongoing bodily experience in the context of an aesthetic environment contrived to provoke certain kinds of explorations. The *subject matter* in these works was the users experience of their own ongoing bodily engagement with the system. It was not unusual that users emerged from their experience of such works smiling, sweating and panting, a testament to their desire to explore the full gamut of possibilities of interaction. These systems were ubiquitous in the sense of being embedded, calm, and deeply *context aware*. They presented an experience of technological immanence: users had no immediate awareness that any computer technology was involved. There was no obvious task or goal, the works encouraged and rewarded exploratory play.

**Sensors and the aesthetic logic of interaction** | Much of the extensive technical R+D required for these pro-jects concerned the capturing and interpretation of real world events (bodily dynamics of users) through custom sensor technologies. In such work, the bedrock reality of sensor



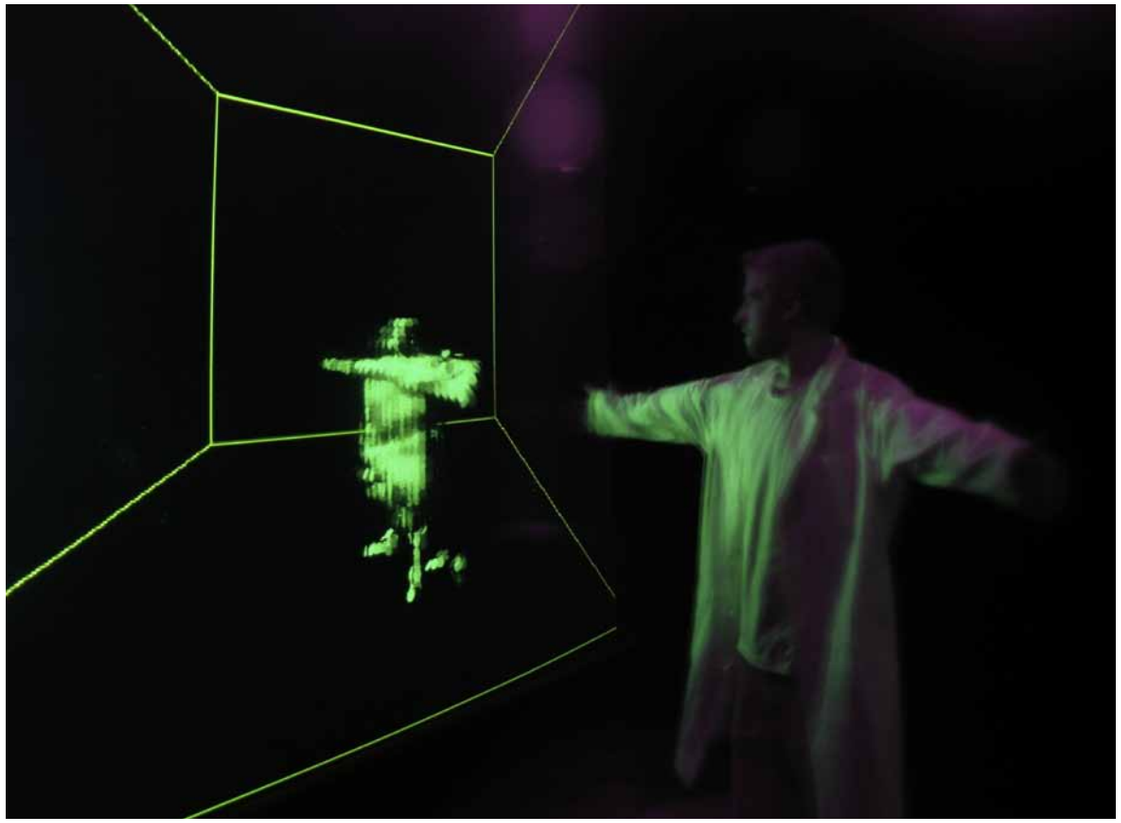


FIG. 4

design is experienced. This fundamental dimension of the development of embedded, situated, context aware systems is often elided, yet it is paradigmatic digital cultural practice in that it combines the brutal pragmatism of engineering with poetic aspirations. Any interactive system can be understood as having two complementary aspects – the 'correct' sensing of the world, and the production of behaviour, which is, take by the user to be related in a meaningful way to their behaviour. The success of any interactive system depends on the degree to which the behaviour of a system is intelligible to a user as being related to their behaviour. The question 'what can I reliably infer from the sensor data about the user, such that a specific system response will be interpreted by the user as relating coherently to their action?' is the fundamental question of interaction design. Therefore one designs with a consideration of not only what the user did, but what you believe they identify as what they did – it would be possible to measure and respond to aspects of the users behaviour which they were unaware of, and in most cases the resulting behaviour of the system would be unintelligible to the user.

Sensors respond to variation in a specific electro-physical variable. An ultrasonic transceiver measures the time it takes for an acoustic ping to be reflected by the nearest object. A video camera delivers an array of values for incident light. No sensor will tell you 'she has her left hand in the air.' The first challenge of designing sensor based quasi-intelligent computational action is to identify what changing electro-physical variable can be reliably identified with a particular human action or environmental event. Any such knowledge is based on inference, interpretation and probability. The pragmatic realities of such sensor tasks often mean that the possible range of action of a system is limited and curtailed by what can be known about the world. More often than not, a system's 'expressive potential' is far greater than its range of behaviors as a working system, because of the limitations of sensing. The alternative, to generate output actions based on interpretation of sensor data that is inherently unreliable, has the effect of confusing the user and thereby breaking the chain of interaction as the system 'responds' to behaviors mistakenly attributed to the user.



FIG. 5

**Machine Vision based interaction – a case study** | The development of custom sensor systems was a key area of technological development by artists. Rokeby's Very Nervous System was prominent among these. In the process of collaboration on several projects, Rafael Lozano Hemmer and Will Bauer developed a useful triangulated ultrasonic sensor system for artistic practices called GAMS. The GAMS system was adopted by other artists, such as the Pares, Pares and Hoberman work El ball de Fanalet, (Figure 5). | FIG. 5 EL BALL DE FANALET (LIGHT-POOLS), PERRY HOBERMAN & GALERIA VIRTUAL, 1998 [26]

The utilization of 'machine vision' (real time computational analysis of video-as-sensor) was a preoccupation in the media art community as it was in the robotics community, but the goals of the two groups were quite different. Following the pioneering work of Krueger and Rokeby, a number of artists pursued camera-based interaction projects. Some used the camera data purely a sensor data, some deployed it as output imagery as well. In little more than a decade, with the rapid advances in processing and storage, the problem transitioned from intractable, to tractable with major effort, to a standard research lab practice (this is an example of rapid technological change discussed above).

Early attempts at commodification and commercialisation of camera based interaction systems by groups such as the Canadian Mandala Systems began in the early 1990s. It was another decade before the commercialisation of the webcam and related technologies, and camera based PC and gamebox game interfaces such as the Logitech Eye Toy for Sony Playstation 2. In December 2008, the Nintendo Wii became the most popular gaming platform in the United States. What is seldom noted is that the aesthetic and technical groundwork for such 'entertainment technology' was laid in the media arts community. In twenty (or, in Krueger's case, 35) years, the intellectual work of that community of ad hoc researchers became fully commercialized. This example is indicative of a general historical process in media arts: vanguard R+D work often occurs outside state institutions and corporate labs, a decade before such issues register in technical disciplines and two decades before they are commercialized.

A new generation of interactive art students are busy hacking Wii controllers as interactive art interfaces, and this in itself is an historical marker. Due to the 'chunking up' phenomenon discussed above, the current generation of students is naturalized to a context of relatively low cost but highly complex, 'user-friendly', 'plug'n'play' technological commodities. What is seldom recognised by such users is that such commodities have been value-engineered to serve an already identified highly specified need – a need which is technically specific but demographically general enough to be profitable according to the logic of mass market economies of scale. Such highly specified devices seldom serve the needs of open-ended artistic inquiry and as such, constrain invention.





**Virtuality as an effect of Anglo-American Philosophy**
Through the 1990s, computer marketing rhetoric was full of the utter newness of digital technology, and this futurism inflected media arts discourses, particularly the more popular strands, in a negative way. But a full half-century of technological and theoretical development (from Alan Turings' seminal papers) had already preceded the advent of the PC. Likewise, the discourses that informed discussion of the techno-cultural context have a long history, as alluded to above. We cannot avoid becoming naturalized to ideas, which are fully instantiated in language and culture. In the west, the separation of immaterial mind / soul and material body is such an idea. We enact it every time we say 'my hand', 'my stomach' or 'my nose'. Such ideas are reified in technologies and undergird disciplines. Computer Science rhetoric actively endorses a separation of immaterial mindstuff from gross matter in the Software / Hardware binary. The mysterious capability of multimedia computer technology was that it could somehow make this 'virtual realm' sensible, experiential, spatial. It is no surprise therefore that (some) media arts discourses willingly affirmed the existence of a virtual realm, laden with uninterrogated and body-loathing transcendentalism that was positively medieval. In this view, the virtual technological imaginary was a realm of Platonic ideals, prototypes and pure examples untainted by body-stuff.

The very term 'virtual reality' instantly belies the philosophical context it arose from, a philosophical context its originators were so naturalised to that it undoubtedly seemed to them simple common sense. This fundamental commitment, almost entirely unquestioned in the scientific disciplinary environment of the time, was to objectivism (or philosophical realism). In the case of VR, this implies a belief in a constant and verifiable external reality and the surety that such objective reality can be represented unequivocally and unambiguously to people regardless of physical or cultural variation. Purportedly, VR simulated sensory (more correctly sensori-motoric) effects, but this construction implied the assumption of an objective external real of which sense-data was a reliably truthful representation. In contemporary cognitive science, these three notions: 'objective external real', 'sense-data' and 'representation' are all regarded as quite questionable, to say nothing of cultural critiques regarding the necessarily subjective interpretations of so-called 'users'.

Mark Weiser, who coined the term 'ubiquitous computing' noted: 'Perhaps most diametrically opposed to our vision is the notion of "virtual reality," which attempts to make a world inside the computer. ... Virtual reality focuses an enormous apparatus on simulating the world rather than on invisibly enhancing the world that already exists.' (Weiser 1991). Indeed, the obsessive pursuit of stereoscopic and interactive verisimilitude led to behemothic technological assemblages (such as the CAVE) requiring highly skilled technical support. This scopophilic obsession with the eye and vision, so consistent with an Enlightenment worldview, produced a technology of the phallic gaze, the conquering eye, in which the holistic nature of embodied being was elided. As vision entered VR, the rest of the body was checked at the door. Much of the rhetoric around virtual reality (the immersive interactive stereoscopic kind) championed it as a more embodying technology, but as I quipped at the time, 'VR is about as real as a picture of a toothache' (Penny 1994). Contrary to rhetorics of embodiment, as an interactive and 'immersive' technology, VR left much to be desired both technically and theoretically. So not only was the understanding of these various technologies among the 'critical community' rather limited, but the technologies

were incomplete. The 'interface' was far less well developed than the data-processing technology. This incompleteness was itself rendered hazy if not obscured by the hegemony of cognitivist discourses redolent with yearnings for a disembodied transcendence, a discourse that was apparently reinforced by the reification of such dualism in the hardware-software binarism.

This is consistent with the general history of digital technology development in the previous decades, and specifically with the history of Artificial Intelligence. The birth of digital computing was roughly concurrent with the birth of AI, as marked by the General Problem Solver of Newell, Simon and Shaw, of 1957. As a cultural imaginary, more so than in its technical development, AI was invested with a conception of intelligence as a closed and abstract capacity for logical symbol manipulation, and this conception profoundly influenced the parallel development of cognitive science, which purported to explain human intelligence in just such computational terms. Thinking, intelligence was the manipulation of symbolic tokens in some abstract logical space, as opposed, for instance, to an ongoing engagement with the material world. In this discursive context, it was reasonable to assert that shortcomings of interface technologies were a minor detail. Certainly, technologies supporting such interfaces were poorly developed at the time, but little attention was paid to why this might be. The root cause was precisely this emphasis on abstracted capacity for logical symbol manipulation and its development in computational contexts, and a consequent undervaluing of the embodied nature of being, of sensing and discerning salience and meaning from the barrage of stimuli which press in upon the organism every moment.

Many researchers felt that such developments were therefore not immediately crucial and could be pushed off into the future. This dovetailed neatly with the fact that may such problems, such as machine vision, were technically intractable at the time. This combination of technical shortcomings and theoretical justifications served to obscure the possibility that the process of perception, in the sense of making available to 'cognition' (in the sense of reasoning) of salient qualities from the world may well be regarded as the work of intelligence. That is, rather than residing in some darkened and isolated chamber in the brain, intelligence can be argued to reside precisely at the periphery of the organism, the membrane, the interface to the world. Such an idea is literally unthinkable within the terms of cognitivist AI. There was a nagging suspicion that 'interface technologies' were not as 'peripheral' as their technical nomenclature suggested, and inhered non-trivial problems beyond analog-digital conversion. The 'common sense problem' or symbol-grounding problem (Harnad 1990: pp 335-346)) reared its head in AI circles in the later 80s, and increasingly was recognised as a problem in principle and not simply a task for technical resolution. [27]

**Post Cognitivism, or: 'Oh, look, there's a body, I hadn't noticed it till now'.** | During the very decade of VR, as recognition of the shortcomings of the cognitivist paradigm became more widespread, new modes of inquiry in cognitive science, AI and robotics emerged, all loosely related to 'Artificial Life' approaches. Human interaction with the world and with technology was addressed more intensively – as is evidenced by the rapid expansion of HCI, CSCW (Computer Supported Collaborative Work) and related areas of research. Cognitive Science and HCI became increasingly interdisciplinary as psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists became involved. New modes of cognitive science grappled with the embodied, situated and social dimensions of cognition: the enactive cognition of (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1992); the situated cognition of (Suchman 1987); and the distributed cognition of (Hutchins 1995). Advances in neuroscientific research revealed new dimensions of the mind-body relation, which gave rise to new work in philosophy of mind. *Philosophy in the Flesh* (Lakoff and Johnson 1999) is perhaps the best known of these.

This movement met artists coming the other way, as it were; exploring the application of computational technologies to embodied, material and situated cultural practices. The crafting of embodied, sensorial experience is the core expertise of the arts, an expertise that is as old as human culture itself. As Merlin Donald would argue, this 'mimetic' intelligence is fundamental to human culture (Donald 1991). [28]

**Conclusion** | The notion of 'the virtual' was unclear from the outset. I hope to have shown that it was in large part a symptom of an incomplete technology and that the titillating promise of 'virtual space' was, in large part, a product of an interdisciplinary confusion over terminology (perhaps in some cases quite intentional). 'The virtual' became doubly virtual as network and interface technology nested it back into lived bodily and socio-cultural space.

In the transition from the VR-centric discourses of the 1990s to more nuanced augmented and mixed reality modes more recently grouped under the 'ubiquitous' rubric; the accumulated research around VR's stock-in-trade tracking and simulation techniques was redeployed in entertainment technology and commodity digital appliances. In this sense, ubiquitous computing is less the kind of antithesis of VR, which Mark Weiser envisaged, and more of a continuity.

Likewise, many topics of media art critical discourse, which had been framed by discussion of the virtual, have persisted after its demise. While artists had been drawn into discourses of virtuality, much of the actual work and the aesthetic goals were grounded in situated, embodied sensorial experience. Thus many of the aesthetic projects of 1990s media-artists were inherently concerned with central issues of ubiquity, in the sense that ubiquitous computing nests the 'virtual' into the physically lived 'real'.

## Endnotes

1 In much the same way that the sci-fi pop culture space travel imagery (Buck Rogers etc) fueled the US 'space race' of the mid twentieth century.

2 See (Penny 2008b)

3 Along with blogging, open source, crowdsourcing, folksonomy and other so-called web 2.0 parapharnalia.

4 Some aspects of this project have been addressed in monographs, anthologies and conferences. See for instance *Artists as Inventors, Inventors as Artists,* anthology of Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, Austria, edited by D. Daniels and U. Schmidt (2008), Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz.

5 To elaborate on the snapshot, consider the following: Displays were monochromatic, 4" and 5 ¼" floppy discs containing a few hundred kilobytes were the portable media. Microsoft had just released Windows3, the first version of Windows to achieve significant success. Apple had just released its first, and commercially disastrous 'portable', sporting a 16mhz 68000 processor and 1mb of RAM. Magnetic tape was the primary recordable medium for audio and video. The Audio CD was relatively new technology. As late as 1998, Apple led the market by abandoning the floppy drive in the then radical iMac. This was only a year after the CD-RW was introduced.

6 The Aspen Movie Map (1978), the root document in hypermedia and interactive video, was only 12 years old and serial accessible 12" interactive video-disc was (still) the normal format for interactive video.

7 Connection to the network was often via telephone lines and modems. Some still used acoustic modems, the kind you stuck the handset of your telephone in (image). These passed data in baud (not k-baud), 2400 bits / second was standard.

8 The original TinyMUD lasted only seven months through 1989-90. AlphaM00, precursor of LambdaM00, was written in 1990. LamdaM00 was released on Usenet in 1991. But it should be noted that through the 1980s a small community of artists concerned with 'telematics' (such as the DAX group, Robert Adrian X and Roy Ascott) had prototyped such environments using fax machines and commercial data networks (the IPSharp network). And Kit Galloway and Sherrie Levine's deployed satellite video in their remarkable work 'hole in space'.

9 The first 'modern' (2G) mobile phone system was launched in Finland in 1991. SMS first appeared, again in Finland in 1993 (The Soviet Union had pioneered mobile telephony in the 1950s). In the US, Motorola released the starTAC phone in 1996. In the USA, mobile phone usage was rare through the 1990s, uptake trailed Scandinavia, Europe, Japan and South Korea.

10 The exhibition of Interactive installation Machine Culture, which I curated for Siggraph '93, included thirty works from the Americas, Europe and Japan and offers a good cross section of such work. Ken Rinaldos *Flock*, comprising three custom hanging robotic sculptures. Myron Kreuger showed a new camera based embodied interactive system, Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau showed *Interactive Plant Growing* – a projection installation of dynamic 3D graphical plants driven by sensors on living plants, and Perry Hoberman showed *Faradays's Garden*, a witty pressure-mat driven and software articulated theatre of domestic appliances. Christian Moeller built an interactive mirror deploying a special glass of controllable transparency driven by custom sonar sensing (regrettably damaged in transit). For full catalog and a series of invited essays (by Manovich, Huhtamo, Wright etc, see (Penny 1993). My own work through the 1990s involved development of custom sensor analysis and robot behavior algorithms, proportional integral derivative (PID) motion control, custom realtime 3D machine vision hardware and software, etc.

11 Many practitioners noted the destabilizing effect this blinding rate of change had on practice. A 1990s computing pundit proposed that if automobiles had changed as rapidly as computers, a Rolls Royce would cost 50 cents and get a million miles to the gallon. To make a similar analogy: if computers and software of the period were paint and brushes, the painter might not recognize her tools and media from one month to the next – canvas might have infinite length, paint might be metered in different units, brushes might be voice activated. It was as if the 'fundamental unit' of a formal language of painting was sequentially defined by; a single hair; a brush-thing made of a bunch of hairs; a brush-paint-palette unit and a 'studio' unit; in a single decade.

12 This situation had major repercussions for practitioners who were also academics and teachers. Practical stress of this situation was tangible the work-related condition of technological 'burnout' was lunch-table conversation. For example, a collaborative document "Running to Stay in Place: Faculty Burnout in the Electronic Arts. Proposed Guidelines for Faculty Computer-based Media in Art and Design", was presented at ISEA94 and at CAA 1994. (Rubin, Weintraub et al, 1994)

13 This notion is consistent with the idea that in the late modern period the community of artists acts as a cultural early-warning system- as a group, though not necessarily individually, their antennas are way up.

14 An example of the range of discourse around virtuality is evidenced by the bibliography by Toni Emerson and Debra Revere at http: / / www.hitl.washington.edu / projects / knowledge_base / VRArt /

15 In the context of the present discussion it should be noted that two of the three large categories of technology I have identified as being the subjects of the VR discourses (the internet (etc) and large scale corporate, institutional and governmental databases) occupy a central place in today's discussions of ubiquity. The general field of sensing and tracking is also continuous.

16 Many theorists have deployed the term virtuality in rather abstract ways, for instance, (Massumi 2002). In my discussion here, I stay close to practices of interaction with sensor and data-driven technological systems.

17 Society for Cinema Studies conference, Pittsburgh, Pa, March'93, personal notes.

18 Philip Agre has noted similar issues of incomprehensibility in the AI community in the same period. (Agre 97)

19 Billy Kluver's famously remarked that all the Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) projects were "ridiculous from an engineers point of view". (Kluver 2001)

20 One of the quiet pleasures of the maturation of media studies and related fields is that they are increasingly populated by people with solid professional technical experience whereof they speak, combined with solid theoretical and critical as well as artistic grounding.

21 An approach that became known in the technical community as 'optical flow'.

22 Depicted is one of the interaction modes of *Videoplace* in which an animated character interacts with the users' silhouette. *Videoplace* existed in various incarnations through the mid 70s'.

23 See http: //ace.uci.edu / penny / works / traces.html, http: //ace.uci.edu / penny / works / fugitive.html, http: //ace.uci.edu / penny / works / petitmal.html, etc.

24 Through the 1990s I also pursued research in distributed, semi-autonomous multi-agent systems, not resident on the net but in freestanding communities such as the emergent sound installation *Sympathetic Sentience*. See http: //ace.uci.edu / penny / works / sympathetic.html. I submitted *Caucus*, a robotic multiagent project based on *Petit Mal*, to the NSF in 1996. It was not funded, but several years later, the NSF established special funding specifically for flocking and swarming multi-robot research.

25 *Body Electric* utilized the Traces 3D machine vision system, originally developed by Simon Penny and Andre Bernhardt for the Traces project (98 / 98). In *Body Electric* the system was deployed to generate real time 3D avatars and realtime 8 channel spatialised sound based on user behavior.
Video at http: //www.neuromech.northwestern.edu / uropatagium /

26 El Ball del Fanalet (Lightpools) by Narcis and Roc Pares, Perry Hoberman, et al, was one such project. http: //www.dtic.upf.edu / ~gvirtual / lghtpls / lghtpl_a.htm
Video at http: //www.fundacion.telefonica.com / at / vida / vida10 / paginas / v3 / pares.html

27 Famously, Marvin Minsky was at one point of the opinion that the common sense problem could be solved in a year or so, given some good grad students.

28 It is a telling and persistent failure of interdisciplinarity that while media artists were at forefront of such research, the two communities had limited connection. Certain initiatives stand out as beacons through the 1990s – such as the artist in residence program at Xerox PARC, the Ars Electronica Futurelab, V2 in Rotterdam, ZKM, the Banff New Media Institute, the Australian Network for Art and Technology, and more recently Intel Labs.

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Arnold Aronson** is a professor of theatre and Chair of the Theatre Program at Columbia University in New York City. He writes frequently about scenography and his books include *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography; American Set Design;* and *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography*. He served as General Commissioner of the 2007 Prague Quadrennial of Stage Design and Theatre Architecture, and is a past Chair of the History and Theory Commission of the International Organization of Scenographers, Theatre Architects, and Technicians (OISTAT). He also served as editor of the journal *Theatre Design & Technology* form 1978-88.

**Michael Ashkin** (born 1955) is an American artist who works in sculpture, installation, video, photography, text, and performance to address issues of urbanism and landscape. He is best known for his use of miniature scale and modest materials. Among other venues, his work has been exhibited at the Whitney Biennial (1997), Documenta 11 (2002), and Vienna Secession (2009). He is currently Assistant Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in Department of Art at Cornell University.

**Prof. Thea Brejzek** (PhD) is a German theatre scholar and former opera and new music stage director. Since 2006, she has been the programme director of the practice-informed PhD Programme in Scenography, a cooperation between ZHdK and the Institute of Theatre, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna. Currently, Thea is the Curator for Theory at the 2011 Prague Quadrenial for Performance Design and Space (PQ). Informed by her dual backgrounds as opera director and academic, Thea Brejzek's research addresses questions of virtuality and physicality on the mediated stage, intermediality and practice-based research in scenography. Thea lectures and publishes widely.

**Greer Crawley** is Senior Lecturer in Spatial Design and Pathway Leader: Design for Film, Television and Theatre and Exhibition Design at Buckinghamshire New University, UK and Visiting Lecturer, MA Scenography at the Central School of Speech and Drama, London. Greer is a practising designer and researcher and a member of the Doctoral programme in Scenography at The University of the Arts, Zurich and the University of Vienna. She is the Editor for *Blue Pages* the quarterly journal of The Society of British Theatre Designers, a Member of the exhibition co-ordination committee and editor for *Transformation & Revelation: UK Design for Performance 2007 – 2011*, The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, 2011; the Prague Quadrennial June 2011; and the V&A and Touring exhibition from April 2012 and Co-editor *Design for Performance* V&A publication, 2012.

**Simon Donger** trained in sculpture and scenography in London and Montreal. His wide-ranging practice includes scenography, dramaturgy, direction and performance. Recent projects include: scenography and performance for *Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio's Tragedia Endogonidia L#09;* conception of the interactive installation *The Circle Is Red for Bauhauslab; and the exhibition Space and Light: Edward Gordon Craig* for the V&A Museum and Prague Quadrienniale 2011.





He teaches scenography and performance arts at the Central School of Speech and Drama (University of London) where he is also completing a PhD in Scenography. Simon has presented his research in various conferences, and recently edited *ORLAN: A Hybrid Body of Artworks*, Routledge, 2010. He is a visiting lecturer at Leeds College of Art and Design and the AA School of Architecture (London, UK).

**Prof. Wolfgang Greisenegger** (PhD) is a drama theorist, former rector and dean at the University of Vienna, author, director and critic. He was appointed tenured professorship in theatre studies in 1977. His academic positions include the University of Munich, University Klagenfurt, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Mozarteum Salzburg and US universities. His research interests are theatre history, scenography and intermediated spatial concepts. Prof Greisenegger is the Academic Director of the Scenography PhD Programme at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) and the University of Vienna.

**Dr. Dorita Hannah** is Professor of Spatial Design at Massey University's College of Creative Arts in Wellington, New Zealand. Her creative work, which has gained awards such as a UNESCO Laureate (1999) and World Stage Design medals (2009), includes scenographic, interior, exhibition and installation design with a specialized architectural consultancy in buildings for the visual & performing arts as well as international performance design projects. She publishes on practices that negotiate between art, architecture and performance, including co-editing an anthology on *Performance Design* and the themed issue on *Performance / Architecture* for the Journal of Architectural Education. Dr Hannah is also on the creative team for the 2011 Prague Quadrennial as international commissioner for architecture.

**Wafa Hourani**, born 1979 in Hebron, is a Palestinian artist living and working in Ramallah. His Future City projects deal with the social, political, and economic realities of Palestinian life to develop grim and apocalyptic predictions for the residents of the West Bank. Wafa revisits the utopian genre to produce architectural models of major cities 50 years from now, including sociological, environmental and behavioural parameters in his subjective and emotional forecasting model.
Hourani's practice encompasses elements of filmmaking, sculpture, photography, architecture and graphic design. He investigates the epistemological possibilities offered by the photographic medium, and the nature of the mimetic relationship between art and reality.

Wafa Hourani is a recipient of the 2007 Delfina Foundation's Riwaq Biennale Resident Artist Award, resulting from the collaboration between the Delfina Foundation and the A.M. Qattan Foundation. The Riwaq Biennale takes place in Ramallah, Palestine.

**Sodja Zupanc Lotker** is currently working on her fourth Prague Quadrennial, this time as artistic director. She was the coordinator of the special project The Heart of the PQ in 2003 and in 2007 Sodja was PQ programming director. She serves as a dramaturg for independent devised and site specific

theatre projects in Czech, Norway, USA, Brazil etc. Sodja has also worked for the International Department of the Theatre Institute Prague, of which she was the Director in 2006 – 2008. She teaches at the Visual Arts Academy in Brno, and has given lectures and presentations at the Prague Theatre Academy, Columbia University, TCG Conference, and a number of festivals, symposia and other theatre events.

**Wolfgang Muench** is a media artist and art educator. He studied Fine Arts in Stuttgart and Vienna, and joined the ZKM Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe in 1996. He was involved in various ZKM projects such as the *Panoramic Navigator* and the CD-ROM series *artintact* and *digital arts edition*. He taught at Merz-Academy Stuttgart (1997), Hong Kong Art Centre (2003) and LASALLE Singapore (2003), and was artist in residence at ARS Electronica (2001), ZKM (2002), and IAMAS Institute for Advanced Media Arts and Science (2003). His research examines socio-cultural implications of technology and human computer interfaces. His interactive art works have been shown at numerous international venues. In 2004, he was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Media Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts Singapore.

Born in 1965 in Düsseldorf, Germany, **Mariele Neudecker** (http://www.marieleneudecker.co.uk/) lives and works in Bristol, UK. Neudecker uses a broad range of media including sculpture, film and installation. She is interested in cultural constructs around representations of landscape within the Northern European Romantic tradition and the notion of the 'Contemporary Sublime'.

She has recently been short-listed for the Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square, had solo exhibitions at Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin, won the prize at the 11. Triennale Kleinplastik 2010 Larger Than Life – Stranger Than Fiction in Fellbach, Germany, made a new large-scale commission for Extraordinary Measures, Belsay Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK and participated in GSK Contemporary: eARTh, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

**Olaf Nicolai** studied at the School of Applied Arts, Schneeberg, and German Literature and Philology at the Universities of Leipzig, Budapest and Vienna. In 1992, he completed his PhD on The Vienna Group. He has been awarded several grants, including the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes at the Studies Centre for Art and Science in Venice, 1993; Villa Massimo, Rome, 1996; the P.S.1 Museum Grant, New York, 1998; the IASPIS Grant, Stockholm, 2000, the Art Award Wolfsburg, 2002 and the Villa Aurora, Los Angeles, 2008. He has participated in numerous exhibitions, such as documenta X, 1997; Venice Biennale, 2001 and 2005; Sydney Biennial, 2002; Gwangju Biennial, 2002; Sharjah Biennial, 2005; Athens Biennial, 2007; Manifesat 7, 2008 and his work is shown in institutions worldwide (Migros Museum, Zurich; Museo Serralves, Porto; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Fondation Cartier, Paris; Lenbachhaus, Munich). He lives and works in Berlin.





Visual artist **Hans Op de Beeck** (B, 1969) lives and works in Brussels. His work consists of large installations, sculptures, video works, photography, animated films, drawings, paintings and writing (short stories). Thematically, the work concentrates on our laborious and problematic relationship with time, space and each other. His work is nourished by a keen interest in social and cultural reflection. Op de Beeck shows the viewer non-existent, but identifiable places, moments and characters that appear to have been taken from contemporary everyday life, aiming thereby to capture in his images the tragicomic absurdity of our postmodern existence. The visual output of his artistic research often produces slumbering, insidious, melancholic and astonishing images.
All about the artist's works, publications and writings: www.hansopdebeeck.com

**Simon Penny**, Professor of Arts and Engineering, University of California, Irvine. www.ace.uci.edu/penny
Simon Penny is an artist and theorist in the fields of digital cultural practices, embodied interaction and interactive art. He built the autonomous robotic artwork 'Petit Mal' in the early 1990s. He is Professor of Arts and Engineering at University of California, Irvine, and founding director of the interdisciplinary graduate program in Arts, Computation and Engineering (ACE, see http: //www.ace.uci.edu). He curated Machine Culture (arguably the first international survey of interactive art) at SIGGRAPH 93. He edited the anthology Critical Issues in Electronic Media (SUNY Press 1995).

Australian designer and architect **Lawrence Wallen** is Professor and Head of School, Design at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). He is also Professor and Artistic Director of the doctorate program in scenography at the Zurich University of the Arts (in collaboration with the University of Vienna).

In parallel to his published works on spatial systems his recent works (2007 – 2009) include the photomedia installation "Repetitive Systems" for the Cairo Biennale, the titanium public art work „Past Mapping" in Seoul, Korea, the electronic scenography for the dance piece „De los Afectos" with Lanomina Imperial, Barcelona, and the stage and media for the opera „Walking in the Limits" (Reber) Zurich / Berlin.

Previous projects have been realised at the ZKM, Vitra Design Museum, Australian Opera, Expo 2000,Istanbul Design Week, Art Basel, Mercat de les Flors de Barcelona, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Cite de la Musique Paris, Munich Biennale, Volksbühne Berlin, Shedhalle Zurich etc.

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