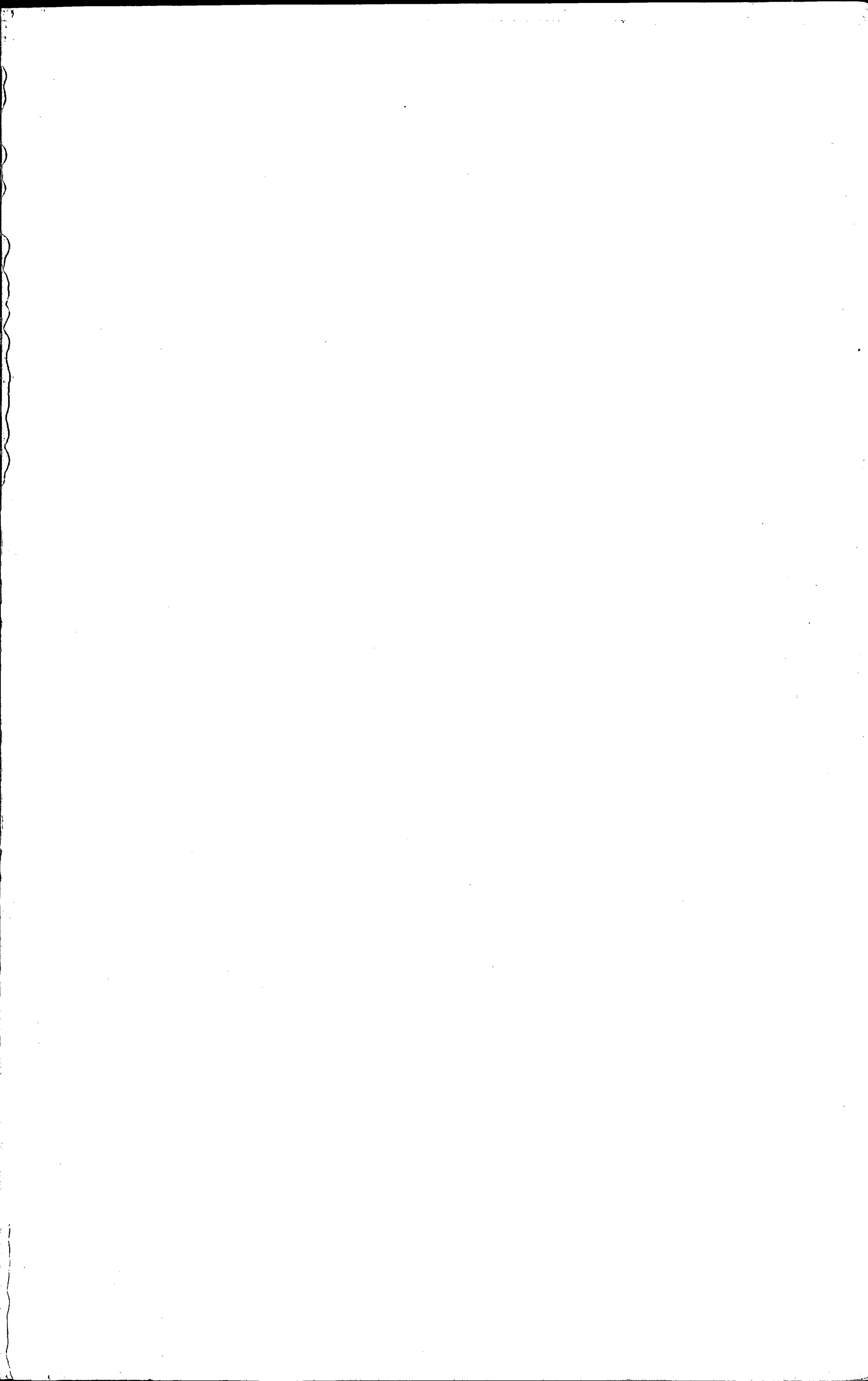
Vol. 14, No. 2

Art Criticism



Art Criticism

Art Department
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

The editor wishes to thank Jamali and Art and Peace, Inc., The Stony Brook Foundation, President Shirley Strumm Kenny, Provost Rollin C. Richmond, the Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts, Paul Armstrong, for their gracious support.

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ISSN: 0195-4148

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This issue of ***Art Criticism*** *presents an overview of art practice in the 1990s and results from a special seminar taught by Donald B. Kuspit in the fall of 1997. The contributors are current and former graduate students in the Art History and Criticism and Studio Art programs at Stony Brook .*

Abstract Painting in the '90s

by Mary Lou Cohalan and William V. Ganis

Introduction

In a postmodern era characterized by diversity and spectacle, abstract painting is just one of many formal strategies in the visual art world. No longer a revolutionary emblem of the avant-garde as it was in the '20s, or a dominant masculine style as it was in the '50s, abstract painting nonetheless has produced a new generation of practitioners. These young painters make few theoretical or social claims for their work, confining their interest to the exploration of new materials, surface effects, gesture, and process. Defined by modesty of purpose and means, abstraction in the '90s, through its very lack of grandiosity, subverts spectacle, commodification, and passivity. Abstraction remains a metaphor for individual action in an increasingly homogenized, global environment, where the visual is made to serve consumption.

Is There a '90s Sensibility?

What is new and different about abstract painting in the '90s? If there is one trend among the dozens of young painters in the United States and abroad, it is the sensibility which has abandoned notions of progress in art. For these practitioners of a historically recognized style in a postmodern era, abstraction in the '90s occurs after the death of painting. No longer is there a need to subscribe to outmoded ideas of originality and change, of the artist as heroic inventor of visual strategies for social mediation.

Many '90s abstractionists circumvent questions of originality by deliberately culling from enduring motifs of abstraction's long history, especially spirituality and exploration of the body through gesture. Having abandoned a priori ideas of progress, the abstract artist of the '90s works in a pluralistic mannerist mode and inhabits a world where many styles of abstraction exist at once: color field, concrete painting, expressionism, minimal painting, specific objects, machine made art, op art. All are touchstones of form from which the '90s artist draws inspiration. Yet even as this new work looks back and takes from earlier modes, '90s abstract painters are creating outside the context of the past—of action painting, the abstract sublime, purity, specific objects and non-theatricality—clinging to an eviscerated notion of personal originality even when theoretically "originality" is no longer possible. The painters are creating an appealing body of work which has been unable in this decade to gather enough momentum for a perceivable movement of its own. As Raphael Rubinstein summarizes in "Abstraction in a Changing Envi-

ronment" from *Art In America*'s treatment of contemporary abstraction: "Instead of *a* movement, there is simply movement."[1]

Yet precisely because of current historical interest, abstraction has become revitalized and is seen as an entirely renewed mode of painting. The young '90s artists (many coming out of M.F.A. programs with strong art historical backgrounds) do not hesitate to derive their forms from art history, but their selections are often without the cynicism of the '80s and without the nostalgia often associated with looking back. These young artists (with some exceptions) are not appropriating to make overt theoretical or political statements. Rather, they are using past styles as formal starting points for their own works.

Most importantly, the '90s artist breaks with historical inspiration on the larger question of purpose. Entirely absent from the work of contemporary abstract painters is a sense of heroics or claims that art can change the world. Though they may paint with a nod to Pollock and de Kooning, or mimic the methods of Kline and Klein, abstract painters in the '90s maintain a sturdy workperson's sensibility: in a world without dragons to slay, there are still paintings to be painted.

One simple end game strategy for abstract painting in the '90s is for painters looking at the above mentioned historical modes as decoration or legible symbols that evoke associations for the viewer. Artists Suzan Batu, Gary Petersen, and Marjorie Welish make paintings that include historical forms, but are rendered in "designer" colors, thus making the works seem dated. For instance, Batu's Untitled 1994, uses the biomorphic shapes of Jean Arp along with the muted '50s colors to give a design feeling. Similarly, Petersen uses "hot" colors alluding to the '60s in his canvas, Pop Up of 1995. Welish's Small High Valley 66 of 1995 is painted with Mondrian's pallet, but also compositionally evokes Malevich, Marden, Kelly, Klee, and Still. The artist says of her work:

> The mentality informing this pursuit derives from the study of traditional art history, which construes style as a grammar—a cultural grammar at least embedded in history as that notion of style...as grammar is a special presupposition of mine for which syntax holds a signifying place.[2]

The Other Materialism

Acknowledging the impossibility of producing work of theoretical or aesthetic originality, the majority of '90s painters have developed an intense interest in materials—particularly products of contemporary technology—sometimes to the point of fetishization. The formal properties of new paints and pigments not only create nuances of difference, they add meaning to the materials by societal association. Some of the most recognized younger artists in Europe

and the United States, for instance, use car paint enamel to produce slick, shiny surfaces which mimic machined, industrial objects. France's Pascal Pinaud orchestrates (auto) accidents in the studio, using sheets of metal and fragments of car bodies, to create heroic looking abstract gestures.[3] In 1994's Schwarz-Porsche the collision of the black sports car and the metal plane leaves a bit of intervening paint as evidence of this event. The "autonomous" stroke is familiar but made unwonted through the context of anonymous mechanical violence. The Canadian-American Christian Eckart's monochromes are made "contemporary icons of a high-tech civilization"[4] through the use of industrial materials like aluminum and car lacquer, which enable the artist to make flawlessly smooth surfaces.

Martha Keller's strokes include brash metallic pigments from discontinued auto paint and a dead-black paint from the manufacturer of the stealth bomber aircraft. She obsessively grinds her own pigments and uses the painting process more to examine the qualities of specific ingredients than produce images. In Tao Wow Now of 1995, she explores the protean nature of zinc, a material characterized by its ability to produce dramatic color shift. Keller's abstract forms do not in themselves comment on industrial and military production—she paints straightforward layers of stripes. Though the forms painted by Keller and other artistic experimenters usually fail to signify outright, knowledge about materials (wax, metals, lacquer, car paint, aluminum) induce a plethora of indeterminate cultural associations in the viewer which would be willfully suspended in the "transparent" conventions of oil, tempera, and acrylic painting. There is room for novelty in materials that double as media and signifiers. These materials paradoxically work in Clement Greenberg's "purity" of materials (which latently operates in this decade's abstraction) despite any "readable" references. Modes of abstraction are now possible that do not absolutely fit in with the theoretical modes of Rosenberg, Greenberg, and Fried.

Suzanne McClelland, Carolano Parlato, and Ai-Chen Lee are also examples of young '90s abstractionists whose "newness" depends on the use of materials. McClelland and Parlato investigate the properties of unusual painting surfaces such as drywall and sheet rock; Lee paints on remnants of Naugahyde, vinyl, and sheet plastic. Typically these material-based painters have developed a "signature style" which immediately conveys authorship and varies little. For them, innovative style is not the point; what matters are properties of paint and surface. Within the framework of unchanging style, they delight in creating ever more rarefied fugues and variations on the theme of their chosen materials.

A majority of artists still paint in the media (oil, acrylic) of their historical predecessors, focusing on exploring possibilities for the medium in which they work. Opacity/translucence, glazing, matte/gloss, texture, painterly/lin-

ear, color relationships, and illusionistic space/flatness are at the fore for artistic investigation through the painting process. Often, artist's statements emphasize the interest in material inquiry. Carolano Parlato states:

> The paintings are created by mixing and pouring combinations of acrylic paint with various polymer mediums directly on to a rigid support. The liquid pour disperses and changes over time. The paint flows, crinkles and separates into strands and puddles of intense color.[5]

The Argentine painter Fabian Marcaccio manipulates his materials to make "visual paradoxes." He tries to make unexpected passages like canvas on top of a brushstroke, gestures coming off the picture plane, buckled (sculptural) three dimensional space, silkscreened "streaks," and other painterly "mutations."[6] The elements that read as textural brushstrokes in Marcaccio's work are actually trowel spread, pigment laden silicone. These swaths reflect and transmit the light with different results than oil and acrylic paints. What Marcaccio has made in effect is an alternative material genre with new visual possibilities. A paint medium after all, is simply pigment suspended in a material matrix.

Process

Closely linked to the study of materials are the '90s abstractionists' attentions to painting processes. This interest in process is often an examination of artistic autonomy (or the lack thereof). Sometimes artists see the process as spiritual ritual (see below). Rebecca Purdum talks of abstraction as "the process of release" from the "rational and recognizable"[7] thus she perceives her process as transformative.

The work of the French artist Cédric Teisseire confronts the viewer with the process of its execution. As the European historian-critic Lóránd Hegyi takes pains to explain:

> ...Teisseire lets the paints engage in mechanical processes within a structure determined by him. The color strips thus created result from dripping paint and form the lower layer of the pictorial surface which determines subsequent steps. The artist repositions the painting, turning the canvas upside down or putting it horizontally...While working on a canvas, he places a second one underneath so that paint drops do not fall off, but onto this empty canvas. Then he changes the canvases, now working on what used to be the lower painting and is now on top. The more often he repeats this, the more superimposed layers of color he creates...[8]

Teisseire's method of execution is not only fascinating to critics, but draws in the viewer who tries to decipher from the paint evidence just how these works were made.

The works of the Austrian painter, Christina Zurfluh, are cross sections of paint. In her process, she builds up the paint surface and then cuts (destroys, removes) the layers to "objectively" reveal the material beneath the painterly surface. Works such as *Untitled* of 1996, are histological investigations of painting. Zurfluh paints for this procedure, however, and anticipates the destruction by making complex relationships of pigments that blend, juxtapose, or remain in small fields. The result of her work is visually novel leaving the viewer to decipher this alien method of painting.

Gesture

Many artists are still interested in the gesture which became the hallmark of autonomy in the 1950s. There is now a renewed interest in recontextualizing gesture for the '90s. Louise Fishman seems to be the heir to the gestural Abstract-Expressionist legacy in her '50s (mural) sized, large stroked canvases, such as Zarif of 1994. Her work escapes being a mere iteration of Kline, however, by her careful application of paint to create regulated grids which compositionally crowd the canvas and—prevent vast negative or illusionistic spaces. This regimentation of swaths prevents the primitive emotional charge ascribed to automatism from working in her canvases.

Gesture in the '90s is also read as the tiny strokes of Japan's Tomoharu Murakami who creates a dense texture of uniformly applied strokes in monochrome works. The expressionist gesture here becomes cerebral, and anti-heroic—a visual Zen paradox of black oil paints that allows the viewer awareness of texture but not of illusionistic or concrete depth.

In the work of Richmond Burton gesture is combined with geometry to produce an experimental effect, or an original compositional look, in which the small strokes are contained in the grid. His 1994 painting, *Heart*, shows three hundred possibilities for autonomous yet limited gestures. Suzanne McClelland's gestures are derived from writing. While addressing, but not laden by, semiotics, McClelland derives the autographic gesture from the calligraphic. Her marks may be recognizable as writing, but are usually not recognizable as language.

Elliott Puckette is also interested in the calligraphic flourish in the making of her "paraphs," the decorative flourishes added to the signatures of formal documents.[9] Her paraph "figures" are actually scratched from the color ground. The autograph is read in the painting context as automatic or at least autonomous. However, the works themselves (aside from seeming like photographic negatives of Georges Mathieu's daubs) seem to go begging for understanding in facile Derridian terms, with the paintings' "absences" of stroke and

obviously "parergonal" subject matter.

Theorizing

Although abstract painting seems mired in style and concern for materials and has always had a tenuous relationship to theory, some abstract artists of the '90s still make theoretical claims for their work. Lydia Dona and Nancy Haynes have taken cues from the theoretical '80s when M.F.A.s from academic programs spouted theory to revitalize their "Neos." Like Peter Halley before them, these painters use sophistic language to describe (or prop up) works that are too sparse or compositionally unstable to work well formally. Nancy Haynes, who composed *Object of Negation* (1995), in a contrived grid containing large blocks of scantily brushed monochromes excites this work with:

> An intention of my paintings is to circumscribe abstraction's mute physicality inside a discourse of the fugitive, where the fugitive serves to dismantle the architecture of composition. Essential to the emptying out of the surface are absences that suggest a twofold complexity and must connect both the visual and its lack. This defining absence manifests itself as a suspension, which is subtly marked by syncopes, lacunae, and pauses, within an empty narrative. As artist/author, the intent of these paintings resides within the negative.[10]

This abuse of theory indicates that Haynes is overqualified to be a painter since a priori notions make for stultified execution. Haynes's real gesture resides in theory and not in the mark on the canvas. Lydia Dona makes equally complex claims for her visually loaded works. She claims among her theoretical influences Deleuze, Kristeva, Blanchot and Bataille, and comes up with the following intentions:

> I visualize the paintings as architectural plans. The first step is an acrylic ground which could be a code for Minimalism. Over that I draw a grid in pencil, like the grid of architecture, mathematics, or cartography. Then I start using masking tape to divide the painting into geometric divisions...After painting some area with oil—the traditional sign system for representation and the hand—I start flooding and dripping with enamel paint...Instead of reduction, I want a multiplicity of readings. I don't want systems. I want to empty out systems, open up other ones, rupture them to create motion and liquidity. This happens even in my long titles, which seek a linguistic collapse as intense as the visual collapse on the canvas.[11]

Dona juxtaposes theory as David Salle threw together disjunctive images.

Typical of her work is *Nomadic Drips and the Molar Loss of Driftings* of 1993 with its intentionally poor taste in composition, color, linear and painterly layers. Dona's abstractions are, ultimately, anti-art, or at least art for art theory's sake.

The Symbolic in the Non-Objective

Another prevalent and somewhat theoretical mode of abstraction in the '90s is the tendency for artists to investigate how abstraction functions as a symbol. Some, Like Pat Steir, paint canvases that look simultaneously figurative and abstract, as the images are dually coded, "waterfall" and "expressionist drip." Steir asks of her work:

> ...Would this picture of light be what you call an abstract painting? Or would it be a picture of reality? Do you believe in a reality that is solely visual?...Do you know at what point an image is not an image? These questions are my subject.[12]

Valerie Jaudon and Philip Taaffe, however, make works that have far less literal potential, works that are ornamentally abstract. In *Painting with Calligraphy on Fire* of 1995-96, Taaffe juxtaposes designs, eastern mandalas, Islamic abstract foliage, and American spray paint, to make works whose symbols are identifiable but not necessarily readable. Taaffe states of his compositions:

> ...We need something which has history pouring out of it, which has grandeur of scale but which is also specific and starkly detailed. I want to use history to shape my work and historical materiality as its structure. Then I want to paint into that historical material. I am not talking about appropriation, which is a technique; I am talking about states of feeling.[13]

Additionally, Jonathan Lasker laments "the tragic loss of the figure"[14] in abstract works and thus brings in more indeterminate visual elements which border on the abstract and identifiable.

The paintings of Denyse Thomasos appear to be abstract gesture paintings, yet she believes that her forms refer to her Afro-Trinidadian identity. In her descriptive language of works like 1996's Unravel gestures become the "lashes of slavery"[15] and the compositions, "...translate into wood, lattice, string, rope, metal bars, and bricks..." i.e., the repeated crossing patterns are emblematic of "structures that confine."[16]

One of the most recognizable names in abstract painting of the '90s is Terry Winters. Earlier in the decade, Winters made works that also bordered on the figurative and abstract. *Illustrated Set*, the title of a series from 1994, denotes an illustration, a visual representation of something real. The complex

compositions of these paintings allow the viewer to "recognize" images in a field of abstract but not so neutral stimuli. Winters's compositional elements from 1997 seem to have been stripped to repeating lines and grids, but this visual strategy serves his dynamic shift from subjectivity to objectivity, or as Winters calls this mode of creation, "...subjective impulses encoded into patterns...as they evolve into images..."[17] The artist derives his images from source materials like architectural renderings, medical photographs, and computer graphics, and synthesizes the stimuli into his compositional conflations by "drawing with his eyes open."[18] A pseudo-psychologist wielding specialized Rorschach abstractions, Winters is fascinated by how abstract art interacts with his own visual cognitive sensibilities and those of his viewers.

Mediative Objects

Ai-Chen Lee, Eleanor Schimmel, and Nola Zirin are '90s abstractionists who continue the exploration of the spiritual made famous by such recent masters as Agnes Martin and Brice Marden. Boosted by a contemporary fascination with the religions and non-material social philosophies of the East—Zen Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism—large numbers of abstract works are characterized by repeating pattern, minimal gesture, and serene surfaces: the visual equivalents of mantras and heightened consciousness. These works are meant to be meditative objects, mediating the material world and the spiritual realm.

Although contemporary painters present this prevalent theme of '90s abstraction as a "new" focus, one ingeniously opposed to western materialism and commodification, the link between abstraction and spiritualism is an ancient and historical coupling which made the critical break with mimesis possible. It is not by accident that the first abstractions were produced by artists who were practitioners of deeply iconoclastic religions. In the most important art historical breakthrough since the invention of perspective in the Renaissance, Vasily Kandinsky seems to have drawn heavily on his iconoclastic religious roots (Russian Jewish in a country surrounded by more iconoclastic Muslims). The concept of non-representation as both an aesthetic and moral stance was internalized in him through his very culture. In contrast, Kazimir Malevich recast the icon in his Suprematist works, thus infusing abstraction with spiritual and religious meaning.[19]

What is important here is not abstraction's historical origins in a particular religion, but its religious origin per se. Through this origin, abstraction gained the unique moral weight which is so often attributed to it. In the translation from religious iconoclasm to vernacular iconoclasm, abstraction borrowed its ethical core from religion and became as Clement Greenberg notes, an art style that is somehow more uplifting, less materialistic, more serious, of higher ethical import—in short, "better"—than representational art.

From the time of Kandinsky's first abstract painting in 1912, abstraction's link with the spiritual and the non-material has been an enduring motif, and the base for abstraction's ongoing ability to suggest critical opposition to things of the world. Even while emphasizing the materiality of their medium, artists as diverse in style as Jackson Pollock and Agnes Martin have described abstract painting as a semi-religious process embodying both the submerging and expression of self. In this context, the spiritual claims of the newer generation of abstract painters in the '90s seem familiar indeed. Nola Zirin, an abstract artist who creates panels of rich, liturgical color applied in contrasting slabs, comments:

> Through the very process of my painting, my merging myself with my materials, I seek a higher reality. I do not ask what I wish to express, but what the medium can express. My paintings always refer to nature, but a higher nature often emerging as fragments of places which I believe are in the spiritual world.[20]

Ms. Zirin's aesthetic strategy is tension: contrasting colors, liquid versus solid, bold versus delicate. She claims these visual binaries express, and are equivalent to, the fundamental tensions of religious myth—the universal couplings of good and evil, matter and spirit, life and death.

The '90s artist Eleanor Schimmel maintains that her abstract paintings of amorphous forms, vaguely reminiscent of boats, signify "the journey," the spiritual path through life that a guru or other eastern religious figure might take. Executed in heavy encaustic, often overlaid in gold, the paintings—like Zirin's—are in the deep, rich shades associated with church decoration.

The repetitive, minimal patterns of Agnes Martin—an older abstract painter whose works are now widely recognized—are often quoted by those younger '90s painters exploring abstraction's ability to express the spiritual. A devoted practitioner of Zen Buddhism, Martin takes the Tao as her inspiration. With their spare, minimalist pallet and endlessly repeated marks, Martin's abstractions are visual mantras which force the viewer to look closer and closer at shades of difference, and, in the process, loose the self in the demands of the act of looking. Abstractionists Tomoharu Murakami and Ai-Chen Lee both employ Martin's meditative strategies. Covering entire surfaces with small, similar marks (in Ai-Chen Lee's case, made with parts of her body) these '90s artists invite the viewer to contemplate the barely perceptible changes among marks, to enter a timeless world of contemplation and reflection.

Though none of these young artists speak directly of politics or social concern, they all insist that their abstractions reflect the non-material. These typically small-scale works use the simplest possible tools and pallets in

an effort to transcend matter. With their Spartan working methods and their insistence on the spiritual content of their work, the group of young '90s artists who focus on spiritualism has created a body of quietly subversive work which cannot easily be commercialized or absorbed into spectacular society.

Rethinking Gender

Historical revision, a key activity in academia of the '90s, is a prominent concern of young artists working in every style. Nowhere is revisionism more active than among the '90s abstractionists. Overlooked and poorly represented in the heyday of '50s Abstract-Expressionism, older women painters of substance and originality who lived and worked a half century ago are being rediscovered and promoted in the '90s. Prominently featured in galleries and museums, these forgotten national treasures of earlier generations and movements have spurred and benefited from this decade's renewed interest in abstraction.

Grace Hartigan and the late Joan Mitchell are among the most prominent of the "new '90s women." These two older artists, who were ignored at the would-be heights of their careers, are now considered "blue chip" as well as "living" art historical figures. Their gestures and aesthetic strategies derived from art world experience in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s are even regarded as more authentic—more truly abstract—than similar marks and expressions by young, contemporary abstractionists.

Books and exhibitions examining the exclusion of women and other marginalized groups from male-dominated art movements such as Abstract-Expressionism are frequently in the news, prompting even more interest in past omissions and—more importantly—providing a source of "new" artists. Hartigan and Mitchell in the '90s claim both the impermanence of history and contemporaneity, a sure-fire sell in galleries and museums.

Important art historical investigations like Ann Eden Gibson's *Abstract-Expressionism: Other Politics* provide further raw material for galleries by examining the work of relatively unknown women painters. Painters such as Alice Trumbull Mason and Thelma Johnson Streat were forgotten because of gender, race, economic class or marriage to a more prominent male artist. Now these artists too are part of a '90s abstractionist focus.

In more radical examples of historical revision, young abstract artists like Lawre Stone are producing work which actively questions abstraction's historical gender blindness. Though abstract, her tondo paintings contain pallets and forms associated with the work of seminal male painters, particularly those like Picasso who maintained stormy and occasionally abusive relationships with women. Explaining *Not One in Dora Maar* (1997), Stone says she has deliberately "borrowed" from Picasso in the same way he "borrowed"

from his talented, artistic mistress:

> I see my work as a kind of setting the historical record straight—perhaps of getting even. Picasso was known for his poor treatment of women, but more repugnant, his outright theft of their ideas and creativity. I enjoy the fact I have stolen back what was stolen.[21]

Like Stone, Karin Davie also appropriates forms for her abstract renderings, but, Davie's feminist strategy is to take back abstraction by making it address or suggest the female body. She states that her works are:

> ...figurative surrogates, stand-ins for both the painter (myself) and the viewer. The scale of the paintings (which originate in the size of the body, but extend as well to its potential field of movement), gesture, and pattern articulate the condition of the human body...[22]

Unlike Bridget Riley's stark optical non-objectivity, Davie's *Before You, Before Me* works of 1994 are intended to be femininely objective. As the critic Lily Wei points out,

> Karin Davie discards the modernist donnée of nonreferentality, situating the contours of her stripes in relationship to the female body...and [these] seem correlated to bodily movements and forms, to the body's swellings and interior spaces. [23]

The viewer approaches these paintings as op works, but leaves with expectations thwarted by expressionist "errors" and blended lines that defeat hard-edge objectivity.

Female abstract painters of the '90s are now closer to equal grounds with their male counterparts. Today there are about as many active female as there are male abstract painters, both sexes get billing in galleries, and the "stars" are not overwhelmingly men.[24]

Commercialization and Commodification

Like the universal converter in the luggage of a canny tourist, abstract painting in the '90s adapts to both positive and negative interpretations of Guy Debord's theories of modern spectacle. As a direct symptom of the society of spectacle, abstract painting can easily be interpreted as the ultimate commodification of visual history. To argue in this direction—that abstract painting is spectacle incarnate—we must briefly turn to Debord's seminal 1960s text, *The Society of the Spectacle*, where the author argues that spectacle in all its manifestations

is an inevitable product of the last stages of western capitalism. More pernicious than the Disneyesque banality associated with the common use of the word, the key manifestation of spectacle as defined by Debord is the ultimate severing of society's links with lived experience and human connections. According to the author, the severing process begins innocently enough the moment money is adopted as a sign of value, rendering obsolete the need for direct barter or exchange. The process of dislocation and human displacement ends with spectacle's triumph, a bleak, utter debasement of the social order. As Debord notes:

> The spectacle is another facet of money, which is the abstract equivalent of all commodities. But whereas money in its familiar form has dominated society as the representation of universal equivalence, that is, of the exchangeability of diverse goods whose uses are not otherwise compatible, the spectacle in its full development is money's modern aspect; in the spectacle the totality of the commodity world is visible in one piece, as the general equivalent of whatever society as a whole can be and do. The spectacle is money for contemplation only, for here the totality of use has already been bartered for the totality of abstract representation. The spectacle is not just the servant of the pseudo-use—it is already, in itself, the pseudo-use of life.[25]

For Debord, spectacle is the image of money. In this purely economic reading of Debord's text, an abstract painting of the '90s is no different than a Rolex watch or Mercedes Benz auto. All are objects which have accrued images existing beyond function as tangible symbols of material wealth. Thus, an abstract painting may be seen as not just a painting, but as a symbol of aspiration to a social class, as evidence of forward thinking, as visual association with certain political sensibility, and of actual or potential wealth. It might even be argued that abstract painting, as "pure painting," represents the essence of visual commodity, the sine qua non of Debord's "money for contemplation only."

Add to this the fact that abstract artists in the '90s such as Dorothea Rockburne and Prudencio Irazabal are creating over-sized canvasses specifically for corporate headquarters and museums, for sites of spectacle, and abstraction's capitulation to commodification seems complete. In a recent article in *Artforum*, drawing upon theories of spectacle, Wayne Koestenbaum describes artists who have achieved great fame and consequently command astonishing prices as no longer producing art, but rather, "fiscal performances."[26] Faced with these works of enormous "image value," the viewer can no longer see the work itself, but only, as the recent movie title so presciently announces, "the color of money."

Irazabal's work is telling. Represented by Jack Shainman galleries in Manhattan, this young Portuguese artist creates work of luminescent surface through the layering of translucent strata of paint. Minimal, yet warm and inviting, the work has become the "hot property" of 1997, yet the gallery persists in promoting the work as affordable. A young gallery assistant recently commented that a 36" x 36" Irazabal can still be had for only $6,000, proudly adding that the Guggenheim has just paid many thousands of dollars for a mammoth work for a single wall of the Bilbao Museum in Spain. As enthusiastic as the young assistant was about her client, one can not help but note her "painting by the yard" presentation is hilariously in keeping with spectacle's relentless commodification of even those things traditionally relegated to the realm of "higher values."

However, abstraction in general, and abstraction in the '90s in particular, avoids many of the mechanisms of spectacle. Even as the globe capitulates to commercialization, '90s abstraction stands outside the dominant social trend. Abstract artists today, no matter how lionized by critics, are not held up as cultural icons as were the '50s Abstract Expressionists, and thus they fail to command extraordinary prices. Since today's work is considered outside of art history and Modernist originality, galleries and museums can not invoke the selling power of the "new." Since '90s abstraction is about nuance and new expression, surface and process, any notions of originality are minor gains. There is none of the monumental progress ascribed to Mondrian, de Kooning, or Noland. Because these new works are mostly quiet and unassuming, they defy rather than embrace current modes of spectacle like advertising, commodity culture, the world wide web, and display.

These '90s works do not make direct or simple communication despite their formal simplicity. The works require the viewer's physical presence for understanding and perception of the size and nuances in texture, pigment, translucency, reflection, and painterly touch. The abstract works do not reproduce well in catalogs, books or slides, thus they fail to be part of the kinds of media imagery (photos, electric media, video, text) which epitomizes the culture of the spectacle. These images are not those that compete for the daily attention of consumers. Indeed, the person interested in these works must actively seek them out in galleries, museums, or collections in order to have a relationship with these art objects. These works do not communicate en masse, in fact, their enigmatic nature defies communication at all and results in indeterminate messages. The works often seem so empty that meaning outside of formal appreciation is projected by the viewer. This art depends on the aesthetic experience.

Even in a "selling scene" like the galleries of SoHo and Chelsea, abstraction in the '90s fails as commodity. In a brief survey of major Manhattan galleries specializing in contemporary art, most dealers acknowledged (al-

though refusing to be quoted) that abstraction was simply not as popular as representative work which, because it draws from current social imagery, is easily perceived as modern and new. "There is no question that it is harder for us to sell abstract work by young artists. The interest, and therefore the prices, just isn't there," said a young gallery assistant in a blunt but anonymous assessment.

Only Jack Shainman Gallery differed, insisting that quality and originality matter more than specific style. Abstraction always sells well as decorative art, particularly to hotels, corporate sites and public buildings where non-specificity of image is seen as non-threatening and thus a decided benefit. Having recently arranged the sale of Irazabal abstractions to the Guggenheim, Shainman's staff contradicted the majority opinion, agreeing only that prices of all young artists are less than the astronomic numbers of the '80s.

Conclusion

In this review of abstract painting in the '90s, one cannot help but be struck by the enormous diversity of approaches to non-representative imagery and the extraordinary number of young artists who continue to work in a style the critical world has all but ignored in the past decade. Entirely absent from "Documenta X," and only cursorily included in the recent Whitney Biennial, abstraction has disappeared as a factor in discourse about the common culture, dominated as it now is by the narrative demands of representational painting, film, video, and installation art.

Some reasons for the omission are clear: abstraction has never recovered from its initial definition as the emblem of Modernism; abstraction has failed to be 'retranslated" for a younger generation (despite Peter Halley's efforts); and abstraction has never commanded the selling power of representative painting. Finally, abstraction, even in the heyday of modernism, has never enjoyed easy theorization. Thus, in this age of theoretical concern with commodification and reification, abstraction can only be used by spectacle but not completely absorbed into it.

What, then, is a way to approach abstraction, this not-yet-dead painting mode, in the '90s? With its reduced theoretical claims, its "passé" status and its lack of dominant trend, abstraction's direction in the coming millennium may lie in redefinition as painting performance, thus bestowing it with the same critical claim to cultural attention as, say, the performance of a great singer, musician, or dancer. Certainly painters are still painting, and many of the new abstractionists are producing images that, while not stylistically new, are drop-dead astonishing in their power to reveal a hidden potential of material and to engage the eye. When looking at the work of a Fabian Marcaccio, Suzanne McClelland, Christian Eckart, or Prudencio Irazabal—this "stylistic salad"—one may do better from a theoretical point of view to think analogously of the

work of the concert pianist Glenn Gould whose sheer stylistic individuality transformed the "passé" Goldberg Variations of Bach into a 20th century musical milestone.

While a "theory of performance" carries the specter of a return to privileging formal standards, and may lead to the kind of ever-narrowing circles of self-reference which Edward Said describes as "three thousand academics producing three thousand works to be considered by the same three thousand academics,"[27] performance is nonetheless very much what contemporary artists are doing. Abstraction, through its condensed purity, is the perfect vehicle to reveal in an instant the weaker painters and showcase the virtuoso. As naked painting, free of theory, abstraction is free to just be painting.

Yet even as abstraction frees itself from theory, and gains attendant ability to exist for itself, critics seek to bring the work of the millennium generation back into the theoretical fold. As Raphael Rubinstein elaborates in the November 1997 *Art in America*, what is needed to make this invisible art visible again is a clear path through the diversity of styles—in other words, a dominant trend. In his sharply-worded article, "Abstraction Out of Bounds," Rubinstein complains of recent high-profile exhibitions which have bypassed abstraction, and critics (targeting Lily Wei) "who view abstraction as still struggling to escape the doldrums of the 1970s":

> These...exhibitions may have run up against the same problem. Namely, the silence and misunderstanding that has enshrouded abstract painting over the past 10 years. If curators...do not feel compelled to pay attention to recent abstract painting, (or choose a style among them), it may well be because neither the aims nor achievements of contemporary abstraction have been adequately articulated and understood.[28]

While Rubinstein promises a new theoretical overlay to come, other critics delight in abstraction's break with theory and subsequent reduction to painting as painting. In the September 1997 issue of *ArtWeek*, in an article describing the current state of abstraction, the critic Mario Cutjar praises an art which stands not as social commentary, but as return to formal consideration. He says succinctly, "Abstraction is the only strategy which can advance the grand painting tradition in an age without grand subjects."[29]

And so abstraction does advance—quietly and persistently, one paint stroke at a time. In an art world which has declared abstraction "dead," it might be better to ask "just what about abstraction is dead?"

What is dead is critical and media interest in abstraction. What is dead is a strong market for abstraction. Dead, also, is the spectacle apparatus of superstar painters and celebrity studded art openings which once accompa-

nied abstraction. But severed from spectacle, market demands, the burden of supporting the "new," and critical scrutiny, abstraction in the '90s can insist on its own authenticity. Remaining a bastion of the "lived experience" as the art of the '90s faces the millennium is no small achievement.

Notes

1 Raphael Rubinstein, "Abstraction in a Changing Environment," *Art in America* vol. 82, no. 10 (October 1994): 103.
2 Shannah Ehrhardt, ed. *After the Fall: Aspects of Abstract Painting Since 1970, vol. I* (New York: Snug Harbor Cultural Center, 1997), 155.
3 Lóránd Hegyi in Sabine Schaschl, ed., *Abstrakt/Real* (Vienna: Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1996), 244.
4 Rainer Fuchs in Schaschl, 184.
5 Statement by Carolano Parlato for the "Substance and Shadow: New Abstraction" exhibition at the Islip Art Museum, unpublished manuscript, 1997.
6 Rubinstein, 108.
7 Erhardt, 145.
8 Lóránd Hegyi in Schaschl, 264.
9 Barry Schwabsky, review, "Elliott Puckette: Paul Kasmin Gallery," *Artforum* vol. 36, no. 3 (November 1997): 116.
10 Erhardt, 132.
11 Rubinstein, 105.
12 Erhardt, 152.
13 Ibid., 153.
14 Ibid., 137.
15 Lennon Weinberg, review, "Denyse Thomasos: Lennon Weinberg," *Artforum* 36, no. 3 (November 1997), 118.
16 Erhardt, 154.
17 Adam Fuss, *Terry Winters: Computation of Chains* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 1997), 19.
18 Ibid., 16.
19 Rainer Fuchs in Schaschl, 184.
20 Statement by Nola Zirin for the "Substance and Shadow: New Abstraction" exhibition at the Islip Art Museum, unpublished manuscript, 1997.
21 Statement by Lawre Stone for the "Better Color Through Chemistry" exhibition at the Islip Art Museum, unpublished manuscript, 1997.
22 Erhardt, 124.
23 Lily Wei, review "Karin Davie at Fawbush," *Art in America* vol. 82, no. 10 (October 1994): 116.
24 This paper includes many female artists not by our will to bias, but by the presence of these artists in galleries and the art media.
25 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 32-33.
26 Wayne Koestenbaum, "Shooting Stars," *Artforum* vol. 36, no. 3 (November 1997): 10.

27 Edward Said in Hal Foster, ed., T*he Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodernist Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 138.

28 Raphael Rubinstein, "Abstraction Out of Bounds," *Art in America* vol. 85, no. 11 (November 1997): 106-107.

29 Mario Cutjar, "Art in the Coming Millennium," *ArtWeek* vol. 28, no. 9 (September 1997): 19.

Figurative Painting in the '90s

by Jason Godeke, Nathan Japel, Sandra Skurvidaite

One sees in the figurative painting of the 1990s an increased awareness of the tension between the power of image and the power of the medium. Regarded as a see-saw, with image sitting on one side and craft on the other, some painters sit more heavily on the power of images, which in most cases is influenced by commercial culture, while other painters stress the role of craft, imbedding their image in the medium.

Strategies of image-making in contemporary figurative painting are situated along three axes: politics, esthetics and technology. Figurative painting with social (political) content as its core communicates through its iconography. Self-reflective idiosyncratic painting communicates through its style, and is based on esthetics, or a reconsideration of esthetic canons. Last, and perhaps most typical of figurative painting in the nineties, is appropriation, in which painters adopt images from elsewhere (media, fashion, technology) and/or mimic the appearance of techniques other than painting: photography, video and film, and computer technology. This is not to say that any of these strategies is mutually exclusive. In most cases figurative paintings in the nineties make use of some combination of all three vectors.

The Celebrity

There is one American figurative painter whose work from the sixties and seventies has had the most influence over the majority of young figurative painters who have gained success in the nineties. Andy Warhol's earnest brand of pop culture appropriation, his use of the celebrity to provide charisma to his works, and his sincere embrace of kitsch have become, either singularly or in combination, the modus operandi to young artists such as Jeff Koons, Elizabeth Peyton, Karen Kilimnik, and Alessandro Raho, among numerous others.

In 1992, Nicolas Bourriaud wrote: "We tend to judge figuration in terms of its ironic provocation value or how well it scores as 'revival'..."[1] He champions a group of artists who have made a "deliberate shift toward the unacceptable," artists like Jeff Koons, Julie Wachtel and Karen Kilimnik. He calls them the "orphans of modernity," and posits that their refiguration "plays...on a notion of anti-eloquence." He suggests that these artists did not engage in "revival," since they rely on contemporary mass media sources. Similarly, they do not rely on "ironic provocation" because they are "sincere"

in their engagement with (adoration of) the language and images of pop culture. Rather than being faux vulgar, these artists are "real fakes." As mentioned, Warhol is the model here. This attitude toward figurative painting coopts the means of non-painting media.

Bourriaud's "anti eloquence" is aptly illustrated by the paintings of Karen Kilimnik. Kilimnik had, until fairly recently, made mostly installation art. By all appearances, she has no particular attachment to craft. Her lazy landscapes, still-lifes, and casually executed celebrity/fashion portraits painted on craftshop pre-stretched canvas rely on our familiarity with kitsch. It is doubtful that her painting of Princess Di is as complex or adoring as the myriad tabloid photographs, articles, and biographies which seek to describe a mythological Diana. But the painting of Diana is meant to create a personal connection between the artist and the celebrity.

Warhol's silkscreen paintings started with flat, stereotyped images of non-individuals (Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley) and repeated the personages, effectively highlighting the absence of individuality in the celebrity. Elizabeth Peyton's paintings of rock stars are an attempt to establish a private relation with a public nonindividual. Her painterly techniques emphasize the author, which simultaneously adds to the humanity of the figure in the painting. For example, in *Kurt with Cheeky Num Num* (1995) the expressive quality of the brush strokes, the inaccuracies in the drawing of the man and the cat, and the size of the painting (14"x11") all suggest a painted sketch of a friend or model. As many critics have noted, we can't tell the difference (except, of course through her titles) between her paintings of friends and those of celebraties. Peyton says she knows Kurt Cobain as well as any friend she might meet for coffee even though she has never met him.[2] While we may find this a pathetic statement about her own life or understanding of humanity, this attitude of undistinguishing equality is borne out in her paintings.

While some painters paint celebrities as buddies, others take their buddies and paint them as celebrities. Alessandro Raho's spare paintings of his friends recall Calvin Klein or the Gap as much as the renowned style of Alex Katz. Raho is forthright about this strategy, saying that his stark white backgrounds came out of fashion advertising, which he considers "very now."[3] This points to the ultimate goal of fashion as well as the avant-garde: to be forever new, forever young. Raho's work is a contemporary version of commissioned court paintings: He elevates middle class nobodies to the status of royalty to satisfy the narcissism of the artist, mimicing the tradition of confirming the grandeur of royal somebodies to satisfy the narcissism of the sitter. What separates Raho's portraits from those of earlier generations is the formatting and style, the association with non-painting modes. These paintings, along with their advertising counterparts, are eye-catching and seductive, but

temporally bound.

Richard Phillips' enormous portraits taken from 1970's fashion photography both question the idea of idolized beauty and use this beauty as a means to attract attention. The almost terrifying enlargements of these fashion plates create a fire and brimstone sermon from the mount of media-created faux wonders. At the same time these images are time-honored agents of attention-getting, and Phillips uses them that way. In the 1996 *Facial Mask Peel*, we see a model's tightly cropped face. From it the facial mask is peeled, a translucent second skin, a simple metaphor for the superficiality of beauty. Phillips' technique calls little attention to itself; it conveys neither virtuosity nor expressiveness. It mimics the disinterest of a camera.

Cartoons

A second major model for today's rising stars of figuration is Philip Guston. His turn from abstraction to cartoon iconography with formal underpinnings has lit the way for eighties stars like George Condo and Julie Wachtel, and an increasing number of nineties painters. Carroll Dunham, Enrique Chagoya, Richard Patterson, and Jim Barsness make use of either direct quotations from cartoons, or they apply cartoon techniques to an otherwise refined formalism.

Carroll Dunham comes nearest to being a direct heir to Guston's innovation. Dunham's cartooning embedded in an elegant formalism is reminiscent of Guston's achievements. In *Demon Tower* (1997), a pink tower rises into a yellow sky. The tower is studded with boxy characters with bared teeth, sporting knives and distorted male genitalia. As in many of Guston's paintings, the viewer is presented with an uneasy humor set against violent implications. In Dunham's work from the mid-nineties, he applied Styrofoam hemispheres to the canvas, a further dual emphasis on surface combined with vulgarity, achieved in this case with the material.

For Chagoya the use of Disney Cartoon characters as violent agents of political or economic oppression is meant to highlight American (cultural) imperialism. Mickey Mouse is juxtaposed with dismembered heads, arms and legs. Chagoya moved from Mexico to San Francisco in 1977. His work has frequently touched on immigration issues. In *The Governor's Nightmare*, Mickey Mouse is tied up, lying on a plate to be eaten or sacrificed by the "savages" (pre-Columbian figures) who dance around a bowl filled with the head of Pete Wilson, the California Governor, a firm backer of anti-immigration laws. Chagoya lends charisma to his works by his subtle rendering touch and by a pseudo-aged surface called "amate," a handmade paper from Mexico.

For Julie Wachtel, cartoons are meant to provoke or indicate an emotional response. Her recent exhibition at Sandra Gering in SoHo was made up of diptychs: one canvas would present, in the quasi documentary style of a black and white photograph, an artifact from Africa or South America; the second

canvas would depict a brightly colored cartoon character, putting them in a direct relationship or equation. In fact, Wachtel's cartoons are specifically intended for her paintings. She has hired professional cartoonists to come up with new characters for her. In a number of earlier paintings, mostly triptychs, the cartoon character appears to be reacting to an image which borders it on either side. For example, in *Landscape No. 9*, a cartoon baby screams in discomfort or frustration, while holding his teddy bear and sitting on the potty. He has made a bit of a mess: pools of pee surround him. The image on either side of the baby is a silkscreen of two masked people working on some sort of chemical experiment. The photographic image is interrupted or disrupted by the cartoon, which demands our attention and is apparently to serve as a sign for the emotion the viewer should have with regard to the documentary image.

Richard Patterson paints toys as monuments. His photographic style owes much to Gerhard Richter. *Motocrosser* (1994) is an acrylic painting roughly five feet tall of a toy motorcycle and rider. It is matter-of-factly painted, brightly colored to the extent that the object it represents is brightly colored. The goal here seems similar to that of Wachtel and Chagoya: to take an artifact from mass culture and by recontextualizing it give it some new grander meaning. In Patterson's work from 1997, Richter's influence is even more apparent. A minotaur is painted in photographic blur with a cityscape beyond. A multicolored smear of paint towers adjacent to him. This succinctly combines Richter's two trademark styles. The twist on Richter is the play on the tension of "low" art image (the cartoon) represented in the traditional "high" art medium of painting.

With scathing humor, Nicole Eisenman's cartoon figuration attacks social as well as political issues through appropriation of known art historical and popular culture imagery. Eisenman says that, "my art isn't primarily about politics. It's not issue art; I don't feel angry. I think it mainly has to do with the nature of humor and of taking everything—the whole world—as your subject matter, and trying to understand how it works."[4] Eisenman created a stir in the early 90s for violent depiction of women attacking Picasso-like minotaurs. Her temporary murals of the early 90s have given way to more traditional oil on canvas.

Bodies and Sex

In the 1990s, bodies and sex are back. In the eighties, Eric Fischl had something to say about an uncomfortable psycho-sexual predicament, as did David Salle. In the seventies and eighties, many women artists such as Nancy Spero and Judy Chicago asserted themselves with feminist/sexual subject matter. Contemporary painting of bodies and sex distinguishes itself again by mimicking non-handmade media. Robert Mapplethorpe has had a substantial impact on young painters as well as photographers. Overt sexual representations are

frequently meant to indirectly address social issues such as feminism or homophobia. Contemporary painting does not have much of the traditionally understood eroticism in it, but has everything to do with the body as commodity and painting as commodity. On the other hand, perhaps any use of frank sexual imagery has worn itself out, as evidenced by some artists' effort to camouflage it by ornamental or abstract devices which require deciphering.

For all the sensationalism of John Currin's images of women, they possess a deftness and purpose in the application of paint. Currin's paint, at once soft and smooth, then suddenly crusty and knifed, has something to say about his subject matter. He says, "the subject of a painting is always the author, the artist...The function of representation is to give a painting the illusion of a subject." Currin first emerged with paintings of young girls. Since then he has painted older females and some males. Currin's most recent paintings are images of women who appear doll-like, their breasts enormously round and distorted, their faces encrusted with paint in a painterly exaggeration of make-up. If they were painted with less specificity, they would look like feminist propaganda, a satire of male desires. As it is, we miss the irony, and see a human dealing with the revulsion of his own desire. Currin has said: "One of my main missions has been to try to get my work to be less ironic...I would rather that my work turn into a cliché than be a kind of artfully dodged, ironic critique."[5] This recalls Karen Kilimnik's attitude toward her subject.

Unlike Currin's, Lisa Yuskavage's agenda may be feminist, but, as with Currin, her method is to give the viewer too much of what they want. Breasts become enormous and distended, lips become hideously engorged, hips curve beyond the realm of plausibility. In *Interior Big Blonde with Beaded Jacket*, we are faced with a naked girl of indeterminate age, her eyes lowered meekly, her breasts pointing downward in an echo of her gaze, her hands suggestively draped over her crotch. The color looks like restaurant decor. The viewing experience is like being asphyxiated by cotton candy, and this seduction/grotesque, attraction/revulsion is efficiently communicated by paint.

In Jim Barsness' *Tower*, an eight-foot-tall version of Breughel's *Tower of Babel* looms up, filled with hundreds of figures, mostly engaging in some sex act. They are drawn like cartoons, but all share more or less the same face (that of the artist?). It is obsessive and vulgar and frenzied, and the fact that it is drawn in ballpoint makes perfect sense. As with Yuskavage, we are at once intrigued and repelled by Barsness' pile of perversion; we wonder just what atrocity waits for us around the next doorway in the tower. Barsness' approach is similar to George Condo's in that he starts with an art historical formalism and twists it with vulgar subject matter. For example, Disney Characters roam in the *Tower* as well as Barsness' own inventions. Unlike Condo, however, Barsness is banking on our fascination with novel content, with perversion, the grotesque or the obscene. And so we see figures eating excrement or

copulating with animals. This parallels current trends in all media, but the photography of Joel Peter-Witkin or Robert Mapplethorpe serves as a particular model.

Deciphering the Image

The necessity of deciphering contributes to the mystique and charisma of a painting. The information contained by the imagery of painting is not absorbed instantaneously by the viewer as information conveyed by contemporary media is. The act of deciphering breaks the media's hold on a work. Spectacle, on the other hand, works through publicly known iconography (narrative).

Some artists rely on abstraction to obscure sexual imagery. Sue Williams has abandoned her confrontational propagandist style as used in *The New Age* (1992) in favor of a swirling nearly abstract mode which takes time and effort to perceive as in *Mom's Foot in Blue and Orange* (1997). The first painting has a clear feminist agenda, and is accompanied by text. The second reads initially as an abstract painting, and only upon close scrutiny reveals bodies engaged in sexual intercourse.

Lari Pittman hides his penises under an abstract veneer of decorative patterns and geometric shapes. We see abstract painting first, and then begin to discover the organs. In *Untitled* (1997), Pittman breaks up his picture into irregular "windows". The painting reads very flat, a graphic design of decorative patterns and symbols. We see light bulbs, which could be read as penises, lipstick mouths abound, some attached to forms which look like uteruses and fallopian tubes. There are also architectural elements. In any case, in order to see sex, we are invited to join the game, to decipher the rebus. Both William's and Pittman suggest that the literalness of sexual imagery is not interesting anymore, that it needs to be made more engaging and exciting by a hide-and-seek game.

Matthew Ritchie groups the seemingly opposed philosophies of science, alchemy, religion and aesthetics by creating or appropriating systems from each body of knowledge and layering them. The results are paintings that are vague in subject as well as surface. He creates shapes that flip from abstraction to a slight indication of reality. On top of these shapes are magic marker drawings of systems and strategies, creating a puzzle of understanding. In Ritchie's *Idea of Structures* (1997), we are invited to reflect on encrypted markings, made more mysterious and seductive by their proximity on top of thickly knifed, subtly colored paint patches which suggest a landscape.

Kitsch

Both Currin, and Kilimnik in her recent landscapes, reference a special kind of kitsch that is particular to popular painting traditions as opposed to other

media. Adopting this tradition is nothing new, having been around since Courbet, but it is a trend in the nineties. Tim Ebner is an emblematic case study. This LA artist was extremely successful in the eighties making slick surface-oriented works. Suddenly, in the early nineties, he shifted artistic modes, and began painting clowns, birds, and other animals in a semi-expressionist manner. In *Untitled (Red Lion and Horse)*, a crudely rendered lion's head and horse's head ride a wave on top of praying hands. The painting is of moderate size (48"x36") easily hung above a couch. The color is raw and has a naive look. Yet the painting does not come across as witty or ironic. If Ebner is thumbing his nose, it would appear to be a joke on himself and his earlier production.

Sean Landers came on to the scene with illustrated blowups of a semi-literate, MTV-infatuated diary. The tedious narcissist conveyed in these pages may or may not have been an affectation Landers' academic pedigree as a graduate of Yale University, but the character exudes anti-intellectualism as opposed to a simple naiveté. His recent paintings have adopted popular motifs of aliens and hippies from the seventies and placed them in loosely art historical compositions playing on Winslow Homer or Mattisse. The imagistic kitsch is coupled with an strategically uneducated painting method and placed in the intellectual, academic context of art history.

Wrestling with Photography

Since the introduction of photography in the nineteenth century, painting has been defined by its difference from photography. If photography is a direct means of representation, painting is suggestive, evocative. Where photography obscures the identity of the artist, painting emphasizes it. Paintings can have a seductive surface and an autonomy (sometimes accentuated by the frame) that is absent in photography, though many contemporary photographers have attempted to adopt "painterly" methods. While photography has long since displaced painting as the preeminent representational mode, figurative painters in the nineties have continued the tradition of parasitizing photographic "objective" imagery and reconfiguring it in a "subjective" medium.

Some painters wrestle with their perceived rival head on. Johannes Kahrs works from photographs, bringing his black charcoal to heap on the obscurity, mystery and suggestiveness which was absent in his sources. In *Untitled (Office)* from 1996, a man wearing glasses slumps in his chair reading a document at a desk with computer. Much of the detail of the foreground is nearly black, while a tenebrist light shines on the man's collar. The charcoal is thick and matte, the drawing hangs loose and unframed on the wall. Kahrs say he works "with an explained, fictitious reality."[6] The chiaroscuro and physical presence of charcoal on paper are meant to serve here to explain the fiction behind the reality of his photographic source.

Hung Liu's recent exhibition in New York was a case study in how paintings can be eclipsed by their photographic sources. Hung Liu's large, colorful, splashy paintings are an homage to the black and white documentary photographs upon which they are based, and the paintings are a kind of record of her internal dialogue with the photos. The photographs were displayed adjacent to the paintings, and seeing them leaves the viewer uncertain as to which images are more compelling, her paintings, or her photographic sources. Her intention may simply be to use her paintings to attract the viewer's attention to the photographs.

In an age bombarded by media images, artists take photography as a departure and make it specific to the medium of painting, forging a dialogue between image and material. Marlene Dumas's portraits, intimate ink washes on paper, are almost exclusively taken from photography, but the application and properties of the liquid medium transcends the image and make a specific surface. Dumas says of her work: "It's expressionism. You have the flow of water, the brush strokes, and the tension, but I don't drown the imagery in gesture."[7] This describes the balancing act all figurative painters have been attempting since the invention of photography.

Luc Tuymans contrasts some of the artists working with the celebrity by creating quiet works, frequently of mundane subject matter. The image in Tuymans' work is often severely cropped, referencing photographic and cinematic influences and creating an uneasiness about the image. Although inspired by photographic sources and his own cinematic background, the immediacy and everyday quality of Tuyman's work challenges the notion of spectacle. Tuymans' muted palette along with subtle changes in forms create a surface of ghost-like aberrations. Using a wide range of subject matter such as the figure, still life, landscape, and abstraction Tuymans' paintings are documentats created by a curious daily observer.

Politics

Political agendas were big in the seventies; they were less evident in the eighties in figurative painting. However Sue Coe and Leon Golub prove notable exceptions. A number of 1990s figurative painters with political agendas have attempted to create, as critic Donald Kuspit put it, "an art that synthetizes the esthetic and activist impulses--one that addresses our humanness with depth and fullness, one that rearticulates a humanness we feel has been obscured, even obliterated by society."[8] Paintings can eloquently articulate humanness through form, regardless of subject matter. While subject matter may resonate with a viewer's humanity, "depth and fullness" is achieved through a resonance with the physical presence of the painting as object.

Manuel Ocampo's overtly political paintings rely on the balance between his expressionist handling of paint (in some places abusing his canvas

to make it look old) and the no-holds-barred use of fascist symbols like the swastika or KKK hoods. Ocampo, a Filipino living and working in Los Angeles, started out making religious paintings and moved to political cartooning. The paintings which have made him famous are an amalgam of the two modes. In *Untitled* (1991), Ocampo places centerstage an infant with the world as his head. The child holds a cross in one arm; his other arm has been chopped off at the wrist. The ground around the baby teems with snakes. In the middle ground of this landscape, a swastika falls out of the sky to crush a woman, her legs splayed either from sex or childbirth. The label "Filipino" appears directly behind the baby, accompanied by another cross and two birds of prey, icons not only from Nazi Germany, but from ancient cultures. Clearly Ocampo does not shy away from explicit (clichéd) propagandistic idioms.

Ocampo intends his paintings to be "testimonies against hypocrisy, oppression and exploitation everywhere."[9] Like Goya's paintings and etchings, they are meant to be a record of history. If they are effective historically, it is because they emphasize the subjectivity of their author. The expressive and varied manner in which Ocampo applies paint highlights his authorship. This emphasis on the fictive or the fantastic is something which comes naturally to painting.

Kerry James Marshall's paintings succeed not because his political statements are particularly insightful, but because his work has a strong abstract structure. In *Watts, 1963*, Marshall shows a group of forlorn, exaggeratedly black (to the point of symbolism) African Americans in front of, or on top of, what appears to be an old, worn promotional image for a garden in Los Angeles, presumably in or near Watts. The image is disrupted by gestural abstract areas as well as a banner over the top, all of which effectively deny mere illusionism in spite of the relatively careful rendering of the people. Here, we again see an emphasis on paint to add weight (authority) to the artist's message.

Attila Richard Lukacs' paintings of German skinheads, like Leon Golub's mercenaries before them, are threatening in size as well as deed. Seething with male sexuality, these packs of half nude young men are both aggressive and vulnerable in relation to each other and the viewer. Depicted in acts of violence or community, these characters represent a primordial masculinity. Equally seductive and tortured is Lukacs' paint handling. The surface has areas of soft plasticity that are contrasted by knifed brown excretions. Lukacs references such painting from the history of art as Breughel with his palette of earth tones and chiaroscuro and his compositions.

Landscapes have become a staple for those with environmentalist agendas. Alexis Rockman's pseudo scientific assemblages mimic natural history dioramas, and showcase the frequently destructive interaction between the human species and all others. Rockman implicates himself in *The Ecotourist*

(1997) placing his own rotting corpse in a fertile jungle. He is the intruder, and may personify the end which Rockman foresees for all humanity. Rockman's ax-grinding is immersed in a careful integration of materials as well as a literal layer of resin.

Chester Arnold's landscapes recall Northern Renaissance paintings, but his allegorical settings frequently criticize the human manipulation of the land. In *The Unfortunate Incidents*, a snow covered clearing is littered with garbage, logs, and tree stumps. A naked old man, the resident of a log cabin in the middle of the picture, urinates into the snow while three other figures watch from a distance, repelled as much by the surroundings as the old man's disregard for decorum.

Carl Hasse's paintings document logging in the Pacific Northwest, and the growth of plants and mushrooms which follows clear cutting. The paintings, while condemning the industry, allow for an optimism, indicating the resilience, the imperviousness of the environment. Hasse achieves charisma through a rich surface of oil and encaustic and a cryptic combination of images. In *Washed Up* (1997), tree stumps are juxtaposed with mushrooms, grapefruits, and an assortment of pulled human teeth.

Traditionalism and "Revival"

Postcolonialism sheds different light on political agendas of the 1990s. Many cultures in Latin America, Asia, or Africa have active traditions of handmade imagery in the form of religious or "folk" art. Many artists from non-European or post-Soviet countries are little interested in integrating pop culture or mass media imagery into their painting, simply because those are still not an integral part of their socio-cultural life. Pop images cannot become signifiers for something else in a society into which they were recently imported; they still stand for desired goods and prosperity. In post-Soviet or post-colonial societies like Eastern Europe or India images of ideological propaganda take the place of pop, and from that point on they communicate in a similar way—meaning emerges by displacement of the signifier. Latin American artists also confront popular culture, but they manipulate a pop culture that derives from folk imagery as opposed to media imagery. They draw from fantasy which is culturally inspired.

Thus the magic realism of Julio Galán has more to say about ex-votives or retablos of the colonial period than it has to say about *telenovelas*. In *What's Missing?* (1990) Galán seats a baby boy on an enormous cushion, surrounded by vases which emit smoke or mist. Real red flowers and silky fabrics are hung from the front of the canvas. Compare Galán's work with that of David Salle from the same period. Both artists attach real objects to their paintings. Both artists juxtapose different painting modes. But Galán differs from Salle in two important ways: first is his rich transparent layering of color,

as opposed to Salle's flat awkward paint handling; second is the imagery, which for Galán comes from religion and fantasy, for Salle from pseudo-erotic photos. Galán's reference is to a handmade tradition, Salle's to the media.

The miniatures of Shahzia Sikander enjoy the support of a cultural tradition in India. In *Not in My Head...* (1997), Sikander gracefully renders strangely costumed figures no larger than four or five inches. Her gesture and brush bear the authority of a hand supported by convention, however personal her imagery may be. She also paints murals, a common mode for political statements. Sikander's feminism, radical in the context of Indian traditions, has different and perhaps opaque implications in the context of a New York exhibition, but the evident sincerity with which her work is crafted is appealing.

José Bedia's paintings and installations owe a similar and perhaps more direct debt to cultural traditions. He was initiated into the Atlantic African religion of Palo Monte in 1983. He says that before his initiation his art was essentially "photographic anthropology" and that afterwards it became more "down to earth" and "simple."[10] He spent 1985 as a shaman's apprentice. The belief systems he has adopted inform and shape his artwork. What we see as viewers are complex and layered gatherings of figures and objects which suggest life experience. Bedia represents an important angle on the nineties "sincerity" or lack of irony. His sincerity is tied to pedigree and to authenticity, which he has supposedly achieved by his real-life adoption of other cultural traditions. This separates him, theoretically, from eighties or seventies postmodern appropriationists, and his formalism contributes to the impression of commitment.

Many American and European figurative painters work within a Western painting tradition, what some term "revival." All of the traditional painting genres are carried on in the 1990's. Richard Ryan's still-lifes recall the work of Morandi. Ryan studied with William Bailey, who himself also walks in the footsteps of Morandi. Ryan's work diverges from the Morandi (and Bailey's seventies neoclassicism) by introducing surrealism. Ryan's figures, essentially objects in a still life, seem to be stuck in an eternal moment, and he mixes figures of different scales in his tableaux. His color moves from parsimonious, made up of three or four colors at the most, to saturated and full, but in every case he uses a meticulous "Baileyesque" chiaroscuro modeling to define form.

Joan Nelson's miniature landscapes rely on old master glazes and even appropriate some old master compositions. Her postage stamp-sized acrylics and oils on paper and wood paintings of modest size are a marked departure from the monumental, operatic paintings of Anselm Kiefer. In fact, it might be a fair judgment to say that figurative painting in the nineties as a general thing has gotten smaller than the corporate, museum scale works made in the eighties. It is not clear whether this indicates more modest ambitions on the part of artists or collectors or both. The grim economics of the early nineties, and what

many perceived to be the overblown and undercrafted nature of much famous figurative painting in the eighties may be operative.

Maureen Gallace's landscapes with windowless structures are similarly intimate. Following a cue from both Albert York and Morandi, Gallace strips the images of specifics to create a subtle softness in relation to the disturbing isolation of closed off structures. Gallace's paintings change slightly with attention to light and weather. Their quietness and humbleness in size and palette are chilling in relation to the subject.

Some artists lean more heavily on the more recent tradition of abstraction than older models. Although they contain some sort of reference to reality, Gary Hume's flat, colorful paintings evoke the Color Field painters' interest in materials. Indeed, Hume's statements include extensive discussion of the layering of paint, the properties of enamel, and the slickness of aluminum required in making his surface. The bright colors and gloss of the enamel references the slickness of pop. In *Funny Girl*, we see large shapes of flat color, and then recognize the face of a young woman, or perhaps we see the face first and then get lost in the areas of glossy color. The abstraction and material substance master the image.

Figurative painting in the late nineties is being marketed as specifically different from eighties painting. Stefano Basilico, Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin said the following about a recent exhibition they co-curated:

> Working with an optimism and pictorial intelligence that argues for absolute freedom within the medium, the artists in this show amply demonstrate that painting needs neither a eulogy nor a triumphal return. Their work is at ease within history but not overwhelmed by it. They take painting as an unfinished project, a work in progress, as mysterious and necessary as ever.[11]

This general statement has as much to do with marketing as philosophy—the dealers' business is to sell the solidity of painting, after all. "Optimism" is a word used not only by dealers, but frequently by critics discussing painting in the nineties. How much this relates to commerce is hard to say, but economic trends in recent years would surely be similarly characterized as "optimistic."

Organizing an exhibit around the theme of *paint* in which all of the paintings are figurative may have something to say about the current trend in figurative painting. Regardless of the kind of image represented, painters in the 1990s are generally interested in adding emphasis to the craft of their art works. What impact does this have on the paintings? It points to the humanity of their maker. In no other medium is the humanity of the creator as evident as in painting. The trend toward emphasizing this advantage is more or less formalist, and it remains a reaction to the pseudo-objectivity of photographic repre-

sentation, and the cool irony of pop art paintings. We see the same impulse to emphasize authorship (call it subjectivity) in a lot of current "painterly" photography and film.

In sum: what keeps painting relevant is the tension between image and the mode of production, the craft. "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images," wrote Guy Deboord. The individually and subjectively produced, craft-based object may serve to counter the spectacle of contemporary representation. In many cases, the sensationalism or spectacle of contemporary figuration comes not through the object itself, but through its title, its author's statements, and critical theory surrounding the object.

Notes

1 Nicolas Bourriaud, "Figuration in an Age of Violence," *Flash Art* (January/February1992): 87.

2 Francesco Bonami, "Elizabeth Peyton," *Flash Art* (March/April 1996): 84.

3 Helena Kontova, "Alessandro Raho, Just Painting Faces," *Flash Art* (May/June 1997): 100.

4 Holland Cotter, "Art After Stonewall: 12 Artists Interviewed," *Art in America* (June 1994): 65.

5 Keith Seward, "John Currin, The Weirdest of the Weird," *Flash Art* (November/December 1995): 80.

6 Johannes Kahrs, artist's statement, *Winter Selections* exhibition, The Drawing Center, November-December, 1997.

7 Jonathan Turner, "Marlene Dumas, Sometimes Clever, Sometimes Smutty," *Artnews* (January 1997): 99.

8 Donald Kuspit, "Crowding the Picture," *Artforum* (May 1988): 112.

9 Philip Linhares, curator's statement, *Manuel Ocampo* exhibition, Oakland Museum, June-September, 1992.

10 Robert Farris Thompson, "Sacred Silhouettes (José Bedia)," *Art in America* (June/July 1997): 66.

11 Basilico Fine Arts, *Project Painting* exhibition catalogue, September 1997.

12 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 12.

Pitching Charrettes: Architectural Experimentation in the '90s

by Brian Winkenweder

In the 1990s, architects, especially those born in the 1940s and 1950s, rely increasingly on experimentation and critical theory to augment their visions of the built environment. As a result, many architects renounce building structures and focus, instead, on producing sculptures and drawings as ends unto themselves. When these young architects are ultimately given the opportunity to build their machinations, often they must compromise their ideals and imagination to accommodate their clients' needs and desires. As Frank Gehry acknowledges, to build in the 1990s, an era in which corporations control public spaces, is to "deal with the devil." Fortunately, advances in Computer Aided Design (CAD) and Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM) allow visionary architects greater opportunities to translate their ideas into constructable designs. Many rising stars of 90s architecture blend rhetorical retreads of Marxist criticism and Deconstuction with the invention of personalized "signature styles"—treating buildings as icons of their own individuality. Surveying numerous examples during the past ten years, this essay attempts to reveal both the aspirations and deficiencies of experimental architecture at the end of this century. Of course, any such overview cannot discuss all of the pertinent architects, schools and regions that have impacted architecture in the 1990s. Instead, this essay focuses on the accomplishments of architects whose celebrity did not rise until this decade, but also examines recent work by selected, well-established architects whose influence impacts young architects practicing today.

Taxonomic Quandaries

Chronological classifications of architecture assume uniform programs of building during fixed periods of time. However, such consistency cannot be gauged without a distant perspective that only the passage of time grants. For instance, the use of the term Baroque, as a category for 17th-century European architecture was not applied until the 19th century. In our era, we are confronted with a problem of nomenclature due to the designation of Modernism as a historical phenomenon that has already passed. As a result, the term "postmodern" enjoys ascendancy as the base category of contemporary cultural productions, even if it can not be demonstrably extricated from definitions of the Modern. This problem is most acute in architecture. Throughout

the past three decades, architects, architectural historians and critics have attempted to distinguish the theoretical innovations of contemporary architects from their predecessors.

The writings of Robert Venturi (*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*) and Charles Jencks (*The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*) codified the term as it is (ab)used today.[1] Jencks defines the postmodern architecture as one which speaks on two levels at once: "The architects can read the implicit metaphors and subtle meanings...whereas the public can respond to the explicit metaphors and messages..."[2] In short, Jencks clarifies "post-modern" as an awareness of "architecture as a language" especially in terms of metaphor and awareness of the vocabularies of past architectural traditions. Among the key theories of postmodern architecture is the hybridization of disparate and contradictory vocabularies: "dual-coding" (i.e., classical orders, broken entablatures and reinforced concrete) in an effort to celebrate multiplicity, heterogeneity and pluralism in the built environment. Jencks, speaking metaphorically, claims modernist architecture (International Style) "has been on an enforced diet" and optimistically concludes that postmodern excesses are necessary for the strength and development of the profession.[3] However, 1990s architectural discourse, many argue, is bloated and flush with excess: Susanna Hagan, in *Architectural Review*, points out "The term 'Post-Modern' as currently applied is barely useful."[4]

Similarly, Hagan realizes the limitations of literary theory for the built environment "[d]econstructionism is rapidly becoming just another style instead of a serious architectural critique."[4] Recalling a conversation with Jacques Derrida, Bernard Tschumi notes this theoretician's mystified reaction to fusions of deconstruction with architecture: "'But how could an architect be interested in deconstruction? After all, deconstruction is anti-form, anti-hierarchy, anti-structure, the opposite of all that architecture stands for.' 'Precisely for this reason', I replied."[5] Although young architects embrace the ideas of philosophers and social theorists, they struggle to find clients who will support their ideas, let alone their designs. The Vienna Architecture Conference of 1992, labeled this problem "The End of Architecture?" Peter Noever, the organizer, reviewed the conference as "a condemnation of anachronistic, sociopolitically indeterminate architecture—of slavish adherence to technology, formalism empty of content, galloping commercialism."[6] Many of the young participants idealistically hoped for an opportunity to work with clients that would allow them to experiment as well as contest cultural hegemony and corporate ideology. Zaha Hadid typifies the aspirations of this generation of architects:

> Experiments will really bear fruit on a wider scale only if such

> explorations are focused by publicly posed tasks and conducted within an architectural community that operates in productive cooperation, rather than the antagonistic competition fueled by zealous insistence on privately marketable identities. The masses have to become once more the client of architecture. But these cannot be the culturally excluded masses of today's increasingly divided society; in this society, the architect still needs to hope for an enlightened patron.[7]

The prospects of such an enlightened patron are extremely dim. Therefore, many architects seek other venues to express their theories. One of the most significant trends in architecture during the past decade is an increasing blurring of the line between art and architecture. Increasingly, architects find sympathetic audiences in the museums and construct sculptures as surrogate buildings to cater to museum-going audiences. For instance, among Rem Koolhaus's most notable contributions to architectural discourse are his show, *OMA at MoMA* (1995) and book, *S,M,L,XL* (1995); the impact of the 1988 MoMA show "Deconstructivist Architecture" (1988) jump-started the careers of Hadid and Daniel Libeskind; the success Hodgett + Fung's show "Blueprints for Modern Living" at MoCA's Temporary Contemporary (1992) enabled them to win future clients. Architecture requires vast quantities of wealth to be built. As a result, many young architects recognize the power of well-made models and drawings that can create a "buzz" in the art world and generate interest in those who might fund their experiments in full.

Ar(t)chitecture

Guy Debord, discussing the social function of architecture in *The Society of the Spectacle*, surmises that it has the power to separate, divide and alienate the individual from others living in same urban areas. Architecture, in Debord's theory, is a tool that enables spectacle to control the "'planned environment'" and produce an "artificial peasantry."[8] He writes: "The spectacle, whose function it is *to bury history in culture*, presses the pseudo-novelty of its modernist means into the service of a strategy that defines it in the profoundest sense...advanced capitalism is translated onto the plane of spectacular pseudo-culture..."[9] Debord's 192nd Thesis is made manifest by Christo and Jeanne Claude's *Wrapped Reichstag*. Much ar(t)chitecture of the 1990s, like the *Wrapped Reichstag*, conveys a sense of impermanence, instability, artificial monumentality, and complicated simplicity. The Reichstag is a symbol for many things: German democracy, reunification, the trauma of World War II and Nazi war machine. Christo's gesture, in itself, did not satisfy Debord's thesis, but the response of the European public, global tourists and German government, who asked Christo to extend the exhibit beyond the originally planned

two weeks to generate additional profit from the tourist response (Christo refused), did. This pseudo-event serves as a metaphor for the relationship between the built environment and the citizens who inhabit it. Here, history is "buried" in culture; yet the symbolism is ancillary to the excuse to party. By camping out and designating the front yard of the Reichstag "Woodstock East," the public created a spectacle out of this artwork.[10]

If Christo's *Wrapped Reichstag* marks an artist's foray into the architectural field, then Kaplan/Kreuger's *Bureau-Dicto City* marks the manner in which architects infiltrate the art world. Consisting of an assemblage of technological detritus connected by cables to a six-headed "helmet" fitted with speakers that broadcast a loop of Tibetan Buddhists chanting, the *Bureau-Dicto City* is an interactive sculpture designed to be experienced in an art museum or gallery. Kaplan/Kreuger graduated in 1984 from Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, after pursuing prior careers as a psychiatric social worker and a sociologist respectively. These two men consider themselves theorists, not builders and hope to "present an alternative to traditional architectural practice, setting up paradigms but providing no easy responses."[11] The *Bureau-Dicto City* appears to bring humans together but reinforces Debord's notion of "together in isolation." It exacerbates our alienation from one another, even in a context of close-proximities; listening to Buddhists chanting does not empower the audience to consolidate power against the repressive qualities of advanced capitalism.

Bureau-Dicto City is a sculpture that is not intended to be realized in a different form—it is an end unto itself. In contrast to Kaplan/Kreuger's intention to not build, another young team of experimental architects, Diller + Scofidio, fabricate models that could serve as maquettes for actual buildings. Their most well-known project, *Slow House*, defies structural and spatial comprehension. The "house" is not a livable space. Rather, it explores the relationship between humanity, technology and the built environment. In many regards, this experimental design recalls Peter Eisenman's deconstruction of the house (Houses 1-11a, 1967-1978). Like Eisenman's House 11a which consisted of three "houses" nesting within one another like a Russian doll and investigates the relationship between humans and their dwellings, Diller + Scofidio hope to enable the public to re-construct the meaning of daily life. Yet, *Slow House* is intentionally enigmatic. They described it as an invitation "to complete and take possession of the architecture."[12] Diller + Scofidio speak of the viewer as capable of providing an architectural "hinge": "in many projects the hinge is the absent element whose definition is contributed by the participant or observer."[13] This optimistic desire to empower the "participant" by stretching the limitations of conventional architectural practice generally manifests itself in the form of sculptures and drawings and not as designs for constructable buildings. For instance, Lebbeus Woods produces drawings of

apocalyptic architecture that display his mastery of draftsmanship but cannot be engineered in the physical world. Like Diller + Scofidio, he hopes to "collaborate" with the public. In his "Manifesto," Woods declares "[a]rchitecture is war," suggests he is "one of millions who do not fit in" and concludes "[t]omorrow, we begin the construction of a city."[14]

Likewise, Asymptote, another young firm (founded in 1987), optimistically aspires to relieve the isolation and alienation felt by citizens living in sprawling megalopolises. Their *Steel Cloud* is a sculptural model that they hope to translate into a massive 1,600 foot horizontal construction that would hover above the Hollywood Freeway in Los Angeles. This experimental design was the winner of the Los Angeles West Coast Gateway competition (1988) to construct a monument commemorating immigration from the Pacific Rim to the West Coast. Contrasting with the verticality of its East Coast equivalent, *The Statue of Liberty*, *The Steel Cloud* sprawls horizontally, a metaphoric allusion to Los Angeles itself.[15] The models of *The Steel Cloud* evoke many of the unbuilt designs of the Russian Constructivists. The enigmatic model defies comprehension, even after reading Asymptote's own description of its program:

> [W]e proposed a project inspired by optical phenomena, surveillance and telecommunications technology, computer simulation, and the inspired and problematic proliferation of information. This monument is located directly above...an urban landscape often perceived as hostile and alienating....The Steel Cloud is a prop that attempts to mend this bifurcated city....The lifted horizon lines that delineate this structure meld with the endless horizontality that is Los Angeles. Here galleries, libraries, theaters, cinemas, parks and plazas all intersect the fluid and transient space of the city. The Steel Cloud is architecture for the post-information age, devoid of perspective, depth, frames, or enclosure; it is a prop for a place where hallucination and fiction temper vivid reality.[16]

These are far-reaching claims for such a monumental organization of steel and cement. Although Asymptote claims this monument offers a counter to the alienation felt by millions of city-dwellers who travel about in single occupancy vehicles, the success of such a social program is bleak at best.

In many cases, architects hope their designs can act as a salve to the wounds of individuals living in a society governed by pseudo-events whose jaded ennui prohibits them from possessing the energy to contest the shallowness of daily life. In contrast to the artificial forms of *The Steel Cloud*, Massimiliano Fuksas's *Niaux Cave Entrance* is a simple sculptural form that accentuates its natural site, the mouth of a pre-historically painted cave, without overtly calling attention to itself. Nonetheless, Fuksas's ideals are consis-

tent with Asymptote's. He states:

> I believe that the more contemporary architecture goes forward, the more it resembles sculpture...the influence of art on architecture is much greater today than it was in the 1970s...I am interested in Joseph Beuys because of the very strong moral sense of the social usefulness of art which he defended. Architects are...behind the times. As the International Style was emptied of its substance in the 40s and 50s, we lost a lot of time. Before, architects considered that they should have very little to do with day-to-day life. They were there to give their judgments, to tell others how to live. Today, you would have to be a fool to have such an attitude.[17]

Although Fuksas invokes the pedagogy of Beuys, the geometry of his *Cave Entrance* (Niaux, France, 1988-1993) constructed from Corten steel, recalls Richard Serra's sculptures. Fuksas's statement exemplifies the ideological idealism of many of the Ar(t)chitects working in the 1990s, yet his gateway is an aberration to this trend since it is actually built.

Post + Lintel Modernism

As we have seen, much architecture of the 1990s offers alternatives to the limitations of Modernism, especially the rigid rectiliniarity of standardized International Style. However, many architects choose to contest mainstream Modernism by re-interpreting Louis Sullivan's dictum "form follows function," animating International Style's box, or pushing Frank Lloyd Wright's cantilever to an extreme. Many architects re-define the vocabulary of Modern architecture but do not abandon it altogether. For instance, Günther Domenig's *Starter Complex* for an Industrial Park (Völkermarkt, Austria, 1996) explores the plasticity of metal forms with a cantilevered "wing" that twists around a conventional steel, concrete and glass box. Likewise, Shin Takamatu's *Kirin Plaza* (1987), located in Osaka's equivalent to Times Square, a seven story theater and restaurant complex, multiplies the Modernist box in its quadruple tower design. The rectilinear towers suggest the shoji screens of Shoin design and emit a muted white light like giant Japanese floor lamps. This subtle structure acts as a calm in a sea of corporate excess.

Schneider + Schumacher's *Info Box* (Berlin, Germany, 1995) is a small, temporary structure that looks like a giant, bright-red shipping container raised on stilts. It serves as a exhibition pavilion where visitors can learn about and watch the rebuilding of the Potsdammerplatz. Inasmuch, the repackaged Modernism of Schneider + Schumacher's design is appropriate since the bulk of the projects this pavilion educates tourists about are being built by some of the most celebrated Modernists (see note 12). Another small-scale structure, Simon Ungers and Tom Kinslow's *T-House* (Wilton, New York, 1988-1994) also re-

invents the modernist box. This house was built for an author whose library exceeded 10,000 volumes. The upper level, 44' x 14' x 16', contains a library/studio and cantilevers 14 feet over the perpendicularly oriented lower level on both sides. Windows, 8' x 2', are evenly spaced throughout the structure at 2' intervals; solid shutters can seal off the space from the outside world. The library runs around the circumference of the upper half of the elevated studio, and a dumb waiter, centrally located, eases the transportation of books between each story. The lower level, 84' x 14', comprises the living quarters and includes very few interior walls, maximizing the capacity of the slender space. This structure, clad in a striking, quarter-inch oxidized nickel and chromium alloy, blends the reductiveness of "form-follows-function" with the aesthetic imaginations of Ar(t)chitects.

Will Bruder's *Phoenix Center Library* (1988-1995) and Arquitectonica's *Times Square Building* (1995-2000) reveals the lingering influence of the International Style. Bruder's glass and steel cube consists of a five story structure with an open atrium lined entirely by glass. Bruder refers to this inner core as the "Crystal Canyon," referring to the geological metaphors he hopes his structure contains. Bruder describes the *Phoenix Center Library* as a pursuit of 'architecture as art' married to a hands on sense of reality....Arizona's natural beauty provides the poetic metaphor for the library's image. A majestic mesa transplanted from the fantastic landscape of Arizona's Monument Valley.... The building's exterior appearance is original rather than traditional, rather like a geological landform or abstract minimal structure.[18]

This allusion to geology parallels Arquitectonica's *Times Square Building* which is designed to look like a meteor is crashing into it. This theatricality, appropriate for a building commissioned by Walt Disney, derives from the use of powerful beacons that will be projected up through a concave recess in the 47-story high-rise. At street-level, the *Times Square Building* incorporates a jumbled facade of mega-signs advertising the corporate logos of Disney culture, and the lobby to a 680-room Hotel whose entrance will be marked by a tower of video monitors. Arquitectonica claims to "explore modernism in times of despair for the modernists."[19] Indeed, this high-rise, built for the 21st century, remains compatible with the ideas of progressive architecture of a hundred years ago.

The conservatism of Arquitectonica contrasts precisely with the recent work of Peter Eisenman, an old master of deconstructive architecture. Andreas Papadakis examines Eisenman's contestation of the Modernist paradigm:

> Eisenman's reaction against Modernism's preoccupation with function, and the conception of 'design as the product of some oversimplified form-follows-function formula' has led him to a type of

> formalism which his opponents have argued tips the balance the other way, so that the programme and its significance are diminished, even apparently, deliberately sabotaged in order to draw attention to the form.[20]

Eisenman's proposal for the *Max Rheinhardt Haus* exemplifies Papadakis' statement. For instance, it could not be seriously considered by the Berlin's city commissioners because it violates the city's height restrictions. This proposal illustrates one of the primary tenets of Deconstruction: there is no center. Modeled on the concept of the Möbius strip, this proposed structure would encircle a void. The structure depends upon the use of CAD "morphing" and illustrates one of the primary changes in the manner in which architecture is practiced today. Increasingly, sophisticated software programs enable visionary architects to render their fantasies in three-dimensional forms that can be economically built. Eisenman relied on CAD and CAM programs to create one of his most celebrated buildings, the *University of Cincinnati College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning*. Drawing on a primary metaphor of deconstruction— the chain of slipping signifiers—Eisenman based this structure on a twisting "string of beads." These "beads" creates a slight 'S' curve that shapes a mall between itself and a pre-existing building. This articulated structure metaphorically looks like the bellows of a stretched accordion. Built on a slope, Eisenman's structure is equally submerged into the ground and cantilevered over it.[21]

Temples of Light

Many architects practicing today exhibit a sensitivity to light that manifests itself in overt ways in their buildings and proposals. Of course, interest in lighting is not a trend new to the 1990s, but architects such as Renzo Piano, Ricardo Legoretta and Steven Holl explore the possibilities of light to a degree previously not imagined. Piano's *Cy Twombly Gallery* (Houston, 1994) merits discussion for its innovative utilization of Houston's natural light. The roof consists of fixed louvers and glazed skylights. Inside, the ceiling includes computer-controlled louvers that make adjustments for morning and afternoon lights. This technological apparatus is concealed by a seamless expanse of white cotton cloth.[22] Legoretta's *Museo del Arte Contemporaneo* (MARCO, Monterrey, Mexico, 1992) also plays with the qualities of natural light. Additionally, his structure includes a centrally located fountain and reflecting pool that regularly receives an energetic burst of water. This fountain emits a loud sound that reverberates throughout the museum. Likewise, the shimmering light of rippling water casts reflections on the walls (and art) of galleries adjacent to the reflecting pool. This museum, like many recent structures designed to house art, conspicuously calls attention to itself, competing, in many cases,

with the art that it is meant to showcase.

Stephen Holl's exhibition at The Storefront for Art and Architecture (1994) counters this problem by not exhibiting any art during his show (designed in collaboration with Vito Acconci) at this experimental Soho gallery; the storefront itself was the art. Examining the relationship between indoors and outdoors, Holl and Acconci created a space with neither doors nor windows. Instead, a series of cut-outs from the wall pivot either horizontally or vertically, linking the interior gallery space to the exterior sidewalk and flooding the space with local light. Holl's first completed, major public building in the U.S., Seattle University's *Chapel of St. Ignatius*, treats light as central to building's program. Originally conceived as "a stone box containing seven bottles of light," it deliberately invokes "St. Ignatius' vision of the many interior lights and darknesses comprising spiritual life."[23] Holl, like Hadid, searches for an alternative to the meaninglessness and vapidity of life at the close of this century:

> Positivist traditions of western rationalist materialism uncritically drive societies into a space of optimization and flow of capital, while the obliteration of place continues to drain the world of individual significance. The horror of current events are projected into domestic living-rooms everywhere. Likewise, a soulless fashionable commercialism characterizes many of the arts. As we allow ourselves to be victims of unconscious habits, skipping from gesture to final image, we leap over the simmering of feelings and thoughts that carries a slow-developing intensity of ideas and forms and their interior spatial consequences.[24]

Certainly, Holl's *Chapel* can be seen as a place for meditative rest from the "horrors of current events." What remains to be seen is if Holl can translate his social concerns into other buildings while simultaneously dealing with the "devils" that pay for their construction.

Floating Metaphors

For Jencks, the metaphor is the central tool for Postmodern architects. Furthermore, "the interpretation of architectural metaphor is more elastic and dependant on local codes than the interpretation of metaphor in spoken or written language."[25] During the 1990s, ships of all kinds emerged as a primary postmodern metaphor—especially in locales near oceans, lakes, rivers, ports and harbors. Frank Israel's *Art Pavilion* (Beverly Hills, California, 1991) incorporates a boat-shaped steel balcony, dubbed an "art ark" by the architect himself.[26] This structure typifies Jencks call for architectural hybridity as it includes references to Japanese Tea Houses, industrial warehouses and the California Modernist tradition of Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra. Ac-

counting for these disparate influences, Israel claims: "It is not a building of colliding forms, but of artful burrowing and carefully made connections."[27]

Three recent buildings in Japan allow the metaphor of the boat to control the form of their designs. Toyo Ito's *Shimosuwa Lake Suwa Museum* (Shimosuwa-machi, Nagano, Japan, 1990-1993) consciously takes the form of an overturned boat and carries out the metaphor by including a rudder. Resting on a narrow strip of land between a highway and lake, this long (200 meters) but very narrow building is clad in aluminum panels cut to create a multifaceted surface. Since the curves of the form are not concentric, a CAD program was used to calculate the shape of the panels to insure uniform cladding and minimize the manufacturing costs by maximizing the efficient use of material. The interior ceiling consists of slatted timber which is warm in comparison to the aluminum shell. Metaphorically speaking, the wood/metal binary corresponds with modern shipping vessels and earlier wooden boats, an appropriate allusion for a regional history museum where shipping continues to play a crucial role in the local economy.

Building on an island that hosts an internationally acclaimed music festival, Fumihiko Maki uses a boat shape for the footprint of her *Kirishima Concert Hall* (Aira, Kagoshima, Japan, 1993-1994). Maki employed a computer program to optimize acoustics of the structure; as a result, the geometry of the roof-line resembles a well-cut, precious stone. Finally, the Glass Hall of Rafael Viñoly's *Tokyo International Forum*, produced by the intersection of two glass and steel ellipses, resembles the shape of a kayak. Monumental in size, the Glass Hall spans 191 meters by 30 meters, stands 57 meters tall, consists of an elaborate, yet rhythmically regular trussing system, and includes four foot bridges suspended several stories overhead. This 1.5 billion dollar project, considered Tokyo's most ambitious architectural project of the 20th century, includes areas for dance, theater, conventions, trade shows, business meetings, cultural information centers and public spaces.

The metaphor of a ship enjoys a quixotic, futuristic twist in Antoine Predock's *American Heritage Center* (Laramie, Wyoming, 1987-1993). However, instead of boats, Predock's building refers to the stereotypical form of UFOS. Simultaneously, this work is intimately related to its surroundings as well. Resting between Medicine Bow Peak and Pilot's Knob, it duplicates their silhouettes. A patinated copper cone, in the center of the design, also suggests the tipi—the basic architectural structure of the Plains Indians indigenous to the region. Drawing on vernacular architecture, Predock also utilizes block-like forms that intimate Pueblos. This architectural quotation, however, defies its location and references the region where Predock resides, the Southwestern states.

Recent Native American building practices are the subject of Carol Krinsky's *Contemporary Native American* Architecture which celebrates a

renaissance of sorts in Native American communities throughout North America.[28] Stasny and Burke's *Warm Springs Museum* (Warm Springs Reservation, Oregon, 1993) also includes a metaphor of travel in the travois which controls the trapezoidal outline of this museum's permanent exhibition space. Stasny and Burke are not a firm of Native American architects; however, as clients, the Native Americans of this reservation, comprising three tribes (Wasco, Warm Springs and Paiute), participated in a week-long charrette with the architects, and influenced the final design of the project. The resulting complex consists of three structures that quote each of the respective tribes' traditions: the aforementioned travois corresponds with the Paiute, a modified tipi relates to the traditions of the Warm Springs Indians and the Wasco long house is echoed in the shape of the administration wing.[29] A similar application of postmodern hybridity is at play in AmerINDIAN Architecture's *Wakpa Sica Historical Society Visitor Center and Rest Stop* (Fort Pierre, South Dakota, 1994). Krinsky describes this building: "The structure is a wooden-palisaded recollection of a fort, with a wooden tipi-like form serving as its entrance. The tipi marks the beginning and the fort—a product of the settlers—recalls the post-contact history of the 19th-century in the northern Plains."[30] Here design directly incorporates history, as the impermanence of the native's tipi is offset by the solidity of the settler's fort. This structure employs a symbiosis of two architectural traditions and corresponds with a 1990s fascination with symbiotic metaphors.

Symbiotic Buildings

During the past ten years, many architects tried to translate the forms of the natural world into the built environment. For instance, the form of Valode and Pistre's *L'Oreal Factory* (Aulnay-sous-Bois, France, 1988-1991) borrows its shape from a three-petaled orchid (Phalenopsis). This factory is notable for its column-free work space. A tubular, space-frame superstructure supports three separate roof elements (130 meters x 60 meters) that contain of 20,000 aluminum and polyethylene composite panels that are adjustable in all three-dimensions. To install these panels required more than 21,000 on-site modifications and used a laser-guided checking system.[31] A central garden and pond attempts to make this factory a corporate Eden; however, although the pond, foot bridge and landscaped berms appear idyllic, they do not invite lingering or assembly of the workers.

Two structures in Germany, Meinhard von Gerkan's *Airport Terminal* (Stuttgart, Germany, 1991) and Christoph Langhof's *Horst Korber Sports Center* (Berlin, Germany, 1990) draw on the basic form of deciduous trees. The hall roof of von Gerkan's *Airport Terminal* is supported by a closely spaced grid of 'twigs,' four of which converge to form a branch, twelve of which, in turn, fuse to form a columnar trunk. The roof of Langhof's *Sports Center* hovers above

the structure, suspended by an elaborate cable system anchored by eight tubular "trees" that tower 100 feet over the single-story building. On sunny days, 420 dome-shaped skylights can be opened to grant greater ventilation to this neighborhood gym.

Drawing on the shape of seeds and spores, Itsuko Hasegawa's *Museum of Fruit* cleverly unites imagination and technology. This museum constitutes a campus of "three structures with differing characteristics...aligned on a shallow southeast slope offering a...view of Mt. Fuji. These shelters include a tropical greenhouse, an atrium...and...a workshop for the teaching of hobbies."[32] These buildings are the result of experiments conducted with CAD programs. Hasegawa describes her design process: "The geometry of the three shelters studied through three-dimensional data created on a computer. Each shape was created through the rotation of simple bodies into complex volumes...The capability to use such complex forms was made possible only with CAD."[33] Hasegawa's metaphor of seeds suggests the fertility and vitality of fruit.

Dissatisfied with static allusions, Peter Cook experiments with architectural necromancy by giving "life" to a building. *Dampstead* (Hampstead, London, 1993), currently unbuilt, will use two enormous water tanks filled by rain water that drains off through a series of canals and pipes through eight stories of apartments. Cook describes his conception: "Controlled leakages integrated with a carefully 'riddled' surface of developed copper and terra cotta."[34] Layers of trellis and mesh are use to encourage the growth of vines and other plants—a kind of vertical garden. Cook, a well established British architect, encourages experimentation but remains skeptical that theory and experimentation can revitalize architecture in the 1990s: "I see a red light when the theorizing goes beyond a certain point, when I start to lose sight of its connection to the [building] process...[E]xperimentation could be the business of extending theory, but...I would say that there comes a point at which if it is not process related then there cannot be experimental theory, there can only be theory."[35] This skepticism of the promise of theory is shared by Frank Gehry who understands that a compromise between a young architect's idealist theories and society's needs must be negotiated: "I chose to be an architect because I wanted to build, and in order to build I have to build within the social system."[36]

Gehry-tecture and West Coast Whimsy

Frank Gehry is indisputably the most celebrated architect of the 1990s, largely due to the media fascination of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (GMB), the "covergirl" of *fin de Millénaire* architecture. This building incorporates many of the common metaphors of 1990s architecture—a large "boat-shaped" gallery and a "flowering" central atrium (one and a half times taller than Wright's

Guggenheim). In order to realize this sprawling structure, Gehry's firm completed more than 565 working drawings and numerous meticulously crafted models. Using CATIA, a software package originally intended to design aerospace architecture, Gehry can coordinate all of a building's systems—from the plumbing and electrical wiring to the structural steel and exterior cladding. A computerized milling machine, controlled by CATIA, carved the scale models of the GMB and provided quality control throughout the fabrication process. The GMB's titanium cladding may at first seem an unnecessary extravagance; however, given its light properties, the cost of the structure required to support titanium, versus stainless steel, was, on an assembly versus assembly comparison, no more expensive.[37] Despite its experimental design, grand scale and precious materials, the GMB was finished on time and budget. Like Legoretta's MARCO, Gehry's GMB is an ostentatious art museum, that, at every corner calls attention to itself, and thereby competes with the art on display. Indeed, Gehry's museum is, itself, art. The GMB contrasts sharply with another widely discussed Gehry project—*The Walt Disney Concert Hall.* Reveling in the glory surrounding the opening of the GMB, Gehry said: "I don't second guess projects. If it happens, it happens. Because if I start to worry about that, I won't work on it. I've done that before, and when there is any slight inkling that it may not be real, I quit. Emotionally, I quit, and then the client has a hard time getting me back into it."[38] This emotional resignation constitutes the status of *The Walt Disney Concert Hall*, a project that remains indefinitely suspended. This structure, should it be built, would consist of a 24,000 seat theater in the round situated above a six level, 2,500 car garage. The lobby of this building will remain open during the day and include a gift shop, restaurant, cafe, spaces for lectures and additional performances.

Dwarfing Gehry's GMB, Richard Meier's *Getty Center* (Los Angeles, California, 1985-1997) cost $900 million dollars, consists of 87,800 square meters of space, excluding the entrance and parking facilities. It has been called the largest project granted to a single architect in the late 20th-century. Meier's campus consciously recycles ancient architectural vocabularies: "In my mind I keep returning to the Romans—to Hadrian's Villa, to Caprarola for their sequence of spaces, their thick-walled presence, their sense of order, the way in which building and landscape belong to each other."[39] For Meier, Rome alone is insufficient: "I see a classic structure, elegant, timeless, emerging, serene and ideal...a kind of Aristotelian structure"[40] A postmodern Forum and Acropolis, the *Getty Center* consists of eleven structures, including six non-museum buildings clad in Meier's signature white enamel-covered aluminum panels. The five museum buildings are clad in three inch thick Tivoli travertine. In addition to the physical structures, Meier carefully attended to the landscaping and included a brook which runs 100 yards through the campus and culminates in a reflecting pool.[41] Between a tram station and a restaurant rests a

lavender trellis, color-coded to evoke wisteria. This burst of color is uncharacteristic for Meier who labels it a "whimsy."

Another Los Angeles area project that has garnered accolades and media attention is Eric Owen Moss's single-handed renovation of Culver City. Working with developer Frederick Smith, who owns the Hayden tract—a collection of discarded, forgotten industrial buildings—Moss enjoyed the opportunity to refurbish the structural detritus of an industrial wasteland. Moss's innovations received so much attention and praise that City Planner Mark Winogrand proposed that the Hayden tract become an "architects' free zone" where, within a given envelope, "no additional discretionary design, or environmental reviews will be necessary—it will be an area where architectural experimentation will be encouraged."[42] In April 1994, the City Council voted to allow Moss's architectural gestures to count toward the City's 1% for art statute. This is "not to say that architecture is art," says Moss, "but that we should want something better than a Band-Aid of Art."[43] One of his more innovative designs is *The Box*, a "Bronco attic" that encloses a 720 square foot conference room. He claims: "I opened up Pandora's Box. But, remember, in the myth, hope is the only thing still in that box. This is an optimistic piece of work. It's about building."[44] Access is via a double flight of outside/inside stairs set within a cylindrical encasement and reveals Moss's ability to create seamless transitions between incongruous shapes.

Debord writes of "temples of frenetic consumption" surrounded by acres of parking lots as "overtaxed secondary centers" that are "cast aside."[45] This dissolution enables the city to "consume itself."[46] Moss reclaims this excremental architecture. *The Paramount Laundry* and *Gary Group Building* are situated on a parking lot with a single entrance. "Each building contributes an ingredient to the discussion of entrance to the lot," such as the ladder going nowhere atop the facade of the *Gary Group Building*.[47] In Culver City, Moss makes "nowhere" "somewhere": "This project at an urban level, has been very important in redefining an area of Culver City which was totally run-down, nowhere place."[48]

Spectacular Architecture

I use the term spectacular in the sense of the Latin *spectare* (to look at) and Debord's critical use of the term to analyze the process by which urbanism and capitalism achieve stability and efficiency by conspiring to isolate and alienate workers who live and work in cramped environments: "individuals isolated together." He writes: "Factories and cultural centers, holiday camps and housing developments—all are expressly oriented to the goals of a pseudo-community of this kind."[49] Nicholas Grimshaw's *Waterloo International Terminal* perpetuates this isolation. The structure consists of a 1,312 foot gently curving canopy based on a repeating module in a manner not unlike Eisenman's

"string of beads" formula. The slight bend of the structure is dictated by the turning radius of the Eurostar. Inasmuch machines, not humans, determined the design of this mammoth structure. Similarly, the surrounding area of rail lines and road ways completely eliminates the pedestrian and provides no general space for congregation and assembly.

Santiago Calatrava's *Lyon-Satolas Railway Station* also affirms much of Debord's social criticism. This structure constitutes a 1,650 foot by 200 foot pedestrian bridge connecting an airport and train station. Describing his intentions, Calatrava claims "I used Salvador Dali's *Melting Watches*. 'Our building is like this painting,' I said. 'Once you've seen it, you'll never forget it'."[50] Therefore, this structure is pure spectacle. It is intentionally a logo—all form and very little function: "My ideal is to make works of pure engineering that are inspired by the soul of the artist."[51]

Morris Graves' *Denver Public Library* also confirms Debord's theories of the inhumanity of urbanism. The structure creates a miniature sky-line within Denver's sky-line and may refer to the architects unfulfilled desire "to do groups of buildings."[52] Graves was one of the most celebrated architects of the 1980s who now sees himself in direct opposition to the prevailing trends of the 1990s—namely, an increasing interest in technology, philosophy and experimentation that stifles "building" (i.e., Krueger/Kaplan, Diller + Scofidio and Asymptote). Graves surmises: "It might be making a new discipline, an amalgam of philosophy and architecture. But it is not going to change building the way the modern movement did, because it is not *about* building."[53] He fancies himself an outsider: "I may actually be in the avant-garde again precisely because I'm building."[54] The *Denver Public Library*, a stacked and cramped composition, reinforces Debord's theory of the urban landscape which "refashions the totality of space into its own peculiar decor."[55]

Mario Botta's *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art* also supports Debord's ideas. This 225,000 square foot building, built on a $60 million dollar budget, incorporates numerous metaphors and historical references—notably ancient ziggurats, Italian Gothic Cathedrals and submarine periscopes. The lobby, overwhelmingly grand, reinforces one's insignificance. Spectators are rendered inconsequential further by the rigid linear path they are forced to follow, particularly in the galleries on the second and third floors. The building's most dramatic moment, the culmination of the spectacle, requires traversing a catwalk of transparent mesh steel situated just below the central oculus and levitating five stories above the lobby five. Critic Eleanor Heartney's description of the lobby, which leads to a cafe and bookstore and is intended to remind one of Renaissance piazza, encapsulates the point of this conclusion:

> The messages conveyed by the mixed-use ground floor are similarly ambiguous. While the lobby may refer to the public square, it

> hardly invites the kind of indiscriminate mingling of different types of people which is the essence of genuine public space. Instead, the array of consumer attractions reminds us that today the closest thing most cities have to the public square is the shopping mall.[56]

Jose Lapeña and Elias Torres's *Folly Pavilion*, constructed for Expo 90 in Osaka, Japan offers a counter-point to SFMoMA; instead of an overwhelming lobby, this temporary "building" contained no entrance, no human space. It was an unmistakably spectacle; it served no function save for banal entertainment. Intended as an exploration of the relationship between gardens and architecture, this structure, like a Disney thrill ride, was animated. Every fifteen minutes, one of four elements moved; every hour all four elements danced in unison as the clock, reigning supreme at the structures apex, chimes. This contraption relates to Debord's 149th thesis: "Pseudo-cyclical time is in fact merely the consumable disguise of the time-as-commodity."[57] Next to the clock, an eye-ball like form displays the temperature but evokes the surveillance techniques of Bentham's Panopticon.

Zaha Hadid's architectural vision idealistically hopes to counter such "folly" and contest Debord's bleak assessment of society. In the late 1980s, Hadid emerged as one of the most widely respected female architects of this century. Hadid's *Vitra Fire Station* (Weil am Rhein, Germany, 1993), part of a campus of innovative buildings for the Vitra International Furniture Manufacturing Facility, is her first attempt to translate her experimental drawings into built form. In a sense, Hadid's vision corresponds with Debord's 179th thesis: "The power of worker's councils can be effective only if it transforms the totality of existing conditions, and it cannot assign itself any lesser a task if it aspires to be recognized—and to recognize itself—in a world of its own design."[58] Hoping to forge a relationship between the built environment, the man in the street and the public sphere, Hadid declares her social program:

> I think there is a great conflict between the interests of the architect, the interests of the public, and the interests of politics. I think the only way we can go forward is if these interests coincide in some way. That may take a long time. If [architects] are seen as the evil force that destroys the city centers and the cities, we cannot push ahead.[59]

In the 1990s, architects (as per Gehry) consider their clients the "devil" and feel the public condemns them as an "evil force" because the city center, at its core, isolates and alienates. Hadid, and many other emerging architects, optimistically hope they can revitalize society. An admirable goal, but one that would require the endorsement of the corporations that own the city centers and continue to profit from the social structures as they currently exist.

Hodgetts + Fung's *Towell Temporary Library* (UCLA, Los Angeles, California, 1991-1993) serves as a concluding postscript. This temporary structure consists of canvas stretched over a metal armature. Reminiscent of Christo and Jeanne Claude's *Wrapped Reichstag*, all of the materials in both structures were recycled. This firm's innovative design incorporates many of the primary trends of architecture in the 1990s—it is sculptural, sensitive to light, metaphorical, symbiotic, whimsical and spectacular. The structure deliberately "creates the impression that it is only a temporary invader of this red brick campus. When we designed it, we knew that it couldn't look rooted or people would scream about its placement in precious open space."[60] Open space may not in itself enable society to abandon its enslavement to the spectacle as Debord suggests, but it does serve as one of the over-riding concerns of the young architects rising in prominence at the conclusion of the 1990s.

Notes

1 Charles Jencks, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 6.
2 Ibid., 8.
3 Susanna Hagan, "The Language of Schizophrenia," *Architectural Review*, CXCIV.1166 (April 1994): 103.
4 Ibid., 104.
5 Bernard Tschumi, "Six Concepts in Contemporary Architecture," in Andreas Papadakis, ed. *Theory and Experimentation* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 17.
6 Peter Noever, "The Theme," in *The End of Architecture? Documents and Manifestos: Vienna Architecture Conference* (Munich: Prestal-Verlag, 1993), 10.
7 Zaha Hadid, "Another Beginning," ibid., 28.
8 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 125.
9 Ibid., 137.
10 David Galloway, "Packaging the Past," *Art in America* vol. 83 no. 11 (November 1995), 86-89, 133. Berlin, the host of this spectacle, merits mention in a survey of architecture in the 1990s. Given the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1990, this city is the standard bearer for architecture in the 1990s—or it could have been. There are more than 150 architects involved in the project of rebuilding Berlin. Unfortunately, this process has not embraced innovation, but rather conservative Modernism. Inasmuch, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, I.M. Pei, Philip Johnson and Aldo Rossi are building here. Although Daniel Libeskind is represented with his zig-zagging Jewish Museum, such architects as Peter Eisenman, Frank Gehry or Richard Meier have not been awarded any commissions. Nevertheless, the rebuilding of Berlin will be considered among the most significant urban developments of the 20th century.
11 Peter Cook and Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *New Spirit in Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 48.
12 Diller + Scofidio," in Papadakis, 167.
13 Ibid., 167.

14 Lebbeus Woods, "Manifesto," in Noever, 91.
15 Cook and Llewellyn-Jones, 48.
16 Hani Rashid and Lise Anne Couture, *Asymptote* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), 58.
17 Massimiliano Fuksas as quoted by Philip Jodidio, *New Forms: Architecture in the 1990s* (New York: Taschen, 1997), 149.
18 Will Bruder as quoted by Jodidio, 126.
19 "Arquitectonica," in Papadakis, 105.
20 Andreas Papadakis, "On Theory and Architecture," ibid., 10.
21 "Peter Eisenman," ibid., 188-211.
22 Charles Dee Mitchell, "Twombly's Tempietto," *Art in America* vol. 83, no. 2 (February, 1995): 47.
23 Annette Le Cuyer, "Congregation of Light," *Architectural Review* CCII.1206 (August 1997): 34.
24 Stephen Holl, "Locus Soulless," in Noever, 36.
25 Jencks, 43.
26 N.A. "Art Barn," *Architectural Record* vol. 180, no. 2 (February 1992): 68.
27 Ibid., 68.
28 Carole Krinsky, *Contemporary Native American Architecture: Cultural Regeneration and Creativity* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996).
29 Ibid., 86.
30 Ibid., 66.
31 Jodidio, 224.
32 Itsuko Hasegawa as quoted in Jodidio, 182.
33 Ibid., 182.
34 "Peter Cook" in Papadakis, 147.
35 Peter Cook, "Academy Forum: Theory and Experimentation," in Papadakis, 44.
36 Gehry in Noever, 12-13.
37 Karen Stein, "Project Diary: Frank Gehry's Dream Project," *Architectural Record* vol. 185, no.10 (April 1994): 78.
38 Ibid., 79.
39 Richard Meier as quoted by Jodidio, 7.
40 Meier quoted by Lawrence Weschler, "When Fountainheads Collide," *New Yorker* (December 8, 1997): 61.
41 Actually, Meier's garden is restricted to the main plaza, Robert Irwin was hired to design a "seasonal" garden as a counterpoint to Meier's finicky "Aristotelian unities."
42 Aaron Betsky, "Urbane Renewal," *Architectural Record* vol. 182 no. 7 (July 1994): 63.
43 Ibid., 63.
44 Aaron Betsky, "Post-Industrial Encounter," *Architectural Record* vol. 182, no. 9 (September 1994): 68.
45 Debord, 123.
46 Ibid., 124.
47 Eric Owen Moss, *Eric Owen Moss* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 111.
48 Ibid., 111.
49 Debord, 122.

50 Santiago Calatrava and Tracy Metz, "Return to the Heroic," *Architectural Record* vol. 182, no. 10 (October 1994): 89.

51 Ibid., 90.

52 Quoted by Janet Abrams in "Grave's Travels: Giants and Dwarfs," in Karen Nichols, Lisa Burke and Patrick Burke, eds., *Michael Graves: 1990-1994* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), 11.

53 Ibid., 11.

54 Ibid., 11.

55 Debord, 121.

56 Eleanor Heartney, "Bay Area Modern," *Art in America* vol. 83, no. 5 (February 1995): 94.

57 Debord, 110.

58 Ibid., 126-127.

59 Zaha Hadid speaking at the Vienna Architecture Conference Roundtable (June 15, 1992), published in Noever, 104.

60 Aaron Betsky, "Technology Focus: Under the Big Top," *Architectural Record* vol. 181, no. 3 (March, 1993): 97.

From Corporeal Bodies to Mechanical Machines: Navigating the Spectacle of American Installation in the '90s

by Lynn Somers with Bluewater Avery and Jason Paradis

Introduction

Spectacle, for Guy Debord is not separate from society, or something discrete added to it, a supplement; rather, spectacle is imbricated into social experience, and by extension, capitalism. Spectacle is a *Weltanschauung* — a world view or world display "that has been actualized, translated into the material realm."[1] In this sense, we cannot recognize spectacle as something outside ourselves or as extrinsic. It is intrinsic to contemporary culture, and some would argue, identity. Installation art, as a means of creating a spatial environment that translates the aesthetic into the material realm, that blurs the boundaries between viewer and object, can be read as a microcosm for spectacle-in-action.

The purpose of this project was to survey contemporary American installation art. Forty-five artists, all of who are working in the 1990s, were selected. While the majority of these would be considered "emerging" artists (defined as artists who began exhibiting in the 1980s and '90s), seven are well-established names (e.g., Serra, Flavin, Graham, Sandback, Bourgeois, Burden, and Oppenheim). The project organizers surveyed the field (which was arguably New York-centered) via gallery visits, recent exhibitions (including the Whitney, Venice, and Documenta Biennials), and publications (*Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Arts Magazine*, *frieze*, *Parkett*, and *Sculpture*).[2] We identified a variety of emerging and compelling themes or trends, which must, however, be regarded as flexible and subjective. These include *Formalism to Materialism*, *Neo-Conceptualism*, *Expressive and Evocative*, *Identity (The Construction of Self and Culture)*, *Technology*, and *Media Culture*.

To understand the impulse and thematics behind much contemporary installation art, a retrospective glance to the criticism of Clement Greenberg is required. Greenberg demarcates the boundary between avant-garde (high) and kitsch (low) in his 1939 essay of the same title in which he aligns the avant-garde with a revolutionary, self-critical impulse in persistent opposition to fascism and capitalism.[3] Kitsch, on the other hand, feeds on both the formulaic needs of fascism and the watered-down, easy-to-digest forms of consumer capitalism.

Moreover, Michael Fried's critique of Robert Morris's and Donald Judd's work,[4] which he pejoratively called "theatrical," in that it moved be-

yond the formal qualities of the material and set up an active relation between the objects and the viewers' bodies is similar. It was in this sense—that the work disassembled the formal boundaries of painting and sculpture, and entered the realm of the extrinsic, i.e., life—that Fried called the work theatrical. The trajectory from the Minimalists' and Post-Minimalists' phenomenological orientation ("theatricality") to body art of the '70s and current modes of mixed- and multi-media sculptural installation and Neo-Conceptualist practices is evident. While "theatricality" in art no longer bears the derogatory stamp that Fried wanted to give it, there is a sense of nihilism inherent in some of the installation art included in this survey. The destruction of form and formal categories, the mixing of media with disparate sources (from pop culture, video, television, music, etc.), the junk aesthetic—all these strategies could be read as nihilistic, or at the very least, anti-aesthetic.

It is difficult to think of contemporary art practice that does not take spectatorship into account, whether through materiality, psychology, or sociopolitical frameworks. Spectatorship is implicated within spectacle, if we understand the term most simply to mean *the act of looking, to be looked at.* The art in this survey could be mapped on a continuum of the spectacle through its medium (form), style, scale, treatment of materials, content, etc. A discussion of the following themes and trends and individual artists will demonstrate this.

Formalism to Materialism

While the roots of installation could arguably be traced to the Pop art aesthetic (in particular Claes Oldenburg's *The Store* sited in the East Village in 1961) and Allan Kaprow's Happenings, for the purposes of this project, we began with an examination of installation's Minimalist forebears. A valid source of installation is found in Minimalist and Post-Minimalist forms that activate or engage the object within the viewer's space.[5] While Minimalist predecessors such as Richard Serra, Dan Flavin, Dan Graham, and Fred Sandback might not be thought of as installation artists, their recent work selected for this survey definitely stakes a claim for environmental, spatial (and bodily) subject-object relationships. The fluidity of this category suggests that other artists, using the vocabulary of formalism and Minimalism, have turned to an aesthetic of materials that is both "pure" and "impure." Artists included are Bryan Crockett, Dan Flavin, Dan Graham, Melissa McGill, Sylvia Netzer, Judy Pfaff, Nancy Rubins, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra, Jessica Stockholder, and Cecilia Vicuña.

Serra's works have always arguably engaged the viewer in phenomenological space and even a politics or poetics of power relations. Borromini's San Carlo cathedral in Rome inspired his recent *Torqued Ellipses*. His idea to take an elliptical volume of space and torque it results in forms of clarity and

monumentality.[6] Manifest in two-inch thick plates of rolled steel (each weighing 20 tons), the work puts the viewer in a precarious and wondrous position as he or she moves among them.

According to Serra, his work since the '70s has been informed by contemporary dance that opened him to the considerations of the body and how movement relates to material and space:

> I began to think about sculpture in an open and extended field in a way that is precluded when dealing with sculpture as an autonomous object...I found very important the idea of the body passing through space, and the body's movement not being predicated totally on image or sight or optical awareness, but on physical awareness in relation to space, place, time, and movement.[7]

In Dan Flavin's 1996 fluorescent piece, currently installed in the Dia Center for the Arts stairwell, he has moved out of the hierarchical gallery space and into an "ancillary" or secondary space in which people move from one location to the next. For Flavin, the medium of light has never been about "eye-appeal" but used as a means to describe space and spatial voids. His consistent use of primary colors and modular forms suggests a romanticist alignment with the Russian Constructivists and their Enlightenment conception of art as a science. Contrasting with the industrial materiality of his medium (the fluorescent tubing) is the sumptuous refulgence of colored light and its spiritual power of transcendence.

Dan Graham's "arcadian pavilion" on the rooftop of Dia is at once sculptural object and public architecture. Its origins lie in the Modernist aesthetics that tie its formal characteristics with the physical context in which it is displayed. The outer rectilinear structure of the piece makes reference to the Manhattan city grid below. The mirrored glass continuously reflects sky patterns, weather, the city skyline's water towers, and the viewers' bodies. The urban social experience and the activities of seeing and being seen (i.e., spectatorship and spectacle) are foregrounded.[8] Graham's work has consistently rejected the museum and gallery space in favor of outdoor or ancillary settings. He states: "I think my works are partly educational and philosophical and partly aesthetic...[they disclose] the necessary social and visual engagement connected with the apprehension of the work of art."[9]

Sylvia Netzer's *Miasma Morph* comprises organic ceramic forms with waxed surfaces. A large trail or chain of purple bead-like forms, threaded onto yellow plastic ropes, cascades from the ceiling. A hot pink undulating ceramic ribbon (approximately nine feet long and barely one inch thick) hangs from lime green ropes. The work brings to mind associations to the novel, the fantastical, mutations, and "morphing." The use of the term "miasma" in the title refers to

a "vapor related to a decomposing substance," a "befogging atmosphere," which ironically contrasts with the celebratory, exuberant tone of the work.

Confronting issues of architectural space and its aesthetic of rationality and order, Judy Pfaff embraces the possibilities of spatial (i.e., formal) and attendant psychological disorder. In her installation *Round Hole Square Peg* (1997), the disarray, however chaotic, ultimately coheres with the support of surrounding architectural structures (i.e., walls, steel armatures) that echo the form of the gallery space in modernist fashion. Steel tubes and wires hold natural forms such as tree trunks and branches in space, in effect "supporting" the life of the uprooted plants. Meticulous concentric circles of poured plaster on the floor and walls reference the organic formations. Her installation is a dialectic between chaos and structure, nature and technology.

California artist Nancy Rubins's roots lie in the Pop aesthetic that embraced detritus and material culture, and similar to John Chamberlain, who uses automobiles, Rubins scavenges for airplane parts. Although the constructions are formally exacting, they are not formally pure, because their sources imply a narrative. The presentation, i.e., stringing them up via wires so that they seem to be weightless and yet precariously balancing in and around viewers, introduces a psychological edge. The works call up fantasies of the violence and exhilaration of crashes and near-disasters; yet, the pieces seem less heroic than exposed, fragile or crumbling.

Her piece *Mattresses and Cakes*, like the *Airplane Parts* series, plays with the idea of a heavy material made "weightless" via suspension engineering. The materials, however, invoke a wholly different, more "feminine" set of associations. The artist does not say whether she intends a sociopolitical statement, although her consciousness of Los Angeles commodity and waste culture seems apparent. The combination of evocative materiality and formalism relates her works to those of Stockholder, Serra, Crockett, and Pfaff.

Fred Sandback's Minimalist language relates closely to that of his peers, Serra, Judd and Stella. His search for a sculptural solution to objecthood has changed very little since he began using yarn and string to demarcate geometric forms in space in the 1960s. His 1997 installation at Dia Center for the Arts was, in fact, largely based on reconstructed pieces. Sandback explores the idea of "pedestrian space,"[10] i.e., the interactive and phenomenological space in which the art work multiply engages the viewer. Similar to Serra's interest in an open and extended field, one in which the art work invokes elements and senses in addition to the visual (three-dimensional space, sound, touch, time, etc.), Sandback's work is precedent to younger emerging installation artists.

Jessica Stockholder's exuberant mixed media work is indebted to a formalist approach involving color, form and texture. The eclectic and surrealistic combination and juxtaposition of materials and objects, however, reso-

nates on emotional, psychological, and social levels. In a statement for the Venice Biennale she writes:

> I engage in a constant process of pulling the rug out from under the ground on which my work rests. The stabs I make against this ground are doomed to fail because I am in love with what I am attacking. Nevertheless, the holes or gaps created in the struggle are full of meaning. There is a feeling of fragmentation which can be aggressive, angry, and uncomfortable; but it is also optimistic, hopeful and exciting in that space is left for the possibility of change and for the emergence of something new and fantastic.[11]

Melissa McGill, who received her B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1991, had her second solo New York exhibition in 1997 titled *Myths, Inflections and Innuendoes.* The installation comprises five, bulbous, blown glass forms resting upon pedestals and virtually "coming out" of the wall. Each of the sculptures invades the surface of the wall and the pedestals, which are hand-formed and part of the installation. A layer of clear glass over a gray glass center gives the surfaces a sumptuous pearliness and fragility. The forms have a variety of sources including ink blob drawings and the negative spaces and cast shadows from Neoclassical sculpture.

Bryan Crockett (who received his M.F.A. from Yale in 1994) was chosen for his piece in the 1997 Whitney Biennial. *Fool's Fire* is both grand in gesture and complicated and intricate in form. Constructed of epoxy resin, latex balloons and light bulbs, the surfaces appear both soft and hard, slick and vulnerable. Balloons and neon tubes inserted inside balloons create intestinal forms that reference the body. The plethora of color, light, surface, gesture, and shape creates a cacophony of artistic form, truly resonating with Debord's theory of the spectacle.

Cecilia Vicuña uses the vocabulary of Minimalism and the metaphysical aspects of nature to create "objects" and spaces that defy objecthood. The artist, who lives and works in Santiago and New York, sees her work as a metaphor for prayer, a form of dialogue or speech that addresses what is both "here" and "not-here."[12] The notion of transience, transition, the act of becoming rather than being is vital to understanding Vicuña's work as open-ended and anti-binaristic, like her Chilean ancestors' weaving, constructing, and nesting practices. Having had a Western art education in part, Vicuña is conscious of the contradictions between a Modernist aesthetic (which she does not deny) and her interest in Latin American women's indigenous weaving practices.

To realize a "weaving in space"[13] (*Hilumbres-Allqu*, 1993, Kotrijk, Belgium), she used industrial black and white cotton spun in Flemish factories

out of raw materials mainly imported from the so-called Third World. *Hilumbres*, a word she coined, combines two words: *hilo* (thread) and *lumbre* (light)—meaning "thread catching light" or "the thread of light." *Allqu* is a South American Indian word and a textile term that refers to a sharp contrast in the play of light and shadow and a metaphor for metaphysical binaries such as inside/outside, self/other, aggression/identification.[14]

Neo-Conceptualism

A trend or shift towards conceptualism (a return to the 1970s Conceptualist work of Joseph Kosuth, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke) is a prominent force in some contemporary installation work which relies on language, semiotics, and a vocabulary of reduced forms. The artists included under this rubric are working in conceptual modes to deal with a range of issues—sociopolitical, philosophical, poetic, institutional critique—among others. Felix Gonzales-Torres, Roni Horn, Nina Katchadourian, Gabriel Orozco, Glen Seator, Haim Steinbach, and Fred Wilson are each "conceptualizing" the installation. The efficacy of conceptual practices is subject to critical debate: the work, with its obtuse references to extrinsic and often intellectual material, requires special knowledge or expertise, thereby alienating some viewers.

During his short career Gonzales-Torres[15] confronted personal, emotional and social issues regarding gay identity and AIDS; however, his work is less object-oriented than it is based on gestures and interventions. (He arranged piles of gold foil-wrapped candies in the Guggenheim from which viewers could take pieces and discard the wrappers in the pile.) Gonzales-Torres made a series of photographic billboards in urban sites, usually black and white, without text, which dealt with issues of private and public sexuality. Very subtle, non-spectacular images disrupt the "typical" style of advertising images. By putting these images in a non-institutional forum, the artist subverted traditional forms of artistic presentation and commodification. In this sense, the work defies the spectacle as a commodity to be bought and sold.[16]

Roni Horn's *Untitled (Buzz and Dust)* consists of 216 two-inch aluminum lettered blocks scattered around the floor that, though impossible to read when installed, spell out the word *ephemeral* 24 times. Language is thus reduced to its most fundamental components (i.e., letters of the alphabet) and made indecipherable. The Minimalist-inflected geometry and Horn's play with semantics as well as the form of children's blocks seems playful and somewhat inconsequential unless you make the link between this piece and another, titled *Gold Mats, Paired for Ross and Felix*, in the adjacent room.[17] Comprised of two paper-thin sheets of pure gold, lying lightly one upon the other, the *Gold Mats* are simultaneously touching and separate. It is a homage to the late Felix Gonzales-Torres and his lover, both of whom died of AIDS. The elegiac *Gold Mats*, when read beside *Buzz and Dust*, infuse the "ephemeral" with an

evocative weightiness.[18] The use of pure gold reduced to a simple and useless form is, moreover, "unspectacular."

We live in a world in which constructed informational systems (everything from time to urban infrastructure) determine our environment and how we negotiate it. Nina Katchadourian appropriates these systems and misapplies them to reveal how they shape social spaces. Her art relies on manipulating these reference points with unconventional uses of cartology and itinerary. *Map Dissection I and II* represents her ongoing process of dissecting maps by removing all the graphic material that does not denote a highway route or interstate. The removal of this "ground" reveals not a technological structure, but suprisingly, that of an anthropomorphic organism. The roads that remain read as a system of internal veins and arteries where life's blood might flow. In *Surface Spoils: Concrete Music from Europe*, Katchadourian collected bits of audio tape she found at various locations traveling through Europe. She then cleaned the tape and spliced the pieces back together. Each sound piece forms a separate audio record of a place along her journey. This transformed music represents her reworking systems of record keeping and metaphorical mapping. The music becomes a replacement for the traditional map or diary.

Gabriel Orozco, who had his first solo New York show in 1994, works in multiple modes, making photographs, sculptural objects, and conceptual installations. His juxtaposition of the ready-made with simple, hand-formed objects explores the syntax of sculpture, namely presence and absence, materiality and void; and sculptural history, via allusions to the Surrealist object, Duchamp, Jasper Johns, and others. The installation *Four Yogurt Caps* comprises a conceptual gesture in which the artist forces the viewer to mentally "fill in" the space "voided" by the artist. The blue rims of the plastic caps, supposedly serve as "drawn" elements that both call attention to the white cube aesthetic and contradict traditional views of sculpture and the classical viewer-object relationship.[19] Some critics saw the work as aggressive and gratuitous, "while others considered it as yet another resolute act of defying the institutional art market system."[20]

Glen Seator challenges how the phenomenological body relates to space in his or her physical environment. By reconstructing everyday, banal settings in another context (that of the museum or gallery space) he renders them surreal. At the 1996 Whitney Biennial he rebuilt the director's office and placed it on a precarious tilt inside the gallery. Disorientation is not only experienced by placing the office outside its original location but is heightened by it skewed position. The horizontals and verticals become dizzying diagonals. Similarly, Seator alters spatial conceptions by recreating the facade of the San Francisco Capp Street Project inside the gallery itself. He painstakingly recreates or copies everything, from the graffiti on the telephone poles to the

oil stains on the sidewalk. Exterior space becomes interior space as perceived reality shifts into the realm of the dreamscape. What was once accepted as part of an ordinary environment transforms into art due to its conceptual and theoretical positioning in the space of the "white cube."

Haim Steinbach's neo-conceptual sculptural work employs the language of the simulacra, similar to Jeff Koons and Meyer Vaisman. The 1995 piece *La Scala* (an edifice the viewer may enter) references both postmodern architecture via art historical appropriation and the constructed, systemic nature of language. Steinbach claims to work as an archeologist or anthropologist in that he collects and combines found objects; however, he does not study the typological genealogy of objects in order to put together a history of a specific society or culture.[21] Steinbach's artist's statement suggests an interest in semiology and the use of theory as part of the work, or at least, a paradigm for understanding it.

> My work is abstract in a semantical sense. It is a kind of alphabet of objects in which each object is a discrete unit and also part of a larger set of meaning. Each configuration deliberates the social and psychological identity of objects. I question the possibility of meaning in the juxtaposition of heterogeneous objects. The recent explosion of works with objects and object surrogates is symptomatic of a crisis of object identity.[22]

Fred Wilson affects neo-conceptual strategies in making public institutional critiques. His background in the education departments of the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the American Crafts Museum led him to begin to think how museums as institutions pedagogically shape public awareness and understanding of the objects they present. He questioned not only the artist's relationship to the museum but also how museums confer information and how the cultural production of certain people gets presented (or not).

Wilson's 1992 work at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore (which collects 19th century Southern Americana, furniture, silver, etc.) is part installation, part intervention. Wilson researched the collections and re-installed the gallery space with objects that had been in storage, rearranging and recontextualizing pieces that revealed the curatorial staff's and the institutional interests and biases. He introduced the suppressed narratives and history of the African Americans from the area into the Baltimore museum and community.

Expressive and Evocative

Installation artists who work with biography, autobiography, embodiment, and

related narratives include Janine Antoni, Louise Bourgeois, Ann Hamilton, Rona Pondick, and Kiki Smith. While this grouping addresses issues of subjectivity and identity (which is another thematic category considered) these artists combine a visceral materiality with the language of expression and evocation. It is arguably through emotional and psychological expression as opposed to neo-conceptualist and intellectual strategies that art viscerally engages the viewer.

Janine Antoni's work engages elements of sculptural installation and performance, and she concedes her interest in feminist body art and Joseph Beuys. (Antoni is also relatively young and made a name for herself in the 1993 Biennial with her chocolate and lard gnawed cubes.[23]) To make *Slumber*, Antoni sleeps in the gallery hooked up to a polysomnograph (EEG) that records her rapid eye movement, indicating dream sleep. Using a section of the transcribed recording as a design pattern, she weaves strips of her nightgown into an endless blanket on a massive loom. For a period of several weeks Antoni sleeps in the bed at night and weaves by day while the exhibition is open. The use of a technological machine allows Antoni to express her unconscious—manifest in the "drawn" pattern of her dream—using a craft associated with the feminine, ritual, and women's work, i.e., weaving.

Louise Bourgeois's long oeuvre derives from Surrealist impulses (the *objets trouvé*), psychological associations, dreams, and memories. Her recent series (the *Cells*) transform sculpture into environmental installations that evoke domestic interiors, animal lairs, shelters, and cellular enclosures. Elements of looking, watching (i.e., spectacle and voyeurism) are heightened, especially in the cells' dimly lit spaces. The windows and tiny entrance ways through which the viewer may look but not cross are enticing and yet foreboding and emphasize the subject-object experience of the work. Her choice of materials (marble, rubber, latex, glass, fiber, wax) is highly expressive. The centerpiece of *Cell (Choisy)* is a marble replica of the artist's childhood home and her family's tapestry factory in Choisy, France.

Ann Hamilton's complexly structured environments all deal with somatic epistemologies that call into question the adequacy of language as a model of knowing and experiencing. An understanding based in memory, recollection, and the personal bypasses intellect and cognition. The 1993 installation *tropos* blurs the boundaries between the viewer and the installation as an aesthetic space. Hamilton physically alters and transforms the large gallery space at Dia Center for the Arts: the floor is covered with an undulating carpet of horsehair; the transparent windows have been replaced with translucent and textured glass. At the far end of the room a person sits, methodically "erasing" lines of text from a book with an electrical burin. The "erasing" (i.e., singeing) creates soft coils of smoke that waft through the air. The transformed space, in combination with sound, light, and performativity, alludes to

visceral bodily experiences and "natural" processes (tropism is an innate tendency to react to certain stimuli, e.g., a plant's tendency to grow towards light).

Rona Pondick's installations comprise collections of sculpted and found part-objects, in the sense of Melanie Klein's pre-Oedipal part-object: breasts, penises, tongues, fingers, anuses, feet, and mouths. The fact that Pondick's objects are psychologically rife with meaning, expressing the oral and anal sadistic drives, extends them beyond the intellectual realm and into a world encoded with myth and the subconscious. According to critic Mignon Nixon, "stringing, lumping, and sticking together, piling and hanging up rubber, plastic, and wax mouths, feet, legs, teeth, nipples, breasts, penises, vaginas, Rona Pondick all but speaks the name Melanie Klein,"[24] namely through her enacting of Kleinian operations: biting, sucking, excretion, fragmentation, and aggressive fantasy. In works such as *Aaron's Third Ear*, strangely polymorphous heads with teeth and ears (a displaced castration) fall into piles from a tree, hang from the ceiling, or spill across the floor, enacting irrational infantile impulses rather than the logical orientation of the contained art object.

Drawn to evocative and somewhat mystical aesthetics, Kiki Smith has extended her discrete sculptural pieces into installations. *Jersey Crows* combines her totemic crucified male and female figures, which hang like pathetic, abject skins on the walls, with scattered bronze crows and organic two- and three-dimensional forms placed on the walls and floor. These mandala-shaped objects suggest organic matter as well as body parts: veins, milk ducts, pupils, penises, anuses and vaginas. Smith's particularly poetic handling of materials and the evocation of both fragility and beauty, birth and death, crucifixion and resurrection, is one of the least ironic (and in some senses least spectacular) strategies employed by the artists under discussion.

Identity—The Construction of Self and Culture

According to Debord, the spectacle creates a split, a chasm, between real, lived, sensuous experience and the self:

> The spectacle erases the dividing line between self and world, in that the self, under siege by the presence/absence of the world, is eventually overwhelmed; it likewise erases the dividing line between true and false, repressing all directly lived truth beneath the *real presence* of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances.[25]

Subjectivity and identity of the self and culture are so prevalent in contemporary work as to be redundant and sometimes naive. The critical question seems to be are these explorations those of an authentic or a false self? Does postmodernity, with its tendency towards fragmentation, de-cen-

tering, dissolution, etc., even allow for an authentic self, and if so, what would that look like? Artists working within this thematic include José Bedia, Chris Burden, Robert Gober, David Hammons, Mike Kelley, Amalia Mesa-Bains, Portia Munson, Pepon Osorio, and Jana Sterbak. Particularly, Gober, Mesa-Bains, and Osorio disable "real," lived experience through the use of a constructed or fabricated experience meant to "stand-in" for the former. The uneasy play between authentic and false is thereby heightened.

Cuban-born artist José Bedia is of Spanish and African descent and would seem to exploit his personal understanding of cultural identity through his work. If essentialism describes cultural characteristics as fixed identities regardless of place or context, than Bedia is an anti-essentialist and holds that culture is constantly altered through the interaction and assimilation of difference. Bedia's installations are both graphic and sculptural in that his gestural acrylic wall drawings are "extended" into three-dimensional groupings of objects. These include relics and ritualistic religious objects from Afro-Cuban cultures as well as Native American and Pre-Columbian civilizations. By mixing these symbols and images without hierarchical positioning, Bedia attempts to show how cultures are interrelational.

California artist Amalia Mesa-Bains chronicles Mexican-American border culture as it shapes communal and personal identity. Her elaborate, large-scale installations involving sculpture, text, mixed media and often sound, document her own Chicano traditions while subverting traditional Western scholarship and ideologies. Generations of Mexican and Chicano women have shaped the cultural folklore and indigenous customs on which Mesa-Bains draws. The altarpiece, votive objects, women's work, and ceremonial centers—encompassing both Mexican rituals as well as Catholicism—comprise the artist's themes. In *Circle of Ancestors* (1996), eight chairs, ritually and obsessively decorated as altars, symbolize eight archetypal women-figures.

Since the 1970s, Chris Burden's work has been more about performativity and conceptual exercises than object formation. His dare-devil stunts (having himself shot, nailed to the roof of his Volkswagen, confining himself into a metal locker for five days) have become legendary in an art world addicted to spectacle. In keeping with his provocative and sometimes political orientation, Burden's *The Other Vietnam Memorial* pays tribute to the Vietnamese who died in that conflict, giving voice and identity, in essence, to a silenced people. The dialectical nature of his work (examining the Other to hegemonic existence) is typified in this piece which suggests the insidious potential of suppressed guilt, rage, and violence. This spare, minimal work stands in sharp relief to his gaudy, kitschy, crumbling *Pizza City* (a homage to Los Angeles) which he made of toys, model buildings, and found objects mounted on card tables.

Robert Gober began making surrealistic objects in the '80s and turned

to full-fledged environmental installations in 1989 in which the "real" and the imaginary are problematized. The 1993 untitled installation at Dia deals with critical themes regarding identity and sexuality, specifically violence and discrimination against gays and children, white Christian heterosexist ideals and social practices. A row of tenement sinks, boxes of rat bait, bundled newspapers amidst a shady green *trompe-l'oeil* "landscape" marked with small barred window —Gober meticulously fabricates every part of the work.[26] The effect is uncanny in that an interior space mimicking an outdoor arcadian vista creates a "malignant dystopia"[27] rather than a romanticized utopia. Gober claims that most of his imagery is privately formed from his childhood memories and associations, linking it more to Surrealism and the evocative than media culture or simulacra.

David Hammons's irreverent, witty, Duchampian practices complicate notions of intrinsic value and the autonomy of the sculptural object. His invocation of the anti-art found object (basketballs, boom boxes, Gucci bags, urinals, boxing gloves) as well as street detritus speaks to the Harlem community where he has lived and worked for many years, thumbing his nose, so to speak, at the academic and art communities. Hammons's objects and installations are simultaneously symbols of racism and black pride, as he quotes both the avant-garde and African ancestral traditions, usurping Western hegemonic notions of artistic quality with irony and critique. His *Untitled* installation in Temse, Belgium comprises a grouping of urinals attached to tree trunks in a bucolic woodsy setting. In *Four Beats to the Bar*, he sheathes bright blue New York subway turnstile bars with condoms in a gesture that refers to the black male penis (size and sexual prowess as stereotype). The title, of course, connotes both musical terminology and masturbation. Both works wryly critique African-American cultural aesthetics and bodily practices while functioning as social protest art.

Mike Kelley, according to one critic, acknowledges "bad faith [is] necessary for the creation of art in an age of commodity—a time that fetishizes the hot young disposable star."[28] Certainly as one of the hip poseurs of the 1980s, Kelley has continued his embrace (even celebration) of the abject, commercialism, rock and roll, and low-brow kitsch. "Feminized" stuffed animals and other white trash bric-a-brac are sculpted or transfigured into giant phalluses, perhaps spoofing adolescent sexuality. His myriad quotations, ranging from pop music to underground comics, place Kelley squarely in the camp of postmodern pastiche artists. His *Brown Star* installation—comprised of brown and tan-colored toys bound into spherical forms suspended from the ceiling—evokes sadomasochism, black humor, and scatological abjection. The underlying themes of Irish Catholic guilt, sin, and degradation infuse a strangely moral tone into Kelley's overwhelmingly ironic proclamations.

Portia Munson explores the multiple realms of feminine identity (al-

beit stereotypical) in pieces such as *The Garden*. In this installation she completely fills the gallery space with wildly colored plastic flowers, floral fabrics and stuffed bunny rabbits, creating a claustrophobic horror that suggests trauma rather than childhood bliss. The irony of Munson's kitsch aesthetic contradicts the cues of nervous anxiety, repetition compulsion, and intense control mechanisms of adult repression. Unlike Mike Kelley's use of stuffed toys (which seem to reference abjection), Munson's bunnies suggest overwhelmedness, insecurity, and the suffocation of maternal coddling. Kelley and Munson seem to suggest a shared psychic experience (perhaps among the Western white middle classes); whether these are anti-essentialist critiques is unclear.

Puerto Rican-born Pepon Osorio draws on the uneasy border between urban American and indigenous Latin cultures. His gritty, mixed media installations, some of which include film and video, deal with cultural and identity politics. In *Badge of Honor*, Osorio reconstructed two adjacent rooms of a Puerto Rican father and his teenage son, except this is no family home in the sentimental sense: the father's room is a jail cell where he is incarcerated, and the son's teenage bedroom is a claustrophobic melange of Latino "kitsch-fantasia"[29] papered floor to ceiling with gaudy stickers, posters, sports memorabilia, etc. The interconnected environment of father and son is both real and surreal, equipped with two spoken personal narratives and video images of the two subjects, running simultaneously and producing solemn strings of broken communication.

Jana Sterbak has used sculpture, drawing, photography, video, installation and performance in her work since 1977, much of which references her youth in Prague. (Sterbak emigrated to the United States in 1968 and currently lives in Canada.) Sterbak's enduring interest lies in the body as an indicator of psychological and social experience; she constantly plays the physical against the psychological, invoking the biological and acculturated body. She expands this discourse in her use of materials, in which the "physical properties of the material world inform the content of the work as much as the shape the material assumed."[30] Mythological and literary narratives provide the impetus for her subject matter—avoiding fate, duping mortality, playing destructive games—all of these inform Sterbak's narratives.[31]

Remote Control addresses the paradox of technology which Sterbak sees as having the power to both liberate and ensnare. In this performance/installation piece, a female model is suspended inside an aluminum "dress" mimicking the 19th-century hoop skirt, an article of clothing notorious for confining women's bodies. The skirt is on wheels and connected to a motor, and remote control, which if in the hands of the model, gives her agency. When in the hands of another, it becomes a device for control. *Vanitas, Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (recreated in a 1991 installation) references

17th-century *vanitas* paintings, feminine identity, the literal process of decay and the ephemerality of carnal pleasures.

Art and Technology

Debord links the principle of commodity fetishism to spectacle. The commodity, he claims, is "at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. This principle is absolutely fulfilled in the spectacle, where the perceptible world is replaced by a set of images that are superior to that world yet at the same time impose themselves as *eminently* perceptible."[32]

Walter Benjamin first noted that art that uses technology as a mode of operation confronts the role of the artist, authenticity, and the aura of the work of art.[33] Reproduction is intrinsic to the commodity, which, when alienated from its "natural" aesthetic, leads to the spiritually bankrupt object. Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton argues that the obscenity of the commodity arises from its evacuation of weightiness, opacity, and substance. The commodity splits form and content and purports a value that is "eccentric to itself."[34] This reduction or negation of *sensuous* perception characterizes the anti-aesthetic and further delineates spectacle.

A majority of installation artists working in the '90s are interested in the intersections between technology and (wo)man; functional and non-functional technology (the absurd); the manipulation of technological materials for ironic effect; and the aura of novelty. The technological object theorized through Marx and Debord could be read as the quintessential commodity. David Arnold, Aziz and Cucher, Tim Hawkinson, Richard Jackson, Dennis Oppenheim, and Jeanne Silverthorne exploit such strategies and forms.

David Arnold problematizes the presumed adversarial relations between humankind and machines. If man makes a machine, then the products or accomplishments of that machine are ultimately the maker's victory. (Mankind here is *not* problematized in terms of race, class, or gender.) Arnold views the machine as an extension of ourselves rather than a dehumanizing abomination. In his piece *St. George and the Dragon*, Arnold duels with a fire-breathing machine and ultimately loses (i.e., he "gets burned"), but as the machine's creator, he is victorious. Not unlike the power of the masochist who derives pleasure from making or forcing an other hurt him, mechanisms of control provide the penultimate satisfaction or means of desire. In *DEA Creature Mark I-V*, Arnold builds tiny steel skeletons to which he affixes electronically stimulated frog tissue and submerges in glass jars filled with liquid. These creatures live for fifteen minutes within a contained eco-system; and yet they ultimately die, demonstrating the frailty of existence that even technology cannot sustain.

California artists Aziz and Cucher juxtapose "useless" surreal objects made with computer parts, cast foam and rubber, trailing cords and connec-

tions, evoking mutation and biomedical "iconography." The plasticine forms stretch and dangle from ceiling to floor in a large space, and the installation includes close-up, large-scale, color prints of the hybrid objects arranged in still life. The computer as an extension of our very being — where the machine begins and where we end and the liminal space in between — is foregrounded in their *Plasmorphica* installation, which seems less like critique than a bland reaffirmation of the aforementioned issues.

Richard Jackson's *Paint Ball* is an ironic gesture based on the grandiosity of his Abstract Expressionist predecessors and that patrilineage. (He began his career making subjectively rendered paintings in that style.) A large, mechanical, steel ball, harnessing the power from a lawn trimmer motor, flings paint onto a canvas mimicking the automatic markings of a Jackson Pollock; the human gesture, however, cannot be replaced by a machine. The works are presented as the residue of the machines' activities; in other words, the viewer enters the space *after* the performative action has taken place, further distancing the reception from human experience. The reference to Jean Tinguely's "metamatic" kinetic machines is also clear. (His 1959 *metamatic-automobile-odorante-et-sonore* was a machine that made some 40,000 Abstract Expressionist paintings.) In the end it is unclear whether Jackson, perhaps unwittingly, reinvests or critiques the grandiosity he quotes.

Dennis Oppenheim has turned from the performative work he did in the '70s to an interest in commodity consumerism based in technological fetishism. His large-scale architectural and machine-based installations rely on the spectacle of fireworks, mechanical contraptions, and sensory overload. Oppenheim's *Blushing Machine* (a technological machine built to replace a human function) becomes a commodity that denies bodily experience in favor of a mechanical cyborg. The disavowal of lived experience in favor of the simulated and alienated surrogate is obscenely spectacular. Similarly, David Arnold's Frankensteinian experiments with animal tissues and Tim Hawkinson's blow-up self-portrait balloon made from a latex casting of his body evoke the post-human as well as the absurdity of science fiction.

Critics have described Tim Hawkinson's work as that of a "quack inventor" and "tinkerer extraordinaire"[35] in that he creates machines to replace human activities and bodily functions, such as his pneumatic "self portrait," or a piece called *Signature* that replicates Hawkinson's John Hancock via a cobbled together school desk and mechanical arm. The replication and reduplication of the body, however, is both dehumanizing and obsessive: puffed-up vanity and autoerotic narcissism sets the tone of these works. While Hawkinson considers the body a reservoir of physicality and emotions, both alien and sadly arbitrary, the viewer is left to contemplate the personal significance of these gestures.

Jeanne Silverthorne begins with the assumption that technology rep-

resents functionality, cultural advancement, and ease in living and then skews it. Silverthorne's objects (which again are not discrete but organic and systemic) are technological in form and yet rendered prosaic. These latex rubber and Hydro-cal pieces are cast from objects lying around her studio, namely electrical appliances, light fixtures, even framed paintings and arranged throughout the space as if to mimic a computerized or scientific laboratory. The appliances appear to be functional as a system of wires and receptacles but turn out to be useless rubber fakes. For example, a rubber light bulb and socket, actually plugged into the "real" wall receptacle, is impotent to harness electrical power.

Media Culture

This project concludes with a consideration of the role of media culture on contemporary installation. The use of media-based materials (film, video, television, print advertising) in conjunction with the plastic arts in specifically theatrical environments, as well as artists who draw images and themes from popular mass media culture, comprise this grouping. Matthew Barney, Andrew Bordwin, Les Levine, Charles Long and Stereolab, Paul McCarthy, Jason Rhoades, and Julia Scher use the language of mass media and popular culture. There is a deadpan Duchampian quality to much of this work. Whether the work is meant as critique or ironic ennui is open to interpretation.

Matthew Barney's status as an international poseur overwhelms the content of his work, which remains obtusely ironic. He toys with the objectified and robotic body, namely his own, via representation and fantasy. He suspends, contorts, and pokes himself on film and video. His transsexual dressing-up games, fashion runway performances, and faux weddings, either spoof or embrace celebrity culture and hyped-up hippness. His sports clinic installations, which also serve as padded cells, torture chambers, porn shops and candy stores, are vehicles for channeling Barney's sexual energy, albeit desire for this artist is primarily autoerotic, with no object other than itself. His recurring use of the satyr or Pan figure evokes both homosexuality, sadomasochism, aggression, bacchanalia, as well as Nietzsche's all-powerful *Ubermensch*. It would seem as if Barney locates the healing of pain and trauma only through the theater of beautiful appearances. However, reliance on appearances, notoriously superficial and fickle, produces an uneasy dependence on temporality. Such work, extending Debord's line of thought, produces a cycle of addiction, a craving for the latest pop culture "fix." Barney's symptomatic responses seem to underlie Debord's theorization of the spectacle as reification, banality and futility.

Andrew Bordwin deals with surveillance (a theme particularly related to the coming millennium) and the multiply reproduced video image. *CM2: Decisions Kept* explores the relentless—and ultimately boring—effect of

videography employed in public spaces. The installation comprises four aquarium tanks, each containing two television monitors sealed in plastic, placed in a square formation. Four monitors face outward in each cardinal direction while the other four face inward towards the central space. A flat prairie landscape image that tracks the viewers' circumferential movement is projected on the outer circle of monitors, while the inner monitors show the tape filming the viewer from an overhead video camera. Bordwin disallows any escape from the relentless circulation of surveillance images. The use of the video technology, as the prime tool of media culture and consumption, is infused with the potential for spectacle and novelty. Whether the newness of the work can be sustained is a critical consideration.

Les Levine calls himself a "media sculptor," a term he coined in 1969 when he began making conceptual art. His untitled 1996 installation deals with the contemporary historicizing, commercializing, and mythologizing of Vincent Van Gogh using the visual language of advertising, video and television. Levine's historicist quotation, conflated with the spectacular presentation (the gallery walls are covered with image and text while multiple television monitors play a faux documentary based on Van Gogh's life), is pure postmodern pastiche.

Charles Long's work is a collaborative effort with Stereolab, London's number one "future-pop" music group, in which Long creates plastic furniture with built-in headphones for music listening and relaxing. The thematic is one of escapism, kitsch, and "Retro-Futurism—what one critic called a response to cries of millennial disaster and current dystopias.[36] All of the works in the *Amorphous Body Study Center* are "pseudo-seductive" and plastic-based, referring to the popularity of plastic in the '50s, '60s, and '70s as the material of the future. The enduring quality of plastic—its fakeness and blatant artificiality—plays upon our sense of the "real" and the "surreal" and references consumer capitalism, media culture, and spectacle.

California artist Paul McCarthy is working with a similar idiom in his embrace of the plastic and movie culture of Los Angeles. He revisits the mythologized American West in *The Saloon*, satirizing the cowboy, the barmaid, and barnyard animals in a variety of twisted sexual scenarios. Pneumatic, larger-than-life-sized puppets perform mechanical, perverse acts on a moving stage that requires the viewer's own movement. McCarthy's brash, cartoon-like movie set-ups are adolescent male sexual fantasies that suggest both consumerism and voyeurism. His Disney-inflected brand of "fun and games" aesthetic (which I suggest exemplifies all of the work in this category) is nevertheless stultifying and blandly novel.

Jason Rhoades, another emerging young artist, made his New York debut in the 1993 Whitney Biennial, and lives and works in Los Angeles. His exuberant, brash work (*Uno Memento/the theatre in my dick/a look to the*

physical/ephemeral) is both formal in its exploration of full-spectrum color and filled with implied narrative and the junk aesthetic which references media culture, sexuality, technological processes and the machine. (The work quotes the 1970s film *Car Wash*.) The provocative title of this piece has led more than one critic to call his work narcissistic, infantile, and masturbatory. The installation, in fact, assumes a penile shape and is computer-programmed to "spring into life" every so often with disco lighting and blaring radio music.[37] Given the well-known historical conflation of masculine sexual prowess and artistic creation, Rhoades's work is logically read as ironic; however, his youth-embracing orientation is autoerotic rather than self-critical.

Turning to the sociopolitical and psychological theme of surveillance that Andrew Bordwin charts, Julia Scher also explores how the integration of the video camera into global capitalism affects and politicizes the artistic image. The presence of video surveillance in commercial venues (stores, banks, toll booths, ATM cash machines, even blue-chip galleries) has become part of the everyday urban and suburban landscape. Both video and televised images have become synonymous with truth, just as the newspaper photograph was once unproblematized as a pure or "real" image. Scher recreates the commercial shopping venue in a mock-store entitled *American Fibroids* that monitors the viewer from many sites: you are counted as you walk through a turnstile, watched via video cameras, and your purchases are recorded via the computerized cash register. Items for sale are typical tourist souvenir kitsch: tee-shirts, cameras, even S & M garb. Like the majority of artists discussed under the thematic of technology, the aggressive, participatory quality of this work is foregrounded along with a unclear ambivalence that does not clearly reveal the artist's intentions.

Conclusions

The stated purpose of this project was to survey the field of contemporary American installation artists and through an examination of these findings see if specific thematics or trends emerged. It is no surprise that this field is marked by heterogeneity, multiplicity, and a pluralistic "anything-goes" mentality. The breadth of the categories (*Formalism to Materialism*, *Neo-Conceptualism*, *Expressive and Evocative*, *Identity—The Construction of Self and Culture*, *Technology*, and *Media Culture*) suggests this. It must be emphasized that these categories are fluid and overlap in many areas; there is no singular mode of presentation or expression used by any one artist. Certain tendencies, however, may be mapped throughout the work, namely a concentration of young and emerging artists, and a predisposition towards irony and commodity. The Romantic myth of the artist as diabolical is also consciously exploited by artists as an attention-getting ploy in an overwhelmingly spectacular art world. Matthew Barney becomes a horned demon; Burden is the Evil Knieval

of Art; Tim Hawkinson is the Mad Scientist; Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy are tormented, sexualized perpetual teenagers. Artists such as Kelley, Barney, Burden and McCarthy embrace the overt narcissism and consumerism that shapes spectacle. Moreover, while the artist's creation of a false self allows the viewer to partake in escapist fantasy, the playing of selfhood in this forum is woefully inauthentic.

Over a dozen of the 45 artists cited are in their early 30s and/or received academic degrees in the early 1990s. (The majority are academically trained as well with Yale, U.C.L.A., R.I.S.D., San Francisco Art Institute, and the University of British Columbia appearing more than once.) This suggests the institutional acceptance and absorption of mass culture, spectacle, and the current art trends. The financial power of the art world requires the institutional stamp of approval as high culture cache; the museums and academia yearn to belong to the forever hip art world infused with both fashion forward sense and the power to capture media ratings.

The embrace of irony, the constant search for the novel, the eye-catching, the tricky, the original (which arguably cannot be found) is an overwhelming theme. The preponderance of mixed and eclectic media, served up in myriad combinations and with a full range of effects, indicative of the postmodern, is reproduced or verified in this project. The status of the object and objecthood is problematized as the art moves closer, inevitably, towards commodity. The relations between the viewer and this destablized, undefined, schizophrenic "object" have been taken to an extreme in the 1990s. If Richard Serra introduced this dialectic in the 1970s with his formally pure, elegant transpositions, Jason Rhoades has turned up the volume of this gesture, but to what effect, one might ask. Rhoades's ironic, funky, low-brow "machines" do not truly threaten or engage the viewer on a level beyond infantile fascination or entertainment. Serra's work, on the other hand, seems to have a poetic and layered gestalt that removes it from the world of the ordinary.

Needless to say, some of this work escapes this dilemma and arrives at engagement, critical consciousness, and/or transformation. Kiki Smith, Rona Pondick, Louise Bourgeois, Fred Wilson, Ann Hamilton, Amalia Mesa-Bains, Pepon Osorio, Robert Gober, Richard Serra, Glen Seator, and Gonzales-Torres, I would argue, approach this. The field of installation art is astonishingly pluralistic, and with the growing interest in video and computer technology, we might well expect the genre to get more spectacular before it subsides.

Notes

1 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 13.

2 All artists discussed here, unless mentioned otherwise, are currently living and working in New York.

3 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* VI, no. 5 (Fall 1939): 34-49.
4 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* vol. 5, no. 10 (June 1967).
5 Installation art is defined here as an environmental space that impacts or is activated via the viewer.
6 Lynne Cooke, *Richard Serra*, exhibition pamphlet, Dia Center for the Arts, 1997.
7 Richard Serra, interview by Lynne Cooke and Michael Govan, *Richard Serra: Torqued Ellipses* (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1997), 26.
8 Lynne Cooke, *Dan Graham*, exhibition pamphlet, Dia Center for the Arts, 1997.
9 Ibid.
10 Joan Simon, "Lines of Inquiry," *Art in America* (May 1997): 88.
11 Jessica Stockholder, artist's statement, *La Biennale de Venezia, XLVII Esposizione Internazionale D'Arte*, ed. Germano Celant (Italy: Electa, Elemond Editori Associati, 1997).
12 M. Catherine de Zegher, "Cecilia Vicuña's *Ouvrage*: Knot a Not, Notes as Knots, " *Inside the Visible - An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art* exhibition catalogue (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press), 349.
13 Ibid, 355.
14 Ibid.
15 The artist was born in 1958 in Cuba and died in Miami in 1996.
16 Again, the point should be made, that this is nothing new. Duchamp inaugurated the 20th century with his claim that anyone and anything could be art, thereby critiquing fine art as a "precious" object. Similarly, Pop artists, Earthworks, and Conceptualists critiqued the object (and commodity) status of art. What is unique is the use of these strategies in their present context. The point could be made that a lot of artists in the 1990s are referencing the outrageous art market activities in the 1980s and the making of New York "art stars."
17 Gregory Volk, "Roni Horn at Matthew Marks," *Art in America* (July 1996).
18 Ibid.
19 M. Catherine de Zegher, "The Os of Orozco," *Parkett* 48 (1996): 67.
20 Ibid, 55.
21 Haim Steinbach, artist's statement, *La Biennale de Venezia, XLVII Esposizione Internazionale D'Arte.*
22 Ibid.
23 These works, in which Antoni gnawed on 600 pound cubes of chocolate and fat, spat out the matter and reshaped it into tubes of lipstick and empty candy boxes, was heavily hyped in the art press as spectacular. Antoni, who wanted to play down the misplaced notoriety of this work, turned to other media and practices.
24 Mignon Nixon, "Bad Enough Mother," *October* 71 (Winter 1995): 81.
25 Debord, 153.
26 These are therefore "remakes," not ready-mades, signifying a radical departure from Duchamp according to Frances Morris. See "Robert Gober," in *Rites of Passage - Art for the End of the Century*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate

Gallery Publications, 1995), 97.

27 Lynne Cooke, "Disputed Terrain," in *Robert Gober* exhibition catalogue (London and Liverpool: The Tate Gallery and Serpentine Gallery, 1993), 18.

28 Simon Watson, "Total Metal," *Arts Magazine* (February 1991), 80.

29 Richard Vine, "Pepon Osorio at 33 and Broadway and the Newark Museum," *ArtNews* (December 1995): 44.

30 Jana Sterbak, artist text, *The Impossible Self* exhibition catalogue (Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988), 70.

31 Frances Morris, "Jana Sterbak," in *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of the Century*, 123.

32 Debord, 26.

33 "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Shocken Books, 1968).

34 Terry Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 205.

35 Gregory Volk, "Tim Hawkinson: The Cutting Edge," *ArtNews* (November 1997): 43.

36 Mark Van de Walle, "Back to the Future - Charles Long and Stereolab," *Parkett* 48 (1996): 6-7.

37 Brooks Adams, "Report from New York," *Art in America* (June 1997): 34-41.

Video Art in the '90s

by Katherine Carl, Stewart Kendall, and Kirsten Swenson

Background

Video art is about technology. In the 1990s, as the status and course of video art continues to be formulated, the medium is intertwined with developments in its technology more profoundly than other more traditional media. A discussion of video art cannot be separated from a discussion of developments of the technologies employed by this art. This is not to say that tracing the history of video technology is the only way to build the history of video aesthetics. However, technical changes produce aesthetic change as a wider field of technological possibility is explored and as artists reject the cutting edge of technology, turning away from the vanguard and thereby exercising an aesthetic choice. In video art, editing techniques exemplify this phenomena.

In typical articulations of its history, video art began with the Sony Corporation's marketing of portable video equipment. The Sony Portapak was introduced in October of 1965. As the story goes Nam June Paik, now one of the progenitors of video art, was the first consumer of this equipment in America. After purchasing his Sony Portapak he made his first video that afternoon.

In its first ten years, video art grew in a radically unconfined way. Making video technology available to consumers on a wide scale opened possibilities for expression on many fronts. Accessible not only within the art world, video was also used by documentary makers and video collectives—groups of videographers who came together around the new technology to record mostly the political events of the day—attempting to combat the hegemonic discourse of nationalized television with their own grassroots brand of video expression. Importantly, though video collectives of this first form faded from view by the mid-seventies, this tendency toward activism within the multiple discourses of video use is clearly visible in the Whitney Biennials of the 1990s, in work such as the *Gulf Crisis TV Project*, shown in the 1997 Biennial and Not Channel Zero's *The Nation Erupts: Parts 1 and 2* (1992), shown in the 1993 Biennial. Further afield, the inclusion of George Holliday's *Videotape of the Beating of Rodney King* (1991) in the 1993 Biennial can be justified through reference to this history of grassroots activist documentary.

Video tapes themselves deteriorate and many original 1/2" tapes shot in the early 1970s have deteriorated so much that their viewability has been compromised. The ephemerality of this technology speaks to its nature as a temporal medium, but it also presents several questions for the historian of video art and the video artist alike. The task of preservation is an act of selection and part of creating a history of video art. Thus preservation is an

important task for non-profit video archives like Electronic Arts Intermix in New York or the Video Data Bank in Chicago.

Since the beginning, video offered itself as portable, relatively cheap, and therefore available to an ever expanding mass of potential videographers. By 1985 Sony introduced microchip-based video camcorders to a mass market. Portable video offered a flexibility that promised such utopian ideals as the democratization of expression on a mass scale. Now, in the late 1990s, the scale itself is unprecedented. We can assert with a fair amount of certainty that after March 3, 1991—the date of the beating of Rodney King and the incident's capture on video—the video image effectively replaced the still photograph or the audiotape as the bearer of truth in our culture. By 1992 these camcorders included digital effects as digital imaging techniques are the technology of our time.

From the technical side, George Mannes's 1992 article in the video column in *Film Comment* titled "Monkey See," presents several of the (then) newer developments in video technology like digital effects and higher image resolution qualities offered by new Super VHS and Hi8 video tape. Ultimately, he argues that the "unspoken philosophy behind all of [these developments] is that you should make your videos look like what you've seen at the movies or on TV...[that]...technical creativity is discouraged by the controls on the camcorder."[1] In general, video is becoming more and more like film while film, taking on the trappings of digital editing, incorporates video work into its larger aesthetic.

Even today some video artists make an aesthetic choice to work at a remove from the cutting edge of technology linking their work overtly to the portable "rough and ready" nature of most video art. Sadie Benning, for example, chose to shoot with a Fisher Price Pixel Vision camera, an early 90s video camera which provides only half the resolution available in even medium grade camcorders. This camera produced and marketed specifically for children. Benning chose to work with this camera both for the associations brought to the equipment through its marketing as a children's camera and for its technical deficiencies, for its *lack* of resolution, for the grittiness of its image quality. This poor image quality both lends a heightened sense of immediacy and refers to the image quality available to the founding generation of videographers.

Although such artists work against the mainstream, a larger group of artists in the 1990s have embraced the culture of mainstream media in their work. Considering the primacy of social activism in the history of video, this trend toward appropriation from the wider media without critical or ironic comment is alarming.

Video art has only been in existence for 32 years and has radically

forged its own tradition within art history only in the past ten years when video art comes into its own. Just as artists in the 1990s use video to create autobiographical and social documentary work that seeks to define the identity of the subject, video art itself is posing these very questions about its own identity.

A subset of the New York Film Festival, the New York Video Festival, founded in 1991, is a flagship event for video art in the 1990s. Importantly, the New York Video Festival doesn't distinguish between types of video; journalism, documentary, experimental video, and all other modes are all represented. The introduction to the 1997 festival highlights the notion that the meaning of video art is still hip, fresh, and importantly, still up for grabs.

> It's time again for an exciting exploration of a medium we never quite know where to place within the realm of moving images. But that's the allure of video. Artists can do anything with it—make frank documentaries about compelling subjects; manipulate still photos, old movies, TV, even surveillance footage-to devise an eclectic, sometimes erotic, and often digitally enhanced world. (Some of) the work presented this year uses the newest technology, while a wild bunch of giddy tapes look like Mom let the kids loose with the VCR again.[2]

As an overt attempt at democratization, more likely an attempt to *represent* the democratic nature of video in its grassroots origins—the festival is open to all submissions. Thus the festival frames video as a frontier still open to pioneering talent of the '90s avant-garde.

Film Magazines and the Discursive Limits of Coverage

1991 marks the year *Film Comment* inaugerated a monthly column devoted entirely to "video." Their coverage reflects a disparity in journals' approach to video. On alternate months this column might treat the video release of a few classic films by Hitchcock one month and the newest "arthouse" video by Bill Viola the next. *Cinéaste, Sight and Sound*, and *Cahiers du cinéma* all offer similar coverage though not on the scale of *Film Comment. American Cinematographer* devotes articles to the technical aspects of video art production, particularly as they relate to digital editing in film.

This indicates a certain fluidity between traditional notions of film, both arthouse and Hollywood, and what we more comfortably consider video art. With the advent of digital processing, digital editing, and image manipulation, all of which fully emerged only in the 1990s, the medium we traditionally consider or refer to as "film" occupies a technical space very close to that of video.

The sparse coverage of video art in art and film magazines falls more or less neatly into several discursive groups, each with their own buzzwords, projects, and prescribed projections defining their space. Coverage of technical developments in video appearing in journals like *Leonardo: Art and Technology* or *American Cinematographer* concerns itself with art or artists in only the most peripheral way. They are treated as examples of technology in action if they are mentioned at all. In these journals video is considered only in terms of *technology*.

A second type of coverage considers video strictly in terms of *activism*. Such coverage takes aesthetics more seriously than that focused on technology, but this definition of video art cannot serve a critical function. In these cases video is described as an artistic practice but is strictly in the service of a larger social cause. Criticism of the work focuses not on aesthetics or artistic decisions but on the social cause.

Video also serves as a vehicle for individual agency. The buzzwords of this genre include reference to "video diaries," to the artist's "uniquely individual perspective," to the "intimate" character of the work. Artists working in this area typically reference issues such as race, gender, and sexuality. In the 1990s some video artists have embraced the form of commercial media. Typical coverage of such work is often couched in hip terminology, emphasizing the artist's creative choice among cultural referents without mention of the artist's relationship to social critique. Social criticism has been reduced to little more than a pervasive dose of chronic irony: detachment remains cool in video art.

Video as technology: technology as experience

Video is about technology, and about space and time as well. In the early days of video art, the 1960s and 1970s, video was seen as technology that could be turned against itself—video images could be disrupted, manipulated to reveal their nature as illusion. This project was part of a larger anti-technological utopianism at the heart of the 1960s idealist youth culture; the older generation of artists typically participate in this project to some extent.

If a shift has occurred in this area of video production since that time, it has been a positive one. Where the earlier generation might have used video as a critique of culture and of communication, today's video artists use video for its own sake, commenting on the place of the television monitor in our homes and in our or using video technology to say something about the way we see the world. As the newness of the technology has worn off, artists have exploited the material of video less and less, more typically commenting on the discourse of video art or video culture. Video as technology is no longer in question: it is a tool among others.

Video artists think about the relationship with video as an interactive

relationship with a video space, the space around the monitor, our relationship with the monitor, with different sized monitors and also with the ambient glow of video colors as they wash over our streets and rooms. Tobias Rehberger's *The Missing Colors* (1997) shown at Friedrich Petzel in New York, speaks to the ambient quality of video lighting. This video installation employs five video projectors to wash three walls of a darkened space with soft ambient color. The work goes on for some 25 minutes, easing through the color spectrum before automatically repeating itself. This work is about space as drifting color lends distinct feeling to the space: the empty space takes on a drifting ambience or mood.

At the other end of the spectrum, Dara Birnbaum's *Tiananmen Square: Break in Transmissions* (1990/91) included in the 1992 Documenta uses multiple monitors of varied size to break up and disperse our view of any single narrative account of the events in Tiananmen Square. In light of this work each of our televisions can be viewed as connected by cables to a vast network of other individual monitors all of which are isolated in their own homes, all of which serve as conduits for information, none of which brings us closer together, none of which offers a unified picture, even the isolated monitors break down into soft pixels and empty space. The Guggenheim SoHo show of early summer 1997, "Rooms with a View: Environments for Video," offered four distinct comments on the relationship of video to our spaces and our lives: here the borders between installation art and interior design give way to the considerations outlined above. As discussed the trend is less critical than commentary.

Judith Barry is an artist who experiments with the innovations of video technology, and through her artworks directly addresses issues raised by the development of these technologies. Barry has been working since the 1970s and is well known for her large-scale projections in public spaces that often depict the mediation of the human body through technology. For example, in *Imagination, Dead Imagine* (1991) she depicts an androgynous human face being doused with repulsive-looking bodily fluids, only to be replaced with a clean face once again inundated by similar discolored viscous substances. The face, the part of the body associated with identity, is defiled not only by spattering it with a foreign substance, but in addition Barry has formed these faces through meshing together digitally pixelated images of a male and a female face.[3] The product of this technological process of fragmentation and reassembly is an erasure of the face's identity. Barry raises questions about the danger of technology encroaching on our personal identity more overtly in her piece executed with Brad Miskell for the "VideoSpaces" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. *Hard Cell* (1994) consists of a crate spewing out derelict computer parts and wires. Bits of scrambled messages emerging from the screens looks like an attempt at cyborg communication.[4]

The title replicates the mixing of computer hardware and human cells—building blocks of the human body. Certainly the title, *Hard Cell*, also alludes to the market impetus behind the explosion of this technology.

Bruce Nauman, considered one of the progenitors of the medium, confounds our fascination with our own image reflected on video screens in *Corridor Installation* from 1970. A video camera is placed at one end of a narrow corridor and the monitor at the other so that the viewer is unable to see the image of his/her face in the monitor as he/she is being recorded walking down the narrow corridor. The frustration of the audience's expectation of using the camera as a device for seeing makes one highly aware of the immediacy of their own body in space and of their presence in real time.

By incorporating the viewer inside the space and time of the artwork, video uniquely makes us aware that although art aspires to be something outside the everyday, representations are inextricably linked with lived experience. Though art is *not* lived experience, but merely a representation, we are nevertheless paradoxically in the spectacle. We are part of it, we create it.

Video as Media Critic

Some artists employ video—a medium often conflated with TV because it uses digital technology and is sometimes disseminated on television—to engage and critique the media culture spawned by television. This use of the technology for critique of the powers that be harks back to the activist tradition so important in the nascent stages of video art. In the 1990s, artists examine how we are taught or conditioned to consume images. The viewer is now very adept at picking up visual effects of pacing, camera angles, lighting, dress, and makeup that affect how we make distinctions between news, drama, documentary, and comedy. We are so adept at reading these cues that we sometimes are not really looking. These artists overtly wrestle with our society of the spectacle and the simulacrum with which we have come so accustomed.

Doug Hall writes, "the spectacle affirms, at whatever cost, cultural values through all the means available to it...These spectacles support cultural attitudes and serve to direct us as a society."[5] His work seeks to ironically undermine symbols and icons of power in contemporary culture, focusing on the pervasive influence of TV and the theatricality of political authority. Hall has been working politically in the medium since the beginning, and in 1991 he edited a compilation of essays entitled *Illuminating Video*. One of his more recent pieces, *The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described* (1987), comments on the passivity of the viewer. The video installation contains two distinct areas, creating distance between the audience and "an event." One side consists of a fenced-in sterile hi-tech area with stiff chairs in which bolts of electricity crackle on the video screen; the viewer's side is outfitted simply with a video screen showing obviously technically manipulated images of

nature. He attempts to demystify video's replication of (and its inability to replace) reality and to comment on the captivating, passifying effect that media has on the viewer.

Stan Douglas has similar concerns and uses video to instigate the viewer to be conscious of the act of looking. In *Evening* (1994) Douglas intersperses archival TV news clips from the late 60's with staged segments. Deliberately zeroing in on the time when media became a dominant force in mass culture, he comments on the necessity of interpretation of media journalism by comparing coverage of nine developing news stories on three stations. Depending on where the viewer situates himself/herself in the installation, the words become indistinct and simply turn into noise, shifting the focus of the news onto the persona of the wannabe-celebrity anchor delivering information that must not be too hard for the viewer to stomach.

In another work, Douglas again aims to remind us that our processing of visual information is not automatic, but that we are taught how to look and that we are constantly constructing contexts in order to make sense of the information we take in. *Hors-Champs* (1992), is a staged tape of a group of African-American musicians jamming. Filmed against a stark background, instead of in a smoky jazz club, Douglas removes the usual visual cues that would normally create an emotional context, thus revealing the seemingly automatic process of construction carried out by both artist and viewer. Two more recent works, *Der Sandmann* (1995), shown at Documenta X, and *Nu*tka** (1996) employ a non-linear narrative carried out through circular overlapping loops and double projection to similarly make us self-conscious of our conditioned—and usually uncritical—viewing patterns.

Instead of stripping away contextual signs, brothers Bruce and Norman Yonemoto (who like Doug Hall work on the west coast) gaudily use all the trappings of mass media for their commentary. Works like *Made in Hollywood* (1990), *Based on Romance* (1979), and *An Impotent Metaphor* (1979) use the visual language of soap opera, Hollywood melodrama, and television advertisements to construct "highly stylized deadpan fictions," as described in Electronic Arts Intermix's *Artist's Video: An International Guide*. They exploit the symbols with which media keeps alive our never-satiated desires and constructs cultural mythologies and memory. In the *Guide* the artists write, "only by understanding the contents and strategies of metatextual nonsense can we hope to put our postmodern spectacle into a new and constructive context."[7]

Japanese artist Mako Idemitsu collapses our intimate relationship with television even further in *HIDEO, It's me, Mama* (1985). The television is self-reflexively omnipresent in all the scenes. As Hideo's mother monitors her absent son's activities via his video image (hilariously, she even feeds him by putting his bowl in front of the set), our own strange relationship to the TV as an avenue of communication and mediation is exposed. Also Idemitsu fanta-

sizes about the chilling potential of television: the reversal of bringing information into the home and instead broadcasting our domestic scenes into the public sphere. This potential is ultimately titillating, maintaining tension between our fear of exposure and our desire to be the focus of a viewer's attention.

Artists like Julia Scher and Beth B overtly use this combination of fascination and threat of camera surveillance by affording the viewer the opportunity of seeing themselves under surveillance. In *Fibroid Reliquary Table* (1996) at the Athens Fine Art School, Scher set up a mock surveillance system and security guard. Beth B's *A Holy Experiment*, part of a special exhibition at Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia in 1995, projects a live-action surveillance tape of viewers being trapped for a few seconds in one of the penitentiary's disused cells.

Video as Agency

In the 1990s artists are continuing to use video as a tool to promote the notion that the "personal is political." When the medium of video became widely available in the 1970s it served the purposes of feminist and other activists in broadcasting personal experience to an audience. Feminists have employed video for the past two decades in projects to take back the male and media gaze. Current work not only continues the activist tradition but also refers back to past work in order to solidify a connection to the beginnings of video, thus writing a history. Such exhibitions as "Consumer Tools: Personal Visions" in 1991 and "Committed Visions" in 1992 at the Museum of Modern Art demonstrate the interest in writing this history.

There are primarily two ways in which video has been used as a vehicle for agency. Feminists initiated the practice of using video to give voice and presence to women's or people of color's unheard or excluded narratives. This often involves the artist using her own body as in early feminist performance. Hannah Wilke's performance videotapes are an interesting precursor to 1990s work in this vein. Although current video artists' work stems from her practice, she is not mentioned in the patrilineage. Her exclusion from this history, which is rooted in feminism is strangely contradictory. Current artists make a connection instead to Vito Acconci whose diaristic, autobiographical contemplations from the 1970s are seen to have spawned this second type of assertion of agency through video.

Of the major figures who have emerged in the 1990s, Cheryl Donegan is a particularly important and prolific videographer. An article in *frieze* says of her: "born in 1962, Donegan is part of the generation that entered adulthood to the rock'n'roll beat of MTV video-porn."[6] As Donegan herself puts it, "when I make my video I want it to be sexy, engaging, funny. MTV video uses sex by taking it away, presenting a pleasing and tempting image only to snatch it away

the moment it is identified. I want viewers to know what they are looking at."[7] Nonetheless Donegan's work largely maintains a gender-centered critique of sexual imagery and the high art discourse of male dominated creativity. In many of Donegan's videos, the artist performs some pseudo-sexual gesture or erotic display elaborating a playful critique of both porn imagery and high art gestural creativity.

At the same time that Nam June Paik was making his first videos in the mid-1960s with the Sony Portapak, the field that was most fully exploiting this new technology was the pornography industry. Many video artists who are active in the '90s pay homage to pornography as a precursor for their work. Nam June Paik acknowledges this influence, but many of these artsits are women. Cheryl Donegan's *Head*, Barbara Hammer's *Nitrate Kisses*, and Shu Lea Cheang's *Channels of Desire* self-consciously belong to this lineage.

Not only are artists attempting in some way to document the reality of their experience, but because of the low cost and ease of use, some artists are using video simply to record—and in some cases comment on—the banality of everyday life. Video shares this supposed veristic quality with photography, but because of its time-based nature, it appears to carry even more immediacy.

As Bruce Hainley wrote of videographer Alex Bag's work *Fall '95*, "She co-opts television's ability to program her by using video to fashion diferent programs of herself...Bag freebases TV, ridding it not of impurities or idiocies, since they're interesting, but reducing to pure affect its mix of music and home videos, talk shows, fashion clips, news and advertising."[8] The skeptic might suggest that such work fails to reach out, to explore and capture the real world around us through sheer acceptance of these prewritten forms.

The work of video artist Alix Lambert falls into this opportunity with a particular venom. In her work, Lambert "does not imitate the personality or styles of fictional or real characters, because she camouflages her identity and transforms her real life," according to a review in *Flash Art.*[9] Lambert's videos follow her through her training and business of being a tattoo artist, through several marriages to both men and women of varied sexual preference, and into the world of the rock and roll picture show with a female send up of Rob Reiner's famous send up of rock movies, *Spinal Tap*. The article in *Flash Art* links Lambert's work with that of Alex Bag and Alex Pearlstein, another videographer of similar ilk, arguing that all three "have specific agendas, each encompassing projects utilizing video and the representation of the 'self-portrait'—whether through a desire to be that other character or to destroy a particular image (social/feminine stereotypes), or merely to construct an imaginary character."[10]

Though thoroughly engaged in contemporary issues, these artists are preoccupied with making history. Again with little cost and relative ease they can write their own history in a way only the TV media and expensive films

used to. Now anyone can be a star and anyone can make history. Continuing in the tradition of the political activism of the 1970s, video today is still being employed as a tool for empowerment. However, the difficult question remains: can video truly be a vehicle for agency? Though the content may be lived experience and the medium may create a sense of casualness and immediacy, video images exist, of course, in the realm of representation, in the realm of spectacle, *not* of action.

Working in both video and film, Cheryl Dunye is an African-American lesbian artist whose work has been curated in the past two Whitney Biennials. Her video *The Potluck and the Passion* (1993), though staged, casually portrays an evening of girltalk, flirtation, and romantic anticipation. Her film *Watermelon Woman* (1996) was screened at the1997 Biennial and accompanied by the series of drawings of the same name. It is interesting to note this new curatorial integration of film and artwork on the gallery walls.

Performance, installation, and video artist Mona Hatoum was born in Beirut, Lebanon and now lives in London. In 1988 her video *Measures of Distance* received critical acclaim but in the last decade she has primarily focussed on installation. However in 1994 she exhibited a new video work, *Corps Etranger* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, which was also exhibited in a traveling retrospective of her work organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1997. In the ultimate expression of the artist's personal experience, this piece relays glimpses of parts of the interior of the artist's body cavity. The video installation recalls Carolee Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* performance from the 1970s in that it exteriorizes the interior of the artist's body. On some level these works evoke a repulsion caused by breaking down the natural boundary of the skin. Dan Cameron of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York writes in the exhibition catalogue, "the host-body is subtly transformed during the short duration of our encounter from a sensorial spectacle to a veiled threat against the viewer's own sense of corporeal autonomy."[11]

Kristin Lucas is a '90s feminist obsessed with her own subjectivity. One of the Brit Pack, her video work has been shown widely and was part of the "Young and Restless" exhibition of new video by women at the Museum of Modern Art in 1996. Lucas writes about her practice, "as a woman, I am creating a discourse within which to elucidate my relationship toward the electronic dream. I unravel the complexity of this relationship by setting up virtual interactions with mediated devices such as automated tellers, public access television, computer games, and the World Wide Web."[12] Her 1996 work *Cable Xcess* is a pirate public service announcement about the danger of exposure to electromagnetic fields. In the video the broadcast is portrayed as being transmitted through the artist's body—a metaphor for her fears of bodily contamination by the media. In *Watch Out for Invisible Ghosts* (1996) the artist is

portrayed inside a video game, battling "rival action-heroes and network sponsors." [13] Again this portrays her fear of being engulfed in a mediated world, stripping her of her identity and the capacity for agency. In the video Lucas has the ability to act only within this world of representations where no real action is possible, perhaps a mirror of our media-saturated society. Lucas' work draws from both the tradition of personal narrative and that of commentary on technology to delve into the threat and also the allure of media.

The work and career of a videogapher like Sadie Benning serve the debates around 1990s video art. Benning chose to shoot her most famous work, *It Wasn't Love* (1992), with a Fisher Price Pixel Vision video camera intended for children. The image quality commanded by this camera, miserable at best, evokes the work of Vito Acconci, as do Benning's shots and personalized subject matter. As a young lesbian from middle America, this video takes its viewer through the motions of any standard road movie, though the actor never left her room in the family home. Surprisingly, even the slightest wink of a critical eye reveals the training and sophistication behind this seemingly rough, intimate, and honest tale. Benning comes from an artistic background, as her parents were artists, and her vision is indeed educated. Her references to the history of video art, such as the work of Acconci, are indeed learned, conscious choices. Here sub-standard technology supplies the look of honesty, lending veracity to suffering. Video artists in the 1990s know what the real world looks like—they've seen pictures of it.

The collaborative work of Inigo Maglano-Ovalle speaks from another side of the issue of agency expressed through video art. Maglano-Ovalle's *TeleVecindario: A Street Level Video Project* (1993) in particular defines an area of video that sees technology as an opportunity to link people and communities together. This installation piece, accomplished with the aid of Sculpture Chicago, put video cameras in the hands of some fifty plus Latino teenagers from the Chicago neighborhood Maglano-Ovalle now calls home so that these teenagers might document their daily life. At this point, Maglano-Ovalle and his collaborators took their project to the streets with yards of cable and seventy five video monitors strung around the city block which housed the budding video makers for a one-day video block party during which the video makers could see themselves, their compatriots and their community mediated by the video lens and magnetic tape. In *Artforum* Judith Kirshner described the work as an "electronic portrait of a neighborhood." She notes that though "the images never completely added up [they] linked neighbors with each other and put a public face on a private experience." The lost reality of this world did not matter so much as the video mediation of that reality: "What was visualized on the videotapes was realized on and reflected back to the block."[14] This criticism misses a crucial point in its assessment of video as activism, as a vehicle for buiding community: where and what is the distinction between

life and life on video?

Between Autobiography and Artistic Fiction: Communication Problems
There are a number of contemporary video artists who are creatively commenting on the fears and difficulties of making human connection in our society filled with mediating technologies. These artists play on video's mythical ability to capture reality. They fabricate jarring situations that are all the more disturbing because the images expose a dark undercurrent of real life.

In 1996 Sam Taylor Wood, another young member of the "Brit Pack," made separate tapes of professional and amateur performers musing about life. These tapes were then projected simultaneously next to each other in *Pent Up* at Chisenhale Gallery in London. At first the viewer may be taken in by the illusion that the characters are addressing each other only to realize later that the images just continue their individual monologues. A reviewer stated that the piece "builds a mood of urban angst from reiterated banalities. Each character verbally asserts a specious independence while conveying, through the desperation of his or her appearance a need for acceptance and reassurance."[15]

Hirsch Perlman's *Conversations,* shown in the Museum of Modern Art's Projects space in winter of 1996-7, exposes the way actors alter, nuance, perform lines. The piece is about the viewer's interaction with art and attempts to make meaning from art. This is continually thwarted because although the actors are attempting a dialogue within the performance, they articulate only confusing cliches and non-sequitors. This creates an awkward humor and produces in the viewer a sense of foolishness and frustration.

Gillian Wearing's *10-16* (1997) also portrays frustrated attempts to assert subjectivity, this time through monologue. The viewer is presented with images of adult actors and actresses paired with a soundtrack of recordings of children, ages ten to sixteen, relating their thoughts and confessional stories. By combining two disparate soundtracks and images, Wearing uses video's capacity to collapse time—stirring up haunting feelings of the past that are revealed through glimpses of future destiny.

The dark, uncomfortable humor resulting from the characters' thwarted attempts to express themselves in these internally conflicted portraits recalls the work of Bruce Nauman. The numbingly repeated phrases of *Shit in Your Hat, Head on a Chair* (1990) and absurdist violence in such pieces as *Clown Torture* from the late 1980s and *Falls Pratfalls and Sleights of Hand* (1993) make the viewer viscerally aware of human foibles and fears associated with mastery over own bodies and use of language—our constant struggle to maintain our subjectivity.

Certainly another artist who bombards the viewer with these issues through video is Tony Oursler. In Oursler's 1996 exhibition at Metro Pictures faces were projected on stuffed dolls that yelled menacing phrases. "'Hey,

you!' shouted one male face to no one in particular from across the room. 'What are you looking at?' snapped an angry woman trapped under a mattress. 'I can't tell whether I'm alive or dead.' moaned a male face pickled like a laboratory specimen in a glass jar." Critic Holland Cotter goes on to say of Oursler's low-tech homemade pieces, they "are little morality tales of postmodern life, emblems of control and complacency. They turn the ubiquitous 'gaze' of recent art theory into a hapless set of Pavlovian tics. They suggest a culture of fragmentation."[16] Oursler's more recent pieces exhibited in the 1997 Whitney Biennial such as *Mansheshe* (1997) were again projected disembodied talking heads, but smooth oval spheres were used instead of his ragged dummies of the past. This alludes to an even more surreal bodily mutation, one mediated or perhaps meshed with technology.

Paul McCarthy has worked extensively in installation, performance, and video. In *Santa Claus* (1997), shown at the1997 Whitney Biennial, large projections on three walls of a room (that is primarily occupied by the remains of the set) depict an alternately playful, disgusting, and erotic scene of Santa's elves run amok in the workshop. Electronic Arts Intermix describes McCarthy's work succinctly in their distribution catalogue: "McCarthy engages in social critique through an often outrageous theatricality. Mining the psychological depths of the family and childhood—via kitsch and pop cultural detritus, the body and sexuality—McCarthy's works inhabit a violent landscape of dysfunction and trauma."[17] McCarthy often collaborates (as does Oursler and Bruce and Norman Yonemoto) with installation artist Mike Kelley. In 1995 McCarthy and Kelley re-staged Vito Acconci's classic video performances from the 1970s. By creating this video, McCarthy and Kelley not only pay homage, but align themselves stylistically and situate themselves within the lineage of Acconci.

The work of Stephanie Smith and Edward Stewart, a husband and wife artist team from Glasgow, Scotland, deals with the veiled sinister elements that infest domestic space and daily routine. Stewart and Smith act out staged violences against each other as a commentary on the fragile lines between love, sex, and death. For example, in *Mouth to Mouth* (1995) Stewart is immersed underwater in the bathtub for a long period of time while Smith looks on. Does he need air? Will she help him? The audience never finds out because in their typical style the events are repeated over and over with no climax or closure. Each artist's struggle for autonomy perversely reveals an inescapable dependency.

Video as Stories and Illusions

In addition to employing video to comment on the effect of technology in our world, to assert the artist's subjectivity, continue an artistic history, or make political statements, video has also been used in the 1990s as an artistic me-

dium like paint or clay. Some of these artists really work with formal qualities of the medium. Others use video to create spaces in time or collapse time to evoke memories or imaginary dreamlike settings. Using video to create fantasy is made all the more disconcerting because of the illusion of video's ability to capture "real life."

French filmmaker Chris Marker's video works are alternately poetic fantasy and eclectic documentary. In 1990 he taped a documentary in Berlin of the newly reunified German city; in 1993 he finished an eight-year video trilogy, including a piece about his cat's love of the music of Mompou. *Silent Movie* (1994-5) shown at the Museum of Modern Art's "Video Spaces: Eight Installations" demonstrates a nostalgia for the golden age of cinema. Marker comments on his relationship to the video medium, "as happy as I am with the freedom that video gives me, I can't help feeling nostalgic when I encounter a 16mm frame...that said, I wouldn't for anything in the world go back to 16mm shooting and editing. Such are the contradictions of the human soul."[18]

Steina is a technical pioneer and a major figure in the history of video. In the 1970s she collaborated with her husband Woody Vasulka to create an important body of work, but she is well-known for her solo work which layers the sounds and images of natural landscape to explore perception, space and modes of seeing. Her acclaimed solo piece shown in 1996 in "Mediascape" at the Guggenheim's SoHo branch displays her virtuousity in the use of video technology. Moving images of the primal forces of water and fire are projected on huge screens placed all around the room. The loud constant rushing and crackling sounds also pervade the space, creating an enveloping environment as the viewer walks amongst the screens.

Bill Viola, born in 1951, has been along with Nam June Paik, the other major figure in video art for the past 25 years. He was chosen to represent America in the 1995 Venice Biennale. As is clear from the substantial collection of his writings, notes, and interviews published in 1995, *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*, Viola fashions himself a mystic, exploring the sensual world for evidence of a God present only in the manifold density of his absence. Viola seeks to articulate liminal states of experience, the passages from sleep to consciousness, from awareness to unconsciousness, ultimately from presence to absence. He seeks to break down the limit traditionally held to separate our inner and outer experience of the world. In his work, vision is the key to the breakdown of this limit.

Toward this end, Viola has become a master of optical effects. For years in the 1970s, he set out to systematically explore the technological limitation of his video cameras. Viola's work extends into sound and video installations, and as recently as 1995 he has worked in film. Yet for all his technical mastery his work remains consistently and powerfully metaphysical, striving after a meaning that, still after all the years, may or may not be out there.

Given the metaphysical drive behind his work, Viola's position vis-à-vis technology is somewhat surprising. On first hearing of his general project one might presume him an opponent of technology and yet this is far from the case. Viola speaks and writes eloquently on the subject of this faith.

> The technologies of the optical image (photography, cinema, video) are machines for the close of the machine age. They are machines that produce content, that have as their product the direct imprints of the outside world. They give us the world back, and for this they are much more profound and mysterious than people realize. By nature they are instruments not primarily of vision, but of philosophy in an original ancient sense.[19]

> With each new step in the evolution of technology, we take a step closer to our ideal of higher and higher quality, which actually means creating things that look more and more like nature itself. Signal-to-noise ratio in sound is a technical term referring to the measure of the strength, and therefore the purity of the signal as it exists over the chaotic noise of a disorganized background. The implied goal of many of our efforts, including technological development, is the eradication of signal-to-noise ratio, which in the end is the ultimate transparent state where there is not perceived difference between simulation and the reality, between ourselves and the other.[20]

Viola takes technology to be the key that will finally put us in touch with our world, truly awaken us to our experience.

Doug Aitkin is a young artist who makes video and video installation with sound. An early work, *Dawn* (1993), was a six-minute video tape spliced together from four different made-for-TV teenage "angst" movies. Aitkin supports himself producing and directing music videos and television ads which have been praised in their own right. Aitkin often enough appropriates footage from these works for his more typically "artistic" work without, however, blurring the distinction between the two worlds.

His most celebrated work to date is *Diamond Sea* (1997), included in the 1997 Whitney Biennial. This work maps desert around one of the world's largest diamond mines. This work focuses on the physical terrain near a diamond mine revealing it as a sensual but empty space of ceaseless change. He claims he first came up with the idea for this film when he looked at a map for the region and saw a big blank spot. Several other videos by Aitkin articulate similar themes of constant motion, of ceaseless flux: *Moving* (1997) features the blinking lights of an airstrip while *Autumn* (1994) uses the desert of South California and the streets of L.A. toward the same end. Many of these works

make use of ambient sound to heighten the aura of displacement.

Mary Lucier did a number of performances in the 1970s and has continued to work in video into the '90s. Lucier's themes often come from the history of art. In past works she has reinvestigated 19th-century pastoral myths and captured the luminosity of the paintings of the Hudson River School. She describes her installations as "at once cinematic, sculptural, and theatrical."[21] In one of her recent works, *Last Rites (Positano)* (1995), Lucier reconstructs the narrative of her mother's youthful romance in Europe. As her mother relates the story on video, the image fades into rippling water and her voice becomes indistinct, floating through the dark gallery space punctuated by illuminated antique furniture and old family pictures. Lucier recreates the fleeting romance in a haunting dreamlike landscape.

Gary Hill investigates the construction of meaning through images, words, and the body in his well-known video work. A survey of his work curated in 1995 by Chris Bruce, then curator at the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington, marked an important moment for video art, solidifying its acceptance into the realm of fine art. Critic Michael Duncan has written that "Hill has a flair for spatial drama."[22] Hill's *Tall Ships* (1992), which made a splash at Documenta IX in 1992 and again in the 1993 Whitney Biennial, interacts with the space of the viewer unlike any other piece of video art. As viewers walk down a dark 90-foot corridor they activate video images of life-size figures. These "portraits" walk towards the viewers, sometimes stare at them, and then retreat back to their static position. *InasMuch as it is Always Already Taking Place* (1990) also manipulates images of the body through the time and space of video, in this case fragmenting the terrain of the body. Individual video monitors each project a looped image of a different part of the artist's body. The blue-tinted images accompanied by ambient sounds create a disorganized, unrecognizable body.

Hill also investigates the "problematic relation of language and experience"[23] and "the enigmatic gaps in meaning that occur in both language and visual images"[24] The sculptural work *I Believe It Is an Image in Light of the Other* (1991-92) is comprised of video images projected onto the pages of open books scattered on the floor. In *And Sat Down Beside Her* (1990), more books containing video images (in place of the expected words) are installed next to an empty table and chair. Nearby is a web of electrical wires springing from tiny monitors that project words (and some images). Hill has stated of his pieces, "I wanted to abuse the images, push them around, manipulate them with words."[25]

Hill's *Learning Curve* (1993) is constructed of mirror-image forms of extremely elongated classroom desks bracketed by video monitors. One of the writing surfaces gradually narrows and is met at the end with a video monitor that is only several inches wide while the other gradually widens and ends at a broad, panoramic monitor. Each of these monitors display a crashing surf., a

metaphor for an opportunity for ceaseless change and rejuvenation, depending on what you make of it. Perhaps the monitor displays Hill's daydreams of surfing when he was a student. At this desk the viewer does not provide his/her own mental vision, instead a monitor—technology, a TV—is programmed to provide the escape. *Learning Curve* is also about access to technology, referring to the disadvantages or advantages that result from whether technology is fuzzy and distant or clear and legible and whether it limits or broadens one's horizon.

Teiji Furuhashi from Kyoto, Japan, is a leading member of the Kyoto-based performance group Dumb Type which also works in video. As Barbara London writes in the catalogue to "Video Spaces: Eight Installations," Dumb Type's work is directly related to the tradition of Japanese dance. Using a vocabulary of movement similar to the avant-garde Ankoku Butoh style, Furuhashi and Dumb Type often expose the dark side of techno mania through the acerbic quality of their work. At times, the group works in the realm of bad taste, the banal, and the embarrassing, reminiscent of the wasteland between reality and illusion evoked in Noh theater. In Furuhashi's *Lovers* (1994), projections of many different ghostlike nude bodies walk around the perimeter of the gallery. Some of the figures appear at first to embrace, but their images jsut coldly walk through each other. Two overlapping soundtracks fill the room: one of ethereal, whispered utterances and the other of firm admonitions. Furuhashi is playing with the illusions and the disconnectedness of the video realm to comment on the difficulties of bridging personal distance in our world.[26]

Dalibor Martinis' video installation *Observatorium* was the Croatian entry at the Venice Biennale in 1997. Martinis has been working in video for 25 years and continues to be interested in the shifting boundaries between the material and the virtual world. In *Eclipse of the Moon*, the viewer can choose where to sit among the theater-like arrangement of chairs to watch the moon's image projected on the screen being eclipsed by a "real model" globe. *Coma* requires more direct intervention from the viewer. The video image of Martinis remains static until a button is pushed which sends the image of electrical currents through the artist, jolting him awake to begin reading a passage.

At the 1997 Whitney Biennial, Diana Thater projected footage of gorillas and their handlers that spanned from floor to ceiling; other mural-scale works include a parrot shown in slow-motion as it attempts to keep balanced on a stick held by a human hand, and *China*, six contiguous wall projections of people trying to train wolves. Also, last year Thater was commissioned for an environmental installation by the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, and for this she projected classic western landscapes—canyons and plateaus—onto the windows of the museum, supplanting the usual view of buildings and flat midwestern terrain. Thater's ongoing theme is the presentation of a simple nature/culture binary, and with the Walker installation, her aim was to articulate

a more complicated series of reversals between the primacy of nature and technology in our environment. She states, uncritically, that our primary way of associating natural environments is through the camera which makes the distant present, that natural environments (landscapes) are acculturated, i.e. *clichéd*, through the eye of the camera.

Marina Abramovic's highly metaphorical video installation/performance *Balkan Baroque* won the Golden Lion for Best Artist at the Venice Biennale in 1997. At this installation, several video images ran simultaneously in a large room: the central looped image of the artist reading a poem about rats and dancing a boisterous tango solo contrasted with flanking barely-moving silent portraits of her mother and father. During the performance Abramovic sits in the midst of a pile of large bones, gnawing at them. Born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, Abramovic evokes the quiet, plodding continuation of domestic life within a history that is permeated by suffocation and sporadically interrupted by bursts of violent action and attempts at personal release.

Matthew Barney has been celebrated for his fantastical decadent images of androgynous bodies. Barney's images always place himself in the starring role and incorporate characters from mythology, models accompanied by bizarre displays of altered anatomies on runways, and abundant quantities of lubricating goo and testosterone—all against the backdrop of dizzying, exotic, often underwater, locations. The image alone is of importance to Barney. There is no emotion or story to relate. Since the early '90's, Barney has been working on his *Cremaster* series of videos made exclusively for Barbara Gladstone Gallery. The climax of the series is the film *Cremaster 5*, which resembles a full-blown Hollywood flick. It does not really depict a mournful, romantic fairy tale, but rather shows what Barney and a big film crew can do with a lot of cash.

The Video Market and the Creation of History

Steve McQueen is consciously preoccupied with video art's current identity crisis. McQueen's work straddles the styles of documentary films and confessional videos. The exhibition materials for *Documenta X* describes Steve McQueen's work as being "at the intersection of two spaces and two movements of the gallery and film. The viewer is also invited to an exercise of mental mobility, a transformation of the self through experience."[27] If McQueen's work actually achieves this, it is because it puts us in a familiar space by calling upon some of our best developed habitudes of looking at TV or movies. McQueen's work is conceived specifically for exhibition galleries and spans the distance from floor to ceiling. His work highlights video's tendency to blur discipline boundaries. The gallery space becomes a movie-house, and the movie-house is turns into a museum.

In the 1990s, galleries have become a new venue for selling film in a

digital package. Canada's entry to the 1997 Venice Biennale was a film. Rodney Graham's *Vexation Island* was the first film to represent a country at the Biennale. Inclusion at the Biennale registers the film as fine art, and consequently in this arena the film was not marketed to a broad audience. Instead it was sold in an edition of six laser disks at $65,000 each. The inclusion of Viola's work at the same Biennale has had a profound effect on his prices. Barbara London points to Viola as an example of the surge of video prices in the late 1990s. The success of his Biennale appearance, among other things, caused the price of his installations to soar to around $185,000. Viola's spectacular success has legitimized the genre of video.

Artists have come up with an array of approaches to the question of video's status as an object. The way video is presented in the art market as an object, affects its value as a commodity, as well as its spot in art history. In conjunction with his film *Cremaster 5*, Matthew Barney's sculptural objects featured in the film were exhibited and sold by Barbara Gladstone gallery. Collectors could also buy the film on limited edition laser disk for several thousand dollars. At the other end of the marketing spectrum Rodney Graham compiled essays in a paperback titled *Island Thoughts* that 303 Gallery sold for $20 when *Vexation Island* was on view there. In each case, a more tangible, traditional object is being attached to the reproduceable video.

Museums also must confront the ambiguous object status of video. At the Museum of Modern Art the galleries are neatly partitioned by disciplines such as "Painting and Sculpture" arranged chronologically with separate viewing rooms off to the side for video. Film and Video curator Barbara London envisions the integration of video throughout the permant collection galleries by "putting an early Nam June next to an early Rauschenberg; Dan Graham with other Minimalists."[28] This would provide an art historical context for video art. Though as mentioned earlier, art history is actually only one of many roots of video. So this gesture would also change the look of the Museum of Modern Art, arguably the most important institution for the display of modern and contemporary art.

Notes

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5 Terry Ann Neff, ed., *Art at the Armory* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992), 81.

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9 Janine Gordon, "Alix Lambert,"*Flash Art* vol. 29, no. 187 (March-April 1996): 90.
10 Ibid.
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16 Holland Cotter, "Optic Nerve," *Art in America* vol. 88, no. 6 (June 1996): 95.
17 N.A., "Tony Oursler," *Artist's Video: An International Guide* (New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, 1991), n.p.
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Trends in Computer and Technological Art

by Kristen Brown and Nina Salvatore

Introduction

Humankind continues to increase its control of the material environment through the unceasing development of new instruments. These innovations have enabled people to change the quality of life forever. For the artist, the computer has allowed for new means to construct images as well as create devices that engage the viewer in increasingly imaginative ways. These new forms of art have become an alternative, rather than a replacement. They have expanded the scope of expression and will continue to do so as new technologies are added to the vocabulary of the artist. Methods and mediums have shifted radically.

As technologies and art evolve there seems to be two principal categories: the interactive and the visual. Stewart Kranz states, in *Science & Technology in the Arts,* that "in the decade of the sixties, a remarkable reorientation in the function, the means, and to a large extent, the goals of the artist became quite apparent. In a phrase, the emphasis shifted from the end to the means."[1] Kranz discusses the involvement of the spectator with the new art. This partnership is "devoted to the ideal that pleasure, whimsy, insight, and even disgust were ends in themselves."[2] The other affiliation between technology and art has been one of a pure science-art relationship. These works include images that have been produced with the aid of a computer, and primarily employ the computer as a design tool. According to Frank Popper in *Art of the Electronic Age,* "For these artists, science no longer acts as an authority but as a creative catalyst."[3] As the computer and technological art in the 1990s continue to intertwine, certain trends within these categories are distinct.

Computers and technology disassociate us from one another. While machines clearly give human independence, there is also a disruption of interdependence. Our desire to search for our identity is inspired by the computer program and the technology surrounding it. Michael Heim writes, in *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality,* "Being a 'body' constitutes the principle behind our separateness from one another and behind our personal presence...The second or stand-in body reveals only as much of ourselves as we mentally wish to reveal."[4] This trend surrounding the body and self and electronic identity will be called The Self Through Electronic Media.

In Cyberspace there seems to be a large number of visual artists that use the computer as an electronic extension of art. This trend, which will be called Technology Simply as a Tool, ranges from cyber galleries to integrating

alternative tools into a new aesthetic. The artists that use the computer as a design tool incorporate the technology in a variety of methods. Sometimes these artists use the computer as an autonomous creator by becoming "a creator or perhaps a simulator of memory, of reasoning and of the brain itself,"[5] according to Donald Michie and Rory Johnson.

"The rapid technologization of our lives, alters the relationships among people and nations, and between people and nature in both the ecological and the biological senses,"[6] says Frank Popper. In 1991 the 'Ars Electronica' exhibition "Out of Control" referred to this theme. Technoculture extends into every aspect of our lives. There is a trend to express this Technology and Its Impact on Our Lives by showing its social implications and the repercussions on everyday life. What are the moral and social consequences of the power of technology?

The trend to use Technology As A Tool For Interaction can be a part of the previous trends as well. The boundaries between the trends are as unclear as the boundaries in the styles and movements throughout art history. "Interactivity, however, is a big part of the Web art equation, often blurring the line between audience and author, artist and viewer," says Joseph Squier.[7] With interactivity, an expansion of communication possibilities develops between the art, the participant and the machine.

What is the significance of these trends and are they a part of the inescapability of spectacle that is a phenomena of the art of the 1990s? Is it possible to become visible without spectacularizing what you do? Exploring the trends and a few artists may help to answer these questions. Whatever the conclusion, however, there is no denying that the shift in how the world can be viewed through art has been changed and will continue to change as new technologies unfold.

The Self Through Electronic Media

Stating our identity in cyberspace is a world of representation. It frees the artist to allow the viewer to apperceive only what the artist reveals.There are no restrictions on our physical identity. Michael Heim reminds us that: "At the computer interface, the spirit migrates from the body to a world of total representation."[8] Through imagery and text, Joseph Squier takes the audience on a journey into his *Life With Father.* He says of Web art: "It's rawer, it's faster, it's about multiple layers of things happening simultaneously. It's an amalgam of still images, text, sound and moving images. It's a world in flux."[9] Squier reflects in his manifesto for *The Place* that it requires new constructions of bodily reality. "Never fail to recognize the difference between self and other"[10] reminds us that the cyberspace personality can be a separate 'other' or not.

Linda Dement uses cyberspace to redefine bodily space. Dement says: "Lesbians have stepped from the shadowy corner of ignominious de-

fect—the notion of a body terribly inverted, off-course, or sadly gone awry—to present a new body, one wonderfully attuned to a critical reassessment of fixed gender roles and stable subjectivity."[11] In a review of *Cyberflesh Girl Monster*, Holly Willis and Mikki Halpin say that Dement's work offers a sense of this body. "Dement violates the sanctity of the body's borders, merging and reconstructing bodies, defiling and disorganizing boundaries."[12] They go on to describe the piece as "autobiographical but in a depersonalized way." It is a shared experience about someone's 'self'. By clicking, the viewer can travel through experiences that engage the participant in an investigation into Dement's narcissism.

Orlan takes the investigation of self out of cyberspace and uses technology and performance to create a "psychological self portrait."[13] She changes her identity by choosing characteristics of other prominent figures of European femininity, and surgically alters her appearance and documents it on video. While only under a local anesthetic she reads philosophical literature, such as Guy Dubord's *Society of the Spectacle.* Is this the ultimate spectacular product of fake gratification or is this a statement about our society and the need for spectacle to engage the viewer? In either case, it is another way to present narcissism with the use of technology.

The investigation of Eros can go beyond subjective fantasy, however. Michael Heim states: "Eros motivates humans to see more and know more deeply. . . . The erotic drive, however, as Plato saw it, needs education to attain its fulfillment." Cyberspace can provide the cybernaut with ideas and information. The cyberspace experience can liberate us from 'the Cave' by giving the participant experience that is beyond the corporeal. "Bodily sex appears to be no more than an exchange of signal blips on the genetic corporeal network."[14] Laurie Anderson's *Puppet Motel* makes a reference to Plato and the story of the Cave. The cyberspace entity is the master of intelligence, and possesses a new electronic life, fueled by the desire for knowledge. Immersing oneself in cyberspace, whether artist or participant, is a distinctive factor of much of the technological art of the 90's. Possibly it is "the wish to leave one's outward frame behind and let the soul soar into the immaterial realms of the Other, fantasy and desire,"[15] says Erkki Huhtamo. "Losing oneself in a simulated world." Huhtamo writes that this may be a product of our dreams, beliefs, desires and fears. Laurie Anderson takes the viewer into the simulated world of fantasy. The fantasy is not the truth, however, and is a world of pure representation. This could perhaps mean the artist and the participant are spectacle in the interaction in *Puppet Motel*. The immersive experience is a vivid example of 'self' in cyberspace.

Significantly, computer art and technology in the 1990s involves both the user and the artist in an investigation of self, often through spectacular narcissism, and frequently through fantasy. Technology has few boundaries,

and as new science is discovered the investigation will continue.

Technology Simply As A Tool

For many artists the computer is simply a design tool. It can be used in personal fabrication or it can utilize the "capabilities analogous to human intellectual processes and may even be considered as a creative entity in its own right."[16] The computer can also be employed as a vehicle that enables artists and other users to transcend logistics. Communities of artists can form spanning great distances. Viewers can experience work they may not otherwise have been able to explore. "Now, point-and-click interfaces to the World Wide Web have made the Internet's vast global tapestry of resources available to anybody who can use Windows or Macintosh."[17] Travel anywhere is possible with a mouse and a computer.

"To some people the idea of the computer as an autonomous partner seems like an affront to human creativity. Yet the idea of not using a computer in the creative process will soon seem like an anachronism," says Holtzman.[18] The computer enables the artist to animate, create three dimensional imagery, manipulate photographs, paint, and explore a mathematical equation to create fractals, to name a few options. John Lasseter, the creator of *Toy Story,* uses "avars" (articulated variables) and the computer, to create characters with lifelike movements and expressions. A program, developed by Pixar Animation Studios, allows animators to construct three dimensional figures from scanned drawings. With the use of the avars the animator can move certain parts of the virtual models. "Every creature, every toy, accessory and every landscape in *Toy Story* exists solely in a virtual space. Absolutely everything."[19]

In the same way that Leonardo da Vinci changed mediums, artists today are using new mediums. The new mediums allow for a new approach to making art. When Joseph Squier defined Web art, he began by saying what it wasn't. "Working on the Web isn't like painting, which is more about texture. Nor is it like photography, which concentrates on detailed accurate, precise images. It is, in other words, a whole new kind of art—and one that artists are just beginning to understand, experiment with and embrace."[20] Most of Web art uses more than one media. It often includes photos as well as text, sound, and moving images. Squier adds: "The first thing I had to do when I started working on the Web was 'shed' my baggage as a photographer." He had to approach the Web as though it was a new medium with different characteristics.

Many pieces that incorporate sound and movement use special software; *Shockwave* is one example. This is usually available to download at the sites that require it. *Bodies INCorporated* by Victoria Vesna is one such site that allows the viewer to design their own cyber body. At the site, there is a choice of texture, gender, history, and preference of death if the participant

chooses to relinquish cyber life. Quicktime is another software program that enables the netuser to experience animation, and is also available for downloading. Artists like Troy Innocent use a net work (Pegasus Networks) to access their artwork. Innocent explores the language of iconic configuration and synthetic abstraction characteristic to the computer.

Even with photography, the computer has varied manifestations. Digital photography poses the question: what is real? Manipulated photography can make illusion explicit. Will we ever know what is real? Anthony Aziz and Sammy Cucher are photographers who use the computer to manipulate the traditional portrait, "depriving it of both its objective content and any personal character."[21] The art of photology uses "modern technology to denounce the preprogrammed reign of all pervasive computer control over the social body." Ray MacDonald is a photographer who uses the sculpture of David Mordini for his digital photography. He says: "Photography has been unleashed by computers...They have transformed tools that were limiting into an ever changing Art medium." Digital cameras are enabling artists to bypass the darkroom altogether and work directly on the computer creating voluminous types of images.

The computer also can be programmed to create its own art. In this case the machine becomes a simulator of the human brain. Systems such as geometry or mathematics can be used to actualize formulas that produce 'art.' Rene Ertzinger is an example of an artist using fractals to create art. Ertzinger has encountered thousands of different base formulas that have resulted in a large collection of work. Optical research, meteorological data, and multitudes of other scientific abstracts are used. The range is vast and continues to be revolutionary.

The netuser may also use the computer as a tool to travel. Using links to pass from one location to another, cyberspace has no walls. Every artist may have a gallery space of their own by setting up a Web site, or share a space with a community of artists. Art on the Net (art.net) is one virtual space where artists join together. In the statement of Purpose for Art on the Net, the Manifesto states that "some think of the site as a gallery, meeting place, or studio." It is an international site and the members are from around the world. A netuser can visit real galleries that have virtual space on the internet, as well. Dia Center for the Arts, based in New York City, has a space which posts information about exhibitions, lectures, press releases, and much more. They also initiated a Web project that polled 3000 Web visitors about their aesthetic preference in painting. The best part is that with a printer anything on the Web can be downloaded, printed and owned. Perhaps the computer is the most versatile tool an artist can possess.

Technology and Its Impact on our Lives

The immersion in technology that characterizes 'technological art' is both embraced and criticized. In 1991 a call for proposals was made by the Banff Centre for the Arts for projects that could be characterized by the technical parameters of real-time, three-dimensional works, with interactive graphics and sound. One of the points of the project was to generate a discourse—for the first time in a public forum—that could deal with the issues around virtual reality. The concern with the dematerialization of experience is but one of the impacts that technology, specifically Virtual Reality (VR), seems to have on our lives.[22] Other issues that are raised by and addressed in pieces that employ technology as a primary component are the impact of technology on world politics, the 'place' of old, debunked technologies, and the nature of communication.

In her piece, *World II*, VR (1993) Jenny Holzer immerses the viewer in a VR piece that depicts an aftermath of a war with villagers describing their experiences with disembodied voices.[23] She says of her work, "I think I am trying to make life seem real enough that one is moved to do something about the more atrocious things. By going really far afield into a completely fake world, maybe there's a chance to make things resonant somehow, or in this case, truly terrifying. To make it as bad as what is happening."[24] This piece illustrates the paradox in many technology-oriented works. Holzer's goal is to stimulate the viewer to action by offering a dematerialized experience of a real situation: the war in Bosnia. Holzer hopes to make a circle complete: she begins with the psychological suffering of war victims, then introduces technology to allow the viewer on the other side to the world to experience this suffering 'face to face', and in turn hopes that the viewer will be moved to act or at least to be psychologically affected by this experience. The dematerialization of experience as a tool to heighten awareness of our human physicality and psychology is a contemporary paradox introduced by the new technology of Virtual Reality. Certainly this alters our sense of self and the world around us in a way never before encountered. Does the viewer respond to the new reality as they do to traditional forms of art or reality itself? Is a new subjectivity and psychological space being created?

Technology not only raises issues of subjectivity, but also has the great tendency to influence interactions on a global scale. This issue is addressed in Ingo Gunther's *Im Bereich der West-Wind-Welt (In the Realm of the West-Wind-World)*, a Video Installation created in 1991.[25] The project consists of two blank flags on metal staffs, never touching, onto which images are projected. American fighter jets and outer space images blend with the American flag on one flag, and on the other the Hammer and Sickle, symbolizing Soviet Communism, appears in sequence with the face of Mikhail Gorbachev and images of Soviet propaganda. The flags' blankness and changing images suggest the fundamental inter-changeability of political programs and ideo-

logical values. Further, the over-laying, flickering images of Soviet propaganda and Western media strongly suggest how the media has played a crucial role in the development in easing of Soviet-American tensions.[26] Indeed, it is the global reach and international quality of the media that leads to Gunther's conclusion that perhaps political programs and ideological values are interchangeable. It is technology itself that allows for this kind of 'world correspondence' and thus a blurring of boundries between political paradigms.

In this discussion of technology and international communication, the question arises about the nature of the World Wide Web, as to whether it is truly a mechanism of 'world-wide' communication. This issue is addressed in Antonio Muntedas' piece *On Translation: The Internet Project* (1997), which is a Web Site[27] created for 'exhibition' in conjunction with Documenta X. The visitor to the Site can scroll across the image of a spiral and different languages will appear. As the user clicks on each language a phrase appears. The phrase, which has been translated into at least twenty languages states, "a certain means of research could raise the standard of international activity through the medium of communication. The particular problem which I have in mind is the inaccessibility to a rapid system of mutual education." Another 'hot-spot' below the spiral, is access to another repeatedly translated phrase, "communication systems provide the possibility of developing better understanding between people: in which language?" Muntadas is interested in the issue of communication on a global scale. If the problem of an English-language dominated Internet can be solved then a 'rapid system of mutual education' is possible. Muntadas's interest is in communication systems and the decentralization of power,[28] to enhance the Internet's primary property as a vast information resource by solving the problem of language translation no doubt would further impact our lives in broader ways than has already occurred.

A critical manifestation of technology used in art is that dematerialization on several levels occurs. We have already discussed the dematerialization of experience in the context of Holzers work, *World II,* but what about language itself? Muntadas considers communication over the internet and what kind of impact the Internet could have if an 'international' translation existed, but the work of Regina Frank looks more closely at the fundamental nature of language in the Internet setting. She calls her traveling long duration performance installation, *Hermes Mistress* (1994-6), "an ironic flirtation with the messenger of the Gods, Hermes."[29] Hermes we can easily imagine is (dis)embodied by the Internet itself. The Gods are anyone who is on-line. She selected sentences off of the Internet each morning and then re-materialized them as embroidery. She states that the work "documents a first investigation into the global exchange of information in virtual space...is an attempt to bridge high tech with traditional techniques of craft." She has "ideas about clothing

as empty vessels for inner developments, as carriers of thoughts or data, or clothing as time documents...ideas about the dress as an ad-dress, as a container for information or shelter to protect from information."[30] Frank provides a striking contrast between the disembodied information we are dealing with everyday via the Internet by selecting the methodical and very tactile craft of sewing to 'reembody' that information. The "flow of data and information, and layers and layers of text and information" of the Web juxtaposed to this very present, real-time activity of sewing makes it again obvious—for those of us who forget—how much of our daily activities are in some way dematerialized. Frank eloquently shows us just how profound the impacts are of our interactions on the Web, and how historically different this 'reality' is.

While we grapple with the impact of new technologies, already artists are scavenging 'old' technologies for their own purposes. Perry Hoberman's VR piece, *Bar Code Hotel* (1994), a project conducted at Banff Centre for the Arts in Banff, Canada, resurrects bar codes to a new life. Up to eight people at once could walk into the *Hotel*, pick any object that they want to 'be'—which was manifested as a virtual object on a surrounding screen—and scan bar codes with one's personal 'wand'. A 'scan' directed one's object to behave in certain ways such as changing it's metabolism, speed, or causing it to commit suicide. A crucial element of this work was that more than one person at a time could be 'in' the piece, so that different objects could interact with each other; indeed, the behavior of other objects would affect the behavior of one's own object—beyond what one had 'instructed' it to do. "Most of the virtual reality I have seen requires an endless wait on an interminable line, only to briefly enter a rudimentary world in which one is a solitary inhabitant with nothing to do."[31]

The impact of this work is many-fold. First, technology of bar code which was introduced in the early 70s is already considered old. "I am drawn to debased, hybrid technologies. Away from the distracting sheen of the state of the art, one can begin to investigate alternatives."[32] Because bar code is so familiar, it is integrated in to the work; because it does not have the 'sheen' of newer technologies it is not the bar code but the VR element that throws this work into the category of 'spectacle', along with most computer mediated work. Further characteristic of technology-oriented art, Hoberman encourages interaction between participants by way of their virtual objects. "I had something else in mind...something more social...more casual...and more disruptive."[33] This type of substitute for real-time, real person-to-person interaction which is also prevalent in commercially oriented technology is creating another kind of impact on everyday life. Does this 'substitute' further alienate people from one another? Does it satisfy the human need for interaction with community?

Technology as Tool for Interaction

Some artists are involved on a participatory or critical level with the issues of how technology impacts on our lives, and others focus how technology can be a tool for interaction. The nature of interactions range from between artist and viewer, viewers with each other, viewer with self, technology and nature, to the relationship between self and nature.

The works of Char Davies and Sheldon Brown respectively examine how technology can make us more aware of ourselves as physical beings within a physical world, and the direct interaction between nature and technology. Davies' Virtual Reality piece, *Osmose* (1996) at the Contemporary Museum of Art in Montreal, Canada, sets up a navigational interface based on breathing and balance. The participant is fitted with a harness, designed to capture motion and breathing—versus the usual power glove—and a head piece. The participant's movements and breathing trigger changes in images taken from the ocean and forest. She states, "The body rather than the head becomes the ground of all experience. Breath disturbs the boundries of inside and outside the body, and in the sense of meditation, brings us closer to the connectedness of all things and reaffirms the physical world and the interior space of self."[34] Virtual Reality is the medium that negotiates our awareness. "Osmose is trying to create an environment of being still and just being—allowing things to come to you—rather than always doing,getting, conquering and moving forward."[35] It appears antithetical that one of the most advanced technologies should be required to heighten our awareness of self and nature. The question arises: is it necessary? Is this use of technology an answer to one of the most basic existential pursuits: to know the self and one's place in the world?

Sheldon Brown illustrates a relationship between nature and technology in *Video Windchimes* (1994), a public art work in San Francisco and San Diego, California. Video projectors hang suspended above a concrete walkway, and, as the wind moves the projectors, it triggers a change in signal. The effect is that as images are projected on the ground, they constantly change as the wind shifts the above-suspended projectors. Here is a simple interaction between technology and nature which suggests the fragility of the instruments of technology, both the physical pieces and immaterial signals, when exposed to the elements. Not only does technology affect our interactions with self, each other, and natural processes in life, such as in the case of genetic engineering, but as Brown insists, there is a more subtle and oft ignored influence of Nature on technology itself.

While Char Davies' *Osmose* asks technology to be a mediator of self awareness, and Sheldon Brown suggests an interaction between nature and technology beyond the self, Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Alien Staff* (1993) and *The Mouthpiece* (1995), use technology to bring people who are face to face back

in communication with each other. Both works are portable video tools that are custom designed, created with the intention of helping immigrants to tell their stories. *Alien Staff* is a large walking stick with a miniature video screen inset on the top. The 'xenoscope' or video screen, has talking head footage of the person who carries the piece around with them telling their tales as an immigrant. The 'xenolog', or staff, is a hollow cylinder containing personal papers or objects from the user's life. The user walks with his or her device in his or her adopted city and engages people in conversation, and thus the staff acts as a vehicle to induce dialogue between people—a variation of the 'conversation piece.' *The Mouthpiece* functions in a similar way, as the immigrant wears a liquid crystal monitor over his or her mouth, which shows footage of the wearer's mouth telling his or her story. Wodiczko calls these works a "vehicle for initiating dialogue between people who otherwise might never converse as equals, if at all."[36] The problem to be resolved is the isolation and rejection of immigrants due to prejudices and language barriers, which Wodiczko himself has suffered as a Polish immigrant. "For the first time these people become confident; they speak, they construct some sort of artifice for their story....then there is the performance. To see that one could approach anyone, it means they are worth something. It's a healthy kind of narcissism."[37] The artist's confidence in the use of technology as a device to help overcome prejudices, isolation, and foster communication is evident. Will it have any greater impact than other attempts to ease this kind of tension in our society? Will the general public who encounters users of *Alien Staff* and *The Mouthpiece* be able to look past the technology to the greater issue or, indeed, will the use of video in this context be the engaging element? Will the viewer be forever changed in some way, his or her awareness heightened having seen past difference to the other that is so similar to self?

Another technique of giving voice to the repressed is Antonio Muntadas' on-line project *The File Room.*[38] Begun in 1994, the work in an interactive archive that lists episodes of censorship from ancient Greece to the present. As one of the first art works on the World Wide Web, it debuted with 450 entries, and has over 200 visitors at the site everyday. The work brings up the issues of viewer-as-artist, as visitors to the site are asked to document new cases of censorship, and thus become an integral part of the work. Muntadas' "utopian" intention is a restoration of all images and texts that have been censored.[39] He says, "the project is...a la Joseph Beuys, a 'social sculpture' that gains its meaning through a group effort of individuals, organizations and institutions. If the File Room remains passive then it is not working."[40] Clearly Muntadas is exploiting the Internet as a vast information resource, to explore his interest in communication systems and the decentralization of power.[41] The site allows interaction between users, and for repressed individuals to at last express themselves. Only a medium such as the Internet can make this

kind of work possible, and to have the far reaching impact that it does.

Jenny Holzer's web site titled *Please Change Beliefs* (1995),[42] is another forum for public expression and interaction. Like her graffiti-altered posters in SoHo in the late 70s, Holzer has created a site where the user can alter existing phrases and submit them to the site. What results is a list of the original and altered phrases that the user can browse through. Everyone can express his or her thoughts, and all thoughts are available to everyone to read. The users are protected by their anonymity and yet part of a community of Web users. This kind of work especially promises to dismantle, at least in part, hierarchies of power long embedded in the art world's gallery and museum system. No one monitors the site, there is no curator, and it exists for everyone and no one. The work is characteristic of many interactive web sites in that it offers a unique kind of interaction between people all over the world. Once again technology steps in as mediator of communication.

The questions raised by the technological in art are many-fold. Does the spectacle of technology disassociate us from one another? Does the 'sheen' of the new computer-mediated medium cancel any sincere quest by artists for answers to the most basic of existential questions? And, at a practical level, how does one navigate the vastness of the Internet without guidance? How does one choose one web site over another, without the guiding hand of the 'the establishment' that normally stamps approval on this expressionist or that post-modern movement?

The critical nature of technology, which, by its newness, is spectacle, is that it does raise questions. The pursuit of new technology is our society's reaction to the search for truth and the higher self. However, ironically, it is the most basic issues of human existence that are typically dealt with in these works, those of alienation, loneliness, community, interaction and communication. Perhaps technology itself is of little importance but it is the very fact of 'something new' that causes society and the individual to be self-analytical. We suggest that technology will not be 'the answer,' nor is it, by its spectacular nature, 'the problem.' It is but one catalyst among many to act as a mirror to society—yet another medium by which artists express themselves be it profoundly or profanely. As with all mediums, the works will remain if the sincerity of the artist stands the test of time. It remains the responsibility of the artist to be honest, and for the viewer to make his or her own judgment—for that is the only judgment to live by.

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Art Criticism

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Art Criticism is published by:
Department of Art
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

Prospective contributors are asked to send abstracts. However, if a manuscript is submitted, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope for its return. Manuscripts accepted for publication must be submitted on a PC computer disk. Please contact the managing editor for a style sheet. Subscriptions are $20 per volume (two issues) for institutions and $15 per volume for individuals in the continental United States ($20 outside the continental U.S.). Back issues are available upon request.

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4. a review, article, etc. expressing such judgment and evaluation.
5. the detailed investigation of literary documents to discover their origin, history, or original form: usually called *textual criticism*.

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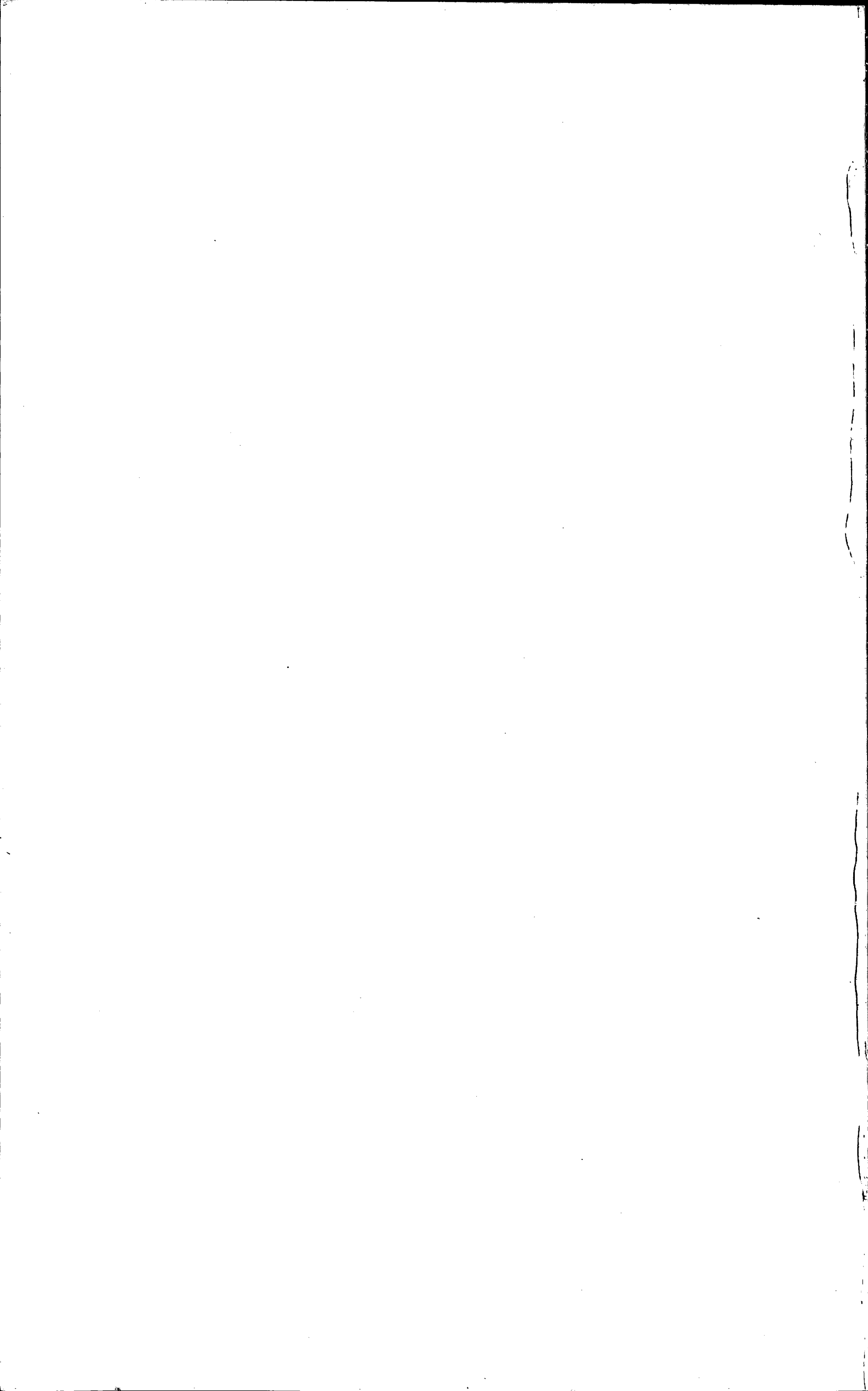

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