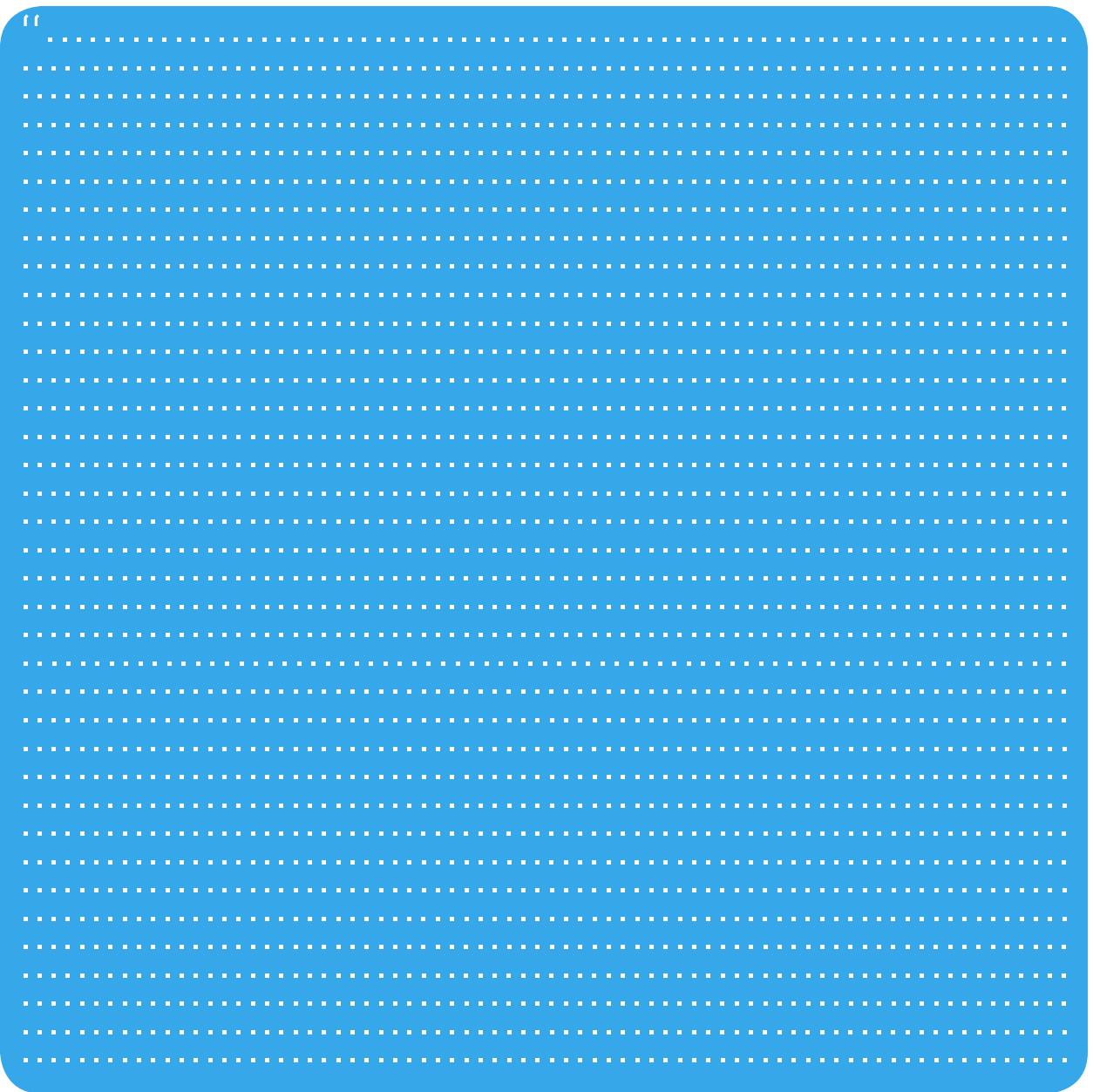


A photograph of a woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light-colored top, lying on her stomach on a grassy hill. In the background, there is a long, weathered wooden fence with vertical slats and a central gate. The sky is overcast.

Pots &
quotes

No. 1



“.....”

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Mega-Life in the Midwest



Essay by Hesse McGraw & Photos by Mike Sinclair

I was brought up in a large suburb of Kansas City. Although the city does not have a large population, it encompasses an enormous land area, which makes it a perfect model for that derided thing called sprawl. I attended a huge high school and later a gigantic university. All of this happened in Kansas, a land of many large things, some of them the world's largest — absurd gigantors such as the largest cow hairball, ball of twine, hand-dug well, and the Big Brutus electric shovel — most of which gather along the roadside to form pitifully epic attractions.

At a certain point in my life, I began to cherish small things and nuanced ideas — walkable streets, mom-and-pop stores, and notepads I could keep in my pocket. One exception to my preference for the petite was the bleary oasis of Kansan nothingness that languidly abuts the highways in between our monuments to bigness. Particularly, I fell in love with the stretch of Wyandotte County farmland that lay along I-70 between Lawrence, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri. This expanse enabled me to feel appropriately human-scaled and reminded me of my place in the world. So I was dismayed to learn in the late 90s that the International Speedway Corporation was planning to build an 80,000+ seat NASCAR racetrack, paired with a 400-acre retail concept called Village West, and all of it would be planted along my beloved stretch of western Wyandotte County farmland. Most curious about their choice of this site, however, was its stifling nowhereness — it's 15 miles outside of Kansas City, at the intersection of two freeways. Much has changed in the last five years.

As the area had been entirely ignored by retail developers for 25 years, the Wyandotte County Unified Government was driven to insidious means to make the speedway happen. The 1,200 acres needed for the track were secured by condemning 150 homes through eminent domain and the additional acreage needed for Village West was purchased through the illegal use of "STAR Bond" tax incentives. As County Administrator Dennis Hays recalls, "This was actually assembling land for economic development purposes for for-profit companies, which was particularly controversial and caused a great deal of anxiety among the property owners" — particularly as many of the property owners were operating multi-generational family farms. Despite the sham financing, Village West and the Kansas Speedway quickly became Kansas' most fantastic roadside attraction. Within six months of opening, Village West's anchor tenant, Cabela's, was officially Kansas' number one tourist attraction.

Calling itself the "World's Foremost Outfitter," Cabela's began in 1961 as a mail-order hunting/fishing/outdoor catalog. Although it's now shipping more than 100 million catalogues to 120 countries, tourists are flocking from four states to visit the store. As I toured the store recently, my friendly, camoed guide rattled statistics: 180,000 products in 189,000 square feet; The Mule Deer Country Museum contains the world's largest collection of life-size trophy mule deer and houses 12 of the top 14 ever killed; the 65,000 gallon walk-through aquarium contains nearly all species indigenous to Kansas and Missouri, including two truly shocking and lugubrious 80-pound blue catfish (the world-record 125-pound blue cat died recently in transit to Cabela's). Yet despite the 30,000 square feet devoid of retail, it's futile to just look at the fish, as you have to walk past 12,000 fishing rods to enter the aquarium.

The centerpiece of Cabela's is a 36-foot "mountain" that features multiple habitats and compresses distance and time like no other space on Earth. Directly adjacent to the Kansan prairie dog mound, you enter an African diorama via the threshold of a flying baboon to encounter the orgiastic freeze-frame of a lioness chomping the neck of a zebra as the striped equine kicks another lion in the face! Also amidst the feverish mix is a 16-foot crocodile attacking a blue wildebeest. As I chuckled at the sensationalism of the scene, our guide said, "Cabela's aims to bring the outdoors indoor." It does something like that, but it also welcomes Hollywood camp, corny Ozark tableaux, dead-serious special effects, riotous surrealism and creates psychological reversals. There is no way to get around the artificiality of Cabela's "outdoors." Within the store, there are varying degrees of natural and artificial, and both are made of fiberglass, steel and concrete. As an animatronic rhinoceros stared straight at me and said, "Look at all the wonderful items they're buying, Lion, the management is going to be so happy," I gave into Cabela's logic and figured that robot rhino was probably more real than the concrete tree next to him. Yet Cabela's cares little about these fussy distinctions, it just cares to redirect your experience of the "outdoors." Cabela's says, "Back to nature, but bring a lot of stuff with you."

As the tour concluded, my seemingly levelheaded guide proclaimed, "You really got to love a store where you can walk around with a gun and nobody thinks twice of it." You might prefer to cast that sentiment aside as an outsider's delusion, yet it's exactly that brand of hyper-normal permissiveness that draws crowds and re-colors nature. It is astounding that a retail chain could veer into so many other aspects of cultural life — entertainment, education, natural history, recreation, leisure, civic duty — and achieve these functions not through the quality of its merchandise, but for its sheer hubris, the extravagance of its presentation and perhaps most importantly, its size. It achieves multiple functions due to its extreme accessibility. There is no trendiness to the scene here. This is pure classicism — conservative Americana reviving Manifest Destiny with an all-embracing fervor. There is





space for everyone in the new America and it begins in Kansas, where you might learn something, even if you've just come to buy bullets. Conversely, if you're part of a kindergarten tour brought here to learn something, you're bound to bring your daddy back to buy some bullets.

Cabela's isn't the largest operation at Village West, but it sets the tone. As our tour continued, from the Great Wolf Lodge (family hotel and indoor water park) to the Speedway (mind-numbingly massive) to Chateau Avalon (gaudily themed love nests), to the Warren Buffet-owned Nebraska Furniture Mart (the biggest of the big boxes), themes recurred and scale increased. At Great Wolfe Lodge, Wyandotte County's enthusiastic Director of Tourism, Bridgette Jobe, explained the concepts driving the development. "Everything we're doing is huge, big. Everything is oversized... We call it extreme shopping!" She further described the "Northwoods" aesthetic that Cabela's initiated and most of the hotels and restaurants have followed, which manifests itself in massive, overly lacquered, rough-hewn wooden furniture with knurled handrails, rustic end tables, lots of big carved heads and rope made to look like it's holding the furniture together. There are ruins left from the collision of rural and suburban typologies everywhere. This new hybrid lacks the grit of rural life, but embraces the excess of McMansioned suburbia. The efficiency and modesty of the family farm has been replaced by tasteful decadence — smorgasbord restaurants are disguised as tree houses and the sex hotel is dressed up as The Bachelorette's manse.

Nebraska Furniture Mart, in particular, is of sense-depriving scale. Jobe raved about the selection — "there is just so much here, and there is something for everyone" — as a security officer rolled past on a Segway. Then she immediately negated the statement by saying, "I came shopping here and it was overwhelming, we couldn't decide. Sometimes just having two or three choices makes it so much easier." Rather than try to

make sense of that contradiction, I sighed and plopped into the largest La-Z-Boy I could find, at the center of a football field of other recliners. The 55-inch wide Snuggler Recliner reassuringly folded in around my body and I recalled the beautiful, vacuous landscape that Village West and the Speedway replaced. There are still similar landscapes to be found — somewhere in the 712,000 square feet of Nebraska Furniture Mart or under the 1,000 gallon tipping bucket in the water park at Great Wolfe Lodge — where it is possible to find respite from an over-scaled world.

Certainly, Village West isn't just about the allure of extreme shopping, it's about the calculated idea of a big life. It allows the normal American to achieve, or at least get away to, the Mega-Life. But Mega-culture is a demanding beast. It offers no alternatives; it gobbles up the countryside and shrivels the resistant. It thrives on megalomaniacs and dumb decadence: Monster Thickburgers, Donald Trump, George Bush, the Hummer 2, Richard Serra and the Gagosian ilk are its stars. These things get better with age. This is a way of living that is not entirely mediated by shopping, nor eased by leisure — it is a way of living that is wholly augmented by huge things. It doesn't matter whether these things are enormous couches, big laughs, or massive hard-ons, what matters is that you are in the middle of nowhere, the world is at your feet and suddenly it feels much bigger because you've been welcomed into a life much, much larger than you've ever dreamed.

BASEKAMP: The Philadelphia Experiment

A dialogue with Scott Rigby & Marc Fischer

The city of Philadelphia has a rich history of interesting collaborations. Our Founding fathers collaborated on the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. Sun Ra made Philly a longtime base for his Arkestra – an intergalactic collaborative team that included not just a large group of musicians but other solar systems! The 1985 bombing and attack on the radical group MOVE's house that caused the death of eleven of its members was a massively ambitious collaboration between the city's Mayor, Managing Director, Police and Fire Commissioners, among other local and national political offices. In the heroic narratives of the Philly-based Rocky movies, a great deal of screen-time is devoted to Rocky's relationship with his trainer, his coach, and his wife who, together, help motivate and guide his rise to the top [of the Art museum steps]. Hell, even some of Philly's more singular criminals have shown a collaborative spirit - like Joseph Kallinger who went on a rampage killing one of his children with the help of his other son. So if ever there was a place to hold exhibitions and discussions about collaboration, it must be Philadelphia - the City of Brotherly Love.

Founded in Philadelphia in 1998, BASEKAMP describes itself as "a non-commercial studio and exhibition space whose primary focus is to participate in the creation, facilitation and promotion of large scale collaborative projects by contemporary artists."

This past March 2004, a group that I am member of - Temporary Services, was invited to present a collaborative project at BASEKAMP. During the installation period Scott and I talked for hours. With the hope of avoiding some of the countless tangents we typically embark on, we tried to focus this discussion on BASEKAMP's history of involvement with collaborative work. Some of our best discussions happened in rental trucks and diners where we were without a tape recorder. When we finally brought one along, a technical fuck up rendered Side A nonexistent. So we considered those discussions a dress rehearsal and blasted through some more exchanges via email.

Marc: BASEKAMP started as a collaborative group in 1998 and that arrangement lasted for four years. More recently, you have retained the same physical space on 723 Chestnut Street, but BASEKAMP is now a non-commercial gallery space that presents artists working in collaboration. I know this is a big request but could you quickly run through the changes that have happened in the BASEKAMP structure and bring readers up to speed on how you see BASEKAMP operating today?

Scott: BASEKAMP started as a few artists deciding to rent a warehouse in Philadelphia with the intent to open a neutral autonomous zone for possible collaboration between any or all of us, and other artists. The point of retaining this location in the first place was so we could have enough space to make the kind of work we wanted to. What that turned out to be was large-scale, often architectural, interactive, demanding, and brutal collaborative projects that took a long time to develop, and which we weren't sure anyone else would want to host. So we did what many startups do and created the conditions to support these projects ourselves.

After the first year of doing this kind of work in our own space we began to receive invitations by other institutions that wanted to host BASEKAMP projects. This occupied a huge chunk of our time for the next three years as we accepted most of these offers to produce collaborative projects in other venues. During this time about 20 artists in total worked as part of the BASEKAMP group. After 4 years, the people who continued to work on almost every project became the core group, so we decided to formalize our group into a specific set of four people. Oddly, almost immediately after this relationship condensation, the group fractured as the four of us stopped working productively together. Effectively the BASEKAMP team turned down further invitations to work together.

During that three-year period when we stopped showing in our own space, the BASEKAMP space itself was free. Since it had already emerged as a recognized place for collaborative projects, we began to invite other groups to do similar work while we were occupied elsewhere. Actually that is misleading because in fact the BASEKAMP space occupied at least as much of my productive activity as the off-site work did. We continued to call our space BASEKAMP too, which caused much confusion among people trying to figure out who we were and what we did. In fact, I don't even know why we referred to our group and the space by the same name.

The only reason I can think of is that BASEKAMP as a structure to facilitate collaboration was and still is an idea with a lot of flexibility. Not a specific method, but a kind of experiment. Though it has a consistent trajectory - along with a growing history of related generative activity, BASEKAMP started out as a project by a group of artists. Even in the program's current form as an ongoing platform for collaborative work it seems to retain some sensibilities as an artists project rather than a gallery or another kind of institution. But unlike a straightforward artists project, it has taken on a life of its own, having grown more or less independent of the specific individuals who set it in motion.

Marc: Your voice has been most dominant within BASEKAMP of late but I know you are anxious to see that emphasis change. You have been creating new functions lately – like creating web-space for forums that other

groups with geographically scattered members like Dynamite are using to work through their ideas. More people have joined BASEKAMP as an organization in recent months. There are three other people that are active in various ways – Leigh Stephens, Jennifer Goettner, and Yuka Yokoyama. It seems like the potential is there for BASEKAMP to become a group that realizes its own collaborative projects again. Is that something you could see happening?

Scott: Yes that is happening. You know, for a few years I had been basically running the exhibition program myself, which was kind of weird since BASEKAMP is a collaborative space and all. Now, over the past year, there is a retrofitted group of us who do what needs to be done in order to maintain the BASEKAMP program. Because we have to meet all the time, and come up with creative solutions for running the exhibition space, we have had the opportunity to come up with other creative solutions that don't necessarily only apply to the BASEKAMP space. This has led to us starting to work together on new collaboratively generated projects, mostly independent of the groups and exhibitions showing here, but sometimes involving members of those groups. People have heard about this re-generation of BASEKAMP as a group of people who run the space and work together on their own collaborative projects again, and have been inviting us to participate in exhibitions now outside of Philadelphia. And so it seems we are up and running again but in an updated way.

Marc: When I was in Philly you shared some notes you prepared for a lecture. In one part you wrote: "Collaboration messes up standard ways of art-making and interpretation. It complicates the relationships between the artist and product, the artist and audiences, and makes the artist as a product a much more complicated, less predictable and a difficult pill to swallow." I would have to agree with all of this, though I would have avoiding terming the work that results a 'product'. To me, collaboration is not just something I want the audience to have to sort out, but a very appealing way to take a vacation from focusing too much on my own obsessions – it's a way to combine my own skill areas and personal interests with those of others'. And hopefully we can create new things that gather together the best aspects of what each participant can bring to the project or situation.

Scott: Artists' work doesn't need to be thought of as a product, but it's usually treated and used in this way. The notion of an artist's work or the artist themselves as a product can become more complicated and seems to be questioned more often when the result is arrived at through a collaborative process, rather than through the supposed uniqueness of a single gifted individual. This just tends to happen when an artwork's authorship, attribution, biographical references etc, can no longer be attached to a single person. Collaborative groups on the other hand tend to problematize the attempt to place their artwork within historic meta-narratives such as the myth of the heroic genius artist, making seminal, linear,

progressive, subjective, coherent oeuvres which is still largely how people are taught to think, talk and write about art. There's more of a history of individually packaged artists than art groups. Individual artists work on the whole is more dependable to the collector, dealer, curator or anyone else who risks some form of investment in the artist as a requirement for their notability within the field. Taking that investment risk requires trust in the predictability of an artist's results, and groups of people are often more difficult to manage and depend on than individuals. More recently though there is a quickly accumulating history of well-packaged collaboration too. When given enough incentives more artist groups are proving to be very good at maintaining an identifiable, linear, progressive oeuvre to make a case for continued support of their practice. The fact that an artwork was generated collaboratively does not in itself make it challenging or interesting.

Still, certain artist groups are less predictable in their approach, saying fuck-all to the incentives offered by commercial artworld structures. They thwart expectations in a variety of ways – from messing with their own group structure, and exchanging members, to producing large, temporary, and often unsaleable projects. The resulting work often reflects their more experimental approach.

Right, I agree that collaboration can have more importance for the artists involved, where social structures are created and real relationships are developed, than for an audience who see the

collaborative process as one of many factors in interpreting the work. Questioning standard ways of looking at art and challenging an audience are important, but don't have to be the end goal of collaborative work.

Instead it's imagining what other narratives are arising in the absence of the dominant ones, allowing what we don't know to come out of this mess, that is really interesting to me. For example, the aesthetics of generosity & aggressive non-competitiveness are emerging as some of the more recent narratives.

Marc: It's fucked up that ideas like generosity – a word that gets thrown around a lot in the art world, can be called a recent narrative. As though it's a sudden innovation that people shouldn't treat each other like shit, but should instead try to be ethical and equitable. We've come a long way baby! But I understand what you are saying.

We are also seeing some collectives right now who operate more like hobby clubs where members bounce ideas off each other, share art supplies and craft tips, make work that is otherwise completely individual, and then exhibit the work in galleries under the rubric of a collective name – which often feels more like a marketing ploy. The effect becomes a density of stylistically similar work that looks more ambitious together than what any one of these artists could do on their own, but ultimately doesn't do much to suggest new social configurations that could mean something outside of a tight club.

It's also worthwhile to mention that lots of work by individual artists is greatly impacted by the input of uncredited assistants and other people who help with fabrication. These helpers can have a huge impact on the finished objects we see. Galleries are usually pretty secretive about which parts of a person's work are done by assistants or the exact relationships between artists and their fabricators. BASEKAMP did a project about this right?

Scott: That's a good point about individual work often being an unacknowledged collaborative process. In the first year of participating in our own collaborative work at our space, we organized an exhibition that looked more closely at uncredited assistants and the collective labor that goes into fabrication and realization of most single artists' more ambitious work. The exhibition was called *Stunt Double* because, rather than doing a straight-up exposé of the often opaque mechanisms behind a single artists finished product, our tactic for focusing on this labor was to remake a duplicate (at BASEKAMP) of an entire exhibition of Sol LeWitt's work that was showing concurrently at the local ICA. The same fabricators that made LeWitt's ICA work also remade the unauthorized version at BASEKAMP. We used the exact same materials and methods (half of the fabricators at ICA were part of the BASEKAMP team). Then included life-sized reproductions of the fabricators going through the entire process of making the artwork. Actually they were reproductions of body doubles we invited to pose in place of the fabricators, further emphasizing the perceived exchangeability of hired assistants.

Marc: LeWitt actually reveals more than most artists about how his work gets made but it still isn't enough eh?!

Scott: Sure, it's enough (for him anyway!). Though the project wasn't only about LeWitt in particular. But, yeah, actually that is exactly why we found his practice interesting and useful for our own needs. The subject matter of his work isn't about focusing on the invisible supporting labor structure behind single artists, but for us his work was interesting because rather than hiding it as most do, he thanks them for it - though without any apparent interest to consider the meaning of the social arrangement or to develop other possibilities. We thought he would be appropriate for our project idea precisely because his work already seemed to point in the direction we wanted to take it. We could have done some version of *Stunt Double* with another artist, but LeWitt's work just made sense. It's not that LeWitt's practice of taking credit for the idea of crediting assistants isn't good enough, but from our point of view, it was actually a perfect fit.

Plus, using LeWitt as opposed to someone else was partly coincidence and partly convenience. He was already scheduled to make a new exhibition at the ICA long before our involvement. After which we were able to work out a deal with someone there to let us weasel in and make his work for him. This opened up the possibility for us to find a loophole in his contract that says that the work his assistants do belongs to him. The contract says we would be

making authentic Sol LeWitt pieces on such and such dates, but it didn't say on those days we had to stop at 5pm when the museum closed! So in the evenings at BASEKAMP we would just continue doing exactly the same work we were doing at the ICA during the day. It seemed real sticky, and we were preparing for some legal repercussion. But instead everyone thought it was funny. Ah well. Another employee at the ICA who doesn't work there anymore also gave us their mailing list, so most of the same people came to both openings, which added another level of richness to our version of the exhibition. Our idea for Stunt Double didn't come out of nowhere, but there were all these factors that led to and informed the series of decisions we made in putting the project together.

Marc: You could offer successful individual artists the entire BASEKAMP space under the condition that they explicitly account for every aspect of their process and admit that their assistants probably gave them some of their best ideas. That would be fun. There definitely should be more discussion about the labor of others when artists talk about their work it is really refreshing when people are open and honest about all of the chains of collaboration that make their art possible. I remember hearing Ann Hamilton lecture and she showed slides of every one of her assistants that helped with an installation. They were great slides too – each worker in these fashion or action poses. Anyway, ultimately you decided to focus on showing openly collaborative work at BASEKAMP. Why did the emphasis shift toward exhibiting collaborative projects?

Scott: There are a lot of reasons for BASEKAMP's focus on collaborative work. We first noticed the lack of opportunities for this kind of work six years ago when we opened the space. But why collaboration in the first place? It's been interesting to imagine what would happen if artists worked collaboratively on a much wider scale. I suppose helping people who already do this to become more aware of each other, and to help articulate what's happening, is something that we feel might be useful.

Like other spaces, BASEKAMP provides a site for critical thought and practice – for voices of dissent – forces of resistance. Many alternative spaces focus on individual imagination. We choose to focus on collective imagination. Overlapping experience and desire. Social imagination. Work we tend to focus on is involved in re-imagining cultural and relational structures. The idea is to bring propositional social imagination into the realm of plausibility through groups of people negotiating joint interests as collaborative art projects. I agree with what you said earlier about some art collectives not suggesting new social configurations, or how those ideas might translate into other contexts outside of art groups. But there are also many collaborative groups who are seriously interested in this, and who use the tools of contemporary art to articulate and enact these interests.

I'm a proponent of people in various fields of experience, vocational or otherwise communicating

more directly to negotiate collective imagination and desire, and to see these air drawings as blueprints for possible futures. Not just artists. It would be great to be able to support attempts to organize, negotiate and enact versions of those and any plans for collective possibilities. So I'm supportive of artists doing this too. I think BASEKAMP's focus on collaborative work between artists is a way to support this kind of activity, within a sector of culture that we can actually have some impact on and also participate in ourselves.

For artists in particular, more than just affecting their own vocational field, one of the basic functions of our work already is that art has the ability to be applied metaphorically to other vocations, or any other sector of culture. This allows artists to both focus on issues with art or their artworld, and to focus on any other area in the world at the same time.

This idea has led to another exhibition project we're spending a lot of time organizing now called Plausible Artworld. It is an exhibition in-progress of responses by international artists and groups who have been invited to design proposals for a hypothetical "artworld". The artworks in the show will simultaneously work together and compete, in order to collectively and individually question how relations, communities, and structures within artworlds are organized and maintained. It questions who this serves, and what we are capable of imagining in it's place.

The focus of Plausible Artworld hints that artworlds themselves are already metaphors or models of other sectors of culture, which are also in need of re-evaluation and hypothetical speculation.

Marc: I think that constant re-evaluation of all these structures is essential. While you talk about hypothetical models and fantasies, both of us also want to see ideas like those that might spring forth in Plausible Artworld tested out on whatever scale can be actually be accomplished. I hope some of these participants will cause a disruption or two that forces some kind of re-evaluation of the artworld. It sure as hell needs it – though it's probably not much less fucked up than the rest of the world.

NOTE: Marc and Scott conducted a parallel dialogue titled "Thank You For Asking About Multi-Tasking" that largely picks up where this discussion leaves off. It can be found in the Australian magazine Natural Selection. Check online at: www.naturalselection.org.nz.

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Everyone's
Real Estate

by Sam Gould

Portland is a town of bridges. The Willamette River cuts the town in two, east/west. Quite often I would find myself walking across the Morrison Bridge to get downtown from the east side. All of the bridges in town, except the Fremont to the North, and the Marquam to the south, are drawbridges. There is a beautiful section in the middle of the Morrison bridge that divides the bridge in half so it can raise and lower. A divide of roughly three inches. I fell in love with this spot. I felt like it was my own private Gordon Matta-Clark piece, lost to the art world and only I knew about it. Each time I walk over the bridge I stop, with my feet on the line of the divide, and watch the river flow beneath me. A ray of water cutting the bridge in half. Spending this much time paying attention to a spot on the bridge made me start looking at the bridge more carefully. What else did it have to offer besides an easy crossing? These thoughts, coupled with past projects focused on issues of space; its use, geographies, rules, brought about the first of what I hope will be a great number of spaces within Everyone's Real Estate.



Morrison Hall is the flagship space within Everyone's Real Estate – a plan to create a free real estate market of “shared-use engagement spaces” all over the Portland metro area. The Hall is located not far from the spot that has such a hold on me. Situated on the North side of the bridge, just off the center, Morrison Hall comes equipped with an over-hang (it rains nearly eight months out of the year in Portland, so this feature was a welcome addition), a concrete construction barrier for safety’s sake (not long before the founding of Morrison Hall a woman distracted herself talking on her cell phone and crashed through the bridges railing, plunging down into the Willamette. She came out of it with only cuts and bruises, amazingly), lights, and an inoperable electrical outlet. If all goes well maybe a thousand of these spots can be developed throughout Portland. Easy.

The action proceeds like this: take a walk around town looking for a new property for Everyone's Real Estate. What does a new spot look like? What attributes does it hold? That depends on the spot. Each is unique. Some common attributes would be size and accessibility. A spot should not be too big. Fifteen to twenty people tops should comfortably fit within any space. It should be intimate and give a feeling of inclusion, some sense of comfort and involvement (such as an overhang to get out of the rain, or stairs to be able to sit on). The spot, as well, should not be too far out of reach, but not so close as to force the interruption of the daily flow of activity around it. A public/private sanctuary available to all public, but not foisted upon everyone if they're not interested in joining in. If one is to consider this a protest it is a secondary protest. One of barely covert action. Of everyday opportunities, everyday life, playing a more open role in public space. As vital as kissing your lover on the street, hugging friends upon meeting them for coffee, even saying goodbye to the bus driver as you exit the bus (people actually do that here in Portland. I'm not kidding. It shocked me at first too.)

Once a spot is found, and you have given it a suitable name, a notice, in the form of a sticker, is placed somewhere on the premises. This notice informs that the sticker serves as the preliminary announcement of the inauguration of " _____ " as a shared-used engagement space within Everyone's Real Estate. The sticker serves as temporary signage till a permanent sign is placed on the premises. Both the sticker, and the permanent signage, in many ways, mimic most other municipal signage. As well, the stickers and permanent sign, inform that the space can be used for art exhibitions, musical performances, lectures, cookout's, card games, book clubs, family reunions, even. Anything can fit the bill as an event at the space. What fits the bill depends greatly on the mood and feel of each particular location, thus further lending a sense of identity to each space. Lastly, the space is assigned a web calendar. Anyone who cares to can go and arrange a date and time to hold their event at their chosen space, therefore people can be informed of upcoming events at various locations from one interface.

In terms of use, let's consider some other spaces within Everyone's Real Estate; their beginnings, as well as their beginnings in relation to possible use –

Choosing a space is as exciting as any aspect of the project. Walking around Portland keenly aware that around any corner a new space could be found. Last night alone The Narrows and School House Commons were inaugurated. The Narrows is located within Portland's "Green Corridor." A section of two city blocks painted solely in green and white near the Franz bread factory. The Narrows, two doorway spaces located within fifty feet of each other on the same block, are, as their name suggests, quite narrow in size. What

they lack in width they make up for in height, rising close to forty feet in the air. An added bonus is that, what with the bread factory around the corner, The Narrows always smells like fresh baked bread. The two doorways that make up The Narrows would work well for some sort of exhibition; either small in size, or one that keenly utilizes the spaces strong suit, its height. School House Commons is not far away from The Narrows. The space is located down a set of stairs leading into the basement of Benson high school on 12th. Ave. Like Morrison Hall it comes equipped with an overhang. As well, there is a garbage can, and built in seating with the stairs that overlook the staging area. Not a blocked sightline in the house. The space would be well suited for musical performances. I'm also very excited to inaugurate The Grasslands, a space situated between Interstate 5 and lower Albina Ave. One must walk through a tall field of over grown grass off Albina Ave. to reach the space along the side of the freeway under the massive overhang of the Fremont Bridge. A huge wall, a base for the overpass, would be great for a visual art exhibition of some sort. Getting back to our flagship space; Morrison Hall is quite versatile. It could be used for any number of functions. It's pretty large. So gatherings of many sorts would work well. A reading, or lecture, perhaps. It is surrounded by low walls, including the construction barrier. So, a visual art exhibition would be nice. As well, though this may be neither here nor there, Morrison Hall has a beautiful view of the Willamette River and downtown Portland.

Space is a problem. Depending on your mood, or possibly someone else's, it is either limitless, or unobtainable. You either have it or you don't. Space can empower, or corrupt, equally. What if when thinking about space, about occupation, one considered the language; let's say, the epistemology of space. When we are defining space what are its attributes? Can the space in question be owned? If so, in what form? How do you own it? What defines public and private? What are common areas? Places that everyone can congregate. How do you define use? Or, better still, usefulness? Guy Debord and The Situationists had a process of renaming the streets of Paris. Remaking the city anew for one and all. Do you know who named the street you lived on? Or, further still, if you live on a street that happened to be named after some long dead soul who is it that your street is named after? What is your connection to this person? I live on Davis Street. I have no idea who Davis is. This is important. When we walk out our doors each day what connection do we have to our surroundings? What roles do we play in the life of our surroundings, and what role does it play in ours? If we set about to have a greater sense of connection to the space that surrounds us think of all the things that could follow. "Space" is an area with no connection to humanity. To ideas, feelings, or desires. But "place," place is when space is married to people. Married to the cares and desires that turn life into what we know of it. There's a reason the phrase "making a place for yourself" has stuck around. It's not as boring as it sounds. There's a reason the phrase still seems so vague as well. We still just don't get it.

Harrell
Fletcher

Interviewed by Jim Drain

Thursday July 7th, 2005

JD: Harrell, why are people apathetic?

HF: Jim, I wish I knew. I guess it's just our human nature or culture or something, it seems to be pretty deep. Actually, I try to not believe in the idea of "human nature." Maybe there is something to it, but I feel like it's better not to think in those terms. I like to think that there is very little essential self, that our character comes from learned experience. As for apathy in US political terms it probably has something to do with people's general disconnect from non-suburban, TV style reality. We are socialized to believe that things are all okay, and are kept at a distance from the things that aren't okay. People are affected by things that have personal impact on their own lives. So if someone close to us suffers or is killed we feel bad, but if someone suffers who is not directly connected to us we don't really register it. If our pet dies we feel terrible. If millions of cows or chickens are killed to supply fast food restaurants with meat we don't seem to care at all, at least most of us. In the same way we don't really react as thousands of innocent Iraq citizens are killed and injured because of our government.

JD: Harrell, who are the powerless?

HF: Ultimately, I think everyone has power, it's a matter of realizing and applying it. Of course there are many situations where if you apply your power you will get punished or killed for it, but that's an option that people have always taken who feel like it is important to attempt to change things that they think are wrong. When I was in Vietnam a few weeks ago, I went to this War Memorial Museum and besides the documentation of horrible atrocities, there were also photographs of people in the US during the war destroying draft cards, people all over the world protesting, and even people in both Vietnam and the US (sometimes very average looking US citizens, not hippies or anything like that) who chose self-immolation in an attempt to express their opposition to the war.

I think in general in the US. the Gov. and big corporations want people to be as powerless as possible so that they do not disrupt the existing power structure--making rich people richer at any cost. To achieve that effect the majority of the population are kept under-educated, uninformed, overly entertained, disenfranchised. A good book to read on the subject is *Savage Inequalities* by Jonathan Kozol. It's all about the disparities between rich and poor public school districts in the US. Pretty shocking stuff.

JD: Harrell, to go back to your first answer about people's apathy, you said that human nature is divided into an "essential self" and a "socialized, learned self." How do you separate the two?

HF: Well, I think there is a popular idea that we as people have what you could call an "essential self," something like a spirit that we are born with and that does not change. With that in mind you can say about a criminal that he was just born to be a bad person, so he should be put in prison with the other people who were born bad and kept away from the people who were born good. In this country the conclusion from that equation would be that most people that are born bad are non-white, because the majority of people who become incarcerated are not white. You could also conclude that there is no reason to provide adequate education, social services, health care, recreation, etc to those essentially bad people, because they are just born that way and nothing is going to stop them from being bad.

Another take on that situation, the one that I agree with, is that people are born with some essential things, the way that a soup can start off with hot water. But then different things are added to or left out of the soup which makes it unique. You can think of living people as this soup base that is being added to everyday with each new experience. Sometimes you might realize that too much salt was added to the mix, at that point you can choose to ignore it and hope that the balance gets restored, you can add more water, you can add sugar, all of these decisions make the soup whatever it is at a given moment. I

think people are the same way, whatever is added--education, love, hate, trauma, positive or negative experiences, exercise, good or bad food all of these things determine who we are. So I would say that we contain very little "essential self" and are instead very much "socially constructed." Still of course people have individual qualities that might be derived from something more essential that they were born with. For instance I'm a shy person, and I was probably born that way. But because I feel like sometimes there are situations that require me to get past my shyness I have developed, or constructed an ability to engage in social dynamics that really go against what I feel like is my "nature." If you follow this reasoning then no one is stuck being good or bad, or shy or anything else. The crucial thing then is who is determining how people are being constructed. My sense is that we are mostly being constructed by TV and related media which is controlled by large corporations and the Gov. which wants to perpetuate and maintain the existing situation--rich people getting richer.

JD: Harrell, To take this in a different direction, do you feel you've ever had a "mystical experience?"

HF: Totally, I have them all the time. I especially had lots of them when I was a kid, then it seemed like mystical experiences were almost constantly happening. I guess I'm defining "mystical experiences" as unexplainable, non-tangible occurrences that seem to have some kind of significance or meaning, and leave me feeling in some ways happy or in awe. These are moments that seem to fall out of what is normally defined as reality. I encounter them when I'm going

for walks and just start to trip out on trees and grass and the sky, also while eating sometimes, swimming in rivers and oceans, gardening, meditating, listening to music sometimes, often while napping, sometimes night time sleeping too. I'm pretty open to that sort of thing, but somehow when I was a kid my whole world seemed mystical, everything was always opening up to completely unexplainable feelings and situations. I even had several encounters with what I thought of at the time as ghosts.

JD: I have two more questions. You seem to conclude that much of the world's suffering is due to the desire by the rich "to get richer." Are there any positive aspects to wealth, to being rich? Lastly, are there things you do to prevent yourself from being negatively "socialized?"

HF: I think there are positive aspects to having enough money to live comfortably, but I think everyone should be able to do that. It's all about wealth distribution. The capitalist system that we in the west use and that is quickly spreading to the rest of the world encourages vast disparities in wealth. A few people get all most everything and the masses get almost nothing, then there is a middle class who are largely unwilling to do much about the ones with nothing because of the hope that someday they (the middle class people) will be part of the small minority who have it all at the cost of the masses who get nothing. It's the same way the art world works. But anyway, as long as we are operating within the system then yeah, certainly there are good things about having wealth. If you have money and decide to share it then all kinds of great things can

happen. I just got a fairly sizable grant and I decided to give a pretty big portion of it away to other artists who are at the beginning of their careers. I'm always encountering an "all or nothing" attitude about how things should work and I think it comes from living within a capitalist world. It would be nice if everyone tried to share a little more, in both the art world and the real world. I don't think I'm any kind of model for how things should be, I include myself in my criticism, I'm a part of the system and for the most part I'm just going along with it all.

As for avoiding negative socialization I think the best way is to stop watching TV. That's the giant pacifier of the people. It is so effective at getting people to think and look and act the same way. I watched a lot of TV when I was a kid and I know that it was wreaking havoc on me then. Life has been much better without it. Of course there are probably some good things to see on TV, but I think the majority is really about getting people to conform and consume, and should be avoided. The more active thing to do is expose yourself to new and different ideas and experiences. I highly recommend reading some of John Holt's books, *Escape From Childhood* is especially interesting. It's all about how children are left out of civic life and responsibilities and the effects that has on them. But once again I don't think I've done an especially great job at avoiding socialization myself, I'm fully socialized, I'm just slowly trying to break out of it in whatever little ways I can.

(Originally Published w. The Wrong Gallery)

THE GARDEN

An Exhibition Curated
by Stephanie Cannizzo

by Lawrence Rinder

All around, no artworks in light
No vitrines filled with gold
A curator's statement
In the monthly newsletter
On this frigid January day

After a poem by Lord Teika of Fujiwara (1251-1338)

You want contemporary art?
Boldly, let me say
A spark in the mind
The Buddha in the Berkeley Art Museum
Still cracked after the Big One

After a poem by Fujiwara Iyetaka (1158-1237)

I'm at home in New York, recalling a show I saw last fall in Berkeley. It was a show of works from the collection of the Berkeley Art Museum, dating from 200BCE to the present from India, China, Vietnam, Tibet, Japan, Europe, and the US. Gently and without pretension the curator, Stephanie Cannizzo, brought together an evocative selection of objects and images, including an ink drawing of a woman in flight by Tiepolo and an anonymous Tibetan sketch from an instruction manual on meditation, a photograph of a magnolia blossom by Imogen Cunningham and Felix Gonzalez-Torres

pair of silver rings, an ethereal watercolor of clouds by Geoff Hendricks and Sheng Mao-Yeh's Ming-era ink painting, Waterfall on Mount Lu. She called the show, The Garden.

Stephanie is someone who might be called—if we had such lingo in our field—an 'outsider' curator. Stephanie, though she has worked at the Berkeley museum for more than a decade—including many years with me—has drawn her talents primarily from within. As it happens, this is the best place anyone could draw them from, though there are few who really do. Her show has the audacious splendor of a breakdance in a subway car. Not that it was unthought—The Garden was an embodiment of mental acuity—what I mean to say is that it was neither trendy nor academic, the twin curses of contemporary curatorial practice. In the museum's monthly newsletter, Stephanie has this to say: "The Garden features objects that...either emerge from historical Buddhist traditions or simply lend themselves to meditative reflection." Although she doesn't mention it in her curatorial statement, Stephanie's initial inspiration for the show was the writings of Geert de Groote, a founder of the 14th century evangelical movement called the Modern Devotion. De Groote advocated a renewal of spiritual life through a return to the simple themes of Christianity and a limiting of the power of the Church. "This exhibition was like my holy communion," Stephanie revealed to me over the phone. "I was ex-communicated from the Catholic Church with my mother in 1961 and wanted to find

a spiritual view that was more forgiving.” The populist appeal of de Groot’s teaching resonates with the spirit of the Mahayana wing of Buddhist tradition. In this form of Buddhist thought, enlightenment is deferred until all sentient beings are prepared to reach Nirvana. Buddhism is understood to be practiced through meditation and acts of compassion. It is available to anyone.

In her show, Stephanie says, “each thing is connected to the thing before it, to every other thing, like in a poem.” Both the images and the flavor of the images were considered when she worked out their arrangements. As you enter the space, on the right the first work you encounter is a large anonymous 14th century Japanese scroll depicting the so-called parinirvana, the entry of Buddha into Nirvana, which is actually a representation of Buddha’s death. On your left, meanwhile, is a small vitrine containing two objects from the 2nd century BCE, a bronze Chinese incense burner and a bronze Greek mirror-back depicting the myth of Leda and the Swan. The 2nd century BCE happens to be the period of the great Indian Emperor Asoka, who more than any other figure in history assisted in spreading Buddhism throughout the world. His missionaries brought the teachings of Buddha to the borders of China in the East and as far as Greece in the West. So, on either side as one enters one is flanked by beginnings, one of the most internal personal kind and the other of communities and nations. These two aspects embody the two main threads of Buddhism: Hinayana, which is devoted to individual enlightenment, and Mahayana, which seeks the enlightenment of all.

The Garden is laid out according to the arrangement of one of the oldest known drawings of a mandala, from the 9th or 10th century. At the center of this mandala is lotus inscribed with the name of Buddha and around which are arranged a diverse assortments of offerings in the form of lamps, dishes and vases. The Garden, too, centers on a Buddha, a Tibetan Shakyamuni from the late 19th or early 20th century made of copper, bronze, gold, and lapis. And surrounding this sculpture is a delightful array of offerings, including a vitrine holding a slice of plaster cake by Claes Oldenburg. With the mandala as her model, Stephanie struck upon a profound solution to the problem of superceding mere representation with something more profound, enactment. In short, her show breaks the stranglehold of the temporal which is the basis of virtually all curatorial work—the march of time, the sequence of styles, the artists’ ‘path.’ Instead, she created a ‘space.’ What is so significant about that, you may wonder. Let’s hear what the noted scholars of Japanese classical aesthetics, Toshiko and Toyo Izutsu have to say about the difference between temporal and spatial awareness:

When we observe through the filter of the teleological condition inherent in our empirical consciousness the temporal aspect of the phenomenal world and the things and events that arise therein, we necessarily recognize numerous lines of causal relationship crossing each other between these things and events, each of them leaving behind it a trace of its own temporal development. Thus we obtain the image of reality in terms of the temporality of causal sequence.

If, however, we are to put the same phenomenal world in a different matrix, the spatial, for example, as a possible alternative to the temporal, quite a different configuration of reality would, we might expect, be articulated out of it. In this spatial grasp of the phenomenal world, we would recognize first of all the co-existence of limitlessly diversified things and events against a background of a boundless, non-temporal space, corresponding and contrasting with each other, each taking its part in the vast extension of the correlational network.

The Izutsu's are writing specifically about the aesthetic mode of wabi as it pertains to the Way of Tea, more commonly called in America, the tea ceremony. Steeped in Zen Buddhist metaphysics, wabi is a means to experience the 'involvement' and 'evolvement' of Nothingness.

Recently, after a hernia operation, I was stuck in bed dosed up on Percocet. After about five days

staring out the same window listening to the sounds of my busy New York street corner, I suddenly became aware of a kind of void, an experience of total silence and darkness that filled, infinitely, the space and time between each and every sight and sound. I knew then how Neo could have dodged those bullets so easily. I know, I cheated. Percocet is no way to reach enlightenment. But still, I think that what I sensed was, actually, something close to what the Izutsu's called 'involvement,' a falling into the darkness of Nothingness. As a poetic example of this dimension of wabi, they cite a poem by Lord Teika of Fujiwara:

All around, no flowers in bloom
Nor maple leaves in glare,
A solitary fisherman's hut alone
On the twilight shore
In this autumn eve.

"Evolvement," on the other hand, is, as it sounds, an emerging from Nothingness, a hint of being set against darkness. The following poem by Fujiwara Iyetaka illustrates their point:

To the yearning seekers of blossoms
With pride, I would offer
A delight of the eye
The green from under the snow
In a mountain village in springtime!

The Garden is, finally, a work of evolvement. More than any of the beautiful objects or profound juxtapositions that I enjoyed in The Garden, what I remember most is the gallery itself. For those of you who aren't aware of the fact, the Berkeley Art Museum—where I worked for ten years—is made of concrete. The architect, Mario Ciampi, is more celebrated for his freeway overpasses than for his buildings. The interior of the museum is, for me, a soul-deadening place. So it is with no small wonder that my recollection of the gallery on this occasion is of a space evanescent in light, vaporously, blindingly, buoyantly light.

Those who are following Stephanie's work may be surprised by The Garden. Her previous show, also extremely well-received, presented Pirkle Jones' and Ruth-Marion Baruch's long lost photographs of the Black Panthers. A photograph by Pirkle Jones also appears in The Garden, a selection that Stephanie says has been among the hardest to explain. It is simply a photograph of a woman resting in the sun with her arm stretched over her head. At first she thought it might have to do with the legend that the Buddha was born out of the left armpit of his mother, Madame Maya, but yesterday she told me she had only just realized it was inspired by a photo of my friend Coco that I used to carry in my wallet.

Stephanie's approach to curating will never be taught in a curatorial studies program. Which is too bad. Curators-to-be could learn a great deal by studying, and enjoying, what she has done.

“Creation is the ability
to capture the feeling
of childhood utilizing
the abilities of maturity.”

- Schopenhauer

Below is an article from Rich Jacobs.

Below is an article from Rich Jacobs. During a phone conversation I had with him after I received the article he said he initially wrote about the extremely popular "Beautiful Losers" show and how he hoped people would recognize the motivation of those artists and maybe that would help them "...find their own thing". Instead he put those ideas into a casual article about his trajectory with art and skateboarding where the tone implies as much as what is actually said. "After all it is skateboarding." We also talked about the commodity of the artworld skateboarder antihero and that an overly critical article on that subject might be as silly as one on the eighties graffiti-in-gallery scene.

In the same phone conversation when asked about curating his first museum show (on skateboarding) and he said half the time it sort of felt like a total scam because "I thought all this stuff was rad since I was fifteen," and "a lot of it I had in my room since I was a kid."

—John S. Vitale



Art and skateboarding? i can only speak from my own experience and i am definately not an expert...but who 20 years ago would have ever thought those words would be used in the same sentence? i know i didn't when i first started skateboarding in 1977(coincidentally around the same time i started to scribble,draw, and make stuff). I was 5 years old - but even then i knew what i was doing wasn't considered part of normal mainstream culture-- most of my peers and fellow skaters were fairly different, raw, or somehow damaged.

Art, on the other hand, seemed a lot like classical music to me-- you know, for old people or uptight adults. i didn't consider that a lot of the visuals, graphics, and aesthetics involved in skating were actually art until much later for some reason. Punk rock, skateboarding, and other non-team like activities seemed like they existed in their own little worlds (outside of the regular realm in which my folks lived in,etc). It was around

junior high (the early to mid-80's) that i finally noticed artists also weren't really a part of the program endorsed by buff weight lifters, cheerleaders, or the smarter math/science kids. Instead the wavers, hesh, goth kids, and what few hardcore kids existed then gravitated towards the art classes. Weird huh? Well not really but it seemed funny then-- especially to the cool/tough kids that would always make jokes and tease us. I realized that art and skating might be cousins...those interested and/or inclined to express themselves were pretty accepting of other misfit, or ill fitting characters like myself-- what choice was there really? We were what was left basically-- although it was a choice, it didn't feel like we could help it. Most of my early outlets for my art were through my involvement in punk and the do-it-yourself-cuz-no-one-else-will realm. I designed and drew record covers, t-shirt graphics, posters & flyers, stickers, silkscreens, self published xerox-copied magazines (which to those making and reading them were called zines) mainly for friends and my own bands-- all of which were tiny and fully obscure luckily. These creative endeavors helped give me the experience and confidence to be brave enough to think it was possible to make and show others what i was making, now called art. I met many if not most of my friends through art,music making and traveling. Not much has really changed since jr. high-- the difference is that those misfit kids are now adults (by default) and are now full time art makers (unlike many of my friends who actually studied to be artists at art school strangely enough). Idefinately

would have laughed outloud if anyone would have asked me in high school if I would one day be curating art shows in a musuem of contempopary art about skateboarding. I guess I have to laugh at myself now. Many of the artists that have an inner skateboarder inside them share a similar history to mine probably, depending when they started doing it. Hopefully these under the radar activities (now fully above ground) have opened windows to other information and haven't left anybody in a moldy room with all the doors and windows sealed shut listening to.... uh I don't knowthe misfits exclusively? (it's fine sometimes- but leave the door opened at least). Anyhow thanks for reading, and remember if you don't like their rules, don't live by them-- make your own, or don't create a need for them to exist. Skate or don't-- but do something radical for sure if you can! take care –rich jacobs

A Golf Lesson With Jon Rubin

by Joseph del Pesco

JON: The most important part of hitting a golf ball, and where the most mistakes happen, is where and how you hold the club. What you want to do is take your left hand and interlock your forefinger and the pinky of your right. The reason you interlock your hands is that you want them to move together as one piece. The way you want to hold a club is like you're holding a dove; firm enough but don't strangle it, because when you strangle it your muscles tense up and you can't swing.

After that you just want everything else to be balanced. You want to be really comfortable. The club straight in front of you, and stand like you're sitting on the edge of a stool. When you swing, it's not a swing motion it's just a torquing. You can think of yourself as being on a skateboard when you're doing it; turning, but keeping your balance, so you won't fall off the board, and then... (SOUND OF GOLF BALL BEING HIT - BY JON)

It's almost like the less you do [during a swing] the more happens and the more you do the less happens. It think it's why the game is so fascinating, because it's not really about effort. It's about giving up to a series of balanced motions. One problem a lot of people have is that they try to hit it really hard... it doesn't work. It feels good up until the point where you hit the ball.

A few minutes and several swings later...

JOSEPH: What's the fat one for?
[referring to a club]

JON: That's the driver. It's used for hitting far. They [the golf clubs] start with the pitching wedge which has the most loft, it's also the shortest. It's meant to get the ball up high. Then the numbers go down and the clubs start to flatten out. Then there's the driver which is one of the flattest clubs.

JOSEPH: Can I try one of those?

JON: Here. I'd choke up on it a little bit.

When you take the club back, take it lower and longer. You can get more lift if you play the ball off the inside of your heel.

It's kind of like hitting a baseball with an aluminum bat. Ok, up until the last moment you were good. In that last moment you were like I'm gonna hit the shit outta this.

JOSEPH: (Laughter)

JON: It's a psychological block.

JOSEPH: I think so... I'll try again.

JON: Good. Better.

JOSEPH: Is golf a metaphor for something else?



JON: I guess the main metaphor is the less you do, the more you get. The more you try to fight everything into being the less successful it is. Golf is about taking away all the bad habits. You have to try to do certain things so you can forget about doing anything. Every time you hit the ball that lesson is reinforced. Golf is the only sport that is not reactive. You start completely inert, you generate all the energy. You're not responding to a ball coming at you, or another human being coming at you. So because of that it's probably the hardest sport there is. You're responsible for every action. It's the most difficult game mentally. It looks like everyone is doing exactly the same thing, but it's the most challenging game I've ever played.

JOSEPH: For me it's a game of chance, I figure I have about a fifty percent chance of hitting the ball, and a fifty percent chance it will go where I want it to.

JON: My first four years were like that. Then you master the swing. . . and eventually you master the course - the specifics of where the ball is and needs to go. It's all self mastery. When you're playing well it's effortless. You body just does what it needs to do and your mind gets out of the way.

Following our lesson at the driving range, Jon Rubin and I sat at a nearby cafe and shared stories and opinions for an hour over gigantic hamburgers. A couple weeks later I emailed him a few follow up questions – based on our post-lesson conversation.

JOSEPH: Just prior to graduating, you gave your MFA review panel a golf lesson. How did it go? Who have you taken to the driving range since then?

JON: Well, I was in the painting department at that time and I had spent two years at the school without making a painting, so I think they were a little disappointed with me to begin with. In fact at that time I wasn't even a very good golfer. I think I was interested in inverting the status relationship between myself and my teachers, and recontextualizing teaching and my hobbies, or seemingly non-art activities, as a creative practice. Although, of course I was teaching something I had

yet to master myself. Which is interesting, now 12 years later as an adjunct faculty member at the same school I graduated from, I realize there is no such thing as teaching from mastery, at least for me. In fact it sounds boring. Part of my desire in creating the Independent School of Art [a current project] was to create a situation where I could fold my practice as a teacher into my practice as an artist. It's a slippery preposition to begin with when you call your teaching your work. Traditionally that has been considered taboo, or at least the slogan "those who can't do, teach" would apply here. But, I've always taken my teaching very seriously and the sensibility and labor involved fundamentally resonate with my socially based practice. The idea of creating ISA at first was almost a joke, I liked the sound of it when I mentioned the idea to people, "I'm starting my own art school." It's so patently ridiculous and overblown. Yet, It's developed into a very serious and complex work and experience. I like that tension between the seemingly absurd and serious. Back to golf, I've taken several of my classes to the driving range, as well as the gun range, a senior center waltz class, the Hollywood Squares television show, a porn studio (in a class co-taught with Larry Sultan), a protest march, a comedy club, really anywhere culture is being produced. Artist are like sociologists, especially when we're in a group of peers, there is nothing better than taking a trip with colleagues and sharing the strangeness of the ordinary world. I love capital A art, but I get bored of

talking about it in a classroom, I mean it's wonderfully monkish to do so, but it all gets so deadly theoretical after a while. I think it's vital that all work and dialogue rub directly against the real in someway, even if it's the bizarrely constructed reality of Hollywood Squares.

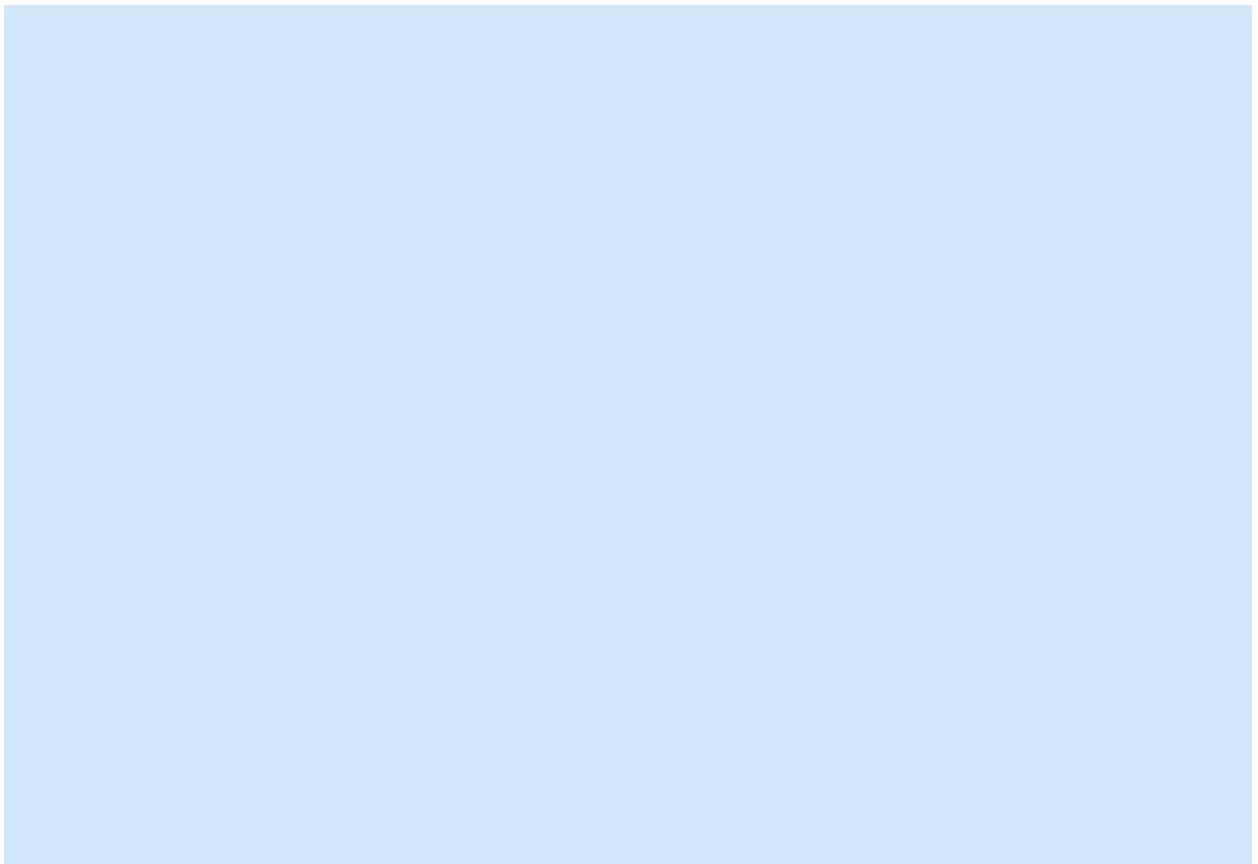
JOSEPH: After our golf lesson, standing in a cue the cafe, you mentioned that you'll sometimes order the same thing as the person in front of you. This strikes me as a really simple game to disturb one's sense of complacency, kind of like writing with only your left hand for a day (assuming you're right handed). What other kinds of simple games do you employ?

JON: Very similar to ordering what the person in front of me orders at a cafe, when I go to the horse races I decide I'll bet on people rather than on the horses. I mean, I know nothing about horses but I know a little about people. What I do is look around for some guy who really looks like he knows what he's doing, you know, lots of racing forums, perhaps a cigar or a limp might be my cue, and I follow him up to the betting kiosks. all the betting is electronic now like going to an ATM so I just stand real close to him and write down what he bets on and then bet it myself. There's still an element of chance, but at least I get to identify with a human. It's like some of the work that I do that involves strangers. In the end the strangers are only a cypher under which I discover my own prejudices and desires .

JOSEPH: You also mentioned during our lunch conversation that you're most compelled by artwork that rubs up against reality. Games are interesting because they're a kind of suspended or simulated reality (like the game LIFE). Where is the line between an art project and a game being played?

JON: I think I've always used my art practice as a way to engage in serious play. By serious play I mean that in someways all the roles we identify ourselves by as adults seem to be a bit absurd, constructed, and tenuous, just like when we imagined ourselves as doctors and sportscasters (in my case) as kids. The problem is that most adults tend to believe they are what their job title (or lack thereof) declares them to be, and don't recognize that they are only engaging in the exact same childhood game except with more stuff. I see myself as a sort of less exaggerated Walter Mitty. Doing something under the guise of art allows me to slip in and out of a variety of personas without having to worry too much whether I really know what I'm doing, or getting too attached to the persona as a singular self-definition. Institutionally, this has manifest in things like developing my own art college, opening a store in a indoor shopping mall, running my own restaurant,

and hosting a game show. The majority of my work though is about strangers. It's funny because I'm basically reclusive most the time. I think making work about other people allows me to safely, and temporarily slip into their identities. I once created a show with Harrell Fletcher about a ten year old boy in Seattle based entirely on video filmed from a camera that he wore on his head for three weeks. We assembled hours and hours of footage and started pouring through it in slow motion, looking to cull out moments that perhaps he didn't even perceive when he was looking at them. In the end it was like curating from inside someone else's head. On the one hand the show comes off like a first person account of a boy's life, but it's really a highly biased and constructed third person presentation of my own reality via someone else's vision. I get to play at being a boy again.



Blank Space allows
for Real Time, or I
have no idea what
to say.

by Bonnie Fortune

Talking is easy, but communication is hard. Most often you walk away misunderstood and alone. My friend Becca Taylor once made a sculpture about this problem. It was a big pink box with two curtains on the inside. If you were able to work with the person on the other end you would be able to look and talk to each other at the same time, if not all you saw was blackness. I heard about the sculpture before I met Becca, before I lived with her on Rice St in Chicago, IL, before she started drawing *The Wonderful Year*.

Growing up in Nashville, TN, I thought that when I left I would like to find a place where artists lived, some kind of utopian community for lost souls where we sat around congratulating each other on our amazing abilities at mark making. Obviously, the sticks couldn't handle me and no one there was every going to understand me. Becca lived in Nashville, too, among other places and that's how I heard about her and her big pink box. Well, Nashville wasn't really the sticks, and Chicago was beginning to feel like a small town, when Becca and I moved in with some other folks on Rice St in Chicago, IL. I thought that the apartment on Rice St would be the utopian hideout that I had dreamed about. But Becca left the big pink box in the alley before she moved in and so our model for how to communicate with one other had to be made up as we went along I have to say that the elegant utopia never happened but we had a few good parties, the cops came a couple of times and Becca did come up with the idea for the Creation Station. It was a table in the kitchen with a stack of plain white paper, a coffee can of pencils, markers, and most importantly a glue stick. Now going back through the covered sheets of paper it reads as a chronicle of depression, mania, bad jokes, frustrations, and something we all called the Feminist Collective. Through drawings, notes, and collages, we mapped out our network of friends, books, songs, and ideas that kept us going. The long Chicago winters saw all of us huddled around the kitchen table drawing for the Creation Station, ranting to each other, and jumping up periodically to dance away the cold. If you ever spend a winter in Chicago, you will see there is a giddy, wild-eyed state that you reach around mid January, when the holidays are over, the nights start at 4pm and the darkness stretches out in front of you like, well, like a pitch black curtain that you aren't sure how to move. The Creation Station helped all the friends and family of Rice St pull back this curtain for a little bit.

Becca began to draw her comic, *The Wonderful Year* (TWY) on Rice St. Some of the time spent around the kitchen table and at the Creation Station comes out in the comic, and a lot comes from her memories. Becca, who always carries a sketchbook with her, used her sketchbook from art school to make the first issue of TWY. She would eventually loose that particular sketchbook, along with many other positions, tossed to the alley or left behind somewhere. Becca's sketchbooks contain fragments of conversations, notes from books she's reading, bits of profiles layered on top of detailed landscapes and bits of landscapes layered on detailed profiles. She works from

these, giving her comic a feeling of memories coming up and fading away like an old and well loved quilt crumpled on a bed.

In one of our on-going conversations Becca and I had talked about not feeling at home in our own skin. When would we achieve a body and mind connection that allowed us to feel finally *there*? We had not found it in any special way yet, maybe in Marrakech, maybe on an herb farm, maybe if we built a country just for artists in the middle of America? TWY works with this disaffection from mind, body, and place; a baby alone on one cover, blood plopping on the kitchen floor, and senior citizens with their socially inappropriate, but uncomfortably familiar senile behavior. Slowly, Becca shows her readers that there is not a place where everything you say will be understood, but that we are understood in fits and starts wherever we might be. This is not what I had hoped for when I left for the big city, but like in another of our ongoing conversations when Becca would joke, *Wherever you go there you are,* it is somehow hopeful. She would tell me that, when I asked her why she was throwing all her positions in the alley or selling all her books to Myopic, or when we all moved out of Rice St and on to separate apartments. It was often flippant, she didn't believe it herself, but she kept repeating it like a corny mantra for the day when she would feel at home.

As a whole, TWY is a chronicle of alienation from the first place you ever lived: inside yourself. Empty white pages of a new sketch book form the backgrounds for many the scenes. Her figures are often alone in the middle, or on the edge of blank space. Even with all

that empty space, TWY creates a clear and characteristic landscape made up of the physical expressions, the phrases and the posturing of her subjects rather than a particularly identifiable place on a map. What is happening to these isolated figures, though, is highly recognizable as the filial angst, embarrassing moments and the times in our own particular kitchens we have spent trying to figure out exactly what we might be doing or at least laughing at what we can't possibly understand. Even though TWY is drawn out of her continued frustration with communication, the comic is able to express a clear and touching view; not only is Becca successful at relating to us on the pages of TWY, she makes us feel it all again and deeply.

Becca left Chicago after completing TWY #9 to live somewhere warmer. Our kitchen table conversations now happen over the e-mail and through phone calls, and though I miss the closeness of having my friend around, I know the utopia is an idea not a location, and the flashes of understanding will happen just as frequently, as if she were in the next room. Becca hopes to one day finish TWY as a series of twelve issues, like a year. She will continue to research and develop her interests in feminist theory, gender identity, humor, and her ability to pull back the curtain with other people, because wherever she goes there she is.

How-To: Trampoline Hall

by Sheila Heti

If you'd like to do it, though I suggest you don't, here is how you do it.

The first thing you need is a host. Pick your most intelligent and charming friend, someone everyone likes to have at a party. I was lucky. The most intelligent and charming person I knew asked me if he could host the lecture series, at the very party when I announced that I wanted to do a lecture series, and everyone told me: don't.

The second thing you need is a curator. Are you the sort of person who is always falling in love? You might be a good curator. My friend pointed out that none of my crushes survived the occasion on which they lectured at Trampoline Hall. I could always count on Trampoline Hall to quell my crushes and save my marriage.

The third thing you need is the right room. The right room will be small. People will be able to buy alcohol in the right room. I estimate that the perfect size for a Trampoline Hall audience is seventy-five people. It is good if the room is laid out in such a way that the audience members can see each other, somewhat. A little stage is a requirement, though this requirement can be gotten around.

The fourth thing you need is a set. The set will ideally change every time. A person wants to feel they are going to the same place every time, but that the place is always changing. Do you know much about memory? I have learned that if you have, say, a really good memory of a night at a particular restaurant, the urge will come to try and recreate that night with the same friend or a different one at that same restaurant. It might even work, but your memory of the first night will be halved. It will meld into your memory of the second night. If something happens once, it is memorable. The more it happens, the less memorable it is. That is why you cannot really remember individual discussions you had with your parents around the dinner table, but you do remember that one time your father spanked you for cutting through the screen door with a pair of scissors, even though you only wanted to see what it would feel like, the sensation of cutting through something, the wire, and then cutting through nothing, the space between the wire, and then something, the wire, and then nothing, the space. He would never have spanked you if he had understood, if only you had enough time to get the explanation out before he spanked you, but there he was, rushing down the hall, a spanking already in his hand. In the same way, the room should be the same each time, and yet the set should be different enough to aid the memory.

The next necessary thing is an email list. It is hard to see how Trampoline Hall would have existed without an email list. But do not send out lots of emails. Just send out one email a month that explains where and when the show is. I would send out emails about a week before the show, because anything anticipated too far in advance is a burden, but people are often busy, and like to schedule things a bit.

If the show becomes popular in your city, as it did in ours, you will need an efficient and sophisticated ticketing system. Ours changed thirteen times in the first year and a half. The reason people put up with it is because we explained all along why we were making changes, and we never tried to hide the fact that we were just a brand-new lecture series doing the best we could. Sometimes we even had to ask for forgiveness. It is important to the Trampoline Hall audience and lecturers that you be honest with them, as you would with an intelligent child. They do not want stories; they just want the truth about the adult world. We had a saying around Trampoline Hall: There is no backstage. If we covered nothing up, we could do anything. If we covered nothing up, then the audience would cover nothing up, then the lecturers would cover nothing up.

Ticket pricing is important to consider. We never raised our ticket price above five dollars, except when it was six dollars when we had to sell advance tickets and the record store asked for a commission of a dollar per ticket. Even then, some tickets were

always reserved and available at the door for five dollars. Five dollars per ticket covered our expenses, which did not include lecturers, because Trampoline Hall must never pay its lecturers. The shows should not be free, but should be cheap enough for students. The tickets were sometimes hard to get and often involved going to this record shop a week before the show, which caused problems for some, but the tickets were always affordable. As our host Misha pointed out, the Trampoline Hall audience was rich in time, poor in cash.

Those are the fundamental elements of Trampoline Hall, plus a program. A program distinguishes the night from other nights. Trampoline Hall is theatre, and in the theatre one likes to receive a program. We have had programs that are the size of a thumbnail, with only the date on it. The program can be any which way. Like the set, it is good if the programs change at each show. But now I am getting into details and quibbles. Here is how the night is run.

The audience is let in and the host takes the stage on time. Trampoline Hall must start on time. Misha would explain how the evening worked, but this was Misha's custom. It is not essential that every Trampoline Hall everywhere include in the commencing address an explanation of how the night will run, but to unify the audience, it is highly recommended. It prevents people from feeling like outsiders, and Trampoline Hall is the sort of event that can become clubbish. People return and then

return with their friends. They return and return for two years. The new person should know what is happening, and not feel excluded or overly bewildered.

After Misha's introduction, he would introduce the first speaker by name. He would not mention the person's topic, which was often in the program, and we also made a point of never telling the audience what sort of employ the speaker was in. This is important, that we know nothing about the speaker. And also it is essential that the lecturer reap no benefit from lecturing aside from the experience of having lectured.

Each night would have three lecturers each night, with breaks between each. The breaks would last about fifteen minutes, and were important so people could be refreshed for the next lecture, and discuss what just occurred. After the final lecturer was "the break that goes on forever," for which people were encouraged to stick around.

Another aspect of the show, equal in importance to the lectures (which should last between ten and fifteen minutes) is the Q+A. I said that your host must be intelligent as well as charming. That is because if they are not intelligent and intuitive, the Q+A will be a bust.

After the speaker has finished, your host should return to the stage and begin the Q+A. The audience

is expected to ask questions of the lecturer. Whether or not the audience will ask questions depends in part on how your host presented, at the top of the night, the audience's task. It is important to frame the importance of good questions in a light-hearted but convincing way. Misha would often tell the crowd, in his opening remarks, that if they wanted to know whether a question was a good question or not, "see how it makes you feel. If it makes you feel proud, it is probably a bad question."

We discovered quite quickly that a ten-minute Q+A, thereabouts, was both long enough and short enough. But we would have considered ten minutes too long if Misha did not have control over this part of the show. Your host has to be a presence that people will feel obedient towards. I cannot imagine a better host for Trampoline Hall than Misha Glouberman, and I will try not to go on too long about it, because I don't want to make you worry that you cannot find as good a host. I am sure you can. But I will list a few of Misha's distinctive qualities, if not as a template, then simply for the sake of illustration.

Misha always wore a mediocre suit. The press came to fondly refer to his suit as "wrinkled." In fact, the suit was not wrinkled. Misha might have been a little unkempt, as far as men go, but his suit was no more wrinkled than the clothes you and I wear every day. He was always able to make the lecturer feel safe, while not coddling the lecturer, and to make the audience feel the importance of their role, while never insulting any member of the audience, even if

the question was bad or they were being annoying. He was also very funny. He had the kind, strict, simple, good-hearted manner of a favourite teacher.

And so the night ran: Misha's introduction. First lecturer. Q+A. Break. Misha deals with Trampoline Hall business, then introduces the second lecture. Lecture. Q+A. Break. Third lecture. Q+A. Misha ends the show. The break that goes on forever.

Make sure your lecturers are giving lectures and not confessions. Try to bring the human element out by discouraging the use of props and aids such as slide projectors and overheads. It is always best when a single person stands on stage, unadorned.

Know also that shows in which everything goes wrong are sometimes the best shows, and that an irritating lecturer sometimes leads to a fascinating Q+A. Make room the boring, the good and the bad.

Now I am nearing the end, and must talk a bit about curating. It is very important to make sure that you are asking people to lecture because you are personally excited by them and curious to see what they might say for twelve minutes on a stage. There is no point in trying to get someone to lecture because you think someone else might be interested in them.

Approach all sorts of people to lecture, especially the shy and withdrawn. Those who most want to

lecture likely have something they want to get out of the experience, which is distasteful, and such people should be discouraged.

Be as honest with your feelings and as open-minded as possible during the one or two discussions you have with the lecturer about what their topic might be. It is best to let the lecturer take the lead here, but you, the curator, must be a guide. Often what seems really interesting to a lecturer will not be really interesting to anyone else. Just as often, what seems really interesting to a lecturer will be really interesting to everyone else. A good curator must be able to tell the difference, and be right about seventy percent of the time.

The task is a subtle one. You want to make sure that the topic fits the lecturer, but not perfectly. It must be a very slightly imperfect fit, like the majority of our wardrobe.

Most significant is the central premise of Trampoline Hall, which is that people may only speak on subjects outside their area of expertise. This means that a conductor may not speak about conducting. On the other hand, a man who has undergone a liver transplant may talk about his liver transplant. And though some people believe that at Trampoline Hall people speak about their passions, this is not quite right. A person may speak about a passing fancy or curiosity -- religion, say, or the suburbs -- but a girl

who is obsessed with tubas and has a tuba collection at home should be discouraged from speaking about tubas.

I never asked to read over a lecture before it was given. Though I would not present this as a rule, it shows a lack of trust in the lecturer, and I would discourage it.

No person needs more than a month to prepare a lecture. Some of our best lecturers were fill-ins and only had a night, having been asked to lecture the day before the show.

There were four people who worked on Trampoline Hall in Toronto between December of 2001, when it began, and December of 2004, when I left. They were: Leah Walker (set designer), Carl Wilson (doorman, music), Misha Glouberman (host) and myself.

One person needs to be in charge. It can be anyone, but it should be the person with the clearest vision, the person who knows what is absolutely wrong for the show, and what the show can accept. I don't mean to suggest that there should be no collaboration and discussion, but there has to be someone who can tend to the aesthetic, and bring the right degree of unity and coherence to all the elements: the programs, the emails, the lecturers, the venue, the ticketing system, and so on. If such a person now and then wants to do a special show, for instance a beauty pageant that

is distinctly Trampoline Hall in nature, or an entire night on the subject of one particular man, with six or seven different lecturers, one a private detective who has followed the subject, another a psychoanalyst who has spoken to him, another an obituary writer, etc., they should do it.

I have not talked about why I started Trampoline Hall, what it all means, what it has done for me, or the audience, or Toronto, or the people who lectured. I will say that only one lecturer ever cried, and she was, by profession, a teacher.

Trampoline Hall is the popular Toronto-based lecture series started by Sheila Heti. It has run once a month, always on a Monday, since December 2001, and has sold out every show from the very first one. The original home of Trampoline Hall was the Cameron House in Toronto. Last year, the show went on a venue tour through the city of Toronto to find a slightly bigger home, and now plays out of Sneaky Dee's. Trampoline Hall has toured American cities down the east coast, and runs a satellite series out of New York. Sheila Heti quit Trampoline Hall last December and it is now being run by its host, Misha Glouberman, and being curated by a revolving stable of curators.

Shoegazing

by Adam Kleinman

Blood, sex, sharks and broken glass often cause a rise. For better or worse, there are certain, almost Pavlovian, mechanisms within us. These mysterious enervating triggers and subliminal targets have the power to bring-fourth near, and in some cases, total emotional alertness and possible extra-ordinary transcendence. But beware! Most advertisers subvert these responses into a conditioning device by piggybacking their product onto one or several of these visceral prompts. The resultant Trojan activates a relationship similar to psychological transference; the viewer falls in love with the "originator" and becomes subjected to the reason for the impulse. This experience then becomes tainted with a hint of lack, and the promise of a reward—instant gratification. Yet there has been an art style, which has been growing out of, or maybe against, this subterfuge.

Shoegaze, as it has been called, hits all of these enervating triggers at once like an EMP so that the initial experience opens-up a claiming realm of intuition and symbolic power. Shoegaze then prefers to simply wander this aimless space without setting-up any heavy handed orientating devices. As it is an all encompassing, unrelenting blast, Shoegaze is not interested in framing for the audience how the world should be, or what it could be, but simply that it is. By staying non-prescriptive, Shoegaze allows the initiate to become the true "mirror of the object" and dissolve into its otherworld. To put it bluntly, Shoegaze is a gesture, not a suggestion.

One can hear the inklings of this through the hyper-realism of Phil Spector's Wall of Sound. Here the near baroque orchestration is pumped full with strings, horns, innovative panned percussions and dozens of other ingredients mastered so that the coalescing sound has a spatial sensation of a hall greater than that of a cathedral—or anything you might of ever heard. Contra the Pop of the 50's, the vocals are not pressed to the forefront as in the work of Sinatra. What Spector was the first to share with his audience is that the so-called "backing" arrangements are equally important and should be simultaneously heard in the forefront. In other words, the realization that sound is not a musical platter in which a single element is to be showcased as a superimposition, but sound as a textured whole environment that creates a unified sense of place via a landscape. Antithetically, the commercial Hollywood cinema of today, has been following the opposite direction to such a degree that the object of lighting, blocking and focus is to get everything in the foreground to be as bright as possible while casting everything in the background as far away and illegible as possible. This kind of technique is that of the retail shop dealer who dramatically lights his product in order to individuate and transfix its newly founded desirability—which manifests in the viewer as lack and greedt.

Spector's super pop, is an attempt to overwhelm these narrowly circumscribed capacities. The Wall of Sound blasts over and dominates our broken logical sequences, instead changing them into one unified, recurring, obsessive litany. By bracketing and then layering so many textures into a self-contained and sustained mood, this music sets up a super-position of acoustic tangibility. This tactility is key for Shoegaze work, as it manifests itself as a kind of non-rational physical urge entering the space of the audience as one would enter a garden.

Take the work of Terrence Malick as filmic case in point. His four films are intensely visual, abound in beautiful nature imagery and elude any formulaic explanation in the typical sense of reducing a character's behaviors to psychological and/or sociological causes. *Badlands*' Kit, played by Martin Sheen, guns people down or lets them live at random; in the end of the film, his calm and well adjusted character jokes around with his "captors" and makes lucid comments on how he likes people—all while he is on the way to certain capital punishment! To borrow from Pauline Kael's ruminations on the protagonists of *Badlands*: "they are kept at a distance, doing things for no explained purpose, as if the director taped gauze over their characters so that we wouldn't be able to make a reading of them." Was Malick not right in "scoring" the film with a narrator who is a complete ingénue? The character of Holly, played by Sissy Spacek, lacks any real sense of motivation; her movements are those of a scared and cor-

nered creature trying to move away from confinement and alienation—literally the struggle for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And for that matter, she really has no motives or proper "actions"—which then becomes her legal defense. Even her voice is striped of linguistic content as it is reduced to a musical leitmotif that floats in and out with the haunting xylophone score. More over, Holly's spoken words are detached from her person since unseen lips speak them. Unlike traditional voice-over, this is a not reflection or an exposition, there is no use of either point-of-view, nor is there the eye-of-god camera tropes which are typical of voice-over. Malick's blocking is a consistent and fixed landscape tableau. Holly is just slightly removed from the frame, dissolved like an erased pencil mark.

Not only is she without motive, she has even dematerialized from the screen. I wouldn't call this simple editing out; this is a melancholic stance of disembodiment. It supplants Holly the character with a conflated meditation upon lost people, places, and things, but more importantly, on those things yet-to-be, or soon-to-be lost in our own present—the first clue of this is brilliantly alluded to in the shot where both Kit and Holly are fleeing a crime seen; shot from behind, we notice how Kit reaches out his hand toward the running Holly, but she doesn't take it. The drama of this aural induction where detached voice and sound become almost as one, is ultimately heightened by the cinematographic use of wide shots and long takes which merge all aspects of the film into one, unified field condition.

If you hadn't noticed, the title of the film is about an impossible, foreboding, yet beautiful landscape, which, one could argue, is the main character. In it we find all the emotional texture, and lyrical intensity that is not on the surface of Kit and Holly's faces. Their psychological blankness is supported by a constant flow of images that have little spatial continuity; we ride with them from a tree house in the woods, to a mansion on an estate, to a desolate oil field, to an airplane hanger, and so forth. Instead of being episodic, the protagonists' identities are slowly eroded into, and modified by, these charged discrete worlds in which the sublimity of nature's infinite indifference is set in relation to the pain of human chaos. Like the Wall of Sound, here in Badlands, we find an opera in which all elements are united into a massive and indivisible sum. This is the opposite direction from something like direct cinema or *cinéma vérité*; here in Badlands, we first see a detaching of practically oriented consciousness towards more extraordinary, universal and less-individuated dream-like states. In fact, these reveries share the same essence of nature documentaries; the attempt to freeze the soon-to-be lost while knowing it's already too late. Could this be why the film is blameless even in the face of such violence?

One could say that dreams create a point of view that organizes something which, from any other angle, is chaotic. Kit and Holly's boredom and pain are not the effect of some psychological reasons like being abused, nor are they the effects of their poverty—Stone's major flaws with *Natural Born Killers*. Rather, experiences

such as alienation, anxiety, and listlessness are shown to be fundamental facets of humanity as life oscillates between our distracting daily tasks and the realization that this banality is not based on unshakable grounds. It is through this understanding that we learn not to envy the protagonists, but simply marvel with them—after all, true sublimity as Burke put it is "tranquility tinged with terror".

As a corollary, take the song *Heroin*; our narrator, Lou Reed, here too, doesn't cognitively know where he is going, and, for that matter, that he is ultimately going to a place where "he doesn't know". Reed's lyrics simply trace out the elated and immediate mood of the drug played against neurotic feelings of alienation, anxiety and desire in 1960's American Culture. Instrumentally, we can tease out a similar mirrored play of tension, release and drifting through rising and falling dynamics which are advanced by sparse then tight rhythmic percussion.

Hauntingly added to the mix is John Cale's discordant viola that is both a shrill jarring sound and a sustained yearning purr. This continuo ties all together just as Malick's blocking wed, but not lead, the disparate elements of Badlands.

Again, we have a narrator much like Holly; one who is intuitively trying for something with a nullified personality who's voice is more or less an aural component to the overall mood of the sound landscape.

Interestingly, the song neither condones nor recommends heroin as that would be an objectification or definition of the cognitive mind that would stand in front of its emotional physicality, that it is. To do so would also negate the sounds themselves; VU are not chemists producing and handing out heroin but rendering a sensation in auditory terms.

And again, what are these terms?

One could say that Reed's, like Holly's repetitive and monotonous speech is that of the depressed. It is a bath of elated despair spoken from unseen lips wafting over a massive yet ultimately repetitive and solidified mass. At the end of the last note you can easily move back to the first. This kind of cyclical pattern seems to acknowledge the disparaging pain that even happiness is temporal and ultimately moves toward a new sense of boredom or confinement.

Yet maybe through certain kinds of development, with subject and modulation, by way of repetition, axes can become unhinged. Like an affirmation that stands against something by baring witness that you are, in fact, in-it, this continued voicing of unhingement bears the ecstatic truth of an infinitely flowing survival mechanism; comfort through continued negation. And there is pleasure in these traumata, for it is a stimulus, which, by definition, pierces the ordinary. But can it be called upon, is it ready at hand?

One Shoegaze trope is the tease of an obsessive restraint, a magnifying of our insignificant banalities and just holding-back slightly from being totally engulfed by them. The b-line to this intensification is simply doubling; picking up on Kit and Holly above, director Won Kar Wai's series—of essentially the same romance film—spiral around one repressed and alienated couple.

Eight times do we see slow motion views of *In the Mood for Love*'s main characters walking to the noodle shop, at work, and so on with the same minimalist score—and on the subject of sound tracks, isn't *California Dreaming* played ad nauseam in *Chunking Express*? In a draft for *In the Mood for Love*, Won Kar Wai toyed with making a film in which Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung would play every character, including the extras that pass by. What we get with this kind of mixture is an implanting of an experience; the setting, the characterizations and the musical leitmotif converge into an empathic litany running parallel to our own repetitive gestures and quotidian rituals. This "same old song" of existence, played over and over again, lullabies the lovers and the audiences into the universal understanding that everyone is exactly like everyone else.

Like past loves and loves yet-to-come, we all have succumbed and suffered for that dream-like dissolution into the other person. Everyone feels the way Cheung & Leung do, at all moments; living together then be-

comes a process of surrendering to this pre-givenness and fundamental non-uniqueness of individual experience.

But, doesn't this fly in the face of the "I" of experience; with the absolute, irreducible uniqueness of the originality of one's own feelings—that "no one else feels as I do".

Yes, exactly, but who goes to the movies alone, it's a social experience. Maybe this trope is a byproduct of a need to separate a little from the story for its vicarious catharsis to fully root. The conceit here is that Won Kar Wai's characters themselves are trying to get space from the story's obvious trajectory.

The players best defense from being sucked in again, is the disconnected solitude or loner/hipster characterizations—aka vanity. Yet, it is through this necessary self-defining vanity that emotion can be felt most.

The not acted upon; the lost chance of an encounter. Is it not these little murderous moments of isolation, which perpetuate a cycle of incompleteness, loss, and want? All that is left of the day is the shell of that memory, of that chance, a souvenir. The English title of the film tells it all, In the Mood for Love; it is foreplay of a story, it is not "in love."

Foreplay then points the way to melancholy; the "what ifs" of life are the most powerful way to occupy some-

one's mind since they dwell in a person's imagination. This is where that on-screen restrained emotion pays off; it becomes that which the audience is aware of, but not shown or heard. This is similar to a good horror film director who appeals to the audience's own creative skills and implies the most heinous and 'unshowable' by simply doing that, leaving it un-shown. Although this is an overly common idea in horror and tragedy, Wai intelligently brings the same idea into the realm of relationship dramas.

This is the trick; we all together intuitively share a "feeling" but can't call to it by name. Just re-watch the final scene of In the Mood For Love taking place among the ruins of Angkor Wat; what does he whisper—if anything at all? This is not a simple silence, but is a loss of breath; a moment in which something ends, and then turns again with the gasping need for new life. This interruption of the narrative, called attention to by the escapism of going on a tour in another country, enables Wai to refer to the past without, however; ascribing meaning to past events in the course of speech. In so doing, the event takes place within the film, but is not declared. Wai is toying here with the possibilities of direction so that the player's memories cannot be fixed, and are allowed to become a personal "fill in the blank" for anyone watching.

This is not an emotion which should be confused with simple nostalgia, for nostalgia evokes the feeling of a fond remembrance, and a bittersweet yearning for old

times. The still silence of the world's largest religious monument acts like an embodied re-experience of a moment, like the long humming drone of a bell after it has been struck. It may be triggered by memory, but becomes an ever-present beyond the history of the characterizations, for it now has a shared resonance in the hearts of the audience—like the proof of the existence of the Sect of the Phoenix, for those of you who know. Yet there are some things, which stand in the way of this shared elation.

Habituation and over-familiarization of the world is rooted in a worthwhile pragmatism; people tend to make models of the world based on previous conceptions in order to form a relative foundation from which to build communication. Yet, an all-to-human laziness sets in so that our projected models blur out, and stand in front of new details and odd nuances that don't fit in with what one has come to expect—aka plot formulae and devices. To collage Werner Herzog together with William Blake, there is a need for new images as a perceptual cleansing so that we can see the world as it actually is.

Take a look at Ed Ruscha's knee jerk reactions to the fleeting nature of Hollywood culture and American advertising. Ruscha, turns advertising back upon itself; catch words, slogans, billboards and so forth, are slowed down so that a clever phrase or flashy color scheme meant to catch the eye at 60-mph, becomes a fixed 3-d still-life to be look at while standing. By very

definition, Ruscha's works are abstractions; ephemeralities pulled out from very real sites. It is in this set-up, a kind of syncopation or caesura, much like the silence at the stones of Angkor Wat, that makes Ruscha particularly Shoegaze.

A key aspect of Ruscha's art is that he is creating non-sequitur monuments out of commonplace moments. Californian urban sprawl has, according to some folks, created cities of landmarks rather than icons, one defined by car culture rather than great architecture. Yet it is in this instantly faded glamour that the lost California dream is triumphant. The quotidian banalities of this dream land; the gas stations, swimming pools, car parks, and so forth, are all bathed in a dramatic, maybe reflected, Technicolor, where the California sunshine is replaced with neo-noir neon. Aided by its blunt and edited minimalism, the absence of painterly gesture employed by Ruscha calls to attention the dramatic worm's eye perspectives and wholly artificial treatment of light. Furthermore, the scale of many of the paintings hovers around 2.35:1, or that of Cinemascope. In fact, Ruscha himself stated that: "most of my proportions are affected by the concept of the panorama... I try to focus on where the sky meets the ground so you have a stretched-out version, something panoramic...a Panavision format."

And now, we have returned to something like that emotionally achieved landscape space of Badlands'; unified fields of repeated images, blurred figure grounds,

life set against the context of the scalelessness and an inherent addiction with our own habits. In Ruscha's work, the very moments of our cultural ephemerality are frozen as an *idée fixe* force pointing the way to a shared mutual dream—or shared hallucination.

Pop culture continues to move you long after the initial external stimulus has ceased, like the proverbial song that gets "stuck in your head". It is by tapping straight into the first stimulus itself, and freezing it, that Ruscha screams instead of whispers this undeniable repeat.

These psychological powers of Hollywood probably did not derive directly from its geography, but is a function of our cultural group concentrating our spiritual force onto that particular area.

The journey West has long been a theme of hope and future in American Frontier painting for centuries. Ruscha's work continues that line and serves as a re-sanctification monument that re-mythologizes and re-codifies the "used-up" land, new yet again. Just as the Christians placed their churches on top of Roman temple sites, this slaking of an emotional thirst points toward revitalization through the use of a recognizable but reconfigured vocabulary.

It may be a bit of a paradox, but maybe here we have come close to what could be called a definition of the Shoegaze stance; the fueling of a monumental every-moment. To have attunement with a mood, it must

be sustained. Climaxing structures and goal oriented narratives simply set one up for the ultimate fall-off, or "fin". The difference in these two temperaments, narrative v. fueling, is best illustrated by how one eats a piece of chocolate; traditional narrative is as those whom bite straight in, Shoegaze on the other hand, lets the chocolate dissolve slowly into the taste buds and coats their topography with a mocha map. As it is an art of stamina and prolongation, Shoegaze must therefore fight differentiation through unification of elements and theme. Furthermore, it brings intensification through repetition, not delineation. In so doing, Shoegaze attempts to meet the world as a groundless source of mystery so that the world reveals itself to us via our moods instead of bracketing itself to narrative lines, or resolved character arcs. We learn to sink or swim depending on how constantly these melodies keep flowing.

†This idea of promoting the awe around the actor him/herself instead of attempting to create a self-contained filmic world is the essence and failure of the so-called "Star System".

Insouciant Art Collectives; the Latest Roll-Out from Enterprise Culture

by Greg Sholette

"Over the years the rebel has naturally become the central image of this culture of consumption, symbolizing endless, directionless change, an eternal restlessness with "the establishment" --or, more correctly, with the stuff "the establishment" convinced him to buy last year"

—Thomas Frank in *Commodify Your Dissent*, (p 151)

For those who crave cultural distraction without the heavy intellectual price tag now comes a pack of new and inscrutable art collectives offering colorful, guilt-free fun. Forcefield, Derraindrop, Paper Rad, Gelatin, The Royal Art Lodge, HobbypopMuseum, their names flicker impishly across the otherwise dull screen of the contemporary art world invoking not so much the plastic arts as the loopy cheer of techno music and its nostalgia for a make-believe 1960s epitomized by LSD, free love and day-glo -- instead of civil rights, feminism and SDS. Yes, artists' groups are hot. Or so chimes the harbingers of art world value production as its symbol-producing machinery gears up to meet what is still a speculative demand. One commentator describes the tenor of this new wave of group art making as "fast, cheap, and exuberant." Alison M Gingeras tells us in the March 2004 edition of *Artforum* that this fresh collectivity is not at all solemn. It is "insouciant." It eschews the "sociopolitical agenda associated with collective art making" and reflects "a juvenile disregard for historical veracity." And all that is fine because its indifference "mirrors the times."

Indeed, the members of Derraindrop must have been feeling pretty insouciant when in an interview they joked about a plan to,

"? kill Paul McCartney as a publicity stunt last year, we were going to wear like one of our shirts and just totally like fucking blow his head off and get our picture taken in every newspaper in the world."

Ah, the proverbial archetype of artist as sociopath only amplified in this case by a communal spirit resembling the Manson Cult more than the Zapatistas and substituting an aged rock idol for the role of Sharon Tate. But can we really blame these kids? With zero knowledge about the rich history of collective art practice they naively reinvent it as if it were another art style or a fraternity for cultural delinquents. Certainly there exists a long legacy of raging against the anesthetized routines of modern life. And it is peppered with plenty of neurotic role models from Alfred Jarry to Johnny Rotten. Except when the Sex Pistols wailed god save the

queen it was anything but an invitation to a schmooze fest with the establishment. Likewise, when the 60s' Japanese art collective known simply as Group "I" filled a gallery with tons of gravel and named it E. Jari (a pun on A. Jarry since Jari in Japanese means gravel*) it was an intentional act of undermining both institutional space and artistic identity. Or consider the descent into cannibalistic behavior that signals the inevitable cul-de-sac of petit bourgeois rebellion in Jean-Luc Goddard's apocalyptic film Weekend. Is it any surprise then that our new, fledgling "fast, cheap and exuberant" art collective's blissfully embrace the entrepreneurial values of the contemporary art world including self-satisfied commercialism, fashionable narcissism, and the rejection of art as a vehicle for social change? Their mirroring of the times is in fact the ultimate nostalgia trip. (Cut to kid pounding bright red trap set in the middle of the woods as pseudo guerrilla cell prepares kidnapped bourgeois family for supper.)

I can assure you that the collectives I knew and worked with in the 1980s and 1990s mirrored a very different reading of reality. Radical politics and social involvement were central to Political Art Documentation and Distribution (PAD/D), Group Material, Carnival Knowledge, and REPOhistory as it was for most collectives that came before and after including Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC), Art Workers Coalition (AWC), Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), Paper Tiger in the 1970s and more recently Dyke Action Machine, Guerrilla

Girls, Gran Fury, RTmark, the Yes Men, Sub Rosa, Critical Art Ensemble, Yomango, Whisper Media and Temporary Services to mention but a smattering of the many self-organized artists organization that have emerged over the past thirty years. And if group anonymity permitted these varied art collectives to boldly challenge the status quo it is likely that it also provides a mask for the anti-social cynicism of the new and the few who, explains Gingeras, "stake their identity on a certain strategic frivolity."

So why this sudden need to revamp the political rebelliousness of group artistic practice, to re-package it as something "cheap," "tribal," "insouciant"? When compared to almost every previous collective and many new ones, the recent crop of gallery sponsored art groupettes is unmistakably a product of enterprise culture. As put forward by historian Chin-tao Wu enterprise culture is the near total privatization of everything up to and including that which once stood outside or opposite the reach of capitalism including avant-garde and radical art. At the same time it provides the ground for sensation seeking artist entrepreneurs such as Damien Hirst and the Chapman Brothers. But if communal activity, collaboration, egalitarian cooperation run directly opposite individuated forms of capitalist greed, well then enterprise culture does not aim to overtly repress this but instead seeks ways of branding and packaging such contradiction in order to sell it back to us.

But wait. Can capital really appropriate its own antithesis? No, of course it can't. But it is able to utilize a range of sophisticated, representational and code-copying technologies much in the way vaccines are formulated to arouse an immune system response. Vaccines are devised by stripping the protein shell of a virus from its resourceful replicating DNA. The contemporary art industry has found a way of separating the image of collectivist art from its incontestable history of overt, political radicalism. Only after this de-politicized scrubbing process can new group formations be rendered appropriate for the institutional art world. The resulting vacuity leaves them fully re-loadable and ready for an astonishing infusion of jargonistic hyperbole. (And always this rhetoric revolves almost entirely around tropes of primitivism and naïveté as illustrated above.) De-contamination of collective politics permits the individualistically centered art world to safely "bond" with its antithesis and without any serious disruption of its market for discretely authorized products. Therefore these groovy new art groups not only appear freshly minted but thanks to an endemic historical amnesia on the part of curators, art historians, administrators, critics and sadly even artists, entities such as Forcefield et al? actually appear, choke, radical, at least from within the circumscribed horizon of contemporary art.

But rather than give this ground up completely is it possible to engage in a bit of reverse engineering? I mean if the prestige and financial power of the art

world can be mobilized to authenticate one rather anemic form of collective practice, then why not use that breach to leverage other, more challenging and socially progressive collaborative forms? Why stop at the museum either? What about work places, schools, public spaces, even the military? The challenge now is to concoct a counter-vaccine or Trojan Virus that renders administrated culture defenseless as a radically democratic, participatory creativity spreads that is every bit as playful and nimble in its own passionate way as so-called insouciant collectivity.

March 31 2004

* Details borrowed from an unpublished essay by Reiko Tomii.

The Pink Bloque

Interview Themselves

Dara and Rachel from the Pink Bloque give themselves the interview they have always wanted.

The Pink Bloque is a radical feminist dance troupe based in Chicago. We do choreographed street dance actions to popular tunes at protests and on our own. Our actions include flyering on specific social justice issues and discussing politics with people passing by. Our intention is to use our tactics to get attention for leftist issues and inspire civic dialogue through giving a new look to protest. Not only have we gotten the attention of people on the street, but we have also been noticed by various press including this here publication.

We started getting tired of being asked the same questions by interviewers about what we do and not what we think about what we do or about the political agendas of why we do what we do. The frequently asked questions about our history can be answered by checking out www.pinkbloque.org. In this interview, we want a chance to answer some questions we often ask ourselves and wish other people would ask us.

Note: In general we like to present a unified Pink Bloque voice in the media. However, we thought it would be interesting to highlight that the Pink Bloque is made up of 13 diverse humans with their own concrete particularities and their own takes on the Pink Bloque. Here are the voices of two particular and peculiar members of Chicago's famed Pink Bloque:

So, we heard y'all went on tour. Why? Can you tell me stories from tour?

R - yes. in august 2003 we went on tour. we went to pittsburg, richmond, dc, baltimore, philadelphia, and new york. we did a presentation about the basic history and theory of the pink bloque and then we gave a dance lesson and did an action on the street about US occupation at home (of minds, private lives, and media through the Patriot Act(s) and FCC deregulation) and abroad (militarily in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, etc).

the most circulated story from tour is our intense interaction with a marine in richmond. he was offended by our banner which read, "Occupation abroad and repression at home are unjustified" and came limping towards us super pissed. he went off, "have any of you ever been over there?" and proceeded to tell us

about how 15 of his friends were killed in Iraq and someone the day before had spit on him because he was in uniform.

some of us doing the action laid on the tactical flirt. we talked and agreed that this occupation of iraq was fucked up and then he calmed down and shook our hands and said, "i appreciate what you are doing out here in trying to get the troops home." as he walked away someone yelled, "don't vote for george bush!" and he replied, "that's a given."

D - I was excited to go on tour because many people in our indy/diy/punk community go on tour with their bands and I thought it would be interesting to see how other forms of culture and resistance do out there on the road. I was also interested in finding out if our tactics made sense in other contexts than Chicago and to continue/promote a national dialogue on creative resistance.

i agree with Rachel that the story of the military man was certainly memorable and although we may or may not have said everything we meant, we certainly wouldn't have had this interaction inside a rock club or in an art gallery.

i was really proud that a group such as ours was able to organize an unusual tour like this and to raise enough money to cover the costs for ten people. The administrative and fund raising work we do is not exactly our activism but the fact that we have to do

it is political. Groups that serve the interest of the ruling class agenda or who have no agenda tend to be funded. Groups such as ours who are saying NO to violence, war, and corporate domination and YES to autonomy, equality, and resistance rarely get a lot of monetary support.

So you say the Pink Bloque is a tactic, not a strategy, what's the difference?

R - a tactic is one maneuver people use as part of a plan to get a goal achieved. a strategy is a larger plan to achieve a clear goal for decisive change and an outlining of what needs to happen for that change to take place. a strategy entails long term and concrete visioning. the pink bloque is an effective tactic in that we are good at getting attention and we want to bring attention to certain issues or change the mood and aesthetics of a certain context.

D - I think that what we are fighting is so huge that it is hard to figure out a strategy that makes total sense. Tactics are an excellent starting point for engagement and so perhaps engagement could be part of our strategy. If more people can be engaged with a social justice dialogue than maybe a larger body of people will actively resist the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal empire and things will change.

What do you mean when you say the white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal empire?

R - i think it is important to use those words because

i think people do not use that language much [call things 'racist' et cetera] and rarely articulate that in their politics. i think my peers tend to say 'that's fucked up' but never how or why or how what is fucked up is linked to structural, historical oppressions.

what we do is an attempt to challenge the devaluation and degradation of women and people of color. we want to confront the polices that amount to violent imperialism via "the market"; and we cannot do one thing or have one beef with an issue. we have multiple beefs and we try to explain how things are white supremacist / hetero sexist et cetera. the pink bloque uses this tag line because we are attempting a "post - issue based activism". none of these things can be separated out from the other. it is like a big pashmina shawl of oppression that we are trying to shake off by dancing.

D - We are basically talking about an imbalance of power that is geographically and historically specific and where race, gender, and capital are complexly interconnected. We know that the land we walk on was taken from indigenous people and we know that the wealth of this nation was accumulated at the expense of the lives and cultures of people from Africa. This historical wrongdoing has not been rectified. We see much of the same power dynamics perpetuated in America's lust for access to cheap goods and access to the world's resources. We know that the ruling class of this country are still predomi-

nantly white, male and have profits and protecting capital as their primary interest. We are not working toward mere representation of non-white/non-males in the powered circle as exemplified by the multi-cultural Bush White House team or the middle class examples of a predominantly marginalized group. We are talking about a paradigmatic shift in ideas and practices of power, economics, and social interaction.

You have enjoyed a lot of exposure in the mainstream and indie press. How do you feel about this and what impact do you think it has on your intention to challenge the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal empire?

R - i understand that media exposure is tactical and that as a deliberate spectacle we set ourselves up to be consumed. however i never really envisioned that we would receive a lot of press. i have a lot of baggage from riot grrrl and not trusting media because they can and will manipulate your message and image – even 'indie' media. i feel like the bulk of the coverage [and there are several exceptions] we have received has minimized our political messaging and focused more on the aesthetics or otherwise benign things about us. i feel like the more we do things the more mediated our politics become. when we get ready for actions, we find ourselves saying, "what are we going to say when the media approaches us?" while it is valuable to think of things to say in advance so we do not come off as

dumbasses ---i wonder if it bothers us collectively that we are so comfortable in the sexism and garishness of spectacle culture that we presume media will pay attention to us; and i wonder if it will occur to us ever again to say, "we are not going to talk to the media." i have doubts that the media, especially mainstream media, will ever portray us as complex, articulate activists.

D - Although I did not expect media exposure when this started either, I have felt that it does fit into our mission of making activism not just more accessible but more visible. Corporate media has the ability to influence society on a mass scale that we can't imagine touching. We just don't have access to those resources, so if the Washington Post only devotes a few lines to reporting that ten women in pink do actions against the war in Iraq, it seems like that could potentially keep street level resistance part of the cultural landscape.

You use a lot of the language of pop culture which is a product of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal empire? Do you feel that using this language is validating this cultural product?

R - we cannot pretend that pop culture does not exist. our ignoring it or not using pop culture will not topple corporate controlled mass media and re-engineer the products. it is limited to use pop culture to convey left messages because it was not created for that, but i think we use a lot of the language of

the left too; which is often dense, condescending, militaristic, hyperbolic, and/or just plain boring.

i on many occasions draw pleasure from an outcast song or a particularly sordid episode of blind date. i think the problem with pop culture lies in the messaging it contains and the way pop culture attempts to validate passivity and apathy -- not to mention questionable fashion trends. appropriating the language of pop culture for messaging that does not have to do with buying things or getting naked is ok by me. well, i do not even want to stop trying to get people to get naked, but that is another interview.

D - I think that pop culture tends to be a one-way communication and I think we are trying to complicate that. I also think that corporate pop culture is not just used to sell products, but also to distract us from important political things and from more meaningful interactions with each other. Since we are already interacting with it (some like to say "It is the air we breathe."), I think it is worthwhile to try to use it in ways it was not intended to be used and as a hook to move our product - which is progressive political action. Of course it is limited in terms of creative and political possibility (as most mediums are). Most pop culture is not attempting to image a liberated or just world except in terms of individualistic desires such as driving fast cars or having shopping choices or whatever it might be. I can't deny I am looking forward to the next episode of Average Joe, but I am more looking forward to the end of white

supremicist capitalist patriarchy, and I am not sure when that season of programming is going to hit the networks so I just try to keep working towards it.

You all are pretty cute and consumable. Do you think this could be a double-edged sword?

R - yes. i think we started off wanting to be funny and we are cute despite ourselves because we are comprised of a group of people that do have marketable good looks across a wide spectrum. after all, there are tons of other smart, articulate activists who do not get splayed across the washington post.

cuteness is great for coverage and getting people to stop and take your flyer or watch your action. However, cuteness does not allow for us to get angry or show anger in a variety of ways --- an expression which has been historically denied to women. we are not those screaming angry feminists or at least not in public and i think there needs to be more room in the public sphere for those angry screamers than there is now. i wish that we were making more room for complex femininities in public and in politics. i think we try to insert into our messaging how certain oppression affects women, and i think that we also attempt to insert the feminist analysis of power, but i think we may also come off as those 3rd wave gilmore girls types, sassy-and-feminist-but-lucky-for- them-they- have- their- good-looks-and-educations-to-fall-back-on appeal. cuteness: it is our gift. it is our curse.

D - I agree with Rachel about how sexism confines how women (and men for that matter) can express themselves. Cuteness is a double-edged sword in that it holds a certain level of power in getting attention for our activism and that is why we choose it as a tactic. My greatest fear in our tactic is that it could possibly affirm narrowly defined ideas about how women can be/look and the world I want to live in includes all variety of gender expressions. We acknowledge over and over that cute, pink girlyness is only one performance of gender among countless possibilities, but since it fits into a dominant idea of how women can be, perhaps it is easy for people to not hear us saying that how we present ourselves is only a performance and not a natural state.

Do you feel like the Pink Bloque has had an influence on politics and/or culture?

R - which politics and which culture? i think we have inspired a lot of people in our immediate circles to pay attention to national and international politics. i think we have reduced our peers shyness or dread about attending public demonstrations. i think that we have thrown some of the most amazing benefits anyone has ever been to ever.

D - I think we have influenced our own immediate community in opening up a space for people to talk about politics more. I am not sure we can measure or figure out ways we have influenced culture.

In your letters, you sign off "yours in a better, cuter world," what does that look like for the pink bloque?

R - there would be no hateration, just reparations. people of all shapes, sizes, colors, and nationalities would be wanted and respected and loved and celebrated. there would be a national rail system, and it would be free, and there would be soul vegetarian protein tid bits served as snacks. oh and the nation state would be abolished, replaced by autonomous nurturing communities that respect the self determination of all people everywhere trying to live without oppressing others.

D - Hey Rachel, can I get on that train with you?

