

SOCIAL SCULPTURE



‘Social sculpture’ is a phrase coined by Joseph Beuys. For Beuys social sculpture implied that art could alter society. It is certainly the case that political art is one of the most significant manifestations of modernity. Its importance becomes apparent when one considers that in the pre-modern period, when art largely depended on church and courtly patronage, political subject matter

was determined by or in discussion with the patron. The evolution of the capitalist art market from the late eighteenth onward increasingly offered the artist a new-found freedom of expression. The principal patron was now the gallerist who, like the artist, was bourgeois. This levelling of social position brought the artist and patron into a new relationship in which artistic indi-

vidualism was valued over and above the will of the patron.

In spite of the explosion of (bourgeois) individualism that accompanied industrialization, one has to admit that Beuys' notion of 'social sculpture' is somewhat romantic. Contemporary political art has to contend with the fact that the modes of visual representation that have the greatest social impact are mass media. In contrast, painting and sculpture consist largely of custom-crafted objects exhibited in a single locale and seen by relatively few people. One can compare this situation to that of the Victorian Grand Tour, when only the wealthy were able to afford to embark upon the international travel necessary to see famous works of art. We have a similar situation today. Of course we can see reproductions in books now, but that never compares with seeing the original. Painting does not reproduce well and sculpture adds the challenge of its three-dimensionality. And as for installation: it is the most difficult form of all to translate into static reproductions. If one wants to see instances of contemporary installationism one must travel to a centre such as Berlin, New York or London. And the capacity for international travel remains an advantage.

To overcome the limitations of the bourgeois gallery system artists have used forms of expression that function outside the gallery. Jenny Holzer's use of electronic display boards in public places in the 1980s is an outstanding example of such a strategy as are Krzysztof Wodiczko's projections of images onto the sides of buildings. But it is not only the art gallery that poses a boundary between the general population and fine art. It is also the case that modern and postmodern art seems more intellectually demanding than popular cultural forms such as film, television and music.

Such art demands that the spectator is informed. In fact this is not dissimilar to the way in which people become informed about popular culture and sport. But avant-gardist fine art appears to place a substantial demand on the intellect. The knowledge prerequisite leads to a situation of exclusivity that can contradict an artist's political aspirations. The most obvious solution to this problem would be to make the meaning of an art work blindingly obvious as is the case in advertising and propaganda. But there are obvious objections to taking such a route.

Abstraction was the first difficult route taken by modern art. But it was eventually understood by quite a broad swathe of the population. This seems to be due to the symbiotic relationship between abstraction in fine art and modernist architecture and design. If a person can appreciate the elegance of modernist architecture or interior design then she or he only has to make a relatively short step to appreciating geometric abstraction in painting and sculpture. And once one has accepted the premise that art can be abstract then that opens the door to an appreciation of other modes of abstraction such as abstract expressionism.

Deconstructive art has no obvious social function akin to that of geometric abstraction-inspired architecture and design. If there is anything that is practical about the discourse of deconstruction then it might be the radical questioning of orthodoxy in general. But the history of deconstructive art is one of chaos and fragmentation, from the shattering of Renaissance perspective in Cubism, to the apotheosis of chance in Duchamp, Dada and Surrealism, and the destruction of conventional narrative in the field of avant-gardist literature.

Fundamentally, it is the intimate relationship between counter-narrative practice and deconstruction that presents a challenge

to political art that wants to be transgressive in a deconstructive mode. The central problem is that political art usually entails transmitting a message. But if one is dedicated to counter-narrative practice then that is a problematic requirement.

One of the challenges facing contemporary political artists is how to square the circle of communicating a political message using an experimental mode of expression. Another is how to step outside the socially restricted sanctum of the art gallery. In this chapter I will examine how artists working in the area of contemporary installation sculpture face these challenges.



RENÉE GREEN

political projections

Renée Green, plan for an exhibiton at the Secession, Vienna: 'I converted the [Vienna] Secession exhibition space into a maze. Within the maze one could encounter a combination of interrelated works produced between 1996 and 1999 and for the first time presented in relation to each other.' {Green, 1999 #873}

Art like humour tends to be less effective the more didactic it becomes. Accordingly, political art often employs allegory which is less concerned with communicating a clear (ideological) message than with placing interpretation into the hands of the viewer.

Renée Green is of interest because she tackles topics that have obvious political connotations yet she is far from prescriptive in the messages her works convey. In this respect she could be contrasted with a fellow African-American artist Fred Wilson who's works transmit more explicit political messages. Green's work is characterized by her use of counter-narrative strategies that avoid the closure of meaning evident in classical linear narrative. As one commentator notes, Green deploys 'many kinds of models for discerning knowledge and in turn alludes to the tensions between them' {Secession, 1999 #865}. In so doing she inevitably creates complexity rather than certainty. Her methodologies make information more complex in a manner antithetical to classical modes of narrative. Hers is a quintessentially *counter-narrative* practice.



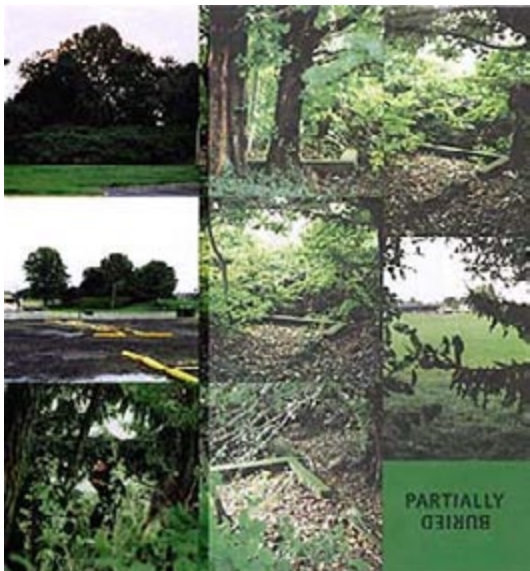
According to the classical framework there is a situation which should be correctly interpreted by the artist according to the proper political framework. But in Green's work the observer (both author and reader) becomes entwined in what he or she observes leading to what might be termed an *implicative narrative*: which is to say a narrative that to a significant degree depends on the reader for its meanings and which is deliberately open ended in order to facilitate this process.

Green's working methods are revealed particularly well in *Partially Buried in Three Parts*. Like many of her works it is constructed and reconstructed over years. She often recycles pieces into other pieces in a way that makes her oeuvre comparable to a holistic system in which the parts and subsystems continually interact and re-organize.

In a talk at Secession in Vienna Green noted that *Partially Buried in Three Parts* began with a reflection upon Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970, which like many earth art works is no longer physically extant and is available solely through its photodocumentation. Instances of these photodocuments are reproduced here. Green's *Partially Buried in Three Parts* grew out of a consideration of the year 1970 and, as will all her works, the associations became increasingly dense as she delved deeper into the project {Secession, 1999 #865}.

In a text on *Partially Buried in Three Parts*, 1996-99, Green provides us with valuable insight into her working method. She cites Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's *Arts of Impoverishment* {Bersani, 1993 #743} noting that their theory of art provides 'a formal model of how human beings "find them-





selves” through a process of misrecognition’ {CEPA, 1999 #867}. In the context of Green’s installation *Partially Buried in Three Parts* she observes that according to the Bursani-Dutoit position the role of viewer is understood as one of piecing ‘together the various parts of the work, rather than attempting to absorb and master it’ {CEPA, 1999 #867}. Applied to Green’s work this means adopting a mode of display that will avoid an overly coherent reading on the part of both the author and the reader (and the author-reader).

This interpretation is supported when Green reports that from the Bursani-Dutoit standpoint the *exhibition* of works of art can be understood in similar terms. Instead of there being a single site that is specific to the unique work of art there are ‘a network of operations which can take place over time and in a number of places’ {CEPA, 1999 #867}. Green notes that *Partially Buried in Three Parts* involves a ‘web of genealogical traces which are probed through the notions of sites of memory as well as site-specific work’.

It would appear that Green imagines her work as operating beyond the confines of its literal exhibition. She explains that in Part One, *Partially Buried* (originally shown at Pat Hearn Gallery in 1996), she was concerned with:

what the notion of “site” or “nonsite” might mean today, when one’s sense of place and time can depend largely on where one’s computer screen is, and when memory is determined for some by computer storage capacity. How are the ‘returns of what is repressed’ mediated and how do they erupt? The concept of being an ‘American artist,’ and the notion of national identities and cultural predilections



become conflated; entropy, memory and its contradictions, memorials and monuments, nostalgia, and “radical” change repeated as style are all ideas which circulate in this work {CEPA, 1999 #867}.

Green points to the fact that globalized communications are altering traditional concepts of home, community, nationality and identity. Personal memory is radically intersected by the Westernized collective consciousness that is mass media and the prosthetic memory that is the internet search engine. The instantaneity of mass media forces us out of the *then* of nostalgia and into the *now* of fashion, celebrity and the latest must-have consumer item. On the other hand increasingly available electronic knowledge opens up previously less accessible vaults of information.

To the immediacy of communications media one can add increased international travel and an acceptance of the need for career-oriented mobility. It is less usual for someone to stay in the same town all their life than it might have been even twenty years ago. An exception might be if that person was born in a major metropolis such as London, Tokyo or New York which function like central processing units into which the rest of the world is connected by millions of differentiated threads: metropolises such as these are simultaneously somewhere and everywhere. They are both sites and nonsites. And they have always been a focus for political struggle as well as being cultural and financial centres.

One can also compare Green’s notion of the intersection of personal memory with the collective consciousness that is mass media and communication and the aesthetics of mon-



tage that stretches back from contemporary digital media to early twentieth century experiments with collage, photography and film. We can connect the peculiarly modernist aesthetics of montage with Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory and the use of such ideas by Craig Owens to theorize postmodernism {Owens, 1984 #144}. Owens observes that 'allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete' {Owens, 1984 #144: 206} and also points to Benjamin's allegorical conception of history as ruins buried in the landscape of the now.

Green gave Part Two of *Partially Buried* the subtitle '*Übertragen/Transfer*'. She explains that this second part explores the change in the perception of Germans living in Germany during the 1970s who since moved to the USA. Specifically she was interested in how they perceived the USA from the standpoint of living in Europe. It can be noted that in line with Green's observations regarding the motility of perception these people will have not only altered their perception of the USA by living there but will have also altered their perceptions of Germany. Green meditates on this cosmopolitan quandry:

How does one return? To a country, to a place of birth? To a location which reeks of remembered sensations? But what are these sensations? Is it possible to trace how they are triggered and why they are accompanied with as much dread as anticipation? {Secession, 1999 #865}.

Green is describing the effect of culture shock that occurs not only when one leaves one's 'native' culture for a 'foreign'

culture, but also when one becomes acclimatized to the foreign culture, going 'native' as it were, and then returns to one's 'homeland' only to experience it with a similar degree of culture shock to that experienced when first arriving in the 'foreign' culture. As such relocations increase so do the psychological states that accompany them. In a sense we are all becoming 'displaced persons'.

Part Three of *Partially Buried* concerns Green's memories of photojournalistic images of the Korean War which she saw as a child. When exhibiting at the Kwangju Biennale 1997 she took photographs of Kwangju and Seoul and mixed them with the Korean War images. She explains that she wanted to express a 'mingling of present and past, what is near and what is far, what is other and what is one's self' {CEPA, 1999 #867}. The resulting photoinstallation draws attention to the complexity of our mental representations of nationalities, and specific times and places. It also introduces a significant element of defamiliarization via a juxtaposition of images of war and peace without any guide to how these ought to be interrelated. The reader is left to make up their own connections.

What is especially interesting about Green's approach here is the way in which she inserts a personal dimension into what could in other artists' hands be purely political commentaries. This marks an interesting development in the genre of political art which is constantly bedevilled by art theoretical prescriptiveness from Walter Benjamin {Benjamin, 1984 #9 [1935]} Peter Bürger {Bürger, 1984 #26 [1974]} through to Benjamin Buchloh {Buchloh, 1982 #268}.

In contrast to such prescriptiveness, it would appear that

Green is intent on deliberately skewing the focus of her messages. One might refer to this, after Craig Owens {Owens, 1984 #144}, as an 'allegorical procedure' where allegory implies the a Derridean labyrinth of representation in contrast to the more direct messages of artists such as John Heartfield or Hans Haacke.



Maria Eichhorn, *Acquisition of a Plot of Land, Tibusstrasse, Corner of Breul*, installation sculpture , Muenster Sculpture Project, 1997.

MARIA EICHHORN

art and life

Maria Eichhorn's contribution to the Münster Sculpture Project 1997 on the topic 'Sculpture in the Public Domain' was a piece in which she addresses land ownership in the city of Munster. Eichhorn explores one of the basic requirements of art in the public space: she questions land ownership in the city. Her contribution to 'Sculpture. Projects in Münster 1997' consists of purchasing a piece of property in the inner city, and documenting the transference of ownership in the land register.¹⁰

The title of her piece was *Acquisition of a plot of land: Tibusstrasse, corner of Breul*. The contract of sale was on exhibition in the Landesmuseum Domplatz the visitor was also directed to the Land Registry Office and to the actual plot of land. How do we understand this as a work of sculpture? One's understanding of such actions may begin with the Readymade but the Readymade is informed by a larger strategic formation which is focused on creating interrelationships between art and life. *And the result of pursuing this objective has not been the destruction of the art museum-market system but the expansion of the boundaries of what is recognized as art.*

Eichhorn's Munster 97 piece is as minimalist as Duchamp's *Fountain*, it is just a plot of ground. The question then arises as to the aesthetic interest of the plot of ground, or whether art requires aesthetic interest. Or whether aesthetic interest

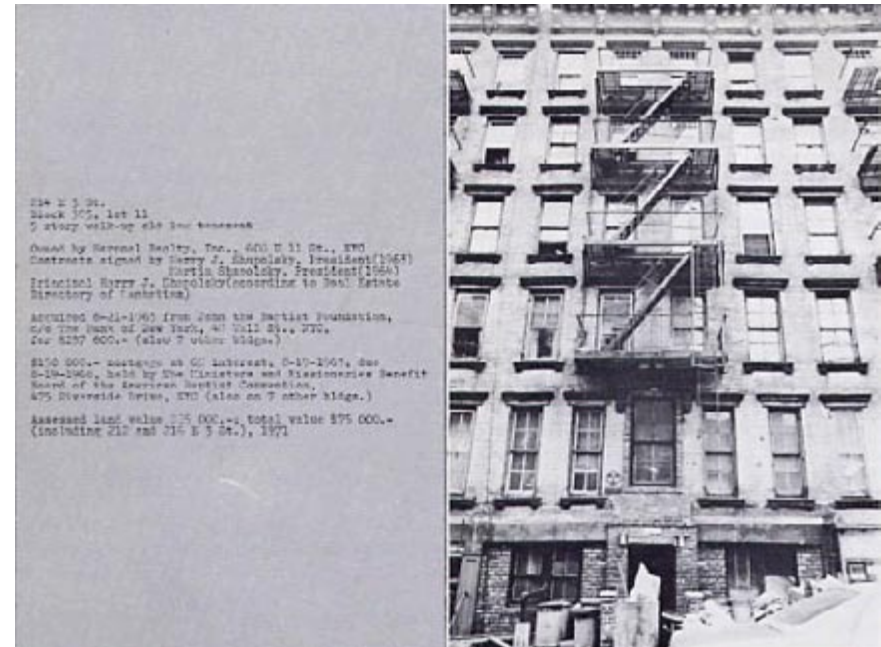
is programmable. I can certainly look at *any* plot of ground as a work of art, especially after seeing and thinking about Eichhorn's work. The plot of ground will not go away. Presumably the purchase was permanent. QUESTION NEED TO FIND OUT. Even if it were not so the documentation would become the work of art.

It is also worth noting that the documentation is just as important as the actual plot of ground. One recalls Hans Haacke's Guggenheim exhibition which has been recorded in art history as an even more radical challenge to the art institution than *Fountain*. But Eichhorn's *Acquisition of a Plot of Land* is not shockart.

The original exhibition of Hans Haacke's Shapolsky installation which was to be exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum was cancelled by the Director of the Museum because Haacke's work in correlating physical decay with the financial transactions of members of the Museum's Board of Trustees. The Director wrote:

We are pursuing aesthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motives. On these grounds the trustees have established policies that exclude active engagement towards social and political ends. {Messer, 1971 #790}

At that time (1971) museums had an oversensistive attitude to such art. Today they would simply exhibit it in the knowledge that being a 'work of art' it would probably insignificant political impact. Today one will find works by Haacke in corporate collections. IS HAACKE'S WORK AUCTIONED?



Hans Haacke, Detail from Shapolsky et. al. 1970

In an interview with Patricia Bickers in March 2001 Haacke noted:

Thanks to a variety of pressures, including decades of institutional critique and other critical approaches to the role of museums in our society, there is now a certain willingness by some to look at the ways they function. After all, there are curators and administrators today who participated in the cultural revolution of the '60s and read the same books as we did. Of course, there are limits to how far they are ready to expose themselves in front of the world. Like their predecessors they are dependent on the goodwill of governmental, and now corporate, forces and need to consider the interests of their trustees. But to the more adventurous among them it is not as problematic as it once was to extend an invitation to me. In turn, I do not consider myself automatically as being co-opted when that happens. {Bickers, 2001 #791}

Haacke is not giving the art institutions a clean bill of health but he is suggesting that there are sufficient numbers of those who would appreciate his position for him to accept that he is not being 'co-opted'. The concept of 'co-option' needs clarification. It refers to a situation in which a hegemony assimilates resistance by accepting it. The process is not simple and perhaps the best account of it is provided by Michel Foucault. There are networks of power and there is resistance to that network of power. There should come points at which the resistance obtains some victory. But the victory can never to be total due to the fact that from an

evolutionary point of view social systems need tension to evolve.

Another exhibition by Eichhorn at the Kunstverein Salzburg, (10.02.1998 to 19.04.1998) concerned artists contracts. Eichhorn's research focused on an artist contract formulated in 1971 by Seth Siegelau and the attorney Bob Projansky. The contract gives the artist considerable rights including fifteen percent of the capital gain on the value of a work when it is resold the so-called 'right of succession' clause. Her research included interviewing other major figures from the Conceptual Art movement Haacke, Daniel Buren and Lawrence Weiner.

A work like this cannot be reduced to the Readymade. It is a much more focused interrogation of the institutional structure of art than was ever the case for Duchamp's *Fountain*. In particular whereas *Fountain* relied on shock value Eichhorn's intervention is analytical. In this work she becomes an art analyst. Thus her creation of a company as her contribution to Documenta XI can be understood as creating a parallel between the corporate world and that of the culture industry. It is not necessarily a critique in the sense demanded by Peter Bürger it is more a statement of fact, turning our attention away from more romantic or idealistic conceptions of art towards concrete real-world concerns. Does this mean that Eichhorn's work lacks a poetic dimension? It probably does but whether this is a problem is a moot point. The closest parallel I can think of is the work of Hans Haacke which has always been focused on real-world issues. But it also occurs to me that Eichhorn's work can be appreciated by noting that this intense self-critical gaze seems to be an especially

attractive aspect of intellectual art.

Eichhorn's plot of land is distinctly sculptural compared with her Documenta XI piece which consisted of her incorporating a company. The exhibition consisted solely of the documentation. The company was a species of abstraction. Commenting on her Munster 97 piece Rudolf Gosskopf notes a connection between an Oldenburg sculpture consisting of three large balls and Eichhorn's contribution. The connection is based not only on the geographical proximity of the pieces but also due to the fact that 'some Munsteraner tried to roll it [the Oldenburg sculpture] into the river'. As he notes Munsteraner of 1997 'some deny that she [Eichhorn] has anything to do with art'. Of course this is a compliment because it is increasingly difficult to provoke this comment. But eighty years after Duchamp's *Fountain* whatever it is that the artist can come up with is defined as art due to an institutional frame in this case the Munster Sculpture Project. Gosskopf makes this very point noting:

If art leaves the framework of the museum, church or collection then usually only the conventional has the chance to remain exempted from the anger of the people: the beautiful well, nice, as realistic a relief as possible, the willwuerdevolle monument. The unusual however produces many feelings.¹¹

But it is also the case that Gosskopf comments are a little snobbish. It is also entirely possible that deconstructive art might provoke thoughtful responses from the public. On the other hand if he is correct in his assessment then one can

speculate on the social value of deconstructive art. Is it just too obscure and buried in conceptualist discourse to be of any value to the broader public?

THOMAS HIRSCHHORN

radical unchic



Thomas Hirschhorn's approach to sculptural installation uses two principal strategies to avoid the exclusivity that accompanies high culture. Firstly, he employs extremely inexpensive materials and, secondly, he often places his work in public spaces. He is best known for his 'anti-heroic' 'anti-monuments' to artists such as Otto Freundlich, Ingeborg Bachmann, Raymond Carver, and Georges Bataille. All the instances just cited can be broadly classified as 'high culture' and consequently might be considered out of place on the street. On this point Hirschhorn comments:

the altar form that I have chosen is familiar from the deaths of celebrities (Lady Di, Versace, Olaf Palme, Mitterand) of the unknown, such as young people who have committed suicide, car-accident fatalities, or victims of crime; we pay homage in this form. Candles, stuffed animals, photocopies, photographs, images from illustrated magazines, and other materials close at hand will be assembled to proclaim a personal commitment or statement. {Hirschhorn, 2000 #860}

It is possible that Hirschhorn intends to overcome the barrier surrounding high culture and that his use of humble mate-



rials together with placement on the street is an attempt to widen the potential audience for avant-gardist art. Certainly, Hirschhorn's concern with non-precious materials is a recent manifestation of the longstanding avant-gardist project not only to enter everyday life but question its priorities. His use of the popular alter form can be understood as subterfuge designed to introduce the public to literature and philosophy that challenges conventional social norms.

Constructed out of polythene sheeting, duct tape, packing tape and aluminium foil these 'altars' last only a matter of weeks. Hirschhorn claims that 'the disappearance of the altar is as important as its presence'. One can note that this can be understood both poetically in terms of the relationship of the altar with passing away and as a gesture against the commodification of the work of art. In February 2000 he also noted:

An altar is a personal, artistic statement. I want to fix my heroes. The altars attempt to memorialize a person who is dead and who was loved by someone else. It is important to testify to one's love, one's attachment. Heroes can't change, but the altar's location can change. The altars could have been made in other cities, countries. They could be in different locations—on a street, a side passage, in a corner. These local sites of memory become universal sites, by virtue of their location. That is what interests me. {Hirschhorn, 2000 #860}

So the very transience of Hirschhorn's arte povera-like monuments actually flags the possibility of them recurring



in different times and places. Hirschhorn certainly repeats his alters but it is also the case that his use of simple materials might suggest that anyone of us could follow his lead and construct 'alters' to our own 'heros' or heroines, if we so wished. But we could hardly place them on the street without the intervention of an institution such as a public art gallery. In the final analysis it is the matrix of such institutions that define what is and what is not art. But it is also the case that this institutional matrix has proved itself remarkably flexible to the demands placed on it by artists, to the extent that it currently plays a crucial role in the realization of out-of-gallery experiments.

Hirschhorn also constructs installations that take over the entire internal space of a gallery. One instance of such is his *World Airport* initially installed at the 1999 Venice Biennale and then again at the Renaissance Society, Chicago in 2000. *World Airport* functions as a metaphor for globalization. But the web of umbilical chords is a mess and the planes are all grounded. Moreover this is a pre-9/11 airport which gives it a certain macabre prescience. Whereas the airport used to signify relatively free flows between the nations of the earth they are now zones of fear and paranoia.

The tendrils connecting the planes to the flimsy control tower seem more akin now to a Foucauldian panopticon in which everyone who enters through its gates is biometrically inscribed, cross-referenced and essentially submitted to the processes once confined to criminals. Since the man with the plastic explosive Nikes everyone is a potential terrorist {Kayyem, 2003 #861}. But to return to less fraught times and the Renaissance Society's (Chicago) exhibition of *World Air-*



port Hamza Walker Director of Education reports that Hirschhorn's instructed the gallery to use 'much tape, badly':

These instructions, delivered as an imperative from Hirschhorn to a gallery assistant, were diligently followed to the degree that the tape is somewhat repulsive, taking on a creeping, organic quality, a bureaucratic mildew of sorts. It transforms the gallery into a cocoon where certain components (televisions, chairs, the base of the partitions), having been literally collaged into or onto the space, lose their edges ... at the point they connect to the floor. {Society, #862} (Renaissance Society 2000)

The notion that Hirschhorn's installations reduce the world to a single substance is intriguing. If we had to designate the essence of Hirschhorn's aesthetic substance then surely it would be paper. Virtually all Hirschhorn's materials are paper-thin: parcel tape, aluminium foil, cardboard, cellophane. And Walker's interpretation of Hirschhorn's ramshackle airport is especially interesting when he notes that it possesses a melancholy aspect:

Despite its humor, Hirschhorn's work is sad, mourning the loss of intellectual and spiritual ideals that have nourished modern utopian thought, and commemorative, celebrating the triumph of the commodity. Since Marxism had become the most comprehensive language of social transformation, one resting on a critique of the current social order, 'the death of socialism' became synonymous with the proscription of utopian thought. {Society, 2000 #863}





The fundamental source of melancholia in the postmodern world lies in the realization that the complexity of contemporary culture cannot be reduced to any single theory. Indeed Michel Foucault's thinking suggests that modern society be conceived as a complex arrangement of nested, interacting systems, which one could compare with the self-organizing systems found in nature. This gives added weight to the Frankfurt School Marxists concept of culture as 'second nature': a second layer of nature.² The Frankfurt theorists traced the origin of science and technology to the desire to acquire mastery over nature (Held, 1980 #97). The melancholic aspect of second nature lies in the fact that science and technology have only served to create yet another layer of nature-like complexity that stands outside our control. In other words we appear to be confronted with a universe of infinite complexity that will defy all attempts to formulate a 'theory of everything'.

Bourgeois technological mastery over life-praxis turns out to be paper-thin. And Hirschhorn's child-like, paper-thin constructions seem to point this out. The materials for church and courtly patronage were gold, marble and lapis lazuli, the materials for late capitalist art are often poverty-stricken. Metaphorically, they point to the poverty of 'advanced' capitalism wherein the First World finds it impossible to help out its poorer neighbours and prefers instead to spend most of its copious funds on a witches' brew of consumer goods and sophisticated weaponry. In Hirschhorn's work the selfishness of the West and its mirror in Third World poverty is conveyed through his use of poverty-stricken materials for what are considered as high cultural artifacts. Whether

this strategy degrades into radical chicness within the hyper-bourgeois world of art is a moot point.

In addition to his deployment of junk materials Hirschhorn's installations are invariably accompanied by texts. Often these are instances of high theory: Marx, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari. Hirschhorn's use of text is significant because of its superfluity. Is one actually expected to *read* the texts in the context of his installations? And how can these high ideals and ideas challenge the immense power of the society of consumption? By making a cardboard replica of Deleuze and Guattari's *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (*What is philosophy*) Hirschhorn seems to underscore the simulacral stature of philosophy in contemporary culture. One might buy a copy of this book because it would look impressive on one's bookshelf (especially in French) but would one actually read it? Probably not, because one would be too busy earning one's living. Turning the book into a hollow icon indicates a new twist to popism. Pop art recodes low into high culture and thereby defies the inherent elitism of the European aesthetic tradition. Hirschhorn, in contrast, recodes philosophy into the useless fabric of ephemeral sculpture. Martin Herbert makes the following perception observation:

Thomas Hirschhorn's sprawling, gallery-filling bricolages immerse viewers in structures that seem halfway rooted in reality and halfway analogous to mental constructs; they encourage the creation of links between multifarious tranches of visual information; and, while invariably offering pointers towards political and philosophical concepts, they generally



MALACHI FARRELL

carnival politics

Malachi Farrell's work reveals that the skin-deep, cosmetic beauty of packaging masks its ultimate incarnation as environmentally destructive waste. Farrell intersects his critical post-povera style with more progressive aspects of popular culture such as punk, grunge and industrial music. His installations consist of mechanically animated objects that give a circus-like quality to his work. Humour is often one of the most potent social-critical weapons and Farrell exploits this to the full. In his installation *Dying Fish Flag* (1998-2000), for example, mechanically animated fish painted with colourful national flags flounder in the air (suspended from the ceiling) and on the gallery floor amidst the flotsam and jetsam of environmentally egregious Styrofoam peanuts, disposable plastic cigarette lighters and foam. In this work Farrell comes close to identifying the sleek modernism of the corporate logo (in this case colourful national flags) with the filthy mess of environmental degradation. In other installations Farrell recodes the colour and variety of packaging with dysfunctional machinery and the aesthetics of landfill.

Malachi Farrell's principal rhetorical devices include garbage, noise, and grotesquely animated objects. One French commentator compares the theatricality of Farrell's work, comparing with street theatre, the Zurich Dadaist's Cabaret



Voltaire (1916), the Living Theatre of the 1960s and the provocative expressionism of the theatrical designer Tadeuz Kantor {CRAC, 2002-2003 #870}. Within the space of a Farrell installations globalization is imaged as a concoction of ridiculous contraptions gone mad.

Farrell's use of bright colour, trash, kinetics and sound make his work susceptible to the label 'theatrical expressionism' but as always today this is not a matter of simple self-expression but a more complex species of expressionism closer to the literary forms identified by Richard Murphy {Murphy, 1999 #723} in his account of Alfred Doblin, Gottfried Benn, and Franz Kafka all of whose expressionistic approaches contained scathing allegories of social injustice in the context of the dehumanizing effects of massified (and now globalized) capitalist society.

One could also describe Farrell's work as social-critical popism because he uses junk materials as a medium for translating the glossiness of the representation of consumer goods in the mass media and shopping malls into an allegory of the ecological damage wrought by consumer culture. This approach is evident in his *Dying Fish Flag* installations. The first version of this intstallation was produced in 1998 on the occasion of an exhibition in the Kunsthalle Bremen and was reconstructed on five occasions. It was also shown in 2002 at the Art Centre in Fresnoy which situated within grounds belonging to maritime business in 'premier Mediterranean French fishing port' the concept of 'dying fish' was highly appropriate. A French commentators notes:

Here the maritime elements mix: like a collection of flags



of all nations ‘fish’ ‘die’ in an environment suffocated with waste. Over this presides a replica of the turret of the first French nuclear submarine. ... the Art Centre’s main gallery was transformed into a vast archeological site, or a construction site made up of the waste products of a consumer culture. Farrell tells us that it is ‘A vision stemming from current political policy’ {CRAC, 2002-2003 #870}

Fish Flag Mourant has also been exhibited in Farrell’s birthplace Ireland as part of the Cork Midsummer Festival at the Crawford Art Gallery. Reviewing this version of the installation Don O’Mahony writes:

In a room lined with trash an elaborate mobile with mechanized fish hangs over an embryonic fish in some kind of incubator. Tubes emerge spewing suds. Macabre. When activated the piece builds up to a symphony of agonizing shrieks as the fish flap in pathetic fashion, suffocating in the squalour. {O’Mahony, 2001 #871}

O’Mahony’s response is indicative of the absurdist aspect of Farrell’s social criticism and the concomitant lack of any real hope of improvement. At this point protest degenerates into colourful animated spectacle. But on the other hand Farrell’s art povera materials do mean that a spectator can walk onto the ‘stage’ or into the ‘picture’ stepping on the fake money and, if brave enough, even defiantly kick a crumpled coke can. In this sense the junk art approach does engage the viewer, and this in itself is a political statement.

One of the key features of Farrell’s installations lies in his animation of the objects with electric motors and sound. Comment-

ing on his recent installation *Nothing Domestic* 2003, Sprengel Museum, Hannover the curator Karin Orchard observes:

As soon as the visitor approaches, the arms [Kalashnikov rifles] fall into line for machine-driven ballet scenes, while the Stars and Stripes on the wall perform a symbolic dance. These sarcastic and malicious showpieces are accompanied by press reports on the most recent Gulf War [2003]. The market stalls represent Africa, the USA, Arabia, the Indian subcontinent and Asia. Sound collages of Strauss waltzes (an allusion to Kubrick's *2001*), Hendrix's rendition of the American national anthem and gospels mixed with sales talks between arms dealers in all languages make up the acoustic backdrop. {Sprengel-museum, 2003 #872}

The overall effect is one of a theatre of the grotesque and its style fits in perfectly with social-critical expressionist, dada and surrealist theatrical manifestations in the early twentieth century. In this sense Farrell has a sound art historical base. It is somewhat depressing to note that a hundred years later we are dealing with similar problems. Farrell's installations point to the failure of capitalism to be a positive globalizing force. The picture he paints instead is of the spread of globalized greed. As Darwin indicated humanity is closer to the ape than to God. Hence Farrell's fascination for art as circus.