TRANSGRESSIONS IN THE WHITE CUBE: TERRITORIAL MAPPINGS
BENNINGTON COLLEGE
SUZANNE LEMBERG USDAN GALLERY

TRANSGRESSIONS IN THE WHITE CUBE:
TERRITORIAL MAPPINGS

GENERAL IDEA
JESSICA STOCKHOLDER
FRED WILSON
FÉLIX GONZÁLEZ-TORRES
PAULA HAYES
RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA
BOB BRAINE/ MARK DION/
ALEXIS ROCKMAN (A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT)

CARY LEIBOWITZ/CANDYASS
SEAN LANDERS
JON TOWER
RENEÉ GREEN
MIKE KELLEY
JULIA SCHER
KATE ERICSON &
MEL ZIEGLER

ORGANIZED BY JOSHUA DECTER

NOVEMBER 17 - DECEMBER 16, 1992

Alexis Rockman: Concrete Jungle II, 1992, oil on wood, 96" x 64". Courtesy Jay Gorney Modern Art. Photo: Oren Slor.
From the avant-garde movements at the early part of the 20th century to the present moment, a diverse genealogy of artists has approached the context of the gallery or museum space as a "site" in which to conduct analyses focused upon the ideological and historical conditions of the cultural institution (i.e., "institutional critique"), de-code the architectural attributes of a particular edifice, expand the limits of formal(ist) investigations in the traditional media of painting and sculpture, transform the gallery/museum space into an environment that evokes the structural characteristics of other social domains, or develop an arena for the enactment of performance- and/or theater-related activities.

Stated differently, it is evident that the supposed neutrality of the gallery or institutional space — the Modernist "white cube" conceived of as little more than a container for autonomous artobjects — has been challenged throughout this century. A legacy of Historical practices — whether one cites aspects of Russian Constructivism; Schwitters’s Merzbau project; Dada events; proponents of the Fluxus sensibility; Yves Klein; Vito Acconci, Michael Asher, Lawrence Weiner and other so-called Conceptual artists; the site-oriented elements of Minimalist and Post-Minimalist work; or other examples — have utilized methods of installation (consciously site-specific in emphasis) to suggest that the meaning of art production is always constructed in relation to — but never absolutely determined by — context (i.e., the formal/structural conditions of a specific space, its social function, etc.).

And while the institutional site of exhibition has come under repeated gestures of analysis and critique — from Broodthaers to Buren, and Haacke to Lawler — it has nevertheless retained a status as privileged, if not sanctioned, domain within which to contest the authority of so-called "dominant" cultural norms, values, and power relations. Following the familiar if binding logic of...
paradoxical blind is invari-
ably courted, tested and re-
played. "Transgressions in
the White Cube: Terri-
torial Mappings" presents
the work of a diverse group
of contemporary artists
who utilize the context of
the gallery or institutional
space to construct new
territories of meaning in
relation to issues concern-
ing politics, cultural iden-
tity, race, the environment,
religion, sexual identity,
the-de- and re-construction
of formal languages in the
visual arts, modes of social
control, ethnicity, etc.
Empowering a wide range of
conceptual methods and
formal strategies, the
artists do seem to share an
abiding concern with the
construction of languages
and structures designed to
suggest a 're-mapping' of
the external cultural
landscape (or the "internal"
landscape of psychosocial
identity). While many of the
artists in this exhibition owe a
debt to the legacy of Conceptual
practices (General Idea,
emerging in the late 1960s,
in fact comprises a part of
this legacy), they have all
managed to articulate
distinct, yet related
frameworks of working and
territories of focus.

Conventional disciplinary
models of ecology, ethnol-
ogy, archaeology, an-
thropology, and history —
organized through the
logic of the museum
cancelled as archive and
bureaucratic system of
(re)presentation — are
critically re-deployed in the
work of artists such as
Mark Dion, Renee Green,
Paula Hayes, and Fred
Wilson. Dion, whose
earlier work addressed the
ways in which art history
undergoes continuous
re-construction as a result
of the manipulative (and
fictionsializing) procedures
of art restoration, has since
the late 1980s focused
upon environmental
questions — specifically,
the emergence of global
eco-crisis. Appropriating
certain formal and concep-
tual methods from biologi-
cal science (e.g., zoology,
botany), Dion constructs
gallery-specific mise-en-
scénes and tableaux that
utilize systems of classifi-
cation to explore a range
of environmental prob-
lems; in a strategically
reciprocal manner, he has
executed projects in
distant regions such as the
Central American country
of Belize, there addressing
the area's specific sociol-
ogical conditions from the
unique perspective of a
hybrid artist-specialist.

Often, the artifacts of such
working expeditions are
integrated back into the
gallery-specific site,
thereby de-contextualizing
an outside territorial
investigation. Dion has also
been collaborating with
painter Alexis
Rockman and photo-
grapher Bob Braine on a
continuous project entitled
"Concrete Jungle," thus
broadening the area of
environmental scrutiny to
incorporate traditionally
segregated artistic media.

Rockman's sensual
paintings have, since the
1980s, utilized a represen-
tational language to
produce subtly disturbing
transformations of tradi-
tional systems of zoologi-
cal and botanical classifi-
cation, thereby creating
what might be described as
a "post-scientific
surrealism." Braine's
ultra-straightforward
documentary photos of
ubiquitous road-kills were
meant to signal that the
already precarious balance
between the natural and
cultural domains has
reached a point of crisis.

Together, these three
artists have developed an
intriguing approach to how
the collaborative method
can be employed as a
means to integrate related
centers and to thereby
establish a more complex
and layered language.

Fred Wilson's primary
focus in recent years has
been to investigate — and
tual evidence is re-shuffled to engender new ways. Renee Green has effective strategy of critical histories. Vitrine displays suggest an infiltration whereby "artifacts" could also be called pervertely substituted for socio-cultural disappearances, or perhaps de-coded - in presentation, Green's de-constructing history and memory (an index of autobiographical investment) to produce a new narrative language alluding to the contradictory dimensions of identity. Green often presents an accumulation of materials and information that make critical reference to conventional systems of display, and she expects the viewer to engage in the re-construction of meaning, rather than passively receiving the authority of yet another master narrative.

Reflecting an inter-mix of horticultural study and an investment in the codes of folklore and mythology, Paula Hayes' mixed-media installations and drawings suggest a preoccupation with the natural (external) and spiritual/psychological (internal) environment - and how these two domains (one material, the other immaterial) and experiential models are fundamentally reciprocal. A professional horticulturist, Hayes has cultivated a scientific relationship to the botanical environment, yet her investment in this territory moves beyond the empirical, rationalist precepts of institutionalized scientific knowledge. In her tabulae, artifacts from everyday life are arranged so as to suggest a kind of theatrical allegory of the mundane; often, these arrangements allude to the artist's self-inquiry as to the relationship between historical characterizations of womanhood (e.g., the myths of wisdom) and contemporary (self)definitions.

Since the mid-1980s, the collaborative team of Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler has been involved with devising frameworks for the literal and symbolic (re)mapping of diverse architectural idioms and geographic locations. Their earlier projects investigated the architectural idioms (i.e., the vernacular) of particular communities - the American urban and suburban communities. Their earlier projects investigated the architectural idioms (i.e., the vernacular) of particular communities - the American urban and suburban communities. Ericson and Ziegler would effect a "collaboration" with homeowners so as to facilitate specific (and agreed-upon) interventions within - or around - the traditionally private territory of the home. Their interests would begin to gravitate towards two distinct contexts - the relatively insular site of the gallery/cultural institution, and the emphatically public space. Generally speaking, they are concerned with "excavating" the repressed histories of

Kate Ericson & Mel Ziegler: Food and Seed (Honey Farm), 1989, seed bags, sandblasted plexiglass, 71" x 144" overall. Courtesy Michael Klein, Inc.

specific structures and places, and often utilize novel techniques of "mapping" to uncover the hidden narratives; their gallery-specific projects often function as veritable "non-sites" — schematic indices which economically display the artificial evidence of work done in another, specifically non-art, context. In a sense, they have developed a method that allows for a sophisticated cross-mapping (or cross-indexing) of disparate social/cultural contexts, norms, idioms, and meanings. Adapting themselves to the everyday protocol of a specific social milieu, Ericson and Ziegler utilize their "license" as artists to participate in the commonplace practices of that place. Their installations become physical and iconographic evidence of such moments of social integration and participation.

Scouring the precints of social power, authority and domination, Julia Scher has re-appropriated the everyday physicality and mythifications of video surveillance and the apparatus of computer-based systems of communication and information to critically investigate — or subversively infiltrate — the realm of institutional control. Alluding to the way in which the individual has become the target of strategies of social control in late-industrial ("information") society, Scher proposes that the only way to effectively challenge or counteract the alienating effects of a disciplinary administration of society (to evoke Michel Foucault) is to literally re-take some degree of control over those very instruments and techniques to which we have become unwillingly subjected. (On a social level, we are deemed "subjects" not necessarily in terms of our so-called "individuality," but in terms of how our very bodies become subjected to an often invisible regime of social control) Having at one point formed her own security systems company, Scher continues to turn such technologies against themselves — to expose the machinery behind the camera, to contaminate the easy flow of information in this world of acoustical computer communication. In other words, to re-install the viability of individual subjectivity as a force of negation or contestation. Her installations become environmental models for the exploration of this possibility, as the viewer is compelled to intervene in — or at all the very least, critically understand — the technological environs.

Rirkrit Tiravanija and Félix González-Torres offer distinct types of territorial mappings. For Tiravanija, the activity of art production itself becomes essentially interchangeable with (or a substitutional sign for) the cultural ritual of food preparation and cooking. Utilising culinary methods absorbed through exposure to his socio-cultural heritage, (i.e., a passing down of traditional recipes through the matrix of the family), the artist is able to construct a kind of reflexive anthropological environment wherein the audience is exposed to the usually hidden, alienated and mystified realm of the artist's cooking. Tiravanija sets up a provisional kitchen to prepare cookies for all to witness. In this gesture, the artist seems to de-mystify himself and his "cultural otherness" by laying bare the mundane "everydayness" of the cooking activity. Tiravanija establishes a territory within the gallery/ institutional space which upsets the normative culture relations; he invites the viewer to participate in the activity of eating, which becomes indicative of a symbolic participation in the activity of cultural production, so that Tiravanija and the public become both subjects and objects — performers and spectators within the hybrid cultural situation.

The model of participatory cultural activity and production (derived from various utopian-inflected artistic movements of the 20th century) finds a strangely compelling synthesis with the formal attributes of a "conceptual minimalism" in the work of Félix González-Torres. Maintaining a long-term commitment to the pedagogic potential of art production (Gonzalez-Torres was one of the founders of Group Material), the artist's corner and stock pieces occupy a territory of the gallery or institutional space on a temporary basis; their constituent parts — sheets of paper imprinted with a linguistic phrase, or a pile of fortune cookies — are meant to be taken away by the viewer retained as the artistic remains (or, perhaps, the memento mori) of the post-autonomous work of art. Furthermore, the
of analytic, rational empiricism. In a sense, Tower’s practice becomes a codified allegorical map of the artist’s own internal struggle to reconcile these two dominant cultural tendencies, and his projects have often utilized the framework of the body — the corporeal vessel — in order to suggest the way in which individuals are always “penetrated” by these ideological trajectories.

General Idea, the collaborative group from Canada (AA Bronson, Jorge Zontal, and Felix Partz), began producing work in the late 1960s, incorporating elements from diverse media: film, photography, theater, performance, video, music, etc. General Idea became a mask behind which the three artists could function in a variety of theatrical guises; “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant” and “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion” were titles that eventually assumed the status of a cultural icon and beyond the parameters of the sanctioned cultural-institutional space. For Tower, this competition reveals the extent to which the institutions of religion and science as diverse media: film, photography, theater, performance, video, music, etc. General Idea became a mask behind which the three artists could function in a variety of theatrical guises; “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant” and “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion” were titles that eventually assumed the status of a cultural icon and beyond the parameters of the sanctioned cultural-institutional space. For Tower, this competition reveals the extent to which the institutions of religion and science as diverse media: film, photography, theater, performance, video, music, etc. General Idea became a mask behind which the three artists could function in a variety of theatrical guises; “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant” and “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion” were titles that eventually assumed the status of a cultural icon and beyond the parameters of the sanctioned cultural-institutional space. For Tower, this competition reveals the extent to which the institutions of religion and science as diverse media: film, photography, theater, performance, video, music, etc. General Idea became a mask behind which the three artists could function in a variety of theatrical guises; “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant” and “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion” were titles that eventually assumed the status of a cultural icon and beyond the parameters of the sanctioned cultural-institutional space. For Tower, this competition reveals the extent to which the institutions of religion and science as diverse media: film, photography, theater, performance, video, music, etc. General Idea became a mask behind which the three artists could function in a variety of theatrical guises; “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant” and “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion” were titles that eventually assumed the status of a cultural icon and beyond the parameters of the sanctioned cultural-institutional space. For Tower, this competition reveals the extent to which the institutions of religion and science as diverse media: film, photography, theater, performance, video, music, etc. General Idea became a mask behind which the three artists could function in a variety of theatrical guises; “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant” and “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion” were titles that eventually assumed the status of a cultural icon and beyond the parameters of the sanctioned cultural-institutional space. For Tower, this competition reveals the extent to which the institutions of religion and science as diverse media: film, photography, theater, performance, video, music, etc. General Idea became a mask behind which the three artists could function in a variety of theatrical guises; “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant” and “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion” were titles that eventually assumed the status of a cultural icon and beyond the parameters of the sanctioned cultural-institutional space. For Tower, this competition reveals the extent to which the institutions of religion and science as diverse media: film, photography, theater, performance, video, music, etc. General Idea became a mask behind which the three artists could function in a variety of theatrical guises; “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant” and “The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion” were titles that eventually assumed the status of a cultural icon and beyond the parameters of the sanctioned cultural-institutional space. For Tower, this competition reveals the extent to which the institutions of religion and science
between private identity and public persona. While his obsessive, sociocentric, and unwanted performances wherein the artist's relationship to the public within the carnivalesque environment of performances is mediated by the Candyass figure represents the more sublimated dimension of Leibowitz/Candyass. For Leibowitz, although one never really knows Leibowitz/Candyass is primarily interested in embracing the viewing audience as a part of his social, cultural and sexual milieu. His installations are invariably composed of provisional artworks - signs, posters, rugs, plates, and other everyday objects are transformed by the inscription of playfully insulting, sophomoric and self-deprecating phrases that suggest Candyass's free-for-all sensibility. These are participatory situations, in which things are either freely dispensed, or available at extremely low prices; in some projects, Leibowitz/Candyass has invited other artists to set up shop and present their "wares" as if for a county fair. The infectious spirit of this approach is always under-cut by irony and pathos - as if Leibowitz/Candyass were reminding us that the apparent utopia of subversive behavior and anti-"high art" sentiments is a kind of grand substitute gratification for - and temporary disapperation from - that which is fundamentally missing from our lives. In a sense, his works and activities reveal a desire to use the territory of the contemporary art world as a means to establish a sense of real community of compatible value systems - a desire, ultimately, to move beyond a sense of alienation.

In conclusion, I would like to discuss the work of Jessica Stockholder in relation to the various notions of "territorial mapping" addressed at the beginning of this essay. Stockholder's language is a hybrid of formal codes and conceptual methods gleaned from Modernist traditions of abstract painting and sculpture; it is possible to detect a fascinating interplay of oblique references to Russian Constructivism, Ab-Ex, Post-Minimalism, among other possible sources. In both her large-scale installations and scaled-down object-oriented structures, there is a consistent, if not systematic, dialogue established between the site and the internal formal logic of the built structure. Stockholder's explicitly space-specific projects indicate a desire to allow the overall structural contours of the "expanded sculpture" to subtly echo elements of the pre-determined coordinates of the architectural domain, so that the syntax of the work always seems to maintain a situational contingency. Even in the smaller pieces, Stockholder has cleverly devised features that reinforce the dialectic between architectural edifice and quasi-autonomous, hyper-extended sculpture (for example, the often literal "connection" between floor-bound object and lower wall quadrant). In the final analysis, it is futile to propose that Stockholder's work simultaneously does and re-constructs its "object-ness" in direct relation to the site's architectural frame, thereby engendering a matrix of territorial plotting.

Mike Kelley: Untitled, 1990, felt banner, 91 1/2" x 70". Courtesy Metro Pictures.

Sean Landers: Cartoon (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior), 1992, ink on paper, one of four leaves 7 3/4" x 6 1/4". Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Bob Braine
Documents: Brooklyn to Bennington 11/14/1992
Black & white polaroid prints, 4" x 6" color prints, typographical maps
Courtesy Bob Braine

Mark Dion
The Desk for the Director of the Queens Museum of Natural History, 1992
Mixed media, dimensions variable.
Courtesy American Fine Arts, Co.

Alexis Rockman
Concrete Jungle IV, 1992
Oil on wood
36" x 84"
Courtesy Jay Gorney Modern Art

Kate Ericson & Mel Ziegler
Feed and Seed (Heisey Farm), 1989
Seed bags, sandblasted plexiglass
71" x 144" overall (34" x 18" each)
Courtesy Michael Klein, Inc.

Paula Hayes
Mr. Cool and Mr. Rude (Replacement), 1992
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy Fawbush Gallery

Mike Kelley
Improbable History, 1992
One hour color videotape
Edition of 10
To Whom It May Concern, 1991
Ink on paper, five leaves
11" x 8½" each leaf
Overall dimensions variable
My Rock Friend, 1992
Ink on paper, five leaves, envelope
11" x 8½" each leaf, 6" x 11½" envelope
Overall dimensions variable
Caroon (Critic: I Like Your Politics), 1992
Ink on paper
7½" x 4½"
Caroon (70% Contractor, 30% Artist), 1992
Ink on paper
7½" x 5½"
Caroon (It’s O.K. Son), 1992
Ink on paper
4½" x 5½"
Cartoon (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior), 1992
Ink on paper, four leaves
6½" x 8½" (Freshman), 7½" x 6½" (Sophomore), 7½" x 7½" (Junior), 7½" x 8½" (Senior)
Overall dimensions variable
Courtesy Andrea Rosen

Robert Ganzieiro-Torres
Untitled (Fortuna Cookie Corner), 1990
Approximately 10,000 fortune cookies
Dimensions variable
Courtesy Studio Ganzziini, Milano; Andrea Rosen Gallery

Rene Green
VistaVision: Landscape of Desire, 1991
Mixed media installation with sound
Dimensions variable (detail: room)
Courtesy Pat Hearn Gallery

General Idea
AIDS, 1992
Silkcreen wallpaper
Dimensions variable
Courtesy General Idea

Cary Leibowitz/Candyass
Candyass 4 Hall Monitor, 1992
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy Stux Gallery

Fred Wilson
Addiction Display, 1991
Four ceramic copies of pre-Columbian artifacts, 3D articles of cocaine paraphernalia, photographs, labels, banners
99" x 48" x 24" utins, 14½" x 12" photograph
Courtesy American Fine Arts, Co.

Julie Scher
Danger Zone Data, 1992
Computer program
Courtesy Pat Hearn Gallery

Julie Scher
Danger Zone Data, 1992
Computer program
Courtesy Pat Hearn Gallery

Kate Ericson & Mel Ziegler
Feed and Seed (Heisey Farm), 1989
Seed bags, sandblasted plexiglass
71" x 144" overall (34" x 18" each)
Courtesy Michael Klein, Inc.

Jon Tower
Human Breath Collection (excerpt), 1992
Wood, paper, vinyl, enamel, plastic (poly(vinyl fluoride), nickel-brass, human breath, nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide, water vapor
18 works each 8½" x 13½" x 13½"
Overall dimensions variable
Courtesy American Fine Arts, Co.

Julie Scher
Danger Zone Data, 1992
Computer program
Courtesy Pat Hearn Gallery

Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled (Here), 1992
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy 303 Gallery

Jon Tower
Human Breath Collection (excerpt), 1992
Wood, paper, vinyl, enamel, plastic (poly(vinyl fluoride), nickel-brass, human breath, nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide, water vapor
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I WOULD LIKE TO THANK BETH HARBOTTLE FOR HER INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE WITH THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE. THANKS ALSO TO ELIZABETH PELLERIN, JANE AEBERSOLD, THE BENNINGTON GRADUATE ASSISTANTS AND GALLERY CREW. FINALLY, I EXTEND MY THANKS TO THE PARTICIPATING ARTISTS, THEIR GALLERIES AND THE LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION.

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