Public Spaces - The Architecture and Landscape Architecture of Vito Acconci: Critical Motion between Art & Design

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Abstract

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Andrew Forster

This thesis investigates the distinction between high-art and applied-art in the frame of the avant-garde's relation to modernity. It takes the practice of Vito Acconci (a performance artist who became an architect) as an example of the viability of art *and* design to engage with important questions in a culture determined by 'functionality.' It proposes questions about the nature of 'criticality' in the interstices between high-art and applied-art as they have been institutionalized as distinct disciplines in schools of art *and* design, where the 'and' has become a term of separation rather than complicity. This separation is interrogated in the light of avant-garde art practices and their relationship to 'technicity'. I look at the unfolding of a 'Bauhaus project' that constructs a divide between applied and high art by merging goals of utility and aesthetics while superseding the radical conjecture of the 'irrational' avant-garde. This 'Bauhaus project' is then juxtaposed to critical theory in art criticism (via Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh) which fixes a place for art in society and fixes the limits of what criticality can mean. I suggest that, taken together, the Bauhaus project and critical theory have served to create and reinforce a binary between 'pure' and 'applied' which is self-fulfilling, self-limiting and self-regulating. In discussing how Acconci's practice encounters and 'unfixes' this binary, I draw from Craig Dworkin (who asserts that Accconci's practice continues poetry by other means), Grace McQuilten (who asserts a contrarian 'mis-design' as a way of opening up commercial culture to critical practice) and Krzysztof Ziarek (who, through an exploration of Adorno and Heidegger, asserts a relevance for avant-garde practices as gestures of post-aesthetic nonpower). In brief, this thesis asks if, in consideration of these positions, we can begin to define a criticality between art and design that supersedes the binary as described.

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Introduction

In 1976 artist Vito Acconci presented an installation entitled *Where We Are Now (Who Are We Anyway?)* at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York City (Fig. 11). He extended a boardroom table out the window several stories above the street below. An audio recording enticed viewers to engage in a game of musical chairs around the table implying that the only way out of this game was to turn the institution inside-out and escape out the window into public space. In 1993 Acconci Studio completed a re-design of the entry hall of the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts and Contemporary Art (MAK), Vienna (Fig. 12). The ceiling was dropped and the floor tilted, making the space into a cacophony of wedge-like forms, totally unsuitable for conventional exhibitions. In 2003 *Mur Island* designed by Acconci Studio was opened in Graz, Austria, a floating public pavilion with a café, playground and theatre (Fig. 24). It welcomed 500,000 visitors in its first season. One could ask what connection there is between these works that may or may not be wholly art, design or architecture. One could also ask what place these works have in the apparently discrete histories of these fields. Furthermore, one could ask what these works have to tell us about critical practices in public space in contemporary commercial culture.

This thesis proposes questions about the definition of 'high' and 'applied' art in the frame of avant-garde histories in relation to modernity, taking the practice of Vito Acconci (a performance artist who became an architect) as an example of an investigation of the viability of design to engage with deeper questions in a culture determined by 'functionality'. It proposes questions about the nature of 'criticality' in the interstices between high-art and applied-art, between practices that have been

institutionalized as distinct disciplines in schools of art and design, where the 'and' (between art and design) has become a term of separation rather than one of complicity. In order to make an allusion to conceptions of research in the university, I will call this a distinction between 'pure' and 'applied'. This separation is interrogated in the frame of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde[1] practices and strategies and their relationship to modernity.

In this thesis I look at the unfolding, over a century, of the ideas and framings derived from a so-called 'rational' avant-garde (especially by the Bauhaus and its successors) in conjunction with the repercussions of critical theory in models of the place of art in society and in what 'critical' means. I suggest that together the Bauhaus project and critical theory have served to create and reinforce a binary between 'pure' and 'applied' which is self-fulfilling, self-limiting and self-regulating. That is to say, that the applied side of the binary is not expected to have any critical tooth beyond aesthetic, formal and technical refinement and that the pure side is thought to live in a hermetic art world which may be disregarded by those outside of the art world as utopian or dystopian dithering. This allows each discipline to detach its most problematic and contradictory aspects and relegate them to a zone of unimportance, even invisibility. In order to suggest modes of practice which, however clumsily, can supersede the pure and applied binary, I look at the institutionalization of this disciplinary division at the Bauhaus (1919-1933). I articulate this division as being part of a deeper dynamic of the relationship of avant-garde practices to technicity and power which reverberates to this day in the relationship of art to design. The unfolding of the nature of this division requires a regard which transits across the pure and applied divide in order to grasp its scope.

To this end, I turn to the artistic practice of Vito Acconci and its trajectory from poetry to performance to architectural design. I outline a consistent mode of practice in Acconci's work from his beginnings as a poet in the 1960s, through performance art, installation, art for public space, and finally design and architecture (as Acconci Studio), a mode where the frame of discipline is constantly 'unfixed.' Thus I use the term 'unfixing' to describe Acconci's practice or attitude; it is a forced release from the known framing or limits of an artistic discipline and a springboard for redefining the inhabiting of human-made space. In the process, Acconci's practice redefines the location and nature of criticality.

In discussing this 'unfixing' practice I draw from Craig Dworkin, who asserts that Accconci's practice is fugitive and continues poetry by other means. How are movement, space and time 'fixed' or codified by information technology and new media? First we must ask how these things are fixed in the technicity of modernity. The nature of this 'fixing' is something that Acconci's mode of practice is predisposed to question. I make a connection between this notion of 'unfixing' and Krzysztof Ziarek's concepts of 'force work' and 'letting go' (*aphesis*). Ziarek proposes, through a reading of the dissonant space between Adorno and Heidegger, that "the force of art lies in its ability to call into question…the very paradigm of making and producing" (Ziarek, *Beyond* 115) and that it is through a manipulation of form rather than adjusting content or explicit purpose that contemporary art, through a kind of powerlessness, has its "paradoxical force" (Ziarek, *Force* 3). That is to say that art's power may be that it is without use or without power; its movement is towards nonpower. I suggest that a stretching-beyond of conventions of use, which Acconci calls 'de-design' (and that Grace McQuilten calls 'mis-design'), is

essential to a practice of art and essential to Acconci's re-writing of the 'program' of design. In this thesis I ask if Acconci's de-design and Ziarek's defence of the contemporary relevance of the poetic strategies of avant-garde poets and artists can be brought into proximity with the divide between art and design in a way that makes clear how the 'force of art' can help re-articulate the 'and' between art and design and generate a 'criticality' that is beyond an institutionalized rational critique.

Chapter One introduces two critical and historical contexts for understanding the ongoing relationship of art to design: the institutionalization of the avant-garde in the era of the Bauhaus and the institutionalization of the postwar neo-avant-garde through critical theory. I begin by setting up a history of the Bauhaus as instigator of a 'Bauhaus project' that institutionalized a division between visual art and art for production and ultimately is a rejection of the avant-garde as a source for conjecture distinct from a scientific model. This opens a discussion on the nature of critical practice and suggests that avant-garde art embodies a particular kind of criticality that is estranged or 'other' in relation to the rational discourses of technicity represented by the Bauhaus and its heirs. I continue this discussion with a discussion of critical theory read through contemporary art critics Hal Foster and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, a reading which tries to preserve 'criticality' by maintaining a high-art autonomy and which ultimately corals the avant-garde within a certain arena that empowers a particular kind of critique but also limits it.

Chapter Two proposes three counter currents in which a reconfiguring of the grounds of these theoretical models is allied to specific creative practices and gestures and brought into contrast to the Bauhaus project and critical theory's conundrum of high-art autonomy. Firstly, I ask, through design critic Grace McQuilten, why art should not be

active on the design side, consequently on the commerce side, through deliberate 'mis-design.' McQuilten juxtaposes two artists, one who achieves a new criticality in commercial culture through 'mis-design' (Acconci) and one who is complicit with it (Takashi Murakami). Secondly, if this cross-over is possible, then the next step is to ask, through Krzysztof Ziarek's discussion of avant-garde poets and contemporary visual art, why this boundary at all? Does this divide between pure an applied have deeper roots in the nature of modernity itself? What is the scission (as Ziarek calls it) between the avant-garde and technicity, and how does art operate across this divide in a way that reveals both the forcework of art (moving to nonpower) and the forcework of technicity (moving in the flow of power)? Here I emphasize the singularity of specific practices as an initiation of critical event in specific contexts (in juxtaposition to much more visible generalizing, categorizing and institutionalizing practices that are part of the flow of power that is technicity). I suggest that there is a positive complicity in some practices of architecture (referring to Jean Nouvel), practices that reveal that there is a scission and make it speak. Thirdly, I extend the discussion of the subtle relation of avant-garde practices to technicity as being neither a rejection nor naïve embracing of new technologies in themselves. This reiterates a theme introduced in Ziarek's careful distinction between *technicity* as a force or flow of power and *technology* as particular production paradigms, instruments and technologically made things, machines, or know-how. Technology can be used subversively in a way that is at odds with and revealing of technicity. This is demonstrated though a discussion of the cross-disciplinary exhibition *This is Tomorrow* and the work of some architects and artists who I identify as 'fellow travelers' of Acconci (though they pre-date him) in postwar experimentation in design

and architecture. The event is the exhibition *This is Tomorrow* in London in 1956 and the architects and artists are the architecture collective Archigram, architects Cedric Price, Carlos Ferrater and Fernando Bendito, and the artist Muntadas. This last set of counter-currents serves to elaborate an embracing yet subversive relationship to new technology as a legacy of an 'irrational' rather than 'rational' pre-war avant-garde. These practices also present a detour through design and architecture that bridges the prewar avant-garde with neo-avant-garde art practices of the 1960s and 1970s, decades in which Acconci's early writing and performances were an important contribution to contemporary art.

Chapter Three is a survey of Acconci's practice from his poetry and performances of the 1960s up to his interior re-design of the MAK (Austrian Museum of Applied Arts and Contemporary Art, Vienna) in 1993.[2] The MAK renovation is a key transitional project that demonstrates both the continuity of an avant-garde practice and an assertion of the space of architecture and design as a critical zone of action for Acconci. This focused survey touches on key themes for this thesis including public and private space, the notions of use and function, the artist's position of agency, audience and public, the use of idiom, the mis-use of technology, and the 'fugitive' nature of Acconci's poetic practice, whether on the page or in the street (Dworkin 99). For Acconci, the body is taken as the threshold between personal and public space, and public space as occupied by the body is taken as emblematic of an analogous threshold between private property and a public place. Also consistent through all his work is the play of language, either written or spoken, as an event or act of articulating similar thresholds. This chapter points to a consistent mode of practice in Acconci's work from his artistic beginnings as a poet. Concisely, this involves the disruption of disciplinary framings, a gesture simultaneously

intimate with the formal limits of a discipline (delimiting the range of poetry or visual art, for example) and, to use Dworkin's term, inherently 'fugitive,' (pushing form beyond its own frame or definition). Through formal or concrete manipulation, poetry is forced beyond the edge of the page to become performance, performance is forced onto the street, and design and architecture are forced into a collision with the body and the ephemeral (ie. a conversation with technicity). The question arises, now that these designed things live out in the world, what do they do that is different from the productions of star architects who populate urban space with feats of visual audacity and inventiveness? In short, what is their criticality in relation to the designed world?

The last chapter turns this discussion to the work of Acconci Studio by looking at three built projects, *Storefront for Art and Architecture* (1993), *Courtyard in the Wind* (1997) and *Mur Island* (2003). I return to the assertion that Acconci's practice is somehow 'fugitive,' that in sitting astride the fracture that is the line separating art and design (the same line discussed in chapter one as the scission between the avant-garde and technicity), these works assert themselves as 'event' with their own signature relative to time and space and their relationship to technicity. Are these projects art, architecture or landscape architecture? It seems that they operate by demanding the terms of this question and asserting the articulation point between these different modes of practice as a vital area of practice.

In the conclusion I take this articulation of the line of fracture upon which the Bauhaus project builds a distinction between the pure and the applied as the place where both art and design can be most revealing of their shared relationship to technicity. I

discuss the relative success or failure of Acconci's gambit in that very zone of techtonic friction and ask what it should mean for contemporary creative practices.

PART 1: Chapter 1

Two poles of the Rational (the Bauhaus and Critical Theory)

In order to understand how different Acconci's gambit is in relation to accepted design practice I will first outline how the avant-garde situated the convergence of high art's revolutionary 'pure plastic art' (to use the De Stijl's term coined by Mondrian and Van Doesburg[3]) and the world of production for social change and mass-market commerce. I will also discuss how critical theory, in allowing a particular and limited opening for art's social purpose, characterizes the institutional reception of the re-emergence of the avant-garde in the post-war West and how this characterization is part of the all-but-complete separation of disciplines of art and design, of the pure from the applied.

The Bauhaus Project

In the aftermath of World War One many artists, graphic artists and architects of the avant-garde saw the unification of pure form (derived from the purified abstract language of painting and sculpture) with everyday utility for the social benefit of the masses, as well as invention and experiment with emerging technology, as branches of a singular radicality. As this aesthetic purity and utility for art as design, and an important parallel revolution in the method for teaching it was codified in the various iterations of the curricula of Bauhaus from 1919 to 1933, I will call this the 'Bauhaus project.' This is not to designate the Bauhaus itself as either the sole or necessarily the most innovative

manifestation of artists moving across the boundary between pure avant-garde abstraction and an idealistic conception of a social, practical or everyday utility and experimentation with new technology. We can also see the broad scope of this desire in looking at examples as widespread as de Stijl in the Netherlands or in post-revolutionary Russia at the Vitebsk art school where, in 1919-20, the painter Kazimir Malevitch joined forces with designer El Lissitzky to extend Suprematism into the social through public graphic interventions and urban design projects in that city and the establishment of Proun ('Project of Affirmation of the New') and UNOVIS ('Affirmers of the New Art') (Ferré 569).

However, among these diverse practices, one can take the Bauhaus as a source of a sea-change in art and design education; it institutionalised a representation of the profession of 'the designer' and 'the architect' that would rearrange the relationship between art and applied art for the century to come. The Bauhaus also became a sign for a rationalist trans-national modernity in its stylistic influence on post-war architecture and consumer design, indeed on the very thinking of the idea 'design' over the last century. The Bauhaus project is emblematic of an intentional conflation of the diverse avant-garde strategies that grappled with a desire to integrate art into everyday life in explicit relation to new technology (for example, by stripping form of its historical burden and local significance). The Bauhaus appropriates these avant-garde strategies and re-frames their aesthetics, craft and form-building as modern technical skills which combine process design and an unornamented, 'pure' formal aesthetic as the predominant mode of cultural meaning-making for the century that followed.

The 2009 exhibition *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity* at the Museum

of Modern Art, New York, is an important attempt to evaluate the contemporary significance of the paradigm shift generated by the Bauhaus (and it is the second major exhibition about the Bauhaus at MOMA, the first being the influential exhibition organized and designed by Walter Gropius and Herbert Bayer in 1933). In writing on the exhibition curators Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman cite Bauhaus director Walter Gropius' desire, articulated in the 1919 Bauhaus program, to forge a "new unity" between art and technology in the face of the isolation of the arts from modern society. The Bauhaus "faculty and students repeatedly addressed the question of how to redefine art in relation to a modern culture of technological media, mass production, expanding consumerism… The school's structural and teaching practices posed fundamental challenges to the distinction between art and design, and irrevocably changed the terms of both" (Bergdoll and Dickerman 13).

Fundamental to the school's method, alongside Gropius' structure of *Vorkurs* (preliminary course) and material-process based workshops, was making the Bauhaus in all its phases[4] a locus to which avant-garde practitioners from across Europe were attracted as teachers, guests, conference attendees, or in the case of de Stijl's Theo van Doesburg, a peripheral presence.[5] The publishing program of the school exemplifies this embrace of the avant-garde as heteroclite resource. The *Bauhausbücher,* a series of books with a unified graphic design and format, were intended both as a dissemination of Bauhaus ideas and as a serial survey of the Europe-wide avant-garde practices from which the Bauhaus claimed its modernist authority.[6] Fourteen *bücher* were published between 1925 and 1930, with the co-editors Gropius and Moholy-Nagy adopting the "vocabulary and model of scientific study, announcing [in the series prospectus] that the

books would include 'research' (*Forschungen*) and 'findings' (*Arbeitsergebnisse*)" (Sudhalter in Bergdoll and Dickerman 196). Sudhatler goes on to note that the books divide fairly evenly between publication on Bauhaus pedagogy by the school's masters (four issues), showcases of Bauhaus production (four) and key documents of the European and Russian avant-gardes (six) (196). As with the faculty and visitors to the Bauhaus, this who's-who of the artistic avant-garde formed an evolving workshop on contemporary culture, often with dissonant views from both inside and outside the school proper. As Bergdoll points out, using very twenty-first century language,

> [T]he Bauhaus brought together artists, architects, and designers in a kind of cultural think-tank for the times. …[T]his purposeful diversity, present from the start, provoked a re-imagining of the relation between fine art and design. …[T]he result was hardly monolithic in orientation, but rather a series of positions, varying and sometimes at variance with one another, that attempted to work their way through the ways in which a new modern culture of technological media, machine production, global communication, and postwar politics might shape the role of the artist. (15)

Bergdoll is correct to point out the intentionally eclectic, international and dynamic nature of the community of practitioners drawn to the Bauhaus throughout all its phases. The school indeed was a crucible within which a vast and influential amount of experimentation in music and sound, performance, photography, and purposing of modern materials took place and it was this very experimentation that allowed the Bauhaus to invent its version of 'applied art.' This invention was an adaptation of the formal purity of geometric abstraction as the aesthetic and form for the design of products and production processes adapted to modern life and industrial manufacturing methods. The question arises, is the Bauhaus project one that distills and separates an instrumental practice from the avant-garde rather than extending the avant-garde's radical conjecture?

As exemplified by the reach and range of the *Bauhausbücher,* the Bauhaus sought sources and resources from throughout the trans-European avant-garde. These resources were drawn into the Bauhaus crucible with a kind of permissiveness that was capable of fomenting many radically new approaches, including putting at question the very register of time, space and vision as we understand it (through Klee's painting, Moholy-Nagy's film experiments and Schlemmer's stage work, for example), and inevitably shifting related disciplinary boundaries as a result. Yet the outcomes, the cultural and commercial production of the school, exemplified by its gradual evolution into a school of architecture, draw only on these experiments as generators of non-traditional aesthetics, form and procedures to be applied to an existing understanding of time, space and vision. This leaves the Bauhaus project as one less oriented to posing philosophical questions or conjecturing new ways of seeing and experiencing but rather bequeathing to the newly coined field of design a refined zone of inquiry pertaining only to aesthetic and formal inventiveness, experimentation and the implementation of technical method. 'Pure plastic' conjecture was harnessed to formal and aesthetic invention, in the context of either capitalist or socialist conceptions of utility and function.

So with the Bauhaus' permissiveness came a simultaneous conflation and a rejection of the avant-garde as an alternate source of conjecture as real as the scientific model Gropius and Moholy-Nagy desired to emulate (as demonstrated in the *Bauhausbücher* series prospectus). In this sense the Bauhaus project separates art from design at exactly the point where the avant-garde proposes radical new directions in "rethinking the very notion of experience in ways that allow us to see art as a site where experience materializes," which is to say, as event (Ziarek, *Historicity* 11). By creating a distinction

between art and design along this demarcation line between event and production, the Bauhaus project veers from any conjecture that is a rethinking of experience in favour of articulating a rational and instrumental relationship to technology. In contrast, when we look at subsequent performative[7] conjecture in relation to the world of design and architecture, for example the work of Archigram or of Vito Acconci, we are looking at work which conceives itself as event and which focuses precisely on this unstable demarcation line drawn by the Bauhaus between event and thing, between art and design, as critical. Acconci, Archigram and many practitioners of the 'irrational avant-garde' articulate this critical ground through a general strategy in relation to technology – *mis-use*. *Use* looks backwards, sees utility in terms that are already defined; *mis-use* looks forward as provisional conjecture around the power of use itself. Here we can begin a redefinition of design (or a re-approach to design) at variance with the Bauhaus project and its ongoing resonance in commercial techno-culture, a redefinition exemplified in this thesis by the work of Acconci and Acconci Studio.

Critical Theory: Functionality, Utility, Autonomy

Critical theory derived from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and the writings of the Frankfurt School is the theme music of the post-1945 visual art neo-avant-garde, especially in America, deeply colouring the institutional and critical reception of pre-war avant-garde practice and defining, through its uptake in institutions of art and design, *both an autonomy and a utility for art*. In spite of the shared history between critical theory and the artistic avant-gardes it is important to note that criticality derived from critical theory and criticality derived from art practice are not the same thing, however closely they have been mapped onto one another. While the term 'criticality' in art practice draws

specifically on a common ground with critical theory, art practices often do not integrate completely or rigorously in this regard. In *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory* Gail Day articulates this point in relation to negativity and negation as manifest in the works of twentieth century artists, both of the avant-gardes and neo-avant-garde. Surveying statements and manifestos from the Dadaists to the American minimalist sculptor (and furniture designer) Donald Judd, the term 'negation' is part of the "routine language of art" and, though it always carries a "radical charge," it varies widely in the explicitness of its reference to critical theory. That said, the predominance of the term reflects not only the "long influence of Left-Hegelian and Nietzschean modes of thinking on the field, but also something of the particular nature, condition, and place of the art 'object', of artistic activity, and of representation in modernity. The modalities of art…may have changed substantially since Adorno drafted his book but the opening lines of *Aesthetic Theory* still haunt contemporary art practice" (Day 6, note). The frequently-cited lines from Adorno to which Day refers have to do with the autonomy of art, that art is separated from normal production by virtue of its ability to bring about new modes of practice or making through naive conjecture, an autonomy "shattered" by the inequity of capitalist progress, the freedom of the particular in relation to "the perennial unfreedom of the whole" (Day 6, note):

> It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, nor even its right to exist. The forfeiture of what can be done spontaneously or unproblematically has not been compensated for by the open infinitude of new possibilities that reflection confronts. In many regards, expansion appears as contraction. The sea of the formerly inconceivable, on which around 1910 revolutionary art movements set out, did not bestow the promised happiness of adventure. Instead, the process that was unleashed consumed the categories in the name of that for which it was undertaken. More was constantly pulled into the vortex of the newly taboo; everywhere

> artists rejoiced less over the newly won realm of freedom than that they immediately sought once again after ostensible yet scarcely adequate order. For absolute freedom in art, always limited to a particular, comes into contradiction with the perennial unfreedom of the whole. In it the place of art became uncertain. The autonomy is achieved, after having freed itself from cultic function and its images, was nourished by the idea of humanity. As society became ever less a human one, this autonomy was shattered. Drawn from the ideal of humanity, art's constituent elements withered by art's own law of movement. Yet art's autonomy remains irrevocable. All efforts to restore art by giving it a social function—of which art is itself uncertain and by which it expresses its own uncertainty—are doomed. (Adorno 1)

Adorno asserts that high-art may not be redeemed by giving it a social function. This is a doomed enterprise yet one that sets for the neo-avant-garde and post-war critics a self-reflexive critical function for art wound around its own inevitable failure and cooption. Failure, in this Beckettian sense, might be the thing that art, by definition, can and must tolerate. Can architecture, the Bauhaus' preeminent field of applied art, do the same? Drawing from architecture critic Manfredo Tafuri, Gail Day states, "As agents of the internal reshaping of capitalist social relations, avant-gardist's search for new forms, for new ways of making art or designing buildings, played an important role in sweeping away older modes of being. In exploring the relations and responses of Dada and De Stijl to the disenchantment of the Metropolis, Tafuri outlines his 'dialectic of the avant-garde,' a dialectic which opens with a classic contrast between Dada's 'violent insertion' into the irrational and De Stijl's efforts to subject form to reason" (Day 87). In this interpretation, critical theory, as a mode of art criticism (as one perspective/methodology of art criticism), continues a process of fixing the boundaries of high art versus design/architecture as interrelated but mutually excluding fields based on utility and social function.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to recount the history of critical theory in relation to its ambiguous interleaving through a century of contemporary art, but I will look, via art critics Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Hal Foster, at a specific and influential reading of critical theory in the context of the American neo-avant-garde of the 1960s to 1990s and how it reinforces the pure/applied divide in a way that has been taken up almost universally by institutions of contemporary art and design. Both Buchloh and Foster have an avid interest in the transformation of avant-gardist strategies in the post-war neo-avant-garde and they are also very skeptical, even dismissive, of the possibility for architecture or design to take on the critical role which they assign to an autonomous art. Buchloh is the more dismissive in this regard, while Foster is on some level more enchanted (and subsequently more disappointed) by the potential hinted at in the production of some of the stars of contemporary architecture.

When one teases autonomy out of the avant-garde, when art becomes mass-culture, one gets what Adorno and Max Horkheimer labeled as the culture-industry.[8] In the performing and cinematic arts one gets entertainment. In the world of material culture and building one gets design. According to Benjamin Buchloh, when Bauhaus architecture in the incarnation of Mies van der Rohe comes to America, it separates itself more completely than ever from its avant-garde roots and the potential of a left-radical social project. Discussing the support given to Moholy-Nagy by Walter Paepeke, president of the Container Corporation of America, in reviving the New Bauhaus in Chicago, Buchloh states that mid-twentieth century design coalesced around the idea,

> that mass culture and high art could be reconciled in a radically commercialized Bauhaus venture. But in his [Walter Paepke's] vision, as in that of many others, the reconciliation was purged of all political and ideological implications concerning artistic intervention in

> collective social progress. The cognitive and perceptual devices of modernity simply would have to be deployed for the development of a new commodity aesthetic (product design, packaging, and advertising). The fabrication of that aesthetic would, in fact, become one of the most powerful and important industries in postwar America and Europe, without, however, resolving the contradictions of Modernism. (Buchloh, *Neo-Avant-Garde* 467)

The contradictions of modernism, Buchloh states elsewhere, include grappling "with the concept of autonomy in bourgeois aesthetics" while it is "only with Marxist aesthetic thought that an adequate theorization of the dialectic of autonomy and instrumentality can be located." Buchloh goes on to assert that Adorno "specifically addresses the problem of the destruction of aesthetic autonomy in the service of instrumental thought and the subordination of aesthetic pleasure under the positivist demands of communication" (Buchloh, *Neo-Avant-Garde* 208). Buchloh, however, does not agree with Peter Bürger's assessment in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) that "it was the goal of the original avant-garde, that of the period 1910-25, to criticize the notion of autonomy, the central term of modernist thinking…to abolish the separation of the aesthetic from the real (what is often referred to as the gap between art and life) and attempted instead to integrate art with social praxis" (Buchloh, *Primary* 41). It is, according to Bürger, the post-war neo-avant-garde "which stages for a second time the avant-gardist break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense and that permits the positing of any meaning whatever" (Bürger qtd. in Buchloh, *Primary* 41).

Buchloh reacts to Bürger's dismissal by suggesting that a more detailed investigation of the relative failure of particular avant-garde and neo-avant-garde strategies and procedures (as opposed to a characterization of the avant-garde as a whole) is needed

alongside an assessment of the "actual conditions of the reception and transformation of the avant-garde paradigms" This might reveal, not a betrayal of an art-historian's mythic "authentic moment of originality" (Buchloh, *Primary* 42) but rather show that the "very same strategies that had developed within modernism's project of enlightenment now serve the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere into the public sphere of the corporate state, with its appropriate forms of distribution (total commodification) and cultural experience (the spectacle)" (52). Art, then, at its best, can struggle with its bourgeois autonomy in order to reveal, in a conflicted agitation away from that autonomy, the forces of spectacle and commodification. If the avant-garde attempted, yet failed, to obliterate the separation of the aesthetic from the real, to bring 'art into life,' then the repetition of its strategies, in contemporary high-art *at least* serves to illuminate a cultural conundrum that Paepke and Moholy-Nagy's evolution of a New Bauhaus in America (and other descendants)[9], in adopting a technological and aesthetic function for design, certainly seeks to ignore.

In essays of criticism collected under the title *Design and Crime (And Other Diatribes)* (2002) Hal Foster states that "the old project to reconnect Art and Life, endorsed in different ways by Art Nouveau, the Bauhaus and many other movements, was eventually accomplished, but according to the spectacular dictates of the culture industry, not the liberatory ambitions of the avant-garde" (Foster, *Design* 19). In this dubious accomplishment, as further described in *The Art-Architecture Complex* (2010), we see, especially in the work of contemporary architects like Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas and Renzo Piano, an amalgamation of commodification, spectacle and the digital-era correlate of these two classic critical theory perils, 'imageability' (Foster *Art*

x). He cites Jean Baudrillard's qualification of a second industrial revolution, styled by the Bauhaus, as signaling a "qualitative leap from a political economy of the product to a 'political economy of the sign' in which the structure of the commodity and the sign refashioned one another, so that the two could circulate as one, as image-products" (Foster *Design* 18). Likewise, contrary to Bürger's dismissal of the neo-avant-garde (and thereby the potential of contemporary art to 'function' in the terms of critical theory), Foster goes on to extrapolate from Adorno's conundrum about the relevance of philosophy in *Negative Dialectics* in which he states that "philosophy, which once seemed absolute lives on because the moment to realize it was missed" (Adorno, *Negative* 3). Foster argues that art might 'live on' in a kind of critical distance of resistance to capital and spectacle, which "through formal transformation that is also social engagement…helps to restore a mnemonic dimension to contemporary art, and to resist the presentist totality of design in culture today" (Foster, *Design* 130). His take on design and architecture is informed by this resistance to post-modern architecture and design as a phenomenon of the market and is exemplified in his discussion of the work architect Rem Koolhaas as complicit or cynical (yet perhaps poetic) in relation to capital and spectacle. In *Dialectical Passions* Gail Day summarizes this discussion:

> Koolhaas in Foster's view [in *Design and Crime*], also manages to reconcile the Bretonian and Corbusian strains of modernism, fusing irrationalist and rationalist tendencies (in this regard, Koolhaas is compared to the postwar avant-gardes and the Situationist International), and tries to 'ride the dialectic of modernization in a way that might keep these projects alive for the future'…. Koolhaas' efforts to 'surf the dialectic' of modernization or the market are caught between critique and complicity, or between bravado and desperation… (Tafuri is one of those critical of Koolhaas' cynicism.) Foster immediately draws out the consequences: 'it is difficult,' he observes, 'to imagine a politics today that does not negotiate the market somehow'. (Day 198)

Foster's discussion of architect Zaha Hadid is illuminating for this thesis in that a study of avant-garde Russian artists, the Supermatist Kazimir Malevitch and Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin, was part of her graduate studies in architecture and subsequently was a reference for the formal strategies of her proposals and built projects (Foster, *Art-Architecture 72)*. From Foster's point of view we have in Hadid a contemporary architect who is not working in a conservative, postmodernist representational idiom (the postmodernism that is Foster's project to repudiate), but who is, rather, taking as source material high modern paintings, *Architectons* (Malevitch's abstract architecture-like sculptures), and other spatial gestures of these pioneers of the non-representational, the transcendental and the tectonic (77).

What a perfect test for contemporary architecture: to be evaluated against its aspirations to emulate art at its most pure and to supplant a moribund postmodern architecture via one of the most demanding, revolutionary (and historically marginalized) sources of its modernity. Foster outlines how Hadid appropriates Malevitch's visual strategies in which the Suprematist "forged his abstraction not only by suppressing the referent but also by unmooring the viewer, in part through an extrapolation of aerial views that make the subject position difficult to imagine" (76). Hadid's taking up of this visual strategy of dynamic representation is a disturbance of any 'normal' perspectival reading of the location of the picture plane, the viewer, of space, of up and down, and so on. As such, Hadid's vertiginous drawings and representations begin to make sense not in the terms of an early twentieth century avant-gardist rejection of representation but in the terms of digital modeling through CAD (Computer Aided Design) and other software- and screen-based representations of space, then entering common professional use.

Furthermore, Hadid succeeded in building these vertiginous structures, whose formal plays appear, in reproductions at least, almost as a *Photoshop* photo-software distortion. What is Foster's verdict on these gestures (since it is the cultural critics' job to evaluate)? He critiques a lack of artistic purity. In several of Hadid's projects there is an incursion of a contradictory kind of representation (which Foster labels as derived from Futurism and Expressionism): "her buildings do not convey movement so much as they represent it—they are precisely 'frozen motion'" (85). Here we are returned to the problems of spectacle and 'imageability.'

For Foster, Hadid's relation "to all these modernisms is less deconstructive than decorative—a styling of Futurist lines, Suprematist forms, Expressionist shapes, and Constructivist assemblages that updates them according to the expectations of the computer age" (85). One might say that in spite of his fascination with architecture's formal play and his own perceptive and historically-informed analysis, this is Foster's pessimistic view of architecture and design practice as a whole. He suggests that they are a sampling of aesthetic style, which radically negates the gesture of criticality that originated them *and* any potential for criticality in the present tense. However, this must presume that, at least hypothetically, there might be a successful version of this transposition, one also uniquely using the visual and the aesthetic to define subjectivity. One might also observe that Foster has picked the right architects in relation to his critique (as there are other practices which might be considered but which do not serve this argument).

Gail Day outlines the fundamental block that Buchloh and Foster do not seem to be able to circumvent on behalf of art in that they ultimately both reach a pessimistic closure

necessitated by their own logic in relationship to a pre-determined use or function of an art that *must not* negotiate or be implicated in the market. She states that in "Foster's account…despite his intentions, and despite his playing the optimist to Buchloh's pessimist, this argument again underscores the impossibility of ambitions for radical social transformation" (Day 200). Stephen Horne, in a review of Foster's *The Art-Architecture Complex,* sets this block in explicit terms, locating it from outside the limited field of potentials defined by critical theory:

> Perhaps what is needed, following Hal Foster's denunciations of design as mere consumerist manipulation in the service of greater efficiencies for capitalism, is recognition of a more general outline. That would be one that attributes the root of the problem more deeply in a description of the rationalist prejudices that dominate our thinking and being. For the style of critique demonstrated by Foster and his colleagues this would be bad news, leaving them revealed as a part of the problem in so far as their project is itself inextricably dedicated to the founding of criticality in a modernity already itself a practice of instrumental rationality. (Horne n.p.)

Because of its debt to conceptions of function and use determined by the Bauhaus (and the art/design boundary as the Bauhaus drew it), definitions of design practice self-limit to ones of 'function' and 'use' similar to those embedded in critical theory's definition of art and resist being drawn into post-modern or post-critical discourse. By extension, design is caught in a similar dialectical bind to the one Bürger, Buchloh and Foster allude to on the art side of the boundary, that, as an agent of change, design is bound to the very same technicity it might seek to reform. One could say, only slightly hyperbolically, that the Bauhaus undermined the avant-garde at the very point it was making an explicit challenge to scientific rationalism as applied to technology and to social change (not in the dynamism of the school itself but in the definition of fields of design and architecture as adjuncts to engineering that it bequeathed to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries).

That challenge to rationalism continued on the art side in the post-war era through the neo-avant-garde where the confrontational yet complicit dialogue between art and technicity continued to rewrite possibilities for thinking about being, time and space.

I conjecture that the field of design, defined in Bauhaus terms, has a vested interest in the 'naive conjecture' of art being marginalized in favour of professional and scientific 'expertise' and an apparently positive (and positivist) embrace of new technology, media and processes (which critical theory appears to vilify in its relation to capital, commodity and spectacle).[10] Design, ironically, may have a more existential dependence on this critical theory derived model than art does. Explorations in new-media and information technology also tend to seek reinforcement on the design side of the divide, perhaps alienated by the apparently idiosyncratic or naive connotations of art in its technophobic dimension inherited from the "violent insertion," as Tafuri puts it, of the 'irrational avant-garde' (Day 87). That is to say, design appears to seek its justification in the rational roots of the avant-garde, a position most clearly represented by the Bauhaus project, a project that still has, in the terms of critical theory, the potential of a rational social application.

PART I: Chapter 2

Counter-Currents: Mis-Design; Art in the flow of Nonpower; Archigram and Postwar Experimentation Architecture

This chapter proposes three counter-currents which reconfigure the theoretical models and historical dynamic outlined in chapter one through specific and singular creative

practices and gestures. These gestures are brought into contrast with the Bauhaus project and critical theory's conundrum of high-art autonomy. Firstly, I explore a notion of 'mis-design' developed by Grace McQuilten in relation to Acconci's practice which, to some extent, attempts to recuperate a progressive social project by inserting art into the discourse of commercial and consumer production. Secondly, I will make a connection between my description of 'unfixing' and 'release' in relation to Acconci's work (discussed in detail in chapter three) and Krzysztof Ziarek's concepts of 'force work,' 'event,' 'letting-go ' (*aphesis*) and 'non-productiveness' as crucial to avant-garde art practices, practices which, in turn, are crucial in illuminating the 'technicity' of the modern and postmodern world (Ziarek, *Force* 1). Lastly, I discuss some important gestures in postwar design and architecture that exemplify how technology can be at odds with, and revealing of, technicity. This is demonstrated though postwar experimentation in design and architecture, namely, the exhibition *This is Tomorrow* in London in 1956, the architecture group Archigram, architects Cedric Price, Carlos Ferrater and Fernando Bendito and the artist Muntadas. This last counter-current serves to elaborate an embracing yet subversive relationship to new technology as a legacy of an 'irrational' rather than 'rational' pre-war avant-garde. It also introduces a diverse set of postwar practices whose mode of relation to technicity has an affinity to both Acconci's poetic and performance practices and his design for public space, which will be discussed in the following two chapters.

Counter-Current I: Mis-Design

In *Art in Consumer Culture: Mis-Design* Grace McQuilten writes about Vito Acconci's appropriation of design as an intentional strategy of 'mis-design,' derived from Acconci's

own assertion that "the function of public art is de-design" (qtd. in Vidler, *Warped* 141). Architecture critic Anthony Vidler articulates Acconci's 'de-design' as a questioning of the limits of the architectural 'program' taken to its furthest extreme, where typological elements are jumbled as if "taken by an unruly child and scattered on the floor" in order to give a new use that disturbs their institutional clarity (140-1). McQuilten takes on Buchloh and Foster's pessimistic conclusion (seeing both art and design as incompatible with social change) on its own terms and proposes a different outcome. She asserts that "pinpointing design as 'criminal' (in *Design and Crime*) in the breakdown of the distinction between art and commercial spheres misplaces the underlying issue of the total design of contemporary culture" where a "critical evaluation of the role of design can thus be configured as a means to salvage the field of critical art from complete subsumption in the commercial sphere" (McQuilten 36). Design shapes and makes the contemporary landscape (education, politics, things, culture). McQuilten invokes design theorist Vilem Fluser's *The Shape of Things* (1999) in describing design's prevalence across multiple forms of social production, where "the emergence of design in modernist discourse as a means to bridge the gap between technology and art… (w)here design used to be a means to formalise production, he [Fluser] argues that now design has the capacity to 'produce alternate worlds'"(1). She goes on to ask if there is potential for this design between art and technology to be taken not solely as linked to the production of commodities but also, as a process of "deliberation, conceptualisation, debate, and critical thought." Taken as such it can generate the critical potential proposed by design theorist Richard Buchanan: "[d]esign is the art of shaping arguments about the artificial and human-made world'"(2). If design can be truly critical it is as a,

> critical artistic practice in an environment marked by the design of commodities, asking whether it is possible to distinguish design as a conceptual practice from its commercial end-product, in order to find a means for critical practices to emerge within the systems of late capitalism.(3)

The models for this critical practice, for McQuilten, are artists who turn towards the field of commercial design in which "artists have a unique capacity to mis-direct the commercial directives of social production… This means reconsidering art as a critical practice occurring within the field of commercial design" (4). Mis-direction, or mis-design, as an explicit goal of critical design practice requires being active in precisely the kind of collusion with power and commerce that Hal Foster sees as the negative pitfall of architecture's glib mix of pure and applied art (picking styles from the palette of the avant-garde). McQuilten, draws from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, arguing for a move "away from oppositional critique to consider how subjects are entwined with social production through desire" (4). These cross-over artists, McQuilten adds, "use commercial design to critique the unconscious aspect of production, revealing how subjects become ensnared by their desire for the seductions of a consumer landscape." According to McQuilten, artistic practice is an "unpredictable process occurring on the inside of commercial culture, suggesting that practices inhabiting the systems of commercial design can present a complex critique of the psychological dynamics of social production" (4). The nature of the collusion undertaken when artists take on the persona of the designer, either ironically or sincerely, becomes a key part of McQuilten's discussion. In order to investigate the complex and contradictory nature of this collusion she discusses the work of two artists who have moved resolutely into the zone of design with very different results in terms of the potential for criticality: Takashi Murakami and

Vito Acconci.

Takashi Murakami's 'superflat' graphic characters, patterns and sculptural figures are derived from Japanese *animé*. Murakami apparently embraces graphics as pure commercial branding, thus taking a step beyond Andy Warhol's embrace of commercial design as a way of distancing the artist from decisions of taste and the requirement to take an ethical stance in relation to the market. Murakami's work is cute, seductive, exceptionally marketable and consumable and extremely successful both commercially and critically (both in the world of consumer culture and high art) (13). Murakami's postmodern acceptance of a "breakdown of meaning" is reflected in the title of his 1999 solo exhibition, *the meaning and the nonsense of meaning* (23). His production could as easily be ironically critical of the glittered surface of pop culture as an enthusiastic and successful participant in it (and likewise ironic or enthusiastic in relation to the hunt for the new look or theory in contemporary art). Perhaps by trumping art's aloofness and elitism as a marketplace, it is all of these at once, deftly calculating and revealing the game of both high and low culture.

One set of events reveals the difference between cynical collusion and critique for McQuilten. In 2006 Murakami's production company, Kaikai Kiki Co., sued a manufacturer of clothing, Narumiya International, for copyright infringement for using images which Murakami claimed were far too similar to the big-eyed mouse character 'DOB,' which is one centrepiece of Murakami's artistic iconography and commercial success (19). In a commercial fashion world based entirely on riffing and sampling as a dynamic in the evolution of style, commercial entities make claims based on copyright in order to preserve existing or potential cash flow associated with a particular style, image,

invention or brand. In making a claim[11] against Narumiya, Murakami asserted the character of the work as 'art' and as unique, effectively claiming that its status as art (the realm of the unique, set off from the flow of mass culture) was itself an inalienable commercial value in the world of business. McQuilten suggests that, "rather than exploring the interplay of his appropriations with the exchanges of late capital in a critical way, Murakami instead defended his commercial territory, claiming tens of millions of yen in compensation" (19). She goes on to conclude that Murakami's mimetic affirmation of a hyper-*culture industry* of commercial-corporate branding "is a perfect statement of the postmodern paradox, where all resistance is futile and no outside position seems to be available" (20). Here, she makes a distinction between collusion and critique, between design and a 'mis-design' where "artistic projects emerging in the field of design have the potential to open up smooth spaces in the field of social production" (26). 'Smooth spaces' refers to Deleuze and Guattari's formulation in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) of mutually influencing smooth and striated spaces, which distinguish between expansive, evolving, reconstituting spaces and spaces governed by social systems of order and control (25). Collusion is striated. Critique is smooth. Murakami slides, and eventually settles, to the reactionary side of this distinction: "when challenged by the very system that he has openly colluded with… [he] defended the authorship of his *animé* designs and espoused the need for society to 'recognise the value of the originality of art'" (30). His defence is based on the autonomy of art as object rather than on its engagement as event (which is a different kind of originality).[12]

In contrast to Murakami, the design and architecture work of Vito Acconci and

Acconci Studio is one of the examples McQuilten uses to show how critical spaces can be opened up within the sphere of commercial production:

> A mistake in design, or 'mis-design' thereby helps the product-based methodology of design give way to the process of conceiving and thinking, producing spaces for human desire and agency. …To embrace art in this way, as a practice of critical design, involves disregarding the formal distinction between visual art and design, and instead turning to art as a critical practice within the designed landscape of both art and commerce. (181)

How does Acconci's work achieve such a productive complicity while Murakami's work is unable or unwilling to propose anything other than a cynical collusion? An example from outside McQuilten's thesis is useful here to indicate how collusion might be *paced* differently. In conversation with architect Jean Nouvel, philosopher Jean Baudrillard discusses complicity as a factor in the process of architecture. For Nouvel, a level of complexity, which is hopefully not an end in itself, can be achieved only if complicity is established. Baudrillard adds, "Like seduction 'complicity' is a term with a bad reputation. Both are contrasted with an ideology of transparency. …Freedom has become the idea of modernity (individualism)" (Baudrillard/Nouvel 77). This complicity happens, for example, when an architect engages the program of building without fulfilling it as a technician would but, rather, in a conversation around meaning, allows a redrawing of that program. For McQuilten, "[b]y embracing a deficient sense of use and a misguided sense of function, Acconci Studio attempts to activate the designed subject and to incite change" (McQuilten 183). This reframing of his practice outside of art is not different from Acconci's earlier strategies, which she describes as attempts to overcome art's modes of cultural domination and its complicity with capitalism (143). Acconci Studio's architecture resists conforming to this system by misdirecting the outcome-based methodology of design, where the "embrace of design affirms art as a misguided practice

that redirects use, disavows purpose and provides space for critical reflection" (143). This take on Acconci's practice elevates the provocation of failure to a primary strategy in the face of capitalism and reinforces an interpretation of Adorno's conflicting pairing of function and autonomy.

McQuilten's critique of Murakami's cynicism echoes Foster's critique of Rem Koolhaas or Zaha Hadid, discussed above, yet emphatically disagrees with Foster as to the location of potential critical response or dialogue with the systems of late capitalism. McQuilten emphasizes this in relation to Adorno's assertion that art *can* dwell in the conflict between function and autonomy: "A work must cut through the contradictions and overcome them, not by covering them up, but by pursuing them" (Adorno in McQuilten 31). Artists can "compromise a degree of critical autonomy in order to engage more openly with systems of production" (McQuilten 31). As McQuilten laments, Murakami brings Adorno's nightmares to life (30). Doubtlessly they are Foster and Buchloh's nightmares too (though maybe they awake in terror at different moments). Yet McQuilten is making an important distinction that Foster does not permit, that artistic actions within commercial culture, within design and architecture, may be able to approach the conflict between function and autonomy in a way that a hermetically sealed high-art may not and that there is an opening for critique operating *within* commercial culture. It is ironic that Murakami, in retreating behind the authority of high-art to defend commercial interests, helps make this point, and that Acconci, in refusing that authority, opens new ground.

This critique from within, in McQuilten's proposition, is highly reliant both on critical theory's rational mapping of a terrain parsed as a functional/autonomous binary

and on art's ability to generate alternative propositions related to that binary from outside critical theory's model.[13] This returns us to the avant-garde marginalized by the Bauhaus project, as outlined earlier, and begins to tell us something of forces of art that may exceed a rational social project.

Counter-Current II: The Force of Art, Art in the Flow of Nonpower

In Chapter One I suggest that the Bauhaus 'undermined'[14] the avant-garde, appropriating its conjecture and experimentation, and drawing a line along a fracture in order to split-off from art a newly empowered set of practices (design and architecture) precisely where the avant-garde was making an explicit challenge to scientific rationalism, putting at question the very register of temporality, space and vision as they were understood. I then suggest that this 'Bauhaus project' has to do with a formulation of art as production (or product) as distinct from an avant-garde formulation of art as event. In this section I will clarify the question around this line of fracture or demarcation as a vital focus of this thesis, not in the sense that it demarcates a normative line between professional or academic disciplines of art and design but in the sense that it is a line of tectonic friction between the avant-garde and a technologically organized modernity, between poietics and technicity. I will discuss Krzysztof Ziarek's propositions about the avant-garde in poetry and visual art in order to clarify the place of art and design in relation to this line of fracture. I use his term 'force of art,' and his sense of event and *aphesis* to suggest a way of looking at the design work of Acconci and Acconci Studio as a dialogue across this fracture.

In the *Historicity of Experience* (2001) Ziarek reads the avant-garde poetry of Stein, Khlebnikov, Białoszewski, and Howe[15] in dialogue with Heidegger, Benjamin, Lyotard,

and Irigiray, thus casting these poets among voices debating the implications of modernity itself in order "to explore how avant-garde 'experiments' bear critically upon the issue of modern experience and its technological organization" (Ziarek, *Historicity* 3). He continues:

> [I] read the explosion of the avant-gardes… as yet another response to the crisis of the humanistic concept of experience, a reaction which leads to a reappraisal of the very nature of poetry and technology. I approach the avant-garde not only as a contestation of the humanistic concept of experience and of its mediating function between body and history, the personal and the cultural, but also as a radical redefinition of experience in the context of everydayness. (4)

Ziarek identifies a "cluster of issues" around which modernity turns experience, namely; technology, everydayness, history, gender and aesthetics. He proposes that the avant-gardes "produce revisions in these aspects of modern experience" (4). He resituates Heidegger (the Heidegger of *Origin of the Work of Art*) as identifying an important distinction by defining a post-aesthetic idea of art; that art *is* "the temporal event of unconcealment" rather than the production of aesthetic objects or things – that art *is* rather than that art *does* or *makes* (4). This non-aesthetic understanding (through which art is liberated from aesthetic categorization) allows art to have a critical role in its relation to technicity, which is the core of the avant-garde's continuing relevance (5). This relation has to do with a "radically different notion of experience in terms of a scission between its everyday technological representation and its poetic disclosure" (5).

This poetic dimension explored by Heidegger, Benjamin and Irigaray and exemplified in the poets Ziarek discusses modifies our understanding of the everyday (technological representation) by emphasizing "the *role of alterity* in its formation" [my emphasis] thus "breaking with the governing psychological or empirical models of

experience and articulating a different, *poiētic*, notion of experience." (5). For Ziarek, the absolute reinvention of language by avant-garde poets like Gertrude Stein and Velimir Khlebnikov are attempts through the *poiētic* to rethink and reveal the technicity of the everyday. The avant-garde poets, in part precisely because of their complex fascination with technology, are able, through the re-sensing of language, to "disclose a different configuration of everyday experience" (6). It is this "scission" between "everyday technological representation" and "poetic disclosure" that is the line of fracture noted in the case of the Bauhaus and its relation to the avant-garde. It is the axis that a post-aesthetic avant-garde discloses (in event) to reveal the play of technicity in the everyday. In this sense, art *textures experience* such that an 'other than the everyday' can begin to emerge to reveal "how modernity constitutes itself through a techno-scientific unfolding of being" (11).

Differentiating technicity from technology is important in understanding Ziarek's proposition. In the *Force of Art* (2004) he states that technicity is not what we know generally as technology (production paradigms, instruments, technologically made things, machines, or know-how) but rather is what makes technology and the technological possible (Ziarek, *Force* 62). Technicity is "the 'power' that determines the scope and modality of relations in modernity" (62). Following Heidegger (translating Heidegger's *Technik* as technicity), this is a tuning (or turning) of relations towards a sense of calculable availability as resource. As such, it is not describing specific types of relations but rather "the power that effects, that is, brings into being and determines, the very form that relationality takes" (62). Disclosing things, material, people, processes, etc. as resource "determines the shape of being, experience, and history in modernity as

forms of power," where power is not simply or specifically understood as domination or manipulation (ie: specific power relations), but rather that these things exist in as much as they are part of a flow of power and an intensification of power (62). Technicity is this power to be intensified, in a way the template of being, where "[e]arth is disclosed as, in essence, a 'standing reserve' of resources" (62).[16] This definition of technicity via Heidegger's *Bestand* (standing reserve) is nuanced through Foucault and Adorno. Foucault has modern power operating "as an array of various technologies," as power formations, and Adorno describes the "circulation of power as technicist …as producing being as inherently manipulable towards efficiency, commodification and exchange" is the "abstraction of social relations" (63).

In the present tense, for Ziarek, technicity is characterised by "a tendency towards equalization of differences, exchangeability, and convertibility" as information or data (63). He conjectures that the Heideggerian terms around technicity could be updated in order to be appropriate for thinking about the digital age: where 'calculability' becomes 'computability,' 'manipulability' or 'instrumentality' become 'programmability,' 'enframing' becomes 'formatting,' 'standing reserve' becomes 'data base,' and 'technicity' itself could be read as 'digitality.' While this transliteration may be towards terms that are either too general or too specific to hold the same meaning, the point made is that 'digitality' carries some of the sense of 'technicity' in that it represents a ground plane defining the flow of power as distinct from various potential instances of technology or ethical questions about specific relations of power.

Finally, in relation to technicity and technology, we can now see that the position of a given artist or artwork towards particular technologies or technology in general (either

being enchanted by it, decrying it, mis-using or simply using it) does not determine whether or not that work in its essence is disclosing the play of technicity in the everyday. Either could be the case. A work could mis-use a particular technology (or an artist or critic could make a range of related claims for it, such as newness or innovation) yet still be captive to the flow of power in technicity. McQuilten's example of Murakami is just such a case. Ziarek discusses how a distinction between the new as novelty, innovation or surprise is crucially different from work that presents the "unexpected opened by the event structure of experience" (Ziarek, *Historicity* 9). He cites Jean-François Lyotard in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (1991): "the occurence, the *Ereignis* [the event] has nothing to do with the *petit frisson*, the cheap thrill, the profitable pathos, that accompanies an innovation" (qtd. in Ziarek 9).[17] It is the extent of a work's post-aesthetic reinvention of experience as event that is important in relation to technicity, as a counter-force. The avant-gardes have many examples of artists who engage with and use emerging technologies while at the same time keeping the question of technicity open. Ziarek discusses DADA and Marcel Duchamp in this regard, as examples from the historical avant-garde (91). Orlan and Eduardo Kac are examples he cites from contemporary art (Ziarek, *Force* 79-92). The attraction of Archigram to new materials and processes (discussed in the next section) is an example of technology put to use in examining or provoking the technicity of architecture, as is Acconci's 'fugitive' use of technology, beginning with language.

What then is the force of art that is distinct from the technological forcework just described? In discussing technicity as the technical impetus of force relations, which is inherently drawn toward and amplifies power, Ziarek invokes, via Nietzsche and

Foucault, the idea that *relating* itself is *relating* uniquely in terms of power relations and that this, in turn, is part of another play of forces (36). This second play of forces is between the *technik* and the *poiētic*, between a play of power (technological forcework) and non-power (art's forcework) where "technicity aims towards power, while art attempts to let it be" (39). For Ziarek, however, technicity and art are much closer than Heidegger allows (in the *Question Concerning Technology* and *Origin of the Work of Art*). He states that there is a "fragile line that separates (and links) force and power in modernity, the narrow line between art's forcework and power/domination, over which Adorno constantly worries in *Aesthetic Theory*" (39).[18] At any moment one could be the other. Power is the central issue. Technicity is not "an overgeneralized concept to describe the modern understanding of being but rather…a concrete vector of relations among forces, relations that always have formed themselves into flows of power" (39). Conversely, art's forcework, also a modality of revealing, is a release or letting go (of power) — a *poiētic* momentum of *aphesis* (36). Power has these two modalities in modernity. Radical art can reveal or "bring out and preserve this double capacity of force" (40). This is not to say that art is poiētic and technology is *technik* but that force can flow to unfold in two kinds of being and art is, by definition, that which shows this. The force of art is the force of non-power, of the non-functional or non-productive. In this sense art dares to be without use in a world of use in order to reveal this double capacity. That is, art presents itself as useless (within the temporality of efficiency and progress which is technicity). Ziarek uses Gertrude Stein's writing to anchor the 'force of art' as an 'event as nonpower' where:

> One effect of Stein's inimitable writing is that the use of aesthetic criteria for her texts becomes obviously unsuitable: the concepts of beauty, meaning, aesthetic sensibility,

> character, plot, theme and even image have no particular relevance… it is as though Stein were coaxing us to reconceive writing and experience along entirely new lines, to look at writing and experience through a nontechnicist, nonaesthetic lens. (47)

Stein's work is not responding in tune to a set of criteria (a program). Her writing is its own *event*, asynchronous to the technicity of language and historicity of literature upon which it turns.[19] Ziarek situates event as implicit in the idea of a 'force of art' or art as an 'event as non-power' and follows a "line of thinking that extends from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Adorno, Foucault and Deleuze and sees force(s) in terms of spatio-temporal play, that is, in relation to the momentum of unfolding" (31). Exploring the term *das Ereignis* from late Heidegger, "[t]he event is a decisive and radical interruption of the way things have been before, an alteration in the historical force field, which frees up the force of the possible" (27). It follows that art as forcework "thought of as an event places the emphasis on the temporal dynamics of art's occurrence" (27). Stein releases reason and sets in play the event:

> The actuation of such an event forms a wordless or proverbial language, like the one Stein attempts to bring into play in her texts, a language or grammar that imprints all relations. It is in terms of such a 'grammar' that the very bifurcation of the event into the material and the immaterial is effectuated in every moment. (33)

Ziarek quotes Stein's definition of poetry: "I had to feel anything and everything that for me was existing so intensely and put it down in writing as a thing in itself without at all necessarily using its name" (qtd. in Ziarek 46). For Ziarek, Stein's "naming without names leads to a releasing of things into the intensity of their existence" which is "normally foreclosed by the generalizing norms of signification" (47). Her work calls into question "semantic transparency and communicative efficiency" so that "the forces composing everyday existence become reworked outside their habitual experiential and

discursive relations" (47). He concludes:

> The temporality of relations that Stein's works keep reproducing is poiētic: a transformative event redisposing the forces of language in such a way that they no longer work according to normative criteria of correctness and sense but let things unfold with a poiētic force of intensity so that things are no longer commodities or objects of everyday use. From this perspective, Stein's texts, highly resistant to becoming artistic commodities themselves, can be regarded as enacting perhaps the most radical decommodification of things and experience. (47)

In the preceding paragraphs I have let Ziarek elaborate the event as the spatio-temporal play of *poiēsis* through the writing of Gertrude Stein (or at least through his description of it). It is important to see that event (which could be described more abstractly through Heidegger or Lyotard's discussion of *Ereignis*) happens in the particular and that it is articulated in the context of a specific set of forces of technicity. This singularity is the 'fragile line' referred to by Adorno earlier. Ziarek's reading of Khlebnikov's *zaum* poetry is different in the particularity of its situation as is his take on Duchamp, though they all articulate a disturbance or disruption of technicity, a release from power. The same is the case for the artists of the Bauhaus and for Acconci in the world of design. This particularity is one of the things that makes the force of art more difficult to pinpoint and describe in relation to the systematic patterns (the striations, as Deleuze put it) of a world ordered by technicity.

Counter-Current III: 'This is Tomorrow', Archigram, Cedric Price, Carlos Ferrater, Fernando Bendito, Muntadas: Experiments in Architecture / Playing with Technology

In the last half of the twentieth century, architecture has a history of practices that attempt to intervene in urban space with critical conjecture and manifestations that challenge the presuppositions of the discipline itself. The work of architects and critics working in

postwar Britain, particularly the work of the Independent Group and Archigram, provides a useful prelude to a discussion of Acconci's move off the page and out of the gallery into urban space. The exhibition *This is Tomorrow*, organized by the Independent Group and held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1956, was a watershed event that proposed a cross-fertilization between art, architecture and a postwar popular culture bathed in new consumer technologies. The originating idea came from architect and critic Theo Crosby[20] who proposed an exhibition where twelve teams[21] composed of artists, designers and critics would make collaborative 'installations' suggesting how 'modern living' might be understood.[22] The resulting exhibition not only demonstrated a model for collaborations between critical practitioners from across the pure and applied divide in the arts but also suggested a reframing of both art and design in the light of pop culture and new technology.[23] *This is Tomorrow* took place at the beginning of a particularly vibrant and critical period of renewal in design and architecture in Britain, a period that gave rise to the publication and then collaborative architectural practice known as Archigram.

Archigram's first presentation of work was the exhibition *Living Cities* (organized by Theo Crosby) at the ICA, London, in 1963 (Sadler 5).[24] Archigram's production was for the most part drawings, collages, and competition proposals (interestingly, in relation to Acconci's trajectory, Archigram for the most part did not build buildings but used exhibitions of drawings in art galleries as a platform for their polemics) with titles like *Living City, Plugin City, Underwater City, Moving City,* and *Computer City*. They were not so much proposals for particular buildings or structures, but rather conjectures of attitudes and processes embracing novel approaches to living in and making urban space

using strategies of modularity, adjustment and new materials (inflatables, soft materials, integrating the organic with the manufactured, and so on). One such proposal was *Plug-in City*. Based on a modular living unit, it was an infinitely expandable city of pods, where residents could choose and re-choose their location. Another was *Walking City*, where giant-legged urban blobs stride the landscape looking for geographies to visit. These were proposals dedicated to being "engines of a culture dedicated to nomadism, social

emancipation, endless exchange, interactive response systems and, following the lead of [architect] Cedric Price, pleasure, fun and comfort" (Vidler, *Histories* 138). The idea of the 'plug-in' emphasized a provisional adding-on or accretion, an inhabited/inhabiting architecture of people in space and time rather than a monumental one — decidedly not the utilitarian modernism of the Bauhaus or International Style.

Architecture historian Anthony Vidler articulates a particular relationship to technology in the work of Archigram and their fellow-travelers:[25] "of all those interrogating 'une architecture autre' in the 1960's, the Archigram group, under the cover of what seemed to be irreverent and harmless play, had launched the most fundamental critique of the traditional architectural program" (137). Archigram's science-fiction-like conjectural drawings and collages, far from being propaganda for positivistic technocratic utopias (in the mode of le Corbusier or brutalism) were more a collision with the future where technology served to create a new ecosystem of the built that questioned the very grounds of the discipline. They conjectured buildings that were not fixed objects or monuments, but rather might move, or be evolved by their users, or disappear altogether. Vidler cites critic and theorist Reyner Banham (another member of the 'Independent Group' and author of *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960) and *The New*

Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic? (1966): "Banham observes that, of contemporary designers, only Buckminster Fuller and the members or Archigram had exhibited a 'willingness to abandon the reassurances and psychological supports of monumental structure,' citing the 'threat' launched in *Archigram 7* 'that there may be no buildings at all in *Archigram 8*'" (140).

Archigram's practice was polemic: a light-footed tuning to the logic of particular technologies became a device or a gambit for upsetting the kind of architecture that technology is habitually geared to maintain, positing not a technology that keeps control but one that wanders according to a momentary logic of use—a Trojan horse in the house of techno-culture. As Acconci suggests that words might become 'fact' and wander from the page into the city as a "…continuation of poetry by other means…" (Dworkin 99), *Archigram* suggests that new ways of thinking about technology might allow architecture to unground itself, that the formulation of boundaries inherent to modernist architecture is not necessarily the only starting point for 'building' in the future. Echoing the implied thesis of *This is Tomorrow,* this meant that architecture could be based in new commercial technologies, the latest trends in social science, popular culture, art, cinema, literature, etc. and that these many aspects of the social were all viable generators of a new architecture. Vidler concludes that it was "Banham's interrogation of the program as calling for a new relationship between science and aesthetics, which gave so strong an impetus to the experiments of Cedric Price" (Vidler 200). In Vidler's discussion of this period in British design he states that Bahnam's interrogation of the program is crucial. The idea that the approach to the architectural program is the place where things are to be loosened up, where one can actually get at and change the grounds of the design process,

is important and one that that comes back in Vidler's writing about Acconci's 'de-design' and in McQuilten's notion of 'mis-design' discussed in the first section of this chapter.

Radical conjecture during this period was not confined to the work of Archigram. Conjecture that specifically questioned the grounds of the modernist program of architecture and design in its adherence to a conception of utility and a particular formal and aesthetic tradition was widespread. Cedric Price was one fellow-traveler of Archigram's working in Britain during the same period. His *Fun Palace* (1960-64), a collaboration with British theatre director Joan Littlewood, was a spectacular proposal for a kind of updated Crystal Palace in which spectators would lose their observer/audience status and would participate in a delirious range of diversions concocted through cybernetic and physical systems in a completely re-configurable building interior. This anti-monumental social experiment, beyond its obvious formal and programmatic similarity to Piano, Rogers and Franchini's Beaubourg/Pompidou Museum of 1977, has been seen as a precursor to contemporary cybernetic and responsive environments (Salter 310).

In 1971 the 7th Congress of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design took place in Eivissa (Ibiza), Spain. Alongside the formal proceedings was a parallel series of encounters which was "not just an open congress where professionals and students could meet and debate; it was a point of convergence between design and the most experimental forms of art and architecture at the time in Spain" (Giralt-Miracle and Grandas 1). Among the events was *Instant City*, orchestrated by Carlos Ferrater and Fernando Bendito, a massive modular inflatable village made of plastic that was home to a social experiment involving collective design, meetings, dinners and so on. "These

ceremonials were ritual parties where the décor and coloured food had a central and transgressive role" (1). In another contribution to the event the artists Muntadas and Gonzalo Meza created *Vacuflex-3*, one hundred and fifty metres of flexible plastic tubing that became an object of spontaneous play on land and in the sea for the conference participants.

From *This is Tomorrow* to *Instant City* we see a desire both to circumvent the modernist boundary between pure and applied arts and a playful yet embracing attitude towards the potential of new technologies. In terms of a relationship of a critical practice to technology, Archigram, Cedric Price and the parallel events of the ICSID congress all represent a third way, suggesting an approach that is neither (to borrow the binary Chris Salter uses to describe the avant-garde's relation to technology) technophilic nor technophobic (Salter xiii). Acconci, as we shall see in the next chapter, takes a movement of thought, through language, across the page and out into the city or uses the terms of architecture to imagine a new space for engagement or experience without falling into a state of either rapture or rejection with regard to the technology involved. Likewise for Archigram, to use the imagery of comic book science fiction and the syntax of consumer technology to imagine a radical rethinking of the processes of modern building and living has nothing to do with a positivist notion of progress or mercantile zeal. It is, from within the discipline of architecture, an imagining of a completely different 'use' for the terms of the discipline (its technology) by testing it with new technologies in a spirit of unrestricted play. [26] This, in itself, is a radical revision of a modernist notion of utility or function in design and architecture as inherited from Brutalism, International Style, and

the Bauhaus' institutionalization of the avant-garde, with its division of high art from the applied arts, of pure from applied, of the conjectural from the utilitarian.

PART II: Chapter 3

Vito Acconci / Acconci Studio: An Architectural Survey

In the preceding two chapters I have marked the fracture that runs through the Bauhaus as being the line between 'everyday technological representation' and 'poetic disclosure', between technicity and *poiēsis* and indicated that the Bauhaus project splits one from the other in its designation of design as the truly modern invention of the Bauhaus. The *poiētic* is marginalized in the din of production, process and a revolution in aesthetics. The Bauhaus project becomes one of representing the modern. That representation evolves into an aesthetic of the functional. The artists of the Bauhaus (be they painters, stage designers, experimenters of light, or architects) who chose to embrace technology either positively or negatively with a view, consciously or not, to keeping technicity in question had to take their leave (either metaphorically or literally) from a project where aesthetics, utility and functionalism became the password (where functionalism is the style or aesthetics of utility). The result is the world of design conflated with commerce that Grace McQuilten suggests needs to be re-complexified through the insertion of mis-design, of design put to non-commercial use. Ziarek might extend this demand by saying that, through a conception of art as event, *poiēsis* reveals the flow of power of technicity in the everyday of technologically determined culture, which includes design. The difference between McQuilten and Ziarek is that McQuilten is suggesting a repurposing

or reuse, a better use, for design provoked by art as a kind of ethical T rojan horse, intended to divert power in commercial culture while Ziarek would take a more radical stand that art as design can disclose, through its intrinsic nonpower and non-productivity the dynamic of technicity itself. While Ziarek never directly suggests that art should activate the field of design (more that we can look to art as, by definition, the revealer of the twofold force of the *poiētic* and technicity) we can infer from his discussion of internet and transgenic art in *Force of Art*[27] that the place of art, the places where art needs most to be evident is where technicity has become least visible through its intensification, whether those places be, for example, the world of 'datability', genetics or design. Ziarek's propositions around the event are relevant in seeing the particularities of how Acconci, the poet, encounters and retextures 'the program' of design and architecture (as articulated in the previous chapter by Vidler) and the nature of the complicity that is generated around this event.

This chapter presents a selected survey of Acconci's early work ending (in terms of chronology) with the 'renovation' of the Central Exhibition Hall of the MAK (Austrian Museum of Applied Arts and Contemporary Art, Vienna) in 1993. This, far from comprehensive, survey attempts to draw out the thematic strains that flow through Acconci's practice via particular work at different stages of his production from words on the page to public space. These include public and private space, the notions of use and function, the artist's position of agency, audience and public, the use of idiom, the mis-use of technology, and the 'fugitive' nature of Acconci's poetic practice whether on the page or in the street, whether in the museum or in public space (Dworkin 99). In this process we can see how Acconci's preoccupation with language and the body as

activators of a threshold (or membrane) between personal and public space or public and private property finally situate his work as a practice in a liminal space between pure and applied (between art and design) in which it is the blurring and consequent revealing of the boundary area itself which becomes most important. We also see a gradual deconstruction of the architectural surround, specifically the room, which becomes an explicit part of a blurred threshold zone. Throughout Acconci's work 'the room' is a contentious, constantly destabilized or unfixed container, prone to being turned inside-out and made into public space (*Where We Are Now (Who Are We Anyway?),* described below, embodies this critical moment of shift). Here we see a playing-out on a different register (with a completely different specificity and complexity) of avant-garde approaches that Ziarek sees in the work of Stein or Khlebnikov and which I articulate in the architecture of Archigram and other postwar architecture or in the cross-disciplinary exhibition, *This is Tomorrow*.

Vito Acconci is principally recognized as a performance artist and as a key figure of the American neo-avant-garde during the 1970's and 1980's. His best-known pieces are a group of performances, photo-documented performances, and performed video works from a period of eight or so years beginning in 1969. These pivotal works, including *Following Piece* (1969), *Proximity Piece* (1970), *Claim* (1971) *Seedbed* (1972), *Untitled Project for Pier 17* (1971), and the *Red Tapes* (1977), are widely documented and discussed. In this short survey I will cite two emblematic sources: the highly influential *Avalanche*[28] magazine which dedicated an issue to Acconci's work in 1972, and Lucy Lippard's chronicle of the advent of conceptual art, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object: 1966-1972).*[29] Acconci's work is important as part of a watershed of post-

minimal, post-modern performance and conceptual art practices of that period in North America and Europe and these two sources capture the rigorous pluri-disciplinary scope and the experimental spirit of the time. This neo-avant-garde encompassed not only new tendencies of visual and performance art but also those from music, dance, and experimental theatre. Through the critical attention focused on Acconci during this short period his work has become integrated into the canon of American visual and performance art as it is taught in art schools and Performance Studies programs.

There is a tendency to separate the burst of energy and the wide-ranging exploration of formal, material and conceptual boundaries prevalent in this period into distinct disciplinary streams within the arts. The purpose of this survey is to consider Acconci's work both more broadly and more specifically. Broadly, in the sense that I will show Acconci's work in the context of the work of neo-avant-garde practitioners from outside the discipline of visual art (in the context of Archigram and the new architecture and design in Britain in the 1960s) and specifically, in that I will focus on how Acconci's engagement spans both across these disciplines *and* along his lengthy career with a singular poetic strategy in relation to public space and a focus on key issues in the complex relationship of art to design culture. His work will be examined not only in the terms of conceptual art and performance but also in the terms of architecture and design (admittedly, a specific understanding of architecture and design, as we will discover). This chapter, then proposes to look at elements of Acconci's body of work as gestures within the frame of architecture and design, gestures which apply deliberate stress to that framing in the same way that the same work also challenges and evolves the definitions of poetry or of art practice. The goal will be neither to draw an arc which connects

Acconci's art practice with a later interest in design as a formal progression (which would be writing a fiction from the present tense) nor to articulate a dramatic schism or reversal in his process (that Acconci 'gave up' art for design).

Acconci's exploration through all these phases crosses over formal disciplines in the arts and moves back and forth across what I call a divide between pure and applied, and in later work most deliberately transits across the demarcation between art and design for public space. Consequently, the very definition of 'applied' as a definition of usefulness becomes something that is vitally at stake in Acconci's thinking. Another persistent and important preoccupation for Acconci is the body as threshold between personal and public space, and public space, as occupied by the body, as emblematic of an analogous threshold between private property and a public place. Across his work the 'body' as understood through performance, meets the 'body' as understood through the architecture of the city (the body of the poietic *versus* the body of technicity). Public space in the terms of architecture (rational civic space) is brought into collision with public space in the terms of human performance (bodily space, performed space, lived space)—what Hal Foster describes (citing Walter Benjamin from *The Arcades Project*), as the collision between the irrational avant-garde of André Breton and the rational avant-garde of le Corbusier (Foster 60).

This collision is yet another articulation of the separation of the pure from the applied. It seems that it is this very collision of pure and applied, of partially irreconcilable conceptions of the body in public space, that is of vital interest to Acconci. For him, this collision space or threshold is *the* place to be. It is the place where we act. It is public space. Yet, the formal construct (the art, the performance, the poetry, the design,

the architecture) that, for Acconci, brings about the desired collision may distract us (the viewers) into a preoccupation with disciplinary definitions, as he constantly revises then drops and renews the means to the end. This is the disciplinary paradox of Acconci's exploration.

If there are consistencies of approach across Acconci's production from the late 1960s to the present there are also important evolutions. Shifting modes within his art practice and his subsequent move into architecture and design are not arbitrary but, rather driven by important changes in how Acconci formulates his own position of agency in the relationship to the work in order to re-formulate ideas of audience and public space. In early performance work he is the singular iconoclast and privileged author while the reader, audience, or unknowing participant is a mute presence (a witness). In later installation work he sets the stage for an audience to trigger or enact the work as their own space, though in a way strictly limited by the framing conventions of the museum. The move to design for public space, art-in-architecture and architecture proper brings an important opening to a potential experience where the authorship of the work is less in the foreground and the situation is left to be experienced in a far more fluid way in relation to time. Acconci signals this turn very early on (in 1971):

> …Before it was mostly me turning on myself, involved with myself…. Now I'm thinking a lot more about interaction…. My sense now to be getting out as much work as I can, constantly doing "public" things… so that what becomes public is not so much finished pieces but a *process* of working… Dislike my pieces considered in isolation… Like them more to appear as a kind of working notebook than finished pieces… I'd say for instance [William] Faulkner was the biggest influence of any kind I ever had, his lack of desire to finish a sentence, his sense to keep on going beyond what you could possibly follow (did I say flow?), like sentences that go on for pages… with so many hesitations and alternatives, his sentences seem to be consciously or unconsciously trying to subvert a

> fantastically conservative framework… I think they kind of win out… like in myself I sense a kind of impulse to overcomplicate things, to mess things up, or thicken the plot, or my daily life, to where I almost can't handle it… & finding a way to put things back together…
>
> A constant attempt to bring out all that might be there… to get in, like I think the push is really towards content, *real* content, and because you're not concerned with perfection, like in Nauman's pieces… it can be very messy, you can use anything, any content, that helps you get there… concerned with the mental superstructure or process that is applied to everyday things and events…. (Lippard 243)[30]

"Movement Over a Page"[31]

The preceding citation brings up an important point; a deep relationship in Acconci's practice to the process of writing and the experience of language. Language is conceived of as event, as an unfolding in time and as a very concrete experience that can, by its temporality, subvert and stress an everyday framework (like the "fantastically conservative framework" Acconci sees Faulkner subverting). Dwelling in place through language, through iteration and reiteration, is not solely an issue of content to be read or heard but is generative of a "real content" through its push into a "messy" space where one must use any means to "thicken the plot". Real content is somehow on a different register than conventional subject matter. Language becomes a lever or a tool, rather than a goal in itself. This is a clue to all of Acconci's work. Language whether spoken or written, whether as articulate phrases, fragmentary streams of consciousness, litanies or individual words, is part of a process for engaging the culture of real things and relations, like a vine or a root finding its way, entwining itself, perhaps forcing itself through a human-made architecture.[32] Acconci emerged from graduate studies in writing (Iowa Writer's Workshop, University of Iowa, 1964) with sensibilities attuned to contemporary

American poetry (Interview 128). Language has consistently been a central part of his process, though deliberately very rarely a final product — as he states, "really, what I know how to do is use language… probably the grounding of all my stuff, I think, [is that] I like playing with words" (Interview 148).[33]

Acconci refers to the work of painter Jasper Johns as one of his earliest visual art influences upon his return to New York in the late sixties. (Interview 128) Specifically, he was impressed by how Johns in his paintings using scaled-up letters and numbers, turned language into "fact". This making language concrete, turning it from meaning into material with which one has to bodily situate oneself in relation to the canvas surface as a place, was a shift that likewise occurred in Acconci's poetic writings of the mid- to late 1960's where language plays a delicate game between signification and its nature as "fact" or "thing" on the page (Interview 130). An apparently dry description refers perhaps to some exterior representation, but predominantly to the fact or act of writing, the traversing of the page with marks, the arrangement and re-arrangement of letters, phonemes and words. Meaning, which happens in the mind through language, is seen simultaneously as trajectories on the page. It is the play between these two not necessarily aligned motions that demonstrate movement of thought as a gradual marking up of the page. In the following example and many others, action refers to the active spatial relationship of writer and reader to the page itself, our 'to and fro' movement in concert with the marks on the rectangular white field:

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I   am   going   from   one   side   to   the   other.

am

going

from

one

side

to

the

other.
```

Fig. 1. Vito Acconci. *I am going from one side to the other,* n.d. (Dworkin 69)

"Johns taught me what idiom was, what convention was… he was discovering 'fact', and I thought, I wanted 'fact'", says Acconci (Interview 128). His literalist approach is certainly akin to John's painting, but Acconci's practice, as it transited restlessly back and forth from the world of poetry readings to visual art events in the late 1960s, began to signal a more focused literalness in building trajectories coming from and extending *beyond* the frame of representation understood as the edge of the page. This is a spatial and temporal concern that wishes to escape, to become fugitive, from the representational boundaries described by a particular form (in this case, poetry) in order to "go beyond" or approach "real content", as he states in the passage from Lippard's *Six Years…* cited

earlier. In Acconci's trajectory this preoccupation with feeling out and traversing boundaries takes him off the page and into the city, into a space we can begin to call public.

Terry Fox describes what Craig Dworkin asserts to be Acconci's last poetry reading:

> Vito […] walked from his apartment to the place where the reading was held and every block that he walked he phoned in to the place and they put it on speakers and he announced: "now I am on 42nd street" and described the situation. And of course he never made it in time to give an actual reading. (Fox qtd. in Dworkin xii)

Here language literally moves off the page. By becoming speech it is used not to make a thing (a poem, a sculpture or a painting) but to activate a space between the performer and the audience which is palpably spatial and urban in nature and which is permeated by the shifting relative position and relative activeness of the thinking and feeling bodies involved both in its generation and reception. The body becomes a sense-organ out in the city and language, as modulations in the current of the phone line, is the stream of feedback. This play of words as visual or aural 'fact' carries on throughout Acconci's work.

Thirty years later, a print piece entitled *City of Words* (1999) is a representation of the same play of language (Fig. 2). We stare down a street illustrated in a Ghibertian linear perspective representing a modernist urban canyon (reminiscent of le Corbusier's *Radiant City* drawings of the 1930's). Strangely, another block of buildings grows down from the sky, like a science-fiction metropolis. More strangely, the entire cityscape is drawn in words, the lines of text following the perspective, wrapping to form the corners of buildings and plunging into the distance. The piece is a polemic. A city made of words,

of meaning and connection, is decidedly not a city to be read or parsed according to the conventions of visual information or communication but rather a city to be experienced in flow of thought out towards its own limits in a Faulkner-like trajectory “beyond what you could possibly follow… like sentences that go on for pages”: words stretching out from the space of the page into to the space of the city (Lippard 243).

From 1967 to 1969 Acconci and poet Bernadette Mayer published the works of neo-avant-garde artists, dancers and writers in their mimeographed magazine, *0 to 9*. This more than simply eclectic mix drew together artists and writers experimenting with non-imagistic approaches to art making who were concerned with what Acconci has called ‘fact’, but also artists for whom language was a vital tool not for description but for action:

> *0 to 9* mixed contemporary "New York" poets (Mayer, Kenneth Koch, John Giorno, Ron Padgett, and Ted Berrigan), canonical writers (Flaubert, Hans Christian Andersen, Novalis), OuLiPo writers (Raymond Queneau and Harry Matthews), Fluxus poets (Jackson Mac Low, Dick Higgins, Bern Porter, Emmett Williams), an unaccountable selection of early modern writers (Sir Walter Raleigh, Robert Greene, Lords Stirling, Herbert of Cherbury),and a diverse range of past and present experimentalists (Guillaume Apollinaire and Gertrude Stein, Jerome Rothenberg and Stefan Themersen, Aram Saroyan and Clark Coolidge). Side-by-side with the texts of these writer *0 to 9* also published, without distinction or comment, the work of visual artists; a partial list would include Jasper Johns ("Sketchbook Notes") and Sol LeWitt ("Sentences on Conceptual Art"), as well as work by Robert Smithson, Lawrence Weiner, Dan Graham, Douglas Huebler, Yvonne Rainer, Les Levine, Michael Heizer, and Adrian Piper. (Dworkin 98)

As Craig Dworkin puts it in the text entitled “Fugitive Signs”, cited above, charting Acconci’s transition from the use of language as poet to his use of language as visual artist, assertions by critics that this transition was an abandonment of a method belonging

to poetry in favour of a method belonging to visual art are erroneous, "(r)ather than 'going beyond the poetic function,' Acconci's body art…is actually an explicit continuation of his poetry. Moreover, the converse holds true as well:…poetic works—as Acconci's own poetry make clear—exist in a 'real space'" (Dworkin 99). Acconci's early performance works constitute "…the continuation of poetry by other means" (Dworkin 100).

Dworkin goes on to cite a number of performance works such as *Rubbing Piece* (where Acconci, using two fingers, rubs a sore on the opposite forearm) *Trademarks* (where he bites his own skin anywhere on his body that he can reach, producing impressions that are then inked and printed) and *Hand and Mouth* (where he stuffs his hand into his mouth until he chokes) as reflecting similar gestures to his poetry — both of writing as mark-making or the marking of space and language as intentionally confounding rather than building conventional expression (Dworkin 102) (Fig. 3). The point that Dworkin makes, with a dominant accent on poetry, is one that I will echo later on when discussing the (so-called) shift to design and architecture in Acconci's practice; that his apparent disciplinary shift actually involves a rigorous continuity of inquiry.

In the case of Acconci's design practice we might think of his interest in making things that are 'useful' as analogous to the idea of 'fact' or literalness in relation to his poetry and early performance. They are tricks to implicate artist and viewer alike in a kind of 'real' world as opposed to the 'it is as if', hypothetical or representational world of literature or art. The public space, or "doing public things" as an "attempt to bring out all that might be there" to which Acconci commits as early as 1970 is the same perplexing space engaged by public art projects in the 1980s and design and architecture

projects from the 1990s onwards (Lippard 243). For the sake of structure (rather than to corral off a 'period') I will first discuss early works which set the stage for the three-hour video epic *The Red Tapes* of 1977 and then examine some key works of installation subsequent to that period which involve the public as viewer in the architectural container and 'public' space of the museum and finally discuss the design polemic that is the MAK museum renovation.

"Moving the Body into Place: Peopled Space"[34]

In the period from 1969 to 1972 Acconci executed a huge number of performance pieces, systematically exploring body, power and the physical, social and psychological threshold of public and private space. This is consistent with the spirit of "constantly doing things" in public articulated in the Lippard citation, above. The Fall 1972 issue of *Avalanche* magazine dedicated to Acconci's work documents at least seventy-five individual works indexed as 'activities', 'performances' 'performance situations', 'performance spaces', 'photograph pieces', 'films', 'audiotapes', and 'video tapes' between 1969 and the publication of the issue. They include the works most often cited in association with Vito Acconci, the performance artist: *Following Piece* (1969), *Proximity Piece* (1970), *Trademarks* (1970), *Claim* (1971), *Security Zone* (1971), *Trappings* (1971), S*eedbed* (1972), and the films *Blindfold Catching* (1970), *Rubbing* (1971), and *Hand and Mouth* (1970). There is a sense in the presentation of this series of pieces that they are not conceived as works of art (as iconic object or commodity), but rather as an event-flow, a process of sounding out boundaries now well off the printed page, much in the mode Acconci attributes to Faulkner's never-ending sentences. Rather than catalogue this litany of gestures I will focus on a handful of works from this period which articulate with

growing clarity an interest in issues which also had come to preoccupy experimental architecture and urbanism in the same period and that gradually become more explicit in later installation work (from the mid-seventies through the eighties).

The period covered by the *Avalanche* issue included time Acconci spent as a guest instructor at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design in Halifax early in 1971 (Kennedy 84)[35]. A lesser-known work from this period, and another from later in the same year in New York are useful as beginning points in understanding the relationship of the performance work to later architecture and design. *Trademarket* (1971) (with NSCAD faculty member, Gerry Ferguson) was an extension or iteration of the piece *Trademark* (1970) (where the artist bites his own skin anywhere on his body that he can reach, producing impressions that are then inked and printed, mentioned above as a bodily extension of writing and mark-making process).

Trademarket was instigated by Gerry Ferguson, then head of studio at the college, who commissioned Acconci to execute this 'print-making' piece on his own body by biting Ferguson's leg and subsequently having the impression tattooed (making it a permanent impression). The piece (or the combination of Acconci and Ferguson's pieces) has comical dimension beyond being a joke about two men in a port city arguing about what kind of tattoo to get. According to Acconci's account, he was quite hesitant to participate and seems to lose interest until the piece becomes one of exchange, a commission (consistent with much of Ferguson's work, which is about exchange). Acconci sells the work to Ferguson's personal collection for $25. (Kennedy 84). Acconci's ambivalence to the piece is puzzling and interesting. Certainly many pieces of this period involve Acconci instigating intimate contact, either physically or through

language as a way of opening a space beyond convention.

Yet there is a strange discomfort in this particular set-up that is a premonition of Acconci's resistance to being folded completely into a persona defined by the specific terms of art and the art market. As with the works of writing that precede them, the procedures that Acconci invents are devised to open up a new space, somehow to get beyond the frame. In completing a transaction, *Trademarket* closes the work inside a frame of commerce in both an ironic pastiche and a forthright reproduction of the terms of the art market, closes the loop instead of opening it, reinforcing the commodity nature of art that many artist of the time felt they were subverting.[36] In the terms of conceptual art it was a closed system rather than an open one, whose reference was entirely within the strategic field of art as a kind of puritan self-referentiality. As such it makes sense (if we credit Dworkin's assertion that Acconci is "practicing poetry by other means") that closed systems, in this case one's referring only to art, are of lesser interest.

Private Property (1971) was executed in a loft in New York. For six hours Acconci is blindfolded, ear-plugged, lying on the floor, tied to a post in someone's living space. During this period he is blindly taking notes and photographing when he senses something is going on (Sharp 53). The documentation (a photo of him, photos taken by him and a short text description) appeared in *Avalanche 5*. Acconci describes the piece from two points of view. Firstly, he is a sensor, for the most part blind and deaf, in an unfamiliar space, seeking to pick up and record both what is going on around him and his own feelings about his physically and sensorially restricted position. Secondly, he has cast himself in a subservient, non-threatening role in the private space of others, "…I'm a kind of silent partner—I can be an obstruction in their path—I'm a pawn they can play

tricks on" (Acconci qtd. in Sharp 53). Here the threshold between public and private space is articulated in an utterly strange way. Acconci is an intrusion in someone's private space, yet by depriving himself of the basic senses he renders himself unthreatening. Like a blind servant, or like a photograph on the wall, he can be looked at but can't look back. He cedes his power to the situation.

The piece plays around the idea of private space as a place where, psychologically and literally, we are spared from the scrutiny of others, where our behaviour is at once free (since no one is looking) and without agency (since no one is there). In this case, though, Acconci *is* recording, both images and impressions, and ultimately through this attenuated surveillance this private space will be exposed in public (as the delayed publishing of the by-product of the action in *Avalanche*). Even without the primary senses (sight and hearing) the space is still experienced and somehow articulate. This is the aspect of the threshold between public and private that interests Acconci. It is not the informational or material articulation of space that matters. The work is about our implication in space as agents and the impingements that bear upon us in the social construction of space. This is an important starting point for Acconci's architecture and design for public space and shows the beginning of a thorough, but certainly not systematic, inquiry into the membrane where public and private meet.

In *Room Piece* (1970) Acconci transports a part of the contents of his apartment to the gallery located in another part of the city (Fig. 4). When he needs something he must go to the gallery to get it and once finished using it he returns it to the gallery, a process more time consuming than the motivating task itself. In Acconci's description his apartment loses a room, only to gain another one eighty blocks away, "an object in the

gallery becomes part of an objective… I get an object when I go to the gallery… I have an object in going to the gallery… when I need something, I have to keep needing it, during the time it takes me to get it" (Sharp 16). If *Private Property* collapses public and private gesture by attenuating the flow of information, *Room Piece* extends it, stretches it out over (or under) many blocks of New York's urban terrain. The private space at the end of the line is in fact public space, and not just any space but a place (a gallery) whose explicit vocation is viewing things. People come here to look. What is viewed is the terminus of a process of holding an object in mind, of maintaining the idea of a thing as a thing for the duration of eighty blocks. If art is supposed to unveil some private holding, expression or desire, here it is, in 'fact'.

Following Piece (1969) likewise projects the trajectories of bodies through urban space (Fig 5). An inversion of *Room Piece*, the artist selects a passer by and follows them through the city. The 'activity' goes on as long as the person is in public and ends when they go into a private space. Instead of his own purpose or objective it is the unknown intention of another that dictates Acconci's trajectory, or rather his clinging onto *their* trajectory. Like *Private Property* he claims that he makes himself subservient to the situation; a follower (Sharp 31). As with his last poetry reading, described above, Acconci is using a method to modulate and fix his own trajectory through the city. When his subjects disappear into private space Acconci is let off the string, abandoned in urban space. Interestingly, this moment of being left behind or lost is not documented or discussed but resonates in the piece. The city provides us with sustenance and motivation, a reason to move and be with and because of others, through and around a devised landscape.

Security Zone (Pier 18, New York, 1971), like *Untitled Project for Pier 17* (1971) (in which Acconci tells compromising secrets to visitors who come individually to meet him in an abandoned building) works on, or against, trust (Fig. 6). In *Security Zone* he is blindfolded, ears plugged, and his hands are tied behind his back. He is standing, moving, on a dock by the river. His lone interlocutor is "someone about whom my feelings are ambiguous, someone I don't fully trust" (Acconci qtd. in Sharp 40). The pier, with its precipitous and dangerous boundaries, is a platform, a public space, a place of interaction. Acconci moves through this space, depending completely on the other for safety, to prevent a drop into the ocean and annihilation. Acconci says of *Security Zone*:

> I'm thinking of a system of places like this—I could be sitting in front of a geographical map that serves as a map of needs, emotions, appearances—these would tend towards specific people—each place would be visited with a different person, we'd play out the keynote of our relationship—each place would fit a certain kind of interchange: our reasons to be there might force us to shelter ourselves against the place, or make it easy for us to build ourselves into its corners—the places would spread out, there could be routes from place to place, emotion to emotion, one appearance to another—this could be a way to locate emotions, give each person a position; a value, into which his normal life leads him or against which his normal life pulls him away. (Acconci qtd. in Sharp 40)

Acconci imagines a map of the city, a topography of spaces of encounter which is not a utopian city of fantastic forms but a fantasy/phantasy city where spaces amplify and permute relations and emotions with others. It is social space *extraordinaire*. Each person has a map of spaces and the paths between them. Each space is a space of encounter. The spaces could be perfectly ordinary; going to work, going home, the space of the street, but heightened in their sense of singularity or specificity.

Claim (1971) pits Acconci against the other in a particular architectural setting. Once again he occupies the transition zone or the threshold of public and private (Fig. 7). The

setting is as follows: Acconci is seated at the bottom of a narrow stair leading to the basement. He is blindfolded. He has two metal pipes and a crowbar. A microphone hangs over his head and a video camera, looking down the stairs transmits his activity to a monitor upstairs near the door to the stairway. The piece is a hypnotic rant, "I'm alone down here… I'm alone here in the basement… I want to stay alone here… I don't want anyone with me… I don't want anyone to come down here with me… I'll keep you away… I'll do anything to stop you" (Acconci qtd. in Sharp 55). Acconci swings his weapons, whose reach is the entire opening to the basement. The private space will be protected. Private space here is basement space, the space of memory and the unconscious. Unlike the transparent modernist villa which has no basement, no hidden places, and seeks to make the membrane separating *in* from *out* transparent, *Claim* insists on an inside as unknown and an outside as menacing system. *Claim* 'stakes out' a territory, the subterranean zone that is personal and revealing and sets about protecting it.

Seedbed (1972) is often introduced with a sentence including the descriptive 'notorious' (Fig. 8). Indeed, the notoriety of the piece makes it difficult to discuss. Beyond this notoriety, *Seedbed* can be located among other works of the period investigating the threshold of public and private. Thinking first of its architectural/spatial play can help do this. Like *Claim*, *Seedbed* occupies a particular architectural setting, this time partially fabricated (it is an installation). A sloping floor or ramp rises from half-way across the gallery space to hit the wall two feet above the floor. It is a minimalist architectonic intrusion into the pure white modernist cube of the gallery. It activates the critical zone where wall and floor meet (which is the space in a gallery or museum where the viewer meets the work). Imagined in another way it is a wedge into public space (like

el Lissitzky's avant-gardist intrusion, *the red wedge*, a forcing open).

Like *Claim, Seedbed* proposes a subterranean zone, but this time one not to be closed-off and guarded (which is, of course, another way of asserting its presence) but, rather, to intrude into the public space, pushing up the floor, like a theatrical stage trap-door, insisting on the infiltration of the private into the public. Like *Room Piece, Seedbed* confounds the neutralised space of public viewing with a different kind of experience. We listen in the silent gallery. The visitor walks on a surface, no longer activated strictly from above by art works on the wall but now animated from directly beneath our privileged viewing position. Down there, as we all know, is the artist; fantasizing, masturbating, narrating his experience through the floor, seeping up via a sound system into the refined and socially delineated public space. The gesture tells us much more about this particular kind of public space than it does about its ostensible content, the underground litany of sexual fantasy, the persona of the artist, which makes the work notorious. The actual fantasy is about the social space above. *Seedbed* feeds on it, plays with it, projects onto it a false permissiveness, distorts it to its own ends, and provokes a revealing of its true nature.

Freeing the Room

The wedge as architectonic element recurs in several later pieces. In the installation *Asylum (All the Others Seek Asylum)* (1978, Fig. 9), a floor-like structure is tipped up almost to the ceiling, separating a room in two. Its twin rises in the opposite direction forming a 'V'. The inaccessible interior space of the 'V' is flooded with light and the voice of the artist asserting a world of people inside, people have been stored away for the viewer's sake (Diserens 345). Viewers can enter the room from one side or the other,

in both cases, below 'the floor', or outside the walls of the 'V', in the void space of culture. Again Acconci asserts a parable of that which is in and that which is out, what is 'our' space and what is 'theirs'—that which is refined versus that which is uncontrollable—by asserting, manipulating and amplifying the boundary. This is another version of public and private, except on the geo-political level. It is the nature of this boundary (in this case both national and physical ones) that becomes the prime focus of the work.[37]

Venice Belongs to Us (Fig. 10) was a piece constructed for curator Germano Celant's "Ambiente/arte dal futurismo alla body art" (*Ambient / Art - from Futurism to Body Art*) exhibition, the curated portion of the 1976 Venice Biennale, whose overall theme was "Environment, Participation, Cultural Structures". Celant's exhibition, which had a historical and a contemporary section, proposed an art of environment both as an extension of avant-gardist ideas of site-specificity and, explicitly, as a crossover between the disciplines of art and architecture. Celant's catalogue essay articulates an encyclopedic narrative which begins with Balla's futurist environments, Tatlin's *Corner Reliefs*, Lisitski's *Prouns,* Doesburg's de Stijl interiors and Schwitter's *Merzbau,* traversing the work of Duchamp (*Miles of String*), Fontana and Pollock to arrive at a proposition for an engagement with the architectural and environmental surround exemplified by the work of the artists he chose for the contemporary part of the exhibition (Celant 5).[38] Celant featured several artists who, in the decades to follow, would continue to work across the boundary separating art from architecture including Acconci, Dan Graham (who presented the work *Public Space*), Michael Asher (whose work placed folding stools in the space) and Maria Nordman (an ephemeral light

installation). The exhibition was one of several key events that cemented installation as a dominant mode of art presentation to the present day.[39] Celant featured artists working across this art/architecture disciplinary boundary who were thinking about the nature of space from a phenomenological point of view as well as considering socio-political aspects of the room as a viewing and meeting space; be it gallery, pavilion or museum.

In Acconci's installation, a courtyard-like room with a large opening to the sky is arranged so that the viewer enters at floor level through one of three doors (Diserens 324). They are immediately confronted with a ladder, almost blocking the doorway, which leads up into the sky. There are three ladders corresponding to the three entrances. The opening to the sky is closed of by a set of regularly spaced beams or bars, which would prevent the viewer from leaving the space by climbing one of the ladders. Above, sitting on top of the bars are four loudspeakers and several benches arranged as if for visitors to this inaccessible upper level. Like many of Acconci's installations there is a division of space, a theatre of in-an-out, public-and-private, of citizen-and-non-citizen. In this case there is a place for the viewers/actors below and a place for the unseen director above. The sound we hear (similarly to many contemporaneous installations where the flow of Acconci's voice carries the work) is a spoken ordering of a fictional movie or theatre piece[40], like the voice of a director. One loudspeaker gives specific directions for movement to 'you', the viewer. Another gives general scene-setting directions. Another proposes theatrical intentions for the protagonists. The cross-talk of voices (accompanied by marching band music) ordains a certain cinematic activity in a public space yet lets the goal or aim of that activity dissipate into a kind of confusion.

Asylum and *Venice Belongs to Us* both extend, now explicitly, the tendency to

construct and reconstruct architectural spaces initiated with *Seedbed* and other works from 1969 to 1972. These two installation works show an inquiry into the nature and function of cultural space as a subset of public space that was hinted at, but not made explicit, in the earlier performance pieces. Overlapping and extending the burst of performance-based work by the mid 1970s was now a group of installation works that situated the viewer as a participant in the work and explored the public/private interaction space of the museum. Some of these works use architectural construction combined with live or recorded audio to situate the viewer's experience as part of the work, in the manner of *Seedbed*, while others use fabricated apparatuses or mechanisms which invoke the viewer's physical participation. Often, simple utilitarian objects such as ladders, swings, chairs or tables invade the gallery, eliciting a response based on their normal use.

Where We Are Now (Who Are We Anyway?) (1976), at the end of the same year as *Venice Belongs to Us,* at Sonnabend Gallery in New York City, carries on this theme of a thwarted or problematized public space that begins to cohere as a metaphor for the complex and problematic nature of the gallery and museum as cultural viewing spaces (Fig. 11). The normal entrance to the gallery is blocked off and the walls delimiting the now inaccessible gallery painted black make it an "object within the overall space" — a black box (Acconci qtd. in Diserens 327). In the resulting antechamber is a long table with stools around it. Above hangs a loudspeaker. This apparent meeting set-up is thrown into a state of confusion by the fact that half of the thirty-two foot long table protrudes out the window over West Broadway Street, three stories below. The soundtrack exacerbates this precarious situation by inciting the listener into a game of musical chairs—this is a meeting where not everyone has a place at the table. The soundtrack

revolves around a fictionalized dialogue of a bureaucratic meeting:

> Now that we are all here together…and what do you think, Bob? Now that we've come back home…and what do you think, Jane? Now that we were here all the time…and what do you think Bill? Now that we have nowhere else to go…and what do you think, Nancy? … Rise! Change Places! Rise! Seats! Everyone take your seats!…So you've lost your voice. So they're speaking up for you…We are the people. We have the people. (qtd. in Desirens 329)

The dialogue refers to the power structure immanent in the situation of this top-flight art institution. The voices, while expressing dissent, are captives of the structure. The entry of the social into this space is fraught both with the conception of politics that is imported and the representational framing that the gallery or museum permits. The last four phrases quoted above situate this conundrum perfectly. "We have the people" begins to sound like a statement of corporate capacity rather than an embracing of change. The only real way out of this loop is to exit. To exit, in this case, is to literally turn the room inside-out and eject oneself out the window and onto the street. Again appearing to follow Dworkin's assertion in reference to Acconci's performance practice continuing poetry by other means, the work wriggles out of the 'it is as if' world of representation within the gallery or museum in search of a 'real' opened up by a transit across the threshold from private to pubic.

With *Seedbed*, *Asylum*, *Venice Belongs to Us* and *Where We Are Now (Who Are We Anyway?)* we see Acconci reframing the viewer's experience of the gallery or museum, spaces *designed* for looking at things. Each of these pieces invokes an experience that shifts parameters, pulling the viewer into new, non-visual (non-aesthetic) relations with the work and its container, provoking a rethinking of the specifics of public and private

that these particular spaces represent. If we are not simply to 'view' in these situations, what is it that we do, and who is the 'we' that has this experience? And if the artist is part of the design side of the conception of such spaces, to what degree can he/she incite them to become something else entirely? What is the purpose of this design? Together, these works signal a push beyond the given frame of action (the museum and the conventions of artistic practice) into a more 'real' or 'public' space analogous to Acconci's fugitive position in relation to poetry and the page. Seemingly, there is a gambit in which understanding the structure permits an act of escape that is not about evolving the form (of poetry or of art) but of making a space for thought that transits across disciplines to occupy other spaces. If the museum can be collapsed then we are in a space where the public/private membrane becomes completely mobile rather than framed. These concerns make the MAK renovation of 1993, a piece without a title (a renovation or work of design), a direct continuation of the preoccupations and sub-texts of earlier works.

Acconci made a temporary 'renovation' of the Central Exhibition Hall of the MAK (Austrian Museum of Applied Arts and Contemporary Art, Vienna) that collapsed and tilted the exhibition space, dropped the skylight to the floor, pushed the floor up into a slope, thereby making the walls acute slivers of surface (Fig. 12). Here 'the wedge' is the push-up of the floor and the pull-down of the ceiling creating a confined and restricted space full of oblique angles, a collapsed architecture. Again the purpose or program of this place (a museum for looking) is brought into a highly intensified play *as collapse*. The piece was conceived by Acconci not as a work of art but as a renovation, a new space for exhibitions, in which walls and floor and ceiling no longer perform as they would in a rectilinear space. The re-design is a polemic about spaces designed for

looking, a demand for a different engagement. The main purpose or program of the space is compromised and the original architectural program put under stress. He re-jigs the terms of exhibition to force other possibilities, to multiply the program by confounding the purpose. Acconci conjectures, "[w]hen a room slips, and loses its ground, then the ground takes over, the ground can grow up over the room. That does not mean, necessarily, that the room is destroyed; it can mean instead, that the room has been freed…something else can begin now, from the ground up" (Diserens 345).

The repeated fugitive gambit in Acconci's practice seems constantly to turn his actions towards public, inhabited and urban space. Yet, this is not an unquestioning embracing of the disciplines of architecture or urban planning. It is an embracing of urban space as a permeable, fluid and polyvalent place in contrast to the strict structures and reverence for form characterizing the fields of architecture, poetry and visual art (as is the case with Archigram). Acconci does not ignore the singularity of his own discipline(s). It is specifically a poet's or an artist's attentiveness to form and craft, to language and to idiom, that permits Acconci to construct a passage off the page into the city or to collapse the 'museum for looking' into a urban platform for other possibilities. What is freed in this process is a kind of idealized 'artist without a discipline', liberated to build and act in a mode that is fully implicated in the flow of urban culture. This idealized artist inhabits a similarly fantastic city, one that has its roots, not in the hygenic or utopic rationality of le Corbusier, but in the dystopic science fiction of J. G. Ballard or the imaginairium of Piranesi (Interview 133). *Anything* can happen here. In a sense it is the city as antidote to boundary (a heterotopia, to use the Foucault's term which influenced disciplines of human geography in the 1970's, through his essay *Des Espaces*

autres). In seeking to make architecture and landscape architecture, Acconci is not hoping to become a master or servant of yet another discipline, but to occupy the same space as a place of action and conjecture as event. To step into this space as a practitioner, rather than as a historian or theorist, is to deal with the terms of action of the field. It is to enter a critical conversation (as he did before with poetry and art) with the idiom of architecture and design. This conversation includes a re-assessment of the notion of 'applied' practice as derived from the Arts & Crafts movement and the Bauhaus, as well as related definitions of usefulness, function and productiveness that are the terms of technological culture and its economic models.

Public Places, Machine for Living

Acconci's projects increasingly take on a more architectural form through the 1980's culminating in an exhibition at MOMA, New York entitled "Public Places" (1988). Pieces such as *Machine for Living* (1981) and *Portable City* (1982) signal a turn to 'deployable structures' (the term used in Desiren's MACBA catalogue survey), mechanical forms with poetic intent activated by participants. They are among the last works that could be construed as museum-oriented artworks and they all engage in a polemical way the idea of house or habitation. *Machine for Living* (the title an obvious reference to le Corbusier) is series of nested house-like constructions activated by participants using swings incorporated into the piece. The use of the swing causes parts of the nested structure to rise into the air, revealing and making accessible the interior spaces of the 'houses'. Without the 'swingers' the structure is a mute exterior. *Portable City* is a stack of aluminum pyramid structures with fabric panels that unfurl like window shades. The structure is re-arrangeable and participants must collude to activate the piece

and make it into a shelter. *House of Cars #2* (1988) is an exterior pavilion made of a steel frame and six car bodies (Fig. 13). The car bodies are attached bottom-to-bottom and linked by steel stairs forming a habitable space. The units are furnished with elements for all aspects of everyday living, from sleeping to working to showering. *House of Cars #2* becomes a proposal for a living space and one that is actually habitable. A flickering sign on the hood of one of the cars reads "LIVE OUT OF THIS WORLD" like a slightly twisted ad for a suburban development (Desirens 392).

What is significant in this work is that from the mid-eighties onwards Acconci began to slip out of a role of artist making 'public art' or 'art in architecture' and was operating more or less fully in the realm of design for public space, landscape architecture or building architecture and that the questions and provocations the work has to make are critical engagements with the discourse of design itself (as opposed to being artworks exported into the realm of architecture). From 1988 on, with Acconci now operating exclusively under the name Acconci Studio as a collaborative practice, we see works that are proposals for public space, experiments in urban inhabitation and responses to architecture competitions. *House up the Building* (1996) and *Park up the Building* (1996) are mobile parasitic structures attached to the modernist facade whose polemic in relation to 'function' seems quite related to Archigram's idea of the 'plug-in', discussed in chapter two (Fig. 14). In one case it is domestic space that clings, exteriorized and exposed to the industrial facade of a building, complete with sink and toilet. In the other it is public green space that is hung onto the inhospitable walls of private property. *Mobile Linear City* (1991) is a self-propelled, public, accordion-habitation that pulls into town as a truck and who's nested sections then stretch out, opening up into spaces for

many human activities (Fig. 15). It is a disruption to urban planning's convention of an idealized separation of driving and living, of the corporate and the domestic.

The Storefront for Art and Architecture, designed in 1993 in collaboration with architect Steven Holl, manipulates or animates the very façade, the very thought, that defines a building from the outside or a room from the inside, and takes this basic signifier of place as precisely the thing to be brought into play (Fig. 16). *Storefront* is the beginning of a formal strategy that continues through much later work, where floors and wall turn into seats and tables, where gardens go vertical, ceilings become ground, where paths wander off-axis and civic space is floated offshore. *Storefront*, *Courtyard in the Wind* (1997) and *Mur Island* (2002) are ambitious built projects (discussed further in Chapter Three), that seem to have a complete independence from Acconci's earlier art work and transgressive persona (Figs. 20, 24). We could mistake them for architecture or landscape architecture. The question arises, now that these designed things live out in the world, what do they do that is different from the productions of star architects who populate urban space with feats of visual audacity and inventiveness? In short, what is their criticality in relation to the designed world?

We see, with this brief survey, some key elements that show Acconci's practice as a dialogue with the grounds and procedural syntax of architecture, landscape architecture, and design for urban space. As such they are in dialogue both with the 'domesticated' avant-garde of the Bauhaus project and with the more radical or irrational avant-garde, as Foster and Tafuri (via Benjamin) refer to it. Also in making dynamic the threshold space between art and design, they reveal that space as an instantiation of the flow between the poietic and technicity. Throughout this trajectory Acconci shows a consistent

preoccupation with the social construction of the membrane between public and private space and the key role of, firstly, the work of art and, subsequently, design for built space as a revealing animator and activator of the dynamics of that liminal zone. Part of that animation is a provocation around received ideas of utility or function that are the echo of an institutionalization of the division of pure and applied derived from the European avant-garde's turn towards the utilitarian, in particular at the Bauhaus. Public space is taken up by Acconci as the prime location for experiment and meditation about these matters, as a locus where the issues are alive and 'at stake', in contrast to the hermetic or 'it is as if' space of the art world (Interview 133). This notion of implication or complicity is not one which says (in the manner of the modernist design tradition) that the practitioner must acquiesce to a codification of 'utility' or 'good' dictated by a particular discipline, commercial practice or by technological culture in general. Rather it makes it the practitioner's responsibility to take the very program (using program in the architectural sense) which defines utility to be 'in play' and consequently the primary ground to be opened up for evaluation and re-making (that is, a territory for pure conjecture in the context of parameters perceived as real). It is here that we see the strongest affinity, in Acconci's work, for some experimental elements of post-war architecture and design of which Archigram is an example. Archigram and their fellow-travellers are likewise a precursor of an attitude towards technology that takes the use of specific new technologies not to be a defining or normative syntax but rather to be provisional elements of play in challenging the normative and the dynamic of technicity.

Chapter 4.

Design as an Art Practice and *vice versa*: Storefront for Art and Architecture, Courtyard In the Wind, Mur Island

In the previous chapter we follow the practice of a poet through a series of movements. Down the page. Across the page. Off the page. Into the street. Below the floor. Underground. Into the museum. Up the building. Out the window. Stretching the building. Collapsing the building. Swinging the house up. Flipping the walls. Spinning the path. Floating the plaza. We experience Acconci's language as flow rather than as representation. He invokes Faulkner. Art work is flow. It goes on. It 'thickens the plot'. In Dworkin's description Acconci's language is fugitive and his performance is simply a continuation of poetry by other means. I conjecture that his architecture is also a fugitive continuation. He is not making things. Things are a decidedly provisional technology. Things are idiom. They are levers made of fact, to be used and left by the way. And new technology itself is for building a provisional syntax, as it is for Archigram, a syntax of escape, of moving off the page.

Acconci is interested in membranes, in places where this meets that. The public and the private. The useless and the useful. The pure and the applied. Failure is possibility. The escape trick, the release move, applies in the art world as a whole, which is both safe house and marketplace, and to its formulation of commodity, authorship and audience. Better public than audience, better stumbled upon through all the senses than looked at directly for meaning. The languaging of poetry moves into public space, in friction with, in collusion with, in complicity with, an idea from architecture and the world of implemented solutions… the program. If there is a program, no matter how controlling,

there are others, there is language, there is complicity, there is event… there is building.

In chapter one and two I traced some guidelines through the avant-garde around the origins of a divide between art and design as an instantiation of a *coming together* of poetry and a technologically organized modernity, of poiētics and technicity. This *instantaneously divided coming together* implies, using Ziarek's model, that the impetus towards a division between pure and applied (as it is institutionalized in the Bauhaus project) is a function of technicity, of the flow of power.

In looking at the Bauhaus project I point to the development of one orphaned-half resulting from this dividing as the sophisticated adjunct to commercial culture and technology that necessarily sees its *other* (the avant-garde) only as a source for aesthetic and formal invention (and uselessness, of course). By this I also imply that the division is not a given in how culture can relate to technicity and that rebuilding this point of *coming together* is a return to a place where forces of poiētics and technicity are in dynamic friction. In looking at Adorno's critique as part of post-war critical theory applied to art, through Foster and Buchloh, I point out a retrenchment — one which says, on the surface, that art stands apart in its autonomy and negation in order to show culture for what it truly is (commodification, spectacle and Foster's 'visuality'), yet when one looks more deeply, this critique shows itself (as a project of domesticating art within a social project) to be inflected by the same rational force.

There are alternatives, however. For example, McQuilten suggests 'mis-design' (influenced by Acconci's 'de-design') as a alternate approach, one where the negative connotation of collusion is replaced by that of complicity, where art takes a more engaged position in relation to the dynamics of social production, critiquing its dynamic

of desire. Via Ziarek, I suggest that we can go deeper still, pulling the avant-garde event into the flow of technicity, such that the friction might actually alter the outcomes, engaging a nonpower that is not a reactive negation of power but rather a post-aesthetic position that offers a reconfiguration of temporal experience. We have seen in the trajectory of Acconci's early work a coherent exploration which engages across the accepted thresholds of discipline, from his beginnings as a poet in the late 1960's, to his emergence as a visual artist through performance work, to later installations that situated the viewer as part of the work, to art works and proposals for public space. How then do these traces and models cash out in Acconci Studio's built work, *Storefront for Art and Architecture* (New York, 1993), *Courtyard In the Wind* (Munich, 1997), *Mur Island* (Graz, 2002)?

The Storefront for Art & Architecture

The Storefront for Art and Architecture, completed in 1993 (rebuilt, 2008) was designed in collaboration with architect Steven Holl and occupies a long ground floor space in the Soho area of New York (Figs. 16-18). It is a long triangular space (about 35 metres) which is about 1 metre wide at the street corner and is about 5 metres wide at the other end. The 35-metre façade was the subject of an invitation extended to Holl and Acconci in 1991 by curator Claudia Gould to propose a temporary installation/exhibition. Prior to Gould's invitation, Holl and Acconci had collaborated (in 1988-9) in an unsuccessful proposal for an 'art walk' for Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation in Washington D.C.

The *Storefront for Art and Architecture* was founded in 1982 as an artist-architect-run event space hosting performance, exhibitions and other activities meant to encourage a

critical cross-over between art and architecture. *Storefront* founder Kyong Park originally conceived of the facade interventions as being replaced on a two-year cycle (which never happened). Responding to this vision, Holl and Acconci's project replaced the existing facade with a steel and cement board structure with a series of twelve irregular panels that pivot at the wall, either vertically or horizontally, to open the entire length of the facade directly onto the street, extending the panels as potential surfaces, tables or seating both into the gallery and out onto the sidewalk. The resulting interior space is completely open to the street (there is no glazing), allowing it to be filled with daylight and sound when the panels are open. When the panels are closed the gallery is cut off from the street except for the open gaps around the panel's edges which let exterior light in. The facade was completely rebuilt, making what had been a temporary structure permanent, in 2008. For founder Park (who was active in the project's process) the wall was a "participation wall… when the wall is open there is no wall, no barrier, no inside, no space, no building, no place, no institution, no art, no architecture, no Holl, no Acconci, no storefront" (Park in Grima[41]).

Storefront manipulates or animates the façade as the very thought that delineates an interior from an exterior or a room from the outside, and takes this membrane, this basic signifier of place as precisely the thing that must be brought into play, literally flipping the public into the private. Due to the confined, triangular nature of the space any manipulation of the panels alters completely the dynamic of the interior in terms of circulation and experience. This reciprocal infiltration of indoor to outdoor makes a space which, unlike a conventional exhibitions space, must be used in a very active way. Adaptation is required.

Acconci disputes whether the perforation of the facade (the activation of this membrane) makes the private space into a public space, as some interpretations of *Storefront* assert. Rather he says, it is an attempt to suggest a space which can be activated or altered by the user (though since it is primarily the staff who do the flipping of the panels, this free-use is limited) (Acconci in Grima). This desire to draw people in as participants rather than viewers is consistent throughout Acconci's public work, for example in *Swarm Street* (2012). There is a resistance to putting people into an audience role (as art viewers, for example): "there's this somewhat beginning effort that…people aren't doing this purposefully, but as they're walking they're activating something. And then, once they realize it, maybe they can start doing it on purpose, or do it with someone else. It's important for us to do stuff that maybe wasn't so easy at another time" (Interview 141). On the other hand, there is a resistance to the manipulativeness of architecture, "what I hate about architecture…is that it forces you to do things and my goal (and we certainly don't know how to do it) is something else" (126).

It is clear from the Grima discussion, cited above, that *Storefront*, while having different meanings for Acconci and Holl, was a sincere collaboration in which both played an equal role, mediated by Kyong Park (Grima). It is possible to see a clear line of thinking that connects through *Storefront* from previous to subsequent work for each collaborator. For Holl, now an architect with an significant international reputation, *Storefront* plays with elements recognizable as signatures of his approach to the experience of interior and exterior space, the sensory and narrative interest in parallax through the shifting point of vision of the visitor or through moving elements, and the 'function' of light and air. Holl notes the play of light through the cracks when

Storefront's openings are closed (comparing it to a camera obscura) and the particularness of the surface and composition of the 'supra-board' paper/concrete panels (Grima). For Holl the project falls in the lead up to the Kiasma contemporary art museum, Helsinki (with Juhani Pallasmaa, completed 1998, winner of a 1993 competition) which was a breakthrough project in his career.

In Acconci's work the interest in inside and outside, in public and private seems to have a more psychological undertow, opening the space to change or intervention, at least symbolically. *Claim* (1971), *Private Property* (1971), and *Mobile Linear City* (1991) all present interesting corollaries. Anthony Vidler sees *Mobile Linear City* (described in Chapter Three) as "produced deliberately by a witty inversion of private and public space that forces a space—closed up until use—to be opened up to the outside once in use" (Vidler 140). *Claim* and *Private Property* (also described in chapter three) also invoke a disturbed delineation between public and private, a constant theme in Acconci's work. *Claim's* protected basement is the space no one wants to go to anyway (we'd rather be up in the gallery where the people are) and *Private Property* is acute in its assertion of the unsettling stranger who stays too long and brings too much into public, not the wanderer who come today and goes tomorrow, as Vidler puts it citing Georg Simmel, but the person who comes today and stays tomorrow (Vidler 136). The public space in these works is a disturbed one where the private is exposed in public, tricking the public space into revealing its patterns of systematization. This version of public space that Acconci wishes to provoke is the idealized modernist polis, as le Corbusier might wish it, where the citizen is idealized and in the process disempowered. Vidler aligns this subversiveness to George Bataille who "sees the architectural monument as a literal

crystallization of the power of cultural accretion" (140).

I suggest that this subversion or transgression is exactly what Acconci attempts to leave behind in his shift from performance artist to designer of public space. This does not mean that he is comfortable articulating the idealized public space that most architecture and urban planning does. His desire is to play in this field and to draw people into a play that frees up the articulation of relations that suggests new kinds of experience. Where Holl would rescue architecture from technicity with a poetic, almost sublime reorganization of space and experience (even a return towards the aesthetic), Acconci is far less prone to believe that the visual or the atmospheric has a role to play, preferring to set wheels into motion that can provoke the unknown. In *Storefront for Art and Architecture* these desires exist in a temporary affinity or harmony framed by Kyong Park's *no intstitution, no art, no architecture, no Holl, no Acconci* program, cited above.

Humour as well plays on the multiple meaning and is an antidote to purity and the rational. Acconci's work, in all its phases, employs humour, or so he claims: "that's a real keynote for me, I think comedy is more important than so-called tragedy…even…I thought the pieces I did in the late sixties, I thought the performance pieces were funnier than other people did." (Interview 125) Like the rotating walls in Buster Keaton's famous parody of building, *One Week* (1920), *Storefront* has an aspect of slapstick (Fig. 19). In *One Week* Keaton builds a pre-fab house, but completely mis-builds it, having lost the instructions. He opens a door and it has the sink attached to it, now on the outside of the house. At one point, the entire facade drops over him and he is saved because he passes through the window opening. It is a film of gags based on displacement and physical and psychological discomfort. There is something of this humourous use of pathos in

Storefront with its absurdly idiosyncratic facade in front of an unexpected triangular volume. The strategy of creating swinging openings, on a rational level, does not makes the space more efficient but rather creates something particular through a kind of inefficiency. *Storefront* is the beginning of a formal strategy that continues through much of Acconci's later work, where floors and wall turn into seats and tables, where gardens go vertical, ceilings become ground, where paths wander off-axis and civic space is floated offshore; a strategy of disturbance with a greater affinity to Buster Keaton and Samuel Beckett than to le Corbusier.

Courtyard in the Wind

*Courtyard in the Wind (*completed in 1997) was a public art project for the City of Munich Building Department Administration building (*Technisches Rathaus*) (Figs. 25-29). The building surrounds a courtyard. On one corner there is a round office tower of sixteen floors with the rest of the building around the courtyard being seven floors. There is public access to the courtyard from three of its corners. The courtyard provides residents and workers a shortcut to the nearby train station and well as general access for city employees. There is also a daycare building within the courtyard and the outdoor seating for the complex's cafeteria.

Acconci Studio's proposal involved a vertical 40kw wind turbine with 8m rotor blades installed on top of the tower, connected to an electricity storage system. In the courtyard a 22 metre diameter ring is inset into the ground. The exterior part of this ring rotates (leaving the centre of the ring stationary), driven by electric motors powered by electricity from the storage system. The ring itself intersects a diagonal path that crosses the courtyard, a section of lawn with a grid of ornamental bushes, and another section of

the courtyard with pavers, benches and trees. When the ring rotates (according to documentation the ring rotates when there is enough wind) it moves a section of the path off axis along with two of the trees, a lamp-post, some benches and some of the ornamental bushes (Schutz 54).[42]

Courtyard in the Wind is a landscape engine and a timepiece. It was originally titled, at the proposal stage, "Landscape in the wind" (Schutz 54). It is a reconfiguration of contrived urban landscape, a fragment of urban park, which is connected to a propulsion system so that when the wind blows it moves very slowly in circles. Sitting on a bench on the ring you would see the buildings surrounding the courtyard gradually turn about you. Sitting in your office overlooking the courtyard you would see the trees and path in their normal position and then look up later to see everything displaced; "you're inside the building, you look out, you see there's a tree there. Now you look out again, and you realize, oh, the tree's [over] there. Or I stand opposite you, I blow my nose and now you're somewhere else" (12). If only the participant moved then *Courtyard* is like a fairground ride, a carousel (indeed the security guards call it 'the carousel'[43]), but, in fact, the elements of landscape itself move — the ground, the greenery and the civic infrastructure. In part, *Courtyard* is a meditation on seventeenth to nineteenth century formal gardens with their contrived vistas and trajectories. Two famous such gardens are located in Munich. The *Englisher Garten* (1789), with its romantic vistas and idealized, formalized and engineered 'nature', is one of the largest urban parks in the world (Jellicoe 251). The gardens of the Baroque *Nymphenburg Palace* is more of a formal French garden (though updated in the English style) with is *grande parterre*.

Acconci refers to Alain Resnais' *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) as an

important influence on his artistic development after he returned to New York in the 1960's, that Resnais's film and Robbe-Grillet's writing respectively helped changed the way he thought about time and the image (especially in relationship to architecture) and the nature of language as non-representational (Interview 127). *Nymphenburg* was one of the locations for *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* and the film's long shot down the parterre is one of the most reproduced images of New Wave cinema (Fig. 23). Perhaps accidentally, the embedded ring and transecting crushed-stone path in Acconci Studio's *Courtyard* resembles the path-ringed pool in the centre of the *parterre* at *Nymphenburg*. Formal similarities aside, *Courtyard in the Wind* interrogates the designed nature of human-made landscape which is normally the domain of the field of landscape architecture.

In this courtyard, nature is a representation, the earth does not go down to the 'real' earth. As in any urban public space there is a vast amount of infrastructure (drainage, electricity, foundations, etc.), and who knows what layers of detritus, beneath any composed area of *nature*. *Courtyard* plays on the visuality of romantic landscape, where any contrivance is permissible if the visual (or sensorial) effect is right for the romantic viewing subject. This visuality is perhaps the modern-world precursor to Hal Foster's dreaded post-modern spectacle of 'visuality', discussed above. Here in Munich the trees move with the wind. Nothing could be more romantic. Yet they don't move in the wind-blown way. They move cinematically, driven by motor and turbine, horizontally across our visual field while we are distracted (the ring is designed to move very slowly).

In *Courtyard* the aesthetic purity is compromised by the slapstick of achieving it and the two form a whole that, in this case, is the work of this art. Looking back at *Storefront*,

this is perhaps the dividing line between Acconci and Holl (one of aesthetic insincerity versus sincerity). It is certainly the reverberation of a revealing collision between poēitics and technicity. The sensitivity to public space as event (almost as parade) aligns Acconci Studio much more clearly with discussions more pertinent to the field of landscape architecture. If architecture needs to be resisted, perforated, even collapsed, *it is in order* to have a conversation with landscape as built public space: "I think building should melt into landscapes, and landscapes can maybe develop into buildings… I did start thinking of public space and of architecture as, let's walk into, across the monument. Let's bring the monument back to the ground we're standing on" (151).

Mur Island

Mur Island was opened in January, 2003 in Graz, Austria (Figs. 24-28). The project was commissioned by the city of Graz as a project in the context of 'Graz 2003 — Cultural Capital of Europe'. The original idea for a cultural island in the Mur river with a café, theatre and playground came from Robert Punkenhorfer (founder of Art & Idea, a contemporary art agency) who proposed it to Acconci. It was presented to the city of Graz in collaboration with Acconci Studio in 1999 and definitively accepted in 2001.

The island is actually a floating structure that, in normal conditions, sits on a foundation on the riverbed but can, during high water, float safely on the river's surface. This 'island' is 54 metres long and 17 metres wide and was built with a budget of 5 million (US$) making it the most significant Acconci project, in financial terms, up until that time (Punkenhofer 104).[44] Acconci Studio devised a shell-like or double-bowl form in which had an enclosed café and an open amphitheatre area joined by a playground zone with a rope grid for climbing and a tube slide (Interview 144). This twisted form is

connected to the two river banks by open passageways on either side that together form a diagonal trajectory in the otherwise rectilinear grid of the city.

Conceptually, the project started with Acconci thinking about making an 'island of water', making a space out of water, "can we make an island based on a whirlpool" literally a hole in the water? (145). The project, as it exists, only started to take form when the team began to consider the programmatic elements, the conventions of a theatre, a café and a playground: "So therefore, it was easy to start with the theatre, because that's a very conventional shape. Some kind of bowl, bowl becomes dome, in between becomes playground" (145).

The Program

"A program is never neutral. The people who draft it are full of preconceptions. The first thing an architect needs to do is to dismantle that program and redirect it," says architect Bernard Tschumi when asked about the role of program in architectural design (Koolhaas 8). His (factually correct) response reflects the authoritative reaction of a master. The brief or program is a technical demand to be shrugged off. This shrug is like a psychological flinch, an attempt to walk away. It is a reaction not to the program as a specific case (and those "people who draft it") but to the rich complex that is the architecture's dialogue with technicity. Jean Novel's statement on complicity as reported by Baudrillard, cited in the previous chapter is worth returning to:

> You've said you prefer complicity to complexity …it reflects a real problem in architecture …only through this complicity do we achieve a certain degree of complexity, which isn't an end in itself… Complicity is the only guarantee that we'll be able to push the boundaries. If this complicity is established, it means that something more than simple comprehension is going on between people, a shared meaning, mutual

> assistance.... There has to be a shared dynamic, one that's often unspoken but translated into actions. (Baudrillard and Nouvel 77)

Acconci adds to this perennial debate among architects,

> ...what interests us in responding to a program, is that the program, I don't know if this is true, but what I was going to say, the program usually involves something that people are going to use. So the idea, we do think of a peopled space, so that we can take hints from the program, we like to double the program, or multiply the program, we like it not to have just a single program. (Interview 147)

He continues by referring to language as a starting point, "probably the grounding of all my stuff is playing with words" (145). Where an architect might begin with a formal mapping of the program, Acconci begins with words; twisting, playing and warping meaning. Yet the program remains as a source against which is played the question, 'what can we do there, what can people do?' (150). As Nouvel indicates, there is no complexity without complicity and the program, however divergently understood, is one source of that complicity. It is a point where the technics of planning can be encountered. The goal might not be to throw out the program to be replaced by the agenda or ideology of the designer but rather to seek a complicity with potential points of opening that turn the power of the program towards nonpower.

The MAK renovation is a first encounter with the program as a potential for complicity and subversion. *Mur Island* presented a far more complex situation. The development of *Mur Island* was fraught with the usual problems that an unusual urban building might provoke, especially the engineering considerations of one built as a public space on water. If *Mur Island* begins in language, it comes to existence in the world of engineers and fabricators. The problems of negotiating this complicity resulted in a variety of formal changes that, for Acconci, stressed his vision of the project to the point

where it might not 'work', where he lamented that it might not be his project anymore (Punkenhofer 100).

Yet when finished, with all the structural and other compromises negotiated out, *Mur Island* was a success in the terms of the city and festival which commissioned it. 500,000 visitors came to *Mur Island* in its first six months (107). Furthermore, this originally temporary project is still in place and in active use. In Acconci's terms, though, success is difficult question to evaluate. His use of the term 'useful' is an intentionally ambiguous provocation (Interview 138). We are not talking about use in the Bauhaus semse of functionality merged with aesthetics. The assertion that something should be useful allows him to slide away from the 'it is as if' world of art into an engagement with work that should not be read but rather needs to be experienced as part of daily going on. In terms of conventional use *Mur Island* is a success. The café operates in the summer. The playground is compelling. The theatre is a public space. Furthermore, the object is unusual in both its form and its situation, as interesting as Peter Cook's *Walking City*-like Graz museum, a blob provocatively wedged into the nineteenth century grid just down river. In reading accounts and interviews of the project, you can almost hear Acconci saying, is that all there is? (144). In some ways *Mur Island* succeeds in being, by succeeding in being a little too conventional. This is no slight to its imaginativeness, or its cleverness in terms of engineering.

Commenting skeptically on *Courtyard*, Acconci says, "I like the idea… lets give it a use, lets make it have a use… a use that wouldn't have been there unless we had done something" (138). What could this 'use' be? You can sit on it? Acconci like this particular use because it defies art (137). You sit on something to look at art. Isn't it more

interesting to think about how you are sitting, at every level? In discussing a proposal for the Freshkills landfill site near New York, he suggests for his work a simpler notion of use, beyond an efficiency paradigm:

> It's almost, can I make them intriguing puzzles. I would love a space, and again, the only way I think about a space is as in the middle of time, that can this be something that a person might want to... rather, it's not that I don't want people to use it, but I hope they can use it in a way that they think 'maybe I can do something to it'. At the same time that it's letting me do something. I don't want people to be forced by something, but I want it to be a junction of person and place and time. We haven't reached that, but a lot of people are thinking that way. But these are architects who don't think about building much… can a project we do be a field of action for other people? (150)

In this perplexing definition of use Acconci is embracing a radical complicity. He is suggesting a letting go or release of the authority of design itself. We can see, perhaps, that the success of *Mur Island* in the terms described is partly counter to his aspirations. Both the *Storefront for Art and Architecture* and *Courtyard in the Wind* in their specific relation to place, time and movement, as well as their awareness of their specific situation in relation to a technicity of use, seem to articulate this aspiration as clearly separate from a conventional view of utility. These works do this by sitting on top of the fracture that is the division between art and design and by making its nature evident, by revealing it. In doing this they serve an artistic purpose in the field of design. This is the 'unfixing' in Acconci's method. This in itself is a demonstration of a deep criticality in relation to technicity. Ironically, it is in thinking about Acconci's own assertions about the weakness or failure of individual pieces that this critical space is revealed. This weakness is the critical space of art in relation to the everyday. If Acconci's is weak design, it is needed because powerful design reveals nothing.

Conclusion

While writing this thesis I found myself asking a seemingly irrelevant question, or one relevant only for proof-reading but not for content. Is it an ampersand ('&') or an 'and' in 'art and design'? Is it an ampersand or an 'and' in *Storefront for Art and Architecture*? Since I continually come back to the avant-garde's 'instantaneously divided coming together' (a split around the emergence of art and design as a manifestation of the articulation between poetics and technicity) it would seem that this apparently matter of fact question has greater depth. I looked around. 'And' is widely used in school names. Nova Scotia College of Art & Design (University) uses the ampersand. Emily Carr University of Art and Design uses a mathematical '+' sign (Emily Carr University of Art + Design). Semantically there is little difference between '&' and 'and'. They both articulate a relationship or an intersection, though the '&' would seem to indicate that these things belong together consistently and regularly (that somehow it is of their nature, as with two streets that cross). 'Plus', however, seems to indicate an addition of two completely separate elements, which maintains them as discrete and, furthermore, asserts the connection as a calculable, rational one. This equivocation in this minor detail around the naming of art and design schools is far from haphazard. It is an important part of the signal of identity they use to market themselves, especially in an era where technology has priority in meaning-making. It is also an indication of the vestigial echo of an originating collision in that first art and design school, the Bauhaus.

The ampersand, which dates back to roman times, is itself a ligature, a joining of two letters to make one symbol (in this case 'e' and 't' for the latin *et*) (Glaister 23). The ampersand is a joining of two letters whose meaning is 'and' as in 'this and that

together'. Its meaning and its composition are one. The *Storefront for Art and Architecture* uses 'and' in their print and web presentation. However, the sign above the facade (designed by Acconci and Holl) uses an ampersand (*Storefront for Art & Architecture)*, its unique curve emulating both the conceptual articulation between 'art' and 'architecture' and the actual physical flipping gesture of the wall panels themselves.[45] If I say this is a conceptual articulation, that is to say that it does not necessarily exist in language, that the meaning of '&' is *only* understood as the conjunction it makes relative to these two things (a conjunction which blurs their individuality). So the *Storefront* facade is an ampersand, a work built around the vital articulation between art and design.

I take that articulation, the line of tectonic friction upon which the Bauhaus project builds a distinction between high art and design (the pure and the applied) as the place where both art and design can be most meaningful, revealing of their shared relationship to technicity and, as Grace McQuilten points out, the potential of critical action in commercial culture in general. This scission, as Ziarek calls the deeper structure of this rift, demonstrates itself in the collision of the avant-garde with the everyday (the everyday being the unfolding flow of power in technicity). That is, it is a collision that is demonstrated on the surface of cultural production in the complex relationship between art and design. This is one example of this collision. I have looked at the specific instance of Acconci Studio as a practice where this example is amplified through works that deliberately engage the underlying dynamics as a meaningful meeting of power and nonpower, of the productive and the non-productive.

This is not to say that the general example or the particular instance that I use are the only places we can see these forces at play. There are corollaries in the development of

avant-garde practices in writing, dance, music and theatre, particularly in how those practices evolve to new technologies, transmission media and so on. All have obvious connections to the commercial culture of mass media and the culture industry to which they have to calibrate practices (and that go deeper than adapting techniques to the purposes of activist resistance, for example). I have focused on this particular example within the visual arts in relation to design as it presents an obvious place where criticism must go deeper and operate on a different plane than that of utility in order to reveal and transform practices. Art as part of design is an example here. The area of sustainability and the environment is one very current opening. Technicity operates via design in the mode of altering environments. Poetics, perhaps, operates by altering thinking. Art and design, acting in complicity, can ask questions which *do not* fold to the patterns that technicity permits.

There are also areas outside the arts or media-arts where power and nonpower are separated by the tendency of technicity to render invisible that which is not part of its flow. These marginal narratives lie at the fringes of power or are completely or partially outside traditions born of modernity. Also, there is a dialogue to be developed in relation to emerging realities in technlology (Ziarek's 'digitality'); genetics and telematics as well as many areas he does not mention which are changing subjectivity as we know it on an ongoing basis, including the health sciences, neuroscience, the depleted environment and so on (Ziarek, *Force* 60). The question is not can design (or other fields bound up in technicity) tolerate exposure to a poetics evolved from avant-garde practice, but where does the 'the force of art' *need* to be active in order to reveal technicity where it is most persuasive (and consequently invisible) in today's culture.

What the field of design has experienced implicitly, perhaps unconsciously, in the evolution from Guttenberg to the present is the transition from a technicity of the word and material to the technicity of data and the immaterial (Ziarek's 'datability'). This is an evolution in how and where meaning is generated. Acconci the poet makes this explicit when he brings a poetic strategy into the world of functionality (functionality understood as the aesthetic of utility and as a fixing of space/time in the signature of technicity). The question here is about how art or poetics stands in relation to technicity *and* about how technicity itself has evolved beyond the modern. Art and design has also experienced an evolution of craft. 'Making' goes from the hand to the machine through mass production and then back to the singular in the digitality of rapid prototyping. If design is about thinking *through* making and thinking *through* making meaning (where *through* means both *by* and *about*) then thinking through art and design is a way to think about all these shifts.

Ways of working, like those of Acconci Studio, that travel across the institutionalized boundary between art and design begin to restitch the scission which was established by the Bauhaus project, allowing practices of making and practices of meaning to come back together, through their ability to reveal the dual forces of poetics and of technicity at play. In some sense this is a reclaiming of 'art and design' by art. In another sense, it is allowing design to make a claim on art, by re-appropriating the poetic criticality of art that is one of design's founding forces. One thing design can offer to the sciences and social sciences and to the world of technology and invention is not a shell based on aesthetic and formal inventiveness, or systems of rational analytics, but rather reflections based on a criticality rooted in the absolute conjecture of the avant-garde.

This is not as ‘theoretical’ as it sounds. The 2013 Nordes conference in Copenhagen entitled ‘Experiments in Design Research’[46] dealt with many aspects of design as so-called ‘experimental research’ rather than aesthetics or production method. The Jan van Eyck Academie[47] in the Netherlands has an art-design hybrid vocation. Two other organizations in Holland, CASCO and TAAK[48] present programs that cross over art and urban issues as design practice.

Acconci’s skepticism as to the success of the works of Acconci Studio are skepticisms as to the terms which could possibly define success. The apparent failure (with a nod to Beckett and Keaton) of some work either as art or as design speaks of the depth of the hardening or fixing of these terms. Architecture and design, narrowly understood, fix the terms of their own success as bound to utility, production, and aesthetics and in the process fix the limits of a practice and the limits of its conception of time and space. Acconci’s is a design whose *use* is to loosen this fixing. A reflection on Acconci’s practice includes necessarily Vito Acconci’s own voice both in its debate of the received terms of art and design and in the timbre of its poetic call. This *unfixing voice* is a good way to conclude this study:

> I would love this to really happen. That’s the problem for us. I’m starting to think, I don’t really want to make surfaces. I want to make pixels, I want to make points, I want to make dots. I want to do thick air. So that the thick air becomes buildings to be in, at least temporarily. Of course I don’t have the slightest idea how. (Interview 140)

And further:

> I would love us to… make this space filled with dots, filled with thick air, and how can that thick air start to fill time. I have no idea, no idea how. So yes, you could do thick air virtually, but this has to be something where you’re walking through time. You’re walking in the middle of time, you know. Time was like tiny flies, you know. But we have until August. (Interview 146)

Notes

[1] In this thesis neo-avant-garde, following Peter Bürger, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Hal Foster and others, refers to post-WW2 American and European art practices which draw on pre-war avant-garde strategies and representation of the role of the artist. For these critics there is a debate as to whether or not neo-avant-garde practices are co-opted or neutralized in the light of the varying degrees of failure of what they articulate as the original avant-garde project (a break with tradition, superseding representation and the autonomy of art, re-integrating the aesthetic and the real, art and life, etc.) in the context of late capitalism. See: Peter Bürger, "Theory of the Avant-Garde", trans. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde", October, Vol. 37, Summer, 1986 and Hal Foster, "Whats Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?", October, Vol 70, Fall, 1994.

[2] A detailed chronology of Acconci's production, from 1959 to 2004 is contained in the catalogue for the exhibition *Vito Hannibal Acconci Studio*, 2004; Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and Musée de Beaux-Arts de Nantes, curated by Corinne Diserens. The survey of works in Chapter Three, in contrast, does not pretend to be comprehensive.

[3] "The development of plastic art is determined by the will to visualize. Art of the past represented the subjective vision of 'naturalistic relationships'. Neo-plasticism embodies a subjective vision of 'plastic relationships'… Pure thought, which does not signify a concept derived from natural phenomena but which is contained in numbers, measures, relationships and abstract lines, is revealed conceptually (as Reason) by Chinese, Greek and German philosophy, and aesthetically by contemporary Neo-plasticism." --*Van Doesburg* in 'Thought – Vision – Creation' 'De Stijl' Vol ll, 2 December 1918 (qtd. in Baljeu 108).

[4] The evolution of the Bauhaus as an experiment in pedagogy and applied arts production is typically divided into phases corresponding to changes in the pedagogical method, the output of design prototypes and other public manifestations of the work of the institution as a whole. These in turn correspond to the influence of the three directors and the faculty engaged to put their stamp on the primary course and workshops. A last correspondence is the geographical migrations of the school (from Weimar to Dessau to Berlin) which on each occasion allowed for,

or caused, a shift in how the Bauhaus organized and presented itself. The first phase took place in Weimar under the directorship of Walter Gropius with a faculty consisting predominantly of German artists associated with the expressionist Der Sturm movement including Lyonel Feininger, Gerhard Marcks and Johannes Itten. Itten devised and taught the first preliminary course (*Vorlehre*) emphasizing experience of colour, form and texture over conventional beaux-arts teaching. This phase is characterized by the teaching of craft and material knowledge through the workshops, a cubist/expressionist architectonic approach to architecture and object-making and the quasi-spiritual approach to the purity of colour and form of Itten. Exemplary output of this period was Gropius' abstract cubist/expressionist *Märzgeffalen-Denkmal* (1921) and the *Sommerfeld House* and furnishings (1920). The house is notable for the invention of a modular construction method. A second phase is signalled by Itten's departure in 1923, the rising influence of Oscar Schlemmer, the parallel presence of Theo Van Doesburg (who lived and taught privately in Weimar in 1921-22, but did not teach at the Bauhaus) and the arrival of Lásló Moholy-Nagy (who took over the preliminary course with former student Joseph Albers). This phase is characterized by a focus on an aesthetic simplicity of geometric forms, Schlemmer and Moholy-Nagy's experiments with light, photography, cinema and theatre and an increased orientation to the adaptation of art and architectural process to technology, especially by Gropius. The minimal and rigorous architecture of *Haus am Horn (1923)* by Georg Muche and Adolf Meyer can be juxtaposed to Oscar Schlemmer's *Triadische Ballett (1923)* and the student production, *Mechnisches Kabarett (1923)* as exemplary of a wide variety of abstract but non-expressionist experimentations with light, space, time and built space. A third phase, with Gropius still at the directorship, begins in 1925 with the move to Dessau. The faculty remains largely the same with several former students promoted to teaching (including Albers, Bayer and Breuer). The *Bauhausbücher* series of publications and the *Bauhaus-chronik* journal begin to 'brand' and set the school's reputation and fix its history. A commercial entity, Bauhaus GmbH, begins to market typography and other prototype products of the school, especially furniture. The iconic Gropius-designed main building and master's houses are completed in 1926. Other production includes Breuer's metal furniture, Gropius' evolving Törten housing estate, both evidence of a growing profile of the school as exemplary of new design and production processes (and commercial success), but also still include significant experiments in dance and theatre including the publication of Schlemmer's *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*. In 1928 Gropius leaves the Bauhaus for private practice proposing architect Hannes Meyer as director. This fourth phase is

characterized by the establishment of a department of architecture which holds primacy alongside a reduced list of other areas (stage, advertising and 'free painting and sculpture'). Commercial collaborations continue and there is a greater orientation to design for popular rather than luxury consumption. Meyer is accused of communist sympathies and dismissed by the state government in 1930. A fifth phase begins when Berlin architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe takes over the directorship. The dynamic student life of the school is attenuated by closing the residence. The curriculum is streamlined. In 1932 Paul Klee leaves, having been relegated to the status of 'free painter' along with Gunta Stolzl (weaving and fabric instructor since 1919) under pressure for being married to a Jew. Significant public presence of the period is the exhibition organized by van der Rohe in Berlin in 1930, *Die Wohnung unserer Zeit* (The Dwelling of our Time). In 1932 under financial and political pressure the Dessau Bauhaus closes. Van der Rohe continues as director through a desperate last phase of the Bauhaus in Berlin-Steiglitz in 1932-33 as a privately funded school (through revenue from Bauhaus patents and licenses as well as art sales) with a much-reduced program and faculty of seven. In April 1933 police seal off the Bauhaus and in July the faculty votes to dissolve the school (Bergdoll and Dickerman 323).

[5] During 1921 van Doesburg taught students in Weimar outside the framework of the school in a polemic prodding of the institution from outside its gates (Bergdoll and Dickerman 325).

[6] The *Bauhausbücher* were: 1. Gropius' *International Architecture; 2*. Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook;* 3. Adolf Meyer's *An Experimental House by the Bauhaus, Weimar;* 4. Oskar Schlemmer's *The Theatre of the Bauhaus;* 5. Piet Mondrian's *New Design: Neoplastcism; 6*. Theo van Doesburg's *Principle's of the New Art; 7*. Gropius' *New Work of the Bauhaus Workshops;* 8. Laslo Moholy-Nagy's *Painting, Photography, Film;* 9. Vassily Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane;* 10. J.P Oud 's *Dutch Architecture;* 11. Kazimir Malevitch's *The Non-Objective World;* 12. Gropius' *Bauhaus Building Dessau;* 13. Albert Gleizes' *Cubism;* 14 Laslo Moholy-Nagy's *From Material to Architecture*. As Adrian Sudhalter points out the *Bauhausbücher* represent the post-Johannes Itten period of the Bauhaus from the arrival of Moholy-Nagy in 1923 to the departure of Moholy-Nagy and Gropius in 1928, a key period where the books both in their content and commercial mass-market form (adamantly not fine art editions) "exemplified the Bauhaus *in production*" (Bergdoll and Dickerman 197).

[7] I mean performative here in the sense of Judith Butler and Mieke Bal. Though performativity as a term is not discussed in this thesis, there is a parallel discourse in performance studies around performativity that addresses many of the issues discussed here, especially through Butler and Bal.

[8] in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, 1944

[9] For example, Ulm School of Design, Ulm Germany, co-founded by Max Bill a former student at the Bauhaus, the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where Gropius and Breuer taught and the Second Chicago School (of architecture) established by Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology. These are direct descendants. In reality, the Bauhaus has deeply influenced art and design education far beyond the actual outposts established by former students and teachers. The most important effect, as this thesis asserts, is the institutionalization of the division between visual art and design itself. In reality the reduction of the avant-garde to the aesthetic (or its arrest in the process of its de-aestheticization) and the useful makes design into the 'visual art', so the definition might be better put as between art and visual art, or art and aesthetic art.

[10] A critique that design can absorb and respond to only as a call to information-based activism.

[11] see the court settlement text by Murakami:
http://english.kaikaikiki.co.jp/regarding_the_amicable_settlement/

[12] Though, conversely, as we will see in the next section, there could be several meanings covered by the word 'originality' in art. The originality referenced here is one of a unique product attached to an individual-producer. This marketplace originality obscures a more original originality, as event.

[13] Through drawing in Nietzsche 'will to power' via Gilles Deleuze and Elizabeth Grosz as a shift "away from outcome and purpose towards process and change" (McQuilten 143) and Michael Hart and Antonio Negri's *Empire* which she does in reference to the subversive or political nature of the event, McQuilten certainly suggests extending beyond a rational mapping derived from critical theory (172).

[14] I mean 'undermined' here in the similar sense that Krzysztof Ziarek use of the term 'domesticate' in *The Historicity of Experience* (2001) where he disputes a way of understanding the avant-garde (specifically Futurism) in a linear scheme of temporality as proleptic, anticipatory or in advance of its historical moment (19). Instead he proposes that the avant-garde's time is "always within the present, but as a specific noncoincidence of its works with the presence of meaning… [that] the avant-garde rupture dislocates the present and discloses it as an event whose historicity marks a structural incompletion, opening the now to the future" (19). If we see the avant-garde as a revolution in aesthetics "with which a future will catch up rather than seeing it questioning of the paradigm of knowledge, of the legibility of experience produced by modernity" then this "propeleptic reading *domesticates* the avant-garde by reinscribing it within the very schema of time, history and experience it critiques" (20).

[15] Ziarek does not distinguish between avant-garde and neo-avant-garde as being pre- and post-world war two as is common in the visual arts especially in criticism referencing Peter Bürger (which uses this distinction to debate the relevance of the so-called repetitions of the neo-avant-garde). When Ziarek refers to 'avant-garde' he indicates a category including both. Ziarek's examples in *The Historicity of Experience* include two poets from the pre-war period, Gertrude Stein and the Russian Velimir Khlebnikov (inventor of *zaum* performance) and two post-war poets, the Pole Miron Białoszewski and American Susan Howe, who are "'postmodern' instances of avant-garde poetics" (Ziarek, *Historicity* 28).

[16] In "The Question Concerning Technology" Heidegger uses a dam and power plant on the Rhine as an image to elaborate the ideas of 'setting-in-order' or 'setting-upon' of nature, *Bestand* (standing reserve or inventory), and 'enframing' (as how we stand within that 'real' order) where the river is transformed into a 'power work' as opposed to an 'art work' (as the river Rhine works in a poem by Holderin) (Heidegger, *Question* 16). The short version of this thesis as it relates to Ziarek would be to read this passage of Heidegger's with the Bauhaus in the place of the dam and power station.

[17] This qualification in Ziarek figures as a response to two questions raised about the avant-garde from the critical theory side. The first that "in spite of the fact that its various techniques have

been incorporated into and helped shape popular culture, [it] has failed both to transform the aesthetic sphere and to reintegrate art into social practice" (Ziarek, *Historicity* 8). This is essentially Peter Bürger's argument, as debated and nuanced by Buchloh and Foster, discussed in the previous chapter. The second 'judgment' is that, in spite of its historical achievement the avant-garde is essentially "an aesthetic of the experimental and the new, an aesthetic representative of the ideology of high modernism" (9). Ziarek's position attempts to rehabilitate the avant-garde, not by disagreeing with these points, but by superseding this limitation to craft and to the aesthetic. In the context of this thesis, these two 'critical theory judgments', together, form the 'positive' interpretation of the avant-garde in art and design history as seen through the Bauhaus project, permitting either a spirit of positivist technological and aesthetic innovation or an activist approach to using the same aesthetic and formal tools (craft, techné) for a design used to different social ends.

[18] The term 'force of art' derives from Adorno's reference to art as a 'force field' in *Aesthetic Theory*: "The concept of tension frees itself from the suspicion of being formalistic in that, by pointing up the dissonant experiences or antinomical relations in the work, it names the element of 'form' in which form gains its substance by virtue of its relation to its other. Through its inner tension, the work is defined as a force field even in the arrested moment of its objectivation. The work is at once the quintessence of relations of tension and the attempt to dissolve them. (Adorno 292) 'Forcework' is Ziarek's indirect derivation from Heidegger's juxtaposition of *Kraftwerk* and *Kunstwerk* in *"The Question Concerning Technology"* sketched in note 16 above (Heidegger 16). So Ziarek's 'force of art' is a productive melding of Heidegger and Adorno, finding a common ground in the apparently conflicting space between the two, "in reflecting on the paradoxical force of modern art, both Adorno's negativity and Heidegger's radical revision of the idea of poiēsis [are] …useful for rearticulating art's transformative potential with regard to technological forms of power" (Ziarek, *Force* 6).

[19] Ziarek refers to Blanchot in pinpointing this nonpower in writing:
"Speech is this turning [where the whole withholds itself]. Speech is the place of dispersion, disarranging and disarranging itself, dispersing and dispersing itself beyond all measure….
What sort of power is this? Is this still power?
[And, later] What is impossibility, *this nonpower that would not be the simple negation of*

power" (Ziarek, *Force* 51).

[20] Theo Crosby, then recently graduated as an architect, was the technical editor of *Architectural Design* magazine (*AD*). Another pivotal work in which Crosby participated as a designer, with the influential graphic designer and typographer Edward Wright, was two exhibition buildings for the 6th International Union of Architects Congress, London, 1961, combining temporary/modular architecture and exterior super-graphics. Later he edited the ICA's Living Arts magazine, and organized the exhibition *Living Cities* (1963), which presented the work of Archigram. He founded the design firm *Pentagram* in 1972 with Alan Fletcher, Colin Forbes, Kenneth Grange and Mervyn Kurlansky. In the 1980's he became associated with a traditionalist and craft-oriented approach to urban planning through the Prince of Wales Institute for Architecture (Sadler 5).

[21] List of participants in *This is Tomorrow*, 1956:
Group 1: Theo Crosby, William Turnbull, Germano Facetti, Edward Wright. Group 2: Richard Hamilton, John McHale, John Voelcker. Group 3: J.D.H. Catleugh, James Hull, Leslie Thornton. Group 4: Anthony Jackson, Sarah Jackson, Emilio Scanavino. Group 5: John Ernest, Anthony Hill, Denis Williams. Group 6: Eduardo Paolozzi, Alison and Peter Smithson, Nigel Henderson. Group 7: Victor Pasmore, Erno Goldfinger, Helen Phillips. Group 8 : James Stirling, Michael Pine, Richard Matthews. Group 9: Mary Martin, John Weeks, Kenneth Martin. Group 10: Robert Adams, Frank Newby, Peter Carter, Colin St.John Wilson. Group 11: Adrian Heath, John Weeks. Group 12: Lawrence Alloway, Geoffery Holroyd, Tony del Renzio (Robertson).

[22] The exhibition is best known to art historians for the appearance of Richard Hamilton's collage *Just what its it that makes today's home so different, so appealing?* presented as part of the polemic devised by himself and architects John McHale and John Voelker.

[23] The catalogue of *This is Tomorrow* ends with two pages of acknowledgements of material and other suppliers, a list which includes IBM and Marcel Duchamp, and is followed by twenty-four pages of advertising by suppliers of, glass, plastic, constructions systems and other new high-tech materials ("The Future is Wrapped in Fibreglass"), reflecting an idealistic notion of a confluence of artistic disciplines, daily life and corporate contribution in a 'future' now at hand (Robertson

n.p.).

[24] Archigram was founded in (approximately) 1961 by architects Peter Cook, Warren Chalk, Ron Herron, Denis Crompton, Michael Webb and David Green. Archigram was initially the name of the publication the group put together to disseminate their ideas. *Archigram* 1 through 8 was published from 1961 and 1968. *Archigram* 9 and 9 1/2 were published in 1970 and 1974 respectively. *Archigram* officially folded in 1974. A useful, and 'in tune', synopsis of Archigram's trajectory is a series of cartoons drawn by Peter Cook as part of a touring exhibition about Archigram (available at: http://www.archigram.net). An archive of reproductions of the publication, drawings and proposals is at: http://archigram.westminster.ac.uk/.
(source: the Archigram Archival Project: http://archigram.westminster.ac.uk, accessed 15-10-12)

[25] Some key figure in post-brutalist thinking include Reyner Banham, Cedric Price, Theo Crosby, and others related to the 'Independent Group'.

[26] There is a distinction to be made between these practices and that of Buckminster Fuller. While having superficial similarities in their embrace of technological experimentation, there is and important difference. Buckminster Fuller, a utopian idealist inventor-entrepreneur in the style of Thomas Edison, said we can live inside a perfected technology/science, whereas Archigram, Price, Acconci *et al* say we can use technology, as a vernacular, to reshape how we imagine, but it is a game where we can change sides anytime we want.

[27] The chapter "Ars Technica, From Futurism to Internet and Transgenic Art" in *Force of Art (60-102)*.

[28] *Avalanche* magazine edited by Willoughby Sharp and Lisa Béar produced thirteen issues between 1970 and 1976 and presented project documentation, articles, and interviews with prominent artists of the post-minimal New York scene such as Carl Andre, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Yvonne Rainer, Gordon Matta-Clark, Lawrence Weiner and Jackie Winsor. Issue 5 (fall, 1972) was dedicated to Acconci's work.

[29] The full title of Lippard's chronical is: *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from*

1966 to 1972: a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mention of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, system, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia (with occasional political overtones), edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard. The title itself mimics the tongue-in-cheek pseudo-empirical descriptive style adopted by many artists of the period (perfected by Lawrence Weiner) in an attempt to locate the 'work' as separate in nature from the art object, that is, to push the locus of art towards its boundaries (and not only away from the market) in such a way that fundamental grounds come to the fore, be they philosophical, political, ecological, etc. These diverse, essentially Duchampian, strategies are gathered under the term 'dematerialization' though as Lippard states, "dematerialization is an inaccurate term… a piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or as 'material' as a ton of lead. But for lack of a better term I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)… the addition of accents rather than the delineation of an independent form lead away from marking the object into remarking direct experience" (Lippard 5).

[30] Original annotation in Lippard's *Six Years*: Rosenberg, David. "Notes from a conversation Tape with Vito Acconci, July 22, 1971. *A Space News* (Toronto) July, 1971. Excerpt" (Lippard 243).

[31] The section titles in this chapter referring to Acconci's practice ("Moving the Body into Place"), are taken from section titles from the documentation of Acconci's work in *Avalanche* #5. The *Avalanche* titles are: "Notes on Performing a Space"; "Early Work: Movement Over a Page"; "Early Work: Moving the Body into Place"; "Body as Place—Moving in on Myself"; "Peopled Space—Performing Myself Thorough Another Agent"; "Occupied Zone—Moving In, Performing on Another Agent"; "Concentration—Container—Assimilation"; "Power Field—Exchange Points—Transformations". This trajectory, outlined in 1972, remains the basis for Acconci's own presentation in talks and presentations about the development of his work.

[32] Hyperbolically, this metaphor could be extrapolated to say that through this entwining, language becomes like a sensing apparatus or organ, a set of feelers which can engage its environment while at the same time being readable and engageable by others.

[33] Interview with Vito Acconci by the author, Brooklyn, New York, June 2nd, 2012. Page numbers refer to the transcription in the annex of this thesis. In-text reference to this material is noted as 'Interview'.

[34] See note 6 above.

[35] Acconci came to Halifax to participate in David Askevold's Project class during February, 1971. He was also a visitor in 1972, 1977 and 1978. NSCAD was known for hijacking important figures in contemporary art to Halifax for teaching, presentations, publication and production projects. See Garry Kennedy, *The Last Art College*: MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 2012.

[36] In an interview for [Venice] Biennale 11 Austria 2011 (http://www.youtube.com/user/Biennale11Austria, accessed August 20, 2012) Acconci laments that the artists of the '60s and '70s, like himself, who put so much pressure on definitions of art, were actually validating and reinforcing the role of galerists as 'guides' and gatekeepers, leading directly to the art bubble of the 1980's, where art became largely subservient to the market ("We were going to destroy the gallery system… [but] my generation caused the '80s!"). "It makes me shiver," he would say of the art world in retrospect (Interview 28).

[37] In 2012 Acconci commented on national boundaries, "every time people are so against something, its a clue that this something isn't going to exist anymore, so all over the world people are terrified of immigrants, probably means there aren't going to be national boundaries, there aren't going to be immigrants, people can go anywhere" (Interview 6).

[38] Artists commissioned by Celant to build room-based installations were Michael Asher, Joseph Beuys, Daniel Buren, Dan Graham, Robert Irwin, Jannis Kounellis, Sol Lewitt, Mario Merz, Bruce Nauman, Maria Nordman, Blinky Palermo, Doug Wheeler and Acconci.

[39] It could be concluded that this neo-avant-garde testing of the art/architecture boundary largely resulted in the absorption of installation and site-specificity as a style within the hermetic boundaries of art rather than having any radical impact, beyond an aesthetic one, on the discipline of architecture or design for public space. Certainly, though, several of these artists, Buren and Graham in particular, are often referenced in the discourse of theoretical architecture.

[40] **Acconci:** “It was a piece that started with the title. I don't think I'd even seen the space. I thought, well it has to have something to do with Venice so the piece was called *Venice Belongs to Us*, stolen from the Jacques Rivette movie *Paris Belongs to Us*. I think that came before I even saw the plans for the space. The thing that struck me ... OK, let me go back into what is probably an habitual way I have of going about pieces, what are the quirks in this space? There was a skylight and there were three entrances, something I thought I could make use of. Lately I've been thinking of what I can do with a space ... simply lay something over a space, or across the space, trying to deal with what is already there and join something to it. So, taking that skylight area, planks were laid across the skylight so that it became a kind of room in itself. At each doorway a large ladder blocked half of the doorway and led up to the skylight. There were some stools placed on top of the planks, the room became loaded with some kind of presence. Four speakers were placed on top so that the sound was directed downwards. Then the text itself; one speaker dealt mainly with in a sense, directing a specific ‘you' ... almost a kind of theatre direction. That was speaker one. Speaker two dealt with kind of movie directions ... setting up a scene. Speaker three dealt with an announcement of possible intention, not so much my intention but what ‘our' intention could be in the "lights, camera, action!" I guess on seeing that space I thought well the skylight area; whoever might be up there ... obviously no-one could be up there but you could look down on the space and ideally out on to the city itself, on to Venice. Almost a kind of lookout space. This movie idea, setting scenes of Venice ... the piece dealt a lot with this ‘we' ... what are ‘we' doing here? Almost a kind of ... a lot about this piece is in different pieces of mine ... that it seems to be stringing people off into "revolutionary fervour", but I don't take them anywhere ... what do I do? I've got nowhere to go and I've got nowhere to tell them where to go. There's this fight ... builds up but then plop it drops” (Barber n.p.).

[41] All information and citations in this description are taken from Joseph Grima interviewing Holl and Acconci for the Architecture Foundation, London (Architecture + Art : Crossover and

Collaboration series), 11 June, 2009, Tate Modern, London
[www.architecturefoundation.org.uk/programme/2009/architecture-art-crossover-and-collaboration/steven-holl-and-vito-acconci]

[42] Technical information from: Schuts, Heinz. ed. *Vito Acconci: Courtyard in the Wind*, Hantje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2003.

[43] In conversation with the author.

[44] Technical information from: Punkenhofer, Robert. ed. *Building an Island: Vito Acconci / Acconci Studio*, Hantje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2003.

[45] In the Grima interview it is clear that it was Acconci who insisted on the sign, both to integrate the new construction back into the building's facade and for the simple fact that a "store should have a sign". Holl is less enthusiastic and it is clear that the sign was an area of difference. Not including it would have been a way to reduce expense (Grima n.p.). Perhaps for Acconci, the artist turned designer, the sign was vital to indicate the utility of the building, as a store — a 'thickening of the plot,' as Accconci says. Perhaps for Holl, the architect with sophisticated artistic interests, the sign would disturb the purity of the object as a visual or sensorial experience. Interestingly on the Steven Holl Architects website documentation of *Storefront* uses images taken prior to the installation of the sign.

[46] http://nordes.org/nordes2013/

[47] http://www.janvaneyck.nl/

[48] http://www.cascoprojects.org/ and http://taak.me/?lang=en

Figures

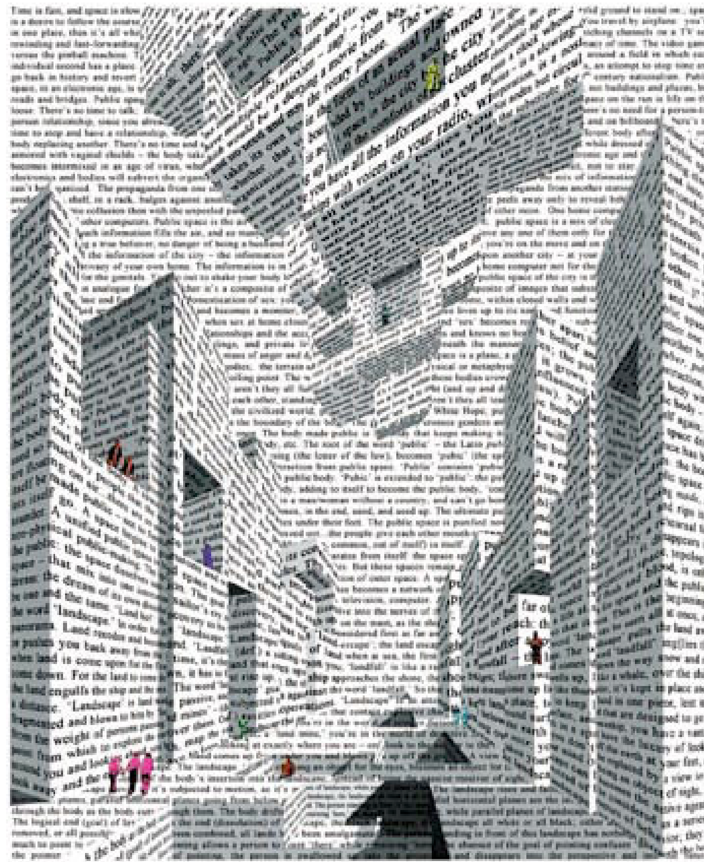

Fig. 2. Vito Acconci. *City of Words,* 1999 (Acconci Studio)

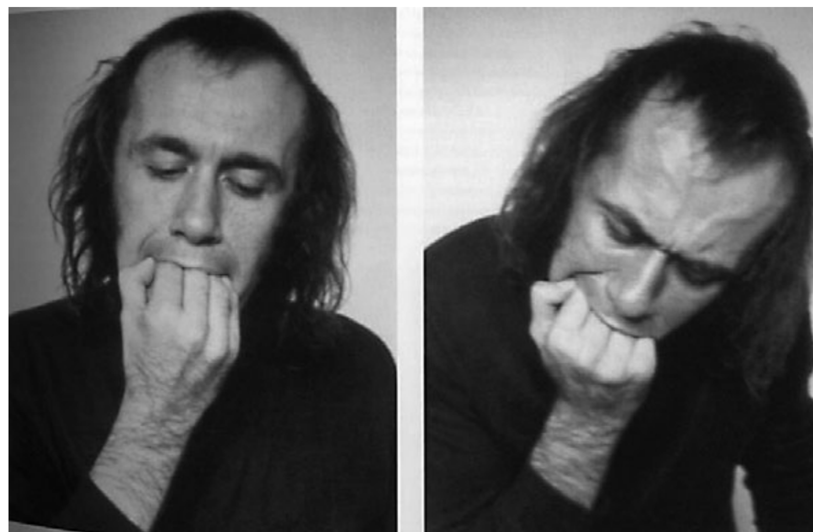

Fig. 3. Vito Acconci. *Hand and Mouth,* 1970, film stills, super 8 film, b & w, silent, 8:05 min (Acconci Studio)

Fig. 4. Vito Acconci. *Room Piece,* 1970 (Tate Modern, London)

Fig. 5. Vito Acconci. *Following Piece,* 1969 (Acconci Studio)

Fig. 6. Vito Acconci. *Security Zone,* 1971 (Harry Shunk Photo Archives of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation)

Fig. 7. Vito Acconci. *Claim,* 1971 (Acconci Studio)

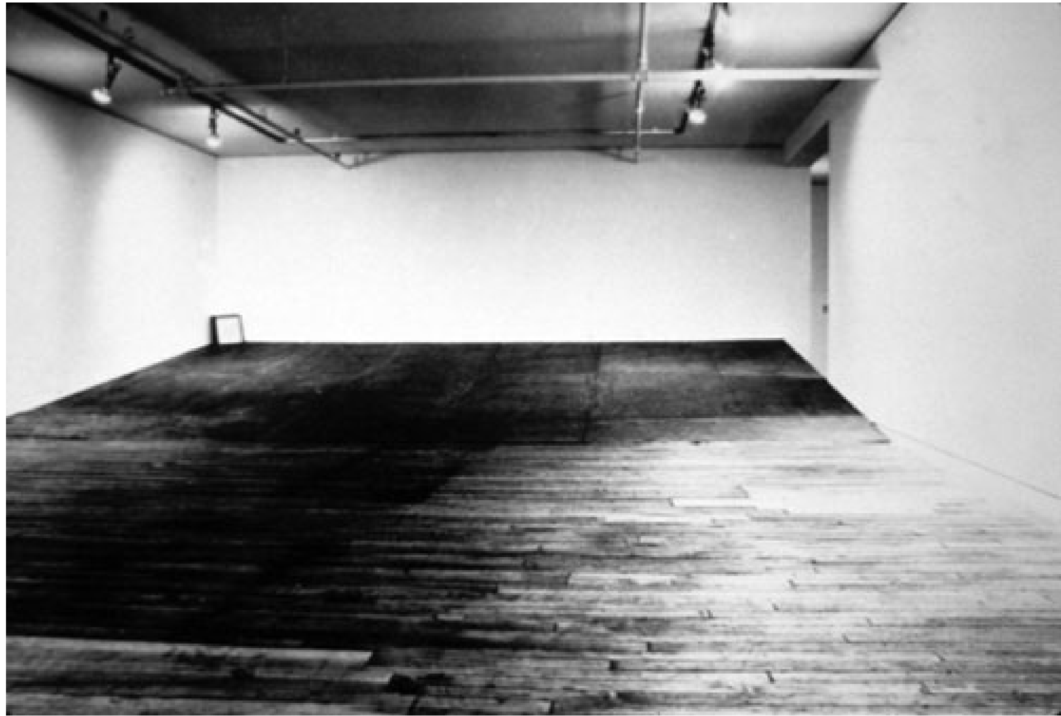

Fig. 8. Vito Acconci. *Seedbed,* 1972 (Acconci Studio)

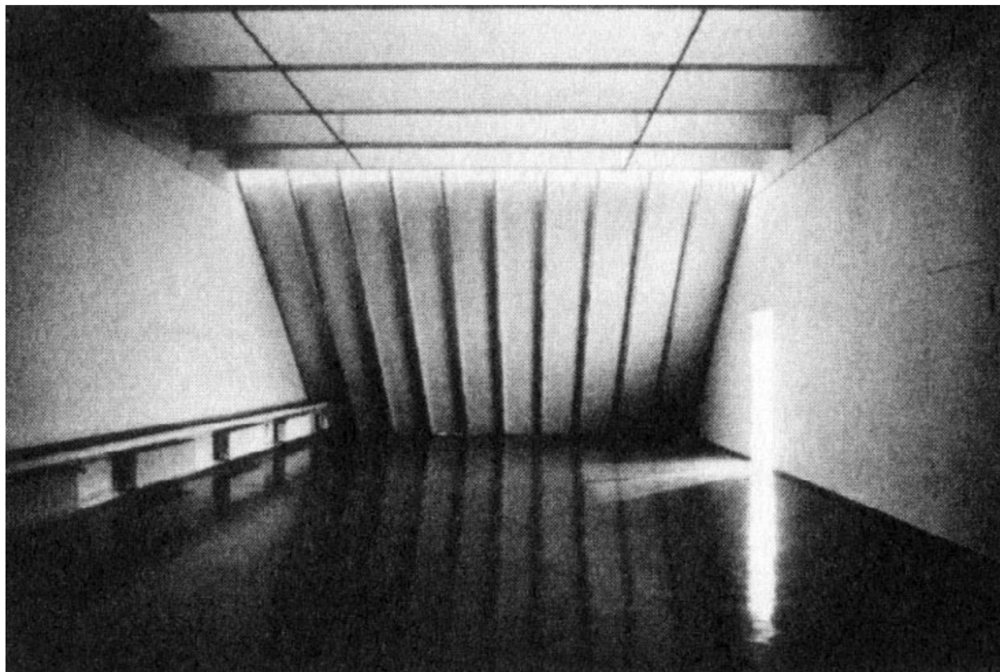

Fig. 9. Vito Acconci. *Asylum (All the Others Seek Asylum)*, 1978 (Desirens 345)

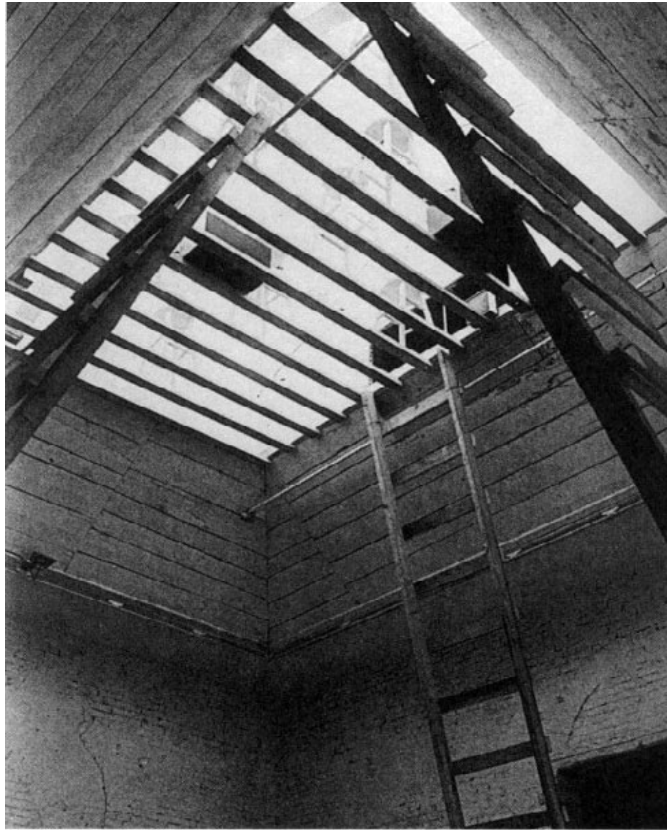

Fig. 10. Vito Acconci. *Venice Belongs to Us,* 1976 (Desirens 324)

Fig. 11. Vito Acconci. *Where We Are Now (Who Are We Anyway?),* 1976 (Acconci Studio)

Fig. 12. Acconci Studio. MAK renovation (Austrian Museum of Applied Arts and Contemporary Art, Vienna), 1993 (Desirens 417)

Fig. 13. Vito Acconci. *House of Cars #2,* 1988 (Acconci Studio)

Fig. 14. Acconci Studio. *House up the Building* (1996) (Acconci Studio)

Fig. 15. Vito Acconci. *Mobile Linear City,* 1991 (Acconci Studio)

Fig. 16. Acconci Studio. *The Storefront for Art and Architecture,* New York, 1993. Post-2008 reconstruction. (A. Forster)

Fig. 17. Acconci Studio. *The Storefront for Art and Architecture,* New York, 1993. Post-2008 reconstruction. (A. Forster)

Fig. 18. Acconci Studio. *The Storefront for Art and Architecture,* New York, 1993. Post-2008 reconstruction. (A. Forster)

Fig. 19. Buster Keaton. *One Week,* 1920. Film still. (Web)

Fig. 20. Acconci Studio. *Courtyard in the Wind,* Munich, Germany, 1997 (A. Forster)

Fig. 21. Acconci Studio. *Courtyard in the Wind,* Munich, Germany, 1997 (A. Forster)

Fig. 22. Acconci Studio. *Courtyard in the Wind,* Munich, Germany, 1997 (A.Forster)

Fig. 23. *Grande parterre at Nympheburg Palace,* Munich, Germany. Film still from Alain Resnais, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad,* 1961. (Web)

Fig. 24. Acconci Studio. *Courtyard in the Wind,* Munich, Germany, 1997. Tower, turbine and courtyard. (A. Forster)

Fig. 25. Acconci Studio. *Mur Island,* Graz, Austria, 2003 (A. Forster)

Fig. 26. Acconci Studio. *Mur Island,* Graz, Austria, 2003 (A. Forster)

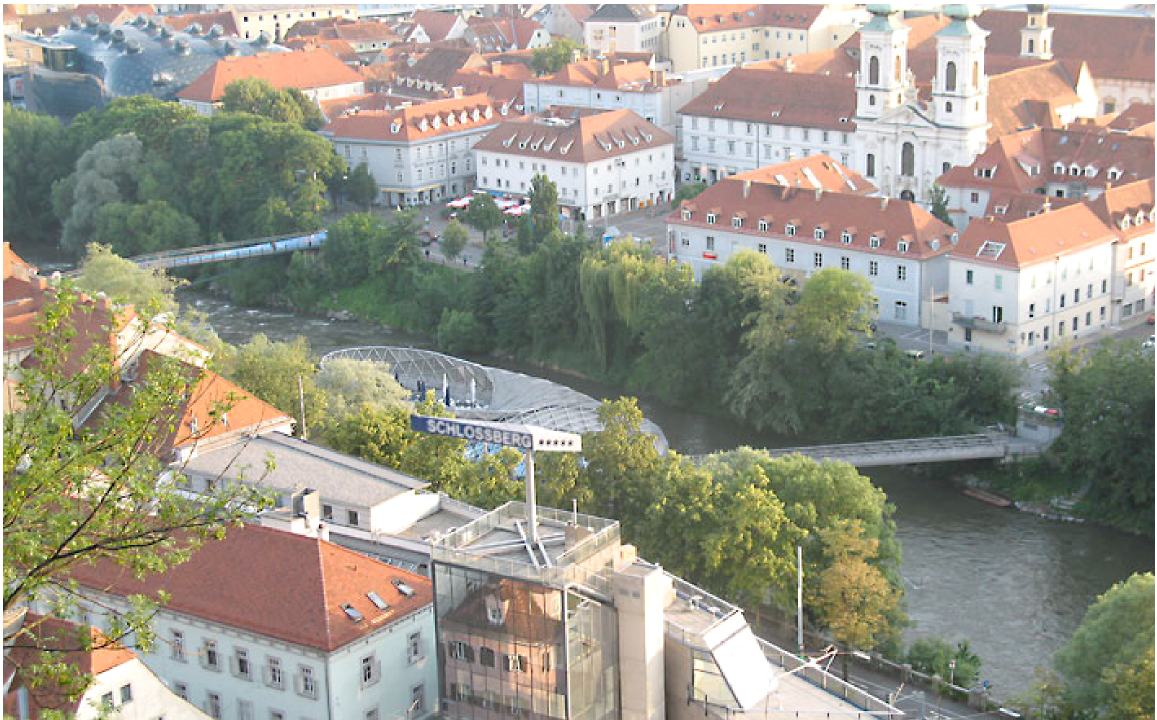

Fig. 27. Acconci Studio. *Mur Island,* Graz, Austria, 2003 (A. Forster)

Fig. 28. Acconci Studio. *Mur Island,* Graz, Austria, 2003 (A. Forster)

Fig. 29. Acconci Studio. *Mur Island,* Graz, Austria, 2003. Interior (playground, entrance to café). (A. Forster)

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Appendix

Vito Acconci Interview

Recorded at Acconci Studio, Brooklyn, New York, June 2nd, 2012
© 2012 - Vito Acconci, Andrew Forster
(not for publication or distribution)

Andrew Forster -AF: interviewer
Vito Acconci -VA: interviewee
[additional notes, added subsequently, in square brackets]

AF: I've been looking at three pieces. One is the *Storefront For Art and Architecture* because it is the beginning of the shift in your work towards explicitly architectural projects. One is the art in architecture project in Munich (*Courtyard in the Wind*) which I saw last year. And the last, chronologically, is the island-plaza in Graz (*Mur Island*). So those are pieces I've been thinking about as key, that I've walked around and written around.

VA: They were, they are, kind of important pieces to me too.

AF: I went to the *Storefront for Art and Architecture* and in the back, behind the current exhibition there is a set of books that you picked. Is that a recent thing?

VA: No it was before the current director was there, before her a person named Joseph Grima who is now actually the editor of Domus Magazine, I don't remember how it started for him, but he asked a few people to give him a book list and the book list would turn into a little book store at *Storefront*. I don't know If I remember all the things I put on, but I'm sure… you know through the years there have been a number of requests for lists of books)… I know I probably put, because this is a very important book for me, a book that I know I got … I got a lot of books in the late sixties… getting clues from the whole earth catalogue.

AF: A survival guide.

VA: Yes That's exactly the one I'm talking about. This kind of "how to survive" book which has chapters on different challenges…

AF: Loneliness, etc.

VA: Yeah, which is great, beautiful chapters; too lonely, too hot, too cold… But it's serious in a strange way… but it doesn't leave out humour, but at the same time, and I think that's a real keynote for me I think comedy is more important than so-called tragedy. I think comedy gives you… I think when you laugh it probably means you've had a second thought, you've reconsidered something, and I think that is kind of my goal. I don't know if it always was but … But yeah … even…I thought pieces I did in the late sixties, I thought the performance pieces were funnier than other people did.

AF: Than other people who were offended or thought the pieces were transgressive?

VA: I mean I hoped they could be, I don't know if I felt you know I didn't think I could use the word transgressive I thought somebody else has gotta use that. I might want something to be transgressive but 'I' don't count here. That until somebody else senses it, then maybe it can be.

AF: In your architecture and public space work since the 90's, I feel you get beyond a notion of transgression that comes out of performance art… That it is no longer the singular persona of artist as shit-disturber, under-miner of all things, but that there is a different mode, that relates to making very demanding gestures in the area of design...

VA: : It probably is. It's different. If I can say what I want our architecture to do (and probably it does or it tries to do more than one thing) but what I hate about architecture (I love architecture)is that it forces you to do things and my goal (and we certainly don't know how to do it) is something else.

What started in the eighties was when I talk about stuff I used to say 'I' and then I had to start saying 'we' because it's a group of people working together, the group changes. The group has changed over the years but 'we' became important because I thought when I thought I was doing architecture I started to think I have to work with other people, because I don't think architecture can come from a single viewpoint. It has to come from a group of people thinking together, talking together and especially arguing together. I think this condition is important. I want architecture to have loose ends, because if it doesn't I don't know why anyone else would want to be there.

But the big problem with architecture is it determines your moves. You know, you go through a door, sometimes you want it a few feet bigger (laughs). And there are ways to do a changeable architecture, but it usually… and we've done it, *Storefront* is somewhat that way, where it has hinging parts. But that is not real freedom, that's like supermarket freedom--you can do everything you want as long as your supermarket carries it.

AF: You say there is a sense of humour in *Storefront for Art and Architecture* [designed in collaboration with Steven Holl 1992-3], when I first looked at it, I thought of the Buster Keaton movie where he is building the house [*One Week*, 1920].

VA: Buster Keaton is a very important, Samuel Beckett and Buster Keaton which are almost the same thing. You probably saw the movie Samuel Beckett made with Buster Keaton [*Film*,1964] …

AF: Yes. In 'One Week' Keaton builds a pre-fab house kit without instructions, but mis-builds it, completely wrong… you open up a door and its got the sink attached to it, now on the outside of the house. Things like that. Gags based on displacement and physical discomfort. There is something like that about the *Storefront for Art and Architecture*. It's like a door in a small room, that you open the door but that makes the room too small to get your body around the door, those kinds of things that are not making the space more efficient, its creating an opening by a kind of inefficiency.

VA: It makes an opening, and it probably, and it possibly provides walls, perpendicular to the existing ones**.** But it provides a change, but I don't know how much it's used. I think it's used more now than it was for a while I think the new, relatively new, director now I think she`s probably been there two years [Eva Franch].

Another book that was on your list was about fashion designer Issey Miyake.

VA: Clothing's important to me, the idea, I mean I think clothing is the first architecture, the way skin covers the bones, then clothing covers the skin and bones. This could be because of my grounding of my work in performance and body, I don't want things to stay with the body but I think maybe it's a convenient way to start, but I want to go out from the body, I don't know if I necessarily can start from outside. I don't know if that's as true now as it was.

AF: So it's the body in relation to space…

VA: And in time… I think architecture is just as much about time as space. I think what taught me, what taught me, everything I knew, which I know is an overly blatant statement, but what taught me everything I at least, everything I turned out to do, was a movie made in 61, I think I saw it in 1961, a movie made by Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet called *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* [1961] and that I think totally shaped, I don't think I knew it then, but you know it introduced a narrator. And I did a lot of stuff involving talk, it was so based on words, but words heard more that words looked at.

But the beginning scene of that movie was the camera aimed down a corridor down a corridor but up toward a ceiling a narrow corridor of what the narrator calls a baroque hotel…and I started, I don't know if this clicked to me then but I realized that the worst thing that could happen, that could have, happened to architecture was architecture magazines, because architecture is reduced to an image and it is front of you. Architecture is around you, you know. You're in the middle of architecture and the best thing about *Last Year in Marienbad* is that sort of, yes maybe you can reduce, translate it

into images, but its image after image second after second. It's a movie about hypnotism, it's, you know, voice is hypnotism if you talk to somebody and you try to convince them to believe you…

Robbe-Grillet was a really important thing to me I thought it would have, I thought it was one of those things that changed the nature of the game, and it was never going to be the same again. But it did that to me I mean and maybe it did for a few people. I could never think of writing as I did before, writing has nothing to do with, for me it has nothing to do with expression, nothing to do with subjectivity, it has to do with something else, I don't mean that something else is necessarily just recordage but it's a…

AF: Is writing a process of making for you?

VA: I don't know how to answer that directly, but maybe starting in another direction I might get to it. I went to writers' school I went to a writer's workshop at the university of Iowa. I was writing fiction. I thought I was continuing to write fiction, when I came to New York, when I came to New York well I guess a lot of this is, you know, what happens after graduate school you realize, "I don't have any idea what to do anymore."

I was born in New York, I had lived in New York, but coming back to New York, well first of all I thought things had changed and I don't know how aware of it I was, I got really intrigued, I don't think, well, I know that before I went to Iowa, I don't think I even knew art galleries existed. I knew the museum of modern art existed, but when I came back to NY somehow the presence of art seemed, seemed very drastic in NY, maybe this was the time of beginnings of pop art, but it was the time when I discovered galleries, and I discovered galleries in a way that, I probably, I was never able to view them like this again, cause I didn't know what the good ones where supposed to be. So I walked down Madison avenue, I walked down 52nd street, and I went to all of them.

I could make my… it was probably the only time… I could make my own judgement… but I got really involved at that time and I realized that, jeez you know, this was ten years ago, and I've only come upon it when I came back to New York but I saw pictures of this work when I was in Iowa. Jasper Johns was important to me at that time. Jasper Johns taught me what idiom was, what convention was, the way I saw Johns was here was this person who really loved to do a little abstract expression with his brush-strokes, but he probably thought, there are hundreds if not thousands of people doing these. How is anybody why would anybody look… well! Now if I put a large number '5', if I make a canvas of numbers or alphabet letters, at least a person would do a double take, so maybe you would start to look, so I started to think maybe writing isn't about invention maybe writing… I mean all the words are there, all you do is put them together differently,

You can break them. You can break them – you can put words inside of other words, but I thought, you start with these conventions. So it was a very, I admit I probably liked very early Jasper Johns much more than the later more finished Jasper Johns. But the person for me, I thought he was discovering <u>fact</u>, and I thought I wanted <u>fact</u>. I wanted the words to be fact on a page. I said, it can't be -- words don't have the factuality of things but

maybe you can make an attempt, maybe… So I would begin a poem with a period, and next line said, I don't know exactly, but the next line is 'there I have made my point'. Then the third line says 'it' the fourth line 'I've made it again'.

So it was just trying to get something that is not necessarily about interpretation, but eventually probably writing and reading has to be about interpretation. But I wanted it to start with some <u>thing</u>, thing, things. Maybe I took very literally what probably, well at least when I went to elementary school you learnt what is a noun, a noun is a person place or thing, and 'thing' seemed important.

AF: You said that the visual or the image is a problem in architecture, that magazines create a problem in that they freeze time with images of buildings and space. I had an experience when I went to *BMW World* in Munich (Coop Himelblau) with its twisty façade.

VA: yeah, I've seen it in pictures.

AF: What it made me think about, fear, realize, is this thing that in a lot of architecture that is made on the screen is that it's all facade, so there is this thing this twisty thing it's this extraordinary image you see as if it is a photograph but inside it is conventionally built. The façade/image <u>is</u> the experience.

VA: Yes but it doesn't have to be, the outside can shape the inside and vice versa. I mean I admit we have gotten involved with the twisty things too…

AF: I've seen some twisty action.

VA: It's hard not to now. It's hard not to, working with the computer. Just quickly, the thing about twisty things is I think what fascinates a lot of people using it, is the continuity of it, it's topology. And it's that you can go from inside to outside and back again. We got obsessed with things like the Klein bottle…

AF: But here is the thing about visual, is that there is a certain kind of architecture that is very visual in a specific sense, that is very much about what it could be as an image. And it makes me think about pornography, actually. That it *is* pornography. That we look at a building and we have a fantasy about how we can live like this, but it's not about something that 'is', as when you talk about the materiality of Jasper John's text as 'fact'. This is not 'fact' or substantial in that sense, it's like this… hmm, it's hard to put it in words… but there a sense that it's connection to stuff is just image, purely for the eye.

VA: Yeah, yeah.

AF: …even though its built for the world, in space. It is just…

VA: Just image. Just image is hard for me I want image to be useful, you know, I want

image to be, you know, can you be in the middle of image -- then it's not image anymore, because it's not. It's not in front of your eyes, its, you know… and maybe if I try to deny it, the notion of, the notion that a bodily experience of something is important to me, yet at the same time now I keep thinking I am not against virtual experiences either.

It might have to be a mix, maybe some of the kinds of things we really want to do can only be done virtually. But I always think, virtual: virtual is an anticipation of the future: you can't do it now, but if we do it virtually, people people will start to think well why can't we do it and maybe eventually you can. I mean I won't be alive, I don't think, but, I think the architecture of the future will probably be movable.

That every time people are so against something, it's a clue that this something isn't going to exist anymore, so all over the world people are terrified of immigrants, probably means that at some point there aren't going to be national boundaries, there aren't going to be immigrants, people can go anywhere…

AF: You teach at an architecture school?

VA: I teach at Pratt. At the graduate school within the architecture school. I also teach at Brooklyn College, in the art department. But I can kind of teach courses like, kind of introduction to design. But they're both graduate schools, and especially in Brooklyn College, I do have to talk to people about their work. Which, you know, I don't know if I love talking to artists about their work.

AF: You can still respond?

VA: Well, I bring up questions. And in the courses that have some kind of subject matter, a design course, there's also a so-called writing and practice course. So I do give writing assignments.

AF: Do you find design students are different from art students?

VA: Yes.

AF: It's amazing...it's what I like.

VA Totally. Absolutely.

AF: Maybe give an art student a project, and it's about expression. You give a design student the same project and maybe they're not in the problem in the same way, it's a problem that other people are having, for better or worse...

VA: Yeah, though there are some architecture students who get obsessed with this [expression] problem, these kinds of problems. A big difference, I don't know if this comes from training in schools, but if you ask an architecture student, I found, if you ask, why did you do this? They try to say why. Whereas art students, they say gee, I don't

know. And even when I ask things... I admit, art students exasperate me. I say, why did you put it horizontally rather than vertical? They say, I don't know. I say, you have to know. Why did you make it that size? It's interesting, 'they come that size'. They almost don't like to give reasons, reasons ruin it.

AF: It makes it impersonal to have reasons?

VA: I don't know. Reasons were always important to me. I mean certainly when I was doing art, I wouldn't have done it without reasons. I mean, I know why I was doing the work I was doing in the beginning, because this was the time, where, I can't say everybody, but people were talking about 'I have to find myself'. Finding oneself.

So I thought in a time like that, what else can I do but do work that tries to helps me find myself. And I always thought music sometimes was a great clue at the time. This was a time of Neil Young, Van Morrison, not 2 and a half, 3 minute songs, but 7, 8, 9 minute songs, single voice, single voice kind of winding around the self. I remember this incredible Van Morrison song, called *Ballerina*, where maybe around 5 minutes in, he says 'we'll it's getting late now'. Yes it is! It's way longer than most songs.

AF: And do find that your approach to design and to architecture, does it collide with young architecture students who are thinking about getting their accreditation, and then it's a much more process-based?

VA: If you've gone to a five-year undergraduate school, then it's a year and a half program. But those people are usually mixed. Especially from the class I had last semester, they seem to think they've got such a very, a much freer idea of architecture, and this is the best course they've had. They might go back, after they've been away for it for a while. But they said, they have said, they like the projects that I give because it gives them, they're open to do things. Like the last one, was a little piece of writing that started "everybody hates immigrants". If somebody's afraid of something so much, I started talking about this before, that probably means there won't be national boundaries. Do a building that can move from place to place. Now that it moves, now that it goes somewhere, can it have a place to be, can it be parasite building, projects like that. So I have been told for the last three years that most people wanted to be in my project, but they all couldn't. Only 12 could be. I admit that makes me feel good. And also a number of classes meet in a very large room, so each class has a large table or two, so it's not classes so much, each day. ...maybe once in a while everybody talks about each other's projects. But mostly I have individual meetings. And when there's twelve people, if people want to see you, you can usually see them every class. It takes time. It's twice a week, it's at least four hours, it's usually closer to five and a half or six.

AF: Is a discussion about sustainability a big issue in schools?

VA: A lot of people there say well we have taken sustainability courses, let's take it for granted, and maybe we can find some specific way to do it. But they do want to... I'm sure the objection could be that this could only happen in theory, the projects they're

doing.

AF: My experience of students is that they say 'don't talk to us about sustainability anymore'.

VA: It's starting to sound like religion.

AF: This is a point of, in the world of design, in the world of architecture, is that one area where there's an opening for a kind of criticality, a kind of difficulty... to insert something that's more difficult. Talking about a project in a garbage dump, it's not about making anything useful, it's about some other way of thinking through that thing, which isn't just the proper materials, proper approach, proper systems, all that kind of stuff.

VA: Yeah. I mean the people who tend to work at the studio are the people I say yes to, tend to be people who are more on the side of, 'let's at least start far-fetched', and see what we can do with it. We have had the opposite, and it has been hard. And almost every time we have hired a registered architect, it's been so much the opposite. It's like now come on, we have to start a project, by realizing okay this is how much money we're getting for the project, therefore we can only spend this and this many hours, and I realize, I can't think like that. I really don't want to. I just, I get so blocked from the beginning, that I say, we're never really going to make money on architecture. I haven't been involved with a gallery in a long time, there were so many installations of the eighties, that were destroyed at the time, that nobody even thought these were sellable. That we probably, if we got connected with the right gallery, we probably can survive from the sale of old art projects. But I can't do that now. I can't stand galleries.

AF: You can't stand the art world?

VA: It makes me shiver.

AF: What about the art world? Is it the business side of it? The closed-off side of it?

VA: Yeah. The last gallery I was involved with, for a relatively long time, from maybe the end of the eighties to the beginning of the nineties to 2005, was Barbara Gladstone. And every time she came here she said geez this looks like an architecture studio. I said it is, and I said, Barbara, you have to realize this is what we do. And she couldn't, and she said, you can't call it architecture. You have to call it sculpture. And I said, I can't. And I kind of personally liked her but there was no way we could...and she really didn't do much with the stuff. It's become such a money...and I can tell even from Brooklyn College art students, they're all assuming that they're going to have a show in the first year that they're out of school, one person had a show, and said 'I did pretty well' meaning he sold stuff. I can't say it was that much of a different world, it's just that the people I knew when I was starting to do stuff, weren't necessarily thinking of how much money is this stuff going to earn or make. Things changed in the eighties.

AF: I was asked to chair a panel, a conference on design. So here's the subject matter that I propose, and I quoted Grace McQuilten, who I think must have come to see you, she wrote about your work, and [artist Takashi] Murakame, in the context of design. I quote from her an idea she has about mis-design. Which comes partly, I think, from your term, de-design.

"Questioning the aesthetic collusion of art and design is a means by which to investigate the possibilities of critical artistic practices, in a planned and commercially conceptualized cultural landscape."

VA: Can I go back? Commercially conceptual? Or conceptually commercial?

AF: And I wonder can we go deeper than that? Is there a ground that is deeper than that. It's not just about making something wrong just so that demonstrates how wrong those products are. It's about, for example, can we get into a question of what do we need before we need a building? What is the urge before calling it something, on a more basic level?

VA: You probably know that most of our projects aren't built. I mean, is that purposeful, it's not that we don't want things to be built, but we don't just want to build anything. And it's probably important. When I think of, I came to architecture kind of late, and certainly in the early seventies, I was thinking God, I can't stand architecture, I can't stand these city buildings, etc... Somewhere there was a change. But I think the change was that I realized, I'm not so interested in space, I'm interested in people in space. And that's a big difference. But when I think, who are the architects through the years who probably meant something to me. In the 18th century, Boullée and Piranesi, and in the 1960s, Archigram... probably not one built project there, but a lot of ideas.

AF: The museum of Graz?

VA: Built at the same time as *Mur Island*. But that was after Archigram.

AF: Beautiful little building.

VA: Yeah, not a great inside though. But I think the problem was there wasn't enough money. I know Peter [Cook] in passing.

AF: To finally see something in one of those walking city drawings, out in the world, tucked into the nineteenth century city grid.

VA: It was almost like one of those pictures of walking city visits New York.

AF: Here's the rest of my panel question: 'Contemporary art and contemporary design share roots in the avant-garde, yet whose differences have calcified around a dysfunctional idea of pure and applied. Contemporary art ask any question down to the very grounds of thinking and doing, design builds to any program. There is a

resistance to seeing these two modes of thinking collide. Possibly because a revealing failure is inevitable. Design doesn't do failure. And art deliberately problematizes notions of usability. Can design be critical? In its practice or its production in the real world, in a way, in which art, confined to a hermetic system, cannot?

Now, that's an overly formal question about criticality. Let's say, art lives over here in the museum, we can ask of art questions in a kind of 'it is as if' way… And design, what can it do?

VA: The fact that you said, and this is true, in the world of gallery and museum, but it's kind of an enclosed world, maybe it can touch on other things. One reason why I started to do what I thought of was architecture in the mid-seventies, when I was doing installations in galleries or museums, I started to think I think I'm in the wrong field, I don't want to do these projects, where only people, who are for whatever reasons for some reason or other are only involved in some kind of art world.

I want do something where somebody goes into or stops in, not because it's art, but because for some reason or other they're intrigued by this, or maybe they hate it. I don't want them to go because it's art. I want them to go because somehow or another, I, the person in the street, have walked down the street, and I say, 'what's this?' And I turn and go… That's kind of ideal for me. I don't like the idea of... I wish things would never be labeled exactly.

AF: I have a friend who is an artist teaching in design who say about design, that as soon as you start making the compromises, the shifts based on utility, that you can't be critical anymore. He says, if you're talking about Vito Acconci's work, if you're talking about other kinds of work we consider important, if its architecture, or gaming, or art, if it is interesting, then it is art, by definition. Finally, he says, design is just a fascist version of art. Pure design. Okay. How do we make a space for that? Should we? I juxtapose that to another friend, an industrial designer, and he says in a crit, you can't ask those questions, those are 'art questions'. That's just about expression. This is too 'one of a kind'. That is too 'handcraft'. That is content. He had this kind of straw man set up that is art which includes everything that is disruptive, that takes away the smoothness of this perfect field of design and <u>needs</u> to be ignored. I think that's precisely where you're working, in this infuriating gap, and that's the only direction design can go, actually. Or perhaps the only way art can go.

VA: I thought you could do design. It could thicken the plot. And that, you know, is as a maze useful? ...I think it is. You can certainly get to a destination quicker without a maze, but there might be things along the way that you wouldn't get if the maze wasn't there.

AF: I'm trying to pinpoint what is this idea of criticality that is so limited when it's carried out in the art world. Yet it's also compromised when it's carried out in the world of architecture and design, but at least it's in collision with <u>something</u>*?* Do you have experiences doing design projects, when the resistance is too much?

VA: […that] we probably aren't going to put it up, because people won't let us put it up? But I admit, we've done things for...a proposal we did for a competition, maybe 2005-6, a competition for a library in Guadalajara in Mexico. It was an open competition. We certainly weren't chosen, even as a finalist. But we were very struck by the site. Because right next to where this library was, there was going to be...there was a large street, almost like a kind of small highway. So we proposed, we'd start the library by stepping down, into the ground, making a kind of maybe a courtyard. Once we get down, we start step up, to make the library. But as we start to step, we can't resist that street. So we go over the street, into the rest of the city. Then we thought, oh, why don't we use this as a kind of expansion system for the building.

Did we seriously believe that anyone would accept that? No. But it gave us a chance to think...I think design is much more about... to anticipate the future. That's more important to me, certainly more important than, it's certainly more important to me than if someone says yes you can build this, but you can't do this part. Well, don't just do parts, where you say, oh there's seven parts, let's do three. I'd rather get something refused...again, I think of Piranesi, I think of Boulez, I think of the sixties' *Archigram*.

The thing about *Archigram* that I like is that they make things look so specific that you say, of course they could be built. Some of them might not have. But specificity is important. I have blocks against certain things. The Situationist person, Constant. Not that I don't look at them, but, for me that stuff is so flimsy, so vague, compared to *Archigram*, where I can <u>see</u> this down the street. This isn't in somebody's mind.

I don't mean it's not that I don't take them seriously. At the same time, it's that I don't get it, just like I don't get *Superstudio*. It's too abstracted to me. It's almost as though they're pulling one over you.

AF: Is it because it's not grounded in a kind of tangible experience? Like you can't say oh, I imagine myself walking in there, and that's not how I would walk through that space.

VA: It is, certainly, and again, it has, some of it has the clarity of *Archigram*, but in a different direction. This is making concrete a kind of abstract thought. I don't know, sometimes I go woozy with abstract thoughts. I mean I love abstract ideas. I hate abstract words. Abstract words just contain too much. I want to get specifically, and maybe in a lot of different directions, to an abstract idea.

AF: There's a lot of architecture theory...

VA: I can also say that projects of ours that have been built, I think that probably shouldn't have been built.

AF: What would those be?

VA: The one I can immediately think of is at the San Francisco airport in 2000. We were asked to do something in the transfer corridor of the airport. And the plans for the airport, at the ceiling, there was a line of light, and we said, let's take that line of light and turn it into kind of physical things. So we turned these things into kind of lightning bolts. They were hard glass, light inside, that went from the line of light, across the narrow corridor, and became a telephone booth. It's okay...maybe the light was just as good without it. The great thing about light is that it's kind of almost virtual. This isn't as important as the glow. And I thought, we took something that was about glow, and turned it into a thing. I don't know if that's good.

AF: The Munich piece, *Courtyard in the Wind*. For me it's interesting because partly it's still an 'art in architecture' piece.

VA: The problem is most of the projects we get to do are so-called public art projects. We've very rarely done architecture projects. *Mur Island* was probably the closest.

AF: Certain artists specialize in 'art in architecture' projects and get very good at producing them in a way they fit in. The system of generating art in architecture is a one-percent scheme with the criteria that something has to last for so many years, it has to 'behave' properly. There's always this push and pull, of wanting to do something interesting, experientially or otherwise, and doing something that isn't going to cause problems.

VA: I admit sometimes, I can't say we've gotten away with something... it's no secret. Sometimes. Like the subway projects, no other subway project is like this, and I don't know how we were able to do it. One is Coney Island, and one is 161st Street. Where we took the subway tile, and raised it up through the ground, so that it becomes a bench made of subway material right in front of McDonald's. The seating is made by taking subway tile and sliding it down and forming seats. Do people notice that? They probably just say it's a place to sit down. Maybe one person every now and then does a double-take.

AF: Back to *Courtyard*: what do you hope someone's experience is walking through this work. What I saw is that the workers in those civic buildings come and go through the piece to the station.

VA: When were you there?

AF: Last fall.

VA: Does it work, does it move?

AF: That's another question. I don't know. I didn't see it move. They're very proud of the piece. I asked the security guard, 'does it move?' And he said 'yeah, but it has to be activated by somebody in the office upstairs. And we'll call him up.' And I said, 'Okay'. And then he came back down and said 'well, no, there's not enough

wind today.'

VA: I never saw that. It wasn't supposed to be that.

AF: If there was wind it moved?

VA: I mean, it's a wind turbine on top of the tower, but it's supposed to store wind. It's supposed to store electricity. Takes wind, stores electricity. And at the beginning... maybe I should write to someone and say can we try do something about this. Because without the movement it's nothing. It means nothing to me. The way I saw it, you're opposite, you're inside the building, you look out, you see there's a tree there. Now you look out again, and you realize oh the tree's there. Or I stand opposite to you, I blow nose and now you're somewhere else. And I thought one of the reasons, it's the building of the Munich works administration building, but I thought they took great pride in making this work. I wonder what happened.

AF: So when I saw it there was this button, I said does the button activate it? He said the button used to activate it, but now there's an electrical problem because of water, so now it's activated from the security office. He called the security office and he said there wasn't enough wind today, which made me suspicious. I was walking around the building, looking at it from different views. The thing that makes me suspicious is that it's parked in the correct orientation so the pathways line up, so I said that's kind of strange that that could happen.

VA: Two people have now mentioned to me they were there and it wasn't moving. I keep meaning... I don't keep track of stuff enough. I should at least explain it to somebody, not to express outrage but to say, it's really important.

AF: If they care about it the way they say they care about it...

VA: And especially at the beginning, especially because it was a building for the administration for the buildings department that it was important for them to get it working mechanically, because they were very involved in it in the beginning.

AF: It seems there is in that a compromise, which is a collision with other concerns and needs. Is it that, every time I go to work I have to walk over the wet grass part instead of the nice path part?

VA: Possibly that's true, I admit that didn't even occur to me...It moved very slowly. That doesn't help the wetness, it doesn't solve the wetness of the grass.

AF: I'm not making an excuse for them. If you're an artist and you have a work in a museum, and you notice that it's hanging too close to something else, some stipulation about the work is that you can object... and there is an obligation for the institution to maintain the work the way you want.

VA: Up to a certain point. At the MOMA, they own certain pieces, from the 80s and 90s, they are supposed to be things that people can use as furniture, but the guards stop people. I was stopped once.

AF: Too precious. In Munich, maybe the inverse is happening. It's our thing, and we'll put it on for special occasions.

VA: It's too bad.

AF: Maybe I'm completely wrong. Maybe it was not a windy enough.

VA It shouldn't depend on a windy day. The way the wind turbine works, it stores electricity. And at least at the beginning, they said it was producing almost too much electricity, so at least at the beginning, part of the first floor of the building was running off the electricity produced. So something drastic has happened.

AF: In fact in Germany there are a lot of people with wind turbines, contributing to the electrical grid, reversing the flow. You would think they would be into that kind of thing.

VA: I admit it gets me very sad when I hear those kinds of things.

AF: It's interesting as an artist when I come to see a work, I'm looking for something, I'm not just a guy going home from work or a tourist passing by who says oh look, this path moves. There's something about that piece, in terms of landscape and trees, it's grown in beautifully. It's a very attractive space.

VA It was early 2000s, I don't know what year it was built. I think it was built before Graz, 2001, 2002.

AF: And for you, as a piece in that architectural space, what was your desire in terms of people's experience of that piece? Not to experience it as a piece, but to experience it as a shift in their experience as they're passing?

VA: In some ways, more than some of our other projects, it doesn't particularly have a use, except to lead to a kind of double take. Where you thought landscapes were supposed to be still. Now it's moving. I mean, it's a piece I like. But compared to what it can do for people, I think it can make people laugh. I'm not sure it can do much more.

I know the way we started it, the site we were given was this courtyard, and the building department that had been renovated, that was going to be renovated, it was clear there was a tall tower in the corner. And we thought that tower is so striking. So we go, the way we thought of it, let's deal with the highs and the lows of the space. Let's put something high in the tower, let's put something low in the courtyard, and one should affect the other. In this case, it's a one-way direction. Once the wind turbine is moved by

the wind, it stores electricity. Therefore down below, this horizontal moves because of what's happening with this vertical.

It was about cause and effect. But I admit, at least in *Mur Island*, I don't even think they use it as a theatre anymore, but it used to be. The way we started that, they had asked us to do a theatre, a cafe and a playground. So we thought, let's start with the convention of a theatre, an amphitheatre. So we start with the bowl. What if we twist that bowl, that bowl is now a dome. The dome could be the cafe, the twisting warping from bowl to dome and vice versa makes a playground. I don't even know if they still have the playground.

AF: The playground is still there, you can climb up and slide down, and it's quite active. *Mur Island* is a public space in the middle of the river.

VA: Good.

AF: You said, about the Munich piece, I admit it that...

VA: It's not that I don't want the double take, or laugh...

AF: What's the other thing it ought to do, or could do?

VA: I remember one thing we did, when we started thinking about the piece. I don't remember what kind the budget was, possibly around a million dollars at that time, but I'm not sure, it might have been less. At first we thought, we should make this whole courtyard move. But we couldn't do that. But even that would have just been a way to take something that's 'normal' and in some way turn it upside down a bit or turn it inside out a little bit. But I don't know what we could have done that could have made it more useful. Because I like the idea...let's give something a <u>use</u>, let's make it have a <u>use</u>. More of a use that wouldn't have been there unless we had done something.

AF: It does do a very strong thing in terms of the language of landscape architecture. In that any urban park is built on top of a serious amount of city infrastructure. Its drainage, its electricity, its mechanics. And all of a sudden you have this piece, and you realize there's motors under there, there's rails under there. There isn't earth down to the earth. It points at the contrivance of those spaces, or conversely, that they are human-made spaces.

VA: They are. They didn't happen by themselves. They are designed spaces. Maybe not particularly good design. But designed. If something's here, and you put it there, it's the beginning of design.

AF: Anyway, anybody I encountered around that space, they are very proud of it.

VA: Even though it doesn't work, that's horrible.

AF: They all said it does work! It's just not working right now.

VA It works but you can't see it!

AF: So I wrote the 'art-in-architecture' person back and asked can you send me a picture when it's in a different position? She didn't answer that question.

So there's a question about an architect or designer as existing on the cusp or the last point where something is particular, or singular or something interesting can happen before something becomes fixed, it's like the last stage before something becomes part of the technologized world.

VA: You don't think technology can help invention? I think it really can. I think you use the means of the time. I never would have been interested in a so-called virtual space a few years ago. But once I realize those possibilities are there, I start to think, can there be a mix.

We're doing this project now, it's being built, a project in Indianapolis. It's a tunnel, a kind of tunnel to a building, it goes through a parking lot. And the reason I and then we started thinking this way, was it was a relatively low budget, around $600,000, although I think it has be raised now. We thought what can we do, the tunnel was relatively long, what could we do physically, we probably couldn't do much. So what we did instead, there's a sidewalk through the tunnel, there's also a street for cars. It was pretty clear at the beginning that we couldn't do what we were doing with cars. As I talk about it, I'll try to explain that. We thought that we would never have enough money to have some physical thing here.

So instead, what we did was, on the sidewalk, there's a place to walk, and there's also a bicycle path. As you walk through, as you cycle through... you activate motion sensors that are above you. There's a steel structure above you, the steel structure holds literally thousands of LED lights, embedded in the sidewalk, there are probably an equal number of LED lights. So when you walk through, as you activate a motion sensor, you turn on these LED lights below you and above you. So as you walk you turn on, turn on lights. So it's like a swarm of fireflies that's flocking around you. Now, if you're coming from another direction, or if you're coming next to me, and you start to pass me, now your lights and my lights start to swarm together.

At least there's this somewhat beginning effort, that, you know, people aren't doing this purposefully, but as they're walking they're activating something. And then, once they realize it, maybe they can start to do it on purpose, or do it with someone else. It's important for us to do stuff that maybe wasn't so easy to do at another time.

And this was just a virtual piece, but two or three weeks ago, during the Milan furniture fair, we got a note from somebody who I didn't know at all. But he said, he was asking these five designers, each was given a plaza in Milan, and in the plaza, and I'm not sure how exactly it was activated, but there would be a kind of a circle in the ground, and a

person could go there with an iphone. And now they could be in that circle, and with their iphone circle, and the plaza would go through some kind of change. At least from reportage, people seemed to be drawn to this - that as you turned, on your iphone, the building that was in front of you, would now have in front of it a screen of pixelations. And as you made a second turn, there would be more pixelations. So that... This is in the image you're seeing. And it was called something like when buildings melt into air... and reform into buildings. All you see is dots. But if you keep going, it goes back to its original. I would have never thought of something like that. I would love this to really happen. That's the problem for us. I'm starting to think, I don't really want to make surfaces. I want to make pixels, I want to make points, I want to make dots. I want to do thick air. So that the thick air becomes buildings to be in, at least temporarily. Of course I don't have the slightest idea how.

AF: This is a piece that's in the process of being made [*Swarm Street* in Cincinatti]?

VA: I was just there with this, with the technology person who is working on it, a week ago. It should have happened. There were some things to be ironed out. Interestingly, this building is the basketball arena. So a lot of people go through it. I don't think I knew that when I first gravitated to it. I picked the site, there were a number of sites, I picked the site because I thought, I just don't think there's enough money to really do something. Of course, you could always do something small, for whatever amount of money, but I thought maybe it would be unnoticeable, but maybe if we did something that depended on light rather than something more physical, maybe we could do more. And also I like the idea, that, I hope that people would start to realize wow that <u>we're</u> doing this.

AF: It's not interactive in the sense that you push a button to get a fix. It puts your movement and your passage through the space back into the central role in experience.

VA: *And* you start to combine with other peoples' movement. I mean we took it from, for a while, a lot of designers were talking about flocks and swarm theory. That's totally what it was based on, called *Swarm Street*.

AF: You have said public art is 'de-design'.

VA: Have we lived up to that? I hope we have. But I wonder sometimes. I wonder sometimes if I'm afraid, do we make concessions without admitting it, because we do want things to happen? I'm not so sure if that's true.

AF: Compromises, they come out of wanting to be implicated, in order to be implicated. It's a complicity. You say, how do I fold the program differently?

VA: I wonder if I even recognise the compromises sometimes. I hope I do. I think most of the things we propose... For example, the two subway stations - there were no other subway stations that had stuff like that. And I don't know why, exactly. I think the only reason we were allowed to do it, is that they do provide things for people. Like places to

sit, like the west 8th street station. One of the most important things, they said...was, or one of the most important things to them, was that people have to be able to see Coney Island, see the amusement park, see the beach from the subway station. So the one of the first things we thought of was how to we make views. We have a tendency, I try to talk to whoever is in studio at the time, was let's not start by thinking of windows with doors, let's start by thinking of openings. If all you need to do or want to do is look, then let's take a solid, let's take a surface, let's split it, but we don't have to split it that far. We can split it only enough so as you can see out. If you want a door, maybe you want a door later, let's tear it out. If you had a door there, we would have walk out into space.

But that was important to us, and then we said, now that we're doing this kind of bulge, and the principle was a bulge inside, and a bulge inside that then twists and becomes a bulge outside, it reaches a breaking point, so now you can look out. But we thought everything in the station should be like this. The seating in the station should be like that. So let's make that same bulge, but when it doesn't reach a breaking point, now you can sit within the wall. What we didn't consider, I realize, we didn't consider garbage cans. That was stupid.

AF: Now you go back to that station and watch how it's lived in, what's your experience?

VA: It's the last stop, well, not the last stop, but the next to last stop on a number of subway lines. So by that time, unless people are going to Coney Island....they probably aren't...people might get off the station if they're going the New York Aquarium, if they're going to Coney Island, they're probably going to the next one. I've been there at a number of times, I've been there at around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and there must be a some schools nearby. Because there are a lot of kids there. And they're sitting. Are they necessarily looking at Coney Island? I'm not sure. Because they're passing by. The seats are more occupied. Does anybody even notice that they're different than other seats? That I can never know. If you go with somebody, I think the wrong way to find out what people are thinking is to go is to go up to somebody, and say what do you think? I think people resent that kind of stuff.

But we made a bigger mistake. We knew at one point, we didn't know at the beginning, but we knew as we were designing it, I don't remember at what stage, we knew that they were only going to do it only one side of the station, the side that faced Coney Island, and not on the other side of the station, which is the side that faced neighbourhood people. And I don't think I can ever forgive myself.

AF: For not insisting?

VA: Or just not doing it. I don't think they would have provided double the budget. But by accepting just that one side, I was saying that tourists are more important than the neighbourhood people.

Coney Island is in the Rem Koolhaas book [*Delirious New York*, 1978] ... I don't know how many tourists now go to Coney Island, but I think they are starting to go again. Coney Island is being revived. What really bothers me, is I'm so aware of stuff like that. And did I block it out my mind because I wanted to do this. And I probably think that I probably did. Although it seems impossible to block it out. But I guess I thought well wanted to... there was no subway station in NY that was allowed to change the nature of the facade. We had this chance, that's it. But in order to do that I ignored the neighbourhood. There's a bad side and a good side. The bad side maybe wins here. The mistake maybe wins. Does the neighbourhood care? I don't see why they wouldn't. They realize that from Coney Island they see this...from where we live they see...

AF: They see the iron work of the bridge, I guess.

VA: I don't know. I want to say something, I'm not sure what it is. I just wish, I wish I could be aware of everything in time. And I wish that if I'm not aware of something, I ask myself questions, I ask myself enough questions that will make me aware. Because I really feel that the neighbourhood people really have a reason to resent us.

There were things at first, there were some things I could understand. At first we didn't want to use normal subway surface. We wanted to use mirrored. We thought you wouldn't even see it, You would see sky and you'd see buildings. But they gave us what I thought was a convincing reasons. They said as you know subway stations are probably some of the most interfered with and maligned places in New York, especially outdoor subway stations. So that they only have three kinds of subway station materials. And they have three kinds, because they always have to be ready to repair it if necessary. And we can't just do something specific to one station. And I might not have agreed with that but I could understand it. So I thought Okay let's try to make it. That didn't seem like, to be insistent on mirrored, just like a spoiled kid. But to insist on both sides, seemed to be a reasonable grown up say, let's have it both ways, not just one way.

AF: I'm kind of intrigued by second thoughts. So thinking about Graz, *Mur Island*. And you saying a while ago, about Munich, 'does it do enough? I don't know if it does…'

VA: It doesn't if it doesn't move. For me, if it doesn't move, it dies. Or it is sick for a while.

AF: So we're in Graz, and this island in the river, does become a public place. It's very active, they've kept it longer than they...

VA: Much, much longer time than it was supposed to be just for.... They probably thought it was going to be much more than the year, that Graz was the European cultural capital. They probably thought two years, three years... People seemed to use it. It got screwed up a little bit. In that, I don't know if after the first year or two, if it was ever used as an amphitheatre.

AF: They didn't seem to necessarily have any programming for it...

VA: No programming for it. It was, for the piece to be done, there was an organization called Graz 2003. Graz 2003 maybe came into existence in 2001, and went out of existence in 2004. So then there was nobody, supposedly who owned the island. That wasn't exactly true, because the cafe and bar was being rented by somebody from the city. But the city wasn't really taking care of it. Instead of being used as an amphitheatre, the amphitheatre was starting to be used as an outdoor cafe for the restaurant.

You know, it's what nine years later now, people in Graz seemed to have gotten kind of involved it in, so that they started this movement that it needs some renovation. And then the city thought, I'm not sure, (it's amazing how you hear two sides of every story). The city said we need to have theatre events, theatre events during the fall and winter. So we need some kind of canopy for the amphitheatre. Then we heard another version that the person who rents the cafe, thought he would get many more customers, I think I believe that story.

AF: What was paying the maintenance was the cafe.

VA: Yeah. And at first they were going to put a canopy. And I said look, I know that...

AF: Do you feel that you exert rights? Or, they can paint it how they want.

VA: You can't as a designer. It's very different. I mean the colours are as they were ... but I did get a letter, not from somebody who was 'responsible' for it now, but from somebody who was involved when the project began, and they said, you know, they want to put this roof over it. And he said that doesn't seem right. And he was right, because the whole thing was about, was based on, here's a bowl, now there's a dome. But I can understand, to make the thing more useful, but then I wrote to them to say look, you don't have to do what we're suggesting. But give us a few weeks to come up with some solutions. And we did, and I don't know if they're going to be followed. But there were things that...there was a roof, that was sort of like these clouds, it would be away from the island, but then on lines of cable could pass over it, and it could be a retractable roof, they say now that they're going to consider what we're saying. But that is the thing about design.

AF: It belongs to somebody else.

VA: I guess they bought it. I mean how much it cost, it cost about $5M, so it was by far the most expensive project we ever did. What did we get? We got 5 per cent. So five per cent, break it down, 3 years, 4 years...but also we needed to work with a registered architect, in Graz, so we had to pay that, so that, you know, working on these projects, you know, you want them to be done.

AF: What it does in the city is significant, and what it does is still happening.

VA: Most of it is hearsay for me. I think that I did go back within the first year, and at that time it was really bustling. But I'm sure it's not bustling anymore. I'm sure the cafe is used more than anything else. I did...see some stuff from Graz newspapers was translated for me, where it seemed like people were saying we need to keep the *Mur Island* going. I did talk to some people. I was very struck when it was first built, and this was even before the cafe part of it was built, people took walks on the island. And I was very struck that especially older people… I always think we lose older people, maybe some younger people become fans of us, I don't know if older people... But older people here seem to enjoy it. I felt that in some way, I don't know if public space is something that you have to 'get'. But when they were in the bowl part, and they walked, and suddenly, they looked up, and there was this dome around them, they started to laugh.

And what I said before that laughing proves you may have a second thought. It seemed that maybe they didn't exactly get what I got, but something, they felt some kind of change. It seemed like they felt some kind of change. When it was first built, a local pastry shop made a little pastry called the Acconci island. It was this little twist, you know. So it did seem, you know, and I wanted to, you know, I don't expect, you know, some everyday person who possibly was seventy or eighty years old at the time, laughed, I don't expect that person to say 'oh this is a dome that, this is a bowl that twists to become a dome...'. But they recognize something. That they felt at least some kind of change.

AF: Also in the grid of the city which is a very uniform grid. Your passage is a diagonal across the grid. The thing that I noticed, visiting, is that it's a shortcut. All of a sudden there is this new angle across the grid.

VA: And this was something, that I started to insist on, but they wouldn't let us do. It's too near an already existing bridge, and I thought, what we proposed first, let's make it where there's no bridge. I thought that then, if we did that, then the land on either side of this new bridge might be more, it might fit into what you want, it might be more developable or something. So I don't like the idea, and we gave in. I can't stand that later I realize I didn't fight.

AF: Every architect gives way. It's about picking your battles, and saying well if we do that, that blows it. I'm going to stand on that one...

VA: Well the battle I picked was maybe it's better to be there than if it wasn't. But I don't know if that's true. There was already a bridge, that close.

AF: I have a question about aesthetics. *Mur Island* has got this particular aesthetic, looking at your work in general, I think the aesthetic is not the concern.

VA: It comes from something else.

AF: Maybe someone in the office had this knack, or craft. Or I look at the models, today it's plasticine, tomorrow it's a nice CAD rendering. And the issue really is

what it does rather than what it looks like.

VA: That is true. I wanted to, and when I say I wanted to have some kind of function, I don't just mean you could walk where you couldn't walk before, but I hope it has a function of something that can be transformed into something else, I would rather now do stuff that can, that ideally can be stuff that people can change. I don't think we've done that enough yet. The Indianopolis thing [*Swarm Street*] is a very small inroad towards that. But I want people to take architecture in their own hands. I don't want people to be subservient to architecture, I hope people can shape architecture. I want people to shape architecture.

AF: Questions of style, questions of aesthetics, the questions we were talking about earlier, the visual, these are things that get in the way of what it does, ultimately?

VA: I hope they don't. I hope the look, I mean I hope, the way this project started was let's make a theatre. I wanted one thing to turn into another. Doesn't exactly turned into another, you have to take this walk, but I wanted everything to come from a bowl. Turn the bowl over, it's a dome. If one thing was on one side, and one thing was on another, there's a twist in the middle, that's the playground. So it started with that... it didn't exactly start with that. The way we started, thinking we're doing something on the water, they're asking us to do what they called a person-made island. At first I thought it shouldn't have bridges. It should have an underground passage. So that, this is an island. We couldn't do the underground bridges, because I didn't realize how shallow the water was.

I didn't want to make a place where people have to crawl. I can't remember what the reason was. But we couldn't go down under the river bed. Anyhow, it was an important project for us, because we needed a lot of engineering consultation, we had to account for things like the 50-year flood, the 100-year flood. Which could be that there was a flood two years ago, and there could be a flood now, and there's not another flood for another 90 years, another 98 years. So everything floats.

I mean sometimes we do start at a wrong direction. I love the idea of an island of water. And I don't know what to do with it, an island of water. We tried, can we make an island based on a whirl pool. Can we, now I don't remember what other kinds of water things we did. But it was getting us nowhere. We only got somewhere when we started to think of conventions. When we started to think of what they asked us to do. A theatre, a cafe and a playground. So therefore, it was easy to start with the theatre, because that's a very conventional shape. Some kind of bowl, bowl becomes dome, in between becomes playground.

AF: It comes to some of the questions I have about architectural processes. The program is what architects talk about. So this is the program, responding to the program.

VA: I mean what interests us in responding to a program, is that the program, I don't

know if this is true, but what I was going to say, the program usually involves something that people are going to use. So the idea, we do think of a peopled space, so that we can take hints from the program, we like to double the program, or multiply the program, we like it not to have just a single program.

AF: Earlier you were talking about Jasper Johns, about language, and process. The program is language, isn't it? You can <u>play</u> with the program.

VA: I really, what I know how to do is use language. I mean probably, the grounding of all my stuff, I think I like playing with words. For example, this project, was a little while ago now, two or three years, we were asked to this invited competition, for a museum in Perm, in Russia. I went to see the site. The museum was on level ground, but there was a slope next to it. So when we started the project, I said I think we have to pay attention to the slope. Let's think of the slope as the call of the wild. The museum is on the flatland, on the plateau. But the slope is nearby. The museum can't ignore the slope. So that the museum starts on the flatland, but now let's build our museum on the slope. So it starts on the flatland, it goes down the slope, and it ends up partially in the water. And it turned out I think they asked ten people at least two or three others responded with that slope too. It's one of those competitions that nobody won. That happens a lot. We got an honourable mention.

AF: You said to me that it's not always that the right projects come up, that are worth to be doing. What's a wrong project.

VA: What's a wrong project? If a project was given to us, or even if a project was given to you, it's not exactly given to you, you can lose it. I'm trying to think now...I know we've rejected projects. We've certainly rejected possibilities of entering certain competitions.

AF: That we can't respond to this program.

VA: It's too many restrictions, but the restrictions are, they usually are, it seems like they want something that's so definitively in one direction, that it makes us think... I don't know if we can play with this.

AF: Back to language and the program, the experience that I have, is often designers and architects see language as part of the selling of the project, and not part of the source of the project. Where your work, you say take the program, where can this go, where can we change this, where can we shift it, or unfix it? Because a program is about trying to fix some kind of set of conditions. And the response seems to be about trying to unfix...

VA: Right now we're about to start working on and it's admittedly a public art project, it's in Washington DC again we're not the only people, I think four or five people were picked, there's a kind of hollow in a building, and they want this hollow in a building, people can kind of enter this hollow part and they want it to be a place for a time piece.

And that seemed general enough for us. But we're thinking, we don't know how to do this. I would love us to do how can we make this space filled with dots, filled with thick air, and how can that thick air start to fill time. I have no idea, no idea how. So yes, you could do thick air virtually, but this has to be something where you're walking through time. You're walking in the middle of time, you know. Time was like tiny flies, you know. But we have until August.

AF: It's the kind of sources that are in the language, that are in the imagination.

VA: Very much.

AF: It's not material. Like, 'we'll build it out of aluminum…'

VA: It's never that. And sometimes I feel I don't think of materials quick enough.

AF: Does that confound your colleagues?

VA: They're all architects, none of them are registered architects yet. But that's a big difference with people ten years ago and now. Then a lot of people who worked for us didn't care about becoming registered architects. Now, everyone wants to become a registered architect. Also a change of money time, from a lack of money time, I think. This is an open competition. There's an open competition for a place called *Freshkills* in Staten Island to form a garbage dump. They want to turn it into a park. We're definitely going to enter that. That deadline is coming closer and closer in July. We've worked, at least theoretically, in garbage dumps before. One in Israel, and one in Holland. But they both were theoretical projects.

AF: One was a floating...

VA: I liked that. But here, at least in the beginning, the thing about a garbage dump, is that it really does eventually change. Because it releases methane gas, etc...so we want to put something like a Fuller dome, not quite that, so that you're on this almost like you're based on a structural system that has a lot of different kinds of pathways, maybe you could eventually go down through part of the original dump. We don't want to plant something. We want some in-between place. Between this earth that's covering the garbage dump, and I know we can't be walking on air, but instead of having trees, or stuff like anything that a park would have, can they be almost be a tree pocket, almost.

AF: A burrowing down through the layers of the dump?

VA: It's almost like having some things above the dump, but very island like. Above and then maybe something below. We need to start very seriously talking about it this week. Projects do come from, and I can't say no other firms work this way. Are we a firm? I don't know. Can you be a non-money making firm? I might start a project off with words, with a general idea. But then we talk a lot. We talk a lot. So it probably doesn't necessarily lose that beginning point. There are, I'm sure there've been some projects that

go in another direction once we start to talk. But at least if it does keep that general beginning idea, it changes a lot with the different people talking. That's why I bring up the, I think collisions are just as important as collaboration. More important. You get to a new idea. You get to a new idea that none of us would have thought about, individually.

AF: Do you think a project that is sitting on a garbage dump is, there's more potential for collision, there's more potential for interesting things than things that are, where things like the Graz island that is a pavilion, framed in an arts and culture context. Or even the *Storefront*, which has that pavilion aspect to it.

VA: Yeah. The strange thing about this *Freshkills* competition, is that something's already been done for *Freshkills*. It's very, very basic. A landscape architect did it. But what they calling this stage now...but that was just a kind of rehabilitation project. And now they're calling this project, strangely, an art project. I'm not sure why. So they're saying, you know, it's open to architects, designers, and I'm not sure why.

AF: If its an art project you're not messing with the systems in some ways.

VA: Maybe you're right, maybe they're thinking now this is the entertainment part.

AF: Maybe it's that they have to find ways for it to be about something else now. Do you turn it back in on itself, and say no, what is the experience in this site?

VA: Because in the ones in the past, and at least until a while ago, both of the Breda project in Holland and the Hiriya garbage dump, which is somewhere between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, we tried to find ways to, uses for the methane gas, I don't know if we have that occasion here.

AF: And I think in your work, you go where the thinking takes you. Whether it's being a writer, strictly speaking a performance artist, public works, participatory installations, architecture. The thing that strikes me is there is a consistency of purpose, people say Acconci was the guy who did this, now he does that, and that doesn't make sense. It makes perfect sense.

VA: I hope it does. Yes. I mean I've always felt that I'm committed to such... I don't know if I ever want to say I believe, but that I'm committed in such and such a thing. But then times change, and maybe I need to reconsider.

AF: If the opening goes somewhere else. That 'where you can do something' is now somewhere else.

VA: I hope you can be critical in any field you're in. That you can be in the field, but criticize it at the same time. So that that may make you change, or it may make the field eventually change.

AF: Do you think that the field of architecture, the field of design, that you're leaning up against...when I'm writing about your work I'm using the term 'unfixing'.

VA: I like that term.

AF: In the sense that there's a process, the process is about fixing. Everything is going to be about fixing. Unfixing is to loosen, and you say I don't know if that one worked, well, it's because the process is always going to be to tighten it up again as soon as you let it go.

VA: Well we hope we have some control over something that can't be tightened up. I have done things that I have realized God, I should have thought more, so that I did object to some of the things. The worst thing I think that happens where we're working on a project, is that somebody says oh, this reminds me of such and such a project, referring to something we did. So I say, let's try to change it. Which might not be the best attitude in the world. There's nothing wrong with doing, maybe a second version of something that you did a year ago, might lead to yes, maybe it's a second version, but it leads to some new possibilities. Sometimes I wonder if I do have too short of an attention span.

AF: In your work, there's an interest in the intimate relationship of the body to space, or body to space to time as unfixed. Which is fundamentally different from master works of architecture and main currents of design, where visuality, monumentality, is the primary experience.

VA: Monumentality is a pet hate for me.

AF: So if we are interested in how technology fixes time and space, and our relation to it, we can see with your work a desire to fish out all that is unfixed, all the unfixed moments, as the moments and dynamics in which there is the most at play and the most to be revealed.

VA: Yeah, again, I mean I see...technologies change. Technologies lead to other technologies.

AF: …the dynamic of the built world, then. As opposed to the dynamic of the world in space and time. You seem to always return us to that space where that's the primary experience.

VA: Loosening up is much more...in some ways I wish we had the chance, we could demand it... That every few years, we could go to a built project and add something, take something away, change it. That's why the notion of...I know what, I don't know if I can say 'we' here, but I know that the most important thing to me is a thing that is always changing, once people are using it, and I really don't know how to do that yet. I want people to be influenced by the space we make and that they're in, but now that they're

influenced by it, can they also change it? So that maybe, it starts to go away from us.

AF: So they're not being trained down to the works function?

VA: Maybe we can do that. Maybe we can do that in the garbage dump. And again, I was so struck, when we did those two theoretical garbage dump projects in 1999, the fact that the presence of methane gas really is making this ground move. Maybe you don't see it in front of you, but...

AF: It also seems to be a thing of <u>not</u> making things user-friendly. User-friendly or WYSIWYG, these are terms that come out of an efficiency paradigm.

VA: It's almost, can I make them intriguing puzzles. I would love a space, and again, the only way I think about a space, in the middle of time, that can this be something that a person might want to...rather, it's not that I don't want people to use it, but I hope they can use it in a way that they think maybe I can do something to it. At the same time that it's letting me do something. I don't want people to be forced by something, but I want it to be a <u>junction of person and place and time</u>. We haven't reached that, but a lot of people are thinking that way. But these are architects who don't think about building much.

AF: It's an intriguing possibility.

VA: It's almost like, can a project we do be a field for action for other people? But they're not just living off...it's not a sport that has definitive rules. But even a sport can be done in different ways.

AF: I think, as you talk about the work, and you're talking about Munich or Graz, that maybe it 'got away' from you? It is the attempt to create that space where there is that kind of multiplicity...and eventually there is going to be an attempt to 'fix' it, in the sense we've been talking about. So failure is inevitable, and out of every failure there is some kind of possibility. I mean Graz was a success, but it leaves you questioning.

VA: Sure. Yes. Do you find the projects that you do tend to take so much longer than you thought they would? Graz, which is the biggest project we did, was probably one of the fastest. It had to be built in 2003. I don't think we began doing it before 2001, maybe 2000. So three years is sometime, but we've done things that have taken nine years, 10 years, 12 years, and by that time, our ideas are different, and we can't exactly change it.

AF: It's the time frame of public works. Do you think of doing pavilion type projects? The Serpentine pavilions for example?

VA: They've never asked us. I'm always really disappointed.

AF: Generally extremely formal.

VA: I just saw some photos of this year's which is a collaboration between Herzog and de Meuron and Ai Wei Wei, supposedly the Beijing Olympic stadium was started by an Ai Wei Wei idea. It's potentially interesting. They've tried to uncover all the remains of former pavilions that are underground.

AF: Foundation points?

VA: And I know Ai Wei Wei somewhat, and he wrote me a note saying this, and it was like I thought gee what he's showing so far just seems like remains. But I don't know if anybody would even know of them, would even recognize them as remains. But then yesterday, one of my former Brooklyn College students said what about this pavilion? And she had found a picture of this new pavilion. It's really kind of interesting. There's a flat, I don't know if it's a circle or an ellipse. Possibly, I don't know if you could step up on it. But let's say it's table height. Then there's stairs, so you go down, and you're under this roof, which isn't a bad idea. I'm still not sure what you come upon when you're underground.

AF: There's an interesting juxtaposition with pavilion architecture, those pavilion spaces, where, it's a specific kind of very simple space or program. Compared to working on a garbage dump. Maybe the pavilion should be on the garbage.

VA: And also, I don't think a pavilion has to be temporary. We've had one or two invitations to do an art fair pavilion which would only be on for five days. It was suggested, can we float something on the hill. I would love to do the Serpentine pavilion.

AF: I was thinking that yesterday, though some of them are way overbuilt and all about engineering or material conceit, rather than ideas.

VA: I don't know what kind of budgets they have, do you? I have no idea.

A last question is to touch on 'I hate monumentality'. That would be a good place to stop, wouldn't it? To me it has a connection to our discussion about visuality.

VA: To me, monumentality is a particular kind of visual, in that you're smaller than the stuff. So it's there to overwhelm you. Something can be big, but maybe broken, so that you can be between it. I guess I think that this is what public space is. It used to be that you had to bow down. Or, even churches are monumental. It's about God. I always remember, when I first started doing public stuff, you have to take the monument and break it down. You have to take the monument and bring it down, so now people can take a monument which by its nature is probably vertical, make it horizontal, and make people walk all over it. Or use it, turn it into a kind of hill town. So now you can inhabit it. It has to be subjected to people in part. So I did start thinking of that relatively early.

AF: It seems to be a thing between 'landscape architecture' and 'building architecture.'

VA: I think buildings should melt into landscapes, and landscape can maybe develop into something like buildings. The nice thing about a building as landscape is that you walk through a forest. You walk in between trees. You're not kept at... the traditional notion of monument is the thing nobody pays any kind of attention to, the guy on a horse on a pedestal, the pedestal is already bigger than the person is. And I did start thinking of public space and of architecture as, let's walk into, through, across the monument. Let's bring the monument back to the ground we're standing on. Once it's in the ground, old monuments do get covered with greenery. That's what nature does, it takes it back.

AF: Saying that you want people to be able to use, change, shift, and completely morph a space that you make is the furthest thing from monument in a way.

VA: Sure. Have you ever been to Berlin? Have you seen the Eisenman. It's not bad. You hate it?

AF: It does both things. Like the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Theatrically it's brilliant, and then there is in the theatricality something disturbing. It's taken everything that sculpture can do, and plays with that for its theatre. A conundrum of architecture. I think the Eisenman is unique.

VA: It's interesting. I've only been there once. But children seem to use it as a game. Which is really incredible. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I know somebody said to me once wow...

AF: It should have a security guard.

VA: But I don't think so at all… Originally it was supposed to be by Eisenman and Richards Serra and I don't know why Serra dropped out. Because basically it's the same project.

AF: We should stop. We can return to some questions.

VA: There's a novel that J.G. Ballard wrote, in the 60s, called *Atrocity Exhibition*. There's a lot of good Ballard stuff. But the San Francisco magazine called *Research* put out another edition of the *Atrocity Exhibition* in the nineties. The way Ballard did it, he took the original note, and did marginal notes on every page. And the marginal notes were on the side. So it was like this was a second chance to do the same novel, in a way. It was really interesting. I like second thoughts. And also having them both there at the same time, it's nice.