

February 28. Donation \$2.

*The Joke Show: Jokes and Their Relationship to Art* (An open show for the first 35 people who call in). Panel moderated by semiotician Marshall Blonsky with artist Beth Haggart, comedian Jeff Litschultz, performance artist Michael Smith, and other special guests. Sunday, May 16. Donation \$2.

*Tabu: Women Painting, Subversion* (Organized by KK Kozik, Emily Cheng, KK Kozik, Marilla Palmer, Lawrence Stone, Nicola Tyson, and Lisa Yuskavage). Panel moderated by Ellen Salpeter. Back Room. John Berens. Sunday, June 20. Donation \$2.

*The Next Generation: Kids Art Project (KAP)* (Organized by Paul Campbell and Roberta Valentine). Works by over twenty-five kids and twenty-five artists). Sunday, July 11.

*Approaching History* (Organized by 80/10history). Aysha Abraham, Todd Ayoung, Stephanie Basch, Neill Bogan, Jim Costanzo, Betty-Sue Lertz, Flash Light, Kara Lynch, Nick Manhattan, Jayne Pagnocco, Lisa Prown, Megan Pugh, Greg Sholette, Tess Timoney, and Sarah Vogwell. Panel moderated by Mark O'Brien with Dan Wiley, Sherrill Wilson, Ruth Liberman, and Charles Mee. Sunday, September 19. Donation \$2.

*Four Walls Benefit Sale and Exhibition* at David Zwirner Gallery. Exhibition of approximately 200 artists. All tickets \$50. Every ticket holder gets a piece of art. October 28-30.

*Fair of A Jewish Planet: Let My People Show* (Organized by Rhonda Lieberman and Cary Leibowitz). ("Jews, honorary Jews, Jew lovers and wannabees, come and be counted. RSVP a creative fax"). Back room: Rosie Cutler. Sunday, November 21. Donation \$2.

1994

*The Beauty Show* (Organized by James Siena). Andrew Moszynski, Dan Schmidt, James Siena, Jessica Stockholder, Elaine Tin Nyo, and Stephan Westfall. Sunday, January 23.

*Positions: Attitudes and Arrangements* (Organized by Perry Bard). Perry Bard, Rochelle Feinstein, Glenn Ligon, Simon Leung, Gary Stephan, Diane Torr, Lydia Yee. Sunday, February 27. Donation \$2.

## Four Walls GENERATION ds Art Project)

The Adults:	
Mariano Aranda	Takeshi Murakami
L.C. Armstrong	Antonia Miki
Mark Ballou	Roberta Valentine
John Berens	Kate H. Ward
Marcelle Brown	Mark Krotzer
Megan Cash	Julius Koppelman
David Cowan	Jess Nispen
Matthew Cutler	Kurt Pryzbilla
Brave Ferguson	Ignacio Platas
Paul Gershuler	Ginny Towne
Genia Gould	Kate Towne
Whitney Gould	Fred Valentine
Alexandra Guitier	

with Roberta Valentine  
with special thanks to Arthur Donowski  
Sat. July 11, 1993  
St. Brooklyn, NY 11222  
Discussion at 7:30 P.M.  
limited



A Discussion with

Hal Foster

Renée Green

Mitchell Kane

Miwon Kwon

John Lindell

Helen Molesworth

## On Site Specificity

**Helen Molesworth:** The editors of DOCUMENTS were recently struck by the international art scene's dependence on site-specific art work. Exhibitions like "Sonsbeek '93" and ones in Firminy and Antwerp come to mind, as well as their North American counterparts, Spoleto and "Sculpture Chicago."\*

Increasingly, it appears to be a dominant mode of art production. However, many of the exhibitions and the works they contain seem to have quite a few contradictory impulses. First, whatever the auspices of most of these exhibitions, all of the artists still retain an immediately recognizable signature style. Apparently, the specificity of any given site is not enough to challenge this age-old tradition. The second paradox is that even though the historical legacies of institutional critique from both the late 1970s (Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Hans Haacke) and the 1980s (Silvia Kolbowski, Louise Lawler) set the stage for current site-specific work, much of this work has dropped a direct engagement with institutional critique. The third problematic is the tendency for artists to rely on a methodological paradigm of ethnography or anthropology. Many of the artists visit sites, do research, and then act as outside commentators and/or translators of the site for both the people in the community and an art

world audience. While many of the individual projects in these exhibitions are interesting, the various institutional umbrellas under which they are organized is disturbing. Given these issues it seemed important to gather both artists and critics to discuss this phenomenon.

**Mitchell Kane:** In "Sculpture Chicago" some of the works are very interesting, but the organizing institution has come up with an overriding rhetoric about what the exhibition is supposed to do, which distracts from what the actual art works might do.

**Renée Green:** Despite some curators' idealistic intentions, overriding themes are often proposed. In some instances invited artists witness a sort of "curatorial domination." But it is necessary to analyze the institutional and curatorial aims of these exhibitions. What are the stated intentions of the curators and the institution? What intentions are left unspoken? What kinds of institutions are the exhibitions held in—museums, housing projects, city streets? What sort of sponsorship do they receive?

**Hal Foster:** What do you mean by "curatorial domination?"

**Green:** I mean it to relate to Mitchell's

\*—"Sonsbeek '93," curated by Valerie Smith, June 5 - September 26, 1993, Arnhem, Netherlands.  
—"Project Unité," curated by Yves Apetitallot, June 1 - September 30, 1993, Firminy, France.  
—"On Taking a Normal Situation and Retranslating it into Overlapping and Multiple Readings of Conditions Past and Present," curated by Iwona Blazwick, Yves Apetitallot, and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, September 18 - November 28, 1993, Antwerp, Belgium. This exhibition was part of the Antwerp '93 celebration.  
—"Places with a Past," curated by Mary Jane Jacob, May 24-August 4, 1991.  
—"Culture in Action: A Program of Sculpture Chicago," curated by Mary Jane Jacob, ongoing.

comment about the rhetoric of the institution. The curator perhaps works with the intention of being subversive, but they can still be perceived as being aligned with the institution. I realize the phrase may seem extreme, but often the curator proposes a theme that they want the artist to fit in. This can become very constraining.

**Foster:** Is it always a theme rather than a problem or a method?

**Green:** Yes, a theme, sometimes posed as a problem, but a theme nonetheless.

**Foster:** Mitchell, what do you think is in it for the institution?

**Kane:** I really don't know, but institutions who do work for the public know that they can get funding.

**Foster:** But why is this attractive to funders?

**Kane:** Because both funders and institutions think this notion of the public includes everybody. The curators in these situations tend to be more utopic than the artists. They still believe that art can do this "avant-garde thing," and they anticipate that socially oriented art will attract more participation from the public. For example, if a work is placed in a community, the institution may think: "Well, now we don't have to get them through the museum door, we just have to get them to appreciate that this activity is art."

**Miwon Kwon:** I've had two thoughts about why the institution might be invested in the idea of site-specificity.

One has to do with the unacknowledged projection of the notion of originality, which to a great extent has been displaced from the art work to the site. There is an attempt to articulate a place as having a specific and unproblematic identity, often by engaging artists who are involved with identity issues. This is especially interesting in relation to discussions in postmodern geography and urban spatial theory. These discourses argue that the disappearance of the uniqueness of places is a direct result of, or a pathological symptom of, late capitalist expansion—that every place is like every other place. In a strange way artists are being asked to make sites specific through their work in an attempt to counter this sameness of places.

**Kane:** Can you elaborate a bit? Because some of the methods institutions use are manifestations of the most cliché and simplistic level of what a site is supposed to represent. For instance, if you deal with an urban center you have to deal with minorities and poor people; if you're in the south it will deal with slavery; in the southwest it will deal with ceramics and adobe and the Native American population.

**Green:** These ideas come from the curator. In some instances the curator attempts to anticipate the work of the artist based on the history of the site, and the work and identity of the artist. Often when the artist visits the site the curator will suggest things having to do with communities: "I think maybe you would like to do something on this neighborhood." For example, Fort Greene in New York or Chicago's

Southside, a black "community," or a site associated with slavery.

**Kane:** This seems to get back to the question of a site having a stereotypical identity.

**Kwon:** Well, it's not just about stereotypes and clichés. There is a certain focus on the marginal community. There is a desire to engage the "marginal" as a means to give identity to places, because these areas are often automatically linked to a suppressed history and perceived to "hold" some source of authenticity in relation to identity.

**John Lindell:** We are talking about addressing these communities, but we are addressing them as outsiders. And often it is the usual cast of art world characters.

**Kane:** But often the artists try to collaborate with local people.

**Lindell:** You can do that. Speaking of Gran Fury's works, we've faced the problem of, if we don't do a project then nothing happens; but if we do accept, then how do we address this problem of being an import? In addition, given what you say about all urban spaces looking the same, a lot of these art shows all look the same for every city because the same names are imported.

**Kane:** How have you resolved this problem in your work?

**Lindell:** We decided to be frank and articulate these issues and address

them to the museum. In Montreal our project tried to deal with how we as Americans were addressing Montreal, so we had a discussion with various groups including ACT-UP Montreal. They had great hostility to our being "the AIDS group" invited in lieu of a local group. Ironically, they too are an anglophile institution exported from New York to Montreal.

**Molesworth:** I wouldn't want to rule out the possibility that people from outside a given place or community can go into that place or community and say something useful or interesting. I'm more concerned with the notion that artists are set up in a purely reactive position, that they are asked to come in and react to ideas and sites provided by someone else. My question is, what does that do to the nature of a critical art practice if its content is always pre-established?

**Green:** Speaking for my own practice I don't see that an invitation to work in a "foreign" location means the content of the work is pre-established. There are aspects of the work which come from a dialogue with previous work that I and others have done, and this doesn't necessarily have to mean the invocation of a signature style.

**Foster:** So far in this conversation we have played "get the curator." Why not exploit the guilty conscience of the institution? For that matter, what is wrong with the desire to open up the institution to other communities? There are repressed histories that are sited in certain ways, and certain communities, not often acknowledged by

museums, may have special access to them.

**Green:** I'm not interested in setting up a "get the curator" situation. Rather I'd like to analyze the ways all of the actors (curators, artists) are implicated.

**Foster:** It's a contract between the artist and the institution, isn't it, Renée, one that the artist signs?

**Green:** It's a contract, but I think a more binding contractual agreement exists between the curator and the institution. So a critique of the role of the curator is also one of the institution. Obviously, it is very important for other histories to emerge and that is part of what my work tries to do. But the "mission" of the museum to reach out to "other" audiences is open to critique.

**Kane:** In a certain sense many of these exhibitions that we are referring to are framed as experiments which use cer-

tain types of histories and locations, but whose end products seem already pre-determined. Finally, all we get is a vague record of whether or not these exhibitions as a whole are more interesting than any of the individual installations.

**Foster:** So the primary work is the institutional project? It is the container and the art is content? Is the art partly or mostly there to facilitate different contracts among various communities, civic agencies, and art sponsors?

**Kane:** Well, most viewers don't get to experience these specific sites, so the exhibition exists through gossip and documentation.

**Lindell:** I'd like to elaborate on that. What's interesting is that the primary site is no longer the physical site. It is the event and everything around it, because no one sees these exhibitions. In the case of Gran Fury, the actual work in the 1990 Venice Biennale was

not the piece; it was the national newspaper coverage that we got, which is a far greater audience than museum-goers. It seems that artists can manipulate the baggage around the project as the real site, and the initial/physical project is just a blasting-off point. I think artists need to design projects specifically to generate these media spaces.

**Foster:** It seems there are two points here. One is the question of reception—that the work exists in its ramifications. This is somewhat true of any exhibit but maybe more so in these instances. The other point is the problem that the real work, as Mitchell suggested, is somehow done beforehand—that the projects serve partly as pretexts for other initiatives. What, for example, was the real stake in "Sculpture Chicago" if the art work, important as it was, was only one level? Did the sponsors want to be re-positioned in relation to other institutions and/or to the general public?

**Kane:** They wanted to be repositioned with everything. Many artists came and did an incredible amount of research, networking with various projects in the Chicago metropolitan area that nobody knew about—people connected to science labs, environmental groups, etc. For the most part these alliances were formed independently of the institution. Yet the institution will ultimately take credit for them and the documentation of the project will have a list of all of the things that made the overall project successful. It's like basic marketing. You need numbers to show how well you reach. And reaching is the

name of the game for a lot of these institutions.

**Lindell:** I think the "42nd Street Art Project" shows very obvious goals. There were three people in charge: Tibor Kalman, the head of the design firm M & Company, Cee Brown from the non-profit public arts organization Creative Time, and Rebecca Robertson from the 42nd Street Development Project. Clearly that project is using names in art, fashion, and graphics to hype up the neighborhood and to get free press in the newspapers proclaiming the turn around of 42nd Street. I raise that example because the goals are clearer. It is not related to a cultural institution trying to increase its market share, but rather realtors trying to change the image of a zone for redevelopment.

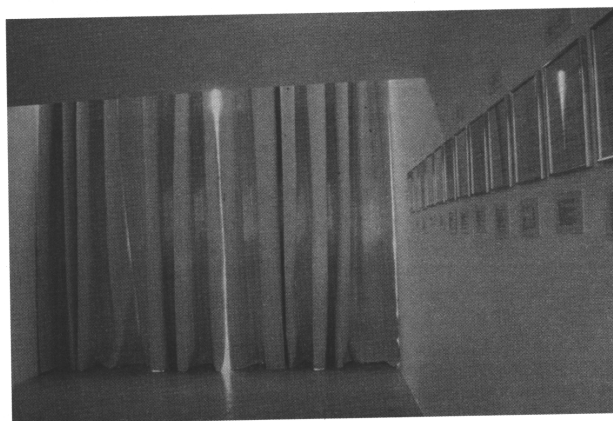
**Kane:** Thinking in terms of institutions and markets might be the most logical end, but I want to go back to something that Hal hinted at earlier—the accountability of the artist, and his or her prerogative to say no to participating in these projects.

**Foster:** As well as the possibility that the artist can transform these projects somewhat. The purist approach is not very helpful. One has to engage these situations dialectically.

**Green:** I agree with the possibility of intervention. Although waging an incisive critique from within is very difficult and prone to a kind of failure. Yet it's possible and interesting to work with and acknowledge the likelihood of failure.



Le Corbusier, Unité d'habitation, Firminy, France.



Christian Philipp Müller, Confort individuel / Individual comfort, for "Project Unité," Mixed media installation, 1993. (Photo: Kreimeier / Blümlein)

**Lindell:** Choosing to accept or not...We all have limited data right off the bat. Halfway through the project you often realize, "Oh, *this* is the real agenda." It seems important to try and acknowledge at every step what has happened to you. Back to the 42nd Street project. There was one project by Bureau that was pulled at the last minute for dealing with the U.S. sailor, Allen Schindler, murdered in Japan. 42nd Street is traditionally a neighborhood for visiting sailors. But this project could not be used in a show trying to fluff up the image of 42nd Street. It seems important to try and add an issue in order to expand the frame of the exhibition. In this case, first, to ignore the needs of real estate development, and later to expose the reasons for the piece's cancellation. (The project was subsequently funded by Creative Time.)

**Green:** It's very important to question the premise of an exhibition, to try and make work that is not reductive. I don't want to make art do the task of social work, when people who are trained in those fields are obviously better equipped for that task.

**Molesworth:** That question seems to become particularly acute when works that are made for one site travel to another site and are exhibited as an "autonomous" artwork. The work has this ridiculous burden of functioning both as a travel guide to and social work from another city.

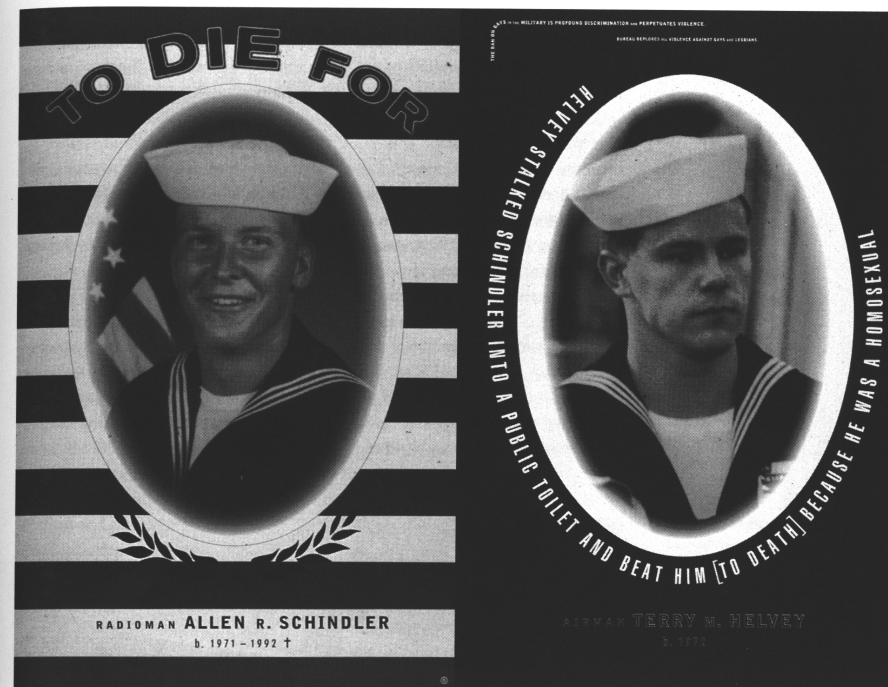
**Green:** I don't have a problem with work made in one place moving to another site where it might resonate

differently; work that includes acknowledgments of its movement and the tensions between locations. Maybe the idea of site-specificity should be thought of as *site-conscious*, because the work is always a continuation of your other work.

**Kane:** I welcome the contradictions of the work moving to a new site.

**Molesworth:** I appreciate John's idea that the site is actually all the ancillary points around the site where the work can occur in a productive way. But I still find the work to be burdened by its sense of an obligation to give information.

**Kwon:** How then is site-specific work different from other art work that travels and gets re-contextualized in different group or theme shows? Silvia Kolbowski is working with an interesting notion of generic installations that have specific transferability. In other words, the notion of specificity is not attached to the site itself, the site does not determine the work. Instead the work predicts and self-inscribes its future transportation to other sites. It's a provocative proposition but it completely confounds me, because the very idea of moving a site-specific work, in a way, is to destroy it. Certainly Richard Serra and many artists of his generation who initiated site-specific work thought so. The very term implies for me the inseparability of the site and the work. So I would still have to question how and to what ends does the critique inherent in the original work get mobilized or transformed once it starts traveling and being recontextualized.



Bureau, In Memory of Allen R. Schindler, Poster project sponsored by Creative Time, Inc., 1993. (Photo: courtesy Bureau)

**Molesworth:** I think the show held at American Fine Arts, Co. "What Happened to the Institutional Critique?" is a good example of this problem. All of those works had been site-specific works for other places....

**Green:** My work in that show was made specifically for American Fine Arts.

**Molesworth:** Your piece had to do with your experience in Firminy.

**Green:** The work at AFA was the sec-

ond part of a work entitled *Secret* which began in Firminy, at the Unité exhibition. I wanted to use the AFA show as a venue to explore issues that were dormant in the Firminy piece. It attempts a self-conscious questioning of the Unité and the AFA show.

**Molesworth:** But in that show AFA's status as an institution was erased. It couldn't even be addressed as an institution or a site, because all of the transported works were addressing other sites. The gallery became a com-



pletely benign space designed solely for the exhibition of art work. The institution closest to home could not be critiqued, while those farther away could.

**Lindell:** For all site-specific work, there are two audiences, the art community and those unsuspecting people who might see the project. It seems to me that the audience at American Fine Arts is actually the primary audience being addressed by those works, even in their original context. There is a gesture toward making public or site-specific work, but in fact it's all ultimately produced for the art world. Also in terms of my own work, homosexual desire is a site and the gay world at

large is a site. Again I'm trying to loosen up the notion of a physical site: a site may be a group of people, a community.

**Kwon:** I often get confused here because there are very different definitions for site-specificity operative in art and in architecture. In architecture the term, which had great currency in past decades in relation to contextualism and regionalism, assumes a direct and intimate relationship to the physical attributes of places. It expresses a certain sensitivity to what is physically present in the immediate environment—climatic, topographical, cultural—and these factors are not only

inflected in the work but in a sense *produce* it. So as much as I can embrace the idea that a site need not be attached to a place, I still feel that a place, understood in an empirical sense, cannot be overlooked or dismissed.

**Lindell:** I was also trained in architecture and it's curious to me that your take on it is focused on physical sites. Because in architecture the specific sites, the buildings, are only learned through their documents—plans, models, photographs. You rarely get to see the buildings. So the real site for architecture students is books. The same is true with earthworks. Who has ever gone to see Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*? The real way I learned this was through ACT-UP demonstrations. They knew that the "real" demonstration was meaningless. The important question was, "How does it look on camera?"

**Kane:** This seems to intersect with the question of what is elitist and what is populist, in terms of trying to create a site and seeing who partakes of that site. Currently institutions want to use artists to help them reach the everyday. It's a tricky problem to establish a site that engages "Everyman on the street."

**Kwon:** It seems to me that institutional critique has become a genre and that museums, artists, and many critics have not quite accepted that. Critique is now desired by the museum.

**Foster:** What is displaced when the museum "commissions" such critique? Perhaps any self-understanding of its

own desires and interests? Is that why it does it—to *contain* critique?

**Kwon:** If the institution is so keen on engaging non-art world audiences while at the same time commissioning institutional critique works to do the job, does this indicate that the institution assumes a "public" that is inclined to be indifferent, if not antagonistic and critical of the institution? By showcasing works that present critical perspectives on the role and function of the museum, is the museum trying to say to the "general public": "We are self-aware, we are with you"? And by default, doesn't this automatically set up the artist as being spokesperson for the interests of the community that is thought to be the "public"?

**Molesworth:** Let's take Fred Wilson's piece at The Maryland Historical Society where he interjected everyday objects from slave life into the museum's permanent exhibitions, as an example. Did that work, which garnered very high praise from the art world press, attract anyone from Baltimore to the museum? Did it increase their market share or widen their public? Or was that piece done primarily for a New York art world audience?

**Green:** I didn't see that exhibition, but I think people come to museums and galleries when they feel there is a reason for them to be there, and when they are informed as to what is there for them.

**Kwon:** To keep with the example of Fred Wilson's project for a moment—his project was considered very suc-

Renée Green, *Import/Export Funk Office*, Mixed media installation, 1991-1993. (Photo: courtesy Pat Hearn Gallery)



cessful beyond the art context. It was seen to represent an African-American perspective on cultural and political history through art. The work was also received as an articulation of the nebulous idea of "African-Americaness."

**Foster:** But does he question his own authority to represent this perspective or articulate that idea? Often today a self-evidence is assumed in relation to the authorial position, on the basis of the identity of the artist (which is taken to be obvious or, again, self-evident) and/or on the basis of the do-goodism of the artist (when he or she plays the role of community historian, social worker.)

**Molesworth:** There is a tricky dynamic in place in terms of the ethnographic model in which if people of color, gay people, people whose identities have been overdetermined and overburdened by the institution, are sent into a site, they are somehow thought to be able to take up an ethnographic role without having to examine certain power relations. In addition, these artists go into these situations with an identity of an artist who "does critique," so the critique of the art work is assumed to preclude the necessity for any other form of critique. In other words, the critique is self-evident both because of the artist's identity and the type of work that they do.

**Kwon:** I think that site-specific work is a crossing of identity politics with institutional critique, and it positions certain artists as able to fill both roles. The notion of authenticity in relation to identity gets crossed with the notion of

the authenticity of the site.

**Molesworth:** Does that crossing possibly engender a less critical audience? There seems to be an expectation, a fantasy—if the artist and the community are somehow on the same plane, then the power relations of people speaking for others isn't there, and the information the viewer receives has a closer relationship to the "truth."

**Foster:** It is important to set this pseudo-ethnographic model in art practice in the context of other developments, for this model is also at work in criticism and history—in cultural studies and new historicism especially. Two important issues remain the authority of the artist or writer, and the displacement of the represented or written. In cultural studies, for example, authority is often disguised by the mantle of the fan. "I am one of you," says the critic. But often this identification, this alliance is a secret displacement: "I am one of you, but *you* are a critic like me, are an artist." Which is to say, "You like me are a subversive recoder of cultural signs or a critical historian of counter memories." This ideal image of the critic or artist is projected onto the audience or community, and whatever counts as politics locally maybe obscured by this projection.

**Kwon:** Many artists willingly align themselves with their audience, of being one with them, being a spokesperson. But on the other hand, when there is an attempt to develop a more critical practice, the collapse between the artist and the audience may be pushed on you by the institu-



Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*, Mixed media installation, 1992. (Photo: courtesy Metro Pictures)

tion or by the framing of an exhibition.

**Lindell:** I think part of the problem is our use of the word community. I say the gay community all the time, but there really isn't one. I'm supposed to represent a community that in fact doesn't exist. I'm an individual in relationship to a very conflicting group of sub-cultural people. This idea that we assign people to groups is false but still very operative. Once you acknowledge that question in your own mind, you can just wipe it out. But it is clear how people who are outsiders don't see this.

**Foster:** That is a case where you are identified—rightly or wrongly—with a community. The ethnographic position is a little different. It is one where you presume, or are asked, to mediate or be in-between different groups.

**Lindell:** I think the curator is the mediator and the artists are used as the fulcrum to get back into the community.

**Molesworth:** What Hal said about the collapse of the artist/ethnographer figure onto the audience made me rethink Danny Martinez's piece in the Whitney Biennial where this collapse is physi-



Gran Fury, Let Them Die in the Streets, Site-specific project at Petrosino Park, New York City, 1990. (Photo: courtesy Gran Fury)

cally marked, because the audience was forced to wear buttons that said, "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white." The status of identification between Martinez and the audience is quite clear here: There is a proliferation of himself onto many bodies and a simultaneous consolidation of those bodies into one. The piece maps how ethnography works as a methodology.

**Foster:** Did his piece consolidate bodies or colonize them?

**Molesworth:** I'm projecting a fantasy onto Martinez, that Martinez consolidates a community of people into a body that actually says what he wants

to say. I think this often happens in ethnography, where the ethnographer goes in and takes the documentation of a community and returns it, either in the guise of one native informant, or the community's discourse emerges from the mouth of the ethnographer.

**Foster:** But the community can ironize this incorporation. Perhaps that is a next step for such work.

**Lindell:** When you brought up fantasy it made me think that the artist who makes work about the social sphere, in terms of propaganda or whatever, is tied to Freud's theory of the artist as someone whose work is a fantasy about

reality. Because of the limited means of public art work, we will never have the budget of a major ad campaign. So in effect, anything we do is always simply a fantasy of how we would want to remake the world. It's only a dream for how to change the world.

**Kane:** I think a lot of public art projects get their inspiration from this idea. Perhaps the contradiction lies in the fact that most of the artists know it's a proposal and most of the institutions keep looking for the long term benefits.

## Looking Back at Parc de la Villette

1984 Interview with

**Bernard Tschumi**

Respondents:

**Christophe Giro**

**Bernard Tschumi**

**Ernest Pascucci**

Parc de la Villette, a 136 acre site of leisure and recreation located in the northeast corner of Paris, is not only one of the largest but probably the most talked about, argued over, and publicized urban design project of the late twentieth century. Ever since architect Bernard Tschumi won the international competition in the early 1980s with his radically untraditional master plan, Parc de la Villette has held a central position in the debates waged in the professional fields of architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning as well as in academic circles interested in the intersection of architectural theory, literary criticism, and philosophical discourse.

Heavily informed by poststructuralist theory, La Villette has been, above all, an attempt to undermine the existing cultural assumptions regarding the concept of a park, revealing the ways in which oppositions such as City and Nature, Work and Leisure, Architecture and Landscape, etc., operate as culturally-constructed ideologies. La Villette has tried, in concept, form, and materials, to embody the intellectual investigations already initiated in other disciplines on the politics of representation and the production of cultural meaning. By radically departing from the idea of a park as a verdant, naturalistic site of respite and insisting on a disjunctive and chaotic urbanity for the park itself, La Villette has also highlighted social problems such as the politics of gentrification, the shifting relationship between the city and its suburbs, and the regulated management of leisure.

La Villette is the interface mediating the demands of a grand government-sponsored program for public open space and a critical design agenda that wants to challenge the expectations and assumptions usually inherent in such programs. It is also an architectural staging of the theoretical developments of the 1980s which focused on issues such as the stability of the viewing subject as "reader," the role of the "author" (architect), the contingencies of interpretation, and the possibility of definitive meaning in any cultural production.

A reassessment of La Villette ten years hence, both as a real park in a real city and as a discursive production, seems a worthwhile means of rethinking the complicated translations between theory and practice. However one might measure the successes or failures of Parc de la Villette, it cannot be denied that it is an exemplary project that embodies the complex and troubling irresolution of interdisciplinary methodology and practice at an urban scale.

—M. K.