

The Architectures of Management

Dan Graham & Cally Spooner

Cally Spooner: So, I am making a show in the Lobby Gallery of the New Museum.

Dan Graham: It's in the space next to the bookstore...

CS: Yes, exactly... And it's got a big glass wall. I wanted to ask you: Why does it have a glass wall?

DG: I think it's very interesting, the area that you're using... One of my favorite pieces... When I participated in the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, I created a two-way mirror glass pavilion in the lobby [*Heart Pavilion* (1991)]. I think lobbies are very important for museums. They are romantic pick-up places. I think the New Museum Store, which is a little overly trendy, is important, but the café is important too... Of course, the genesis of my work *Waterloo Sunset* [2002–03]—which I hope is still up—at the Hayward Gallery was actually an idea for a piece for the lobby of that museum, which would have included a children's day-care center with CD-ROMs and computers. Of course CD-ROMs are out of fashion now. I think these mezzanine areas are pretty important spaces for museums... But I understand you're going to do a semi-dance performance at the New Museum.

CS: Yeah. There are going to be six dancers in the Lobby Gallery following this choreographic instruction to remain both intimately bound to one another and violently separate. They'll be using techniques appropriated from contact sports and romance.

DG: Oh, you don't mean rugby, do you?

CS: They are going to be learning rugby, yes!

DG: I know your prime minister played rugby when he was at school.

CS: Yeah. He did.

DG: In other words, he went to a good school.

CS: Yeah, exactly! That's a very good point! But the choreography is also based on a management strategy used in software development firms and advertising agencies, and it's called a "stand-up scrum," a term which borrows from rugby's "scrummage" and translates this aggressive huddle of bodies into a 9 a.m. meeting which, in my experience, happens in a conference room enclosed by glass.

DG: Oh, I see. In other words, you're dealing with the area of the City.

CS: The area of...?

DG: The City of London. Corporate meetings.

CS: Yes... I guess I am, actually... I'm glad you said that... But, why does the Lobby Gallery have a glass wall!?

DG: I think it's to put the people and the architecture on display.

CS: So, it's a question of visibility?

DG: I think it's about corporate and museum image... What is the relationship between the corporation and the museum? I think it's a fantasy that museums have—that a lobby can be like a city square. And I say it's more like a corporate atrium.

CS: Because of the relationship museums have to their funders? Which you talk about in your article, "Corporate Arcadias" [*Artforum*, no. 22 (December 1987)], right?

DG: So, for instance, what happened in the 1980s at the Whitney is they took over very small corporate lobby areas at the Equitable Life Assurance Society and Philip Morris, for example, and made them into museum spaces... Then there's corporate space like the IBM atrium [IBM Gallery of Science and Art], with a coffee bar and a downstairs space where the company presented small exhibitions, mostly about science—but all these spaces had surveillance cameras to make the areas very safe.

CS: So, these are super-transparent spaces where everyone can see out but also be seen and monitored. Why do you think contemporary workspaces, offices, and meeting rooms are often made of glass?

DG: I hadn't noticed that they were. But I think it probably goes back to the corporate building itself, which originally used transparent glass so people on the outside could see inside... So they could see what was actually happening inside the corporation.

CS: And is that a way for the corporation to show their transparency? Or their openness? To show they are open and available with nothing to hide. Like the Googleplex.

DG: I think it goes back to a misunderstanding of Bauhaus architecture. Glass was originally a Bauhaus idea. There's an architect from Holland called Johannes Duiker who is probably the most interesting Dutch architect, and he did the Cineac in Amsterdam in 1934. You can't read any of his books because they are all in Dutch, but he built the cinema using glass, so from the outside, you could look inside, and you could see the projectors, how they worked, and how films were being projected—to open everything up to the public.

CS: So, this is an architecture of transparency—the revealing of the workings of a project—that was adopted and misused in corporate architecture?

DG: Yes, although when corporations started using two-way mirror glass, they used it primarily to cut down on sunlight and, therefore, to cut down on their air-conditioning costs. This was the period when Jimmy Carter made everyone aware of ecology, and I think corporations wanted to reflect on that and to mirror it to the outside—to reflect the sun and sky, as a kind of alibi. As a kind of proof that they were considering the environment. But the glass actually facilitated a surveillance situation because you would see the outside when you were inside, but when you were outside you couldn't see inside.

CS: I've always interpreted or thought of your interest in this "two-way-ness," as being related to the impossibility of real exchange...

DG: Yes. You have to go back to the Paris arcades. Or to Mies van der Rohe. It's almost like a showcase window. The interesting thing about thick glass, particularly in a shopping area, is that people can see ghost images of themselves projected onto the products being displayed. And often in showcase windows, they use mirrors to refract these images of the viewer. So, shoppers see themselves, their bodies, from the outside, as kind of broken up but also transposed, because of the thick glass, onto the displayed products—say, a pair of shoes, for example. Then they have to go inside to buy the product to become whole. But first they see themselves as un-whole.

CS: In my show there are no objects to look at...just bodies. The audience has to choose between watching from the café or entering the gallery. When they enter the gallery they'll have an actual fleshly experience of the bodies that will be carrying out choreographies of closeness, violence, intimacy, separation. There might be a difference between being outside and being inside, but the only separation is a wall of transparent glass...

DG: I think it's like a typical street situation, where you have a café, but at the New Museum the café is on the inside. And I think privileged knowledge is in the store, where you can buy books and magazines.

CS: I wonder if a glass meeting room is about being able to prove bodies are laboring, about making that labor visible, even though corporate workers don't make anything tangible. I am thinking about how this relates to a museum needing to prove there's knowledge and culture being made through this glass wall.

DG: That's a real stretch, but it's a much more interesting take on the alienation of corporate space... A key element in my work is people viewing each other. Spectacle in the museum. That's

why I think the café in the New Museum is so important. I think you're dealing with the city space surrounding the museum, which is a very good way of looking at things... You know, when I did my Dia piece [*The Rooftop Urban Park Project* (1991–2004)], the rooftop was actually used for performances. Then the area that had been a toolshed became a videotheque, to show videos that were made of dance and music performances by artists from the '70s. I did that deliberately because of what was happening in art in the late '80s. People were very against the corporate and its aesthetics too... And in the next decade, that led a large number of artists—Jorge Pardo, Liam Gillick—to consider a fantasy of design: the fantasy of design as utopia. Whereas I took the Walter Benjamin point of view. I wanted to show continuity between the decades. I wanted the videotheque to show historical work that was done in the '70s—music, dance, performance—when a lot of the work had been performances done outside. And I think your work relates to that time period. Then I brought the coffee bar into the videotheque because I wanted my work to relate to the corporate atrium space... But I think the key thought is that the main funding for museums is now corporate.

CS: And do you think that's a problem?

DG: Yes, because that's why the central atrium is a way to monumentalize a corporate feeling.

CS: Because museums have internalized their funding apparatuses?

DG: It means the work tends to become monumental.

CS: And do you think it's problematic? That desire for scale?

DG: Yes. Work should be more intimate.

CS: Transparency is a word that gets used a lot right now—for instance, Google promises transparency and openness in its business model and in what it asks from and how it manages its

smart creative engineers. I feel that this approach is indicative of much post-Fordist work, which depends increasingly on open and allegedly transparent conversations and working relations as an architecture of management. You have called transparency an “alibi” for corporations and have explored this idea by studying and reproducing actual transparent glass, as it is often to be found in the architectures of corporate buildings and museums. I wanted to ask you about transparency, and whether you think our contemporary understanding of transparency has changed since when you started making work?

DG: I have nothing more to say about transparency.



Dan Graham, Dunkin' Donuts on the highway, street showcase, Union City, New Jersey, 2006