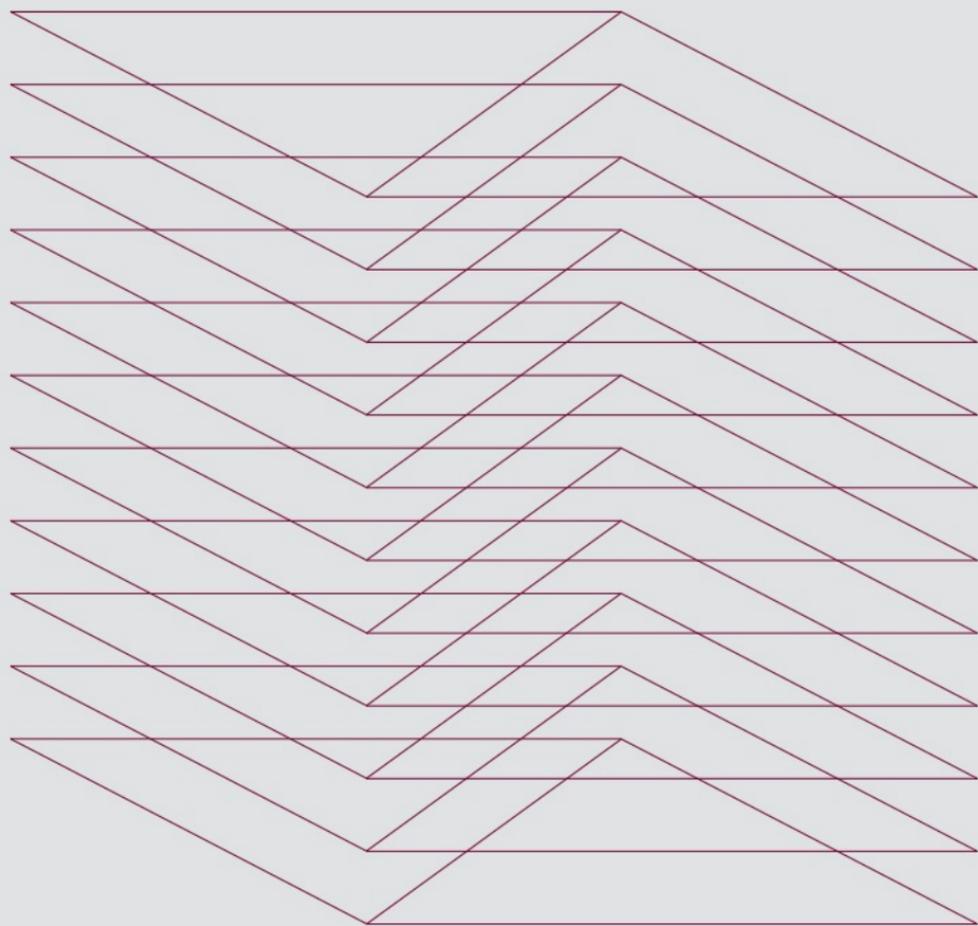
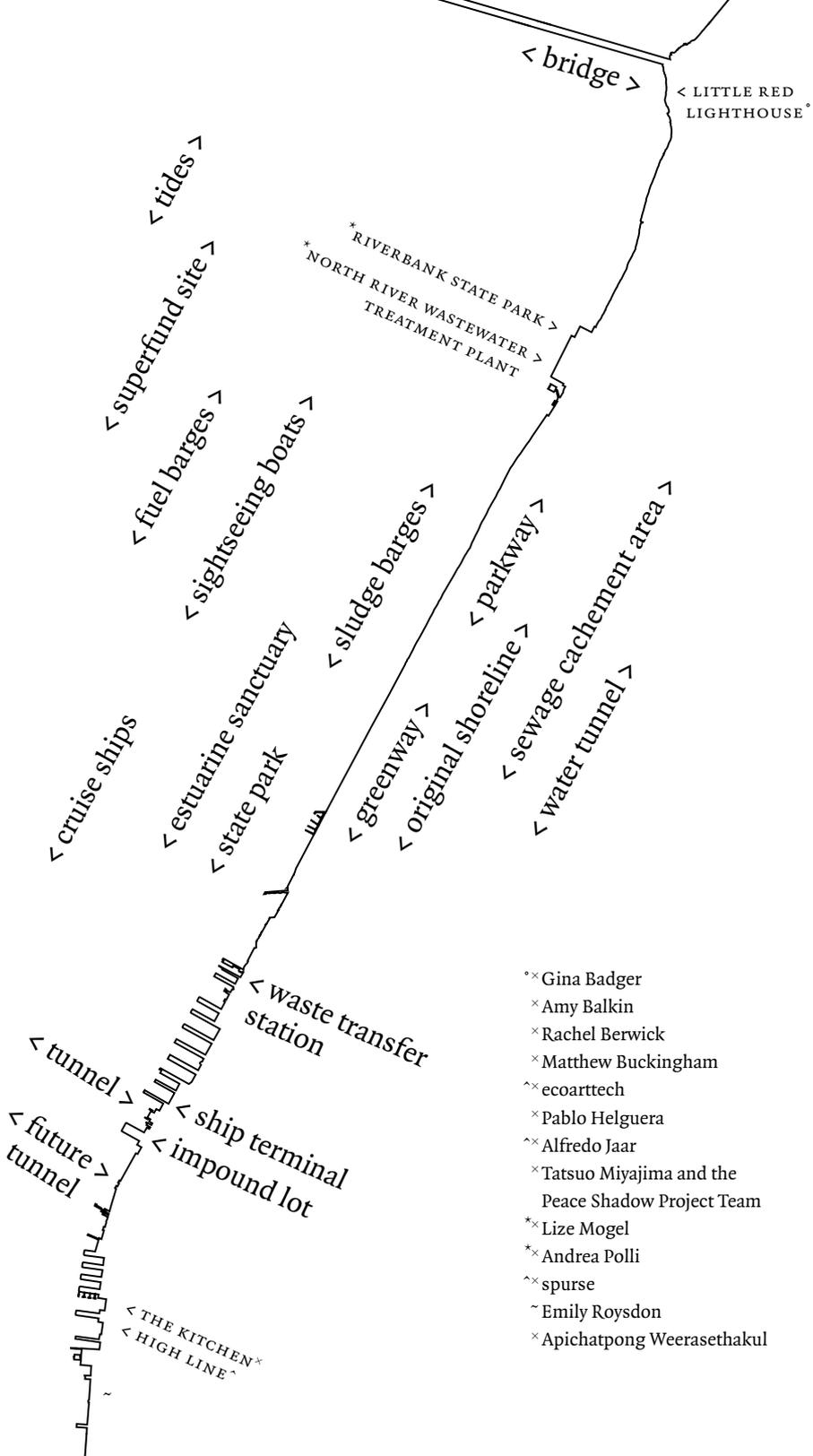


Undercurrents



Experimental
Ecosystems
in Recent Art



- × Gina Badger
- × Amy Balkin
- × Rachel Berwick
- × Matthew Buckingham
- ^× ecoarttech
- × Pablo Helguera
- ^× Alfredo Jaar
- × Tatsuo Miyajima and the Peace Shadow Project Team
- *× Lize Mogel
- *× Andrea Polli
- ^× spurse
- ^ Emily Roysdon
- × Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Undercurrents

EXPERIMENTAL ECOSYSTEMS
IN RECENT ART

EDITED BY
ANIK FOURNIER
MICHELLE LIM
AMANDA PARMER
ROBERT WUILFE

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Distributed by Yale University Press,
New Haven and London

Contents

INTRODUCTION 9

ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION 15

Anik Fournier 45

THE RUIN IN THE AGE OF JUNKSPACE

Michelle Lim 65

FLÂNEUR ON THE HIGH LINE:

THE TENTH AVENUE SQUARE AND STRUCTURES

OF VIEWING IN A PUBLIC SPACE

Amanda Parmer 87

AURALITIES

Robert Wuilfe 101

CATASTROPHE AND THE “ARTISTS OF THE REAL”

KEY WORDS 121

INFLUENCES 137

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION 143

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 147

BLACK PAGES

Artist interventions throughout the publication

Introduction

Ethical cohabitation—how to live together in a shared environment—is the problem that brings together the sociopolitical, cultural, and ecological within this exhibition. While ostensibly aiming to achieve harmonious balance, such relations are nevertheless inherently antagonistic and always unstable. Situated in this context, how does one choose to act? To address this question, we have traced out a network of physical sites along the west side of Manhattan—both literally and figuratively—to explore existing and possible modes of cohabitation in everyday life on both local and global registers.

The Kitchen was the first space designated for the exhibition, and it, in turn, generated a network of sites along the west side of Manhattan. Specific project sites for the exhibition include the Kitchen, the High Line, and (within the larger context of the Hudson riverfront) the Little Red Lighthouse and the North River Wastewater Treatment Plant. This decentralized exhibition structure suggests multiple positions (geographical, historical, and physical) in which visitors may situate themselves. We provide the opportunity for artists and visitors to perceive and participate in these interrelationships within the urban environment.

The exhibition proposes three intertwined conceptual categories: histories, the everyday, and entanglement. These serve as discursive lenses informed by artistic practices.

HISTORIES

Histories are constructed, contested, and subjective. Many of the artists in the exhibition engage history through acts of critical recuperation and retelling. Artists such as Alfredo Jaar, Pablo Helguera, and Matthew Buckingham articulate in different ways how history forms the present: Jaar by exposing a moment of obscured political history of U.S. involvement in Latin America; Helguera by bringing contemporary practitioners of the art academy into dialogue with

the contemporary art world; and Buckingham by engaging Walter Benjamin's claim that "there is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."¹

THE EVERYDAY

Following Michel de Certeau, we want to engage the life of the city from the perspective of the everyday. Looking to Henri Lefebvre, the artists facilitate the creation of situations within that environment. For example, *ecoarttech* asks viewers to reposition themselves in relation to the habitual modes of viewing and experiencing the city; Lize Mogel makes visible the infrastructure built around human waste and the sanitization of urban environments; and Andrea Polli coordinates "soundwalks," which privilege the aural senses over the visual in navigating the city.

ENTANGLEMENT

Bruno Latour held that any binary relationship between culture and nature is a fiction; we agree that ecological transformations should not be seen as separate or removed from action at the level of the individual, government, or market. Amy Balkin invites viewers to perform in a public reading project that exposes how such artificial separations are overwhelmingly present in current political, scientific, and regulatory discourse; spurse investigates the entangled processes and effects of labor, markets, and local communities; and Lize Mogel makes social networks intelligible and immerses the participant within them through tours, maps, and data visualization.

In this catalogue, we unpack additional questions that underlie the exhibition. Anik Fournier attributes to the ruin a new use value in introducing alternative representations and histories into the built and lived city; Amanda Parmer looks at artistic practices that focus on the aural, rather than the dominant mode of the visual, to slow down our processes of reception in response to the constant stream of information we are inundated with today; Michelle Lim looks at how *flâneurism* and other "stroll-in-the-park" narratives have been

updated with regard to the newly opened High Line in New York; and Robert Wuilfe addresses the aesthetic and political dimensions of depictions of catastrophe and the ways in which they are implicated in both the construction of neoliberal systems and as sites of discourse for counter-hegemonic resistance.

This catalogue is also a site for artistic intervention. In addition to the series of curatorial essays, all of the artists participating in the exhibition were invited to make a small content contribution to this volume. Ten of the thirteen artists have elected to contribute short texts or images relating to their work or to the themes of the exhibition in general. Each project is presented as an object in itself, each on the front and back of a black page, which are dispersed throughout the book.

The final section, Key Words, reflects how certain terms have reverberated through our discussions on the various artists' projects. Others have emerged as contested sites of meaning as we worked out our curatorial premise. This section highlights and defines some of these key words, by way of framing the curatorial vision for this exhibition.

Undercurrents is an experimental ecosystem in itself, opening up a collective platform for thought, dialogue, imagination, and action; the exhibition serves as a site through which to critically engage the complex and evolving entanglements in the world around us. The range of artistic practices and issues produce surprising encounters, each demonstrating in their own way how cohabitation can be the source of struggle and creativity, problems and solutions, malice and beauty. Cohabitation—and the responsibilities it implies—sets the parameters of the stage on which we all ultimately play a role.

I. Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian" in *Walter Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 124.

Michelle Lim

FLÂNEUR ON THE HIGH LINE: THE TENTH AVENUE SQUARE AND STRUCTURES OF VIEWING IN A PUBLIC SPACE

The city has become not merely a theater but itself a production, a multi-media presentation whose audience is the whole world. This has given special resonance and depth to much of what is done and made here. A great deal of New York's construction and development over the past century needs to be seen as symbolic action and communication: it has been conceived and executed not merely to serve immediate economic and political needs but, at least equally important, to demonstrate to the whole world what modern man can build and how modern life can be imagined and lived.

—Marshall Berman, 1988¹

I.

In the summer of 2009, a new public park opened on the west side of Manhattan, spanning nine blocks from the corner of Gansevoort and Washington streets to Twentieth Street and Tenth Avenue, with plans for it to eventually extend to Thirty-fourth Street. This new park was reclaimed from an abandoned railway track running above Tenth Avenue, parallel to the West Side Highway and the Hudson River, and despite early complaints about noise, tour buses, and the effects of gentrification in the neighborhood, it was clear that the new High Line had been integrated into New York's urban fabric by the end of summer.²

In this series of vignettes, I examine the Tenth Avenue Square on the High Line as a panoptical framing device that continually reorganizes the picture frame and direction of sight lines as one moves through this new urban parkland.³ I am interested in updating ideas about *flânerie* and “stroll-in-the-park” narratives. Architecture here is used allegorically, as a metaphor to analyze our experience of the city

today through the ways we see; it renders visible a physical frame that enables us to observe the movement of bodies through a constructed space. The architectural object provides, in other words, a hyperreal bio-political theater in which social relations in an urban setting are acted out for amusement and edification.

II.

The High Line railroad came into being in 1929, at the outset of the Great Depression.⁴ The track was elevated to remove it from lines of sight on Tenth Avenue and thus avoid the numerous ground-level collisions that had caused that thoroughfare to be called “Death Avenue” by the turn of the last century.⁵ With the growth of interstate highways and commercial trucking, the High Line gradually fell into disuse by the 1960s and 1970s. The last freight train pulled through the High Line in 1980, carrying three carloads of frozen turkeys.⁶

In order to battle attempts by property owners to demolish the rail tracks (a demolition order was signed by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani a few days before he left office), the nonprofit group Friends of the High Line was formed in 1999.⁷ Inspired by the Promenade Plantée in Paris, a once-abandoned 19th century rail viaduct that became the first elevated park in the world in 1988, the group lobbied and sued to preserve the High Line, arguing that an investment in public money would pay off in economic returns from the development of the neighborhood.⁸

The eco-design of the High Line park by landscape design firm James Corner Field Operations and New York based architectural firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro invokes the detailed instructions for roof gardens provided in Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret’s famous 1926 treatise “Five Points Towards a New Architecture”: “The roof gardens will display highly luxuriant vegetation. Shrubs and even small trees up to three or four meters tall can be planted. In this way the roof garden will become the most favored place in the building. In general, roof gardens mean to a city the recovery of all the built-up area.”⁹

With the renovation of this urban space from wasteland to parkland, the High Line is now restored to vision, yet it is a recuperation that could prove to have less than benign ramifications. By reclaiming



Promenade Plantée, Paris, 2010. Courtesy Maurice Tan

space at mid-level, the new High Line is not just an innovative public park design; it also opens a new frontier for the development of property and land values.¹⁰ In effect, it heralds the arrival of the “third urban order” in modern architecture and urbanism, when cities no longer limit themselves to horizontal and vertical expansions but aim towards “a linear and oblique urbanism.” As described by Paul Virilio, “a city can expand both linearly but primarily through topology, through oriented surfaces which allow the ground not to be covered. There will be bridge structures and mega-structures, but which use the oblique.”¹¹

Neither perpendicular nor parallel, the oblique connotes muscle and flex, a trialectical tension between gravity, lateral surface expansion, and a human desire to ascend.¹² Such architectural expressions correspond to new ways of perceiving and experiencing our spatial environment, and attempts to reconcile modes of social existence and identities that stretch across liminal space and time. In trying to



View from the High Line, New York, 2010. Photograph by Michelle Lim

balance these contradictions and inherent tensions, architects have, in recent decades, devised solutions that include the building of bridges between (or within) vertical buildings and the aestheticizing-gardening-smoothing of building rooftops that are now visible from the window seats of airplanes and orbiting satellites (think Google Earth).

But these expressions cannot in themselves reorder human relations, a process that depends on natural use and functionality, or what Michel de Certeau has proposed as the “practice of everyday life.”¹³ It is debatable whether architecture *generates* or *responds* to changes in our ways of experiencing and seeing; the ways we acquire, process, and absorb visual information have changed significantly over the last century. Increasingly, our encounters with one another take place across constantly upgrading technological interfaces. As Giuliana Bruno has thoughtfully observed:

As an outcome of modernity, space has been radically mobilized and new horizons of seeing have opened up. As space was dynamically traversed by new means of transportation and communication, different perspectives were revealed and new and multiple planes of vision emerged. The perceptual field became

discontinuous, shattered, and fractured. As a result of this radical cultural mobilization, our visual terrain changed in ways that are still visible, becoming what it is for us today: disjointed, split, fragmented, multiplied, mobile, transient, and unstable.¹⁴

III.

The High Line demonstrates, through its architectonics, the convergence of internalized surveillance mechanisms with the omnipresent spectacle regime.¹⁵ The design of the Tenth Avenue Square would seem to amplify Foucault's bleak pronouncement: "We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism."¹⁶ All have merged into one.

It made sense for Foucault, looking at the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to decide that the spectacle regime, as a social product of the absolute monarchy, was already passing into the history of the fading Empire. "Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance. . . in a panopticism in which the vigilance of intersecting gazes was soon to render useless both the eagle and the sun," he wrote.¹⁷ But both the spectacle regime and the disciplinary society in their pure forms are no longer possible under current conditions, and as Jonathan Crary has pointed out, "Foucault's opposition of surveillance and spectacle seems to overlook how the effects of these two regimes of power can coincide."¹⁸ And according to Gilles Deleuze, while Foucault did not foresee the internalizing of surveillance mechanisms into spectacle culture, "what Foucault recognized as well was the transience of this model: it succeeded that of the societies of sovereignty, the goal and functions of which were something quite different (to tax rather than to organize production, to rule on death rather than to administer life); the transition took place over time, and Napoleon seemed to effect the large-scale conversion from one society to the other. But in their turn the disciplines underwent a crisis to the benefit of new forces that were gradually instituted and which accelerated after World War II: a disciplinary society was what we already no longer were, what we had ceased to be."¹⁹

The internalization of surveillance mechanisms in a spectacle

society has given rise to a new system wherein calculated and controlled visual-heavy experiences are constantly being produced and consumed as a series of spectacles within a closed urban system. The optical operations at play on the Tenth Avenue Square demonstrate how our modes of viewing in the public space have been reprogrammed by our everyday experiences in the twenty-first century. The Tenth Avenue Square is located at the juncture where the High Line crosses between West Sixteenth and West Seventeenth streets. The Square is defined by the Overlook, a sleek design feature by Diller Scofidio + Renfro. The sunken Overlook neatly contains, in formal architectural terms, the idea of omni-directional viewing. Rows of bleachers slope down towards a glass wall that doubles conceptually as a “screen” for people watching.²⁰ Its transparency works both ways, enabling those on the High Line to observe pedestrians on the street while, conversely, being put on view behind glass for those passing below.²¹ The screen “breaks up” the lines of sight, mediating vision and creating a sense of alienated reality—experiences familiar to the reality-TV watcher or the cyber-surfer sitting in front of a computer screen. On a clear, sunlit day, people strolling across the top edge of the Overlook are re-cast as otherworldly figures on the glass screen, their ghostly passage superimposed over the “real” action of cars and people moving along busy Tenth Avenue, turning the outdoor amphitheatre into a cinema of the city.

Architectural design is geared towards the creation of these crisscrossing sight-lines—lines that are underscored by the physical movement of bodies on display. The design rationale of the High Line works on the principle of scaled movement from one vantage point to the next, a topographing strategy not dissimilar to the design of golf or ski courses. The design of Tenth Avenue Square allows a view of Midtown Manhattan when one looks northward through the glass screen of the Overlook. As one climbs up the steps out of the Overlook to the “level ground” of the High Line, the southern horizon is marked by the Statue of Liberty.²² Thus with each step taken and every angle turned, the view is transformed and reframed, “each view unfolding an otherworldly synesthesiatic motion.”²³ The one who walks on the High Line is, in effect, a flâneur who is “a mobile consumer of a ceaseless succession of illusory commodity-like images.”²⁴ Frame after frame,



View from the High Line, New York, 2010. Photograph by Michelle Lim

the cinematic mode of viewing is now the modern way of seeing life and experiencing it; every experience is a film, and our memories are filled with loose narratives made up of fragmented visual sequences.

The flâneur on the High Line sees and takes in with pleasure the views that New York City offers for one who can afford to walk leisurely through the Chelsea neighborhood of galleries and fine restaurants. Accordingly, he takes a moment to sit back on the clever deckchairs designed with old-fashioned rail-cart wheels meant to evoke the High Line's historical past. Perhaps he might even take out a suitable book to read, if not his Kindle. The flâneur knows he is not there just to see but also to be seen—he is a necessary ornament to the design of this new city park. On the High Line, the flâneur is never simply a “man of the crowd.” As Walter Benjamin shrewdly observed of Baudelaire's flâneur: “he went to the market; to look it over, as he thought, but in reality to find a buyer.”²⁵ The flâneur on the

High Line does not need to take out his opera glasses to survey the marketplace; he has put himself into an elevated position the better which to be seen. If surveillance is a form of punishment, then it may be said that the *flâneur* on the High Line is one drawn to indulge in sadomasochistic pleasure. The *flâneur* is no man in the crowd; yet the crowd is made up of *flâneurs*, each of whom, as Benjamin puts it, “is thus in the same situation as the commodity. He is unaware of this special situation, but this does not diminish its effect on him; it permeates him blissfully, like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations. The intoxication to which the *flâneur* surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity immersed in a surging stream of customers.”²⁶

In today’s celebrity culture and world of reality shows, does the pleasure belong to the one who sees or to the one who is being seen? The one who consumes or who is being consumed? Here on the High Line, who is watching whom? On the sunny winter afternoon that I was up on the park doing my research, I overheard an exchange between a little girl and her mother. While waiting for her mother to frame a picture on her camera-phone, the girl peeked down at the street and exclaimed with surprise that someone was trying to take their picture, too.

Yet the large glass pane at the base of the Overlook is only one of many. Hundreds, perhaps a thousand more windows are embedded in the facades of the tall buildings that shadow the park. These views are made not so much for discipline but for excessive consumption. The top of the Foucauldian tower is now everywhere and everyone can get to the top of the tower.²⁷ Unlike Jeremy Bentham’s prison model, the High Line is a moving conveyor belt, not a stationary building. Planes of “omni-directional sightlines” are cast and recast as the *flâneur* strolls through the elevated parkway.

One such plane, for example, was made visible in media reports when guests of The Standard hotel, which literally is built astride the High Line, compelled pedestrians to become voyeurs to their sexual antics during the summer of 2009. Parents were warned not to let their children look up as exhibitionists performed strip acts and more, with hotel room lights blazing and curtains pulled back from their floor-to-ceiling windows.²⁸ The transformation of an almost rarefied



View of The Standard hotel from the High Line, New York, 2010. Courtesy Ho Han-Peng

park space into an outdoor burlesque theater was initiated by an array of clever marketing strategies—including provocative Facebook and other blog posts by the Standard hotel staff—but the final credit surely had to be shared with a public whose members readily took on typecast roles as degenerate performers, outraged parents, gawking tourists, and so on.²⁹ The media was also instrumental to the sexualizing of the spectacle. Although architect Todd Schliemann was quoted saying that he had designed The Standard to be “a Le Corbusier-style glass building, *floating* above the High Line” in the manner of “other New York International Style glass buildings as Lever House and the United Nations,” this architectural aspiration was overshadowed by earthier characterizations, such as those found in a New York–real estate blog post describing the design of the hotel over the park as a “perpetual lap dance.” To which the hotel’s owner, André Balazs, responded, “Very apt. The hotel straddles it in a suggestive way, but

they never touch.”³⁰ What Balazs makes transparent—or sexual—is the manufacture of desire by the capitalist machine, by way of satisfying its own libidinous appetites.

The question is, is there a way out of this labyrinth?

IV.

In his introduction to Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*, Luc Sante evoked his impressions of contemporary New York:

What passes for the city in the average experience is nothing more than a thin coat of paint . . . the city has been around for millennia. Although it was not always located at the mouth of the Hudson River, or even in North America. It was not even always a city. For a long time it was known as a forest. It was, in fact, the primeval forest, inhabited by trickster foxes and stolid pigs and woebegone wolves and the occasional shape-shifting human, but it was recognizably the same labyrinth of chance.³¹

The flâneur of nineteenth century Paris already had a doppelganger in the detective who had prowled the streets of a city that Alexandre Dumas had imagined as primeval hunting grounds overlaid with the sheen of phantasmagoria in *Mohicans de Paris*.³² This detective, in Benjamin’s words, coupled “forensic knowledge” with the flâneur’s “pleasant nonchalance.” But the Parisian streets have since become nostalgic parody and touristic delight; the “poetry of terror” that once pulsed through Paris now measures its dark cadences in post-AIDS crisis, post-9/11 New York. And as Benjamin wrote, “In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in a position of having to play detective.”³³ Dumas’s intrepid Cooper has since been succeeded by Auster’s detective Quinn, for whom:

New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. . . . On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things: to be

nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and he realized he had no intention of ever leaving it again.³⁴

The cityscape had become a dystopic dreamscape, and escape from this innerscape no longer seemed possible—or even an object of desire. The inspiration behind the new High Line park was the haunting—and haunted—dreamscape of the urban wasteland that had resisted the Giuliani clean-up of the 1980s.³⁵ Yet in its attempt to resist the passage of time through calculated design strategies, the park has become a gentrified parody of itself, one that is now embraced by a very different spectrum of society from those who had once found refuge along its tracks.

v.

On the subject of “public space” today, the early Baudelairean anecdotes still retain their freshness. In his prose poem “The Eyes of the Poor,” Baudelaire writes from the point of view of a young man explaining to his beloved why he now hates her.³⁶ They had spent a wonderful day together, at the end of which they sit in front of a new café with glasses and carafes of wine that the young man describes as being “larger than our thirst.”

And then:

Right in front of us, on the sidewalk, a worthy man in his forties was standing, with a tired face, a greying beard, and holding with one hand a little boy and carrying on the other arm a little being too weak to walk. He was playing the role of nanny and had taken his children out for a walk in the night air. All in rags. The three faces were extraordinarily serious, and the six eyes contemplated fixedly the new café with an equal admiration, but shaded differently according to their age. The father’s eyes said: “How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! You’d think all the gold in this poor world was on its walls.”—The eyes of the little boy: “How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! But it’s a house only people who aren’t like us can enter.”—As for the eyes of the smaller child, they were too fascinated to express anything other than a stupid and profound joy.

The young man is somewhat embarrassed by the plentiful food and drink on the table but nevertheless touched that the beauty of the world was being shared with others. He turns affectionately to his beloved, expecting to see these sentiments reflected in her beautiful eyes. Instead she says to him, "I can't stand those people over there, with their eyes wide open like carriage gates! Can't you tell the head-waiter to send them away?" Baudelaire's young man then laments on the absence of empathy, "So difficult is it to understand one another, my dear angel, and so incommunicable is thought, even between people in love!"³⁷ Indeed, we may all be looking at the same thing but still see the world so very differently, and one might well ask, the new High Line Park intended for whom?³⁸

VI.

A "desire line" or "desire path" is a term often used in landscape architecture to describe a path that is worn away casually by people finding their preferred route between two points (usually the shortest distance).³⁹ Desire Lines are physical markings left on the environment by people as they follow their natural inclinations as they go about their everyday business and leisure activities. The gridded plan of Manhattan would initially appear to preclude the possibility of new desire lines, since it already "assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations."⁴⁰ How does one create a desire line within such an ordered space? (This is not to say, of course, that what is desired and attainable is necessarily good or better.)

The recuperation of the High Line can be seen as the inscription of new social desires on a desire path that had faded in recent decades, having originally come into existence in response to economic needs.⁴¹ At the same time, however, the panoptical quality of the new High Line Park makes it a problematic site for the articulation of personal or private desires. There is no hiding in a crowd, and up on the High Line, only those private desires that coincide with public ones are given outlet. Nevertheless, even on a formalized pathway within a structured, controlled environment, there is always a choice between finding alternative routes and/or making temporary connections between broken-off lines, freight-hopping off one line

to get on another in order to reach one's destination in the most efficient way possible.

The acts of seeing or desiring both involve drawing out lines that measure distance. What is too close cannot be seen, yet it obscures the possibility of other kinds of seeing, the tracing of the line between the real of what we have and the ideal of what might be possible.

VII.

For the *Undercurrents* exhibition, we decided not to restrict ourselves to one site, or even purposefully define multiple ones, but rather to propose the activation of the entire west side of Manhattan as a conceptual terrain. Artists were encouraged to go beyond the formal parameters of the Kitchen gallery, the High Line, and the Little Red Lighthouse to find their own sites of interest.⁴² Thus, somewhat off-the-beaten track sites, such as the pile fields of the Christopher Street piers and the North River Wastewater Treatment Plant near 145th Street, are included in the exhibition. Several artists, such as Gina Badger, Andrea Polli, and Emily Roysdon, have spread out their activities through the temporal and aural registers, with works that span the gamut from sound recordings and “soundwalks” to singing.

The identification of such spaces between the cracks and underneath the surface is crucial to the breaking down of hegemonic control. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to attend to the general structural conditions within the mass society and consider more broadly differentiated, less individually specific, solutions. A comparison of the amphitheatrical aspects of the three “main” sites, the High Line (see earlier discussion of the Tenth Avenue Square), the Kitchen gallery, and the Little Red Lighthouse (Jeffrey's Hook Lighthouse) might perhaps propose some possibilities for escape, respite, or recovered agency from the ceaseless surveillance and compelled seeing.

The Kitchen offers guests two performative spaces: a white cube gallery inside the theatrical black box and a black box auditorium for performances. The retrofitting and repurposing of this conserved building suggests another possibility, that of a return to the comfort and conventions of clearly designated roles and rituals between audience and performer.⁴³ In the classic amphitheater, sight lines are

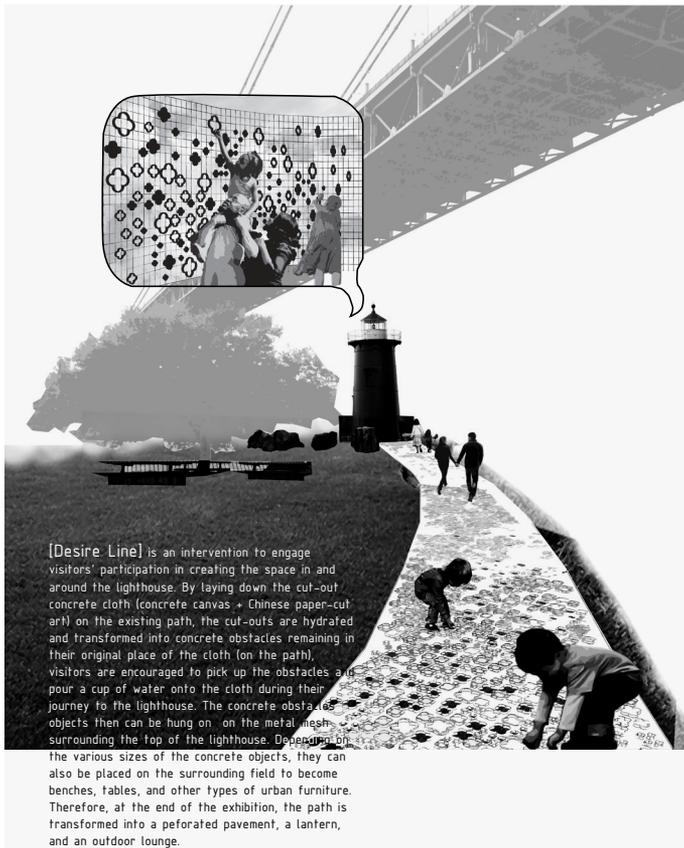
directed in one direction and the absence of the returned gaze provides a measure of relief from the ceaseless inspection of strangers.

The site of the Little Red Lighthouse is particularly charged. At first glance, it presents a picturesque scene of Fort Washington Park, with its charmingly historic little lighthouse, the Hudson River, and the George Washington Bridge.⁴⁴ A narrow path that branches off from the main jogging track leads up to the lighthouse that sits next to the foot of the bridge. A short distance away, a low stone wall curves in a wide semi-circle around the leg of the bridge, enclosing a grassy patch that seems well-suited for relaxing Sunday picnics. The stones are aesthetically matched to the rocks of the Hudson shore. The spatial arrangement of these built structures appears to suggest possibilities for an outdoor amphitheater, with the low wall doubling as possible seating. Initial appearances well to the contrary, this site is in fact under heavy surveillance by the state. The low wall was built after 9/11 to dissuade potential terrorists from driving into the leg of the George Washington Bridge and blowing it up with a truckload of explosives.⁴⁵

In American-Taiwanese architect and artist Alice Chang's proposal for an intervention-installation at the Little Red Lighthouse site, sculptural arrangements and interactive exercises suggest that individuals are still able to carve out their own "desire paths" despite the presence of seemingly fixed structures. Furthermore, the cumulative effort of different individuals can break down the rigidity of existing social (and physical) structures and effect the complete transformation of the environment, thereby creating a new "desire space."⁴⁶

VIII.

The anxiety of being "lost" in the crowd has internalized and transmuted into a high nervous energy. Night and day, the contemporary detective moves purposefully through networks, aided in his searches by modern engines like Google. Yet in using these tools to map his search territory, he himself is being used to extend the reach of a "global network." He is one nexus among many in a virtual world that is already larger than any real metropolis and yet at all times, he is solitary in this cellular network, separated as much as the prisoner in



Alice Chang, *The Desire Line*, architectural rendering of a proposed installation by the artist, 2010. Courtesy the artist

Bentham's prison. This entanglement offers the virtual sense of being connected 24/7, and its logic governs how we deal with "contemporary life." This is the futuristic evolution of the panopticon that is already functioning today.

And when all's said and done, despite being every terrorist's dream target, despite being the epicenter of the world's financial catastrophe, if cities could dream, which does not desire to be the next New York? In every century, there will be one city that captures

the imagination and spirit of its times, inspiring those living outside it to make pilgrimage. Thus, the modern detective—who is in all of us—continues to stake out New York at the beginning of the 21st century as a phantasmagoric hunting ground, adrenalized by the scent of terror—and the urgency of this passing moment. For as some suggest, the New York as we know it today is already in its twilight years, with Shanghai, Dubai, or some other cosmopolitan city waiting in the wings to take its place. What happens tomorrow? Perhaps, as Auster wrote: “The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell.”⁴⁷

Much appreciation to Jason Best, Johanna Burton, Steve Chen, Kenneth Chong, Ron Clark, Nika Elder, Niels Henriksen, Anna Katz, Brian Reese, and Joshua Shirkey for reading and commenting on the early drafts; to Alice Chang for her illuminating artwork; to Han-Peng Ho and Maurice Tan for photographing to my needs, on the High Line in New York and Promenade Plantée in Paris respectively; to Kiat Chan, Anik Fournier, Yumiko Ikenaga, David Kelley, Ryan Kelly, Zoe Kwok, Alexandra Lim, Gabriel Martinez, Jeannine Tang, and Ren Tay for their generous feedback and support along the way.

1. Marshall Berman, “In the Forest of Symbols: Some Notes on Modernism in New York,” in *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 288–89.

2. Diane Cardwell, “For High Line Visitors, Park is a Railway out of Manhattan,” *The New York Times*, July 22, 2009.

3. This essay’s vignette structure takes from various writings on the experience of the modern city by Baudelaire, Benjamin, Berman and de Certeau (as cited in these bibliographic notes). The narrative of the modern city, as recorded by these writers, reflects a historical trajectory from mid-nineteenth century Paris to its peak (arguably?) in late twentieth century New York. My mix of style and density is deliberate here: the text performs as structural metaphor for the experience of moving through a textured metropolis like New York (or Tokyo). The “breaking” of the narrative and the interspersed insights reflect the shattering, bridging, convergence, and divergence, of the sight-lines and time-lines at multiple junctures, in line with the cinematic experience of space proposed by Giuliana Bruno.

4. By historical coincidence, the High Line park opened in 2009, the year of the Great Recession.

5. Joel Steinfeld, *Walking the High Line* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2009), 56. Railroad tracks had run at street level since 1847, as authorized by the city of New York. Men on horseback, called the West Side Cowboys, would ride in front of freight trains waving red flags. A detailed timeline of the High Line’s history, with notes and historical photos, can be found on the official website of the High Line and Friends of the High Line, <http://www.thehighline.org/about/high-line-history> (accessed February 10, 2010).

6. Adam Gopnick, "A Walk on the High Line/ The Allure of a Derelict Railroad Track in Spring," in *Walking the High Line*, 48.

7. The official website of the High Line and Friends of the High Line, "High Line History," <http://www.thehighline.org/about/high-line-history> (accessed February 10, 2010). "1999: The Friends of the High Line is founded by Joshua David and Robert Hammond, residents of the High Line neighborhood, to advocate for the High Line's preservation and re-use as public open space." In the mid-1980s, a group of property owners lobbied for the demolition of the railroad. Members of this group owned land under the High Line that had been purchased at prices reflecting the High Line's easement. Peter Oblatz, a Chelsea resident, activist, and railroad enthusiast, challenged demolition efforts in court and tried to re-establish rail service on the line.

8. See Joshua David, *Reclaiming the High Line: A Project of The Design Trust for Public Space with Friends of the High Line* (New York: Design Trust for Public Space, 2002), 18–21, and "The High Line: Elevated Railroad in Chelsea," discussion thread in "Wired New York" forum, <http://wirednewyork.com/forum/showthread.php?t=2868> (accessed on February 10, 2010).

9. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, "Five Points Towards a New Architecture (1926)," in Ulrich Conrads, ed., *Programs and manifestoes on 20th century architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1971), 99–100.

10. I am not addressing the High Line's gentrification effects at length in this essay although I am interested in this topic, with regard to questions of public space ownership and usage. More information on ongoing debates can be found on the *Right to the City* website at www.righttothecity.org (accessed on February 10, 2010).

11. Paul Virilio, "Paul Virilio and the Oblique: Interview with Enrique Limon," in *Virilio Live: Selected Interviews* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 54. According to Virilio, the first urban order (villages, land population) is mainly based on horizontality. The second urban order, based on verticality, ended with mega-structures, such as the skyscrapers in Manhattan and Tokyo.

12. See Peter Wollen's essay "The Situationist International: On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time," in *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 138, for background on the idea of trialectics. Danish Situationist International member Asger Jorn first came up with the concept of trialectics, which he saw as a way of circumventing the binary structure of dialectical discourse. The three-sided football game was later developed from Jorn's idea as a physical means of exploring the workings of trialectical dynamics, moving beyond the simplistic relational opposition of "us versus them." Here, I am using it to describe a dynamic relationship among three forces which maintain a constant equilibrium through minute adjustments of tension and counter-pressures. I am less concerned with the historical drive that compels dialectical forces to converge and resolve in a unitary manner; this is more of a diagrammatic metaphor in the context of urban planning and architectural design.

13. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 91–110. In "Chapter VII Walking the City," de Certeau addresses the experience of walking through a city, opening his essay with a bird's eye view of Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center.

14. Giuliana Bruno, "Modernist Ruins, Filmic Archaeologies," in *Public*

Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2007), 57.

15. *Designing the High Line* (New York: Friends of the High Line), 102–103. See DS+R’s plan for a Twenty-sixth Street viewing spur.

16. Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” in *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 217.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, Mass.: the MIT Press, 1992), 4.

19. Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (Winter 1992), 3–7.

20. This architectural signature has appeared in other DS+R projects, such as at Lincoln Center in New York, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and in James Corner Field Operations and DS+R’s original winning proposal in 2004 for the design of the High Line park. In these earlier incarnations, however, this design feature was in the mode of an outdoor sculpture. The steps rise from the ground to end with a glass wall at the top. In the computer-generated architectural renderings (available on the High Line website), the earlier design vision is clearly an expression of early 2000s spectacle culture. The evolution of this protruding design element into the submerged overlook can be read as an almost inevitable dialectical response to the visual excesses of the time.

21. See *Designing the High Line* on the later design feature of the viewing spur in the second phase, 102.

22. *Designing the High Line*, 30–31.

23. James Corner, preface to *Designing the High Line*, 30.

24. Crary, 21.

25. Walter Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” in *The Writer of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press and Belknap Press), 66.

26. *Ibid.*, 85.

27. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. In Foucault’s theory of the surveillance, Jeremy Bentham’s model of the panoptical prison becomes the architectural structure by which the maintenance of social order is analyzed. The architectural structure is one of a tall tower at the center surrounded by cellular walls, each containing an isolated prisoner. Each cell has front and back windows, and the backlighting ensures that the prisoner has no respite from being watched. The tower structure ensures, through its height, the perpetual sense of being under surveillance even if no watcher is actually present—because one can never be completely sure.

28. “High Line Peep Show: Guests at The Standard Hotel Provide the Naked Entertainment for Park-Go-ers,” in *Huffington Post*, August 25, 2009. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/25/high-line-peep-show-the-s_n_266897.html (accessed online on February 10, 2010).

29. Lachlan Cartwright, “High Line is a Lust Cause,” *New York Post*, September 2, 2009. A posting on The Standard hotel’s Facebook page encouraged guests to “exercise your inner exhibitionist. . .” (accessed February 10, 2010).

30. Matt Tyrnaeur, “Hop on the High Line,” *Vanity Fair*, February 2009. <http://www.vanityfair.com/style/features/2009/02/standard-hotel200902> (accessed online on February 10, 2010).

31. Luc Sante, introduction to Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), x.

32. Benjamin, 72–75.

33. Ibid.

34. Paul Auster, “City of Glass,” in *The New York Trilogy*, 4.

35. Gopnick, 48–52.

36. Berman, 148–55. In his essay “Family of Eyes,” Berman begins his discussion of Paris’ birth as a modern city with this prose-poem by Baudelaire. He hails the invention and deployment of the Parisian boulevards in Baron Georges Eugène Haussman’s 19th century urban plan as “the most spectacular urban innovation of the nineteenth century, and the decisive breakthrough in the modernization of the traditional city.” The High Line too proposes to ‘open up’ the city, but while the Parisian boulevards were designed for economic stimulation, the High Line innovates late 20th century urban planning as a “green pocket” comparable to Central Park’s role as the “green lung” of New York or the Metropolitan Green Belt of London.

37. Charles Baudelaire, “The Eyes of the Poor,” in *Spleen: Little Poems in Prose*, Cat Nilan, trans., <http://www.piranesia.net/ baudelaire/spleen> (accessed February 10, 2010).

38. Berman, 148–55. Berman pointed out how the distance between the two lovers and their reactions could be read in terms of “a radical opposition in ideology and politics,” reading from Baudelaire’s almost ruthless sketching of how the themes of class difference and privilege played out on the Parisian boulevards. At the same time, the story also provides a means by which to consider the politics of ethical relationships between the “self” and the “other,” through the lens of affect, which Judith Butler has lucidly explored using Emmanuel Levinas’ notion of “face,” in her essay “Precarious Life,” in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London; New York: Verso, 2004, 128–53). See also Butler’s *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London; New York: Verso, 2009).

39. This concept is often attributed to philosopher Gaston Bachelard and is thought to be in his book *Poetics of Space*, but I was not able to locate it in either the English or French versions of the book. In French discourse, the term *les chemins du désir* is used.

40. Foucault, 216.

41. The original “path,” in the form of a street-level freight rail track, had been built in the mid-nineteenth century as an overland trade passage, running parallel to the Hudson River.

42. These sites were “formal” in the sense that we required permission and collaboration from the management of each site. the Kitchen is a non-profit gallery/performance space, the High Line park is a public park managed by the Friends of the High Line, and The Little Red Lighthouse is part of the Historic House Trusts. The latter two sites come under the purview of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. All three sites have been repurposed for art exhibition use.

43. The building was formerly a windowless ice-making factory, thus insulated from sun and temperature changes.

44. The Little Red Lighthouse has had a colorful itinerant history. This was not its original location or original structure. Like the High Line, it was slated to be dismantled in 1951, but strong public opposition, especially from fans of a children’s book that had featured the lighthouse, eventually led to its preservation

as a New York City landmark. More information can be found on the Historic House Trust website. <http://www.historichousetrust.org> (accessed February 10, 2010).

45. There is a double layer of high security fencing around the foot of the George Washington Bridge, but most visitors can be easily distracted from this by the prettiness of the lighthouse.

46. See Alice Chang's architectural drawing, developed from her earlier proposal for an unrealized site-specific installation at the Little Red Lighthouse. Concrete Canvas, the material she proposed to use for her project, was first developed for use in humanitarian situations by Peter Brewin and William Crawford, two industrial design engineers who were studying at the Royal Academy of Art. Concrete Canvas is essentially a cement-impregnated material that, upon being sprayed with water, hardens within twenty-four hours and becomes weatherproof. It is impervious to small-arms fire and shrapnel. The British army is currently using Concrete Canvas to improve its frontline sandbag defenses in Afghanistan. <http://www.concretecanvas.co.uk> (accessed February 10, 2010).

47. Auster, 3.

Key Words

COLONIZATION/COLONIALISM

The terms *colonization* and *colonialism* help to describe the tangled history of inhabitation in the Hudson River Valley—from the impact of human activity on prehistoric oyster beds to the present-day incarnation of New York as a global city that parlays its social, political and cultural influence well beyond its physical geography, through various forms of media including magazines, films and books. The ideas of territorial conquest, occupation (benign or otherwise), and ecological tensions are implicit in both terms and it is thus necessary to distinguish between them, some overlap notwithstanding.

Colonization refers to the act of establishing a settlement or colony, whether through physical, biological, or political strategies. In the nineteenth century, this was part of the biological vocabulary frequently used in association with birds, bacteria, or plant species. It is in itself a topic with a long and varied history in archaeological and anthropological scholarship, often crossing into the phenomena of migration, diffusion and dispersal. These terms were traditionally used to explain cultural change but in recent years have come to be redefined as “more biogeographically based processes that are themselves in need of explanation and that should be investigated in their own right.” Marcia Rockman suggests that colonization begins at the point when humans initiate contact with an environment.¹

Colonialism has a negative connotation as it is conventionally applied to the historical period between the fifteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Europeans were establishing colonies in other parts of the world that were already populated by indigenous peoples. The territorial expansions of the European empires often brought religious persecution, subjugation, displacement, disease, and other forms of suffering to local populations. The Hudson Valley, for example, was already inhabited by the Lenape people before the Dutch arrived in the early seventeenth century. Under the Dutch West India Company, the region was known as Nieuw Nederland (New

Netherland). When the English took control of the river port in 1664, it was renamed New York, and the historical record was rewritten to favor the English narrative.²

The critical unpacking of colonialism has shaped the post-colonialist discourse as it developed in the second half of the twentieth century. In recent literature, the word *contact* has often been used in place of colonialism. This can be seen as a tactical attempt to evacuate the problematic historical and political inflections of colonialism. More recently, the word *globalization* has appeared as the ubiquitous term *du jour*—deservedly criticized for serving as “a placeholder, a word with no exact meaning that we use in our contested efforts to describe the successors to development and colonialism.”³ These semantic variations can be seen, on one hand, as attempts to bring home the understanding that “far from being fixed within borders or limited to local communities and national states, many of the world’s most important commodities, political systems, and spiritual practices are the consequence of diverse cultural encounters over time and space.”⁴ At the same time, we need to question if these elaborate definitions double as obfuscations, deliberately constructed to allow the circumvention of the moral implications that result from these processes and their effects.

That said, it is not just physical and human geographies that are subject to the pressures of the colonization / colonialism discourse. Earlier meanings have long since been suffused with Darwinian undertones—namely, the view that nature plays a greater developmental role than nurture and that evolution ultimately depends on the survival of the fittest. In a world of limited resources and competing needs, psychological and sexual boundaries are constantly being contested and re-drawn. Today, an updated usage of the term colonization can provide an alternative means of recasting power dynamics at play in gender and queer theories. Colonization is also productively deployed in debates on public space, especially with regard to gentrification issues that entangle economic and commercial stakes, socio-economic consequences like displacement, and demographic change. Finally, we return full circle to an expanded biological/environmental lexicon, where the term colonization can now be used to describe various configurations in inter-species relations (for example, oysters and

humans in the Hudson Valley over the last millennium) and to unpack the politics of competing ecologies in overlapping ecosystems.

1. Marcy Rockman, "Knowledge and Learning in the Archaeology of Colonization," in Marcy Rockman and James Steele, eds., *Colonization of Unfamiliar Landscapes: The Archaeology of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 8
2. "Exploration & Colonialism," in *Mapping New York's Shoreline, 1609–2009: Celebrating the Quadricentennial of Henry Hudson's Exploration of the Waterways of New York*, pamphlet for New York Public Library exhibition from September 25, 2009–June 26, 2010 (New York: New York Public Library, 2009).
3. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1.
4. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., introduction to *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

COSMOPOLITANISM

The word *cosmopolitan* has its origins in the Greek *kosmopolitēs* or "citizen of the world."¹ Although this term is not explicitly utilized in *Undercurrents*, cosmopolitanism is an idea that is implicitly present in the conversation in which we are engaging. It is a term that has gained prominence in public discourse, yet remains problematic by virtue of its multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings, employed by a vast array of theorists, academics, and politicians. As David Harvey has written, "Unfortunately, cosmopolitanism has been reconstructed from such a variety of standpoints as to often confuse rather than clarify political-economic and cultural-scientific agendas."² At the same time that it supports progressive views of responsibility, common humanity, and citizenship, it can also be used to support market-driven visions more properly identified by the term *globalization*.

Common to many conceptions of cosmopolitanism is a core notion that we all, as humans, potentially have a stake in a shared community that transcends political borders and more nebulous nationalist demarcations. In the context of this exhibition, we are considering cosmopolitanism as a state of potentiality in relation to other key words we have included, such as *entanglement* and *ethical cohabitation*. We consider it from a utopian perspective of possibility in which multiple ideas come together to rearticulate a vision in which

the community of humanity takes precedence over a globalization in which the individual or smaller group is de-prioritized in relation to multinational markets. This perspective draws from ideas such as responsible, intersubjective relationships towards the “other,” as elucidated by Emmanuel Levinas, and multi-layered understandings of space and geography, as described by David Harvey.³ In this context, the individual as a cosmopolitan figure is not the embodiment of the urbane world traveler who is shielded by privilege but rather a figure who is keenly aware of the potential for recuperated democracy in a world in which we identify collectively as human.

1. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. “cosmopolitanism,” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/> (accessed March 15, 2010).

2. David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 78.

3. In much of his work, including the most recent *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, Harvey has theorized geography as an essential component to understanding political and social relations. In several instances, he has posited a useful framework for understanding “space” in three interconnected ways: absolute, relative and relational. This recent publication is also recommended as an in-depth overview and discussion of cosmopolitanism.

ECOSYSTEM

In this exhibition, we use the word *ecosystem* in a way that attempts to release it from a strictly “green” meaning. We seek a more expansive understanding of the term that allows for complex interactions among the social, political, and cultural, as well as the ecological. In recent years, common understandings of the word have often created a sense that ecosystemic matters are fundamentally separate from the human. If the traditional definition of ecosystem is understood as “a biological system composed of all the organisms found in a particular physical environment, interacting with it and with each other,” then it is vital that we shed any false oppositions in our understanding of the word, such as human/nature or politics/environment.¹ In the context of *Undercurrents*, we consider this challenge within the ecosystems of Manhattan—a complex city that provides opportunities to simultaneously examine the notion of ecosystem within the urban setting from many local and global perspectives

We seek to explore ecosystem in this expanded context by looking at writings by sociologists and artists, as well as exhibitions that demonstrate how a change in the system, initiated by humans, can cause transformation on multiple registers within the immediate environment. The systems in turn respond by adapting to the set of altered conditions. Many of the projects articulate and make visible the role that human beings have in altering the general conditions of their ecosystem. For this reason, we find it useful to look at theories that address this dynamic within the urban context and global setting.

In Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, he discusses how space is socially produced, involving complex relationships between politics, class, and culture.² In her writings about the global city, Saskia Sassen traces the ways in which multiple sub-national spaces are connected through legal systems,³ as well as the service economy,⁴ delineating paths across time and space.⁵ Many artists in the 1960s—for example, Hans Haacke—visualized social and ecological systems in order to make visible the political, environmental, and social repercussions of human actions.⁶

Since the groundbreaking exhibitions *Information and Software* (1970, the Museum of Modern Art and the Jewish Museum, both New York, respectively), artists have continued to explore knowledge and media sites by investigating their impact on our relationships to time and space. Other exhibitions like *After Nature* (2008, New Museum, New York) and *Terre Natale* (2008, Fondation Cartier, Paris) have, to varying degrees, highlighted the damage caused to the environment, drawing attention to its specific impact on cultures, land and traditions of various populations around the world. *Undercurrents* seeks to use ecosystems to explore the interrelation and co-evolution of the economic, social, political, and environmental conditions made visible by the works in the exhibition.

1. The Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “ecosystem,” <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50072004> (accessed March 22, 2010).

2. Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991)

3. Saskia Sassen, “Toward a Multiplication of Specialized Assemblages of Territory, Authority and Rights,” in *Parallax* 13, no. 1 (February 2007), 87

4. Saskia Sassen/Isabel Donas Botto, *Spaces of Possibility: An Interview with*

Saskia Sassen, *Spaces of Utopia: An electronic Journal*, nr.4, Spring 2007, 1, <http://ler.letras.up.pt>

5. Saskia Sassen, "Toward a Multiplication of Specialized Assemblages of Territory, Authority and Rights," in *Parallax* 13, no. 1 (February 2007), 89

6. Hans Haacke's work with systems has taken many forms, including *Rhinewater Purification Plant* (1972), which drew attention to issue of wastewater pollution in Krefeld, Germany. The project shed light on the negative role the wastewater was playing on the local environment and the ease with which it could be cleaned. In Shapolsky et al., *Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System*, as of May 1, 1971 Haacke examined the slum real estate holdings and financial relationships of Harry Shapolsky, a prominent New York City landlord.

ENTANGLEMENT

The word *entanglement* stems from the Middle English root *tangilen* and the Scandinavian term *taggla*: to disarrange.¹ To be entangled refers to a state of being trapped or enmeshed together, presupposing, then, the involvement of two or more entities.

French anthropologist-philosopher Bruno Latour has proposed the term *entanglements* to jettison the distinctions that the history of Western thought and various modern sciences have enacted to polarize concepts such as nature and culture, things and signs, past and present.² Latour argues against notions of progress that envision humans as increasingly distancing themselves from a premodern past and its attendant belief systems, disengaged from nature and contingency at the same time. Latour argues that, on the contrary, there are more entanglements today than ever before among humans, things, technology, and nature. For him, one needs to first recognize that any binary relationship between culture and nature is a fiction, that "in spite of its transcendence, Nature remains mobilizable, humanizable, socializable. . . . Conversely, even though we construct Society through and through, it lasts, it surpasses us, it dominates us, it has its own laws, it is as transcendent as Nature."³

Another, not unrelated, school of thought belongs to the scientific realm, where the idea of entanglement originated. Albert Einstein's pioneering work in general-relativistic physics provided a coherent solution to a perplexing phenomenon first proposed by Newton—known as *action-at-a-distance*—which allowed for the possibility that two particles could somehow be inextricably linked, such that a gravitational change in one would be instantly reflected in the

other, irrespective of any intervening distance.⁴ Quantum-physicist-turned-feminist-theorist Karen Barad has expanded the reach of these ideas into philosophy and feminist theory with her theory of agential realism. In Barad's elegant definition:

To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through as a part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future.⁵

The curatorial perspective of *Undercurrents* and of many of the artists in the exhibition, such as the collectives *spurse* and *ecoart-tech*, reflects this “entangled intra-relating” that Barad mentions. To understand contemporary society and the changes taking place in the environment, there is a need to think in networks, to trace the web that weaves together humans and non-humans, practices and instruments, documents and translations that make up how we understand and relate to each other and the world around us. This method implies not starting from binary poles, such as nature or culture, but from a more multivalent perspective, from which the work of translation and mediation between the poles can occur.⁶

1. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/entangle> (accessed 1 April 2010).

2. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Catherine Porter, tr., (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 133

3. Latour, 37.

4. Amir Aczel, *Entanglement: The Greatest Mystery in Physics* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002). For his scientific insights, we would like to thank Brian Reese.

5. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), ix.

6. Latour, 133.

ETHICAL COHABITATION

“Ethics” is a plural noun that refers to systems of moral principles or rules of conduct recognized by an individual, group, or culture. Ethics is also a branch of Western philosophy that can roughly be divided into three schools of thought: the first, with Aristotle as its main proponent, proposes a set of virtues (such as charity, benevolence, generosity) that are deemed beneficial to the person that possesses them, as well as to the individual’s society. The second school, attributed largely to Kant, equates ethics with the concept of duty, and asserts that the knowledge of being a rational person should serve to compel one’s duty of respect towards others. The third school, utilitarianism, claims that the guiding rule of conduct should be the one that assures the greatest amount of happiness or benefit to the greatest number of people.¹

For *Undercurrents*, we use the adjective “ethical” to qualify the term cohabitation. “Cohabitation” implies entities living together, and the projects in *Undercurrents* address the cohabitation of humans, other life forms and non-sentient beings with which we share the world around us. For us, ethical cohabitation is above all a question of responsibility. That said, on what and whose moral principles can we establish a notion of responsibility in relation to the fact of cohabitation?

Judith Butler has demonstrated the productive shift that comes from moving away from concerns with the precariousness of life, towards the investigation of the conditions of the sustainability of life. She argues that once we accept that the body is vulnerable to the world in which it exists, but that it can only exist through its relations to this world, then the question of self-preservation becomes inextricably linked with a responsibility to sustain the “other” who is indispensable to the survival of the “self”:

Hence, precariousness as a generalized condition relies on a conception of the body as fundamentally dependent on, and conditioned by, a sustained and sustainable world; responsiveness—and thus, ultimately responsibility—is located in the affective responses to a sustaining and impinging world.

Interacting with others in a responsible way then becomes an imperative for self preservation and the basis for ethical cohabitation. The

projects in *Undercurrents* demonstrate that this responsibility comes into play at all levels of conduct: in the ways we develop and use technologies and scientific processes; in the politics of representation that are deployed in various ways to allow certain narratives to exist while excluding others; and, in a growing awareness that how we choose to act in a specific locale can have far-reaching and significant repercussions in a remote location. Consequently, in a world that is increasingly networked and global, these remote locations require the same responsiveness and responsibility that we have to our immediate surroundings.

1. Oxford Thesaurus, Microsoft Word 2008, version 12.2.4

2. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* (London: Verso, 2009), 34.

THE EVERYDAY

Everyday is an adjective that refers to the commonplace, the ordinary, and the banal. The adverbial phrase *every day* highlights how that which occurs each day—the repetitive, habitual, and quotidian of our daily lives—quickly becomes familiar and consequently falls under the threshold of the noticeable.

Kristin Ross has argued that everyday life emerged as a site of interest with the experience of the Western metropolis in the late nineteenth-century, in which life became ever-more codified into repetitive channels. During this period, hours, work, leisure, and money became increasingly calculable and calculated.¹ It is only after World War II that the everyday was elevated to the status of a theoretical concept by Henri Lefebvre. The everyday, he pointed out, is inherently hard to grasp. He assigned art an important role in understanding the everyday because it could function like “play-generative yeast,” intervening into the familiar through processes of fermentation, agitation, and disruption.

Earlier thinkers, such as Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Georg Simmel, and others, saw a revolutionary potential in the everyday. Since their initial work, the term’s conceptual and political possibilities have also been explored in other ways across various disciplines

and artistic forms. For instance, the notion of the everyday has played an important role in the developments of surrealist, situationist, conceptual, and feminist theories and practices. Running through these experiments is a continued commitment to ways of uncovering and acting on the everyday.

The everyday functions as an underlying condition and operation in the curatorial framework of *Undercurrents* and in the selected artistic projects included here. An interrogative rather than assertive mode of looking is exercised, in order to make visible ideas that have become obscured in the common ground of the everyday. Related to this is a belief in the transformative possibilities of the quotidian. By creating situations that intersect with the habitual routes of the cityscape, the artists ask visitors to explore—and even plumb—the inherent contradictions on everyday urban life: to see urban terrain, as Lefebvre puts it, as bearer of both alienation and creative potential.³

1. Kristin Ross, “French Quotidian,” in Lynn Gumpert, ed., *The Art of the Everyday: The Quotidian in Postwar French Culture* (New York: Grey Art Gallery, 1997), 19–30.

2. Stephen Johnstone, “Introduction/Recent Art and the Everyday” in Johnstone, ed., *The Everyday* (London: Whitechapel, 2008), 14.

3. *Ibid.*, 15.

HISTORIES

The word *history* derives from the Latin *historia*—a narrative of past events or an account, tale, or story—which itself was derived from the Greek *istoria*: learning or knowing developed by inquiry.¹ For this exhibition, we have chosen *histories*, the plural form of the word, to gesture towards the fact that the representation of past events can never be seen as fundamentally objective or free of political and affective content. Any history is one of multiple possible histories—or narratives—that can be written about the past, whether that past is at a distance of centuries, decades, or hours.

All histories are, to some degree, constructed. All histories are contingent upon the situation of the present, and *dominant* histories have often reflected a desire to create a unified continuum of progress and general consensus. Recognition of this is crucial, and *Undercurrents* encourages entanglement between notions of the historical with

consciousness of multiple perspectives in the present. This is not to deny the existence of real events with real effects, or to have the discussion devolve into complete relativism, but rather to help question dominant narratives. As Walter Benjamin wrote in his essay “On the Concept of History” (1940):

But no state of affairs is, as a cause, already a historical one. It becomes this, posthumously, through eventualities which may be separated from it by millenia. The historian who starts from this, ceases to permit the consequences of eventualities to run through the fingers like the beads of a rosary. He records the constellation in which his own epoch comes into contact with that of an earlier one. He thereby establishes a concept of the present as that of the here-and-now, in which splinters of messianic time are shot through.²

This interrelationship between the past and the present begins to point toward the difficulties of maintaining a single historical narrative. Raymond Williams (whose work has inspired the inclusion of a key words section in this catalogue) extensively defined the usages and problems of variations on the word *history*. Most importantly for the context of this exhibition, he made sure to privilege understandings of the word that tie together not only *history* and the *present*, but also the *future*.³ If we are to implicate ourselves in a discussion of *ethical cohabitation*, we have a responsibility to posit how future relationships will build upon a complex conception of the past.

1. The Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “history,” <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50106603> (accessed March 22, 2010).

2. Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” Dennis Redmond, trans., in *Gesammelten Schriften I:2* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), http://www.arts.yorku.ca/soci/barent/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/benjamin-concept_of_history1.pdf (accessed February 8, 2010).

3. Raymond Williams, *Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

MAP

The word *map* as we know it has its origins in the Latin *mappa*, which refers to the physical substrate—cloth—upon which maps were often

drawn.¹ Historically, mapping was fundamentally understood as a way to grasp and chart the vast, otherwise unknowable world, and as such it performed both scientific and speculative functions. This representational tool for understanding was not limited to mere geography: maps in the Middle Ages, for example, featured depictions of historical events, mythological creatures, spiritual ideas, and cosmology.² In a way, these older uses of maps foreshadowed the expanded ways in which we now use tools such as Google Maps, with embedded information that goes beyond the physical.

In the context of this exhibition, we are using map as both a noun (map, as a tool for navigation) and a verb (mapping, as a physical and mental action). The two senses cannot be looked at in isolation from each other. We approach mapping with an awareness that it is used and abused as a tool for information, didacticism, and politics, but we attempt here to investigate the potential of maps as more democratically oriented discursive tools. Mapping has become a key strategy in contemporary art, albeit one that is perhaps sometimes simplistically used. In this exhibition, we have sought out artistic practices that approach the concept from new and critical directions, as exemplified by participants Lize Mogel, ecoarttech, and spurse.

The field of thinking in relation to maps and geography is large, but one can look to a few key theorists as an entry point. Geographer David Harvey has, throughout his career, examined how our understandings of spaces—physical and social—are constructed and politicized. As he has written, “where an ecosystem might begin and end . . . is fundamental to the whole question of how to formulate an ecologically sensitive politics.”³ One can also look back to the influential work of urban planner Kevin Lynch in the mid-twentieth century, who developed the notion of “cognitive mapping” to describe the ways in which we develop relational mental pictures of the cities we live in, pictures that ultimately guide our movements and perceptions.⁴ This idea was later taken up by Fredric Jameson and applied to the field of social relations in the global political sphere. His expansion of the idea of cognitive mapping indicates the possibility of understanding class and other relations in a very precise representational field. Jameson also warns, notably, that the inability to clearly understand and map the social can cripple any attempt at positive

change.⁵ In the same way that cognitive mapping can make an urban space intelligible, Jameson's social mapping helps us navigate the political terrain.

1. The Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "map," <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00301686> (accessed March 22, 2010).
2. The Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "mappa mundi," <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00301711> (accessed March 22, 2010).
3. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 75.
4. Kevin Lynch, *Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960).
5. Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 347–60.

SITE

Site is a noun that refers to a location, place, position, situation, or locality. It is also a verb, meaning to place, position, or locate. Site has its etymological roots in the late sixteenth-century Middle English use of the Latin term *situs*, which means "local position." Within art history, site emerged as a category of critical investigation with Minimalism, Conceptualism, and institutional critique. Miwon Kwon has traced out interweaving explorations of site specificity in recent artistic practice that can be roughly broken down into three categories: works dealing with phenomenological concerns, social and institutional frameworks, and discursive vectors.¹

The critic and curator Geeta Kapur has argued that, today, artistic practices dealing with site need to be rerouted and made to operate in a way that addresses the actual politics of a place, in all its material and other specificities:

I propose to situate the artist (here the Indian artist) in an uneasy "subterrain" of the contemporary where she/he reclaims memory and history; where the leveling effect of the ahistorical no-nation, no-place phenomenon promoted by globalized exhibition and market circuits is upturned to rework a passage back into the politics of place.²

The curatorial model and site-specific works in *Undercurrents* attempt to move in this direction. While adopting a productive model,

the exhibition does not reinforce the image of its site, but rather, actively displaces dominant representations by situating the visitors within alternative perspectives.

In this light, it is crucial to point here to the politics inherent to the name of the geographical site of *Undercurrents: Manhattan*. In the global imagination, Manhattan evokes images of a concrete island of towers, glamour, culture, money, and fashion; it stands as an emblem of the American dream. *Mannahatta* is a word that stems from the indigenous Lenape people, whose homeland stretched from the edge of present-day Connecticut to Delaware.³ The word means “island of many hills.” The Lenape word, slightly altered, now designates a cosmopolitan world center, home to a population of over eight million inhabitants. The Lenape populated the island for some 5,000 years before Henry Hudson sailed into the harbor; the descendants of the Lenape who survived the effects of colonization, are presently scattered throughout Oklahoma, Kansas, Wisconsin, New Jersey, and Ontario, Canada.

1. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity in October* (spring 1997) 95.

2. Geeta Kapur, “subTerrain: Artworks in the Cityfold,” in Claire Doherty, ed., *Situation*, (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 175.

3. Eric W. Sanderson, *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City* (New York: Abrams, 2009), 104–6.

Works in the Exhibition

GINA BADGER

Rates of Accumulation, 2010
Closed-circuit televisions, drawings,
and sound installation at the Kitchen,
and radio broadcasts from the Little Red
Lighthouse, dimensions variable
Collection of the artist

AMY BALKIN

*Reading the IPCC Synthesis Report:
Summary for Policymakers*, 2008
Video, color, sound; 38:53 min., looped
Collection of the artist

RACHEL BERWICK

Geochelone Abingdoni; Lonesome George, 2007
Cast polyurethane and steel,
digital video projection, 37 x 45 x 30 in.
(94 x 114.3 x 76.2 cm)
Collection of the artist

MATTHEW BUCKINGHAM

*Muhheakantuck—Everything Has a
Name*, 2003
16mm film, color, sound;
40 min., looped
Collection of the artist and Murray Guy

ECOARTECH

*A Series of Indeterminate Hikes in “Google
National Park” and “Manhattan Island
National Search Engine,”* 2010
Installation and performance: internet,
shipping pallets, recycled cardboard
boxes, recycled computers with open-
source operating systems
Collection of the artists

PABLO HELGUERA

Beauty for Ashes, 2010
Mini-exhibition of juried paintings,
pamphlet, and documentary video.
Installation: courtesy Pablo Helguera;
video and text collection of Helguera;
paintings: collections of individual
participating artists

ALFREDO JAAR

Fragments, 2010
Performance and collage of drawings,
33 x 44 in. (83.8 x 111.8 cm)
Collection of the artist

TATSUO MIYAJIMA AND THE PEACE

SHADOW PROJECT TEAM
Peace Shadow Project, 2009
Installation with web component, prints
on heat-sensitive paper, and documen-
tary video, dimensions variable
Collection of the artists

LIZE MOGEL

The Sludge Economy, 2010
Wall painting and maps, dimensions
variable
Collection of the artist

ANDREA POLLI AND MEMBERS
OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR
ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY

Untitled, 2010
Public soundwalks
Courtesy the artist and New York Society
for Acoustic Ecology

ANDREA POLLI AND SHA SHA FENG

Sound Seeker, 2005–
Web project: www.soundseeker.org

EMILY ROYSDON

Untitled, 2010

Performance with site-specific songs

SPURSE

Sharing the OCEA(n):Ocean Commons

Entanglement Apparatus, 2009–

Installation and workshops: modular tables, written materials, interactive

computer station, research equipment

Collection of the artists; developed in

partnership with the Northwest Atlantic

Marine Alliance (NAMA), and Parsons

COLLAB Design Studio (George

Bixby, Chris Hennelly, Kat Reilly,

Nadia Shazana)

APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL

Unknown Forces, 2007

Digital video, projected on four-screens, color, sound; looped

Commissioned by REDCAT with support

from the Asian Cultural Council,

New York; North Star World, Bangkok,

Thailand; the James Thompson

Foundation, Bangkok, Thailand;

R23, Los Angeles; Smallroom,

Bangkok, Thailand

Collection of the artist

Support for the Independent Study Program is provided by Margaret Morgan and Wesley Phoa, The Capital Group Charitable Foundation, The New York Community Trust, the Whitney Contemporaries through their annual Art Party benefit, and an anonymous donor.

Endowment support is provided by Joanne Leonhardt Cassullo, the Dorothea L. Leonhardt Fund of the Communities Foundation of Texas, the Dorothea L. Leonhardt Foundation, and the Helena Rubinstein Foundation.

Emily Roysdon's performance/variable media artwork was made possible, in part, by the Franklin Furnace Fund supported by stimulus funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency; the Lambert Foundation; and Jerome Foundation.

Partially funded by
the MIT Council for the Arts 

JAPAN FOUNDATION
NEW YORK 

Technical support provided by

 **THE RIVER PROJECT**



City of New York
Parks & Recreation
Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor
Adrian Benepe, Commissioner

Use of The Little Red Lighthouse has been made possible by our project partner, The Historic House Trust of New York City/New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.

This catalogue was published on the occasion of the exhibition *Undercurrents: Experimental Ecosystems in Recent Art*, May 27–June 19, 2010, at the Kitchen, New York; the Little Red Lighthouse, New York; and other public sites throughout New York. Curated by Anik Fournier, Michelle Lim, Amanda Parmer, and Robert Wuilfe, the 2009–10 Curatorial Fellows of the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program.

Copyright © 2010
Whitney Museum of American Art

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, or otherwise (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street
New York, NY 10021
whitney.org

ISSN: 1068-7823
ISBN: 978-0-300-16954-6

Frontispiece: Lize Mogel, *Hudson River Ecologies*, 2010

Distributed by
Yale University Press
302 Temple Street
P.O. Box 209040
New Haven, CT 06520
yalebooks.com

Printed and bound in the United States

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This publication was produced by the Independent Study Program and the graphic design and publications departments at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Editors: Johanna Burton and Jason Best
Copy editor: Brian Reese
Printer: Thompson-Shore, Inc.

Set in Quadraat. Printed on Rolland Enviro Natural 100% PCR. Cover printed on Mohawk Via Light Gray Linen Cover.



Whitney Museum of American Art is committed to preserving ancient forests and natural resources. We elected to print this title on 100% postconsumer recycled paper, processed chlorine-free. As a result, we have saved:

8 Trees (40' tall and 6-8" diameter)
3 Million BTUs of Total Energy
756 Pounds of Greenhouse Gases
3,643 Gallons of Wastewater
221 Pounds of Solid Waste

Whitney Museum of American Art made this paper choice because our printer, Thomson-Shore, Inc., is a member of Green Press Initiative, a nonprofit program dedicated to supporting authors, publishers, and suppliers in their efforts to reduce their use of fiber obtained from endangered forests.

For more information, visit www.greenpressinitiative.org

Environmental impact estimates were made using the Environmental Defense Paper Calculator. For more information visit: www.edf.org/papercalculator