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My exhibition is not about hope, or about creating points of stabilization, it is about showing my disgust with the dominating discourse and showing my contempt for the fascination with power.¹
– Thomas Hirschhorn

It has proven difficult to imagine what sculpture could be at the beginning of the new century. To actually produce it seems to have become next to impossible. The reasons for its temporary demise or its definitive bankruptcy are manifold. Some are obvious, others obscure. Obvious is that the incessant overproduction of objects of consumption and their perpetually enforced and accelerated obsolescence generate a vernacular violence in the spaces of everyday life which regulates every spatio-temporal order and devalorizes all object relationships. Tatters and fragments are its experiential matrix. Less obvious, but more powerful in its impact on sculptural theory and practice, might be the increasing extrapolation of almost all previously visible, if not tangible, economic and material processes of production and exchange on to a heretofore unimagined level of electronic and digital abstraction, generating an all encompassing mirage: that of the transformation of matter into its mathematical 'equivalents'. Any spatial relations and material forms one might still experience outside of these registers of the overproduction of objects and of electronic digitalization now appear as mere abandoned zones, as remnant objects and leftover spaces, rather than as elementary givens from which new spatial parameters and new object relations could be configured in sculptural terms in the present. Other reasons for the demise of sculpture remain – for the time being at least – more latent, if not utterly obscure. One could hypothetically point in the direction of sculpture's own recent and frequent collaborations with the forces of spectacle culture and its ideological mediations through post-modern architecture.

Sculpture's plethora – the frequency of its transformations and the multiplicity of its morphologies and object positions within the last thirty years alone – can hardly be explained as mere prolific cultural productivity. The despair of having to respond to the rapidity with which corporate enterprise and its architecture have abrogated even the last remnants of what was once experienced as public space might turn out to be a more pertinent explanation: they have reclaimed and recruited almost all of the new object types and spatial relations that recent sculpture had opened up (from the anti-monuments of Claes Oldenburg to the phenomenological sculpture of Sol Lewitt and Richard Serra; from Gordon Matta Clark's *anarchitecture* to the Foucauldian pavillons of Dan Graham). It seems that at present, any radical aesthetic practice (sculptural or other) would have to define itself inevitably in a contestatory relation, if not in manifest opposition to architecture.

One crucial example of the recuperation of sculptural models from recent history would be the fate of phenomenology which had informed much of the best of Minimal and Post-Minimal sculpture in the work of Robert Morris, Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra. Their radicality had presumed the constitution of an emancipated spectator whose encounters with immediacy and presence would transcend all forms of pre-established conventions, stylistic

morphologies, and aesthetic norms in the pure and spontaneous practice of embodied perception.

Thirty years later it is precisely this *radical neutrality* that has been undone. Either it has been abrogated by epigones such as Rachel Whiteread and Kiki Smith who imbue phenomenology with a retrograde appeal of figuration and literariness, resuscitating traditional forms of sculptural representation and monumentality. Or the neutrality of phenomenology – seemingly emptying the intricate ideological and socio-political investments from the production of space – is now claimed for an architecture of spatial control and spectacle (e.g. Richard Meier's Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona, not to mention his Getty Museum, or Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao). The architects Herzog and de Meuron, for example, describe their understanding of the phenomenological aspects of Dan Graham's work precisely in terms of a universalized architectural abstraction, as the articulation of a pure and de-historicized space for the embodiment of transhistorical subjects:

Architects are increasingly interested in the aesthetic fascination of Graham's mirroring pavilion walls. However, Dan Graham does not function simply as an architect. He uses his scalpel to reveal the psychological and perceptive structures of our social behavior.²

Architecture's recent embrace of the sculpture of the Sixties (e.g. Peter Eisenman's passion for Sol Lewitt, Frank Gehry's for Claes Oldenburg, and Richard Serra, Herzog, and de Meuron's for Dan Graham), seems to originate less from the desire to renew an age-old fraternity, than from the insight that architecture, in order to remain socially viable, has to operate first of all in the registers of the spectacular and of sign exchange value: thus what was once tectonic now has to become semiotic in order to achieve the media visibility that seems to have become architecture's primary horizon of aspiration.

Paradoxically, however, radical artistic practices since the Sixties have withdrawn from privileging visuality. In fact they oppose their reduction to the sphere of the specular (and the spectacular) by pointing to the dialectical opposites of all of their constituent characteristics: reduced to fetishes, aesthetic objects incessantly pronounce the urgency to de-fetishize experience. Simplified to be read as mere semiotic structures, works of art recuperate the somatic and the corporeal; declared to be purely pictorial, paintings point incessantly to their linguistic status; works of art as textual propositions insist on the simultaneous reading of the textual, the discursive, and the institutional contexts of their presentation.

Most importantly, however, contemporary artistic practices reflect their status within a larger visual apparatus under the regime of the spectacle. Rather than abiding by this regime, they deconstruct it, trying to find – even if only experimentally – precisely those spaces in which the universal hegemony of spectacle has not yet been fully established. If the principles of total fetishization and of spatial control are undone by contemporary artistic practices, they return in the hands of the architects as newly enforced. It is against this historical backdrop that we want to situate the following observations of the sculptural displays by Thomas Hirschhorn.³

As is typical for the work of artists that generate an actual paradigm shift within the disciplinary conventions of their genre, Hirschhorn's work seems to have uncannily internalized almost all of the central issues that sculptors of the last thirty years have been engaged with, and he fuses, in an almost inconceivable synthesis, all of these apparently incompatible legacies (e.g. from Pop Art to Post-Minimal sculpture, from ready made iconicity to phenomenological anti-form and the abstractions of process- and structure-

determined practices). In particular, he engages with the more esoteric but crucial sculptural paradigms of the recent past that have redefined our thinking about the possibilities (or rather, the impossibilities) of sculptural production.

From the moment of Fluxus and Pop (e.g. Claes Oldenburg, Allan Kaprow, and Robert Whitman) in the late Fifties and early Sixties to figures such as Michael Asher and Dan Graham at the end of that decade, approaches to sculpture asked specific questions about its sites and situations in the remnants of the former public sphere. Yet these artists were not merely involved in a critique of the discourses of exhibitions and the museum institution, but they actually contemplated the collective conditions governing the experience of objects and spaces under the visual regimes of late capitalism.

Sculpture as Pavilion

Rather than designing sculpture as either a solid monolith (anthropomorphic or stereometrical), or as a serial structure (biomorphic or geometrical), or as the ready made analogue to the commodity, Hirschhorn has defined his major works in two genres. The first is defined as *altars* (i.e. as devotional or commemorative sets), seemingly instigating a new type of cult value. Often they are positioned in public space without any evidence of a legitimizing institutional or discursive frame. Due to their cumulative organization and their potential of infinite anonymous additions, sculpture turns into the semblance of collective articulation. Conversely, the artist defines his works as *pavilions* (i.e. expository 'display spaces'), where the condition of exhibition value itself seems to have become the first subject of investigation. These pavilions are hybrid architectural containers shifting between vitrines and shrines, exhibiting enigmatic elements and objects. As in the 'altars', their participatory potential is radical; here, however, it does not allow for a vandalism of random addition, rather one that might remove crucial elements at any time, or even annihilate the work altogether.

In terms of an initial schematic comparison, two artistic predecessors or architectural prototypes come to mind. The first one would be the history of the *Kiosk* and of *Reklame-Architektur*, as it emerges from the sculpture of Russian Constructivism in the work of Gustav Klucis and in the work of Italian Futurists such as Fortunato Depero, where declamatory signs and letters had displaced architecture's traditional foregrounding of tectonic structures. The second, more purely architectural type, would be the modernist exhibition pavilion – its most outstanding example, of course, being Mies van der Rohe's *Barcelona Pavilion* (1929) – its later embodiments continuing through to Gerrit Rietveld's pavilion for the Kroeller-Müller Museum in Otterloo. Slightly later examples exist in the work of the Swiss Socialist architect Hannes Meyer and his COOP architecture where serial commodity display and the order of the socialist distribution system regulate (if they do not displace), architectural tectonics. All of these models partake in what one could call the rise of a new semiotic architecture of the 1920s and 1930s. This new 'architecture of signs' (rather than an architecture of social spaces and functions) develops at the very moment when architecture's traditional tasks to contain and enable the various social functions in public space (e.g. labour and production, domestic and public leisure) were displaced by the new tasks to organize space as 'media', in competition with, if not in execution of, the interests of a rising media and commodity culture. In its totalizing culminations in the present, contemporary semiotic architecture (such as that of the 'strip', the airport, or the mall) disseminates politically

authoritarian or consumerist ideologies and extends commodity control into the very fabric of quotidian architectural envelopes.

Not surprisingly, the moment came in the late 1950s and early 1960s when the recognition of the inextricable entanglement between commodity production and artistic production and the entwining between the frames of shop windows and the frames of museum displays would become mandatory. Fluxus and Happening artists such as Allan Kaprow and Robert Whitman, and emerging Pop sculptors such as Claes Oldenburg, resuscitated the architectural *type* of the *Kiosk* or the *Store*, displacing assemblage aesthetics (from Cornell to Rauschenberg) and their contemplative containers. Kaprow's large scale structures such as *Kiosk* (1957–58) or *Apple Shrine* (1960),⁴ Robert Whitman's untitled participatory frameworks and 'sets' from 1958 made out of cardboard and discarded materials, wooden lattices, various translucent and light reflective foils such as nylon and aluminium, and, perhaps most notably, Claes Oldenburg's installations *The Street* (1960) and *The Store* (1961), would be the crucial examples of that moment.

Oldenburg's aesthetic of tatters, fragments, and charred pieces of cardboard collected in the streets articulated the sculptural transformations that the advanced stages of consumer culture of the 1950s had brought about: the total fragmentation of spatio-temporal experience, the devalorization of the use-value of objects, the ever increasing rapidity of their planned obsolescence, and the perpetual acceleration of the cycles of object acquisition and expulsion. But Hirschhorn not only resuscitates Oldenburg's iconic approach to mass culture, and Kaprow's and Whitman's performative architectures, he also repositions sculpture within the participatory radicality of that historical context. Theirs were dialectical constructions embodying at all times spectatorial experience without reifying it, dissolving fetishistic objects without denying the pervasiveness of objecthood, conceiving sculptural constructs as mass cultural mimesis in which the actual governing conditions of experience in public space were articulated without being monumentalized.

The explosion of commodity production, the permeation of everyday spaces by discarded refuse, and the restructuring of sculpture as accumulation of obsolete objects (and as the spatialization of the ready-made), were registered at the same time in Europe in works such as Arman's *Le Plein* (1960), while in the theatre, gesture and movement were rigidified and restructured as arrested *tableaux vivants*, and actors were buried in growing mounds of debris, as in Beckett's *Happy Days* (1961). At that point it seemed that sculpture could not even be conceived anymore as a discrete industrially produced object allowing us to contemplate the conditions of fetishization. It had become a wasteland of refuse, a *theatricalized* set of total reification. Hirschhorn's rediscovery and re-reading of these legacies positions them as the paradigmatic – and largely unrecognized – instances in the redefinition of post-war sculpture.

The sculpture of Michael Asher and Dan Graham (among others), in their dialogues with Minimalism, further articulated the contemporary rediscovery of the semiotic dimensions of architecture. But more importantly, their spatial models and 'pavilions' first of all refuted the suspicion that all sculpture, once positioned in the remnants of public space, would be condemned to the conditions of a fraudulent monumentality.

Graham traces his version of a history of the pavilion-structure as follows:

At that point I started to devise sculpture pavilions, works that were hybrids between quasi-functional architectural pavilions and sculpture. . . . The pavilion idea had a lot to do with where you can interface art with the actual world and where you can't. It evokes history, the park and the city, rather than simply the art world as context. It might happen that some of those ideas

will later be used by an architect, so that my piece would be like an earlier visionary example. That I consider okay The architecture with the greatest influence on me is modernist. Many of my initial forms come from Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion or late Rietveld.⁵

In pointed opposition to Graham's late modernist pavilions which suture the spectator within the surfaces of the mirrored glass of international style architecture (in a remnant of the egalitarian expectations of the Sixties), Hirschhorn's pavilions are made from detritus, the materials of waste and impoverishment. They remind their spectators incessantly that at this point even the slightest allusion towards a material analogy or formal alliance between sculpture and techno-scientific rationality only exacerbates the masochistic identification with the conditions of experience inside the spaces of control that the corporate regulation of everyday life imposes on all of its subjects.

Constructions: Fragile and Febrile

Hirschhorn's pavilions displace these advanced forms of late modernist self-reflexivity, exchanging the notion of a transhistorical subject for a new, enervated, not to say hysterical, 'phenomenology' of subjects and spaces of advanced reification. Not surprisingly then, his work systematically inverts all of the characteristics of sculpture embodied in the modernist pavilion: structures that were rigid now become limp, surfaces that were shiny and reflective now become matt (or at best translucent), and if any reflection is ever allowed in the facades of Hirschhorn's pavillions, it is usually in the form of light caught in an infinity of small fractures of crumpled aluminium foil. No longer drawn from the techno-scientific industrialism of Minimal and Post-Minimal sculpture or from international style architecture, Hirschhorn's structures, procedures, and materials seem impoverished in their resources and infantile in design, ending up in the vernacular of amateurish bricolage: aluminium and nylon foils, cardboard remnants, and paper fragments. All of them seem to have been taken from the *non-sites*⁶ of consumer culture, the *negative ready-mades* of containers and wrapping materials in which objects had been packed and shipped (but the objects themselves are of course never shown), thus salvaging the discarded evidence of an infinite production of waste.

Yet, this sculpture emerging from a poverty of means and materials does not attempt to continue the legacies of *arte povera* or Joseph Beuys. Their work had situated anti-industrial materials (e.g. raw cotton, felt, and fat coffee beans) within a privileged discursive recess where it would still seem possible to experience a natural material 'otherness'. Or where the materials' subversive baseness could generate a sensation of exemption from the universal dual regimes of technology and commodity production. This undialectical insistence on material otherness and on spaces of exemption inevitably generated *arte povera*'s immediate aestheticization. If anything, Hirschhorn's work opposes this primitivism of materials as much as it subverts the triumphalism of the techno-scientific paradigms of Minimalism.

In a parallel dialogue with Post-Minimal sculpture, Hirschhorn rearticulates the spatialization of the ready-made as it has passed from a morphology of sculptural objects to one of mere spatial demarcations. Hirschhorn's protuberances (the tentacular and capillary extensions protruding from his objects which he strangely identifies with the English term *ramifications*), undoubtedly have *one* of their historical progenitors in Eva Hesse's sculptural hybrids of linear and volumetric structures. They articulate a paradoxical vision of biomorphic machines and mechanomorphic carnalities, of bodies flayed in an uncanny fusion of *derma* and *techne*. Modelled from crumpled aluminium and

coloured foils, these bulbous tentacles meander through Hirschhorn's sculptural displays like some unknown hypertrophic growth, embodying thus the sculptural equivalents of the actually existing spatio-temporal forms of the advanced and universal reification of desire (and what else could at this point make up the matter of sculpture?).

Participatory Tactility and Planned Vandalism

If Hirschhorn's sculpture articulates in fact a new 'phenomenology' of advanced reification – both in terms of the actually governing modes of object production as much as the subject positions that it enforces – this phenomenology would have to be readable first of all at the level of spectatorial participation. While re-radicalizing the performative dimensions of Post-Minimalism (and its precursors), Hirschhorn does not, however, merely resuscitate activities of the late Seventies in which sculptural production was actually displaced by (often provocative) performative interventions in public and semi-public spaces, in particular the museum and gallery institutions (e.g. Vito Acconci's *Seed Bed*, 1971).

By contrast, he positions his 'work' within a number of actual *public sites* (for example, in his *Altars* in the street or, more specifically, in the staircases of low-income housing projects) anticipating a rather different type of 'participation'. The alien presence of his 'sculptural' objects in these spaces of the most abject everyday is bound to generate encounters that differ drastically from those that the traditionally protected spaces and frames would have permitted. In the *Altar* pieces, but even more so in other instances, when he literally installs his sculptural structures near public trash containers, as in his displays *Somebody Takes Care of My Work* (1992), or *Abandoned Works* (1992), Hirschhorn solicits a form of 'participation' that generates the paradox of *planned vandalism*.

Furthermore, the artist's radical redefinition of late Sixties' *distribution sculpture* and its *informe* morphologies, inscribes his 'displays' within actually functioning circuits of object distribution, i.e. the circulation of commodities or the rituals of their disposal. Thus, Hirschhorn organized some of his 'displays' in the stalls of markets where his objects were offered as cheap gadgets to mostly unsuspecting and uninterested audiences (and a few observant art-world members). In displays such as *Souvenirs du XXe Siècle: Marché de Pantin* (1997), or *St. Tropez: Exhibition with Artists showing in the Harbour* (1992), the artist offered art reproductions wrapped in frames of silver and gold foil and numerous other banal objects, or a multitude of variously shaped found pieces of wood, differentiated from mere driftwood by seemingly haphazard or mechanically applied monochrome painterly marks.

Many of the sculptural/painterly objects that Hirschhorn disseminates on the floor or on shelves in unexpected locations, demarcated with a single painterly mark (such as a line or a rectangular marking), assume an extremely precarious status: neither painting (signalled by the fact that they lie on the floor in a horizontal position), nor sculpture (signalled by the fact that they are flat chromatic surfaces), neither ready-made objects nor techno-scientific geometric constructions, these structures are first of all reminiscent of the peculiar status abstraction acquired in the hands of artists like Palermo in the late 1960s. In his approach to abstraction, elements of sculpture and painting appeared for the first time as though they had been designated to inhabit precisely those vacated spaces and object forms that had been once defined by use-value.

Hirschhorn's 'works' seem to follow that evacuation mimetically, thus dramatically differing from the reformulations of a non-representational aesthetic

as it had been resuscitated in the context of Minimalism. Incessantly hovering on the brink of debris, these works utter no confidence with regard to the scientific or industrial component of the sculptural paradigm, any more than they pay heed to the formalist models of defining artistic practice in the Sixties.

'Participation' in Hirschhorn's sculptural displays not only solicits vandalism, small-time barter, and acquisition, but it inevitably also entices forms of petty theft, the clandestine removal or addition of small parts (like candles or bricolage objects of all kinds from his *Altars*). His work thereby violates first of all the idea that a sculpture is an integrated totality from which nothing can be removed (or to which nothing can be added) without destroying the whole. More importantly perhaps, to the very extent that Hirschhorn's work solicits these grotesque gestures of vandalism and illicit exchange, it undermines the assumption that sculpture as a discourse on the conditions of object experience in the present could still be constituted within registers of autonomous objects and spaces, exempt from the universally enforced banality of private property and the terror of controlled space.

In exact correspondence, the spaces that Hirschhorn treats as 'public' are all defined by the most attenuated definitions of 'publicness': like the shelves of cafes and bars (e.g. *Exhibition at Zorba's Cafe*, Paris, 1994) where people would normally expect to see either the decoys of advertising or the trophies of local and vernacular subcultures (e.g. the bowling club prizes, or the little pennants of the sharpshooters' union). Even more ephemeral, the artist chooses fleeting and mobile spaces as transient exhibition containers where the absence and inaccessibility of real public space is all the more manifest. Thus, on several occasions he organized exhibitions inside a van or an old station wagon, as in *Night Car Exhibition*, Civitella d'Agliano (1994), or on the flatbed of a banged up pick-up truck, as in *Pub Car Exhibition*, Limerick (1996), and illuminated the displays for the curious spectators passing these strange vehicles at night.⁷

Commemoration and Cult

Hirschhorn's radical reversals of the phenomenological models of participation in sculpture occur most poignantly in the 'altar' displays (e.g. *Altar for Mondrian*, 1997 (Fig. 1); *Altar for Ingeborg Bachmann*, 1998 (Fig. 2); and *Altar for Otto Freundlich*, 1998 (Fig. 3)) where the commemoration of modernism's heroic and tragic figures – in a sudden revelation of the dialectics of subjectivity and cult – is strangely short-circuited with mass cultural forms of celebrity.

In these *Altars* the artist accumulates the most banal mnemonic objects (e.g. candles, found photographs, placards, stuffed animals, etc.) and presents them in the manner of spontaneously erected street shrines that pay tribute to victims of accidents and crimes. Crudely inscribed signs pronounce *hommages* (e.g. 'Go Piet' or 'Thank you Otto') in the enunciatory registers of sports fans rooting for their team or their 'star'.⁸ These are *hommages* first of all to the tragically failed projects of modernity which had opposed the myths of an exceptional subjectivity, and which had precisely attempted to subvert its industrially produced substitutes by enacting the forms of a newly decentred, collective subject. They are pronounced here in the guise of a dialectical allegory of contemporary cult.

Thus, Hirschhorn's *Altars* demonstrate that the artist's desire to reposition commemoration as central to participatory artistic practices is inextricably intertwined with the forms of mass culturally engineered adulation operative at the very centre of artistic production and reception in the present.

Spectatorial participation and sculptural tactility occur in the work in yet

another manner: in the artist's frequently deployed, apparently random accumulations of the most diverse stickers, decals, and other adhesive labels that have emerged since the Sixties as some kind of mechanical *graffiti* of preprocessed participation and speech (subversive or affirmative). In these identificatory statements and ideological sutures, subjects can iterate the interests of the culture industry as though they were articulating their own. Considering them simultaneously as instances of collective and anonymous enunciation in public space, and as ideological interpellations, the work takes the socially specific inflection of collective speech competence and viewer participation (as conditions of containment and control) much more seriously than previous phenomenological participatory models could have envisaged.

Its dialectical opposite can be found in Hirschhorn's own usage of typographic design where disfiguration and dismemberment at this time have to take hold of graphic design at large, even of the letter form itself. Unlike the Conceptualists, whose typographic choice could still entrust itself to an affinity with the typewritten texts of the administrative order of everyday life, Hirschhorn has to denounce that last modernist alliance of typography and technology. Instead he concocts unsavoury combinations of non-design and anti-typography (very much integral to his strategies at large) in which the domestic and the amateurish are combined with an aggressive stupor, generating writing and letters made out of



Fig. 1. Thomas Hirschhorn: *Mondrian Altar*, 1997. 'Été 97', Center Genevois de Praxure Contemporaine, Geneva. (Photo: Barbara Gladstone Gallery).

crude tape applications and ballpoint pen scribbles, weird hybrids between drawings and found fragments of advertisements, and design detritus, as though constituted from the deeper recesses of memory in the digital ages.⁹

Cargo Cult, Fetish and The Spatialized Ready-Made

Objects in Hirschhorn's *displays* are identified by the artist in a somewhat untranslatable term as '*Skulptur-Erinnerungen*' (i.e. 'sculpture memories', or 'memories of sculpture'). One of his most distinct object types are the meandering bulbs and febrile linear forms made out of various silver and coloured foils that often traverse the entire exhibition, linking diverse images and objects as a labyrinthine network of spatialized ready-mades. The 'tears' as Hirschhorn calls the more bulbous among these meandering structures, often grow in size and shape to form veritable caves of stalagmites and stalactites, and they make the universal reification of all spatial experience, its total permeation by objects, pertinently palpable.

Another of the more enigmatic aspects of his sculptural iconography, are the hypertrophically sized objects whose seriality originates in the law of the commodity, not that of Minimalism. Thus, for example, in his display *The Pilatus Transformator*, 1997 (Fig. 4), the artist modelled a series of giant rectangular volumes from gold foil that seemed to articulate either a child's image of the chocolate holdings of Switzerland or rather, the gold stock of the Swiss Banks (then just having reached the apex of its infamy when the degree of the Swiss Banks' collaboration with Fascist economic interests had become known). Other



Fig. 2. Thomas Hirschhorn: *Ingeborg Bachman Altar*, 1998. 'Freie Sicht aufs Mittelmeer', Kunsthaus Zurich. (Photo: Barbara Gladstone Gallery).

hypertrophic objects such as the giant watches (or, more recently the giant memorial spoons in his display *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake* at the Art Institute of Chicago, 2000) (Fig. 5), are equally modelled from a variety of tinsel such as crumpled aluminium and coloured foil, cardboard, and other packaging stuff, and they appear as though they had been fabricated by the bewildered members of a distant cargo cult, attempting – in some kind of reverse anthropology – to fathom advanced forms of Capitalist fetishism and its intensified rituals of commodity culture and private possession, without actually intending in the least to share these preoccupations.

But the juvenile bricolage at the core of Hirschhorn's sculpture establishes of course yet another reflection: this 'primitivism' is not a romantic regression into alternate models of pre-industrial or pre-adult practices, seemingly free of the rules of the governing object regimes. Rather, what determines the 'primitivism' of these bricolages is a candid study of the perpetual violence of a never-ending rule of design, commodity enforcement, and control, contemplating it with an amazement with which one might have traditionally studied the strangeness of the cults of others.

In the serial installations of his menacing watch props (high end models only, such as *IWC* and *Rolex* among others) as for example in the display *Time to Go*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1997–1998 (Fig. 6), or again, in *Pilatus Transformator*, 1997 (Fig. 4), the spectator can recognize not just the threatening violence of the fetish's universal presence but also the grotesque power operative in this particular cult: after all, what would be more comical than



Fig. 3. Thomas Hirschhorn: *Otto Freundlich Altar*, 1998. Berlin Biennial. (Photo: Barbara Gladstone Gallery).

the delusion that a luxuriously crafted chronometer could assist a subject in differentiating itself from the universal law of the digital quantification of time?

Considering these works in the more limited perspectives of sculptural history, the watch props do in fact teach us another instant lesson as well, that fetishism as an overpowering condition of experience was not yet central to the object relationships articulated in Oldenburg's hypertrophic ready-mades of everyday life. Strangely enough, it also appears that certain objects (precisely, for example, a watch) would have been unthinkable in Oldenburg's sculpture of the early Sixties, even though it was not the technological *per se* that was absent from his iconography of the domestic and the vernacular. Rather, it was the *object as fetish* that remained largely outside of Oldenburg's aesthetic purview. The reasons for this absence are undoubtedly very complex but at least we would want to suggest one argument: in all of Oldenburg's objects some remnant of a utopian positivity towards the world of commodity consumption as a transformation of everyday life still seemed to apply, an attitude towards the object's beneficial abundance that was typical of the 1950s and that would have been undoubtedly already on the verge of a breakdown by the early 1960s.

Hirschhorn's work confronts a more advanced condition, one from which any ambiguity has been extracted and that recognizes the proto-totalitarian conditions of consumer culture. It has to confront the linguistic spasms generated by the iterative experience of name recognition and the perceptual branding enforced by the stridency of design with a delinquent mimesis and a hebephrenic semblance of disintegration and destitution. The artist seems to apply what one could call the 'Canal Street' model of the public sphere, a



Fig. 4. Thomas Hirschhorn: *Platus Transformator*, 1997. Provsorium I. (Photo: Barbara Gladstone Gallery).

condition of spatial experience that is simultaneously both abject and totalitarian in its complete submission of every temporal and spatial unit to the instantaneous enactment of random acts of acquisition, small incremental incidents of surplus-value production, and a vast production of instantaneous obsolescence and a correlative production of detritus inherent in the total elimination of use-value from any form of everyday life.

Thus, Hirschhorn's most haunting structures are these instances of material mimesis, grotesque juxtapositions of commodity objects where the travesty of failed utopian aspirations sparks negative epiphanies. These strategies culminated for the time being in his display *Very Derivative Products*, 1999 (Fig. 7), where, for example, a series of little red rags attached to a serial line-up of domestic vertical fans, wildly fluttering in the fans' propulsion, conjured up lethal memories of the not too distant past when utopian aspirations had deteriorated to the military parades of the May Day Celebrations in Red Square. Yet, Hirschhorn's grotesque dialectics gave the viewer a sudden insight into the conditions and consequences of the present where a totalizing *atopia* flared up with even greater menace. Another typical object-structure in this display was the serial line-up of the ubiquitous umbrellas sold and thrown away by the hundreds in Manhattan on a rainy day: all the more comical in their most pristine product state, they already anticipate their instant disappearance as waste, the squandering of resources and labour they embody.

The temporalities of these objects (their geo-political sites and phases of production, their cycles of usage, disposal, and of exhibition) are strangely compressed in Hirschhorn's displays, as though all the object states now had to



Fig. 5. Thomas Hirschhorn: *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake*, 2000, mixed media installation, dimensions variable. (Photo: Stephen Friedman Gallery).

be collapsed into a single, simultaneous stage. To rush from its production in a distant third-world country and its distribution in the first, and from the production of exchange-value to a brief performance of use-value, and its imminent dismissal as detritus in ever decreasing temporal cycles seems to have become the universal condition of the commodity that Hirschhorn's artistic practice mimetically follows.

1. Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Virus Ausstellung' exhibition flyer (Galerie Arndt & Partner: Berlin, 1996), n.p.
2. Herzog and de Meuron, 'Endorsement for Dan Graham' in Alexander Alberro (ed.), *Two Way Mirror Power* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1999).
3. 'Display' is in fact the term that Hirschhorn himself has coined for his work and he has emphatically refused to have his work associated with a tradition of installation sculpture, or linking it to any other form of recent sculpture that was primarily defined as *contextualist*, aiming at site-specificity and discursive and institutional criticality.
4. Or the extraordinary discovery of Clarence Schmidt by Allan Kaprow, featured in his *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966).
5. See Daniela Salvioni, 'Interview with Dan Graham', *Flash Art International*, no. 152, May-June 1990, pp. 140-4.
6. Hirschhorn actually employs Robert Smithson's term *non-site* explicitly in projects entitled *non lieux*. See his installation *Otto Freundlich Altar - Non Lieux* in Basel, 1998. See illustration.
7. Typically, the reflection on mobile exhibition containers as the articulation of the actually prevailing conditions of 'public space', would remind us of work such as Michael Asher's crucial contribution to the three international exhibitions of *Sculpture in Muenster* in 1977, 1987, and

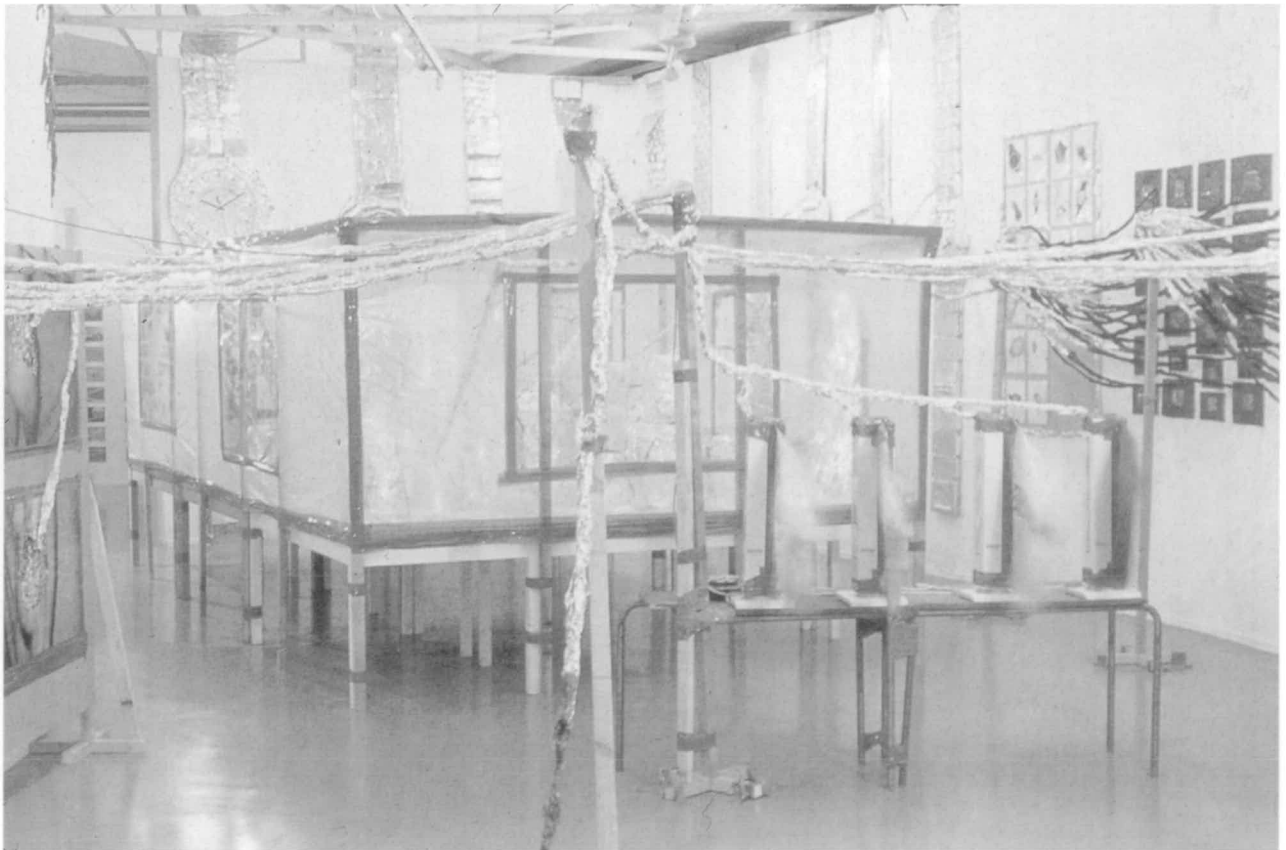


Fig. 6. Thomas Hirschhorn: *Time to Go*, 1997. Musée de la Ville de Paris. (Photo: Barbara Gladstone Gallery).

1997, respectively, where – repeating the work for three decades – the artist circulated the same camping trailer at different pre-established locations throughout the city and its margins, changing at weekly intervals during the fourteen-week duration of each exhibition. An example of work from the late 1970s in which acquisition and mobile audiences appear as the true model of contemporary 'tactile' participation and of a 'performative' enactment of governing object relations – certainly unknown to Hirschhorn at the time – would be Martha Rosler's installations such as *Monumental Garage Sale* (1973) and *Travelling Garage Sales* (1977).

8. These inscriptions are similar to the rhetorical figures in Hirschhorn's installation of *Artists' Scarves* (Limerick, Ireland, 1996), where the names from his artistic pantheon (e.g. from Alexander Rodchenko to Robert Filliou) were inscribed in the crude typography of fabric letters applied on to mostly striped, brightly-coloured football team scarves, faintly echoing the fate of Buren's radical critique with painterly means.

9. The most extraordinary example of Hirschhorn's deconstruction of graphic design and typography as forces within the visual regimes of consumer culture can be found in his book *Les Plaintifs, les Bêtes, les Politiques*, published by the Centre Genevois de Gravure Contemporaine, Geneva, 1995. There is an additional ironical aspect in the fact that Hirschhorn's professional training was not that of an artist but that of a graphic designer in the best Swiss tradition.



Fig. 7. Thomas Hirschhorn: *Very Derivated Products*, 1998. 'Premises', Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York. (Photo: Barbara Gladstone Gallery).