MY LITTLE COFFEE SHOP

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
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This thesis establishes links between the phenomenon of 'cargo cult', naiveté, and the notion of performance as a \textit{twice behaved behavior} - a reenactment. Cargo cult as I realized, is: \textit{life, once more}, yet inescapably, differently enacted. It is for that different-from-the-original that cargo cult is a survival mechanism. Why? Because at the same time that it allows adaptation, it maintains a link to the original 'behavior', thus maintains the identity of the surviving subject.

Memory of an idealized original, namely 'nostalgia', has a role here. It is exactly by reenacting a memory of an unsurpassable event (a revered event that belongs to 'days of innocence') that one resists enfranchisement, and despite naturalization, manages to maintain nomadic status. \textit{My Little Coffee Shop} was such a reenactment.

TO HAL
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to Anita Szerer who made sure this project would flourish,
but first and foremost, ought I say, to Sharone Putter my sorrowful wife who was always on stage – always at my side, whose part in it all is unmatched, and who I hope loves me still.
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CHAPTER 1

BETWEEN “CANCELLED” & “DEPARTED”

I was asked to appropriate elements (or what I called ‘airport parts’) from my most recent work – my airport at the docks. (1,1) At first glance this was a benign request – a request for an act that itself greatly characterized my work. But this time, it was a request to desecrate, that which in my own cosmology had attained a holy status. But even if I fully acknowledge the fact that the word ‘holy’ is doomed to be met with the raising of an eyebrow and a chuckle, and given my extensive writing about that-most-recent-work, how could I have been so misunderstood? If I wrote that that show was a rare trans-disciplinary conjuncture of elements, where it was the subtle self-organizing relationship between the elements that mattered, then what service could an appropriation of these elements provide? How would pulling them out of the breathing entity they had enabled, be of service here? Is it all to teach me that there is nothing holy, and that it is for my own sake to recognize that appropriation has no end; more so, that it can backfire?

For a long-while the task seemed impossible. I was convinced that as the Between Pier & Runway project was an ‘ultimate work’, the requested show could only fail to match. I wrote:

Why do I think that the Between Pier & Runway project was an ultimate work (and that the upcoming show could only fail to match)?
I answered:

The *Between Pier & Runway* project (I refer here specifically to that stretch of time that preceded my research and writing about it) was an ‘actuality’. (1,2)

The upcoming show however, although it can be about actuality, can never be actuality itself. It can never be more than an illustration of an idea. It is an attempt to communicate a ‘message’, thus it is primarily an attempt to affect. Nothing could negate its intentional nature. The upcoming show would literally be a SHOW, a good or bad one.

**What do I mean by ‘actuality’?**

Actuality (as a noun) is a convergence point of a physical space (specifically here it is the dockyard), a moment (sometime in late August of 2002), and myself (a subject); it is therefore a case of being affected. Actuality (as a verb) means: to inhabit a space, to inhabit a moment.

To inhabit means: to mesh in, to live. To live means: to adapt to an ever-changing present, over which one acknowledges one has no control, and also wishes never to have control. Gaining control, as I nearly experienced, would mean the end of adaptation, which is to say: the end. Actuality therefore, is the deferring of the end. At the dockyard (from August of 2002 till September of 2004) the deferral was in the continuous regeneration of that first moment of convergence – a moment which is forever remembered as beyond belief. A fresh and affecting present was incessantly produced. (1,3)

The dockyard, as I came to realize, was a crack in the organized world. It was this crack that triggered it all. Although I was not responsible for the crack, I was responsible for discovering it, for accepting the invitation in, and for ensuring that it remains a crack. The means for my task was ‘attentiveness’. Yet, one would ask, attentiveness to what? Attentiveness according to what criteria? A partial answer would be; the unique situation at the dockyard. A more comprehensive answer here
would be similar as for the question; what did the crack trigger? It triggered a vision, and it was the vision that then set the guidelines – always in accordance with the instabilities of the dockyard’s situation. Beyond the instabilities, a great challenge was also the blurry nature of the vision. As much as the vision seemed graspable, mostly it was in a thick fog. Elucidation was always in deferral.

This work needed a delicate balancing. Conclusiveness, either by interfering with the self-organizing operation of the network (which I have been witnessing its unfolding within the crack), by defining borders or markings, or by attempting to defog the vision, resulted with a complete loss of its vitality. Moreover, these threatened to make the crack disappear (‘the end’).

For these reasons I feared the implications stemming from subjection to external guidelines and timeframes – those whose origin is external to my vision, and that would interfere with, and attempt to channel “the way things go”. I distanced myself from anything that could impose itself as a point of reference; that could necessitate itself as a guide – as a pair of spectacles – as a vision-aid. At any cost, I veered off from appendices, entrapments, or absorption into the metabolism of an otherwise imposing network. Therefore my job, although requiring a high degree of attentiveness – unconditional attentiveness, was solely a maintenance job. I was in the service of maintaining the self-organizing operation of a network that kept unfolding in front of my eyes. The Between Pier & Runway (a maintenance job) was thus not about life, but LIFE.

* * * * * * * * *

Now (2-4 years later) I am being reminded of what I myself wrote (to myself) in my original thesis writings (Part B, Chapter 7a, p.140):

“Yes, forget the ‘vision’, don’t even mention the drift (especially not its length). Better still: convert it all to an ‘idea’, to a theme, to a lofty message, to a humble message, to any message; find a gallery, reserve a fine spot. You are now at
ground zero (the point of zero); now is the time to read from Massumi (and from Deleuze and from Guattari); now is the time to detonate those sensations at the surface of the body (not yours! –the viewers’) at its interface with things....”

* * * * * * * * *

So the Between Pier & Runway project was an ultimate work, for it remained true to my own convergence with space and time, for it maintained ‘actuality’, for it neither obscured nor inscribed the very vision by which it was ‘commissioned’, and for the very fact that I did not say a word. I only listened, or rather unconditionally listened. In contrast, the upcoming show would necessarily be a ‘work of inscribing’ (whether good or bad).
Notes

(1.1) By 'my most recent work' I refer to the Between Pier & Runway project (2002-04), which I presented on September 2004 in lieu of the MFA public-show requirement. In this thesis, I refer to that project as the Dockyard project, or as the Airport at the Docks.

(1.2) In my writings about the Between Pier & Runway project I wrote that my practice was neither art nor leisure; it was/is the creative (and attentive) correspondence with daily emerging challenges, and like for a nomad or a homeless, but peculiarly also for the well-off flâneur it (was) a daily re-modification of my domain, a daily oscillation between 'here' and 'there'. (1.4) My practice (was) best described then, as the architecture of the homeless. My practice (was) best described then, as the architecture of the homeless. (Part A Chapter 9a, p.60)  This 'existential standing' substantiates my claim that that past project was a case of 'actuality'.

In "Act Two", an introduction to Peter Eisenman’s, Written into the Void: Selected Writings, 1990-2004, (Yale University Press, New Haven, February 2007), Jeffrey Kipnis wrote: The architect (Eisenman) appears to claim that what is unique to architecture as writing is that, by dint of its metaphysics of presence, all metaphors of interiority that architecture writes come to assume existential standing as actuality, because the medium of the writing is not ink but building. He seems to suggest that a building is the singular situation where “I am inside” is not only an intellectual fact but an existential truth, one that always feels “literal”. (p.13)

...Interiority is metaphor in every discipline including architecture, but the “literal insidedness” of lived building inevitably confers actuality upon architecture’s interior metaphors. ...it is the metaphor, not the real building, which achieves this strange actuality, much as it is the writing not the ink that conveys upon literary metaphors their own special magic... (p.14)

Similarly, when I refer to the Between Pier & Runway as the ‘architecture of the homeless’, such architecture, which is, as I see, an oscillation between ‘insidedness’ and ‘outsidedness’, attains a status identical to Peter Eisenman’s ‘insidedness’; it is both a metaphor and a literal truth.

In the ‘upcoming show’, by the very fact that it would be a ‘show’, neither homelessness, nor ‘insidedness’, nor ‘outsidedness’ could be a literal truth. To begin with, the medium of a ‘show’ (even if it is Chris Burden shooting a bullet in his arm, or Orlan having her face permanently deformed) is ‘ink’. To begin with, ‘show’ is a signifier, a metaphor.

When ‘insidedness’ (or architecture of the homeless in my case) emerges as both a literal truth and a metaphor, the distance between ‘presence’ and what Eisenman terms as the ‘quality of presenness’ (p.12), between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ shrinks to zero, or in Kipnis’ words: ...the distance between the architecture signifier and signified has collapsed to an absolute minimum, beneath awareness. (p.15)

(1.3) Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote about such productions of a ‘present’. From his writing I deduce that his notion of ‘perception’ is similar to the ‘actuality’ and its relation to a particular ‘past’ that I talk about. Merleau-Ponty wrote: Rather than being a genuine history, perception ratifies and renews in us a ‘prehistory’. And that again is of the essence of time: there would be no present, that is to say, no sensible world with its thickness and inexhaustible richness, if perception, in Hegel’s words, did not retain a past in the depth of the present, and did not contract that past into that present. ...There is no related object without relation and without subject, no unity without unification, but every synthesis is both exploded and rebuilt by time which, with one and the same process, calls it into question and confirms it because it produces a new present which retains the past. Phenomenology of Perception, Colin Smith (trans.), Routledge, London and New York, 1962, p.240 Originally: Phénoménoologie de la Perception, Paris, 1945
CHAPTER 2

FROM BETWEEN PIER & RUNWAY
TO MY LITTLE COFFEE SHOP

Despite this gloomy situation, the experience gained during the Between Pier & Runway project and the research that followed taught me a valuable lesson. It taught me about vigilant awaiting of miracles, and about the way miracles come into being – if only one lets them. A form of innocence has a role here. Indebted to Michel de Certeau, my realization, as articulated in my original thesis writing, was as follows:

…it is an “art” as de Certeau writes (thus adding an amount of subjectivity to ideas of self-organizing). And even if ultimately this art is the subject’s ability, just like a detective’s, to listen, to “read” and to allow oneself to be affected by those little tracks – prints in soft ground, snapped twigs, droppings, snagged hairs or feathers, smells, puddles, threads of saliva (2.1) or plainly as de Certeau puts it: affected by ‘memory’, it is an ability, a knowledge that could be articulated neither as rules nor as a strategy. It is ‘the tactics of the tightrope dancer’, and never ‘the tricks of the charlatan’. The little tracks, the memory, are those snippets, which involuntarily (‘self-organizingly’, though never independent of context and always on the watch for contingencies) are being deposited in one’s brain – tattooed on this or that terrain. Potentially, each of these snippets is capable, while inserted in a sequence of elements (in an established situation, in an existing narrative), to irreversibly distort their relationship. (2.2)
There is a whodunit form in which the past (memory, relics from past experiences, past situations), by coming back, overturns an established hierarchical order: “He must be the murderer, then!” The structure of the miracle has a similar form: out of another time, from a time that is alien, arises a “god” who has the characteristics of memory, that silent encyclopedia of singular acts, and who, in religious stories, represents with such fidelity the “popular” memory of those who have no place but who have time – “Patience!” (2.3) – those who have no place but nevertheless vigilantly await for the opportunity, the occasion, for the right point in space and time to be in the service of a stir, followed thereafter by their retraction, accompanied by new memories, to the ‘inventory list’ from which they had just sprung, always ready for a next recall, and knowing all too well that never will there be an identical one.

First there was the established space – a place already forming a harmonious ensemble. Concurrently, there were the ongoing depositions of those snippets accumulating in a memory bank – individual bits and fragments. One detail, many details, (these) are memories. Each of them, when it emerges in a shadowy setting, is relative to an ensemble which lacks it (its origin). Each memory shines like a metonymy in relation to this whole. From a picture, there remains only the delicious wound of this deep blue. From a body, the luminosity of its eyes, or the texture of a bit of white glimpsed through a gap in a hairdo. … The oddest thing is no doubt the mobility of this memory in which details are never what they are: they are not objects, for they are elusive as such; not fragments, for they yield the ensemble they forget (their origin); not totalities, since they are not self-sufficient; not stable, since each recall alters them. This “space” of moving nowhere has the subtlety of a cybernetic world. (2.4)

The next stage is the occasion – that right point in space and time for which these snippets have been so patiently waiting. And the occasion constantly eludes attempts to define it, because it can be isolated neither from a conjuncture nor from an operation. Is the occasion ‘a crack in the grid of the organized world’? It (the occasion) is a fact that cannot be detached from the “turn” or “trick” that produces it – it is unique and inseparable from its location and time. (2.5) A fraction of a second later, and the conjuncture is gone.
It is hard to tell if it is a sharp eye, fast computation and extremely quick scanning of one’s memory bank that would follow the detection of such a spot, followed thereafter by the distorting insertion of a memory snippet into that crack (the crack thus attracts), or perhaps it is a ubiquitous computation, constantly weighing (superposing) all possibilities of every little detail in the memory bank against ever moving situations, thus scanning for possible cracks. Whereas the latter is in one way or another the case of a rebel ever-seeking an opportunity for a coup, the former, though far from being passive, is more the case of the innocent rebel, who naively (and naturally), just like a child with no malicious intent, simply by disclosing his sincere thoughts can very easily embarrass his parents - the shapers of his ‘existing equilibrium’. Similarly, this innocent rebel might insert a memory snippet into the existing situation (into a crack in it), and wonder thereafter about the distortion it brought about. Whichever the case, the insertion is irreversible, and the distortion and warping it brings about to that existing situation cannot be flattened back.

A distant memory appeared here in my service. It was triggered by the numerous folding wooden chairs that were strewn in the particular space I was weighing as an option for ‘my fine spot in a gallery’. It was these chairs, which pointed at the crack.

I could never accurately trace the triggering that took place. I can only guess as to the transdisciplinary conjunctures of elements. The conjunctures of a dimly lit black painted old industrial space crowded with abandoned chairs, with the caffèine in my blood, with the taste in my mouth of the coffee I had just had, with the phenomenal sprawling of Starbucks-type coffee-shops in the American urbscape, with the survival aspect of the task I was given, with the notion of silver in the Between Pier & Runway installation, with the concurrently-running Shiny show at the nearby Wexner Center for the Arts, with the notion of the colorful in the Between Pier & Runway installation, with the notion of the romantic in the Between Pier & Runway installation, with the notion of the “disfunctionality” of my airport at the dockyard, with my cargo-cult heritage… all that triggered (and I cannot be
memories of Arab coffee-shops in Jerusalem's old city, of stubby straw-chairs set around round copper tables, of low wattage light bulbs dangling precariously from high vaulted ceilings, of the thimble-size cardamom flavored sweeter than sweet Turkish coffee you get there, of the pastries... and I want to write more about the Swiss coffee shop in the nearby Salah Adin Street, and about all those established in west Jerusalem, about the instant-coffee, the 'upside-down' coffee, the 'mud' coffee, the espresso, the froth, the complimenting pastries, about all the flâneurs and intellectuals, friends and lovers, grandparents and grandchildren, bombs and suicide-bombers that these places have attracted, about the introduction of the Belgian Rombouts single-cup coffee filters, about Viennese coffee houses, about 'Stehkaffee' in Germany, about Kavárna in the republic of the Czech, about exotic places and colonialism, Julius Meinl, and Douwe Egberts... about the 'French-press', about the coffee shop in the new terminal at the Tel-Aviv airport, of course about the coffee culture of Spain and of Italy, and the global emergence of the espresso bar and the latte... and about Nick Cave's orgasm in Australia:

...I went to bed last night and my moral code got jammed.
I woke up this morning with a Frappucino in my hand... (2, 6)

A fraction of a second later, and I had my little coffee shop right in front of my eyes:
My Little Coffee Shop

A Master of Fine Arts Exit Show by Ran Berdichesky

Monday, November 20, 2006 5:30-8:00pm,
at Haskett Hall Sound-stage (room 220)
156 W. 19th Ave, Columbus Ohio. (access also from 155 Woodruff Ave or the connecting alley)

contact: berdichesky@copper.net

While growing up in Papua New Guinea, like all the people in my village,
in the hope of luring the bounty-laden silver birds to descend from the sky.
But the cargo never came.

In 2002 I applied for a green card.
I thought in America I would be closer to the cargo.
So when I finally received the card, boarded a plane and moved there, I brought my airport parts with me.
But the timing was bad for constructing airports, and I was advised that by doing so I might actually be found suspicious of terrorism.
So I opened my little coffee shop, and once a month I pack a box full of goodies and send it back home.

Figure 1: My Little Coffee Shop – Invitation/ Statement
It is important to note the electric power conduit across the floor. It functioned both as a marker and an external grid of the coffee shop. As a marker it distinguished the coffee shop from the rest of the hall. As a grid (marked by four evenly spaced outlets) it had an effect on the spatial distribution of the furniture in the coffee shop (all tables were dependant on electrical power).

Perpendicular to this power line, on the right side of the photograph was a ‘line of light’. The regulated pattern of lit and the dark areas on this line, gave it a calm didactic appearance. This ‘line-of-light’ included points of reference to the much yearned for Between Pier & Runway project. The regularity of the ‘line-of-light’ was contrasted with the haphazard organization of the (quite odd) coffee shop furniture. The consequent effect was the emphasizing of those points of reference (rather than the furniture) as indexical and therefore reliable – a reliable history.
Another conspicuous straight line was the diagonal of the stairway (far left). In contrast with the other two, this line offered a dramatic departure from the reliability of horizontal lines (and world). Here, the illogical distribution of red light areas, along evenly spaced balusters and those areas of darkness between them, contributed to a mysterious aura. Having a clear sense of direction, this line pointed upwards, yet towards nowhere in particular.

These three determinate lines, demarcating the coffee shop, contrasted with the erratic arrangement of its interiors, plucked from their harmonized existence at the Between Pier & Runway airport. In their new coffee shop existence, they emerged as multiple centers, which although depending on a common source of energy, functioned as independent microcosms (each, of a table and a set of chairs).

* * * * *

As mentioned earlier, the strewn abandoned wooden folding chairs (their number being irrelevant) had a role in triggering the coffee shop plot. They also became crucial elements in the actual coffee shop.

Figure 3: A chair
Repurposed elements from the airport/dockyard installation rescued these chairs from their abandonment. The silvery elements from that airport reappeared here as silvery mylar cushiony-looking airliner seat headrests. Dangling from the back of these 'headrests' were strips of fleecy material with a colorful rhomboids pattern. Given the rather minimalist character of the coffee shop, these ribbons could potentially be perceived as having a function other than decorative. Were the ribbons an imitation of a detail (possibly insignificant), whose function the coffee shop's 'cargo-cult naive creator' did not understand, but perhaps thought important (and therefore necessary to include)? On the other hand, these ribbons could have been an intentional appropriation towards ends that were different from the original. In this case, the ends of course are a 'coffee shop'. But again, one could ask, what part of a contemporary coffee shop do these imitate? It is worth mentioning, that these ribbons were snipped from an airport worker's uniform that was part of the airport/dockyard installation.

In that past event, the 'silver' elements stood for the airport 'terminals'. The shoes of the above-mentioned worker were also silver. Yet, other than the airport/dockyard 'creator', why should anyone care for such details of a 'private cosmology'?

Unlike the chairs' 'accessories' whose repurposing was somewhat oblique, the 'coffee tables' themselves were directly repurposed from the dockyard project. To recount their purpose of existence prior to the coffee shop would be unnecessary, for that can be viewed in the nostalgic photographs that follow. Like photographs on a mantelpiece these were the indexical objects on display beneath the 'line of lights' appearing above in Fig. 1. Apart from the information that the photographs conveyed, the general public had no access to the original symbolic meaning of the photographed elements, or to their previous functioning as 'airport parts'. And again, why should coffee shop goers care?

There were two types of tables, four of each, thus corresponding to the four 'evenly-spaced' outlets of the above mentioned power conduit.
A quick whiff and an observation of the mud and seaweed with which the three-legged bases were coated, would have revealed their being ‘recently-pulled-out’ from a bog, as indeed they were. As for the tabletop and light underneath, please refer below to figures #17,18 and 19. Any thirst for more knowledge about the plexi (glass) ‘tabletop’ whose story goes back to a certain glass wall in the old terminal in the Tel-Aviv International airport, could be met at appendix B.

To learn more about the coffee tables of type B, please refer to figures #11,12,13,14,17,18,19 and 20. To learn even more about these and about the remains from an airport messaging system they still carry, please refer to appendix C. Again, this extra reading about elements, whose now bygone cosmological meaning was obtained from minute mechanical details – as if taken out of an ‘operating-manual’, is strictly optional. After all, my invitation was for a cup of coffee, and I understand one’s desire (while sipping a cup) to make up his own stories.

The quantities of things that could be read in a little piece of smooth and empty wood (a chessboard square) overwhelmed Kublai; Polo was already talking about ebony forests, about rafts laden with logs that come down the rivers, of docks, of women at the windows... (2.9)
Figure 5: Coffee table, type B ( #1)

Figure 6: Coffee table, type B (#2)
Figure 7: Coffee table, type B (#3)

Figure 8: Coffee table, type B (#4)
Just like the landing strip in the *Between Pier & Runway* airport, so also the stairs (leading to a door of an airplane?) appear to be forgotten or bypassed, but could become active, or function as subterfuge, a secret dock for unofficial visitors, for classified information...  (2.10)
As for this romantic ‘line of lights’, I quote here from appendix B (originally Chapter 8 in Part A of my original thesis). This quote is a memoir originating from the observation deck at the old terminal in the Tel-Aviv International airport (late 1960s early 70s):

“...The specter only seemed more mind-blowing when it got dark. The lights were turned on inside the planes, and one could see the movement of people through the little rounded windows. Physically, they were not that far away - perhaps not more then 400-ft, but they seemed miles away, so visible and yet incomprehensible”.
Notes


(2. 3) Ibid, pp.85-6

(2. 4) Ibid, p.88

(2. 5) Ibid, pp.83-4

(2. 6) Nick Cave, “Abattoir Blues”, Abattoir Blues, Mute Song Ltd. CDStumm233, April 2004

(2. 7) “of the kind that could be used in a ‘wet-emergency-landing’ as a flotation device”. An observation by Michael Mercil.

(2. 8) For ‘silvery’ elements, refer to Figures 13,14,18 and 19. For more information regarding the ‘airport worker’ and his uniform, refer to Figures 15 and 16, and also to Appendix A, titled: The Pulley Guy


(2. 10) Johannes Birringer, Fragility Bridges – Reflections on a site-specific installation-in-progress by Ran Berdichesky, 2004. In the original text Birringer’s reference was to the ‘landing strip’ in my dockyard installation.
CHAPTER 3

CARGO CULT

First, an entry from Wikipedia, the online free encyclopedia (December 29, 2006):

A cargo cult is any of a group of religious movements that arose in Melanesia, in the Southwestern Pacific, and which believe that manufactured western goods ('cargo') had been created by ancestral spirits and intended for Melanesian people. Cult members believed that white people, however, have unfairly gained control of these objects. Cargo cults thus focus on overcoming what they perceive as undue 'white' influences by conducting rituals similar to the white behavior they have observed, presuming that the ancestors will at last recognize their own and this activity will make cargo come. Thus a characteristic feature of Cargo Cults is the belief that spiritual agents will at some future time give much valuable cargo and desirable manufactured products to the cult members.

[edit] Overview

Cargo cults have been recorded since the 19th century, but have been continuously growing since World War II. The cult participants generally do not fully understand the significance of manufacturing or commerce. They have limited purchasing ability. Their understanding of western society, religion, and economics may be rudimentary. These cults are a response to the resulting confusion and insecurity. They rationalize their situation by the reference to religious and magical symbols they associate with Christianity and modern western society. Across cultural differences and large geographic areas, there have been instances of the movements independently organizing.

The most famous examples of Cargo Cult behavior have been the airstrips, airports, and radios made out of coconuts and straw. The cult members built them in the belief that the structures would attract transport aircraft full of cargo. Believers stage "drills" and "marches" with twigs for rifles and military-style insignia and "USA" painted on their bodies to make them look like soldiers.

Today, many historians and anthropologists argue that the term "cargo cult" is a misnomer that describes a variety of phenomena. However, the idea has captured the imagination of many people in developed nations, and the term continues to be
used today. For this reason, and possibly many others, the cults have been labelled *millennialist*, in the sense of a *utopian* future brought about by a *messiah*.

**[edit] History**

Discussions of cargo cults usually begin with a series of movements that occurred in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The earliest cargo cult was the *Tuka Movement* that began in *Fiji* in 1885. Cargo cults occurred periodically in many parts of the island of New Guinea, including the *Taro Cult* in Northern Papua New Guinea, and the *Vailala Madness* that arose in 1919 and was documented by F.E. Williams, one of the first anthropologists to conduct fieldwork in Papua New Guinea. Less dramatic cargo cults have appeared in *western New Guinea* as well, including the *Asmat and Dani* areas.

The classic period of cargo cult activity, however, was in the years during and after *World War II*. The vast amounts of *war matériel* that were *airdropped* into these islands during the *Pacific campaign* against the *Empire of Japan* necessarily meant drastic changes to the lifestyle of the islanders. Manufactured *clothing*, *canned food*, *tents*, *weapons* and other useful goods arrived in vast quantities to equip soldiers—and also the *islanders* who were their guides and hosts. By the end of the war the airbases were abandoned, and "cargo" was no longer being dropped.

In attempts to get cargo to fall by parachute or land in planes or ships again, islanders imitated the same practices they had seen the *soldiers*, *sailors* and airmen use. They carved *headphones* from *wood*, and wore them while sitting in fabricated control towers. They waved the landing signals while standing on the *runways*. They lit signal fires and torches to light up runways and lighthouses. The cultists thought that the foreigners had some special connection to their own ancestors, who were the only beings powerful enough to produce such riches.

In a form of *sympathetic magic*, many built life-size mockups of airplanes out of straw, and created new military style landing strips, hoping to attract more airplanes. Ultimately, though these practices did not bring about the return of the god-like airplanes that brought such marvelous cargo during the war, they did serve to eradicate the religious practices that had existed prior to the war.

Over the last seventy-five years most cargo cults have petered out. Yet, the *John Frum* cult is still active on the island of *Tanna, Vanuatu*. And from time to time, the term "cargo cult" is invoked as an English language *idiom*, to mean any group of people who imitate the superficial exterior of a process or system without having any understanding of the underlying substance.

The term is perhaps best known because of a speech by physicist Richard Feynman at a Caltech commencement called *cargo cult science*, which became a chapter in the book *Surely You’re Joking, Mr. Feynman!* In the speech, Feynman pointed out that cargo cultists create all the appearance of an airport right down to headsets with bamboo "antennas", yet the airplanes don't come. Feynman argued that some scientists often produce studies with all the trappings of real science, but which are nonetheless *pseudoscience* and unworthy of either respect or support.

**[edit] Other instances of cargo cults**

A similar cult, the *dance of the spirits*, arose from contact between *Native Americans* and the *Anglo-American* civilization in late 19th century. The Paiute prophet Wovoka preached that by dancing in a certain fashion, the ancestors would come back on *railways* and a new earth would cover the white people.

A religion described as a "cargo cult" developed during the *Vietnam War* among some of the *Hmong* people of *Southeast Asia*. The core of their beliefs was that the second
coming of Jesus Christ was imminent, only this time he would arrive wearing camouflage fatigues driving a military jeep to come and take them away to the promised land. The origins are unknown, but one can surmise that it was assembled out of the images of new power apparent to them in that time period, in the form of the American military and of western Christian missionaries.

A more recent example of a mythological worldview misinterpreting scientific practices occurred in Africa, where an aid organization, focusing on slowing and stabilizing population growth, distributed abacuses with red and white beads corresponding to a woman’s menstrual cycle. Women were instructed to move one bead a day, only having intercourse on days represented by a white bead. However, the experiment failed, and the population grew in the households using the abacus. The problem was that the women believed the abaci themselves were magical, and that they would be protected from pregnancy by moving a white bead into the place of the red bead before intercourse. [citation needed]

Some Amazonian Indians have carved wood mockups of cassette players (gabarora from Portuguese gravadora or Spanish grabadora) that they use to communicate with spirits. [citation needed]

[edit] Analogues in Western culture

The cargo cult has been used as an analogy to describe certain phenomena in the First World, particularly in the area of business. After any substantial commercial success—whether it is a new model of car, a vacuum cleaner, a toy or a motion picture—there typically arise imitators who produce superficial copies of the original, but with none of the original’s substance. The term is also used in the world of software engineering as “cargo cult programming,” which describes the ritual inclusion of code which may serve no purpose in the program, but is believed to be a workaround for some software bug.

Cargo cultism can also be seen in the adoption of management structures without understanding or implementing the underlying processes necessary. For example, creating a program to get ISO 9001 certified, thinking that having the certification will make the group successful, when ISO 9001 simply recognizes formalization of an underlying management structure which documents repeatable processes. It is the repeatable process that breeds success, yet poor managers think that by putting forth the minimal paperwork effort to achieve the certification will yield a successful organization all by itself.

The same mismanagement can be seen in slavish following of UML in programming - generating documents without actually performing the thorough analysis or getting stakeholder buy-in and understanding. Any new management fad is subject to abusive cargo cult adoption by other poor managers.

My cargo-cult practice was very literal. “I (simply) used to build decoy airports in the jungle, in the hope of luring the bounty-laden silver birds to descend from the sky”. The Between Pier & Runway installation was such an airport. My cargo-cult practice in My Little Coffee Shop, this time disguised as naïveté, materialized however as a twice enacted cargo-cult. This is to say: I repurposed the parts of my ‘decoy’ airport, or in other words: I repurposed the parts of my own identity.
As a result of repurposing identity, the coffee shop could be perceived as having at least two different ‘creators’:

1. The naïve aborigine, who attempts to imitate western behavior and signification without understanding it in the local western terms, and who in order to achieve this, repurposes the little property he has, eventually desecrating that which he reveres.

2. The naïve western entrepreneur (a Mr. Starbucks for instance), who had traveled to faraway exotic islands, and returns with artifacts whose local cosmological signification he does not know or value, but who nevertheless finds these artifacts (which perhaps he did recognize as appropriated from his own culture) as profitable for being re-enlisted into his own cosmology (capitalism?). Western culture emerges thus itself as an incredibly adaptive cargo cult.

Similarly twofold are the realizations:
The western entrepreneur’s realization is a confirmation of that which he hypothesized prior to his adventurous trip. There is nothing new here; the stock exchange is the gauge.
The bitter realization for the aborigine (the actual ‘creator’) is that the much-aspired cargo, to which he has finally obtained access, is nothing really to write home about. The good news is that he acknowledges this, and that despite being naturalized, it is exactly via double cargo cultism, namely via desecration of his own cargo cult relics (namely repurposing his own identity) for the sole purpose of “adaptation”, that he managed to maintain both his memory of an unsurpassable event, and his belief in a “cargo”. Yet, could not the same be said about the western entrepreneur?
CHAPTER 4

IMPROVISATION AND 'UNSURPASSABLE EVENTS'

Here I hope to clarify the reasons for which I dare to distinguish between the aborigine's "cargo" and the western entrepreneur's one, between unsurpassable events and those that are, between practice that attains (what I named earlier as) "actuality" and practice that does not, between a practice where externally imposed constraints do not exist and a practice where they very much do; again, between the Between Pier & Runway project and My Little Coffee Shop.

Now that both the Between Pier & Runway project and its reenactment My Little Coffee Shop belong to the past, I have the perspective to discern finer distinctions between them. The Between Pier & Runway project was a reenactment of a vision, where it was the ideal itself (a vision) that was the guideline. The coffee shop was a reenactment of an ideal, where the main guidelines were externally imposed. Therefore, in social terms, and unlike the coffee shop, the Between Pier & Runway was a reenactment within vacuum – an ultimate work indeed.

But when I claim that the Between Pier & Runway project was a reenactment of a vision, I can very much claim the same about the coffee shop project, for there too, if to take into consideration the miracle that the strewn chairs triggered, my subsequent installation did follow a form of a vision (based on a memory snippet). So still, other than in social terms, how could I justify my discrimination between the two?
In fact, I consider both projects as works of improvisation – of making do with what I have. But as this implies that ultimately, all improvisations require a set of constraints – a program, where lies the difference?

Indeed, in order to improvise, one needs certain guidelines or a program – an ‘ideal image’ to compare one’s acts to; all which might as well be externally imposed. My writing about the Between Pier & Runway project preceded My Little Coffee Shop. However, while writing about the former, I struggled (and finally—with the help of my four-year-old son Hal—succeeded) at pointing out the would-be-differences I sensed. Following, are four paragraphs from that piece of writing. If not exactly a proof of success, and even if dismissed as filled with false assumptions, this writing nonetheless provides evidence of my (futile?) struggle with the conflict, which emerged when I realized that I had either lost my innocence or, as Lyotard would put it: committed a traitorous act (“that’s life”).

Here are those paragraphs:

1.

From Part A, Chapter 9c, titled “Leisure? – The Verdict” (p.77)
After weighing the difference between Leisure and the practice of the genre of l’aéroport du jour (the phenomenon of the practice of constructing ‘airports’) as the possible answer to the conflict, I arrived at some conclusions.

My hypothesis was proved wrong. It is not a matter of self-sustainability (namely, not being summoned back to base) that differentiates between drifting as a ‘commodified skill’ (that can be learnt, bought, sold...), and drifting as a ‘genuine talent’. It is not a matter of having any inborn in-capability or independence that makes the distinction between drifting as ‘leisure’, and drifting as ‘air for breathing’. What does matter eventually, is the type of base to which the practitioners of both types of drifting end-up being summoned to. It is the local ‘gas station’ vs. the one in the ever-receding horizon. And Lyotard is right by saying that as long as the drifting is continuous, there is really no point in ever looking for any this-or-that difference – the end of all critique. Inarguably, drifting is a matter of continuity. The problem starts though when drifting stops.
Leisure (though cyclical with ‘work’) is never continuous; it comes in cyclical bouts. *The genre of l’aéroport du jour* (to which the *Between Pier & Runway* belongs) epitomized continuity, but then it stopped. I was innocent, but now I am a traitor.

2.

From Part B, Chapter 5, titled “**Hal and the mediation of a pass**” (4.2) (pp. 123-4)
Here I struggled with my baffling realization that what else is capitalism if not the recruiting of ‘creativity’ to propagate its aims, which ironically lie in no place, but way beyond the receding horizon.

Observing Hal my son, I realize I have the answer in front of my eyes. Yet this answer is twofold:

1. Constant Nieuwenhuys has said it right: *The child knows of no law other than its spontaneous sensation of life and feels no need to express anything else.* And whereas out there among the multitudes it is a make-believe child-like-creativity, namely *imitations of children’s creativity or reproductions of play patterns,* (4.3) here at home, I know I have it for real. Closer to its prenatal condition, namely, when a child is less exposed to or more oblivious to the social commitments, benefits, grids, and liberties which shape the environment into which he was born, playfulness has no end product, nor does it allow shortcuts. It is an endless and purposeless yet obsessive process of narration, of spatially weaving trajectories between objects, images and ideas, where these too are only trajectories of other trajectories – it is the mystery of the mercury – it has no form, (4.4) and it is not happening for an audience........

2. There is no difference between Capitalism at large, and Hal’s creativity. Both have their *gas station* in the receding horizon. Yes, Capitalism’s *gas station* lies neither in the oilfields of the North Sea, nor in those of the Middle East. And although there is no difference between Hal and Capitalism, there is a difference between Hal and the multitude that is mobilized by Capitalism. There is a
difference between a Subject’s creativity and that enlisted-one of the multitudes. The multitudes’ gas station is indeed any of the many just around the corner (namely the Arctic, the Middle East...). In Deleuze’s words, the multitude is eternally in debt. As for Hal and Capitalism, in Derrida’s words they are eternally in deferral. Hal and Capitalism are twins deferring independently. Capitalism however, may consider the Subject as a rival, and therefore there are mines laid in the terrain.

Regarding those ruses pointed out by de Certeau, for Hal they are not little, neither are they big; other than his desire they are all that there is......

3.

From Part B Chapter 6, titled “Citations” (p.129)
Here with the help of Sigmund Freud (via Sadie Plant, Writing on Drugs) I obtained a crucial viewpoint with which to look at ‘creativity’. Beforehand however, an articulation about ‘desire’ – a quote by Bernard Tschumi I brought in the above mentioned chapter – Part B, Chapter 5, (p. 125).

A Streetcar Named Desire perfectly simulated the movement towards something constantly missing, towards absence. Each setting, each fragment, was aimed at seduction, but always dissolved at the moment it was approached. Every time it was substituted by another fragment. ‘Desire’ was never seen. Yet it remained constant.

Bernard Tschumi

“...It now seemed as if the organism was engaged in a continuous double movement that gave its life instincts the task of prolonging what was now an overriding, or a powerful, drive to die. The two instincts serve each other, and the life of the organism as a whole becomes a quest “to make ever more complicated detours before reaching its aim of death,” to take increasingly “circuitous paths to death.” What keeps life living is not so much its desire for life itself as the fact that “the organism wishes to die in its own fashion.”

Sadie Plant
4.

From Part B, Chapter 7b, titled “The Point of Zero (0.2)” (pp.149-150)
Here, everything confluences into a conclusion

So no, my airport parts – my gizmos, Brian Massumi’s ‘stills’, Nigel Coates ‘hotspots’, Bernard Tschumi’s ‘fragments’... are not different from Ford’s cars, from the mobile phone, from the knife or the spoon. They are all frames and forms that work on the mobilization of intuition. Furthermore, to begin with, whether we are original, hangers-on \(^{(4.10)}\) or just mainstream, we all are practitioners of a ‘cargo cult’. Whether we are the Papuan tribes in New Guinea who used to build replicas of DC3s in the jungle in the hope of luring the supposedly bounty-laden silver birds to descend from the sky, \(^{(4.11)}\) the people behind the steering-wheel of a car, the users or the abusers of any newly introduced ‘extraterrestrial entity’ be it a mobile phone or a light bulb, or those openly subversive who rebelliously appropriate the sacred artefacts or images of society (...) recombine or redeploy them and invert their meaning\(^{(4.12)}\) ultimately, we all are, in this way or another, if to borrow Dirk Sijmon’s words: enticing the unprogrammed, or in de Certeau’s words: multiply and diversify the unpredictable resistances of the body to be (con)formed. Yet, I am reminded now of conclusions to which I arrived earlier (Chapter B5). As subtle as it may seem, there is a significant difference between those who are enlisted (even if by rebellious negation) to the ‘big cause’ of society, and those who just like children (like Hal) are loyal solely to their own desire to die in (their) own fashion.

It is the origin of the constitution – the cause – the code – the context, which points at the difference. In the case of children, these “C” words are originated from processes already underway, indeed inevitable and self-organizing. Children thus are neither the owners, but also not the renters of these “C” words; they are truly surfers. In the case of ‘the enlisted’, these words can always be trailed back to society at large – to the system – to Capitalism/Communism/ Tribalism. Here too, ‘the enlisted’ are not the owners of the constitution/cause/code/context; they are the second-hand renters, eternally in debt. \(^{(4.13)}\) It is as if intuition is blinded or disabled here, in a way that prevents it from truly departing somebody else’s cause/code/ constitution... It never arrives to utterly original processes already underway, indeed inevitable and self-organizing.
Always being second, no matter how far that intuition would take the enlisted individual that rides it, or how laissez-faire the society may seem to be, it would only work for the propagation of the mediating agent, for the benefit of meeting that agent’s own desire to die in (its) own fashion, and which is therefore, always mindfully on the alert, as Deleuze and Guattari phrased it, to learn where will the revolution come from, and in what form? ...(4.14) Ultimately, in the case of ‘the enlisted’, intuition always ends at a nearby gas station (call it a coffee shop if you like).

*To die in (my) own fashion* meant abiding by the ‘vision’ I had.

In my case, it was the ‘vision’, which provided the necessary program (ultimately, all improvisations require a program), within its frame I had to work. And it is true that in both the *Between Pier & Runway* project and the coffee shop, my improvisation was guided by ‘visions’. In *My Little Coffee Shop* however, whether I was the aborigine or the western entrepreneur, as defined above, my vision was already “enlisted”. So, no, other than in social terms I am unable to discriminate between the two. End of story.

But in the form of nostalgia, there is a ray of light coming from the past. It is my double cargo cult – that *twice behaved behavior* – my reenactment of a truly ‘unsurpassable event’ (truly, for it happened within vacuum), that comes to my aid. It is that reenactment that despite the inescapable differing brought on by my assimilation (my absorbance into my social reality), allowed me to maintain an unobstructed link to my desire *to die in (my) own fashion*.

And even in social terms, given that I am a honest person, and that *My Little Coffee Shop* was created in good faith, should I tie the fact that people could not even sit on my coffee shop’s chairs, and that the tables were precariously shaky, more so, literally electrified, to the naïve clumsiness of the socially inexperienced ‘creator’, or should I tie these to the socially inept ‘creator’? Possibly, it is a combination of them both. Nevertheless, once again it is the case of the innocent rebel, who naively, just like a child with no malicious intent, simply by disclosing his sincere thoughts ends up embarrassing the shapers of his ‘existing equilibrium’. Similarly in the world out of the vacuum, when one reenacts an
unsurpassable event taken from a world in vacuum, one is bound to wonder shortly thereafter about the distortion that this brought about....

*My Little Coffee Shop* showed me the link between nostalgia, naïveté, absurdity and a committed aspiration for a "cargo". The next time I visit one of those recently opened coffee shops in our urban reality, I am surely to have a grin on my face. Why? Because eventually, it is for all this coffee talk that I still did not leave my airport.
Notes

(4.1) Where do you criticize from? Don’t you see that criticizing is still knowing, knowing better? That the critical relation still falls within the sphere of knowledge, of “realization” and thus of the assumption of power? Critique must be drifted out of. Better still: Drifting is in itself the end of all critique. Jean François Lyotard, “Adrift”, appears in Driftworks, Semiotext(e), 1984, p.13, translated by Roger McKeon. Originally “Dérives”, a text dated October 1972, was first published as the introduction to Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud (Paris, Union Générale d’Editions, 10/18,1973) Lyotard directed this essay to the Situationists (or to the ‘spirit’ that they had just (1972) left behind). Quoted also by Sadie Plant in The Most Radical Gesture, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, p.121

(4.2) We have never abandoned transcendence – that is, the maintenance in presence by the mediation of a pass. Bruno Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, translated by Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, 1993, p.98 Originally in French, Nous n’avons jamais été modernes: Essais d’anthropologie symétrique, La Découverte, 1991, p. 128


(4.4) Maurice Nio & Lars Spuybroek, “The Strategy of the Form”, www.v2.nl/DEAF/96/nodes/NOX/text1.html “…Imagine an object made of gray matter of which the form is thought. Pure intelligence. The other forms that surround it are not reflected, they are absorbed as information. They fall as if through a fluid mirror so as to be completely and arithmetically processed by the memory metal. This object has no self-image, it has no consciousness and will not pass the mirror phase”.

(4.5)Control is short-lived and of rapid rates of turnover, but also continuous and without limit, while discipline was of long duration, infinite and discontinuous. Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt. Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control”, appears in Neil Leach, Rethinking Architecture, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 312

(4.6) Remaining eternally different means: remaining eternally different from itself. Derrida (and deconstruction) stress the idea of différences. In French, the word différences means both differing and deferring. In the thought of Derrida, différences refers roughly to the fact that words and signs can never summon forth what they mean (the “absent signified”, which Derrida called the trace) but can only be defined or explained in other words. Therefore, words and signs are always different from what they mean, and the actual things they refer to are always postponed (deferred) by human language. Derrida’s différences argued that because the perceiver’s mental state was constantly in a state of flux, and differed from one re-reading to the next, a general theory describing this phenomenon was unachievable. Because of this, we are trapped inside an inescapable web of language, which, moreover, shifts each time we hear or read a given human utterance. There is a deferrment of meaning with each act of rereading. There is a difference of readings with each rereading. Adrift on a sea of words, we suffer from an epistemological seasickness. Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia, wikipedia.com/difference (July, 2005)

(4.7) Borrowed from Sadie Plant, The Most Radical Gesture, Routledge, London and New York, 1992 The original text: Garbled versions of situationist imagery, attitudes, and theory pepper contemporary cultural discourse without a trace of their origins in the critique of commodity relations, and it is only too easy to characterize postmodernism – in art, philosophy, and politics – as a whole

Cont. ➤
recuperation of the century’s radical currents. And because the situationists were so aware of the dangers of recuperation, it is tempting to imagine that there are mines laid in the terrain which has been captured from them. They certainly fostered the idea that their critique would re-emerge regardless of the obstacles and recuperations it might face. (p.187)


In his introduction Hebdige wrote: ...the distinction between originals to hangers-on is always significant one in subculture. Indeed, it is frequently verbalized (plastic punks or safety-pin people, burread rastas or rasta bandwagon, weekend hippies, etc. versus the “authentic” people).


(4. 12) Rick Poynor, *Nigel Coates: The City In Motion*, Fourth Estate LTD in conjunction with Blueprint magazine, 1989, p. 100. Poynor wrote: In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Dick Hebdige showed how subculture groups, using a process of bricolage similar to that found among primitive peoples, appropriate the sacred artifacts or images of society (comb, suit and tie, Union Jack, swastika), recombine or redeploy them and invert their meaning.

(4. 13) See above note [4. 5]

Up upon receiving the statement/invitation to *My Little Coffee Shop*, a dear old friend wrote back:

Welcome Fitzcarraldo,

You have finally embraced (that which) we all need to survive in the lands of our colonial mothers and fathers.

I wish I could attend. Enjoy!

(and you may have seen the film by Werner Herzog, or may be not, it does not matter)
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

“THE PULLEY GUY”
(Excerpts from Ran Berdichesky, The Barge Circuit + The Gate Circuit,
Between Pier & Runway: The Parts, 2006)

...If the ‘movie’ was “information streaming from afar”, I was then the one who brought it; I was the messenger, I was Hermes. I had the right outfit and even the ‘silver shoes’.

Figure 21: The Pulley Guy (“I even had the ‘silver shoes’”)

I was lying down on a ramp – on a platform extended (in an ‘odd’ angle) from the south edge of the dockyard towards the floating south-pulley. I had headgear with a blinking
orange light on top (an ‘airport utility light’). My eyes were fixed down on the pulley, while my hands submerged in the water, slowly, steadily, and ardently pulling the cable—back and forth, back and forth... da uad fort (7:00pm till 9:00pm).

As for that worker’s outfit, this goes back to 1966 Emilio Pucci’s wardrobe design for the Braniff International airhostesses................

Figure 22: Emilio Pucci’s collection for the ‘Braniff hostess’, 1966

...it should be remembered that Emilio Pucci invoked yet another mythical figure, and that the body-hugging innermost layer of airhostess’ clothing (in his 1966 edition of the ‘airstrip’) with its colorful rhomboids, did not quite disappear when discarded in 1968. An airport employee, who is normally behind the scenes – an operator of a messaging system, salvaged it from the garbage-bin. Again, neither Pucci nor Mary Wells articulated any direct association to Hermes the messenger. Most likely it is my imagination, which is responsible for the connections.
APPENDIX B

THE AIRPORT OF THE NON-TICKETED
(Originally Chapter 8 of Part A, in Ran Berdichesky, Between Pier & Runway, 2006)

This is the story of a man, marked by an image from his childhood. The violent scene that upsets him, and whose meaning he was to grasp only years later, happened on the main jetty at Orly, the Paris airport, sometime before the outbreak of World War III.

Orly, Sunday. Parents used to take their children there to watch the departing planes. On this particular Sunday, the child whose story we are telling was bound to remember the frozen sun, the setting at the end of the jetty, and a woman’s face.

(Chris Marker, La Jeté, 1964)

The interest in airports is a cultural phenomenon dating back to the beginning of the 20th century; long before the use of airplanes for public transportation or any related commercial potentiality had materialized. The interest in liminality and crossroads however, is as old as the winged shoes of Hermes. Therefore, it will only be too simple to say that “what drew spectators (especially in those early days of aviation – first decade of the 20th century) was the risk involved”, or at that matter, the lure of what came to be Paul Virilio’s ‘accident’.

It is true, the near coinciding of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks with the approaching centennial anniversary of aviation (2003), brought about a growing interest in airports and aviation. But the subject of airports cannot be reduced to the mere spectacle it came to be, neither in the hands of capitalist propagation, its terrorist enemies, the system’s counter-attack, nor in those like Martha Rosler who by their way of criticizing and de-spectaclizing it, miss their target and end up severing the wings off Hermes’ shoes.

My own interest in airports and air travel can also not be isolated to an academic speculation regarding its connection to ‘Hypersurfaces’. It can also not be limited to the Asperger folk’s
fascination with traffic systems...and to being drawn to things that resemble clockwork, that have a kind of inner logic which defies common sense. (A8-5) It is an existential attraction to liminality, for which Romanticism becomes a vehicle.

* * *

My obsessive fascination, with airports, dates back to the mid 1960’s. I was given the middle name Emanuel after Emanuel Liberman, an uncle of my father, who died in 1965 when the Lan Chile DC-6 he was traveling in, crashed into the Andes.

Like many people in Israel, a large part of my family lived abroad. In my case they lived mostly in South America. There were many trips to Lod-Airport (later renamed ‘Ben-Gurion International’) to pick-up visiting family, and as many trips to escort them to their return flights. There were also trips to escort those of the family that left with the intention never to return. There were trips to escort those who left just for a bit and came back, there were those less frequent trips in which I myself.......

In such a small country surrounded either by enemies or sea, with the nearest friendly shore being 12 sailing hours away (the island of Cyprus), the airport gains a significance indeed. It becomes the only threshold to anything that can possibly take you away from the daily state of emergency that rules that country. It is also a statement of national identity (as Hugh Pearman recently wrote) especially in regards to Tel-Aviv airport. (A8-6)

I remember the ‘Old Jerusalem-Tel-Aviv road’ one had to take to reach the airport. From Jerusalem this meant driving west three quarters of the way (about one hour) till reaching the Arab city of Lod. One would then turn north for another 5 miles until reaching a train-crossing next to huge (camouflaged) gas reservoirs. This was the army guarded airport entrance. It was not until 1979/80, that a 60 Km freeway connecting Jerusalem and the city of Tel-Aviv via the airport was constructed. Arriving at the airport, I remember the smell emanating from the surrounding orange orchards, mixed with that smell of jet fuel. I remember the emotions in the air – owing to (an imminent separation or to an imminent reunion, to the thrill of flying, to the fear of flying, to the disappointment of landing or to the relief when one finds oneself back on solid ground – in Israel that is the ‘Holy-land’. There were many pilgrims: Greek, Turkish, Persian, Scandinavian (of which many were UN soldiers), French, Italian, (in those days hardly
any Spanish), Belgian, Dutch, German, Swiss, Austrian, (from 1967 no eastern Europeans except Romanian or those lucky immigrants from the Soviet Union), British, American, Hassidic New-Yorkers, Canadian, South African, Australian, South American...(from 1967 hardly any Asian or Black African). Then there were immigrants, returning Israelis, those that stayed behind, soldiers, police, taxi drivers…. This was long before signs of globalization appeared even in that western enclave in the Middle East. There was the culture shock of those arrived, and the ‘dis-simulation’ of those about to depart.

I remember the smells of perfume (the kind that could be purchased only in duty-free shops), of sweat and cigarette smoke. I recall many languages and the English & Hebrew-speaking lady over the loudspeaker announcements, preceded by a distinct ‘pre-high-tech’ mechanical chime. I remember the red circles on those automatic doors used only for exit, and those green circles marking the doors to enter. I remember the pre-digital flights information board – the ruffle of the flipping message cards, the noise and smell coming out of the air-conditioning system (unique in Israel of those days), the roar of the accelerating jet engines shaking the building, followed by another ruffling of cards, indicating the removal of that flight from the board. I remember the vinyl flap-doors at the end of the conveyor belt leading from the check-in counters to the back of the building – on lucky occasions if the flaps were pushed open by a traveling suitcase an airplane might be visible on the tarmac. There was an escalator to the departure hall on the second floor, which only ticketed passengers could use – the final stopping place and the climax of farewells. I also remember a large bulletproof glass wall in the other end of the terminal. This wall separated the ‘naturalized’ section of the building (and of Israel) from the baggage claim and the arrivals area. This is where a large crowd would elbow over to the nearest spot of the glass, hoping to catch a first glimpse (as if through a telescope) of long awaited loved ones among the foreign-looking disembarked multitudes pouring-in some 200-ft away. They would all wave and yell and sometimes swear or complain about an adjacent person’s behavior or under-usage of deodorant. A few of the disembarking passengers would wander over to check for someone recognizable behind the glass. If someone was visible there might begin an exchange of words that never quite managed to come across the glass. Nevertheless, the centrality and popularity of that wall were unquestionable.
There was something heroic about the disembarking passengers. It was not just that they came from faraway worlds or that they looked different. They were also the survivors of the travel through air – the travel in those fabulous winged tubes. These were people who at least for a short while, were close to having a birds-eye point of view (even if only through a pigeonhole). So if they were heroes, what about the crew?

This was the end of the sixties/early seventies. People were walking on the moon. The jet-age was literally in the air, the “future was then”. The stewardesses seemed glamorous ‘Martian’ fashion models, and the pilots – especially those of El Al, the Israeli airline – if not exactly space walkers, were literally, heroes of war. But Both the disembarked and the embarking passengers had a different aura of heroism around them – it was suffused with anxiety. They either came from, or were about to board ‘no-man’s land’, which exactly in those years attracted evermore those who did not have a land: the terrorists.

Paul Virilio observed: With the Palestinian problem, popular war had suddenly taken on global proportions. Indeed, the tactic that consists in embracing in a diffuse manner the most widespread territories to escape the powerful nuclei of military repression could have no meaning for them, since the very cause of their struggle was the deprivation of geographic territory. They therefore lost no time in literally settling into the time zones of international airports. The new unknown combatants, come from nowhere and no longer finding a strategic terrain, fight in strategic time, in the relativity of travel time. Since in the final account there is no road that is not strategic, from this moment on there is no longer a truly civilian aviation. (A8-7)

The hourly news-broadcasts on Israeli radio stations (especially in those days of pre/early television) were another ‘statement of national identity’. I remember the way all were tuned-in to the streaming updates regarding the latest hijacking or act of terrorism, aimed upon an Israeli target. The early seventies were especially notorious, and while I don’t remember the exact details, I do remember the frequent recurrence of such incidents. I remember vividly the tension, and I remember perfectly the electronic sounds emanating from the hand-held ‘transistors’ and coming from a hijacked airplane’s cockpit or from a reporter standing in view of such a plane. On those specific occasions, the radio signals and electronic background noise, for some reason, sounded shiveringly different.

In the spring of 1972 (I was almost six years old) on a family visit to Europe I left Israel for my first time. It was my first time to experience an airplane’s interiors, my first time to fly... and
when we returned, it was also my first time to be on the other side of the glass wall – to be a “disembarked”.

One month later a Sabena plane was hijacked and forced to land in Tel-Aviv, I now had the basic knowledge and geography of plane interiors and so could imagine the situation beyond the radio signals and information. Three weeks later, when three Japanese terrorists (subcontracted by the Palestinian PFLP) aboard an Air France flight arriving from Paris via Rome opened fire on passengers from simultaneous arrivals in the baggage-claim area, I already knew that place from both sides. To this day when I am in that hall in Ben-Gurion International - among the disembarking passengers, I am doomed to look for remnants of a pool-of-blood or a bullet hole in the wall. “It could be worse” as people in Israel say. Indeed there were many more horrific incidents that had nothing to do with aviation terrorism. There were the wars, and now such remnants – more fresh, are dispersed all across the country. But an assault in an airport is not just an assault on a physical terrain (living in Israel that was a given). Airports are crossroads where imagination and possibilities take off. An assault on the airport is an assault on Hermes. (A8-8) It is the turning of a ‘space’ into a ‘place’. (A8-9)

* * *

There was yet another part of the building without which the experience of the non-traveler was incomplete. This was the observation deck. One had to climb a long staircase, insert a coin into a revolving barrier, and then you were on the jetty. (A8-10) Below lay the tarmac, and further off, the runway. I learned to recognize airline liveries long before I could read either Hebrew or Roman alphabets. In Israel, aluminum foil was not yet a common kitchen commodity, so I had nothing to compare the planes’ silver shells to except themselves, or perhaps to the foil wrapped around imported chocolates. It was as if each plane had a different flavor. Lufthansa’s belly was the shiniest of them all – it was coming from Frankfurt and Munich. There were the Turkish Airlines from Istanbul, Cyprus Airways from Larnaca, Olympic from Athens, SAS from Copenhagen, Finnair from Helsinki (bringing more UN soldiers), BEA till 1972 and then British Airways from London, Sabena from Brussels, KLM from Amsterdam, Swissair from Zurich and Geneva, Austrian from Vienna, Tarom from Bucharest, Alitalia from Rome, TWA from New York via Paris, Rome or Athens, CP-AIR from Toronto and Montreal via Amsterdam, Air France from Paris via Lyon or Nice - occasionally via Athens or Rome; and a weekly flight from Paris via Tel-Aviv to Delhi and Bangkok, SAA from Johannesburg via Lisbon, and of course many of
El Al from all of the above (minus the Far-Eastern) in addition to Mexico City, Miami, Chicago, Montreal, Marseille, Nairobi and Tehran. It was perplexing to see one of those airliners - especially the foreign ones; what could be said though about seeing them in a group? The spectacle only seemed more mind-blowing in the dark, when the planes’ interior lights were turned on, and one could see the movement of people through the little rounded windows. Physically, these people were not that far away - perhaps not more then 400-ft, but they seemed miles away, so visible and yet incomprehensible. What could be said about the movement in adjacent planes (whether parked or taxiing) in relation to this one, in relation to the commotion of airport vehicles around? Everything could have been described so quantifiably, yet each object was highly charged with qualities and trajectories, which out there on the observation deck and juxta posed to wide open skies, could have only been imagined, or more precisely, were intensely triggered to be imagined…

Notes


(A8-3) In Politics of the Very Worst, Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, New York, 1999, p.89, Paul Virilio writes: The accident is an inverted miracle, a secular miracle, a revelation. When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane you also invent the plane crash… Virilio kept developing this notion to the extent of instigating the establishment of ‘The first museum of the Accident’. In an interview with Luc Debraine, Le temps, Geneva, Switzerland, on January 29, 2005, he described this museum to be a conservatory for the accidents that those inventions generated. And then also alternatively, a new university that will teach the knowledge of accidents, of what happens, and will help us face our fear better, and even the panic that we expect. Two years earlier (November 2002-March 2003) he conceived an exhibition in Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain in Paris, under the title: "Ce qui arrive" (What is Coming), officially in English: "Unknown Quantity". It consisted mainly of journalistic photographs dryly depicting colossal accidents and disasters. These were meshed with actual art pieces, created by contemporary artists (many of which are media based), who were thus ‘adding’ (via technology) the missing ‘human touch’.

According to Virilio, the exhibition attempted at establishing a new kind of museology and museography: one which consists in exposing or exhibiting the accident—all accidents, from the most commonplace to the most tragic, from natural catastrophes to industrial and scientific disasters… thus hoping to contribute to the development of a philosophy of postindustrial eschatology. Furthermore, it attempted at counteracting the excesses of all kinds with which the great news media swamp us daily, …habituation to insensitivity and indifference in the face of the craziest scenes […] in the name of an alleged freedom of expression that has transformed itself into […] an academicism of horror, (into) the heroicization of terror and terrorism.

cont. ▶
Taking place just over a year past the September 11 attacks, and heavily taking a ride on that day (thus advancing the idea of ‘The first museum of the Accident’), this show emerged, as Joseph Nechvatal observed, to be Virilio’s repetition (his own falling into the trap) of the nihilism of, in (Virilio’s) words, the “markets of the spectacle”. Or more artificiously:
apocalyptic-chic imagery... wallows in the pathetic tropes of Romanticism by inviting us to contemplate the smoky ruins of World Trade Center attack. 

Just as our televisions did not show us any actual, mangled, dead bodies of the victims of the World Trade Towers and Pentagon attacks, neither does "Ce qui arrive" / "Unknown Quantity" show anything intimate, personal or subjective. Nothing individual is examined in terms of 9_11. Only more abstractions - more mystifications...it focuses not on individual passions and inner struggles or joys but on fearfully transcendent ‘big picture’ dramatic performances – what are essentially extenuations of Romanticism’s Romantic Sublime...besides having all the weight of a kitsch disaster film, his exhibition is something which definitely does NOT have the feeling of an accident. Rather it is something which has only the LOOK of the accident. What we see and experience is something highly controlled, something highly crafted - thus something pretending and thus, one could say, intellectually fraudulent.

The point here, if to follow Nechvatal’s accusations (beyond his own personal settling of scores with Virilio for being a “Romanticist”, more so a “technophobe”), is that, sadly, despite Virilio’s declared intentions, ‘the accident’ was reduced into nothing more facile but a spectacle aiming “to teach us that ‘shit happens.’”

Virilio is quoted from his forward to the "Ce qui arrive" / "Unknown Quantity“ Exhibition.
http://www.onoci.net/virilio/pages_uk/virilio/avertissement.php?th=1&rub=1_1
See also exhibition’s catalogue: Paul Virilio, Unknown Quantity, Thames & Hudson, 2003
Nechvatal is quoted from Joseph Nechvatal, “Review of Paul Virilio's 'Ce qui arrive' / 'Unknown Quantity’”, in Film-Philosophy, Vol. 6 No. 47, November 2002

Vidler wrote: Rosler photography take on the air of pictorial revelations of the underbelly of capitalism, its spaces manifested as empty, sterile non-places, determined more by mathematical calculation of time of arrival and departure than by any regard for the human subjects subjected to this version of total control and surveillance. Humans would be absent from the photographs, then, not for aesthetic reasons but to mark their real nonexistence for spaces occupied by their transient bodies, moved through as quickly as possible. Blankness would be seen in the place of modernist fulfillment; anomie and estrangement in the place of a truly public realm. Spaces, that is, have been substituted for places; airport spaces now take the “place of the public.” (Vidler, pp.180-81)

In this way Rosler’s images of the airport, transcontinental and ubiquitous in their uniformity, stand at once as figures of the triumph of modernist spatial concepts and of the forces that have supported this triumph. (Vidler, p.185)

Unlike the modernist architects whose photographic representation of the spaces they constructed, which deliberately appear to be evacuated of untidy human intrusion (Vidler, p.178), thus emphasizing their vision of an unbroken path between the precise contour of a flight machine and the aesthetics of modernity (Vidler, p.178), and that demonstrate their ideology of flows, of rush, of transfer, of space opposed to place (Vidler, p.179). Martha Rosler’s photographs of evacuated spaces, are shot deliberately to be appearing as images from a hospital’s waiting room, moreover a morgue’s, thus ironically criticizing the architects of those spaces.
Yet, my own addition here is that it is exactly this deliberate sardonic contrivance (in the name of art), that ultimately diverts Rosler from her own target, and directs her instead into enforcing exactly that which she criticizes, namely, the butchery of a once excited thrill of spatial exploration, and which indeed appears now to be regularized into a controlled mechanism of calculated (and contrived) flows and uneasy, unwanted delays. (Vidler, p.185)

“The same could be said of airports. Whereas most people get in and out of them as quickly as they can, I love to linger in them as long as I can, savoring their geometries, cool air, and glassy surfaces. ...lovers of airports are as common among Asperger folk as are a loopy fascination with traffic systems or outmoded computer programs. Inexplicably to ourselves, we are drawn to things that resemble clockwork, that have a kind of inner logic which defies common sense.”


   Quoted by David Pascoe, *Airspaces*, p.191

(A8-8) Re: Hermes: Among the Hellenes, as the related word herma ("a boundary stone, crossing point") would suggest, Hermes embodied the spirit of crossing-over: He was seen to be manifest in any kind of interchange, transfer, transgressions, transcendence, transition, transit or traversal, all of which involve some form of crossing in some sense. This explains his connection with transitions in one’s fortune -- with the interchanges of goods, words and information involved in trade, interpretation, oration, writing -- with the way in which the wind may transfer objects from one place to another, and with the transition to the afterlife.

   Among the many epithets attributed to Hermes, and which I find related to the ‘airport’ are:
   – The god of boundaries and of the travelers who cross them (therefore the Patron of travel)
   – An interpreter who bridges the boundaries
   – The messenger from the gods to humans, and the one who deliver dreams to living mortals

(A8-9) I am relying here on Michel de Certeau’s distinction between ‘space’ and a place.

A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities...

...the law of the “proper” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.


The attack on the airport was a patriotic act seeking the establishment of a new order (new ‘stability’).

As I see, it was an attempt to severe and then incarcerate all those unnamable vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables... of intersections of mobile elements that resonate and converge at the airport.

(A8-10) Due to the terminal’s expansion at the end of the 70’s, the observation deck was permanently closed. A new terminal (Terminal 3) was opened in November of 2004, thus replacing and bringing an end to Terminal 1 – the terminal to which I am referring in my writing. (The little Terminal 2 is still used for domestic and military-personnel air services. Although Terminal 2 is an important part of the Tel-Aviv airport, my recollections of/from it, are irrelevant here)
APPENDIX C

“THE OILRIGS” + “THE NEON MESSAGING SYSTEM”
(Excerpts from Ran Berdichesky, The Terminal/Bridge Circuits + The Gate Circuit,
Between Pier & Runway: The Parts, 2006)

Note: In this appendix you will find that the significance of the ‘oilrigs’ and ‘messaging system, emerged from minute technical details. For this reason, reading this appendix is optional.

Figure 23: An ‘oilrig’
B2. 5 The ‘Oilrigs’

In varying distances of 3 to 5-ft from the western ends of the piers, the oilrigs were the next elements along the terminal/bridge complexes. Anchored in their location, yet with the ability to rise and fall with fluctuations of water level, these three-legged structures rose two feet above the water. The legs were made of mechanically perforated steel (suggesting a calculated modular structure), and like the overall condition of the dockyard, they too seemed battered. A ‘giant’ (14 inches in diameter) glass-looking bubble, half-submerged in the water, was locked between the three legs. The air inside the bubbles enabled the oilrigs’ floatation, while implying their inhabitability, and therefore their function as satellites of the main terminals. Thus, the oilrigs could serve as terminals for marine means of transportation. In this case, the ‘legs’ function as docking structures and/or elevator shafts to the upper surface, and the bubbles as ‘glass’ domes capping underwater arrival/departure halls. The ‘extendable’ greenish lighting complexes protruding from underneath the adjacent piers/terminals fit easily into this narrative.

Each set of three legs supported an amorphous, yet flat and relatively thin surface (each, averaging 6 Sq-ft) on top. These surfaces were coated with grayish tar, reminiscent of a paved lot – a tarmac, a ‘heliport’, or as a zone allocated for taxing/parking ‘planes’ and/or for any ‘airport utility vehicle’ (AUV). The amorphous shape of these surfaces contrasted with the mechanical shapes and the grid-like linearity of most other elements in that ‘airport’. These amorphous shapes echoed shapes of natural islands—or, more accurately, of islands that were artificially elevated above the ocean, and technologized to the degree that there was nothing left of their natural features, but an amorphous contour line. A padding of black rubber covered the winding edges of those surfaces. This rubber connected them associatively to those thick rubber bumpers, padding the adjacent pontoons.

B2. 6 Beyond any visual association, why referring to them as ‘Oilrigs’?

Oilrigs are self-sustained manmade islands which similar to airports, are trans-disciplinary entities, or in other words they are ‘single knots of flows’. In the case of real oilrigs, there are various vectors traversing them:
There is a downward ‘flow’ of the drills and an upwards flow of the oil pumped from down below. The ‘legs’ provide docking facilities for tankers and other marine vessels, while the upper (elevated) part is a mini-city with its residential, recreational and industrial zones, and even a heliport.

In the case of my oilrigs, there were additional vectors passing through. The visible ones (one per each oilrig) were the bridges, (or rather should I say ‘THE BRIDGES’) that while allowing traffic between the runway and each of the terminals, curved their way through the oilrigs. My oilrigs functioned thus also as transferring stations between the piers (the terminals) and the runway. Transferring stations are those places, which enable two-way traffic, to use the same tracks simultaneously. They are highly charged zones where polarities are reversed. Indeed, my oilrigs reversed polarities, but through a messaging system transmitting single-word airport messages, they also produced multiple of polarities. These messaging systems were imbedded in the surface of each ‘elevated island’. Each transmitted message sparked a polarity – a departure of a new vector.

Each of the words: arrived, departed, boarding, cancelled, and delayed, in addition to the possibility of ‘silence’ (when none of the anticipated messages appear), or when a red light appears instead (indicating the possible out-of-order status of the messaging system itself), had the power and potency for stealing or adding a heartbeat or two… Thus, the new vectors sparked by the messaging systems, were mental ones, traversing deep through the hearts of those who use the ‘airport’. The ‘users’ here, were imaginary avatars manipulated by the viewers’ imagination.
B2. 7  The Single-Word Airport Messaging Systems, technically, how it worked?

The ‘airport’ as I hypothesized, is a ‘hypersurface’ in its nature. It is a place where various physical spaces dedicated to transits, to departures and to arrivals, converge with mental spaces, where the departures & arrivals could be any of the following five: imminent, delayed, aborted, on-time, or belonging to the past.

Information spaces that are scattered across the airport continuously provide factual and impartial substance to those mental spaces. The impartiality however is strictly momentary. Ultimately, the mythical magic of air-travel, combined with the ever-inhabited potential of catastrophe leave their mental weight. The convergence of the physical, the mental, and the informational spaces – a convergence, which is constantly in transaction, is what constitutes the airport space. It is a trans-disciplinary space. It is not a mere collage of its components, but a transmutation into unpredictable conceptual space (1). This hypothesis was the departure point of the messaging system I constructed.

Theoretically, in order to operate the messaging system, each oilrig had to have three integrated electrical circuits under operation. One was a low voltage direct current powering a controller – a computer geared with sensors. Another powered a servo-motor (a motor that allows an arm to be operating like a dial). The third was a high voltage alternating current,
originating from a neon transformer. This current flew through the dial on the servo-motor to one point (out of five) on a ‘switchboard’ which then transferred it to a corresponding airport message (again, one out of five), and back to the transformer (as it was alternating current, I can say it again: “back and forth, back and forth...”). The activation of the servo-motor, i.e. the movements of the ‘dial’, hence the activation of a particular message, depended on information gathered by the sensors and which was then processed by the controller.

Ultimately, what became visible on the surface of each oilrig was a glimpse onto the mechanics of an operating switchboard system. By saying the mechanics, I mean that the array of elements on the surface of each oilrig unfolded as an accentuated linear diagram of a switchboard system.

This accentuated linearity had a direct correspondence to a physical attachment and detachment of ‘airplanes’, or in other words, to the notion of “arrival” and “departure”. This was further amplified physically by the visible and audible electric arc between the dial on the Servo and the ‘switchboard’. It thus brought into (mental) awareness (also) the high-voltage involved. The arc, in addition to the so obvious analog-mode of the circuit, or what Brian Massumi’s calls a *narrativizable action-reaction circuit*... (2), grants the viewers/airport-users with a deepening emotional sensation traversing through their hearts.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 25: The ‘neon messages circuit’ – a diagram.
The elements on the surface were:

1. A high voltage cable emerging from below the surface and connecting to the ‘dial’.
2. The ‘dial’ itself.
3. A 120° semicircle with five hotpoints – five stations – five gates – (in an exact distance of 30° from each other). This semi-circle worked as such as a mini-terminal, a five-gates terminal. The internal side of each ‘gate’ was basically a receptor for the ‘dial’ and for the electrical arc it conducted. The external side of each gate was an electrical channel connecting to a particular single-word message.
4. Five 4 inches long blackened neon tubes, each wired to a particular gate. Each of these tubes, when crossed by electricity, would light up, to reveal in bluish neon light, a single-word airport message.
5. The convergence of five high voltage wires (one from each tube) into a communal drain. Although I knew that this drain carried the electricity back to that place underneath the surface where it came from, visually (and associatively) it functioned as those marking on an actual airport tarmac, that mark the taxiway from each gate to the runway. This detail owes its importance to the fact that it was not the electricity being aired out as the newly sparked vector (that I mentioned above). Rather, it was a highly charged message that just like an airplane took off from a communal ‘runway’.

As I mentioned earlier, each oilrig’s upper surface had its own amorphous shape. The actual array of each messaging system – each switchboard system, including the exact placing of the tubes and the curvature of the drain-line (‘the taxiway line’) varied from one oilrig to another. The array on top every single oilrig, in addition to the curvilinear passing-through of each ‘BRIDGE’, corresponded to each oilrig’s particular amorphous shape. These undefined shapes, despite the precariousness they suggested, or rather exactly because of that shakiness, suggested also those miraculous aspects inherent in the ‘airport’ – the mythical magic of air-travel. A century (1903-2003) after the invention of the airplane, and in spite of technological advancements and attempts to hide the shakiness (by turning what once was magic into an exact science), my futuristic yet corroded airport reveals that
shakiness is still in the airport’s diagrammatic infrastructure, in its wire-frame, in its very bones, and that this is where magic still lies; seeking a connection to human imagination.

It should be noted that the high voltage powering the neon messages came from a transformer independent of those 9000 Volts ones on each eastern pole of the terminal-bridge complexes (after all, oilrigs are self-sustainable entities). The transformers in this case were much smaller, and were hidden underneath the amorphous surfaces.

But nothing powered the servo-motors. They were unplugged. In fact, there were no computerized controllers hidden beneath the surface. Although the ‘dials’ were capable of moving, they did not move, and there was no switching of messages. The switching and all the vectors that it sparked were in the viewers’ imagination. The viewers, who were the imaginary airport-users, were thus also the controllers of the switchboard. Moreover, the viewers were not even in a position to read the messages. They were too far and way too small to be legible. As I wrote earlier, I had to avoid any illustrative animation, for it is that animation which even if happening through tactile interactivity, when connections become concrete (rather than imaginary), that serves against the formation of a trans-disciplinary space.

B4. 7 The Communication/Information Hub

…No degree of technological advancement could have gotten rid of the noise, the blur, the graininess and the pixelation of the video images and information these products transmitted. ...in the case of the messages systems on the ‘oilrigs’, the information was moving through rusty and corroded conduits, or, more accurately, through invisible conduits that are triggered to be imagined as rusty and corroded.

By referring to the information coming from the ‘oilrigs’, I am referring here specifically to an LCD that was placed on the actual communication/information hub. Those ‘airport-users’, who either passed or lingered by the ‘gate’, were bound to face it. Again, the images were the result of what appeared as a real-time surveillance/scanning. This time the surveillance was of the messaging system switchboards on the oilrigs.
Earlier, while writing about those messaging systems I mentioned that there was nothing powering the servo-motors – they were unplugged. In fact, I wrote, there were not any computerized controllers hiding beneath the surface (to control/operate the servos). Although capable of moving, the ‘dials’ (on the servos) did not move, and there was not any switching of messages. The switching and all the vectors that it sparked were in the viewers’ imagination. The viewers, who were the imaginary airport-users, were thus also the controllers of the switchboard. Moreover, the viewers were not even in a position to read the messages; these were too far and way too small to be legible. It is with the aid of the surveillance images, appearing on the communication/information hub, that the controlling of the switchboards (by the ‘airport-users’) was at all enabled. Of course there was not even a surveillance camera on site. Both the camera and the corroded cables that supposedly carried the ‘captured’ grainy images were triggered to be imagined….

Notes


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