



SACRAMENTO METROPOLITAN ARTS COMMISSION

A City County Agency

**ART IN PUBLIC PLACES COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

Date: December 3, 2003

Location: former APP Committee Member Paulette Trainor's residence

Convened: 4:15 pm - Adjourned: 6 pm

Attendance: Chair Don Sronce, Troy Corliss, Dave Gibson, Brenda Louie, Marquita Plomer

Absent/Excused: Donna Billick, Rachel Clarke, Whitson Cox,

APP Staff: Linda Bloom, Ann Mottola, Elisa Nicholas

Guest: Margi Park, Arts Commissioner

Approval of Agenda: Sronce moved, Plomer seconded

Approval of Minutes: Sronce moved, Plomer seconded

ACTION ITEMS:

- 1. Approve Proposal by Sayed Alavi for Airport Bridge Project - County (Mottola)**
- 2. Slide Review & Selection of 3 Artists for the Watt Ave. Enhancement Project - County, Non-Required (Bloom)**

Chair Sronce encouraged Committee members to make more of an effort to maintain regular attendance. At the November meeting, the Committee did not have a quorum, so it was not able to vote on any Action Items for APP. The items had to be deferred to the SMAC for voting on behalf of the APP Committee.

Chair Sronce also mentioned he received a call from the Mayor inquiring about the balance of Committee membership (i.e., City/County makeup, etc.). L. Bloom asked the Chair (also a Commissioner) to check with the Arts Commission regarding its policy on SMAC committees membership. A. Mottola expressed her concern about electeds' jurisdiction over the APP Committee membership.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Approve Proposal by Seyed Alavi for Airport Bridge Project - County (Mottola)

A. Mottola reviewed the project, then passed out Alavi's proposal to Committee members. Ten artists were recommended by the APP Committee [see staff report for details], then APP staff convened a public review of slides & resumes of the 10 artists. The APP Committee reviewed the 10 artists' slides, then selected 5 finalists from among them. The finalists were paid to create proposals. APP staff then convened a public panel, which reviewed the 5 proposals, then chose Alavi's proposal titled, *Connecting Flights*. This artwork will consist of carpeting with digitally-designed aerial images of the Sacramento River. The artist intends the work to be a "koanic relationship between a river and a bridge," reminding viewers of "a flowing river that takes us along with its current to another destination."

In regard to maintenance, M. Plomer suggested creating the work in 12" x 24" pieces, to aid in replacing areas when needed. She also mentioned there are many technologies available today to assist the artist in its creation. D. Gibson inquired about the artist's experience in public art, to which A. Mottola replied that the artist has prior public art experience.

VOTE: 5 ayes, 0 noes, 3 absent. T. Corliss moved to accept this proposal; D. Gibson seconded. All in favor.

2. Slide Review & Selection of 3 Artists for the Watt Ave. Bridge Enhancement Project – County (Non-Required) (Bloom)

L. Bloom reviewed the project, noting that it is a non-required APP project with a short timeline of completion. The Committee reviewed the slides of artists who previously applied, through an RFQ application process, for the FC Joyce fence public art project. The Committee selected 3 finalists (these finalists will be paid to create proposals, and APP will convene a public review panel to review the proposals. An artist will be chosen by the panel and commissioned to create the artwork).

The finalists include, in order of highest ranking by points: Michael Riegel, Team - Donna Billick & Alan Osborne, Lane Van Doren. Barry Kulmann was chosen as an alternate, should the invited artists be unable to carry out the proposal for some reason. Also, should the Billick/Osborne team be selected, Donna Billick will step down from serving on the Art in Public Places Committee.

INFORMATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS, UPDATES

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

6. OLD/ BUSINESS

None.

7. NEW BUSINESS

None.

8. PUBLIC DISCUSSION

None.

The APP Committee meeting ended at 6 pm. The next regular APP Committee meeting will be Wednesday, January 7, 2004, at 4 pm.

INTERACTIVE PUBLICS

Steve Dietz

The presence of all kinds of electronic displays is an essential part of contemporary architecture. This new "screen architecture" already has its classics (for instance, Prada's store in NYC by OMA/Kram, or the Facsimile project by Diller + Scofidio), but since in the near future every surface may become an electronic screen and/or a working computer, we are just at the very beginnings of what promises to become a whole new field.

—Lev Manovich¹

PHYSICALLY, *FACSIMILE*, DILLER + SCOFIDIO'S NEW COMMISSION FOR THE SAN FRANCISCO Moscone Center Expansion Project, is a 100-foot-tall steel armature holding a fifteen-foot by twenty-five-foot LED video monitor that moves along the exterior of the building's second-story glass facade. A live video feed of the interior lobby is broadcast on the LED screen. Segments of fictional, prerecorded video programs that appear to be live are randomly substituted on the screen. On the rear of the sign, readable from the interior lobby space, are four horizontal, alpha-numeric LEDs that modify a live feed from Google, a process designed by Ben Rubin and Mark Hansen. The effect is to create a kinetic, text- and image-based spectacle that is familiar yet reverses private and public spheres, broadcasting the inside to the outside and vice versa, and that is further denaturalized by inserting fictional video segments and scrambling the news feed.

Conceptually, *Facsimile* is a border on the map of public art terra incognita between the siren call of new technologies that promise to upgrade the very notion of site-specific public art, and the pragmatic realities of attempting to do so. Beneath the bureaucratic surface of San Francisco Arts Commission minutes is a tale of near-Homeric proportions in which Director of Public Art Jill Manton navigates between the Scylla of Diller + Scofidio's thrilling yet shifting vision for their project, and the Charybdis of technical difficulties and pragmatic snafus. Is it worth it? As noted new media theorist Lev Manovich points out, already Diller + Scofidio's *Facsimile* is a classic portent of what the future holds. Interviews with dozens of artists and administrators reveal a wave of public art commissioning that is increasingly ambitious technologically and aims to engage broad audiences in public venues. What lessons can be learned from this work? What are the philosophical reasons for commissioning it? How best to produce such work? What about maintenance and obsolescence?

What is interactive public art? Interactive. Participatory. Multimedia. Metamedia. Digital. Computational. New media. There is no generally accepted terminology for the work under discussion. This article focuses on work that is permanently installed in public spaces that are not art spaces, uses computation to incorporate participant and/or environmental input (in other words, it's dynamic), and uses more than one medium—text, audio, video, sculpture, the Web, and so forth.

FROM THE HEAD OF ZEUS—NOT

Multimedia public art that is responsive is not without a history, whether it is the immersive, panorama-based environments of a Daguerre in the mid-

"Ms. Manton reported on the status of the Diller + Scofidio project for the Moscone Center. Ms. Manton is confident in Mitsubishi's quality and will seek a sole source exemption for Mitsubishi from the Human Rights Commission because of their proprietary patented technology" (September 25, 2001).

"Ms. Manton reminded the Commissioners that artist team Diller + Scofidio had to redesign the equipment once before when SACO went bankrupt and Mitsubishi was hired for the job." (December 13, 2001).

"Mitsubishi is now proposing an air intake and cooling system comprised of 60 small units. Ms. Manton suggested that in order to monitor the cooling system a computer would have to be installed." (January 16, 2002).

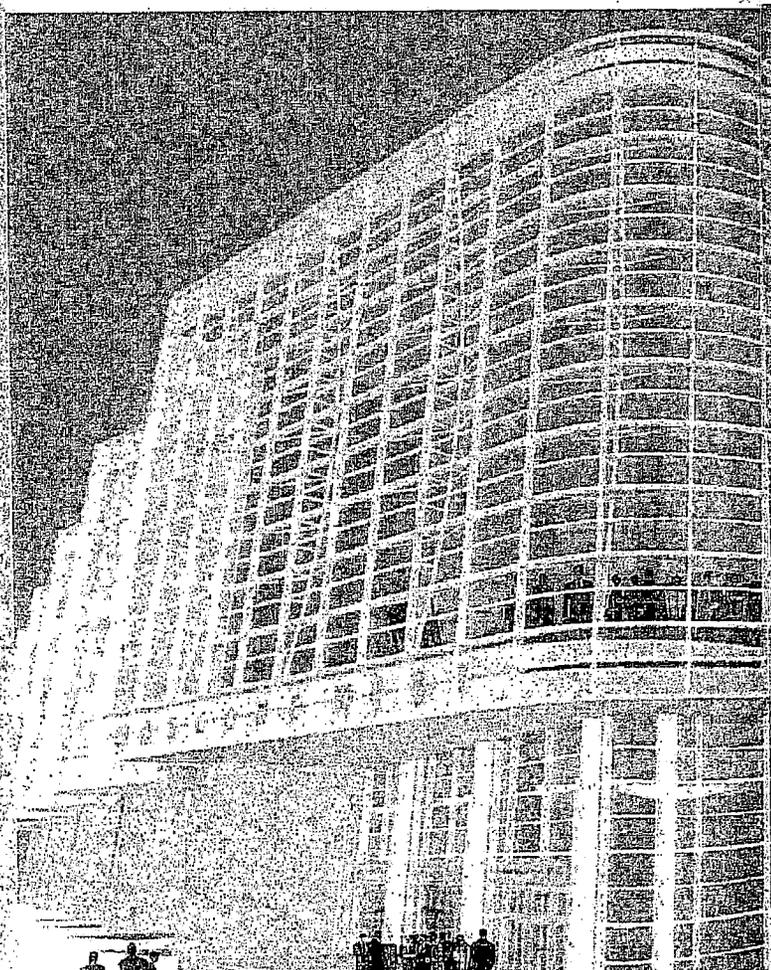
"Ms. Manton explained that because Mitsubishi repeatedly responded in an untimely manner with information that was frequently inaccurate, artist Ric Scofidio contacted another LED vendor." (March 20, 2002).

"Because the large-scale LED screen is such a specialized project, it has been difficult to find a manufacturer who could serve as a true collaborator with this project. After three attempts with other companies, Ms. Diller said that she believes they have found a true collaborator in MultiMedia, the current LED company, and that she is very happy with their service so far." (May 22, 2002).

nineteenth century or the architectural sound and light shows of a Nicolas Schöffer in the mid-twentieth century. In 1976, Creative Time commissioned Max Neuhaus to create *Round: Sound for Concave Surfaces* for the domed rotunda of the U.S. Custom House in Bowling Green. *Round* was a three-day event during which the audience heard one fundamental pitch with various overtones circulating around the space via a ring of sixteen speakers. In 1980, Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz's *Hole-in-Space*, a telematic projection portal between Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City and the Broadway department store located in Century City's open-air shopping center, was sprung on an unsuspecting public that thronged the event space in increasing numbers over three nights. And at various festivals throughout the world, hundreds of interactive public art projects have been presented for anywhere from a few hours to a few weeks by Robert Adrian, Roy Ascott, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Christian Moeller, Bureau of Inverse Technology, Knowbotic Research, Surveillance Camera Players, and dozens of other artists and groups.

"PERMANENCE"

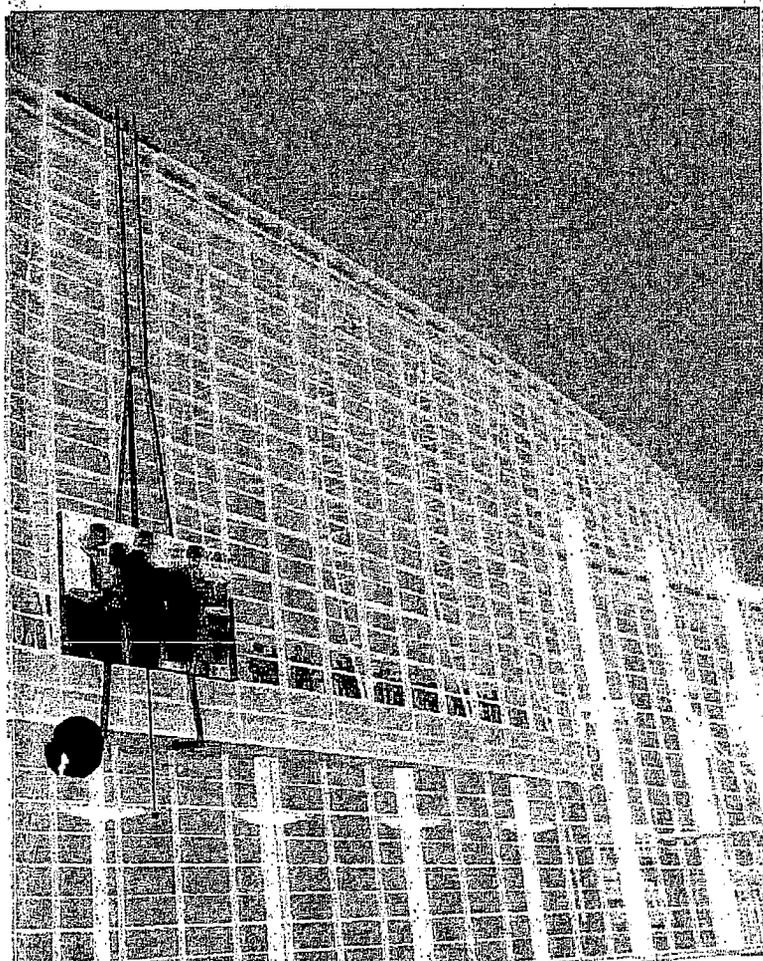
While the history of temporary installations is rich, permanent public art has been relatively uncommon. *Jump Cuts* (1996) by Diller + Scofidio and



Paul Lewis (with technical support by Ben Rubin) was a reworking of the traditional theater marquee at the United Artists Cineplex in San Jose. Not unrelated to the inside/outside, public/private binaries of *Facsimile*, *Temp Cuts* placed a row of twelve large LCD panels on the theater's glass façade. Mounted in the lobby, a matching set of projectors cycled through live images of people on theater escalators, trailers of movies supplied monthly by United Artists on laser disks, and a transparent mode where the theater lobby could be viewed through the panels. In 2000, however, United Artists left the complex, which is now abandoned, and even if it is resurrected as an active Cineplex, trailers are no longer distributed on laser disk, so significant reprogramming of both hardware and software would be necessary.

New York-based artist John Klima's *ECOSYSTEM*, commissioned by Zurich Capital Markets and installed in its New York offices, uses real-time data for global currencies, market indexes, and the weather conditions at JFK airport to drive a simulation environment with flocking birds (currencies), branching trees (market indexes), and cloud formations (weather). The project requires only a data connection, electricity, and a

Diller + Scofidio, *Facsimile* (model),
 in Francisco, Calif., 2003;
 photo courtesy San Francisco Art Commission.



"Motion to authorize Director of Cultural Affairs to enter into final contract with Liz Diller and Ric Scofidio for artwork for the Moscone Expansion project in an amount not to exceed \$355,000" (June 19, 2002)

"Motion to authorize the Director of Cultural Affairs to enter into final contract with artist team of Diller + Scofidio for final implementation of their artwork entitled *Facsimile* at Moscone Center West for a total amount not to exceed \$447,452" (July 1, 2002)

"Ms. Manton reported that the Diller + Scofidio project at the new Moscone Center has been the victim of contractor complications" (October 16, 2002)

"Ms. Manton passed around a copy of the impressive brief that the city attorney prepared relative to our assertion that the Arts Commission should not have to pay sales tax on the purchase of the LED screen for the Moscone Project" (November 20, 2002)

"Ms. Manton also reported that Diller + Scofidio continue to work on ideas for the LED text for the interior of the building. [They] are interested in creating a kinetic word sculpture which would extract random words from an ongoing source of news data" (January 15, 2003)

"The problem with the screen not moving around the corner of the building has been corrected" (May 21, 2003).²



Diller + Scofidio and Paul Lewis, *Jump Cuts*,
San José, Calif., 1996.
Photo courtesy San José Public Art Program

projector. It has proven very robust, with a predictable MTBF (mean time between failures) for projector bulbs and other components. Yet if the format in which the data are delivered ever changes—and it almost certainly will—the project will not run unless the software is at least tweaked. The same is true for the Google feed for *Facsimile*. At some point, Google will change the format in which it delivers the news, and Rubin or someone equally skilled will have to modify the program.

YESTERDAY'S FUTURE TODAY

Why bother with interactive art? No one I spoke to was interested in technology for technology's sake. And no one, practitioner or commissioner alike, even hinted that interactive was the only way to go. But there was passion. Shelly Willis, University of Minnesota public art coordinator, who has commissioned three major interactive projects (Janet Zweig, Eduardo Kac, and Ann Hamilton and Ben Rubin), says "It's about who we are right now. And you are getting a work of art that truly has the possibility of living into the future, which a static work can't." Carol Stakenas, curator at New York-based Creative Time, echoes this sentiment, noting that many artists are interested in engaging the public in the life of the city through art, which increasingly means using the electronic means that are part of their everyday lives, from video billboards to personal digital assistants.

The content of interactive work may be ever-new, but inevitably its form will be obsolescent almost from the day it is installed. Brighter screens, faster processors, and new gizmos will all be on the market in short order. Artists have devised a variety of strategies to deal with this reality.

Sheldon Brown's *In the Event*, a 1994 installation at Seattle's Key Arena, is a sixty-foot wall with twenty-eight video monitors set into cast alu-

Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, *Hole-in-Space*,
installation at Century City, Los Angeles, Calif., 1980.
Photo courtesy Galloway/Rabinowitz © 1980-2003



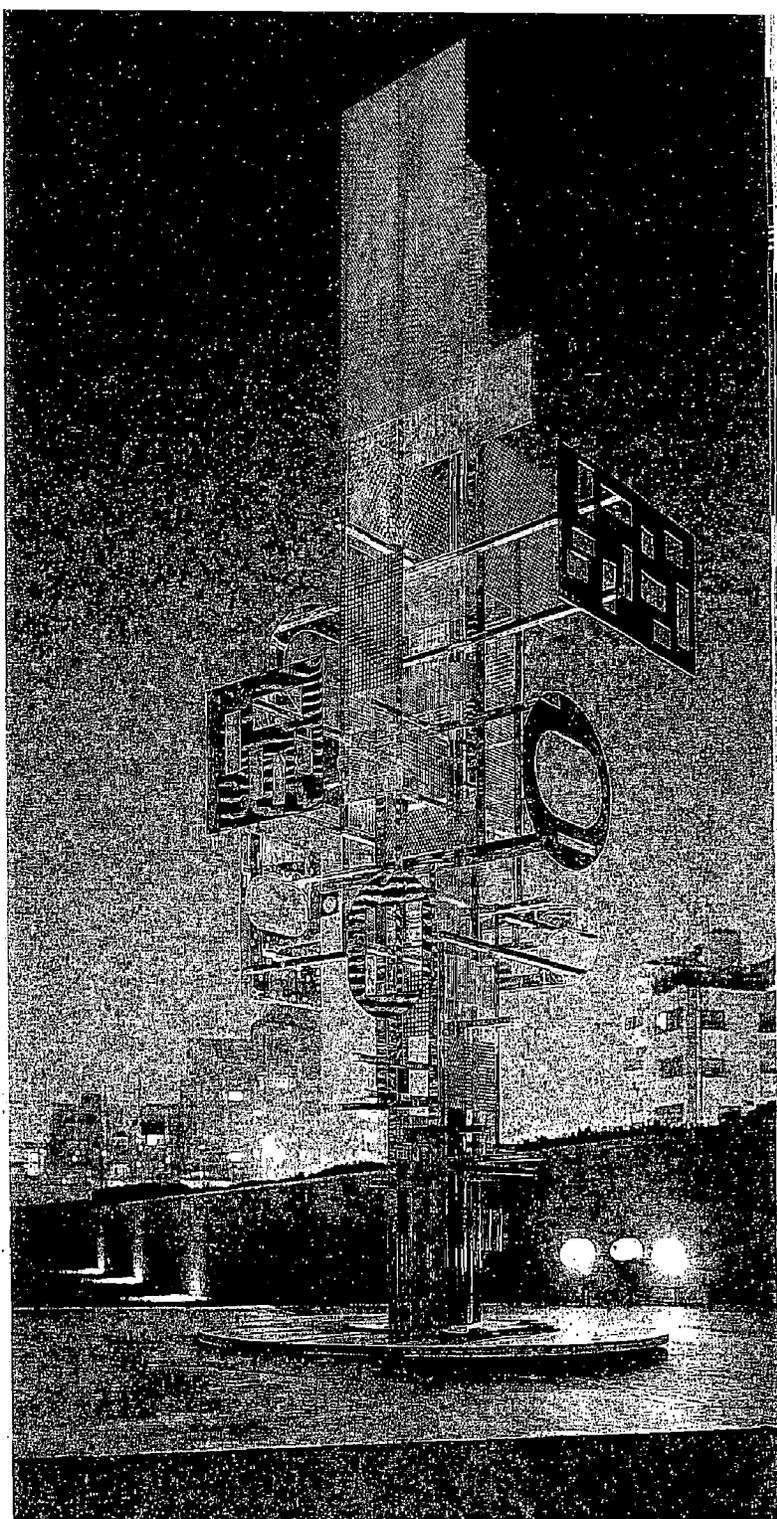
minum relief panels. Its video imagery is generated from several sources including two video cameras, a laser disk, and the arena's live-event feed. The piece is controlled by a network of nine computers that sequence and display video imagery on the monitors. Brown describes how he dealt with the artwork's inevitable obsolescence: "Knowing that the project would be on exhibit long past the point at which its technology would be considered contemporary, I worked to construct the sculptural and mediated artifacts of the technology into the content of the piece. The shape and materiality of the video monitors are likely to be a historical form by the middle of the life cycle of the piece; the pixelization of the imagery at the large scale of its display is likely to be an artifact of its time of invention—so working with these elements as compositional forms is important to the long-term viability of the piece."

Janet Zweig's forthcoming project for the Minneapolis Light Rail system (April 2004), *Small Kindnesses, Weather Permitting*, is a series of forty-six interfaces that a traveler uses to access video and audio clips about "Minnesota nice" and the weather—another tic of Minnesota courtesy. The project's infrastructure is state of the art, piggybacking on the rail line's fiber optic communications system to deliver content from a central server. But the actual interfaces, rather than being variations of a keyboard and mouse, are whimsical mechanisms, with parts ranging from a windshield wiper to a bicycle brake to a miniature pinball game—commonly used devices from everyday life that will not soon become obsolete, at least no more than they already are.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC SPACE

Part of the appeal of Diller + Scofidio's *Facsimile* is its incorporation of fictional as well as Web-based content into what appears to be documentary format. As Manton writes about the Google feed component, it "channel[s] the ubiquitous but otherwise invisible streams of information circulating through and beyond the city outside."³

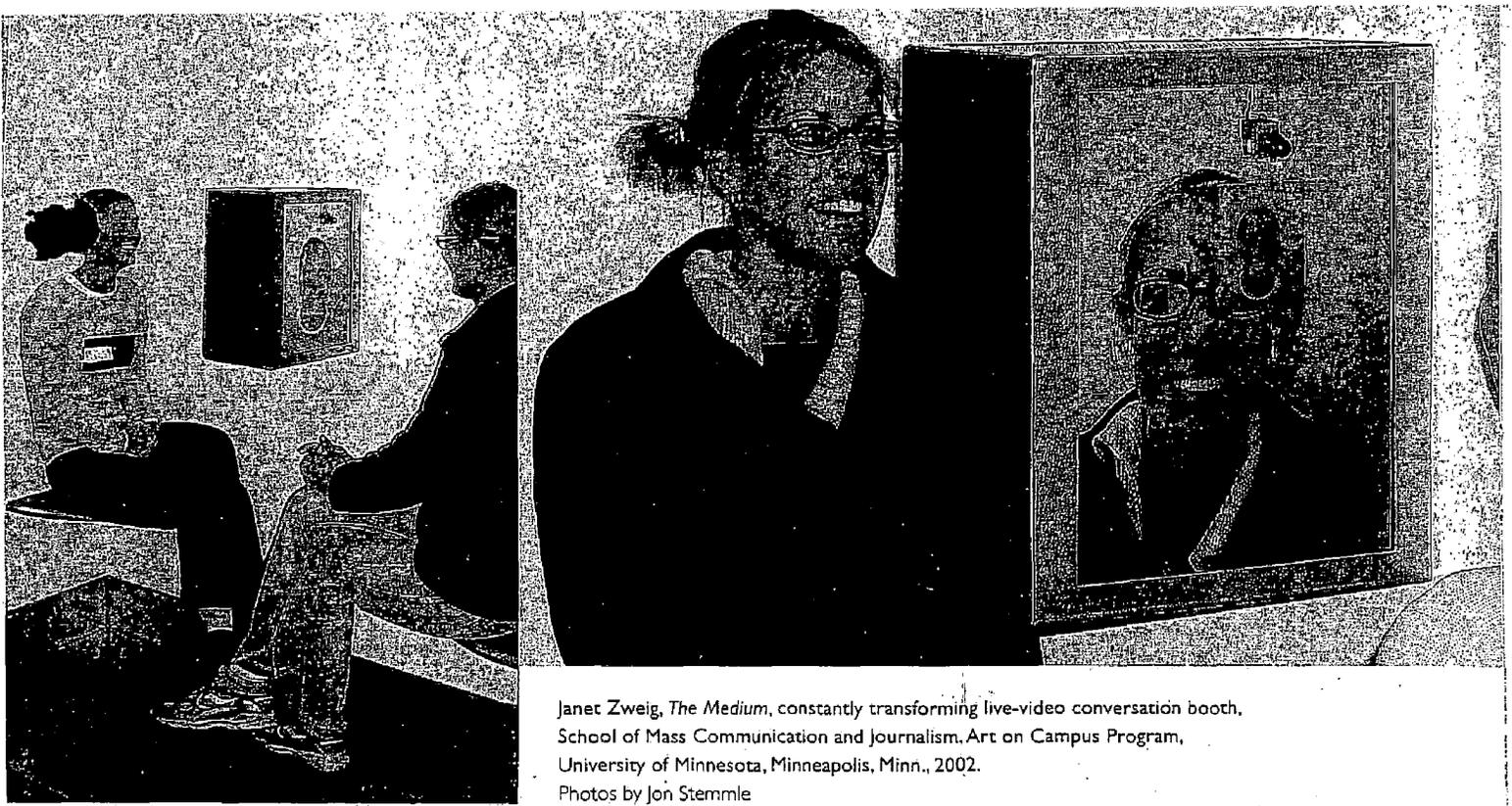
The World Wide Web is public space, but its precipitous growth has generated considerable debate about how to maintain a robust online public domain in the face of commercial and regulatory pressures. Artists have been part of this debate. Muntadas's *File Room*, an online, open archive on censorship, is an important work of interactive public art. UK-based Simon Biggs's *Babel* is in the same vein but has a physical as well as a network presence. Also in the UK, a fifteen-meter LCD display wraps the Media Center in Huddersfield, England. Participants can use the Internet or cell



Nicolas Schöffer, *Lux 10* (view at night), Toyko, Japan, 1959.
Photo courtesy Banque d'Images, ADAGP/Art Resource, NY ©
Coll. E. Schöffer

phone text messaging to publish their messages on *Speakers Corner*, developed by Jaap de Jonge.

Other projects, such as Lynn Hershman's *Agent Ruby* and *PDPal* by Marina Zurkow, Julian Bleecker, and Scott Patterson, use personal digital assistants for platform-specific, mobile public artworks that engage the public in narratives and mapmaking, respectively. As wireless networks proliferate, so will projects that use personal electronic devices to modify the envi-



Janet Zweig, *The Medium*, constantly transforming live-video conversation booth, School of Mass Communication and Journalism, Art on Campus Program, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn., 2002.
Photos by Jon Stemmler

ronment. *PDPal*, when it makes its October 9 New York launch on a Times Square video panel, will be site specific but malleable, permanently available but ephemerally visible.

PRAXIS

Interviews with artists revealed a wide variety of interactive public art projects in the works or on the drawing board. Despite the diversity of these projects, several practical issues surfaced again and again.

Everyone warned against technology-based projects that are more about the technology than the concept. A close second was general disdain for interactivity as a buzzword rather than something that truly adds to the user experience.

For public art projects, David Allen, public art manager for the Hiawatha Line of the Minneapolis Light Rail project, suggested using technology that already exists—that one could see in operation somewhere else. Shelly Willis, on the other hand, said that part of what a university can and should do is provide shelter, so to speak, for experimentation. No one would argue with using proven, available technology when possible and weighing carefully the benefits of trying something unknown. Almost every project I discussed had brought in expert “integrators” to help with the technology. This function needs to be further professionalized.

MAINTENANCE

This is the topic no one wants to talk about too explicitly for fear it might jeopardize the project. How can host organizations be made to understand

and accept maintenance as normal? Light bulbs? Of course they need to be replaced on a regular cycle. Computers? Why aren't they “permanent”? To be fair, every project I heard about had a plan for maintenance. There just isn't much experience to go by. Eventually we will know that a computer in a reasonably protected environment can last x years, an LCD screen needs to be replaced every y months, and we'll plan accordingly.

It's programming that is a particularly gnarly issue. Leaving aside the problem of buggy code, what happens when the information architecture changes? Who is responsible for making the necessary adaptations? All the artists I spoke with indicated a willingness and even commitment to maintaining the code as long as necessary, but most were uncertain whether they would be paid or how long they would be able to do this. Over the next several years, this good will needs to be converted to standardized practices for the field that make sense for both commissioners and practitioners.

OBSOLESCENCE AND CONSERVATION

This is partly a conceptual issue: How does one avoid relying on something being “new” for its impact? Because it won't be new for long. But the issue is also a pragmatic one. In 2005, a certain level of brightness for projection may be generally accepted, but over the course of twenty or more years it may come to look shoddy. Should there be a plan to replace not only projector bulbs when they fail but also the projector itself when the difference in quality for the same cost is a certain order of magnitude? Similarly, DVDs are not permanent storage devices. How soon should the data be

(right) Sheldon Brown, *In the Event*,
Key Arena, Seattle, Wash., 1994.
Photo by Sheldon Brown

(below) John Klima, *ECOSYSTEM*, New York City, N.Y.
Photo Courtesy Postmasters Gallery and Zurich Capital Markets

migrated? And in twenty years, while it may be easy to migrate data, will anyone be able to write a new DVD, or will that component have to be replaced with the latest holographic storage medium? At a minimum, there should be a contingency plan. With *Facsimile*, for instance, Rubin and Diller + Scofidio are planning to have prepared texts available that can be switched on if the live feed fails for any reason. And *ECOSYSTEM* is set up to be able to run off historical data, if necessary.

Some of these issues will be solved only through experience, but there may also need to be a redefinition of "permanent." Perhaps permanent means that the function remains the same for twenty years, but the means of delivery changes after ten years, while the content quality (e.g. level of digitization) changes every five years, and the content itself changes every other year. Just as a plan is necessary to maintain steel sculptures, there should be a plan and budget to maintain technology-based public art. And it will be up to every commissioner, in consultation with the artist(s), to decide whether this includes periodic "upgrades." Whether this added complexity is worth it will remain an individual decision, but some public art has always directly reflected the contemporary environment, and computers and the network are not mere fads. As Ben



Rubin put it, he is shooting for something that acquires the layered familiarity and meaning over time that he feels for the Citgo sign looming over the left field wall of Boston's Fenway Park and is visible from almost every part of the city. How can he give something like that to the community? No doubt, twenty years from now a young artist will be inspired to create a new generation of the kind of interactive public artwork that meant so much to her when she was growing up.

Steve Dietz was the founding director and former curator of new media at Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Notes

1. Manovich, Lev. *Soft Cinema*. ZKM, 2002. See also http://www.manovich.net/cinema_future/design_history.html. Manovich is also the author of *The Language of New Media*.
2. From minutes of the Visual Arts Committee of the San Francisco Arts Commission.
3. Manton, Jill. Diller + Scofidio project description. March 2003.

