

# **SOUL DELAY**

**SUZANNE COTTER**

William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition*, Berkeley Books, New York, 2003, p.1  
 David Summers, *Real Spaces. World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, Phaidon Press, London, 2003, p.431  
 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1992, pp.37-38)  
 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Réel, Paris, 1998  
 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Cargo and Cult: The Displays of Thomas Hirschhorn', *Artforum*, November, 2001  
 Hal Foster, *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes*, Verso, London, 2002, p.125

**'Five hours' New York jet lag and Cayce Pollard wakes in Camden Town [...]. She knows [...] hearing the white noise that is London that Damien's theory of jet lag is correct: that her mortal soul is leagues behind her, being reeled in on some ghostly umbilical down the vanished wake of the plane that brought her here, hundreds of thousands of feet above the Atlantic. Souls can't move that quickly, and are left behind, and must be awaited, upon arrival, like lost luggage.'**<sup>1</sup>

Our contemporary understanding and perception of space is a complex one; no longer defined by the immediate landscape through which we move but by the shifting borders of geography, history and politics. The very notion of what is real, as one definition would have it – 'the space we find ourselves sharing with other people and things'<sup>2</sup> – has become inextricably bound with an infinitely more permeable space. Theorist Fredric Jameson vividly describes post-modern space as 'a sprawling depthless hyperspace' in which our capacity for visual representation has had to respond to vastly different parameters – 'the whole new decentered global network'.<sup>3</sup> Where once, artists could provide images and forms which captured the collective experience of a changing world – Turner's steam engine racing through the countryside, Boccioni's futurist half-man-half-machine, modernism's streamlined architecture – the multiple realities of contemporary experience call for new forms of representation.

Recent discussions on current art have asked questions about its ability to critically express something of the conditions of the world in which we live. Writer and curator Nicolas Bourriaud has coined the term 'relational aesthetics' to describe a practice in which the material object is given over to questions about site, audience and the social network of art itself; an 'interstitial' art based on participation, conviviality and the spaces between codified social structures.<sup>4</sup> The art historian Benjamin Buchloh has asked questions about the place for art and, in particular, sculpture 'outside the registers of overproduction and electronic digitalisation'.<sup>5</sup> And, in his recent collection of writings on visual culture, Hal Foster asks: 'What comes after?' in the wake 'not only of modernist painting and sculpture but of post-modernist deconstruction of these forms, [...] in the wake not only of the pre-war avant-gardes but of the post-war neo-avant-gardes as well'.<sup>6</sup>

To make art that avoids aesthetic and intellectual closure, that is relevant while still working within the conventions of object making, is a concern that faces many artists. In his book *Chromophobia*, the artist David Batchelor eloquently expresses this anxiety in relation to materials in the modern world and the idea that they might be more interesting than anything that could be

done with them in the studio. While his analysis is based on the medium of painting, his conclusion could readily be applied to the outdated notion of medium specificity in general. Batchelor asserts that, given the competition artists face with production in the outside world, the only real possibility for the continuation of any medium is through its corruption: 'by being made impure rather than pure; by being ambiguous, uncertain and unstable, by embracing rather than resisting that which might extinguish it'.<sup>7</sup> Far from championing the self-conscious notion of 'the interdisciplinary', Batchelor's analysis reveals the spirit of elasticity and experimentation that is necessary to communicate something beyond the form itself.

The hybrid works of Katie Grinnan, Wade Guyton, Christina Mackie, Bojan Šarčević, Paul Sietsema and Hiroshi Sugito encapsulate this sense of meaningful instability. Working across painting, sculpture, film and photography, they combine, with unselfconscious ease, an aesthetic mix of ready-made forms and images. Their reconstituted formal narratives suggest states of discontinuities and displacement; of transformation and mutability; less post-modern pastiche than an ecology of the crafted and technologically possible. In diverse ways their work reflects the changing conditions of contemporary perception and, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, reopens the possibility of sculpture, albeit in an inverted, upside down and inside out way, as an expression of a more actual experience of the present.

**KATIE GRINNAN's** sculptural works are simultaneously landscape, architecture, open situations and private imaginings, in which the photographic image is both site and support. Her intuitive formalism is meant to evoke the play of perspectives that condition subjective experience. Working with photographic images she has taken of spaces around her – a Manhattan street corner, a tropical rain forest, or a burnt out building in the desert – she creates a fantastic world of proliferating vegetation and fluid architectures inhabited by strange other-worldly figures. Exploiting the technical possibilities of Photoshop, the image is bent, distorted, collapsed and reconfigured into three-dimensional forms in which surface merges with structure in a refractal play of mirroring and multiplication. Aggregates of things found, moulded and modelled, built up and leached onto other supports, her works suggest a world of interconnections and conflicted contexts.

In *Tower Story* and *Crane*, both 2004 (page 26), buildings are caught somewhere between construction and meltdown. The tower of moulded plastic and neon-yellow Plexiglas rises up on a foundation of wooden pickets at the same time as it unfolds out into the space as kaleidoscopic carapace. A roughly assembled crane, resembling a fetishistic totem made from recycled pieces of wood, stands alongside. *Tower Story* merges two faces of a single site in California not far from Grinnan's studio:

Reaktion Books,  
London, 2000, p. 100  
Email  
correspondence,  
November 2003  
Email  
correspondence,  
September, 2004  
The description  
comes from Johanna  
Burton, 'Such  
Uneventful Events:  
The Work of Wade  
Guyton', in  
*Formalism, Modern  
Art Today*, exhibition  
catalogue  
(forthcoming),  
Kunstverein  
Hamburg, 2004  
In conversation,  
September 2004

an abandoned nursery in Santa Monica on which condominiums – privately owned apartments – were being built. The wood at the base of the tower and the crane are from the nursery site; the images that make up the tower's prismatic shell were taken by Grinnan over a period of eight or nine months as the building was gradually taking shape. Mirroring the processes of transformation which she witnessed over time, it is a model of perception writ large in which processes of breakdown and emergence are held in momentary suspense.

Grinnan's merging of image and sculptural form translates a sense of in-between states in which verifiable locations are held in tension. Her choice of readily available and relatively 'poor' materials – paper, plastic, Plexiglas, sticks and stones – and their construction of fragile balance go hand in hand with the fleetingness of visual and spatial information she is attempting to capture. The vulnerability and uncertainty of her precarious assemblages structures express states of fragile equilibrium that exist between individuals and their environment. Her use of photography dates back to her early sculptural interventions in New York City in the early nineties, where she set up temporary structures in the street, on building sites and under bridges (for one project, she dragged a lifeboat around the city until it disintegrated). As with the expansive and influential practice of Robert Smithson, who used photography as a 'non-site' to his 'sited' earthworks in the 1960s and 70s, Grinnan's documentation opened up a larger field in which the relationship between structure and environment and the idea of the site as material has become paramount.

**WADE GUYTON** also plays with notions of the residual but, unlike Grinnan, his territory is less that of experiential space than the representational space of specific cultural moments which he reconfigures as provisional forms. Exploiting readily available techniques of reproduction, Guyton crosses a strong graphic sensibility with sculpture, which he, in turn, crosses with photography, architecture and design. An 'x', repeated across an image of 1930s German vernacular architecture found in a book, reappears as a monumental negative, crossing out an opening in an industrial building, or a mute anti-space of 'x' marks the spot' in the Californian desert. Each new body of work is both a negation and an elaboration of the initial motif, an unravelling and extrapolation in two and three dimensions. The 'x' is replaced by a 'u' which floats across found images of modernist sculpture or dilates into a highly polished form (pages 20, 27).

Guyton's work is a concrete refusal of the 'specific object' or specific-ness of sculpture which he sees as absorbed into the reductive state of information to which cultural production is inevitably subjected; an attempt to avoid 'a general tendency to edit, mediate, market, file and smooth out'.<sup>8</sup> His process is counter-intuitive:

he concentrates not on the things themselves but on their framework, not on the volumes or the surface but on its outline and the denial of surface blacking it out or rendering it immaterial or perfectly reflective. He also resists obvious choices in his use of images, which he takes from pages of books he has found, in bookshops and elsewhere, rather than from the potentially vast image bank that is available digitally. His approach suggests an interest in the materiality of the image and its support not only as cultural signifier but as a ready-made material to be manipulated: 'Each page is put in the printer so the marks are made directly on the book page. There is no scanning, nor is there anything digitized about them. I started by making drawings with sharpie markers on magazine pages. The printer made this mark making more efficient and uniform – there is a tension [...] that doesn't exist with the hand drawn printed material.'<sup>9</sup> With his 'ink jet paintings'<sup>10</sup> (pages 42-43), Guyton plays with the assumed effortlessness of printer technology to create graphic compositions on large pieces of finely woven linen. A cross between an El Lissitzky Suprematist painting, a Warhol screen print and a Robert Morris Felt Piece, they are hung loosely from a wall, or stretched onto variously shaped supports which lean against it. The uncertainty of the technique and its accidents of registration are carried through to the relative arbitrariness of the loose folds and layering created by the effects of gravity.

Guyton's encounters with found forms also result in excursions into three-dimensional pieces: a triangular shelf support inspires a series of 'portable' sculptures; the tubular chrome of a Marcel Breuer chair is bent into the sinuous lines of an *Untitled (Action Sculpture)* (pages 42-43). Perhaps less serendipitous is his reformulation of specific sculptural vocabularies. In the articulated framework of *New Design* (pages 42-43), for example, the radical proposition of Dan Graham's pavilion, *New Design for Showing Videos*, 1995, is divested of its reflective, semi-transparent mirror panels and reduced to an oak armature through which the viewer's gaze passes unimpeded. Guyton's interruption, and reconfiguring of these references within the functionless-ness of the aesthetic domain questions whether sculptural form can have any meaning beyond a purely aesthetic one. Echoing the assertions of cultural levelling effected by post-modernism, his works ask the question: 'what happens if you disregard the formula and attempt to leave only the meaningless, that is, the purely aesthetic aspect of sculpture?'<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between the singular object or experience and the technologically possible and reproducible is caught up in the narratives elaborated by **CHRISTINA MACKIE**. Her hybrid compositions are physical expressions of abstract lines of enquiry; scenarios enacted according to questions of 'what happens if' or 'next'.

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The daughter of scientists, Mackie has always been struck by the necessity of improvisation and invention which drives scientific experimentation – a process which combines high-end theory with the fashioning of makeshift apparatus to test out ideas. In not dissimilar ways, she likes to manipulate elements from her environment to give poetic form to less tangible notions and experiences shaped by our knowledge of the world.

Mackie's starting point often relates to simple, although not necessarily obvious, questions articulated by way of varying object and image-related scenarios in which different sensations and spheres of knowledge intersect and converge. Combining technological know-how with an intuitive approach to assemblage, her works can be economic, involving short loops of video footage on single or paired monitors; or elaborate compositions in which seemingly disparate objects, drawings, assembled structures are in close dialogue. Natural phenomena, materials and subjects found in nature often replete with personal resonance for the artist – birds in a garden, mountain rivers, a sunrise across Siberia, polished rocks from a Canadian beach – are an essential part of the mix of empiricism and subjectivity which animates each work.

For *IIP-Intron Image Project*, 1999,<sup>12</sup> Mackie encoded an image of one of her drawings which she then had translated into a DNA sequence. The project involved the hypothetical insertion of the sequence into the genomes of poplar saplings, the idea being that the drawing's 'materiality' would somehow be hidden within the poplars' shimmering leaves. The leap of imagination required to to envisage such an outcome not only signals the breadth of scope of Mackie's art, it also draws attention to the simultaneous proximity and seemingly immeasurable gap separating concrete, verifiable facts and the abstractions of human thought and expression.

*Xing*, 2004 (pages 36-37), plays on ideas of repetition, compulsion and the circular impulses of nature and general life experience. Different lengths of wood in varying stages of refinement, from the gnarled, petrified branch of a tree to a polished plank, are propped, lent and laid in an angular arrangement of varying planes in space. Shadowing this play of propped structures are two elongated patches of colour, a mauve-purple extends up the wall; a similar shape is evident as a darkening of hue which extends towards the centre of the floor. A slim cylinder of light, in the form of yellow Plexiglas, pins the different elements together. Their relationship to one another seems both improvised and formally rigorous. On an adjacent wall, a wash of pale pink floats in a cloud-like formation next to a suspended track of rectangular tiles of cut wood linked by an electric pink tape printed with the words 'Road Location' down its length. Binding these two structural components within the space are three pieces of video footage filmed by Mackie, of a motorless reaction ferry propelled across a river with the aid of water

currents, which loop through the space. The elaborate wall drawing (pages 38-39) made up of an overlapping arrangement of coloured stickers and postage stamp size coupons, digitally composited by the artist, maps out the profile of a mountain lodge. It acts as a key to the rest of the installation, capturing a series of moments as impulse, as time overlaid. As with all of Mackie's works, technology is paired effortlessly with the crafted and the manually intensive. It is a relationship which underlines the tension between individual experience, the one-off and the hard-won, with the generic and the readily sampled.

In what might be considered as a reversal of Mackie's process of translating objects and forces from the physical world into less tangible expressions, **HIROSHI SUGITO** looks to make paintings that exist in the world in the same way as any other objects. He makes no claims for their specialness or heightened symbolic value. Nor does he resort to the irony and quotational aesthetics of post-modernist rhetoric. The powdery surfaces of his paintings seem as if they are not trying to be there, as if they are looking to slip into some more ambient experience of the senses; a world of private moments of reverie, of seeing simple things which strike us for one reason or another – the markings on a wall, the angle of a building, the momentary flash of light on water, or images of childhood stories that somehow encapsulate realities of adulthood. Like modest moral tales of sorts they hover between pictorial sensation and object, between simple story telling and formal inquiry.

Sugito builds up his images of dreamlike interiors and hazy sea and landscapes through a meticulous process of layering, stripping away and building up again of the painterly surface. The scale of his paintings can vary from the minute to the monumental, the support, from canvas to velvet to wood. He tends to work on a number of pieces at the same time and always in relation to one another. Each new painting adds to the elaboration of an ongoing narrative. Stories of spiders and birds, mountains and lakes act, in turn, as phrases within more abstract conversations on the motif – a mountain shape, a diagonal line, the drapes of a curtain – which, at times, can become separated from the pictorial support to declare themselves in the world of three dimensional objects and things.

Sugito's paintings occupy an ambiguous terrain in which the conventions of painting in their most specific definition – 'a plane surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order'<sup>13</sup> – dissolve into constructions of a more perceptual type. The palpable physical and physiological effects he achieves is indebted, in part, to his training in the techniques of the 19th century Japanese school of *Nihonga*, with its emphasis on the use of ground natural pigments made from minerals, shells, corals and semi-precious stones. Beyond that tradition, his work shares a certain lineage with the German artist Blinky

- 4 As Douglas Fogle recently asked, 'Is there a philosophy of painting that extends beyond the confines of the medium?' in 'The Trouble with Painting', *Painting on the Edge of the World*, Walker Art Centre, p.15
- 5 Email correspondence, October 2004
- 6 I am grateful to the artist for sharing some of his thoughts and notes written during his elaboration of *Empire* for the writing of this essay
- 7 In conversation, September 2004
- 8 Artist's notes

Palermo. A student of Joseph Beuys at the Dusseldorf Academy in the early 1960s and friend of the painter Gerhard Richter, Palermo's abstract canvases made from stretching bolts of dyed fabric, and his wooden wall reliefs and wall paintings executed in response to particular spaces – stairwells, galleries, rooms – hovered between painting, sculpture and architecture.

Context plays an important part in the development of a given work as well as in his decisions as to when the painting begins and ends. It is perfectly normal for him to continue painting in the gallery space in which the works will be shown as if it is only then that they assume a reality beyond the notional pictorial world he has created in the studio. He might also create additional pieces which echo a structural feature of the space at the same time that they introduce or elaborate on elements within his unfolding story. The painted relief, *butterfly*, 2004 (page 4) is an expansion of one of the intense points of colour in the centre of his vast canvas, *bird song*, 2004 (page 22) which was, in turn, painted in relation to an equally large work, *spider song*, 2004 (page 23). The yellow painted wood which is the support was cut from a piece found by Sugito on a building site in Vienna, the knots showing through the surface reminding him of his then work in progress, the curving contours, of the arcing lines on the larger canvases. If, in their physical make up – canvas, pigments, arrangement of elements relating figure to ground – Sugito's narratives are defined as painting, they suggest a more expansive status 'beyond the confines of the medium' in which the edge of the painting slips into realm of the everyday world.<sup>14</sup>

**PAUL SIETSEMA** is interested in the perception of space and the things that inhabit it as something culturally and historically defined. His films are meticulously researched and crafted productions in which sculptural space merges with cinematic space. *Untitled (Beautiful Place)*, 1998, his first film, presents, over eight sequences, a close up study of different plants and flowers handmade by the artist from a variety of different sources: a textbook, a scene from a Hollywood movie, a flower seen in his garden or on one of his daily walks. Compellingly immersive in its slow pans over stems, petals and stamens of a gerbera, narcissus or the bough of a blossom, its lack of narrative, halting edits, flares, discolorations and the use of 16mm film and projector – vaguely reminiscent of home movies or a screening of scientific fieldwork – also conspire to render the act of viewing a highly self-conscious encounter.

Sietsema describes *Untitled (Beautiful Place)* as 'a location that I was creating from scratch',<sup>15</sup> a process to which he refers in the title – a literal translation of the Beaulieu camera which he used to make the work. With *Empire*, 2002, (pages 14-15) Sietsema crossed sculpture, architecture, painting, photography and the medium of film to create what he describes as 'a pure hallucinogenic

space'<sup>16</sup> Out of blackness fading into light a translucent grasshopper emerges. The camera moves through a cavernous organic form, a latticework of intersecting lines, a spinning crystalline structure and two decorative interiors – the New York apartment of the modernist art critic, Clement Greenberg as it was reproduced in an article in *Vogue* magazine in 1964, and the eighteenth century Salon du Princesse of the Hôtel Soubise in Paris.

*Empire* condenses different moments of history through changing notions of space. In making the work, Sietsema spent four years reading and amassing information and images on the history of the avant-garde, from the Enlightenment to the present, and on related theories of perception. An 'aesthetic soup of visual styles', it confounds any linear cinematic narrative in favour of a shifting dynamic in which relationships between figure and ground and abstraction and representation are reconfigured, equalised and sent spinning in different directions. Each sequence is punctuated by moments of blankness, sometimes black, sometimes white. A sensuous blush of rich red-orange bathes the sequence involving Greenberg's apartment in which, drawing on techniques from structuralist and experimental cinema which flowered around the same period of the *Vogue* shoot, Sietsema transforms the environment of the interior, with its African and Oriental *objets d'art* and 60s colour field paintings into an exercise in spatial mapping. These different spatial transformations culminate in the final sequence of the rococo interior. Shot on negative film stock, the tendrils of decorative decor become more solid than the supporting architecture and the walls give way to the infinite space of mirrors and the reflecting crystals of the central chandelier. The camera's slow, repetitive movements gradually cancel out everything into darkness.

Sietsema's description of *Empire* as a kind of drawing<sup>17</sup> relates to his physical manipulation of the film which he edited and spliced by hand with the aid of scissors and tape. The related collage drawings, photographs and three-dimensional objects forming part of the overall project all reinforce one another as inter-related structures. *Organic Sculpture*, 2001 (page 34) began as an element of the film and was completed in relation to a small photography he had taken of it. Similarly, *Black Sticks*, 2001 (page 35), which also refers to one of the abstract sequences of the film, is seen as an optical counterpart to the corpulent materiality of *Organic Sculpture*. Sietsema holds these concrete aspects of the work in tension with the illusionary space of cinema. 'I was thinking about what strong and influential form cinema is. [...] I wanted to turn it into a weak construct, one that would parallel actual perception and the impervious media constructions that confront us daily.'<sup>18</sup> To this end, he has created a kind of 'daydream' in which the palpable and the concrete are dissolved into a space of reverie and illusion, a space in which the past is reconfigured as a new location within the present.

- 19 Krauss, op. cit., pp. 44-45  
 20 in conversation with the author, September 2004  
 21 *The Urmaterial Urge*, *Parkett*, n.70, 2004  
 22 Fredric Jameson, op. cit., p.37  
 23 Gibson, op. cit., p.4  
 24 op. cit., p.24

**BOJAN ŠARČEVIĆ**'s practice also interrogates established codes and ways of visualising and experiencing space. Strategies of displacement are key to his interventions in different types of space – be it physical, cultural, symbolic or historic – whether orchestrating a Turkish *Maqam* ensemble trained in the tradition of musical improvisation to perform cover versions of reggae, rock and soul music (*Cover Version*, 2001); shifting a corner of floor from an apartment in Amsterdam to different spaces around the world in *World Corner*, 1999, or filming himself walking through the streets of Bangkok (*Untitled (Bangkok)*, 2002).

Convergence is another way of thinking about Šarčević's spatial disruptions for which his use of the corner operates as literal as well as poetic metaphor. The transparent Plexiglas and steel dome of *Where the hand doesn't enter, heat infuses*, 2003 (page 30), is placed across a corner of a given space bulging into it and obliging the viewer to adjust their orientation. Monumental in scale – four metres high with a four-metre radius – and visually generous in its transparency, it is also resistant in the way it impinges on and frustrates movement around or through it. It is a dynamic and physical resistance with a certain psychological charge. The suspense of Šarčević's various projects is emphasised by his use of physical processes and the residues arising from them.

His *Workers' favourite clothes worn while s/he worked*, 1999-2000, was a performative work in which bakers, cleaners, factory and other workers from Amsterdam were asked to buy and wear same set of clothes every day for two weeks. The resultant heavily stained clothing was presented in an almost forensic display in which each trade displayed a distinctive arrangement of dirty marks. With his series *1954*, 2004 (pages 18-19), Šarčević looked to the left over space of an archival photographic project documenting the modernist architecture of domestic and public interiors in 1950s Germany. Taking seventy-six of these images from the architectural journal *Baumeister*, he made precise incisions into the black and white images, extracting thin elements which he replaced in a decorative marquetry of forms which float in and fragment the space. The introduction of these strange presences to the mute and literally soulless interiors creates an uncanny effect, like some retro-science fiction in which space is dilated and collapsed in a force field of time travel. Despite their small scale, each of the images is endowed with an otherworldly monumentality while the very fabric of the image is caught in an elaboration of decorative friezes and crystalline marquetry. In this subtle game of formal transformation and transference, modernism is well and truly domesticated into the language of decoration and craft, architecture is absorbed into photography and the 'indexicality' of photography is appropriated into the service of sculpture.

At a time when material relations of every type have

been translated into virtual transactions, an attention to materials and their physical manipulation in the work of Crinnan, Guyton, Mackie, Šarčević, Sietsema and Sugito might be considered as fundamentally incongruent. The art historian Johanna Burton has recently posited the term 'Urmateriality' as a way of describing the contemporary turn towards a collective pool of 'information, experience or history' as primary materials for certain forms of artistic practice.<sup>19</sup> The emphasis on materiality might also be thought of as an attempt to locate oneself within a world of 'spatial and social confusion', which Fredric Jameson, again, ascribes to the workings of the global economy.<sup>20</sup>

In William Gibson's post-modern sci-fi novel, *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce Pollard, 'cool hunter' with an allergy to logos, is a follower of the footage – filmic sequences which appear sporadically on the internet and which have an underground following by way of an online chat site known as 'the forum': 'The forum has become one of the most consistent places in her life, like a familiar café that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones.'<sup>21</sup> In trying to make sense of the footage, we learn: 'The one hundred and thirty-four previously discovered fragments, having been endlessly collated, broken down, reassembled, by whole armies of fanatical investigators have yielded no particular narrative direction.'<sup>22</sup> Gibson's footage might serve as an allegory for the approaches of Crinnan, Guyton, Mackie, Šarčević, Sietsema and Sugito: their strangely familiar, non-linear narratives in which material forms coexist with fluctuating sensations, offer poetic and critical connections with the intersecting trajectories that shape present reality.