

# Adaptations

curated by Craig Buckley  
January 7 - February 7, 2004



If architecture and urbanism, as means of planning, have been the traditional sites for utopian projection in imagining ideal cities, the work in *Adaptations* draws attention to processes that fit within neither the plan nor the ideal: the flourishing of the black market and its impact on built space, the establishment and failure of experimental communities, randomized construction, and the necessity of makeshift solutions. Although at the margins of planned space, and at the narrowing end of modernity's long shadow, these works do not give up on the prospect or project of articulating a utopian horizon. Rather, they shift the discussion away from traditions of development based on the *tabula rasa*, and toward processes of adaptive transformation. The frictions between centralized controls and autonomous initiatives, between regulated frameworks and dispersed systems, are not approached with ready-made design solutions, but are engaged as forces enabling an analysis and rethinking of both lived and built space.

Nils Norman's *Proposal for an Entropy Information Kiosk (Church & Lispenard Streets)* will appear for the duration of the show as a poster placed in a phonebooth kiosk near the gallery. Norman's project is a proposal for a new kiosk in downtown Manhattan. A center for observing the effects of global warming, Norman's proposed kiosk updates global temperature change, forecasts local weather, enables storm and drought tracking, monitors global oil consumption, and provides webcam views focused on prime glacial-shelf disintegration. While all the component parts of this kiosk are fully functional, together they create an unwieldy, unworkable fusion of agit-prop and the entertainment industry. So seemingly of Manhattan's delirious multi-functionality and yet impossible within it, the *Entropy Information Kiosk* raises questions as to the limits of contemporary urban space, as well as to the instrumentalization of public art in its redevelopment.



Nils Norman, *Proposal for an Entropy Information Kiosk (Church & Lispenard Streets)*, 2004, digital print

*The Wild City: Genetics of Uncontrolled Urban Processes*, a collaborative work by the STEALTH group (Ana Dzokic, Milica Topalovic, Marc Neelen, and Ivan Kucina), examines the explosion of unregulated and illegal architectures stemming from Belgrade's economic and political crises in the 1990s. While such building was decried in the press as wild, chaotic, and destructive of Belgrade's planned urban fabric, the STEALTH group developed a visual and verbal vocabulary for the regularities and patterns in struggles underlying processes like black-market street trade, urban transport, and roadside gasoline-selling. In their case studies, plastic kiosks grow coffee shops, concrete basements, and living spaces; entirely new shopping districts form along formerly empty pedestrian routes; and state department stores stay afloat by renting out vacant space to black-market vendors. Analyzing the complexities and contradictions relating top-down to bottom-up forces, the STEALTH group has developed this research into Processmatter, a design computing program whose algorithms formulate the possible outcomes of these interactions.

The agonistic conflict of desires and designs is also a key concern of Gardar Eide Einarsson, who uses commercial wall paint to reproduce the signature orange-pink tones of the *Financial Times* newspaper. As a source of information on global industry, economics, and finance, the *Financial Times* adopts an editorially "neutral" tone, reporting facts and data for the global investor. In Einarsson's painting, the neutrality of this tone tends to be institutionally suspended. On the one hand, as the artist writes, the painting "rids the space of the (mock) neutrality of gallery white." On the other it can easily be misrecognized as a curatorial accent-color. As a material support that tends to disappear while in plain view, the work subtly suggests the subsistence of alternative economies and black-market processes within more dominant economic forces.



Gardar Eide Einarsson, *Ft wall painting*, 2004, latex paint

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cover image: Stealth Group, *The Wild City - Genetics of Uncontrolled Urban Processes*, 2001- present, photographs, video, software and digital animation

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Kim Adams (Toronto), Arnait Video Collective (Igloolik, Canada), Gardar Eide Einarsson (Berlin), Nils Norman (London), Ocean Earth (New York), Michael Rakowitz (New York), Raqs Media Collective (Delhi), Stealth Group (Rotterdam/Belgrade), Oscar Tuazon and Richard Fischbeck (New York)

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Raqs Media Collective, 28°28' N. / 77°15' E. *The Coordinates of Everyday Life*, 2002, projection

Phrases from the "civil war between the master plan and the moment" make up a part of 28°28' N. / 77°15' E. *The Coordinates of Everyday Life*, by Raqs Media Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta). The texts are lifted from Delhi's official and unofficial sticker cultures—ranging from warnings on city walls and bus seats, offers of sex, employment, or training, to slogans that hover ambiguously between the buzzwords of contemporary theory and advertise-

ments for the "new" economies of electronic capitalism. Slightly re-scripted, translated into several languages, and placed in an endless sequence, they offer no coherent message and no continuous idiom. Alluding to a relationship between prohibition and incitement as one that is subject to adaptation and redefinition, the texts engage a linguistic strain of the public sphere where one finds conflicting visions of what it means to inhabit not only Delhi, but also any number of other cities.

Video is a tool for interrogating settlement and lived history in the work of the Arnait Video Collective (including Marie-Hélène Cousineau, Mary Kunuk, Madeleine Ivalu, Susan Avingaq, Rachel Uruyasuk, and Katarina Soukup). The video *Anaana* (Mother) features Vivi Kunuk and her extended family, whose stories recount the family's experiences of living on the land in Igloodik, Canada, during a period where there was significant pressure to adopt settlement life. Filmed at outpost camps during a hunting trip, the film was the starting point for the Nunatinnit Mobile Media Lab, a project that further explored the relationship between settlement and camp life by temporarily transplanting the video production and distribution processes to a remote location.



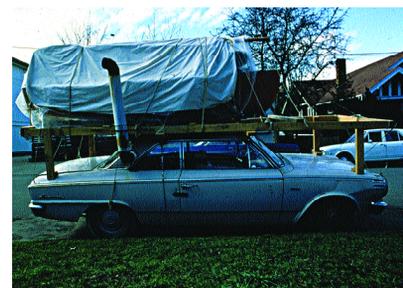
Arnait Video Collective, View of Siuraarjuk, 2001, video still



Richard Fischbeck, *Randome*, 2003, aluminum and plexiglas dome

Oscar Tuazon has collaborated with the designer and dome builder Richard Fischbeck to produce an aluminum structure poised between randomness and order, called a *Randome*. Fischbeck's technique involves using identical panels placed in a loose arrangement to create a geodesic structure without complex calculations or extensive pre-planning. If geodesic domes bear the stains of a failed counterculture legacy, Tuazon positions the iconic form at a crossroads where ideologically opposed groups—from techno-futurists to neo-luddites, cold war strategists to disenfranchised youth—were momentarily drawn to the same forms. In engaging with the continuance of something commonly seen as a failed gambit, Tuazon risks being seen as a revivalist. His intentions run closer to an archaeologist of the contemporary, examining how the visionary ambitions for creating what he calls a "city without a ghetto" confront their complicity with the more mundane realities of urban flight, slum clearance, and real-estate speculation.

The reconfigured vehicles, adapted houses, makeshift monuments, and abstract machines that Kim Adams comes across in his travels are an essential part of the production of his large-scale public sculptures. They are pieces of a commodity world that has been taken apart and pieced together again along different lines: a pedestal in Manila holds wreckage from the daily flows of traffic around it; a sedan is turned into a hunter's cabin, complete with stove, boat dock, and sleeping quarters; a house is built around a summer camper like a body constructed from a prosthetic limb. With these slides (from an archive numbering close to a thousand) and his 1:87 scale models, Adams mines the apparatus of contemporary production—long-haul trucking vehicles, farming supplies, work sheds, garden equipment, construction gear—and re-assembles it into public objects whose apparent functionality conceals the fact that they refuse to do any of the things we expect them to.

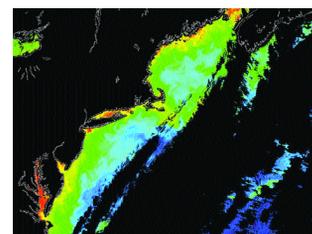
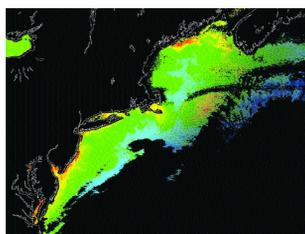


Kim Adams, research slides, 1978-present, 35mm slides in a continuous projection



Michael Rakowitz, *paraSITE*, 1998 - present, inflatable shelter made from plastic, tape, velcro and metal hooks

The *paraSITE* shelter, a double-membraned structure that latches onto exhaust ducts, capturing the flow of waste air in order to inflate itself, takes advantage of the overlooked infrastructures that keep cities running smoothly. Michael Rakowitz initiated the *paraSITE* project in 1998 in response to the aggressive anti-homeless measures (such as homeless-"proof" vents and benches, along with the enforcement of anti-camping laws) being taken in Boston and New York. Each *paraSITE* (of which there are approximately 30 in existence) is the result of a design process that involves working directly with the homeless person who will use the shelter. Variations have included pockets for messages and belongings, extended necks to reach upper-story vents, a shelter shaped after the Star Wars character Jabba the Hutt, and a low-slung tube designed to fall within a loophole in New York's anti-tent laws. In this sense, the *paraSITE* project is as much a tactic of visibility as a functional shelter, a means of a collaborative addressing of the visibility of unacceptable circumstances that continue to exist within the carefully policed space of the city.



Ocean Earth Development Corporation, *Proposal for Jamaica Bay/NY Bight*, 2004, satellite imagery showing changes in phytoplankton levels over two week period

A corporation founded in 1981, Ocean Earth Development Corporation views dependence on fossil fuels as an unacceptable circumstance. Seizing on the recent scuttling of the Concorde supersonic transport, Ocean Earth (George Chaikin, Peter Fend, Sarah Peschel, and Eve Vaterlaus) has returned to a previously interrupted research proposal for the waters surrounding JFK airport and the contentious 1971 Concorde runway extension. In conjunction with the University of Plymouth in the United Kingdom, they are proposing an algae bio-mass harvesting unit that would be a source of sustainable, clean energy and a program for the bio-remediation of the affected area. Focusing on big-picture initiatives, Ocean Earth links local ecological struggle directly to current geo-political conflicts.

While they are based in different fields—architectural research, collective video and new-media production, urban planning, environmental design, and project-based art practice—what the documents, hypotheses, and projects of *Adaptations* all share is an approach to process that emphasizes the productive possibilities of moving back and forth between the existing and the imagined. In the end, if humanist ideals enabled modernist attempts to design for the common good, the conflicting desires and designs reflected in the built spaces of *Adaptations* pose the question of how to envision collective transformation when such a humanist ideal no longer seems workable.