

From: *Dan Graham*, curated by C. Christov-Bakargiev, exhibition catalog (Rivoli-Torino, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'arte Contemporanea, 28 April - 30 July 2006), n.n.

Dan Graham

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

Our bodies are sensors as well as limits. When we receive this sensory information through our bodies, we process it into what we ultimately identify as 'ourselves' (our presumed 'inner beings') through a set of physical reactions determined by the laws of perception. These define human nature just as the oxidizing of silver nitrate on a photographic plate is determined by its reaction to sunlight. But our consciousness is also extremely unstable and mutable, constantly focusing and losing focus, renegotiated by changing memories, altered by different perceptions and stimuli from the outside. Historically selfhood and identity were defined by our biography and property - we *were* where we were born, what education we received, what jobs we did and what we legally owned. This notion of a 'stable', verifiable identity indicated the wish for a stable and ordered society. Consumer culture and the rise of spectacle and big cities in the twentieth century radically altered that vision, and made that ordered society impossible. The rise of ever-more advanced technologies of mechanical reproduction ushered in an age of the mirror, an age of hyper-reflexivity that was harnessed by industry in order to homogenize our experience (in the suburbs, on television, in the supermarket) in ways that purported to offer freedom but were in fact deeply conventional and repetitive.

Partly in reaction to the overflow of visual imagery and products in the new consumer culture, the Conceptual artists of the mid-1960s dematerialized traditional sculpture and painting - art could be a process, a study, an idea, a situation, an event, a group of people doing something together. Dan Graham has run a gallery, published articles as artworks, explored performance and film, and bridged art and architecture in a critical practice that has consistently explored how consciousness works and can be celebrated in an open, on-going process where the boundaries between public and private are questioned and become experimental. In his early film/performances, made between 1969 and 1974, Graham experiments with perception in an expanded field, exploring what happens when the body's natural faculties are prosthetically heightened or expanded by the camera's lens. In the resulting works, the body and the camera become a single machine for moving and sensing, and one sees oneself seeing.

During the second half of the 1970s, Graham began to think about what it would mean to expand these types of film-performances by constructing architectural models for similar experimental experiences and "situations". He built works/spaces such as *Two Viewing Rooms* (1975) and *Public Space / Two Audiences* (1976) which were soon followed by free-standing pavilions - structures made of two-way mirror glass which are variously reflective of viewers and their environment, including the recent *Children's Day Care*, *CD-Rom*, *Cartoon and Computer Screen Library Project* (1997-2000). Graham has discussed how in corporate structures made of reflective glass, a controlling gaze can see out from the inside, but we on the outside cannot peer in. Rather, we are encouraged to "live happily ever after," perceiving only an unreal world reflected by this almost invisible architecture. By redirecting these elements and creating radically shifting and changing

environments in his pavilion/installations, Graham allows us to *perform* our own experimental perceptions and interactions. Epitomizing this approach is his *Children's Pavilion*, which, in a world where young people are on the one hand predated upon as consumers, or on the other inhibited by moralistic educators, invites them simply to hang out.