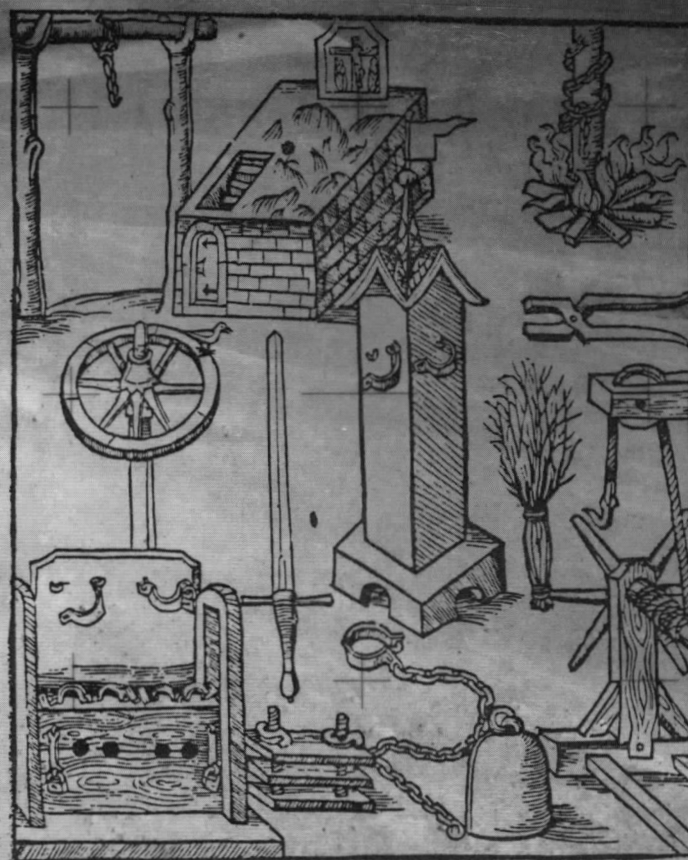




CORPORATE CRIME/MALICIOUS MISCHIEF

Power and Mediation: A Fin de Siècle Tautology

CORPORATE CRIME/MALICIOUS MISCHIEF

Power and Mediation: A Fin de Siécle Tautology

INSTALLATION

San Diego, California

November 14 - December 19, 1987

CURATED BY ARMANDO RASCÓN

INSTALLATION PRESS
San Diego, CA



JANE BAUMAN *Out of Gas* 1986,
Enamel on vinyl, 12" diameter Photo credit:
White Line Photography

CORPORATE CRIME/MALICIOUS MISCHIEF

Power and Mediation: A Fin de Siècle Tautology

RICHARD ARMIJO

JULIE AULT

LUTZ BACHER

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BEACH PARTY

TRICIA COLLINS and RICHARD MILAZZO

MICHAEL CORRIS

PETER FRANK

GUILLERMO GOMEZ-PEÑA

FÉLIX GONZÁLEZ-TORRES

LYNN HERSHMAN

RICHARD IRWIN

PETER NAGY

MICHAEL PEPPE

NANCY SPERO

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INSTALLATION PRESS

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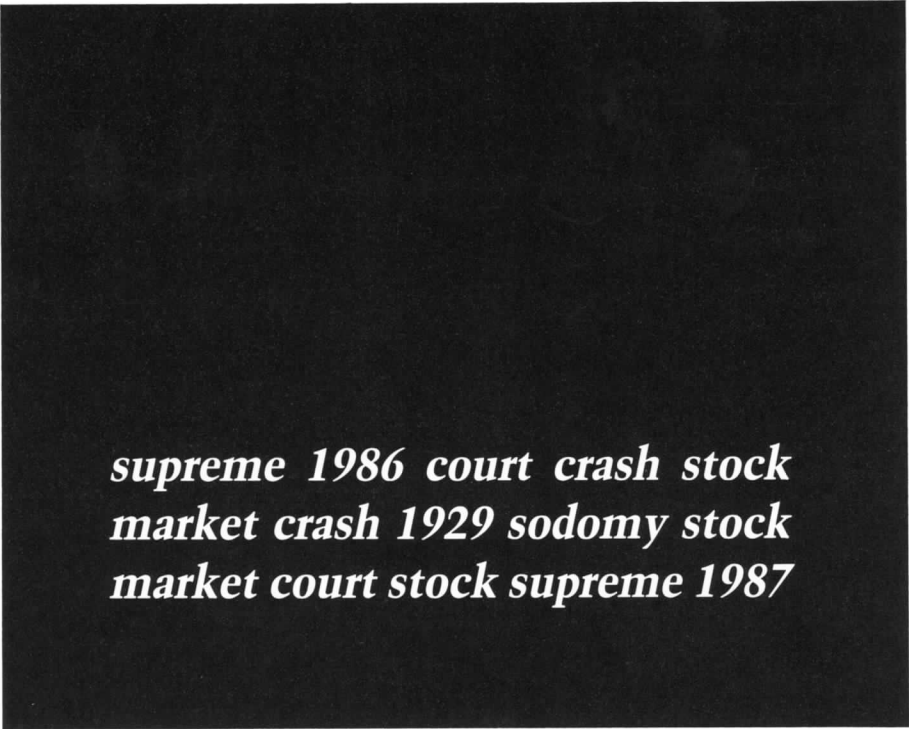
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*supreme 1986 court crash stock
market crash 1929 sodomy stock
market court stock supreme 1987*

FÉLIX GONZÁLEZ-TORRES

1987, 1987. Photostat, 8 x 10"

INTRODUCTION

Displacement is everywhere the motif of our time. Not only the displacement of the individual physically, as in our homeless who are consigned to the streets and bereft of even the most minimal requirements of food, clothing and shelter, but also morally and psychically. The brutalization of entire groups, minorities, the elderly, the terminally ill, (the powerless) creates a self-fulfilling despair. The media's numbing banality and promulgation of class distinction reinforces a status quo dedicated to puerile fantasy and calculated economic gain. This shift has taken place at many levels and to differing effects, but is most visible in the corporate and political structures. From rapacious overbuilding by developers, to the exploitation of Third World labor, to outright deceit by elected representatives, and a military that consumes one third of the national budget, a complicity of attitudes is at work. Imagine the orchestrated complicity necessary for something like CONTRAGATE or the latest insider trading debacle . . .

Corporate Crime/Malicious Mischief is a multi-disciplinary exhibition that examines some of these complicities by artists engaged in practices critical of these structures and committed to a progressive social change. Curated by Armando Rascón, this exhibition is a timely one for San Diego: Issues of burgeoning real estate development, the changing vagaries of local government, our interdependence with Mexico and the quotidian border convulsions plus an astounding number of local political and police abuses of authority make this show a relevant one indeed, for "America's Finest City," the appellation used to market ourselves to the world. A universal condition that differs only in the specifics.

In an era of plausible deniability with a vengeance, it is incumbent on us to provide a forum for the expression of ideas. Access to and distribution of information now parallels other commodities with the same methods of the marketplace. If real power today is the control of information, then access becomes the means by which we can resist our own displacement. The spasms of our current *auto da fe* can only be stilled through action, and it is in this spirit that INSTALLATION welcomes *Corporate Crime/Malicious Mischief*.

KAREN ATKINSON
DAN WASIL

PREFACE

There is the teleological scenario (a fiction), in which the Humanities as a whole have come to be liquidated and summarily struck from a level of contention within tropes of ongoing social, political, and cultural praxis.

Within this fiction, it becomes possible to construct a model for the so-called means of production in which an implicit consensual element now obtains, and in which its principal functional mode (non-interference) persists internally/externally by virtue of players (complicity/complicitors) and enforcers (political apparatus) whose collective *raison d'être* is the mere servicing and promulgation of this latter day Panopticon and New Social Formation.

A possible mode resultant in the deposing of the varied structures and investigative constructs first mentioned above (and whose philosophies and languages held concern for humanism as preeminent) could be the fierce implantation of some tautological script, a Unanimous Convention, (a VOID), the contours of which dispel a kind of seamless germ-free Culture Effect.

The pernicious repression of history is linked up squarely to the model, here, and its pronounced effects induce the reification of a remystification of reality through the varied interstices of Epistemological and Ideological Imperatives.

Further deployment of a neutral modality in the social can be traced to a paradigmatic firmament in the institutionalized ordering of the landscape. Monitoring of the terrain (Database for Culture), then, is attended to by a team of experts, *phantasms*, who are seen performing here and there while held steadfast to their enterprise by some transparent Mimetic-hold.¹

Within this scenario (a fiction), we now behold a visible trajectory (charted and mapped) of the humanities as passing through the varied diachronic phases of Emergence, Ascendance, Brilliance, and Decline. This is the final stage: the spectre of life as FOSSIL (one more retired function contained in the eternal clockwork). Yet one more agenda imposed upon a heterogeneous present. POPULAR MECHANICS.

So these are the structures within which all things must pass...The action, a variable construct of things spoken or carried out. Methodology, a tradition or practise. The persistence of issues of power and control², particularly with respect to the increasing monopolization of information by private business, of special interest to the disenfranchised and superprivileged alike.

Corporate Crime/Malicious Mischief: The willful, wanton, or reckless damage to or destruction of another's property by an association acting lawfully as an individual or by an individual against another for purposes of amusement or economic CONTROL.

ARMANDO RASCÓN
September 1987

1. See Edward W. Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 153.

2. Observed in Fredric Jameson's "Forward," to Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xiii.

POLITICS AND INTERACTIVE MEDIA ART

(An excerpt)

LYNN HERSHMAN

Technological innovation is manifestly altering the terms of social dialogue and political debate. Such innovation is radically decentralizing the institutions of communication, and the political implications are enormous. This is particularly true in authoritarian and totalitarian systems, which rely on centralized control of communications to maintain their political control. The infiltration of personal computers into Eastern Europe, for example, is obstructing if not virtually nullifying efforts by the totalitarian regimes there to control access to information, and the consequent erosion of political authority is becoming increasingly evident. Both mass movements like Poland's Solidarity and individual dissidents in the Soviet Union have found their opportunities for analysis and transmission of "freedom's raw material"—information—expanded dramatically.

The decentralization of information empowers formerly marginal groups, which had no power because they had no access to information. In addition, this institutional effect has very great implications for individual behavior—for how individuals conceive their roles in society, how they relate to authority, and so on. This more fundamental, individual change will occur as technological innovation alters the very bases for exchange of information, the conditions of definition for the person who expresses his or her self, as well as for the audience.

The new technology will be extremely subversive of all forms of traditional authority—political, social, and religious. That is, when one encourages active participation by individual citizens and worshippers, the standing of authorities to issue commands is greatly retarded. If communities were traditionally held together by habit, active encouragement to participation (thus to question) will tend to undermine the traditional bases of community.

The impact of the new technology is thus not limited to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. It will touch the Western democracies as well.

Interactive technology in art

These radical changes in the terms of communication are also reflected in art, and they

are more strongly felt in the art world because the kinds of people drawn to art, who become artists, tend already to rebel against authority. They tend to follow values formed by their own *experience*, and this tendency is reinforced by the technologies that encourage individual participation, subverting leaders' ability to dictate outcomes.

Traditionally art was structured like other realms of life—hierarchically. The art world has thus long functioned on the presumption that *viewing* art is passive, while only *making* art is active. Technological change in the form of such media as laser and video art, however, is changing this traditional way of viewing art.

These changing technologies are called "interactive technology," and they involve systems that need user/participants in order to function. Rather than offering pre-sequenced narrative information to a passive viewer, interactive media insists upon an active choice by its observers. Both function together, as a unit, as a cyborg. Interactive technology thus represents the antithesis of communication as we have known it.

Electronic media are based on the speed of information. And the "super" transmission of this kind of sign language or visual shorthand that allows instant transmission of messages. As a result, we have become electronic nomads, wandering the world without ever leaving one place. The terminal, which as a word ("terminal") was once a sign for endings or closures, becomes the matrix of information expansion.

We have heard over the past decade that the old characteristics of the work may be destroyed by the development of the personal computer. In the past, giant buildings housed innumerable offices filled with disconnected individuals, each assigned an apparently-unrelated, repetitive task—that was the image of the corporate entity. Work-station computer terminals can allow, first, a situation in which each individual employee has far greater access to the overall picture of corporate operations, and second, the transfer of the actual site of activity from a hive-like concentration of workers to the home or other personal area of the employee. It is easy (and tempting) to celebrate these effects without

hesitation. Whether celebration is warranted, however, depends on whether individuals given more authority over their daily lives can handle that authority; or whether the resulting sense of isolation only makes them feel bereft and vulnerable to the imposition of new authority sources. We must not forget that the twentieth century brought a profound decline in the older, traditional sources of authority: family and church. It also brought incredible hideous new forms in Left and Right totalitarianism.

The introduction of mass electronic media in the 1950's created an unparalleled opportunity to control mass perceptions, and immediate communication tended to increase the *importance* of media to the mass of citizen-voters. Beaming pictures into millions of homes every night had the effect of speeding up the pace of life and destabilizing traditional communities and allegiances, while leaving the individual citizen powerless to affect what was being imposed on him (other than by reaching out and turning off the tube in front of him.)

This tendency to speed up the pace of events and force them on the private lives of people is evident in television's understandable instinct for focusing on dramatic, visual events. This instinct, driven by the commercial drive to maximize viewer audiences, is evident in its most extreme form in relation to reporting news about wars. It is hardly surprising that from their inception, the electronic media of moving images has been attracted toward war as a primary subject for coverage. News programs show firing squads, and simultaneous viewings of death. There is a great debate among scholars of the media availability. To the extent this may be true, victims of war become victims of media. It is interesting in this context that Marey invented a camera that looked like a rifle when he was developing Chromo photography. His gun/camera was modeled after the Colt and allowed him to "shoot" and preserve images of birds. There exists a black market for violent photographs; they are also coveted by mass media for reproductions.

Life is a moving target

The very act of viewing an image creates a distance from the original event. The "captured" image in a photograph, film, or tape is a relic of the past. Life is a moving target: any object or event that becomes isolated becomes history. Information becomes "redesigned" to displace the direct contact of a viewer by replacing his or her vantage point with the frame provided by a cameraman/journalist/photographer. The direction in which information is edited beyond an individual's control separates one from the event or image referred to, resulting in a diminution of these sense of identity.

Personal pronouns, Roman Jakobson points out, "are the last elements to be acquired in the child's speech and the first to be lost in aphasia." Personal identity is extremely tenuous, and the territory inhabited by the individual or viewer easily become an area of absence. The loss of anchorage (presumably healed by "anchormen?") results in a suspension, a "flotation" in voyeuristic passivity. Many artists today feel great alienation in a world both removed from nature and highly dependent on media/technological representations of reality. This is a special problem for people who rely on personal experience as the touchstone of reality. Most people (fortu-

nately for them) live and define themselves through traditions. Cut off from these sources of identity and belonging, the artist must rely on his or her own experience, and this explains why the artificiality of media representations is so alienating for them much more than for the broader middle class.

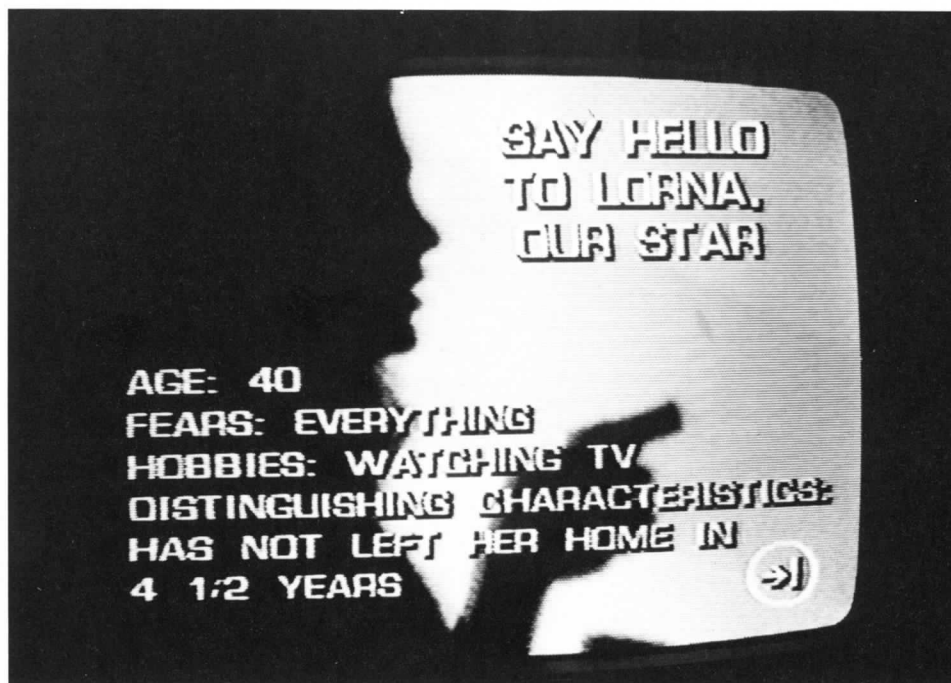
For many artists, the act of repeating, simulating, fabricating an event blurs the original in each successive episode of replay. In Marshall McLuhan's "rear-view mirror" theory, a screen represents an individual's perception of truth despite contradictory life experience. The unresisted imposition of false information stimulates passivity, then nihilistic rage. Freedom is subverted by an all-encompassing impotence.

With individual choices increasingly expanded by the information revolution, many issues of "creativity" that were formerly considered to be the exclusive domain of the fine arts will become central to the concerns of the whole human community. Laser/video art, and particularly interactive media, represents a major step toward this breaking down of traditional barriers. Some may view with dismay such a dissolution of the artist's traditional "outsiderhood." But few can argue its inevitability. The time is indeed coming when, as the great nineteenth century poet Isa-

dore Ducasse, the count of Lautremont, predicted, "poetry will be made by all, not by one." The technological dimension of this revolution will probably precede its spiritual emergence, but the reformulation of fundamental human dialogue has clearly already begun.

As the new range of options made possible by the interactive media technology becomes increasingly visible in areas of society outside of the artworld, the political impact could be as meaningful, if not as spectacular, in the Western democracies as for the Soviet empire. The structures and presumptions of all politics would be radically centralized. While many people alienated from traditional forms of authority may celebrate this development, its ultimate value will depend on whether new forms of authority arise that earn the consent that the old forms do not, particularly among artists. But if new forms of order are not to be found for people who experience a growing need for personal participation in discovering values to order their lives, they may ultimately demand that order be imposed on them. As in each past instance of a change in ethos stimulated by a change in social relationships, the result may be greater freedom—or a more inhuman horror.

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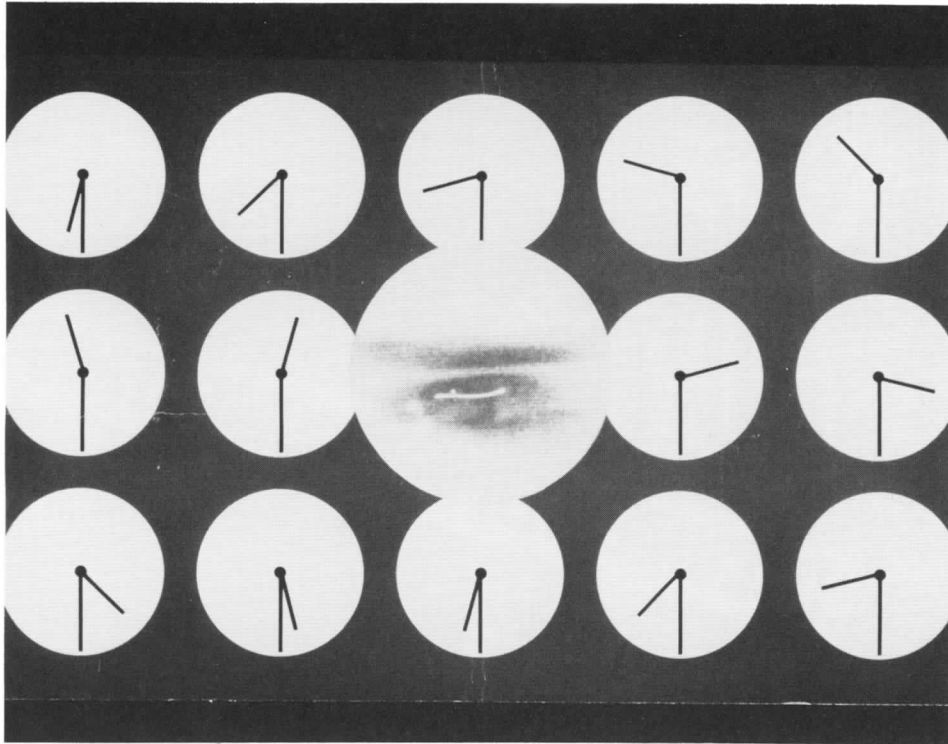
LYNN HERSHMAN

Still from *LORNA: THE FIRST INTERACTIVE VIDEO ART DISK*, 1980-84

*Bitburg Cemetery 1985 Walkman 1979
Cape Town 1985 Water-proof mascara
1971 Personal computer 1981 TLC*

FÉLIX GONZÁLEZ-TORRES

1987 1987, photostat, 8 x 10"



1987 1987, cichrome photograph, 7 x 9"



GUILLERMO GOMEZ-PEÑA

Documented/Indocumentado 1987,
Photo-collage, 9 x 6½"

The illegal we do immediately; the unconstitutional takes a little longer.





NANCY SPERO

detail *Fleeing Woman (Irradiated)* 1985,
handprinted and collage on paper, 20" x 7ft.

Photo credit: David Reynolds

Courtesy Josh Baer Gallery

"In the classical era the person who saw history in the light of myth was the prophet, an Isaiah or Jeremiah; in the modern era the person who saw history in the light of myth was the artist, a Blake or a Yeats; But now in our postmodern era the artists have become a degenerate priesthood; they have become not spirits of liberation, but the interior decorators of Plato's cave."

WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON