ETC

Behind The Boxes
*Sham*me / Logic Bom*, The Glace Gallery, Montreal, August 20 - September 20

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MONTRÉAL
BEHIND THE BOXES

The Glace Gallery is a window space on St Laurent. Donated by the travel agency above, it is now used as a venue for installations. August's show was by an artist who, working under the name Sham*me makes installations in shop windows. For this show the mechanics of travel as t our/error ism were focused in on.

The window is a 61/2 x 3 ft space, which the artist covered with three black satin curtains. Split into three sections they ran back and forth on curtain rails; this movement was activated by the presence of the public visiting the travel agents above. When they walked through the door and onto the stairway to colour saturated heaven, a motion sensor was triggered which in turn prompted the curtains to open and reveal a set of three grey magicians boxes; the type which apparently dissects the participants body when the boxes are disjointed in their upright position. Thus it was the visitors to the location who unknowingly performed the magic trick by their presence, a presence designed to reveal absence, as allusions to the body were played out amongst the boxes viewing incisions.

Viewing the boxes from the street inverted the placement of audiences position to one of backstage access so that it appeared as though you were behind the stage in the space where the unseen reflects structure. Thus as if behind the boxes, looking out to where the audience would be, colour saturated images from travel brochures fill in the spaces where fragmented hands, feet and head should attest to the existence of a body in full magic spectacle flight. These pieces of exoticised location are viewed through computerized dialogue boxes, which frame the images in system lingo and graphics. Laid out on the glass, the dialogue boxes suggested a shift in the perceptual understanding of the commercial window from essential store front material to metaphysical membrane; the computer screen which not only delivers into your living room but also allows you to change the contents and design of the display unit proposes that the notions around reciprocal relationships are changing. That they are often attached to the context of buying and selling is no surprise, for it is in this arena that corporate bodies conduct their research and thus create these social narratives around commodity characters. From the neon sign of the eighties to the pied pipers subliminal mall music emancipating credit from credit cards, the relationships of context, product and consumer have been dissected to the point of pseudo scientific theories of transaction. Thus Foucault's assertion that 'one invests bodies in depth, behind the great abstraction of exchange' was accepted but redirected to probe perceptions of exchange, in an alternative arena, that initiated by terrorist activity.

As cultural force and tool applied as a type of transgressive violence, this socially oriented activity demands covert undertaking. Here however overt presentation declared a bomb, wired between the three boxes, each component snugly fit into Styrofoam suggestive of electrical goods packed and ready to go. The placement of the bomb between the manipulated imagery of exotic landscapes and the dialogue boxes on the window suggested a collapsing of the western magicians mirrored stage and instead overtly uncovered the illusion of self, when that self is made to disappear and re-appear as something new (yet the same) by technologies wand.

Terrorism carried out by minority factions is often carried out in the fear of effacement of identity and in the twentieth century is often a response to the lack of channels open for airing resistance (except by those integrated into the system). The terrorism involved in the spread of a western idea of technological progress is not to be confused with the political, religious groups usually suppressed by a more powerful organization. With this in mind, we can look towards Edward Said's assertion that with « the continued projection of hard/software into third world area's, such complete dependency will breed a whole psychological mind set that will carry forward into generations ». Thus the savior of technology which appears to be the antithesis of the bomb in essence plugs into a similar terminal ambition to erase cultural difference and identity.

As culturally specific entities, hardware and software often reflect facets of other cultures composition into an economically and materially viable form to the western consumer. Thus what has become known as immersive space (the digitally contoured environment conditioned by the Internet to the virtual headset), represents an ideological drive to construct a culturally accepted spiritual space reminiscent of the Canadian indigenous peoples dreamtime. Therefore, the technological story telling involved in the construction of a transgressive conscious space seeks to create an identifiable system extension of the body; identifiable by brand name and version number. For whereas the shared memory of communal narratives and insights is problematic to commodify, the RAM counterpart steps in and over to supply the globe with its
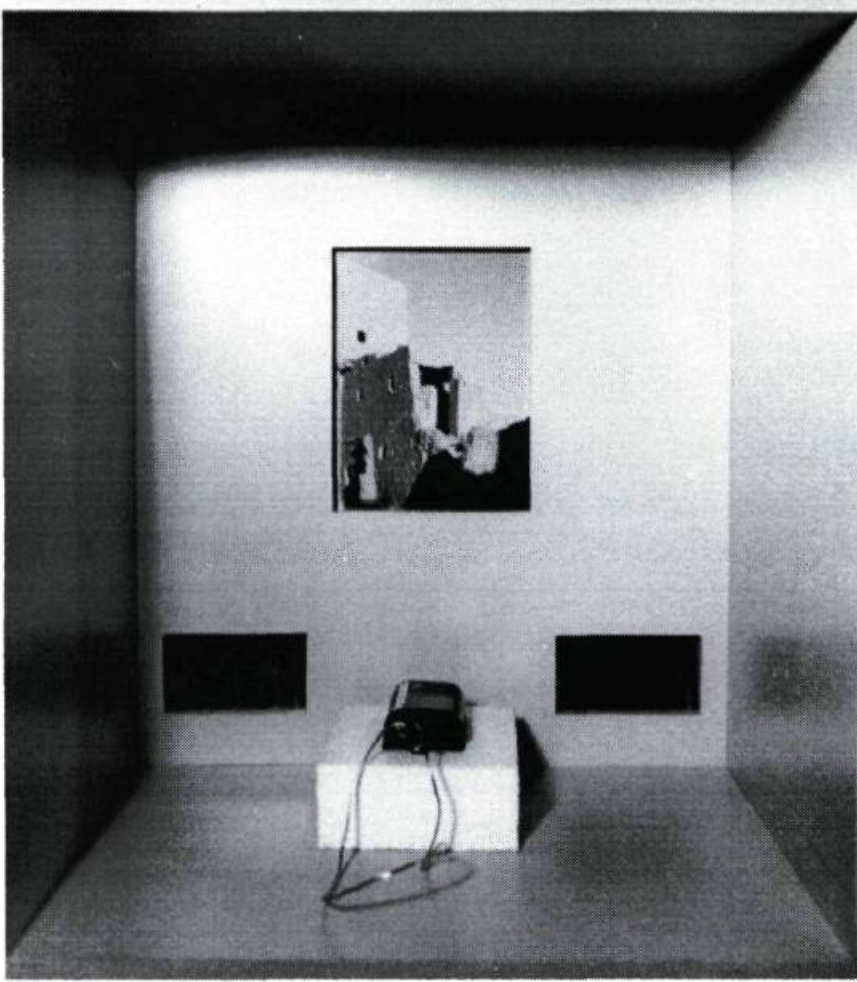
Sham*me at the Glace Gallery, St-Laurent Blvd, Montreal.

own version of vision bit memory. Sharing the miracle of technology encompasses the all embracing ethos of the West's former religion, simulating the parable of loaves and fishes when promising there is a byte for everybody.

Reflecting these concerns, McLuhan's flight of fantasy, elevated to axiomatic position by many writers is the dominating ethos of the global village. A term which has basically became an euphemism for a global American franchise and the promise of a social, homogenized and bound to the tenets of western culture. The question was not whether other cultures wanted to be a part of this village, but when they would become. A becoming re-routed for the wide load flow. Any movement off this route being dismissed as static discourse by the operators of accelerated modes of communication.

Playing on the fact that the space was formally used to display and sell « lands of leisure » it presented Sham*me with a perfect site for questioning the agency of travel, and discussing changing ideas of travel as mutated by technology; inquiring how these changes affect those who do not have the resources to travel, but are subject to the visitor (who increasingly becomes a symbol of threat?). A first world information comes to define and represent dominated cultures through TV, radio, news media and the Net, these cultures often become dependent on outside sources for information about their own situation. Logic Bom's effacing of the body in the boxes suggests that identity has become contingent with the will, « to occupy » Baudrillards « non space, the empty space of representation that is the screen », but instead of the meaninglessness attributed to said state, « Logic Bom » argues that such spaces resonate

with questions about the manufacture of severed representation. Taken a step further, this fracture of self-identity is compounded by the fact that the structuring of language and ideas inherent in migratory technology, means that criticism is often bound in the internal logic of the carrier which does not comprehend the needs or beliefs of the people it visits. Therefore, as a catalyst for any meaningful discussion between the conflictive arena of indigenous culture and portentous ideology this type of criticism becomes a redundant tool. This notion of technology as carrier of ideological blueprints proposes a radical reformatting of the structure of space, time, speed and language filtered through western concepts of binary logic.

Logic Bom alluded to the shift in perceptual understanding of the body in the wake of technological change. Within the context of the travel agent, these concerns took onboard wider ranging perspectives of cultural identity within the electronic migration of ideas. The imminence suggested by the grey boxes lay in their ambiguous presentation as magic box, packing case and computer ware casing. Performing the role of the twentieth century Trojan Horse, the boxes became the metaphorical gift, but instead of people, the boxes are packed with explosives, the most direct way to fragment a body. Mindful of the dialogue which prescribes the body as meat, this piece alluded to the violence of such declarations by presenting the fissure between those cultures who have the power to subordinate others un-technologised bodies to the status of flesh for sale.

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