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THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

INCONVERSATION

DAN GRAHAM with Carlos Brillembourg

When Carlos Brillembourg arrived at Dan Graham’s studio, he was given *Not Yet Realised: Pavilion Drawings*, the catalogue for Dan’s recent show at Lisson Gallery (*Pavilions*, March 21 – April 28, 2012). The two spoke at length about contemporary architecture, Graham’s deep knowledge of which comes from his reading of the complex history of modern architecture and the subtle interconnections between different architects, their lives and the cities where they worked. Graham is curating *A Drawing Show* at Galerie Micheline Szwajcer (June 21 – July 28, 2012) and has a solo show called *Urbanism* at Galerie Johnen (June 27 – July 28, 2012).

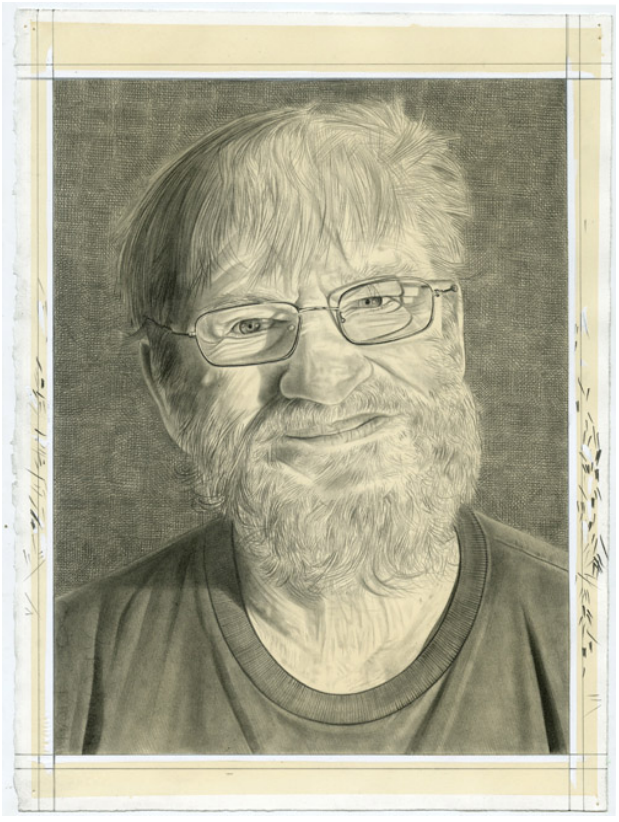
Carlos Brillembourg (Rail): I first encountered your work as an architectural student at George Wittenborn & Company Books on Madison Avenue. I was searching through the stacks and I found your mimeographed manuscript, and was fascinated by it, and bought it. That must have been around 1972.

Dan Graham: What was the text on?

Rail: It was a mimeograph text. I can’t remember; it was about 50 pages long and it was on different schema and conceptual schemes that you were writing about. So it was a collection of these different things?

Graham: Yes. Published actually in the catalogue *For Publication* by the Otis Art Institute.

Rail: Oh, that’s been published later because that was self-published at that time. I think your interest is also to a great extent architecture—but it’s of course—you’re not making architecture.



Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

Graham: Well, I think I make hybrids.

Rail: Yes.

Graham: My pavilions are a kind of hybrid between sculpture and quasi-functional architecture.

Rail: Absolutely and that hybrid nature of your work is really what fascinates me and what can capture not only architecture, but also language and concept and many things are involved there. It's a very complex work.

Graham: Well, the early work was for magazine pages, which meant that they were disposable. I was very interested because the artists I was showing with in my gallery, like Sol LeWitt, after the gallery closed, he said since the work was made of wood it should be used for firewood. Dan Flavin said the fluorescent lights should go back to the hardware store. And Carl Andre said the bricks should go back where they came from. There was this whole idea of defeating monetary value in the air in the '60s, so my idea was to put things in magazine pages where they'd be disposable with no value. And that was a hybrid also because the work was a combination of art criticism and essay: magazine page as an artwork.

Rail: Right. I remember from that period you published a conceptual schema for an ideal exhibition. You said you would be the curator of the exhibition. You would choose four artists, and then the text would be each artist talking about each other.

Graham: One of my least important pieces.

Rail: Anyway, let's go on to my first encounter with the beautiful piece you did on top of the original Dia Foundation in Chelsea. What interested me is how this sculpture became an optical instrument. It was not only about reflection, but it was as much about the space made hyper-evident. Being that it was impossible to maintain a fixed perspective, it amplified the way the eye is in constant motion as it perceives the world. This was my reaction to your work. Is that close to what your intentions were in that piece?

Graham: Well, I think the intentions were to use the grid of New York City for the cube, which is Renaissance perspective, and the inside cylinder being Baroque. Because as the sky changes, the two-way mirror surfaces shift, being more or less transparent or reflective each moment, and people can see each other gazing on both sides. The work contrasts Renaissance perspective in the cube's mirror Baroque cylinder situation, the Baroque means things are continually moving in time. And of course they are fundamentally optical. And maybe it goes back to the time when I was 13 and my father and I made a telescope.

Rail: Yes, it was very much like that. It was very much like an optical instrument as well as being this way of perceiving the city. Was it about the perception of the city?

Graham: Well, also I was taking a little bit from two architects. The cylinder was the same dimensions as the water tower, which Aldo Rossi said was the symbol of New York City. And the platform used boardwalk material. I used that for two reasons: One, because I thought Battery Park City would be coming up the Hudson. There was a proposal by Robert Venturi for the Westside Highway, and I related that to Coney Island references from Rem Koolhaas's Delirious New York. But I was also looking at New York in terms of the '70s and '80s, putting both together. And I also used an existing tool shed as a coffee bar and video tech, the coffee bar came from the '80s corporate atriums. The Dia Rooftop piece was a combination of a penthouse roof and a slum roof. So it's very much about New York both in the '70s and '80s, as well as being an optical device.

Rail: So it was also very much of a social space.

Graham: I wanted it to be used for performances because the corporate atriums like the I.B.M. atrium always had performances inside on a kind of stage setting, surrounded by a rusticated, ecologically perfect interior. The videos I put in the coffee bar were videos that artists made of performances or music that were done during the '70s, because when the piece went up in the late '80s, people had forgotten about what happened in the last decade. One overlooked aspect of architecture is program. I wanted to change Dia's post-Wagnerian sense of a quasi-meditative viewing space for the "genius" work of art to turn it into a more democratic experience.

Rail: Right. So it was grounded in its time to the late '70s and the early '80s?

Graham: I wanted to combine the '70s alternative space with the '80s corporate atriums. There was a reference to the '70s landfill of present Battery Park City now superseded by a formally landscaped corporate park which as landfill was used in the '70s for performances. You can actually see Battery Park City from the Dia rooftop. I wanted to change the Dia's program. Dia's program was to show great works of art by supposedly godlike artists in ideal spaces, in a kind of meditative genius situation. That's Heiner Friedrich's idea of Dia. I guess he identified with Ludwig II of the 19th century and was looking for a kind of Wagnerian experience, a Valhalla for the genius artist and work of art. I actually had a chance to show with Dia Foundation many years ago but declined because I realized I was a populist.

Rail: So this sparked your interest in landscape architecture and the history of landscape architecture?

Graham: Well actually, I got into landscape architecture because I was doing a lot of things through the '80s French socialist regional art spaces, which were often set in gardens—these gardens were overlays of different historical periods. And of course, American art in the '60s was all about instantaneous present time. But in the '80s I was more interested actually in the European situation of historical overlays, and then my work became more involved with time, contradicting minimal art which was about more fixed and instantaneous present time.

Rail: Right, so you're more diachronic than synchronic.

Graham: And there's a very good interview I did with Rodney Graham in the Beyond catalogue. He said when he saw my piece "Public Space/Two Audiences" at the '76 Venice Biennale, he realized it was about time because things take place in my work as the spectators move around and observe other members of the audience as they observe themselves.

Rail: But in that sense, your interpretation of the Renaissance garden as also a museum space and also as a public space, and perhaps the first one—

Graham: Well not very public because it was aristocratic.

Rail: Was it open to the public at one time?

Graham: Probably, yes.

Rail: And certainly before the advent of museums, because all the collections were very private at that time. And so, in a way, the position of public art in Renaissance Florence, in the gardens and also in the squares, is really the beginning of the museum or the idea of public art.

Graham: Well, I was also contesting Daniel Buren, who has a fixed Cartesian idea of the museum not changing. I see the museum change in every decade.

Rail: Right, it's in constant evolution?

Graham: Of course.

Rail: And one of the first museums, the Prado Museum, is actually a taking over of a scientific space. It was not designed to be a museum. It was a science laboratory, and then it became a museum later.

Graham: In terms of Judd, my interest in Judd was in his early writings. Judd grew up as a teenager in New Jersey, where I grew up, but he's originally from Kansas City. And he wrote a very early article about the Neoclassical city plan of Kansas City, and I've seen in his work a tension between Neoclassical and highway culture. In a way, I think he couldn't really adapt to New Jersey highway culture, and Robert Smithson had the same idea—he was from New Jersey, but what he particularly liked about New Jersey was the pollution.

Rail: Well he liked the industrial landscape.

Graham: Yes, in other words the pollution because that's a little bit of the 19th century idea of ruins.

Rail: So he equated pollution and the romantic idea of ruins?

Graham: Well also he was being devil's advocate. Later, all artists became ecological, but he liked William Burroughs's idea of a polluted media-trash-wasteland and he was perhaps also influenced by T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land.*

Rail: That was Smithson being a romantic there, very much. But Judd was not a romantic in that sense.

Graham: I think the interesting thing also about Judd are his first articles—one was about the Kansas City plan, but he also wrote an article about Lee Bontecou. Also an article about his girlfriend, Yayoi Kusama. I think in his early work he identified with the female body in some strange way.

Rail: Interesting. I didn't know he was with Kusama.

Graham: Oh yes. Well they lived in the same building. He's in a way a very cold person. But she actually had an affair with two somewhat emotionally closed male artists: Joseph Cornell, who lived with his mother, and Judd, who was, in a way, always flirtatious with women, a little bit cool and distanced from women. So he was probably seduced by her. Also he's very smart. He knew she was a great artist.

Dan Graham, Two Way Mirror Cylinder Inside Cube and Video Lounge, 1981-1991. Dia Center for the Arts, New York. Courtesy Dan Graham Studio.

Rail: Anyway, let's get back to your early work. In one of your written pieces called "Schema" you write that, "Systems of information seem to exist somewhere halfway between the material and concept, without being either of these categories." In some ways I see this applying to your sculptures, in that it is essential to perceive them both as object and idea simultaneously.

Graham: I think the early works like "Two Adjacent Pavilions" are philosophical models. And of course I was influenced when I was 14 by reading parts of Being and Nothingness by Sartre, and Beatriz Colomina picked up the quote in her essay on me that was very important for me, about the gaze in the mirror stage defining the child's nascent ego in terms of their own gaze, because as you know Lacan took a lot from Sartre, in a way. At this time artists, were very interested in philosophical models or physics. So I wouldn't say they were ideas in any kind of academic way.

Rail: Do you think, for example, that Pavilion in Porto, Portugal ("Double Exposure"), although specific to its location in Serralves park, also plays with this duality and inversion?

Graham: Well, actually, the piece comes out—I had done a lot of videos, time-delay installations which became too expensive to continue. I had previously used analog video time delay but then everything became digital and it became impossible for me to continue time-delay video work. So the idea comes both out of 19th century American landscape artists like Frederic Church or Albert Bierstadt, but it also comes out of how to make a time delay without using machines. The piece is a triangular structure, two sides are two-way mirrors and the front side is a color transparency superimposed on the glass. Fifty meters in front you can see through the image to observe the landscape shifting in terms of times of day and season. The spectators can enter the structure and see each other inside and outside of the two-way mirror surfaces.

Rail: When I saw it, there was a group of young students lining up to go in it and they were all crowding inside as many as could fit in, it was almost like they were entering a space capsule and once they got in, they disappeared and became a reflection inside this space and so it also operates on that level of magic, of transformation, of sleight of hand, if you want.

Graham: Of course that's the birth of cinema, which began at the same time as the panorama, which Church was very involved in—his teacher Thomas Cole as well as his friend John Martin began their careers doing proto-cinematic panoramas, painting on glass and then illuminating the glass with colored lights. So in a certain sense this tradition, which I picked up from Church, is very much there.

Rail: What about the writings and buildings of Robert Venturi and his idea of pop architecture, do you think that pop architecture exists as a category and do you think in some ways it's still happening?

Graham: Well I think Venturi and Charles Moore, who are the great so called post-modern precedents, I think they are not doing post-modernism. Venturi actually was deeply influenced by Morris Lapidus. In other words, the conditions of the new commercial architecture architects have to deal with in America and signage was very important and also he often talks about Alvar Aalto because Aalto broke the modernist view.

Rail: Right, Aalto is a very important figure in breaking the mold of a flat modernism. Venturi writes in his first book Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture on the history of Italian Renaissance and Mannerist art and architecture.

Graham: That's one thing Venturi has in common with Smithson. Smithson was deeply involved with Mannerism, whereas Venturi was influenced both by Palladio in terms of signage, as well as Italian Mannerism. Whereas I think Venturi's first interest was in Italian Mannerism, and he tried to merge Palladian villas with their statuary with the signage of Morris Lapidus. Venturi and I had the same fascination with Italian Americans moving from Brooklyn to Staten Island; they have a swimming pool, of course, and they have their own kind of signage which is topiary or small little statues as fake Renaissance or Baroque references. The interiors of these suburban houses often look like Hollywood mansions that are trying to be pseudo-Baroque.

Rail: So in that sense, your interest in highway culture is very much like Venturi going to Las Vegas and analyzing the streetscape and the signage system——

Graham: But I think it actually comes not from Las Vegas but really has to do with the houses surrounding normal houses. Even acknowledging it, in Venturi's project in Philadelphia—what he does with the open frame representing the house that disappeared as a ghost image and painted in a slightly pink and brown. I think that relates to the bricks of the surrounding buildings in Philadelphia, so he's juxtaposing 18th century Philadelphia with the current grid of Philadelphia. All his work was about the city plan, and the key to my work beginning with "Homes for America" and also continuing to the Dia Foundation is about the city plan.

Rail: Right, so there you have in common with not only Venturi but also with Aldo Rossi who was extremely interested in the city as the work of art.

Graham: Well I certainly got that from Rossi but also Sol LeWitt who worked for I.M. Pei; also Sol LeWitt loved De Chirico and De Chirico's paintings, he said, dealt with the city plan of Torino.

Rail: I didn't know that Sol LeWitt worked in I. M. Pei's office. Tell me a little bit about your interest in the California architects, in John Lautner and that tradition, and we can't forget Rudolph M. Shindler and Richard Neutra who went there after working for Frank Lloyd Wright.

Graham: Don't forget Charles Moore's Sea Ranch Condominiums and the other great simple wood buildings he did. I think actually Charles Moore was one of the first ecological architects and I think his work has influenced recent Atelier Bow-Wow works. My model "Alteration of a Suburban House" from 1978 is made in terms of hybrids—putting together two contradictory things. It takes its composition from the mirror dividing the living room from the bedroom and the private area in the back, and it gives the image of the surrounding houses. It's like a billboard advertising ideal suburban houses to be sold, which are derived from the actual situation. And of course my influence then was very much the Bennaceraf house by Michael Graves, which I think also influenced Frank Gehry and Gordon Matta-Clark.

Rail: Yes, it is one of Michael Graves's most radical works.

Graham: It's also Cubist.

Rail: Yes, it was inspired by Juan Gris's paintings.

Graham: That's what I mean, they are influenced by Cubism.

Rail: We haven't really explored the relationship to Matta-Clark, did you know him?

Dan Graham, "Public Space/Two Audiences," 1976. Two rooms, each with separate entrance divided by thermopane glass, one mirrored wall, muslin, fluorescent lights, wood. Circa 86 2/3 × 275 2/3 × 86 2/3". Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

Graham: He knew me when he was in architecture school. He liked my work, and when I wrote the first article about him for Parachute, a Montreal magazine, this was a re-discovery of his work at that time. He'd been forgotten, but I was having a show—actually in the Bern Kunsthalle with the director Jean-Hubert Martin. When I looked at Matta-Clark's work, I realized Matta- Clark and I had a lot in common. But I think the difference is that where I deal with post-World War II suburban houses sited next to highways, Matta-Clark often works with the decaying houses built by post-World War I railroad towns.

Rail: Right, because of his early work near Buffalo and all that, he's dealing with early industrialization.

Graham: Whereas my 1978 model, "Alteration to a Suburban House," which is very Venturi-like, comes from highway culture post-World War II. It's actually a forced hybrid of Mies's Farnsworth House and Venturi's highway-sited suburban houses.

Rail: Well I think some of the later work of Matta-Clark is also very environmental in the sense that it deals with the opening of a huge building opening up to the sun and also his work——

Graham: Well that's partly Louis Kahn.

Rail: You think that's Louis Kahn?

Graham: Of course, but what he did was he made agitprop and also in my research I think he was a South American artist. I think he related to his father and he may or may not have seen Lina Bo Bardi's factory and was possibly influenced by Hélio Oiticica's architecture models; they both had an interest in the drug culture of the art world and everyone knew each other.

Rail: I'm also thinking of the work that he did when they were building the Pompidou. There he cut huge circular openings into the walls of the Medieval houses. Here it wasn't so much about railroad culture.

Graham: World War I.

Rail: Well World War I, but it's about a large scale intervention that never becomes a social space.

Graham: I also think it relates very much to the Paris student protests of '68 agitprop against technological modernism.

Rail: I was struck by something you were writing on Lautner's Sheats-Goldstein House, and you said:

> Lautner's use of glass in this and other houses is vastly different than that of modernist architects, where window glass makes a clear divide between the outdoor light and the interior space, with an audible exception being Mies's Barcelona Pavilion. Lautner employs the use of overlapping layers of glass of the interior partitions to capture light reflections of people moving around transition spaces, linked by various staircases. The interior glass reflects and connects people's gazes and bodies, with the doubling indoor and exterior light.

How is this connected to the use of light and reflection in your own work?

Graham: I think my work is much closer, in a strange way, to Mies's Barcelona Pavilion. It's about the mirror stage. In other words, in my column about Aries architects in Domus, I say Terragni's and Mies's work is very close. Because you see a ghost image of yourself, and as you walk around you see other people looking at you, which is Sartre, or Lacan, who picked it up from Sartre's mirror stage. In other words, it's the ego, which is just beginning to be formed as unstable because it has lots to do with how people see your gaze as you see them. Whereas I think with Lautner, what was happening was actually a tree house. In other words, the flickering light is the effect of the light outside covered by foliage.

Rail: So being in the forest kind of thing.

Graham: Yes. They're really like tree houses. And of course in his own life history, Lautner was actually born and raised in a tree house in Michigan.

Rail: So he was recreating a kind of very familiar environment, I see. But in Mies's, the reflections are not only coming from the glass, they're also coming from the highly polished marble, from everything else.

Graham: The water.

Rail: The water. And they're also coming because the reflections exist, both in interior and in exterior spaces. So in that sense, your pavilions are very closely related to that.

Graham: Well also they involve the outside light. In Terragni's Casa del Fascio, the ceiling was actually a mirror. Somebody who worked on reconstruction of the building said that the ceiling was actually a mirror.

Rail: The ground floor hall?

Graham: Yes, the ground floor ceiling.

Rail: Right. In that sense, the idea of reflection and light—the natural light—is related not so much to Lautner's use of it, but more to Mies's and Terragni's.

Graham: Actually, I only had a background idea of Mies. I initially was against Mies because I read Venturi attacking Mies as a corporate architect. But more and more, I realized similarities between my work and Mies's. In other words, what I disliked, in a way, was partly what I was involved with. In fact, I think his European work is so different from his American work. In his American work, I think the Farnsworth House is more about structure making it into a kind of neo-Greek temple and the landscape is referenced but the house seems isolated in nature. Whereas I think the Barcelona Pavilion also involved the landscape and was more urban as a showcase for the new products of the Weimar Republic.

Rail: Yes, in that sense it is exactly like your work, which is also sometimes conceived of as a temporary pavilion.

Graham: Also my work really comes out of the feeling of walking the streets in the shopping areas of New York City.

Rail: And the Barcelona Pavilion was very much about the movement through it, and not being stationary in it.

Graham: It's totally about the procession. And in a certain sense, I always saw it—and some people have mentioned this—as a little like English landscape architecture such as Stowe, an allegory of the Weimar Republic, and it's also as you move around, there's almost a semi-narrative. Although it's a very abstract narrative.

Rail: But also within that context of that exposition, and in relationship to that great wall which was built behind it, this is also a great lesson in manipulation of scale as well as movement.

Graham: Because most of his European work was actually asymmetrical. And I think the Barcelona Pavilion has a relationship to the Tugendhat House. I think the Tugendhat House is like a Palladian villa for businessmen, who used it as both a luxurious home and an office for conferences.

Rail: That's one of the great differences between the American work and the European work, the European work is very much about a procession which is asymmetrical and the American work tends to be more hermetic and symmetrical. Let's talk about your project, "Homes for America." In your description there you write:

> Both architecture and craftsmanship as values are subverted by the dependence on simplified and easily duplicated techniques of fabrication and standardization modular plans. Contingencies such as [*you mention some and then*] land use economics makes the final decisions denying the architect his former unique role. Developments stand in an altered relationship to their environment. There is no organic unity connecting the landsite and the home. Both are without roots, separate in a larger, predetermined synthetic order.

For me, this is really a very crucial project of yours.

Graham: Well I think I got that very much from Donald Judd, and the whole idea then to do work that is non-humanistic that doesn't have roots, that's not rooted in the ground. Because the central metaphor then was the idea that things had to be rooted. So, but of course there was a new highway culture after World War II on the East and West coast situations which created mass-produced tract homes. On the West coast there was the aircraft industry and on the East coast they were building ships, so they used that kind of standardized material in building to construct new houses for the people who had just gotten back from the war, new families.

Rail: Right. This really created the new American "carscape" which is in crisis today. But in this project there's an interesting use of photography for the first time in your work. And also, there are charts which you do as kind of a summary of observations about what you see. On the one hand, I'd like you to talk about the photography and on the other hand, these charts look to me to be kind of influenced by structural anthropology. Were you reading Lévi-Strauss at the time?

Dan Graham, Porto, Serralves (Double Exposure), 1995, 2002. Two-way mirror, color cibachrome transparency, and stainless steel. 7 1/2 × 13 1/8 × 13 1/8. Collection Fundacao de Serralves Contemporary Art Museum, Porto, Portugal. Installation in Porto, Portugal. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

Graham: As a child, I read Lévi-Strauss, yes. But I was also interested in serial music, especially, Pierre Boulez, and I introduced Sol LeWitt, actually, to a magazine called Die Reihe, which was about the tone row series. "Homes for America," actually, is a kind of combination of Sol LeWitt and Judd. [Judd actually comes from Kansas City and he wrote a very good article about the neoclassical city plan of Kansas City and then he moved to New Jersey. Sol LeWitt was interested in the grid/city plan of New York. And there is a conflict between that, a tension between that and New Jersey highway culture, and new synthetic materials.] They didn't agree on their favorite French "New Novelists," Sol LeWitt and Judd. Sol called Judd a goddamn romantic because he liked Alain Robbe-Grillet where Sol liked Michel Butor. I was also very influenced by the writing of Michel Butor, which dealt with the city plan as a basis for a novel or for art. So the thing about the "Homes for America" is that I was rejecting the white cube of the gallery as a basis for making art and more interested in the city plan, which was the new suburban city plan. But I was also doing—it really comes from literature, a lot of it, it was also very involved with Flaubert, flat-footed irony, and it's also a celebration of the petit bourgeoisie. It's not a sociological critique. In fact, it's actually making fun of all the sociological articles, with famous formalist photographers showing the sterility of the suburbs.

In writing "Homes of America," I went to the offices of a company making homes for seniors retiring in Florida, and I borrowed some of the brochures. The interesting thing was I met a kind of older salesperson relating to seniors that maybe wanted to retire in Florida, and he thought that I was there actually to look into a home for my parents or grandparents, and then they gave me a brochure and they said "maybe you can squeeze something out of this." [Both laugh.] So that was the semi-cynical sensibility there. But it was very antithetical to this idea of high architecture. But this to me had a kind of humor.

Rail: So you were kind of sympathetic to this new landscape?

Graham: I doubt that. My position in the article is a kind of new deadpan, you don't know what the position you're taking is, there's no position. If anything, it comes from the French new novelists, also from English Pop music such as "Mr. Pleasant" by the Kinks. Almost all my magazine pages are like pop songs. But unconsciously I think I was going for the suburban city and was rejecting the cliché in Minimal art having the work contextualized by the white cube of the gallery. [I hadn't read a lot of de Rossi but

Sol LeWitt told me later that his biggest influence was de Chirico and de Chirico's paintings showed the city plan of Torino.] Later I found de Chirico was a pretty interesting figure, half-way between Surrealism and the new kind of rationalism of Italian fascism.

Rail: So in some ways this is a project which attempts to be new realism so it is related in a way to the projects of the late '50s and '60s in Europe.

Graham: I didn't know anything about this.

Rail: No?

Graham: No. I was simply looking at magazines. I grew up near the edge of the suburbs and of course T.J. Clark says that some of the most interesting paintings done by van Gogh document Paris between the edge of the countryside and the emerging edge of Paris. T.J. Clark and I really agree with his observation that the real revolutionary class is the petit bourgeoisie, people who are upper lower class or who are lower middle class. I grew up in a community that had upper lower class people who lived in cheap army barracks-like housing, and I always loved my neighbors, who were Italian-American or Polish-American and had a sense of spectacle. So in a way, "Homes for America" documents a kind of petit bourgeois false arcadia. And my article is more of a celebration. The article doesn't take a position of this emerging suburban culture.

Rail: Right, which is a very difficult thing to do, to celebrate it without taking a position.

Graham: But at that moment, a lot of films, like Jean-Luc Godard's films, like *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*, also had a huge influence on my photos and art as they deal with the de-centered new city.

Rail: But they did take a political stance, in that film in particular. Jean-Luc Godard was criticizing this post-war housing.

Graham: Yes, but it's like a magazine page. So in other words I'm taking the magazine page and I'm using it in terms of more clichés. What I liked about magazines and pop music is that they dealt in clichés. So I wasn't really thinking about architecture but inherently through Sol LeWitt and Judd, who both had different interests in architecture, there was an appreciation or understanding of what was happening around me in the suburbs.

Rail: It's fascinating. Let's go on to another project of yours which is called "Two Adjacent Pavilions" (1978 – 1982). And here you just mentioned before the idea of the Arcadian ideal in suburban project, but in this one you really make a direct reference to the 18th century architect theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier and to his conception of the elemental rustic hut as being the origin of all architecture. And in these two adjacent pavilions, one has a roof—which makes it opaque and to the sky—and the other one is open. And otherwise they are identical, right?

Graham: Well actually, the piece was sited in Documenta in Kassel in relationship to the main building, which was kind of a Baroque palace. So, in a way, it was a little bit like a kind of folie/pavilion. It was next to a small river, and it was meant to be seen actually from the cliff, looking overhead. I think I wanted to use this new office building material, two-way mirror glass, which I had used in one of my first video pieces because it was emblematic of the center of the city. Two-way mirror glass, used in these new office buildings, is both transparent and reflective. It's also a philosophical model, perhaps of two egos—observing each other's gaze. So all of my early works were almost like philosophical models. But the relation to the sun is very important.

Dan Graham, "Homes for America" (article for Arts Magazine), 1966. Printed matter. Variable according to publication. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

Rail: Right. And they function very differently because one would be more transparent because they had natural light, and one would be more opaque.

Graham: Well, the one that had natural light overhead would be oscillating between being both transparent and reflective, and people would be superimposed to each other. And also the idea was, in the siting, that people could lie down outside. When I first saw the piece—the first time I saw the piece early in the morning—there was a police siren, somebody was walking their dog, and they walked inside the piece and the dog couldn't see them and was barking on the outside. [*Laughs*.] Later, I realized some of these pieces have a little to do with 19th century French Impressionism because there are people lying down on the grass outside the pavilions.

Rail: Right, so they have to do with the kind of bourgeois 19th century park and the whole leisure idea.

Graham: In fact the city of Kassel, where Documenta was sited, has a big monument; a Disney-like statue of Hercules. It's an imposition of a 19th century park on top of a Baroque park. So, what I learned in Europe, doing my pavilions, is there's always an overlay of different historical aspects of the park.

Rail: And yet at the same time, could we also say that you're interested in these pavilions in going at an origin or an original condition for architecture?

Graham: Well, I was vaguely reading books about that period so I put that into the text, although it was very unconscious. I was coming out of Minimal art, and in a way I was getting away from Minimal art where the works were discretely self-contained reflecting self-referentially the galleries' white cube. I wanted something that would be a little bit more baroque that would change as you walk around.
So I introduced the idea of time and light shift, but of course light shift really got involved with Flavin—Flavin loved Bierstadt. Ed Ruscha also said his favorite artist was Bierstadt. So I was influenced by all of the minimal artists, especially Flavin.

Rail: Yeah, I think in a way they could be related to Minimal art. Certainly, the way that they are perceived is not Minimal, because somehow the presence of the body and the person is always there, and Minimal art always wants to exclude the body and the person.

Graham: Oh, the other thing was I was doing something very deliberate. I saw a piece by Sol LeWitt sited outdoors, and I thought it didn't really work. So I said why not make something like Minimal art and put it outdoors almost as a challenging contradiction.

Rail: It certainly worked very well. I think another constant in your work is your interest in the history of theater and the opposition between the audience and the spectacle, and public and private. And you have a project actually for "Cinema" in 1981, which was in collaboration with an architect. And here you——

Graham: Well this project for "Cinema," which was not a collaboration with an architect actually, was based on a postulated Bauhaus architecture that we would be showing for people outside on the street, the machines and people inside working nakedly. I hadn't seen the Duiker's Amsterdam Handelsblad Cinema but my project somehow relates to it. It really relates to an existing movie theater except I was more interested in attaching my "Cinema" to an existing corner two-way mirror office building. It had a lot to do with the preview box showing previews of the film. In my "Cinema" you can see the actual film projected through the two-way mirror outdoor surface of the building which inside is the screen. Through the people's gaze on the inside, who are gazing on the inside, the gazes would meet, as well as the gazes of the actors that you're gazing into. The "preview" is silent so you have to enter the "Cinema" to see/hear the film which the box is advertising.

Rail: [*Laughs*.] Right.

Graham: And I wanted to get more into the intro-subjectivity of the gazes of spectators outside on the street and the spectators seeing the film inside.

Rail: Well certainly the idea of the screen becoming a two-way mirror glass which is——

Graham: Well it's mylar.

Rail: Mylar—actually being seen from the inside and also the outside. And then the theater becomes actually part of the public space; it becomes part of the street.

Graham: It was unrealized, but I think its one of my best potential pieces.

Rail: Yeah, I agree.

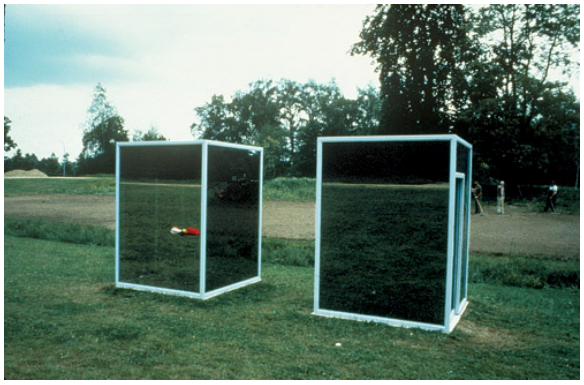
Graham: But of course it also had to do with cityscape.

Rail: Yes. And it has to do with this inversion of public and private as well through the use of light.

Graham: Mm hmm.

Rail: You have said that you were very influenced by Marshall McLuhan. How exactly is that shown in your work?

Graham: I think everybody at that time was influenced by Marshall McLuhan, "the medium is a message," but later I figured out my first influence was actually Walter Benjamin, who was translated by



Dan Graham, "Two Adjacent Pavilions," 1982. Two structures: two-way mirror, glass, steel. 98 3/4 × 73 1/5 × 73 1/5". Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

Hannah Arendt and was available in '55 and '56 and I think McLuhan, as exciting as he was, in a certain way took something from Walter Benjamin. But of course the whole idea of a media culture was kind of exciting. I'm not against Marshall McLuhan, I think he was inspirational. But he brought together a lot of things and kind of exaggerated them and brought them to the general public.

Rail: Well he was originally a teacher of literature.

Graham: Yes.

Rail: And then he got together with his friends and anthropologists and together they worked on this idea of how, in his age, radio and television were transforming the heart of America.

Graham: He also in a strange way was a Catholic.

Rail: Yes, he was a Catholic.

Graham: *Radical Software*—see I was introduced to all these positions by *Radical Software*, the magazine *Radical Software*. To me, the person who made the greatest use of topology in terms of a media situation was ultimately John Chamberlain's raw foam rubber couches.

Rail: Yes.

Graham: Which really comes out of that particular period.

Rail: And the fact that they are ephemeral because they eventually disappeared.

Graham: Well I've written a lot—the best John Chamberlain I saw was in the lobby for a show called *Westkunst* which was put on by Kasper König in Cologne. It was the idea that the influence of American art on European culture and art was at an end, so it was called *Westkunst*. So Chamberlain had in the lobby one of his ephemeral couches and on the armrest he had TV monitors like he found on Greyhound bus stations and showed American commercials where they made mistakes. It was absolutely brilliant and ephemeral.

Rail: Wow. So in that sense you were going back to McLuhan there.

Graham: Well I discovered this later. I have just published a very long article, for the last Chamberlain catalogue for Gagosian about John Chamberlain, conceptual artist. Judd loved his work because I think he began as an Expressionist then became a pop artist. And all his work was about cultural things like built-in obsolescence. And I think I was interested in—and I think Judd was aware of this.

Rail: Well also he was the first one to work with this kind of material. And then Judd also started to work with these kinds of automobile materials and making his art out of metallic surfaces.

Graham: And——

Rail: You also have written that fascism did not die after World War II, but that it was incorporated into capitalist advertising techniques, and that somehow this has to do with your idea of highway culture. Can you explain this a little bit further?

Graham: The article was actually "The End of Liberalism." And being Jewish, liberals think my art is about liberal humanism. But underneath liberal humanism, which in a way was a rationale, there was advertising culture coming originally from Swiss graphic design which was used by the advertising industry. And there's a certain terror underneath there. Unconsciously I was thinking about Jack Goldstein, who made very good use of the terror, of the MGM lion logo. So it was really my appreciation of what I was sensing in great artists who were involved with that. My own work, in terms of highway culture, I think maybe it's because I'm from New Jersey but I never had a driver's license because I was a troubled teenager. So in a way it's a kind of a highway culture I never had.

Rail: So it's highway culture walking around the railroad tracks. [*Laughs*.]

Graham: Yes. Exactly.

Rail: Okay.

Graham: Certainly it comes out of the same appreciation for what's happening to the upper lower class becoming lower middle class that Venturi had. In fact, the interesting story about Venturi is I was doing an interview for Bill Menking's newspaper and Denise Scott Brown was there and Venturi said, "I would love to retire to a northern New Jersey suburb, of course Italian-American where I can see the skyline of New York," and Denise says, "That's a nightmare I hope never happens."

Rail: [*Laughs*.] Well there you can see the tension between those two.

Graham: Well, I have to say she was a Libra and Jewish with a moralistic background.

Rail: Also South African.

Graham: She's South African and moralistic whereas Venturi is a kind of apolitical Italian-American who is in love with England, and still watches English TV soap operas. In many ways I think his interest in signage actually comes from Morris Lapidus and his break from the modernist buildings white cube was from Aalto, but I think in a certain way his interest in highway culture comes from his interest in Palladio and Italian Mannerism.

Rail: I think the interest in Mannerism is really previous to Denise Scott Brown.

Graham: And also his interest in Aalto.

Rail: Right, because Aalto represents a modernist architect who is not pure.

Graham: Yes, he broke the white cube. I relate Venturi's break with the modernist buildings white cube's purity and a return to 19th century wainscoting borders in my article "Art as Design/Design as Art" was Venturi's Knoll Showroom I think in the Upper East Side.

REGEN PROJECTS

Graham: Of course, he was very involved in the whole idea of interior decoration, which is something that modernist architects were staying away from.

Rail: That's true, except for one exception of Paul Rudolph. Paul Rudolph would be very involved with interior decoration and that's why maybe in that sense he's such a unique architect because he designed many apartments, most of which don't exist, before he was doing this very large scale work.

Graham: But what I liked about

SIDE EFFECT / COMMON DRUG	Anorexia (Appetite loss)	Blood clot	Blurring of vision	Constipation	Convulsion	Decreased libido	Dermatosis	Depression, torpor	Headache	Hepatic disfunction	Hypertension	Insomnia	Nasal congestion	Nausea, vomiting	Pallor
STIMULANT also APPETITE DEPRESSANT															
Dextroamphetamine (Dexadrine)	•			•	•				•		•	•		•	
Methamphetamine chloride (Desoxyn)	•			•	•				•		•	•		•	
ANTI-DEPRESSANT															
Iproniazid				•					•	•	•				
Trofanil			•				•		•		•				
TRANQUILIZER															
Chorpromazine				•		•	•	•	•						•
Hydroxyzine				•			•	•	•					•	•
Meprobamate					•			•			•				
Promazine			•				•	•	•						
Resperpine	•				•	•	•	•				•	•		
Thiopropazate			•	•	•		•	•	•	•		•		•	
SEDATIVE															
Barbitol			•					•						•	
Phenobaritol			•					•						•	
ANTI-MOTION SICKNESS															
Dimenhydrinate (Dramamine)							•	•						•	
Marezine							•	•							
Meclizine							•	•						•	
CONTRACEPTIVE															
Norethynodrel (Enovid)		•	•						•	•				•	•

Dan Graham, "Side Effects/Common Drugs," 1966, Courtesy Dan Graham Studio.

Venturi is he incorporated a great love for American pop art. In the first version of *Learning from Las Vegas*, the original version, he has a kind of cut-out, a fold-out of Ed Ruscha's book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*.

Rail: I mean, basically *Learning from Las Vegas* comes from that experience.

Graham: And a little bit from Oldenburg and LeWitt; I think for the central wood "ghost" structure of Franklin Court, which I think is brilliant, he seems to have been referencing Sol LeWitt. I think in that ghost house he's actually doing a symbol of Franklin's now demolished 18th century house structure, super-imposing the 18th century Philadelphia grid on the current 20th century Philadelphia grid. It's suburban because it's slightly pink and brown which relates to the bricks of Philadelphia. The great thing about Venturi is he loved painting. In other words, color for him is very important.

Rail: He's a kind of misunderstood architect because in a way people have not looked at his writings on architecture.

Graham: Also, the actual buildings, the subtlety of the color is very important.

Rail: Right.

Graham: But this is just my later discovery of great architects who I missed originally.

Rail: Well, I think many people, in a way, are not really looking at Venturi anymore because they look at him as a kind of representative of post-modernism.

Graham: Well, he would say he's not post-modernist. And the other great architect who was also supposedly post-modernist was Charles Moore and I figured out that Bauhaus's wood buildings, like the structure for the 50-year-old woman who retired and was living with her pony is straight out of Charles Moore.

Rail: Out of his early work, like Sea Ranch, that's right.

Graham: Well, not Sea Ranch, but his smaller semi-open buildings obviously influenced Atelier Bow-Wow. Of course, he has one advantage over Venturi. In a way, his work is ecological.

Rail: Some of it.

Graham: Somewhat. His worst work, I'm afraid, is his Supergraphics.

Rail: Right, well, perhaps his worst work is that failed plaza in New Orleans.

Graham: Oh, that's exactly what I mean.