

JULIANE REBENTISCH

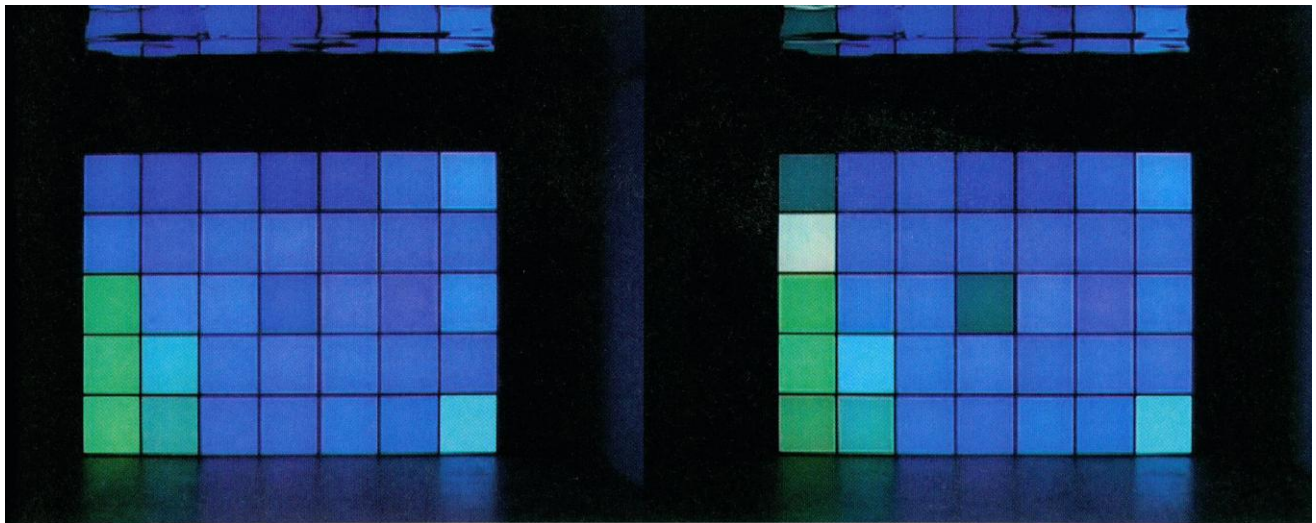
Angela Bulloch's

In Angela Bulloch's most recent works—installations of so-called pixel boxes—Minimalism, especially as practiced by Judd and Flavin, is as unmistakably referenced as are the devices of film, television and digital imagery which have been used to create them. The boxes, measuring 50.8 x 50.8 x 50.8 cm, are arranged in space as Minimalist sculptures, columns or similarly simple configurations, often presented individually or in groups to form surfaces which have recently become as large as cinema-sized screens. Inside the simple wooden or plastic boxes, whose glass fronts are covered with a special film to diffuse the light, there is a RGB light system consisting of one red, one green, and one blue fluorescent tube and,

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like a monitor, it is capable of generating 16 million colors. Bulloch developed a DMX modular system with Holger Frieze so that the boxes can be linked to each other and programmed with any desired visual information. As we know, a pixel is the smallest unit of representation on a monitor. The procedure of enlarging single pixels until they are half the size of a square meter corresponds to extreme reduction in the resolution of the source image. The pixel exhibition does not aim to enlarge details of a given picture but rather to reduce the visual information. What is left of the moving picture after this operation is only a surface grid on which colors pulsate in the equally reduced rhythm of one picture per second.

Abstraction of this kind can only be generated under digital conditions. Bulloch's modification of Antonioni's *Blow Up* (BLOW UP TV, 2000) makes man-



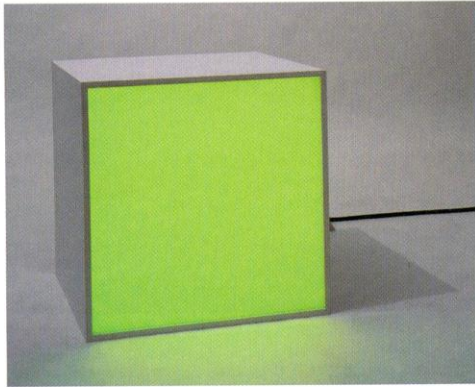
ANGELA BULLOCH, *MACRO WORLD: ONE HOUR³ AND CANNED*, 2002, four exhibition views /
vier Ausstellungsansichten, Galerie Schipper & Krome, Berlin. (PHOTOS: HOWARD SHERONAS)

Digital Reduction

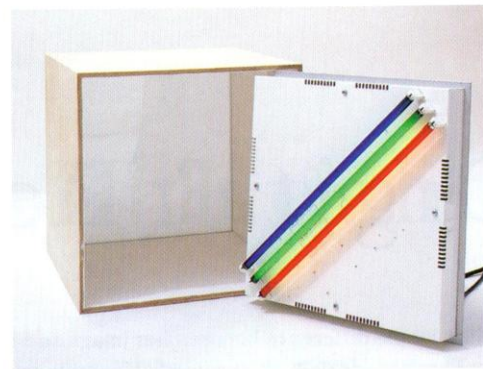
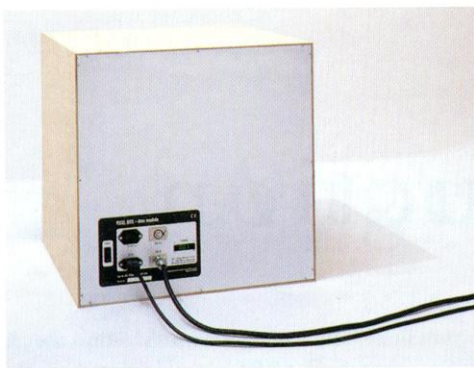
ifest the media difference between her image and the film. The film deals with the medial conditions of photography and thus of the film as well, specifically the indexical relationship of photography to reality, the *punctum* of the detail, and the impenetrable mystery of the traces that light deposits on celluloid. Bulloch's work, on the other hand, reflects on how digital conditions affect film and photography. The surface of the pixel contains no information, there is no indexical relationship to reality, and the visual information is subject to near infinite manipulation.¹⁾ After Bulloch's digital intervention, all that remains of Antonioni's photographer, who has already reached the limits of his medium with his fantasies of omnipotence, is an abstract grid of colors. The photographer now merely delivers material for programs that make abstractions of him with his passion for reality, and of his medium with its mysteries.

But the installation also abstracts from the film. The cinematic flow of 24 pictures per second has been interrupted in Bulloch's pixel installations: although hints of motion can be perceived in a modus of one picture per second, they keep receding into pure patterns of color even, and especially, when the source images are as well known as *Blow Up* and *The Matrix* (WORM IN; BULLET DODGE; BULLET STOP, all 2001); the last eight minutes of Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, in which Daria Halprin imagines the modernist luxury mansion exploding (Z-POINT, 2001); Kubrick's *2001*; or pictures of the landscape also made famous by Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, the Artist's Palette in Death Valley, whose name Bulloch appears to take at face value in her latest installation, *HORIZONTAL TECHNICOLLOUR* (2002). In the pixel box installations the filmed material is consigned to a condition of latency, it retires behind the mini-

Angela Bulloch



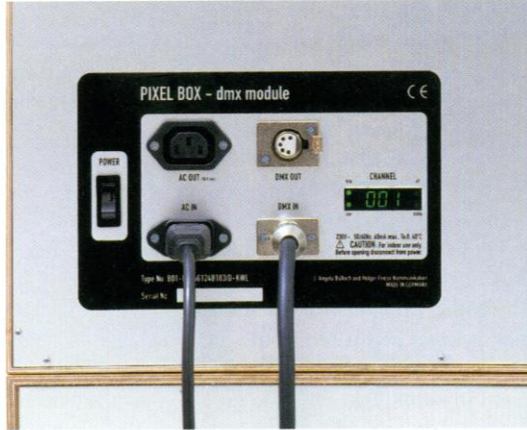
ANGELA BULLOCH, *PIXEL BOX (DMX MODUL)*,
front view, back view, and back view open, showing the
RGB lighting system / Vorderansicht, Rückansicht
und geöffnete Pixelbox mit RGB-Beleuchtungssystem.



mally-staged and slightly opaque sequences of color. Nonetheless, the color events are never entirely severed from their source material: the image is always an abstraction of something.

In some installations, the soundtrack additionally underscores the tension between awareness of the source material and the surface appeal of its digital reduction. The soundtrack also appropriates the original sound, which, like the moving images, is subjected to a reductive operation with the same purpose of filtering the now acoustic information. Bulloch's treatment of Pink Floyd's *Come in number 51, Your time is up* (the soundtrack of the final minutes of *Zabriskie Point*) for her installation, *Z-POINT*,

somehow has a digital sound to it—curiously flat. On the other hand, the soundtrack, digitally marked as a quotation, evokes the famous film sequence. Similarly, the pixelated surface proves to be of great semantic density; it is interwoven with our memories of the film and their affectively saturated semantic horizons. But like the literalness of a Minimalist cube, any attempt to make these memories adhere to the abstract surfaces of color glides off their slickness. Thus, the sound is not as organically integrated into the grid of colored pixels as the original soundtrack is in the film. No longer linked to the purpose of enhancing the illusion of a filmic reality, the digitally processed variation acquires a dynamic of its own. It



ANGELA BULLOCH, *PIXEL BOX (DMX MODUL)*,
back view detail / Rückansicht, Detail.

oscillates between the precise meaning of sound or the semantic coding of a track, on one hand, and complete elimination of meaning until only an atmosphere remains, on the other. In the congenial soundtrack which David Grubbs composed for Bulloch's installation *HORIZONTAL TECHNIQUE*, he generated precisely this tension between atmosphere and meaning by aesthetically destabilizing soundscapes from Kubrick's *2001* and Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*. On the visual level this ambient effect—the oscillation between the precise meaning of an ordinary sound and its reduction to pure atmosphere—is embodied by the tension between the source material, which is still perceptible despite extreme abstraction

Angela Bulloch

due to the explicitly coded original, and its reduction to a pure color event.

In *HORIZONTAL TECHNIQUE* this tension is also reflected in the tension between abstraction and figuration, plane and spatial illusion. As soon as one reads the pixel wall as abstract painting, as a succession of static surfaces of color which change in a strict rhythm of one picture per second, their flatness, to use Clement Greenberg's famous word,²⁾ comes to the fore: a host of images whose event of being colored is indicative of nothing but their two-dimensionality. But if we begin to see the pixel wall as a cinema screen, space begins to figure in the planes of color: horizons become visible, the arrangement of lighter and darker areas of color suggests depth. More and more, the spaces or landscapes become particular spaces or landscapes: Kubrick's masterly treatment of spaces in the combination of three shades of red; Antonioni's allegorical landscapes in an arrangement of light blue, green, and brown. The succession of color combinations no longer seems to be arbitrary; it now possesses potentially narrative strands. But such strands, such potentially matching stories cannot be objectified: they keep dissolving in the perception of individual fields of color. Nonetheless, devotion to the pure color event is now contaminated with meaning: it is invested, among other things, with memories of a very specific psychedelic sensibility of the sixties, explicit in the films of Kubrick and Antonioni but also a latent influence—as if behind its back—on the curiously psychoactive effect of Minimalism.³⁾

The abiding tension between Minimalist surface and semantic resonance, which generally characterizes Bulloch's pixel works, is even more accentuated in the digital reduction of material aired on the news channel BBC World (*MACRO WORLD: ONE HOUR³ AND CANNED*, 2002): every second shows a different, incredibly attractive color combination—the fashion world would be delighted. And, of course, the installation with its cool, opaque hipness also evokes the smart takeover of Minimalism in Prada Shops around the world. But the heightened decorative quality of Minimalist aesthetics in Bulloch's installations potentially also contains the entire weight of the world and the problems of global mediaization, although these

Angela Bulloch

concerns are not objectively explicit in the installation. It is this tension—and its obstruction of both a purely formalist-consumerist as well as a purely content-oriented reading—which constitutes the genuinely aesthetic quality of Bulloch's works and which is essentially what makes them art.

The fact that this quality only emerges in relation to the viewer, that art cannot be without the performative perspective of recipients who embody the specific aesthetic tension between form and content, once again refers to Minimalism. However, Minimalism's historical achievement of having brought to the fore the role of the viewer as a constituent of the being of art in the medium of art is not to be equated with the much-vaunted involvement of the viewer, especially when this involvement is misunderstood as interactivity.⁴⁾ Bulloch's works of the mid-nineties already gave an ironic twist to this misunderstanding, which crops up especially in connection with the artistic processing of the so-called new media.⁵⁾ The aesthetic potential of a work is not exhausted by pacing off installation arrangements or initiating technical processes. A work unfolds its full potential only through the play of meanings that it triggers in the mind of the viewer. Consequently, purely technical descriptions, even of Bulloch's pixel box works, end in an aesthetic blind alley: how a work is made technically does not offer insight into what the work is.

An intentionally casual backstage area complements Bulloch's recent installations, which addresses the technology inside the Minimalist pixel boxes. The back of each of the boxes has been designed by Bulloch in the style of the hi-fi technology of the seventies. Bulloch thus not only points out the industrially and quasi-industrially produced parts of her work in responding to Minimalism; she also updates the question of the mysterious interior of Minimalist objects, which was firmly discounted by the positivist ideology (What-you-see-is-what-you-get) of some of

its producers. In attempting to answer this question, Bulloch deliberately avoids resorting to a now technically formulated positivism. The staged reference to the technology inside the box is itself potentially aesthetic material, a stimulus for increased production of meaning. Bulloch knows full well that the secret of the Minimalist box has never been aired simply by unscrewing it to see what's inside. Instead, the secret lies in the open-ended act of producing meanings in the process of aesthetic experience through which the information on the inner life of the box may at times be turned inside out as the decisive context of the work—only to retreat inside again as irrelevant information. There is lettering on the back of the pixel boxes, which might be read as an ironic commentary on the fact that, even under the conditions of digital technology, this logic—a specifically aesthetic logic—cannot be canceled out. The lettering provides, among other things, technical information on the input and output terminals for the corresponding cables: AC OUT/AC IN; DMX OUT/DMX IN.

(Translation: Carin Rathbec)

1) Cf. Jennifer Allen, "Angela Bulloch" in *Artforum*, February 2001, p. 161.

2) Cf. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1960), *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, vol. 4 of *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago, 1993), pp. 85–93.

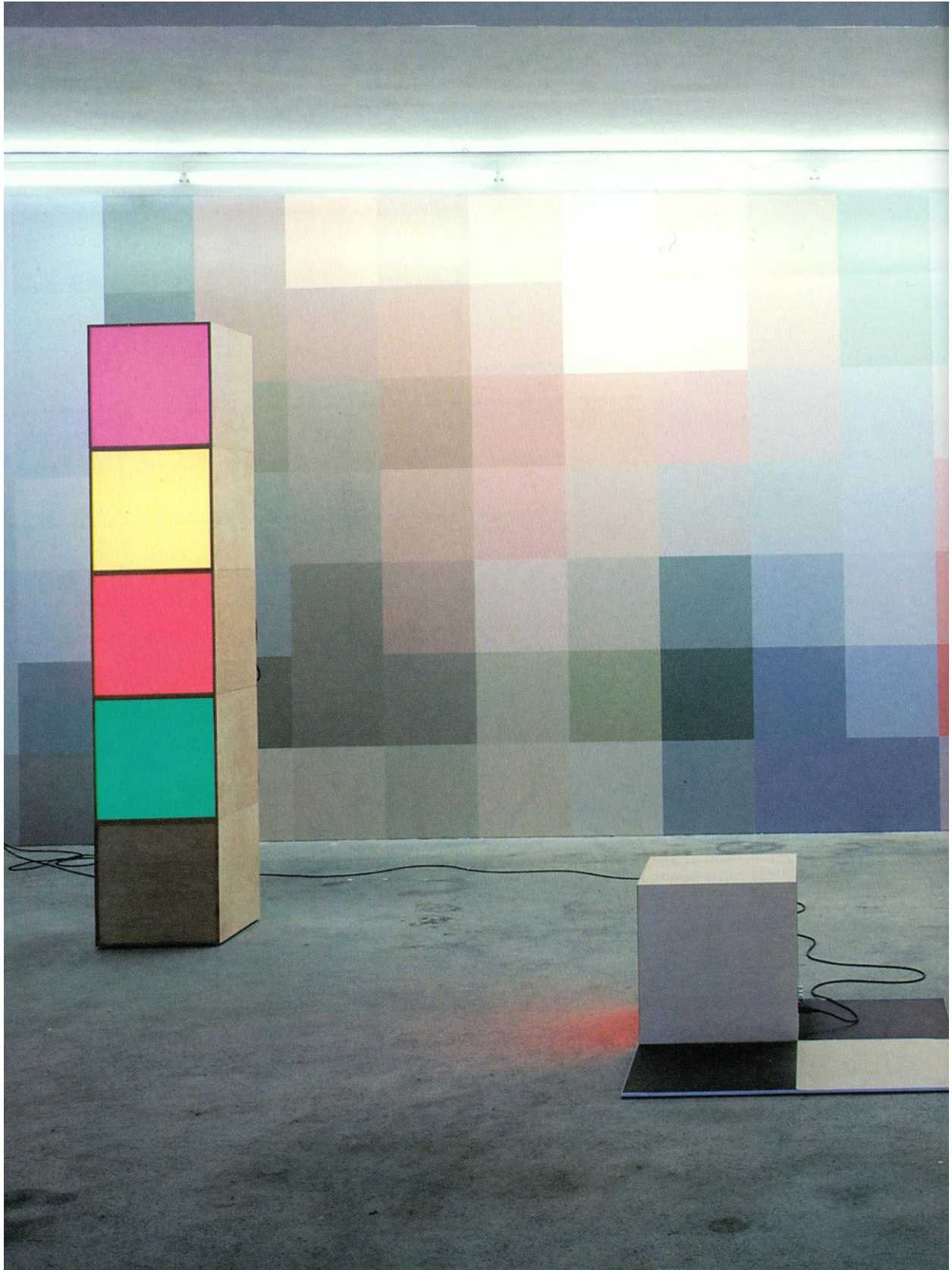
3) On the link between minimalism and psychedelics, see Diedrich Diederichsen, "Psychedelic Gifts: Minimalism and Pop" in *Timewave Zero/A Psychedelic Reader*, ed. by Lionel Bovier and Mai-Thu Perret (Frankfurt/Main, Geneva, Graz: JRP Editions/Revolver/Grazer Kunstverein, 2001), pp. 33–52.

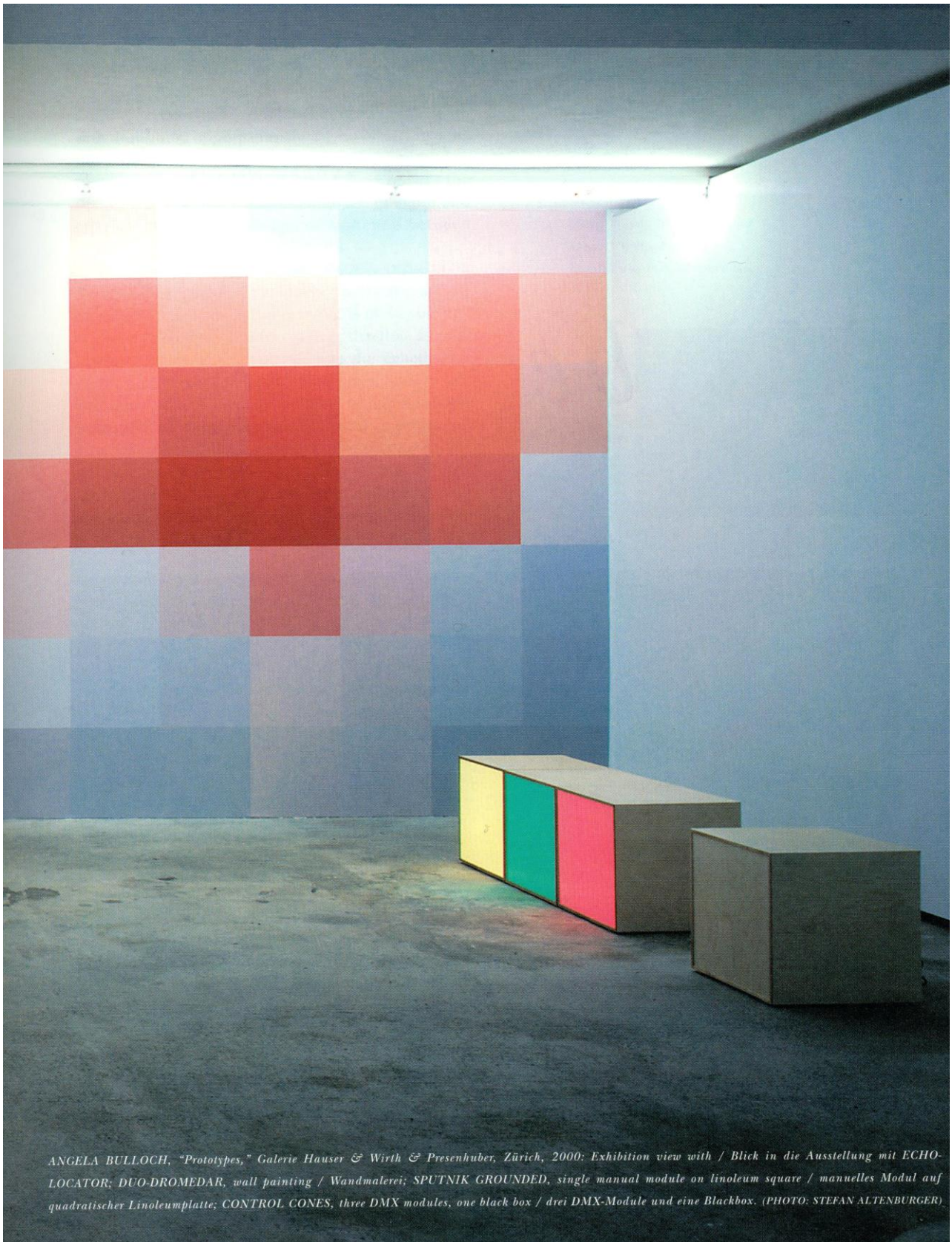
4) Cf. also Juliane Rebentisch, "Mythos 'Betrachtereinbeziehung'" in *Texte zur Kunst* (40), December 2000, pp. 126–130.

5) As in the drawing device BETAVILLE (1996), in which the interaction between device and viewer is reduced to the viewer's taking a seat and thereby causing the device to draw horizontal instead of vertical lines. Cf., for example, Angela Bulloch, "Szenen aus Betaville. Ein Gespräch von Hans Rudolf Reust" in *Kunstforum International* (135), October 1996, pp. 331–337, esp. p. 337.



ANGELA BULLOCH, *Z POINT*, 2001, installation view, Kunsthhaus Glarus.
(PHOTO: PETER HUNKELER)





ANGELA BULLOCH, "Prototypes," Galerie Hauser & Wirth & Presenhuber, Zürich, 2000: Exhibition view with / Blick in die Ausstellung mit ECHO-LOCATOR; DUO-DROMEDAR, wall painting / Wandmalerei; SPUTNIK GROUNDED, single manual module on linoleum square / manuelles Modul auf quadratischer Linoleumplatte; CONTROL CONES, three DMX modules, one black box / drei DMX-Module und eine Blackbox. (PHOTO: STEFAN ALTENBURGER)

Angela Bulloch

ANDREW WILSON

Maybe

Two people each sit down on stools facing one another over a low table. The table is a video game from the past—*Space Invaders*—and sitting on the stools has activated the game. The object of the game is to destroy the space invaders before they destroy you. The objective of Angela Bulloch's *SPACE INVADERS WITH LASER BASE SWITCH STOOLS* (1996) is rather different. The work proposes, in microcosm, a framework for the organization of behavior. The work does not control anything or anybody if one chooses not to interact with it. The choice may or may not be taken to engage with the structure the work proposes or, alternatively, you can choose to stop the structure operating at any time by getting up off the stool. But when you get up, the structure still remains as a potentiality, a way of working through the world.

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At the heart of Bulloch's work is a paradox. The structures she forms within her work are fixed; triggers are set off in a predetermined fashion in reaction to simple behavior or in a fixed mechanical sequence. Regulated systems are applied to the ordering of elements; lights go on and off, colors are arranged according to an internal logic, rules are laid down. Despite this rigidity, the work gains its power through its relation to the open-ended nature of individual behavior, and the work's success can be located in its ability to engender a negotiation between the viewer and the structures of the work. This negotiation is founded in the coding and rereading of those signs which have been displaced in her work. The Belisha Beacon is an instantly recognizable aspect of British street furniture. It alerts pedestrians to a zebra crossing—the point at which pedestrians have a right of way to cross a street—whilst at the same time alerting motorists to stop if somebody wants to cross the zebra crossing. This is a rule. From 1988, Bulloch displaced the beacons' light globes, which are no longer the standard globes of zebra crossings, directing onto the walls of galleries a variety of colors, configurations and phasing of illumination. The coding goes all awry as these objects have

Angela Bulloch

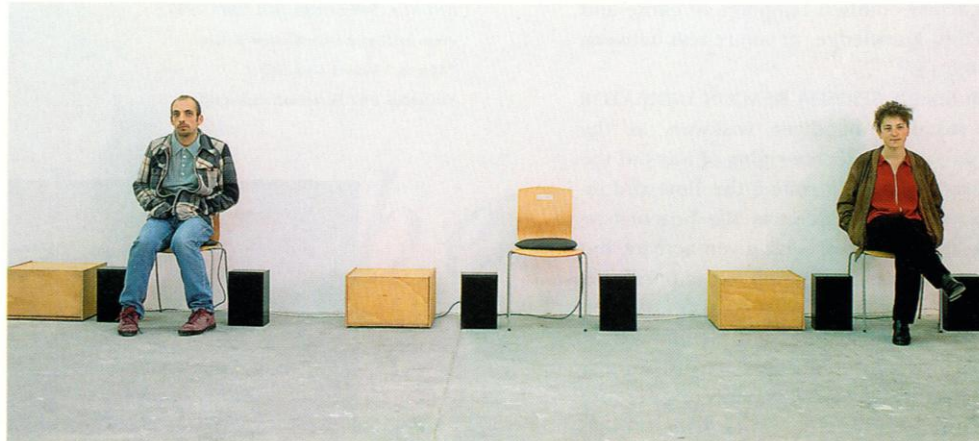
nothing to do with road safety and everything to do with durational oppositions (being on or off) in a defined space. The viewer has to work out and understand this shift as Bulloch's beacons become "like the first words in a new codified language of cause and effect, action and knowledge, or awareness between people and objects."¹⁾

In 1996, Bulloch's BELISHA BEACON INDICATOR SYSTEM was installed in three walkways at the Leipziger Messe not to indicate rights of way but the opposite, being switched to reflect the flow and direction of pedestrians. In this way the beacons remain as a marker for a particular given activity, but no longer alert different road-users to the possibility or need of crossing the road. Instead they reveal certain characteristics of an activity to those outside the walkways whilst also reinforcing that activity to those moving through the walkways. This shift of reference was earlier marked by her video work SOLARIS 1993

ANGELA BULLOCH, *SOLARIS* 1993,
video still and installation detail,
"Aperto," Venice Biennale /
Videostill und Installationsdetail.



Angela Bulloch



ANGELA BULLOCH, *YES SOUND CHAIR PIECE*, 1991; *MAYBE SOUND CHAIR PIECE*, 1991;
NO SOUND CHAIR PIECE, 1991. Installation, "Vehicles," Le Consortium, Dijon, 1997.

(1993). The original film by Andrei Tarkovski was shortened to 15 minutes to encapsulate the relationship between the scientist Kelvin and the repeated death and reanimation of his wife Hari. The film's image-frame was cropped and its soundtrack dubbed into English, but entirely out of sync with the characters' lip movements. The video monitor is installed opposite two pairs of beacons which are illuminated in a sequence that is out of phase with each other. This light is reflected in the monitor's screen, at times even obliterating it. The beacons here provide a counterpoint to the relationship enacted in the film as well as a problematized narrative that is enacted as much in the space of the viewer as in the space of the screen.

Bulloch has suggested that her works "indicate the limits of choice and the possible consequences of one's actions. The work outlines the fact that one's individual choices are more or less meaningless, because the system or structure has already defined the parameters of choice. The work seeks to highlight

behavior. It focuses on ... choice, perception and control. The viewer is already framed within the work, whether one likes it or not."²⁾ In 1991, for the exhibition "Broken English" at London's Serpentine Gallery, Bulloch installed three works which give a direct sense of the degrees to which the viewer is framed by her work. *YES CHAIR SOUND PIECE* (1991), *NO CHAIR SOUND PIECE* (1991), and *MAYBE CHAIR SOUND PIECE* (1991) each consist of a chair on which is placed a cushion pad. Sitting on the cushion activates the recorded voice of the artist, and using various different expressions one chair says "yes," one says "no," and one says "maybe." The work contains both choice and declaration—the choice is made by the viewer as an act of de-coding, the declaration could be made by the viewer who has chosen to sit in a particular chair, or is being made at the viewer. Furthermore, the repeated answers are isolated and follow no question, so that the viewers have to ask themselves what is being referred to here. There is also the framing in relation to the exhibi-

tion itself.³⁾ The three works were placed opposite Damien Hirst's ISOLATED ELEMENTS SWIMMING IN THE SAME DIRECTION FOR THE PURPOSE OF UNDERSTANDING (LEFT) (1991), and the choices and declarations that are a part of Bulloch's three works also bounce off and become reactions to the very different sculptural systems underpinning Hirst's.

Of these three works, it is the MAYBE CHAIR SOUND PIECE that reveals most about Bulloch's practice. The two other declarations, "yes" and "no," are direct answers, yet if there is a degree of ambivalence written into "maybe" it paradoxically gives more control to the viewer who, instead of being given a positive or a negative statement, receives in "maybe" an opening up of the structure to other possibilities. Strangely,

you cannot be passive in the face of "maybe," and yet "yes" and "no" also demand their own sorts of negotiation—they are not necessarily final answers. It is this formation of a structure of control alongside the stimulation of a behavioral taking of control that also places Bulloch's ongoing *Rules Series*⁴⁾ at the heart of her oeuvre. Bulloch's concern with the structuring of behavior in terms of a given authority or authorizing voice underpins the extent to which, one way or another, she is ultimately concerned with constructing a social sculpture which puts such authority in jeopardy and is defined through the different forms of negotiation of the structures she sets up and the particular displacement and recontextualization of language and signs used within each work.

Angela Bulloch



*Left / Links: British zebra crossing with Belisha beacons / Englischer Zebrastreifen mit Belisha Beacons.
Below / Unten: ANGELA BULLOCH,
BELISHA BEACON INDICATOR SYSTEM, 1996,
installation view / Installation an der Leipziger Messe.
(PHOTO: M. RÜCKER, LEIPZIGER MESSE GMBH)*

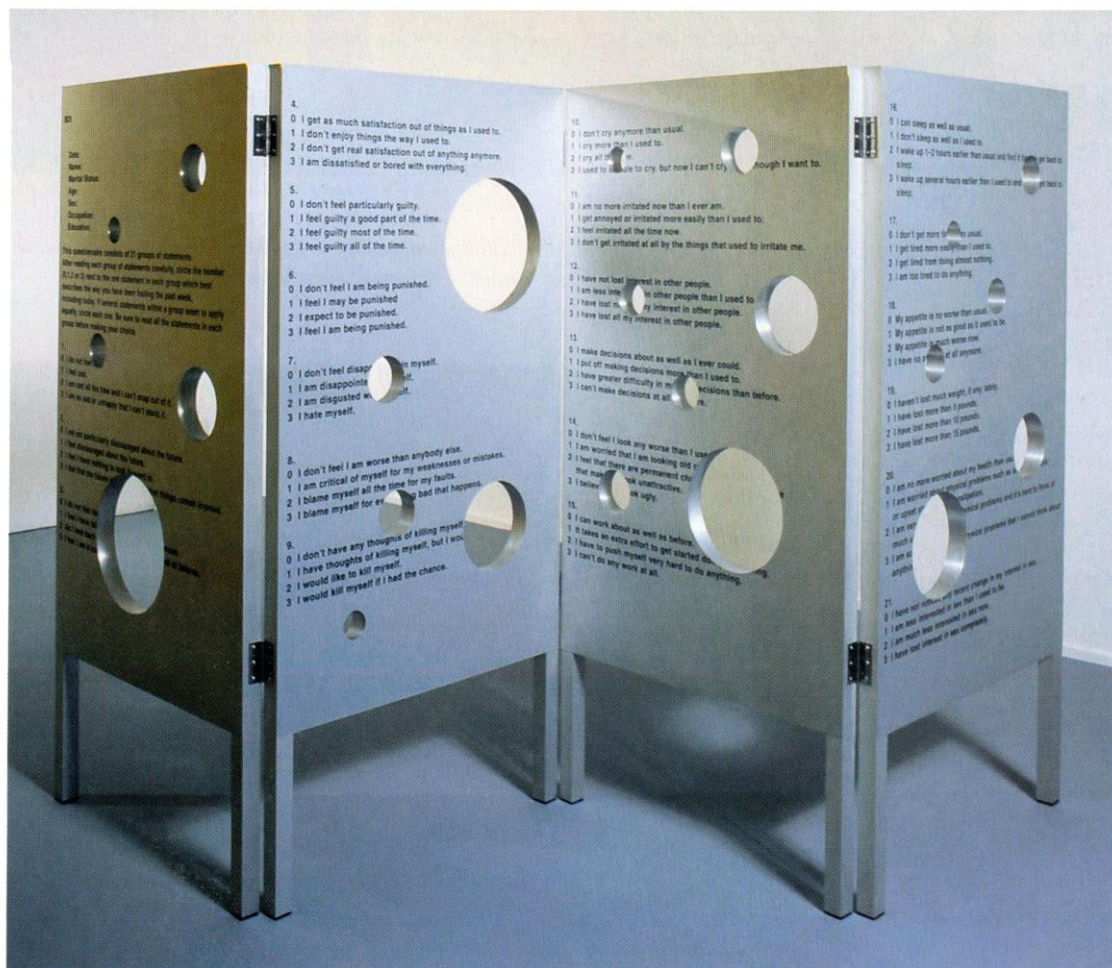


Angela Bulloch

"The rules are lists of rules that pertain to particular places, practices or principles."⁵ By having been shifted away from their specific regulatory function, the different listings chosen for the *Rules Series* adopt a critical position in relation to their original objective and to the means by which individual behavior may be manipulated into group behavior. However, despite their ostensible purpose to describe limits for behavior—what can and cannot be done—all rules are open to interpretation and can be followed to the

letter, ignored or subverted. Rules are, after all, made to be broken; "maybe" is as much a valid reaction to any rule as "yes" or "no." We have that choice. Concerning the series, Bulloch has stated that "Whether you physically participate or not, you still negotiate the idea of doing it by reading and qualifying the information—you imagine doing it anyway, even if you have no intention of actually doing it ... it's a negotiation of information and terms."⁶ In terms of the negotiation and re-coding of information that Bulloch

ANGELA BULLOCH, *RIDDLED SCREEN*, 2000, installation view / Ausstellung «ein/räumen», Kunsthalle Hamburg.



pursues throughout her work, the *Rules Series* indicates the extent to which behavior is subject to a regulation that spreads through all aspects of life—whether you are a stripper at the Baby Doll Saloon, a Member of the British Parliament, someone taking Prozac or in need of a haircut—but through isolation and displacement the series also allows us to question the often arbitrary and restrictive nature of such regulation.

The presentation of individual rules within the *Rules Series* has “no fixed form”⁷⁾ and can be anything from photocopied sheets of paper to wall paintings or even parts of fabricated objects, and as such the definition of the rules shifts in relation to the context within which they may be exhibited. ZEBRA CROSSING WALL PAINTING (2001) consists of the black and white stripes of the British zebra crossing painted vertically on the wall, onto which were pasted the regulations covering the installation of such road crossings as well as the manner of their function. At the recent exhibition “ein/räumen” at the Hamburger Kunsthalle a number of rules were screen-printed onto aluminum stocks and screens whose form used the series of stocks by Cady Noland as a departure point. The representation of restraint and punishment within the form of Noland’s objects complemented Bulloch’s representation of how behavior is policed.

Bulloch’s recent pixel works continue this investigation into the functioning, structuring and coding of social behavior and images. Taking segments of films—such as Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Zabriskie Point* or Stanley Kubrick’s *2001, A Space Odyssey*—or, in a recent exhibition in Berlin, elements of the BBC World hourly TV broadcasts, Bulloch creates an enlarged pixelation of these found images alongside treated soundtracks. Such a shift in scale, isolation and displacement again forces the viewer into an active decoding of these new images as the formation of a critical language (indeed, these can be understood as a clear development from her illuminated globe works). The changing color here is not aesthetically pre-ordained or decorative, but is purely functional—each pixel being the building block of the changing image. It is also entirely apt that Bulloch has, with her two series *Chain A* and *Chain B* (2002),

created 32 chains of pixel boxes using the two color permutations found in André Cadere’s *Round Bars of Wood*. For Cadere the color of his bars was not decorative but functional. Each color identifies the different segments within each permutational sequence, the colors in the sequence providing a key to deciphering the chain. Furthermore, in working out the code that structures the work, the error that Cadere inserted into each work is also replicated by Bulloch, in terms of a “maybe” that opens up the system whilst also unsettling its decoding.⁸⁾

Writing about Bulloch’s recent exhibition, “Macro World: One Hour³ and Canned,” the artist and critic John Miller perceptively highlights how the “idea of instrumentalism” can be tracked through Bulloch’s oeuvre to the recent pixel works and that “by isolating and enlarging a small sampling of TV pixels, Bulloch confronts viewers with the seemingly senseless underpinnings of mass communications.”⁹⁾ Although one might not immediately grasp her immediate sources in these works, the critical language that Miller identifies being constructed, as well as its socialized function, relies not just on “yes” or “no” for its foundation, but on “maybe” by virtue of its open-ended stance towards those fixed systems of authoritarian language that make up our world.

1) David Bussel, “Who Controls What? Interview with Angela Bulloch” in *Art from the UK*, (Munich: Sammlung Goetz, 1997), p. 31.

2) Ibid.

3) The exhibition consisted of work by Bulloch’s contemporaries and also included Ian Davenport, Anya Gallaccio, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Michael Landy, Sarah Staton, and Rachel Whiteread.

4) A selection of these can be found in Angela Bulloch, *Rule Book*, (London: Bookworks, 2000).

5) Angela Bulloch, “Rules Series” (1993), *ibid.*, p. 11.

6) David Bussel, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

7) Angela Bulloch, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

8) The “chains” are divided between 20 pieces using Cadere’s color Permutation A, and 12 that use Permutation B. Similar permutational systems (though not Cadere’s) were earlier used by Bulloch in her MASTERMIND BEAD FORMATIONS (1998), in which tin beads, painted in 9 different colors were strung together in 23 cm. lengths. The colors are the same as those used for the counters in the seventies game in which players had to understand and break the codes made by their opponents.

9) John Miller, “United Colors of BBC, Angela Bulloch in der Galerie Schipper & Krome, Berlin,” *Texte zur Kunst*, September 2002, pp. 153-55.

Angela Bulloch

MARTIN PRINZHORN

The SIMULATION of SIMULATION (and vice versa)

In the history of 20th-century art, numerous artistic strategies have probed the local and therefore medial embeddedness of artworks by shifting, redefining, eliminating, and subverting the borders between them and their surrounding contexts. The possible loci of a work are basically extendible ad infinitum, for even then the borders are only indirectly defined by the artistic objects themselves. What is meant here is the much-debated psychological space, which is generally initiated and thus created through formal and conceptual artistic interventions, but which, logically, cannot itself be measured by the physical properties of the intervention since it is determined primarily by the level of intent, where it seeks to define an entirely different kind of autonomy. To a certain extent, art echoes a development previously already targeted by utopian architectural fantasies of an affirmative modernism but from another point of view, as a physical project in which technological progress would enable human beings to endlessly stretch and expand their material environment and ultimately themselves.¹⁾ Thus, contrary to contemporary custom, environment is not to be equated with nature, the more so, since it was not created until the beginning of modernism anyway.²⁾ Instead it ties in with the highly developed architectural and technical machinery devised to extend the human body physically and perceptually in order, ultimately, to become one with it. In contrast to such fantasies of technological totality, in which an exterior can, in effect, no longer be defined since the void begins beyond its borders, minimalist sculpture and installation art represent procedures that actually implement

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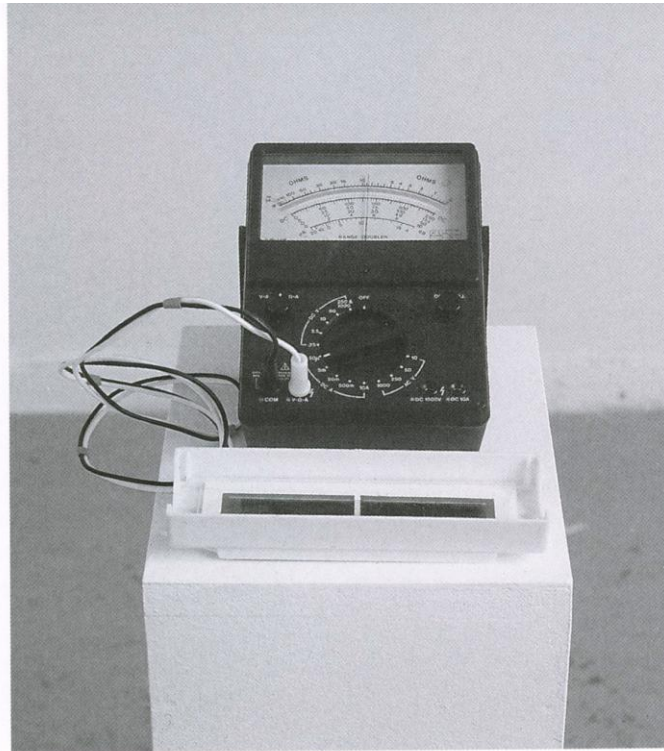


ANGELA BULLOCH, *SUPERSTRUCTURE WITH SATELLITES*, 1997,
installation view, "The Turner Prize," Tate Gallery, London. (PHOTO: MARCUS LEITH)

the steady expansion of the space of art as fantasy. Both are expansions and strategies of de-limitation, but they are also complementary inasmuch as they start on the level of the other.³⁾ Moreover, both make specific and specifically distinct reference to perception: while the artistic approach makes implicit use of perception, for it is the latter that makes it possible to invest the work of art with a larger context on a psychological stage, the technological, architectural utopia is expanded and modified and finally united with the newly generated environment through physical intervention. In one case, a new form of art emerges through intervention in perceptual givens; in the other, a new form of perception emerges from the modified environment. In one case, the point of departure is a profoundly skeptical stance regarding the fundamental potential of further artistic development; in the other, an old, affirmative belief in progress is taken to extremes. Within the fine arts the two approaches are most likely to merge in the various modes of medial art although, in contrast to architecture, the development of new medial possibilities often faces the problem of not being generated by the internal logic of art but instead seamlessly imports and reprocesses already existing developments. Above all, this dodges the problem of having to opt for either a skeptical or an affirmative attitude. A potential dynamic between the two approaches can only be generated if the causal relations between the culturally defined perception of form and the technically possible form of perception are basically analyzed as open territories of action.

Angela Bulloch's work is based on activating the dynamics of this relationship between technical possibility and cultural space of perception. The statics of the object or of a specific model of production is consistently undermined because the presentation always takes the shape of

ANGELA BULLOCH, SOLAR POWERED LIGHT METER, 1990,
installation view, APAC, Nevers. (PHOTO: LOTHAR SCHNEF)



a mix, contains shifts in size and speed, and can therefore never be reduced to one single interpretation. Bulloch's works often purport to have a system of some kind or even a set of rules but they never produce the anticipated grammar and, in fact, generate unexpectedly open-ended situations. The lamps in a gallery turn on and off at different intervals or balloon-like bodies of light gradually modify the quality of their illumination and turn off when the door opens. The colors appear to be subject to a system but one that remains elusive, with a symbolism that cannot be pinned down—like machines that only function according to internal self-referential rules and represent a self-contained environment by virtue of which they generate an impression of an uncanny other. Their shape recalls minimalist sculpture or an installation but they are still autonomous organisms incapable of adapting to any context. Or take the artist's electricity gauge which is connected to solar cells and measures the light in the gallery. Perfectly ordinary and obvious at first sight, it actually contains the entire complexity of Bulloch's work: a closed system and yet one that is modified by its context. However, this context does leave one specific question unanswered: is the work of art determined only by light as a physical phenomenon or does our perception of it come into play after all? The object acts as if it were autonomous but at the same time it refers to perception and is only constituted in the actual process of use. This in turn raises the issue of interactivity: in these works the question as to the exact point at which use actually constitutes the object turns into an endless loop of its own. It is the fundamental concern of semiotics to examine how symbols are embedded, what determines convention, and what perception. Angela Bulloch interrogates the spaces in between; her art never addresses the rules themselves but always the complex concatenation of various sets of rules. Her work *Rules Series* investigates context-specific rules vs. universal rules. At the same time the rules are the art itself and the instructions for making it. The territory thus charted explores questions of original and copy or of object and concept, or rather the description of the object. In the tradition

Angela Bulloch

of conceptual art, such questions were resolved only in terms of representation and its various modes and often did not go beyond a commentary on the possibility of different medial representations. In contrast, Bulloch is concerned specifically with the process of making and perceiving art. The rules are not only art and instructions for its specific production; they are ultimately contradictory in their concrete placement and thus become metalinguistic commentaries on art. No specific agenda but rather the exploration of agendas per se. To use Wittgenstein's metaphor, when you follow rules and their logic, you have to throw away the ladder after you've climbed it. They are not rules that give pointers or mean something within art; they only say something about art.

Bulloch's pixel works make this strategy even more complex by involving additional levels. The issue of perception as illusion has been constitutive for the whole of modernism. The fact that the gaze actually rests on nothing but the coupling of various visual and other cognitive aspects, whose totality is inevitably illusion and a generated harmony, has always, at least implicitly, been a subject matter of art. This also explains why art is so closely linked to its technical medium; because it is there that explicit use is made of that fact. Art has always referred to these medial techniques and exposed their internal structures by means of enlargement or deceleration. The pixel as the smallest semantically relevant unit in the digital visual world gives practically no indication anymore of its illusionary properties in Bulloch's work: while digital cameras aim to squeeze as many pixels as possible onto a surface in order to perfect the illusion, in Bulloch's work they are blown up to a size that produces the impression of monochrome painting. The illusion is utterly perverted since the function of an almost perfect perception machine is suddenly turned into an arena for all kinds of interpretations and assignments of meaning. The filmed footage is additionally undermined by changes in individual fields of color, which further obstructs the reconstruction of a dynamic sequence of pictures. Yet even so, the artist avoids spiraling into a completely arbitrary, semantically unclaimed space. The material, scenes from a film by Antonioni or footage of television newscasts, is carefully and deliberately selected, with explicit reference made to it in the titles and descriptions of the works as well as the accompanying music. Abstraction to the point of non-representation is thus treated as illusion in these works, quite like a perfectly readable picture made of thousands of no longer distinguishable dots of color. Here, the illusion of an open psychological space and the illusion of technically generated machinery that utterly determines perception are inseparably linked—and with no avenue of retreat. The entire installation is a repeat of this rupture: the arrangement of the room, the mirror, and the music are more reminiscent of a party, an impression, which in turn contradicts the transparent presentation of technique and the conception of the gallery space. The idea of a technically determined totality and the generation of unfixed subjectivity are firmly interwoven; the one cannot be read without the other. A field emerges on which it is no longer clear what is generating what; there are processes of representation but their direction cannot be fixed.

(Translation: Carin Rathbec)

1) See R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).

2) Such definition was also made possible at the beginning of technical developments such as flying or optical devices and has therefore always had a medial connection.

3) There are actual examples of architecture, whose logic follows these utopias but only inasmuch as the concept of expansion is symbolized by organic forms.