

THRESHOLD

The Power Plant, Toronto, April 3 - June 14

In both perception and architecture, a threshold marks a point of transition, of passage toward or away from the perceptible, into or out of a place. Recognizing within the built environment the capacity of quotidian means to alter perception fundamentally, the nine installations in "Threshold" explore conditions of liminality, states of becoming other.

Curator Louise Dompierre locates the cultural context of this international show in a resurgence of "the concept of space as a speculative realm," as witnessed in popular thought about cyberspace, for example. Indeed, dealing with generic space rather than site, these installations might be understood

collectively as attempts to imagine the physical dimensions of a non-place of random-access potentiality — space formed by conjecture.

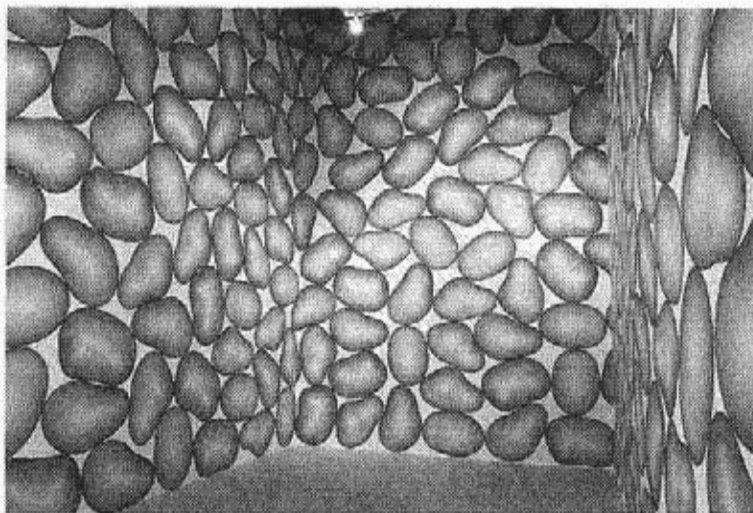
The exhibition proposes architectures of revelation and introspection that transcend existing material facts, divulging another recurrent motif: a certain grappling with "alternatives to an entirely secular state of being." It is orchestrated as a succession of distinct spatio-temporal experiences — a directive structure echoed in many of the individual installations, which, as they dissolve architectural particularities in favour of abstract space, tend to both reveal and partake of its potential for control. Classically sublime, this "alternat-

ing current" of contemplation and persuasion propels these encounters beyond the familiar.

Opening physical space onto mental and emotional space, each of the installations displaces architectural bounds through sensual or perceptual instability. Cognitively, some suggest openings onto other spheres: realms of the imagination in Peter Kogler, models of disembodied communion in Mischa Kuball, alternative states of consciousness in Ann Lislegaard, or an uncertain retrieval of a lost past in Ian Carr-Harris. Others amplify the emotional potential of architecture as social structure, whether by reimagining familiar cultural edifices, as in Masato Nakamura or Judith Schwarz, or by drawing out the hidden longings of architectural features, as in Lyla Rye, Teresa Fernández and Claude Lévêque.

The apparent fog of Fernández' *Untitled (Smoke)* (1998) sets the dual tone of meditation and unease. The walls of a corridor are spray-painted to meld the grey of its concrete floor gradually into the white of its ceiling, visually dissolving most architectonic articulation, except its insistent directionality. The side walls are punctuated by a series of vertical mirrors clouded by taut scrims, reiterating the indistinct haziness of the surround. As the mirrors reproduce each other in oblique and infinite regress, they open the axial space onto other dimensions. Passing through, one's experience alternates between discrete forms of estrangement: viewing oneself in the mirrors as if at a distance and, when poised between mirrors, feeling invisible, as if having eluded representation within this obscurely overexposed space.

This enveloping atmosphere gives onto the calm brilliance of Ian Carr-Harris' *231 Queens Quay West* (1998), the one installation that draws on the historical specifics of the former industrial building. A blinding grid of light panes creeps across the space, quietly replicating the voyage of the late-afternoon sun as it might once have shone through the long-covered-over western windows – an imagined excavation carrying the force of epiphany. The compelling effect is produced by two powerful projection mechanisms on a continuous twenty-mi-



PETER KOGLER, POWER PLANT, 1998, INSTALLATION VIEW;
PHOTO. COURTESY THE POWER PLANT.

nute cycle, installed approximately in place of the original windows, relentlessly collapsing a vision of the past into a now-fragmented interior.

A framework of densely-aligned aluminum construction studs forms Lyla Rye's *Untitled Limbo* (1998). The skeletal walls of this irregular maze proudly display their inherent brutality, creating a silvery zone of interference between other installations. Overturning the traditional labyrinth's promise of a central paradise, its plan is exocentric, more filter than finality.

Bypassing Claude Lévêque's would-be threatening but actually non-functioning swinging chandelier, Masato Nakamura's room, *mm* (1998), encloses the four luminous golden arches of two reconstituted McDonald's signs forming a radiant altar whose ruthless light and low buzz penetrate one's consciousness as they saturate the space. This charged environment is the sensual translation of the icon's capacity to shape experience, and the edifice for its devotional force. The lower portion of the walls are stencilled with a decorative dado of tiny washed-out M's, ghosts of a fugitive domesticity.

The hidden cavern of Peter Kogler's *Power Plant* (1998) teems with silkscreened organic shapes (clones of four computer-generated variants) rendered with astonishing perceived volume against the towering white walls. Nudged into close contact with each other, their implied motion produces a fantastic loss of bearings. This sense of mutable boundlessness is not unlike

the mesmerizing gyration of Kogler's second installation, in the long, reconfigured upper gallery. A simple computer-generated video loop is projected exactly to fill the end wall. Little more than an undulating dark spot, it convincingly suggests a hypnotic penetration into an anonymous tunnel, opening one austere space onto another more pliant, equally compulsive, virtual one.

Judith Schwarz' *Crossover* (1998) quietly expands its space through perceptual play. High on the end wall of a narrow gallery is a spotlight metal rose window of geometric design, its vista blocked by another wall. Approaching along the room's inevitably nave-like axis, we realize that the pattern is doubled on the hidden second wall. As the tracery patterns shift in relation to each other, they animate a kind of abstract symbolic matrix, a transi-

tional space of surprising depth, revolving around and completed in its own perceptual functioning.

Mischa Kuball's galactic symbology of technological excess seems more crudely rhetorical. In deep darkness, the round beams of three slide projectors are each eclipsed by a spinning disco ball, allowing only thin haloes of light to reach the walls intact. The remaining information contained in the beams – the words "space," "speech" and "speed" – are refracted by the balls' mirrored facets into brilliant bits of data impelled into dizzying orbits circling the room.

In a quite different version of otherworldly urging, for *The Garden of Eden/The Need of Danger* (1994) Ann Lislegaard has hung row upon row of black-lit white blinds from ceiling to floor, dividing the existing room into a regular succession of permeable, eerily phosphorescent chambers, in which we quickly lose our sense of depth. Instead, we might attempt to navigate by sound, guided by a disembodied mix of hypnotic Danish and English speech.

What we feel in the directed experience of these environments is a certain frisson of coercion, a thrill of disorienting compulsion that borders on duress. They reveal the wills to self-estrangement harboured by our edifices of belief and comfort. Conflating categories of experience, they confirm that the spaces of the familiar and the other are actually coextensive.

– GERMAINE KOH