

Zittel claims to produce designs that are mass produced, and on the surface that might make us think that her approach is comparable to the Bauhaus strategy of producing prototypes for the mass production of products that serve to supply a mass society with valuable aids to living. But if we look a little closer we find that Zittel is producing art toys for the collector community. What she produces are works of art that cannot be called functional except in the aesthetic sense of expressing individual creativity.

Take, for example, Zittel's *Escape Vehicles* of 1996, also known as EVs. Zittel observes that in her travels across the United States she noticed that most of the trailers in recreational vehicle (RV) parks were permanently parked. Their owners had 'added elaborate landscaping or "skirts" to conceal the mobility of their vehicles' (Zittel 2003). She reports that she was disappointed at first due to a 'romanticised idea that travel trailers were a means to greater freedom' but eventually realised that the owners found freedom 'in the intimacy of the small and completely controllable universes that they constructed within their trailers' (Zittel, 2003).

Focusing on people's idiosyncrasies is quite a revolutionary concept in the context of classical modernist design where the ideal style was an expression of a mathematical-like essence of reason rather than individual peculiarities. Having gained this valuable insight Zittel embarked upon her plan for the A-Z Escape Vehicle. The concept informing this device was 'escape to one's "inner world"' as opposed to travelling to a destination in the external world' (Zittel 2003). The device became a species of personalised immersive installation. Zittel reports that ten identical *Escape Vehicles* were constructed at a Camper Company in Southern California: 'As each trailer was purchased, the new owner then constructed his or her ideal escape fantasy on the inside. Some escape fantasies range from the construction of a floating tank, to a Cinderella carriage crossed with a limousine, to a recreation of a Joseph Cornell environment' (Zittel, 2003).

In her *Escape Vehicles* Zittel produces a design in which function is displaced by fantasy. The closest correlation I can come up with is with a children's tree house or Wendy house. Pruitt-Igoe may have been a massive failure but at least it was part of a larger project to integrate art and design with the realities of peoples' lives in a mass society. What we see in Zittel's design is not an explosion of art into the social reality of architecture and design but instead an implosion of design into the idiosyncrasy and elitism of art for art's sake.

On the plus side, however, one can suggest that Zittel is producing personal art zones designed to intermesh her artistic creativity with that of the individual purchasing the unit. Which is to say her work is certainly participatory, but only at the level of the individuals willing to buy her objects.

Another instance of Zittel's art-design are her *A-Z Living Units*. These are demountable personal spaces that 'could then be set up inside of homes that other people owned'. This is obviously not functional in the modernist sense. The concept is idiosyncratic and its 'function' is defined entirely by play, accordingly, one assumes that her clientele lies exclusively within the art community (*l'art pour l'art*). When you buy a Living Unit you actually buy a work of art that pretends to be functional. Its actual function is to be eccentric and idiosyncratic in a manner that accentuates the buyer's individuality, freedom, and disposable income. This is the Dada-design that has replaced modernist rational design.

Real Design: Atelier Van Lieshout

The European phenomenon that is Atelier Van Lieshout (AVL) offers a more effective solution to interacting creative play with real world problems. AVL was founded in 1995 by Joep van Lieshout but this creative individual backgrounds himself to a significant extent by emphasising the communal



Andrea Zittel, A-Z Living Units, 1994



Atelier van Lieshout, AVL-Ville.' The goal of the free state is to create an autonomous space where everything is possible within a country that is over-regulated to an increasingly oppressive degree. AVL-Ville has its own flag, its own constitution and its own money. It is a harmonious and self-supporting enterprise located for the time being in the Rotterdam harbour area and in the future on a contaminated soil dump near Zestienhoven airfield. The motto of AVL-Ville is: as long as it's art, just about anything's possible. AVL-Ville is therefore not a commune or a construction company but an open air museum bubbling over with enthusiasm, where art is produced on a daily basis: ranging from its own food and energy to its own houses, objects and mobile buildings' (AVL).

aspect of his mode of production. In so doing he removes one of the barriers, alluded to above, that problematises artistic interactions with the everyday. AVL literature informs us that the name Atelier Van Lieshout was chosen to 'emphasise the fact that the works of art do not stem solely from the creative brain of Joep van Lieshout, but are produced by a creative team' (AVL-Ville 2005) The atelier began on the basis of van Lieshout creating simple furniture that sold well. He hired more staff and eventually his venture evolved into a species of commune.

[Atelier Van Lieshout](#) and [AVL](#) infinitely extendable picnic table which is set up in the A. Montgomery Ward Garden, Grant Park, Chicago.

In 2001 Atelier Van Lieshout established AVL-Ville, ambitiously referred to as 'free state' in the port of Rotterdam, although obviously it would be under the jurisdiction of Dutch law. A more measured description might be that of a commune. AVL-Ville publicity describes the project as 'the biggest work of art by Atelier van Lieshout to date. This free state is an agreeable mix of art environment and sanctuary, full of well-known and new works by AVL, with the special attraction that everything is fully operational. Not art to simply look at, but to live with, to live in and to live by.' One can sense an affinity here with Andrea Zittel's approach, which appears to be oriented towards selling not simply functional products but a philosophy of life.

There is a curious mix of capitalism and counter-culture evident in AVL's manifesto. This is made even more curious by the admixture of functional and neo-surrealist design which appears more directed at the art market than the design market. AVL's bread and butter products are furniture, mostly shaker copies or foursquare furniture made out of urethane foam which AVL describe as 'primitive' or 'simple and straightforward' suggesting an intentional lack of style. But their reproductions of Shaker furniture suggest that the Shaker's social philosophy may provide an inspiration for their own functionalist furniture. Then there is the more surreal facet of their productions, for example: 'a complete series of human internal organs, ranging from heart, and brain to liver, rectum and the male and female sex organs.' (AVL-Ville 2005).

AVL design becomes especially successful when carries off the difficult task of intersecting the surreal and the functional. A key instance is *Bar Rectum*, 2005, where AVL managed to bring the surreal internal organ aesthetic into gear with practical functional design in the form of a demountable, mobile bar shaped like a giant rectum. Such manifestations add to the counter-cultural image of AVL and they have become much more than simply a furniture factory. For example, in 2001 AVL were commissioned by the [Women on Waves](#) (WOW) an abortion rights organization to design a portable abortion clinic. In their newsletter AVL reports that 'around the world; every year, approximately 70,000 women die as a result of illegal abortion practices and poor hygiene' (AVL 2004). In response they constructed *A-Portable*, 2001, a fully functional clinic furnished with all the necessary equipment and approved by the Dutch health authorities.

AVL explains the modus operandi: 'With a hired ship and the abortion clinic on board, WOW sails to the countries where abortion is illegal. Once docked in harbour, the organisation provides information on family planning, safe sex and abortion. Women who want to have a safe abortion can board the ship and be treated in international waters under Dutch law' (AVL 2004).

What is impressive about the WOW project is that AVL appear capable of rational design as well as the counter-rational evocations evident in their more surreal designs. It becomes evident that what is being expressed by a construction such as *Bar Rectum*, 2005, is a counter-cultural philosophy that uses a similar vocabulary to that of surrealism and indeed expressionism. The message of a work such as *Bar Rectum* appears to be that the body is repressed in a social imaginary dominated by instrumental rationalism. The body becomes a figure for a subversion of instrumental, governmental control. This is also the case for the WOW project where a real world solution is offered for the control of women's bodies evident in those jurisdictions that do not allow abortion.

We can delineate a line interconnecting the work of AVL with the theatrical actions of artists such as Paul McCarthy and John Bock. But McCarthy and Bock remain contained in the jewellery box of the art institution whereas AVL have at least one foot in the real world. It is to AVL's credit that they can combine a subversive discourse of the body with rational contributions to society rather than being cut off from social function by total dependency on the socially marginalised elitism of the art system.

AVL's achievement also draws our attention to the fact that the museum is a socially condoned zone of subversive expression that implements a variety of devices in order to make what is actually socially unacceptable acceptable. We can now understand the function of the barriers, guards and CCTV in art galleries and museums is not simply to protect the precious object but to create a condition of the disembodied gaze in order to defuse the subversive content of the objects on display.

Museums are, accordingly, akin to the mirrored window that separates the voyeur from a sexual performance. Deconstructive art, therefore, might be thought of as a form of political pornography—an expression of the socially unacceptable made accessible by the regime of the disembodied gaze.

To suggest that museum-bound installation art can transcend that barrier is nothing other than naïve. That barrier can never be transcended because it is the crux of the unwritten contract between art and the broader society. The point of this digression is that AVL come that little bit closer to taking the subversion of deconstructive play out into the streets. Their WOW project, in particular, points to distinction between the now reified mode of installation art and the younger and more fruitful concept of *situational art*.

Redirecting Artistic Wealth: Dan Peterman

Dan Peterman's work provides additional evidence that art can interact with the real world in ways that have some degree of use value. Peterman's *Store (Cheese)*, 1991-93, provides such an instance. In 1991 Peterman read a newspaper article regarding the accidental ingestion of the DDT-like insecticide Aldrin by fifty-one cows at a dairy farm in Hillsboro, Wisconsin. Like DDT Aldrin moves easily through the food chain. The article reported that the dairy farmers would have to continue to feed and milk the cows for a year for the Aldrin level to reach a safe standard, and until that time the milk would be dumped. Peterman was interested by the paradox that even the dumping of the milk was a problem. Indeed, the state government was making life difficult for the dairy farm by placing increasing restrictions on its dumping of the contaminated milk.

Peterman saw this as a 'useful avenue of research' where creative input might lead to a more effective toxic waste disposal programs for Wisconsin farmers' (Peterman 1991). Peterman's solution was to turn the milk into cheese. He noted that 'cheese is a way of preserving milk' (1991) thereby overcoming some of the issues of contamination. In addition the modularity of the pats of cheese enabled them to be exhibited as a work of art in the minimalist aesthetic style that Peterman uses for most of his work.

One could suggest that *Store (Cheese)* was more allegorical than practical. But there was a pragmatic element in that Peterman was able to acquire sufficient funds to interest the financially distressed dairy farm. But also of significance is the way in which Peterman uses the art system. He obtains money for projects from grant awarding bodies and in addition raises money via the sale of his ecological products as works of art. This is one of the most fruitful aspects of Peterman's work because instead of entering the cul-de-sac of institutionalised 'transgression' he takes a highly positive interactive approach in which he not only interacts with social reality but also connects with the money flow of the art system redirecting this flow into socially beneficial avenues.[34]

We should also be impressed by the way in which Peterman's

approach achieves the tricky interconnection between functionality and fine artness. Take for example his *Running Table* a thirty metre (one hundred foot) long, infinitely extendable picnic table which is set up in the A. Montgomery Ward Garden, Grant Park, Chicago. The work is made out of planks of plastic lumber which is a recycled material that has many industrial and commercial uses. In the case of *Running Table* the work functions both as a classical modernist sculpture in the minimalist mode and as a functioning picnic table for citizens of and visitors to Chicago.

Summary

Interaction is the crux of the deconstructive project at the turn of the millennium. It is a seminal strategy and considerable challenges confront artists who dare to enter into this most difficult avenue of artistic production. There are those who rise to the challenge, but most fine artists are not equipped to deal with it. Digital art and media art seem better placed and it is only a matter of time before, like photography and video before it, digital art takes on a key role in the field of fine art. For the moment however the most promising territory for contemporary installation art lies in domain of nonlinear narrative. This strategy may not involve the viewer to the extent of a creative game but it does enhance the viewer's involvement by presenting creative puzzles. In the next two chapters some of the more successful forays into nonlinear narrative installation art will be explored. In addition, these instances will be evaluated on the basis of to what degree they are successful in involving the viewer in the creative process.

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