

## Combines SESSION 1 (Monday, 10th September 2007) and SESSION 2 (Sunday, 23rd of September)

WHAT WOULD IT FEEL LIKE TO HAVE A FRONTROW SEAT FOR THE SHOW OF THE CENTURY? IT'S A PRIVILEGE THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO ENJOY WELL AFTER THE 2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS, WITH THE CREATION OF A MASSIVE VIDEO SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM DUBBED "SAFE CITIES" TO WATCH A "HARMONIOUS" CHINA UNFOLD TOGETHER WITH AGGRESSIVE ONE-PARTY CAPITALISM. I WASN'T SURPRISED TO DISCOVER THIS IN THE PAPER ON SEPTEMBER 11TH 2007, NOR WAS I IRKED THAT SUCH AN INVASIVE SECURITY NETWORK IS BEING FINANCED BY AMERICAN CAPITAL MARKETS: THE EVENING PRIOR I MET WITH ARTIST SARAH MORRIS, WHOSE WORK IS AN EXERCISE IN FRAMING EXACTLY THIS SORT OF TWISTED REALITY. AND HER EYES, LIKE THE REST OF US, ARE ON CHINA.

MORRIS HAS BEEN WELL RECOGNIZED, EVEN EARLY ON BY FELLOW ARTISTS LIKE JEFF KOONS, FOR HER CORPORATE-SIZED, OPTICALLY SNAPPY CANVASES, MADE WITH NO-FRILLS HOUSE PAINT. BUT AS SHE EXPLAINS, THESE ARE ONLY ONE SIDE OF HER MULTI-DIMENSIONAL WORK, WHICH ALSO INCLUDES A SERIES OF SHORTLENGTH FILMS AND EXTENSIVE PHOTO AND MATERIAL PRE-PRODUCTION. WE DISCUSSED HER WORK AND HER LATEST FILM PLANNING – BEIJING 2008 – IN THE MIDST OF TALL WHITE WALLS AND A VINTAGE CONCRETE FLOOR AT HER CHELSEA STUDIO IN NEW YORK. WARM, LOQUACIOUS AND INCISIVE, SHE SEEMED VERY MUCH AN ARTIST, SIMPLY DRESSED IN A DESIGNER LAB COAT. YET HAVING FOREGONE ART SCHOOL, HER TRUE MÉTIER IS SOMETHING MORE LIKE COMMUNICATION. I UNDERSTOOD AFTER OUR DISCUSSION THAT MORRIS IS A NEW KIND OF ARTIST, A SOCIOLOGICAL CRAFTSMAN OBSERVING A WORLD WHERE POWER, POLITICS, COMMERCE AND MEDIA HAVE DRASTICALLY OVERHAULED CULTURAL PRACTICE.

Do you find cameras sexy? Some of the most alluring shots from your movie Los Angeles were close-ups of cameras in motion, swiveling around on robotic arms.

I don't know that I would say I find them sexy, but there is something intriguing to who is watching behind the cameras. In Los Angeles there were a lot of situations where the crew became aware that the things we were filming were being filmed. We were actually just taking part in an already meditated event and that was something that I became quite aware of. But definitely, given all the mechanics, I would have to probably say yes, sexy.

You remind me of how 9/11 brought home the idea of the hyper-mediated event, because the amateur reporting

was more relevant in a way and had more impact than what was diffused on established media, because it was all being circulated so fast. There is now an intense multiplication of the number of lenses in the world and a deluge of pictures. There always seems to be a second, a third, and a fourth camera now.

The repetition of any single object by definition becomes more attractive and I think with cameras certainly. With 9/11, I would say that the event was chosen for its cinematic potential. The types of decisions I make before I shoot a film are the same types of decisions that went on there. Of course it was about maneuvering a Boeing 757. It was about some level of technical finesse. However, there's a reason

why you wouldn't do it in January or February. You wouldn't have the same amount of people on the street, the same amount of tourists or the same clarity of image.

Right, New York's crisp autumn skies.

In fact, if you look at my film *Capital*, which was shot literally one year before that – it was shot at the very same moment. We were hanging out at the Pentagon, Pentagon City, Dulles International Airport, with almost no permits on any level. Everybody was saying, "Oh, it's really difficult. You are going to have a really hard time with how patrolled and how monitored it is," and actually we were rolling around the Pentagon parking lot with a crew in a van and a 35mm camera: if I am able to make a film somewhere, it's

not that guarded, or you can assume I charmed people, which was not the case with the Pentagon.

I think that's where *Capital* and much of the footage shot on 9/11 show that the institutions we think are seamless and impenetrable are actually totally riddled with holes.

They are in fact empty, which is a much more terrifying idea than the classic liberal dilemma of thinking there's a conspiracy. What if there are no conspiracies? What if there is just emptiness? I find Joe Klein's analysis of Clinton very interesting and what that administration meant and the way that administration operated and Clinton's methodology of saying "yes, and" instead of "yes, but." That methodology is a run-on sentence which keeps moving forward, including your enemies and contradictions. I try to adopt this attitude. There is one line by Klein in my issue of *Parkett* which is really great, something like, "What if power's doppelganger is just emptiness?" And what if you actually think of government as a sort of *Brazilia*, with all of these guys walking around in suits and briefcases and actually there is nothing really going on. The information is not being collated in a way that's useful or pertinent. And it's all just a big nothing. Before I did *Capital* I don't think I had been to Washington, D.C. since the bicentennial of 1776 and I think I saw the Eames exhibit and I was very influenced by the exhibitions I saw in Washington at that time. When I went back I was so amazed I was wondering, "How can I put together these images in such a way that the narrative makes it seem like something is happening?" And that's the challenge of putting together film and being able to give meaning to a pile-up, so to speak, of various images. I am very interested in the films of the 1970s, conspiracy films particularly, because I think there is a parallel between the methodology of filmmaking at that time and what

was going on politically. It was an interesting coalescence, perhaps not unlike today.

Can you tell me the reasons for calling your studio Parallax, which I believe is a reference to one of these movies?

At some point an accountant in St. James, London said that I better make a company for tax reasons. I was always intrigued by this idea of a slightly imaginary company, which in the case of *The Parallax View* (1974) somehow procures potential assassins or potential characters to work for it without them knowing what they are doing.

That's what you did with the footage for *Capital*: you produced footage to which you had to bring a narrative and you made it perform although your subjects were unsuspecting.

Yes. Have you ever been to Washington, D.C.? It is incredibly uninteresting.

But you solved that problem. What kind of narrative did you get out of *Capital*?

I guess one has to admit, Clinton was the first president I voted for that actually got into office. I felt that it was important to somehow document this moment because it seemed clear that we were coming to the end of something, the end of an epoch. I didn't like the new alternatives. I would never be able to make that film now, nor would I want to.

You wouldn't get into the cabinet room.

No. Going back to Clinton and the shot I have of him in the Cabinet Room with Trent Lot, he is engaging his enemies, even though dangerously. Ironically, it was very close as a vocabulary and methodology to working as an artist – it was hard to explain this to Joe Klein – having someone operate multiple cultural arenas and in a way that felt very familiar, not as cynical or manipulative but just sort of moving through contradictions and just being engaged with them. I found it to be very captivating and true and I thought I better make this film before it's over.

They were very helpful and also very non-paranoid. They were the type of operation that would not ask to see the footage. There was no level of control or checking or monitoring. Once you were vouched for, you were there. You could talk; you could do whatever you wanted; the only rule placed upon me was "no tripod" in the cabinet room.

Did you put your camera on the table?

Right. I think the tripod was maybe too close to having a gun or something.

And that gave you a great shot of the presidential cup.

It is a paper coffee cup, by the way! Everybody else is drinking with china except for him.

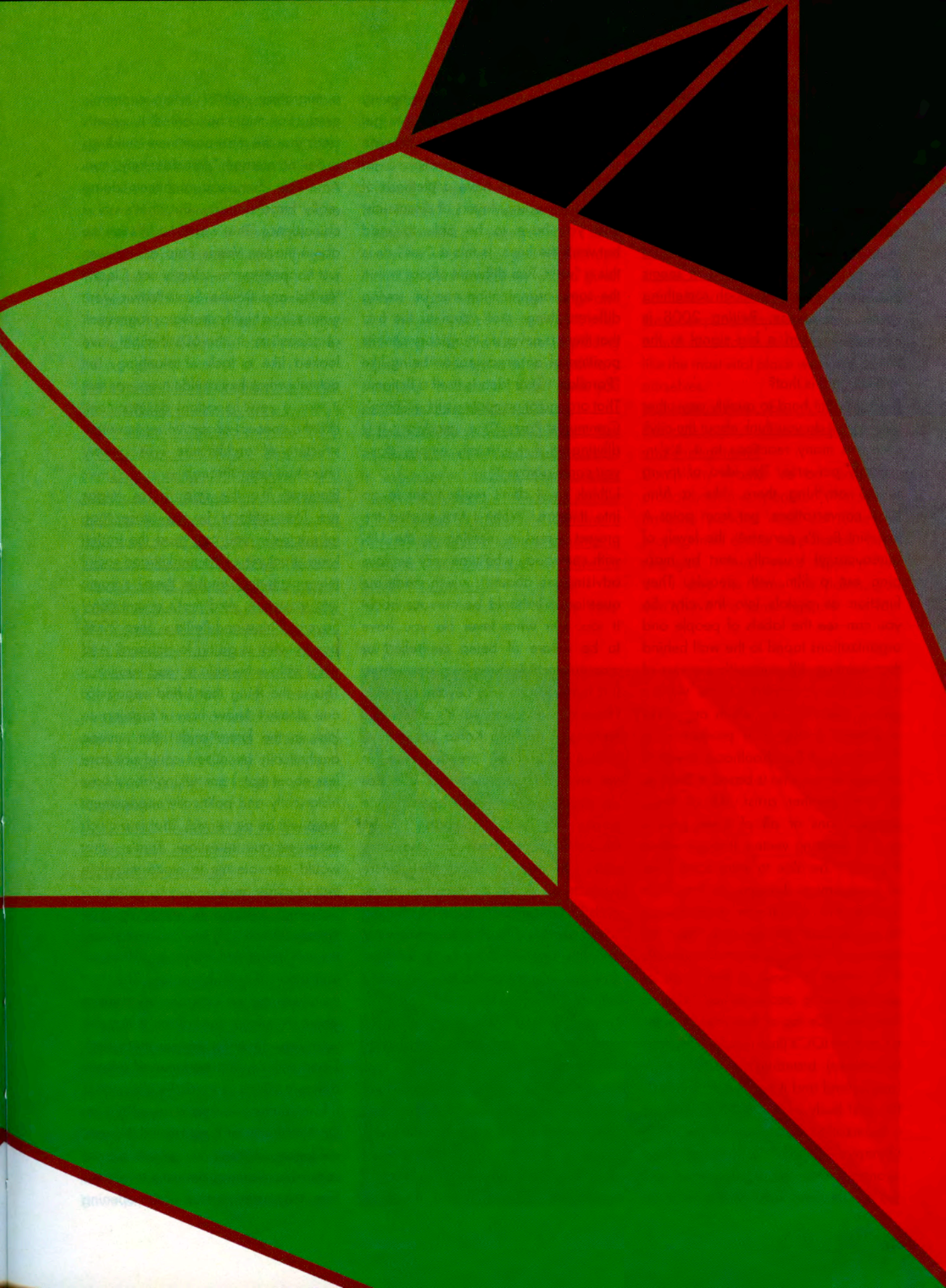
But why did you remove the dialogue?

I think I do that naturally. The last film I did called *Robert Towne* has dialogue and it's the first one. When I was making *Los Angeles*, Warren Beatty remarked that the ultimate maintenance of power is to not let people speak. I had to seriously consider that. So to make a film and not let anybody speak has a certain dynamic which I hadn't really thought of before. But I have been more interested in the idea of the potential of a situation and the readings you place on that potential rather than a specific narrative.

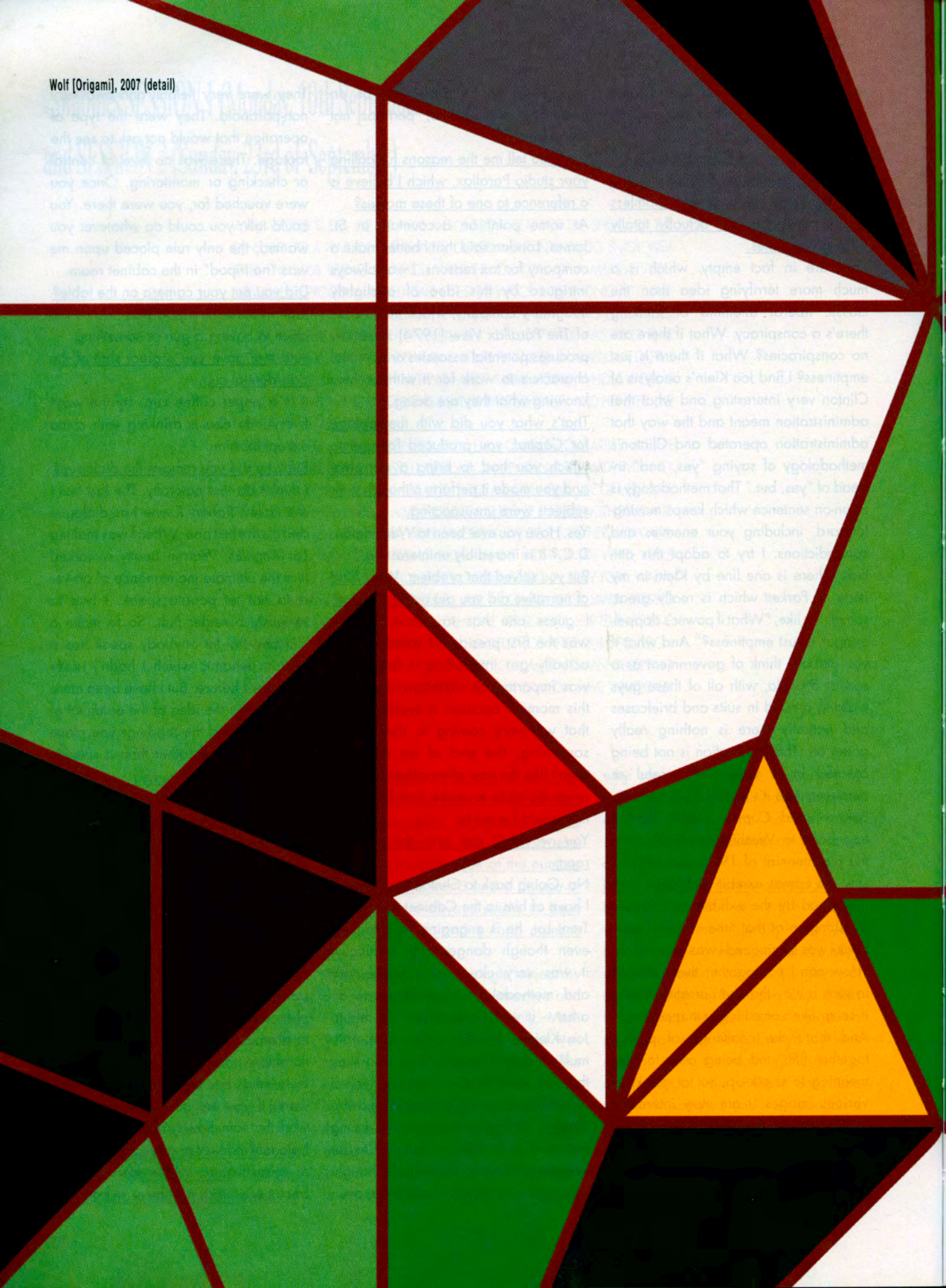
The critic Ron Jones has called *Capital* a "period piece," which forced me to think of your work as kind of historical.

Would you consider yourself a historian in a way?

Probably not. I think there is way too much fiction involved. I don't see the work functioning as documentary. People say that even in relation to the paintings. I'll hear that the paintings are photo-based or have some relationship to photography. There is no direct relationship to photography in the paintings, there never has been, even in the early work. If you are making iconographic work that somehow symbolizes a specific historical moment or a specific institution or infrastructure in the society it will become used; it will have a historical



Wolf [Origami], 2007 (detail)





use value in that way. I don't think there is any direct correspondence, although I think there is a certain element to the films being engaged in their time. But that's not my aim.

Ironically, the fictionalization of historical narrative could be re-named propaganda, for example how Cold War Russia rewrote its past. It seems like China is going through something similar. Of course, Beijing 2008 is intended to send a big signal to the world.

What signal is that?

B-L-G: I find it hard to qualify any other way. What do you think about the city?

One has many reactions to it. It's incredibly perverse. The idea of trying to do anything there, like a film, have conversations, get from point A to point B, it's perverse: the levels of bureaucracy! I usually start by mapping out a film with people. They function as portals into the city. So you can see the labels of people and organizations taped to the wall behind that painting. I'll start with a series of conversations, whether it be with a group called CCFC, which organizes and helps foreign film production in China, or with Rem Koolhaas, or with a scientist I know who is based in Beijing, or with another artist. All of these conversations or all of these people end up creating vectors through which you might be able to enter some level of engagement. Between the language barrier and a Chinese methodology of saying "yes" but meaning "no," the bureaucracy you have to navigate as a foreigner to make a film there or get something accomplished is quite intriguing. On top of that you place the issue of the IOC's (International Olympic Committee) branding: it is based in Switzerland and it has a parallel body, the host body called BOCOG (Beijing Organization Committee for the 2008 Olympic Games). We have all these strange names of organizations that we are involved with. And when I say

involved, I mean involved in having multiple discussions about how to get an image. To be able to obtain the type of images that I want involves a lot of discussion. We have a plethora of discussions going, layers of discussion, and you have to be able to read between the lines. Is this a "yes" or is this a "no"? Two different offices within the same organization can be saying different things that return to the fact that there is never an imaginary centrist position of an organization being like "Parallax." That idea is itself a fiction.

That organization might well be China's Communist Party. One wonders if it is diluting or if it is totally empty. Have you come across it?

I think so. I don't really want to go into it more. When I first started the project I had a meeting at the UN with somebody who was very nervous advising me about it, which made me question if I should be nervous about it too. On what level do you have to be aware of being controlled or manipulated? To cut a long story short, it is bureaucratic way beyond anything I have ever experienced. It's almost of a comic sort: nothing Kafka could have written could have prepared me for the level of convolutedness! It makes Los Angeles seem like a one-sentence conversation which of course it's not because people there are constantly going on and on about their future projects as if the conversation never ends. I still get calls today! In Beijing sometimes it is difficult to ascertain what people's agenda actually is; whether they are Western or Eastern, you can't tell what the agenda is.

Have East and West mixed in these networks of people you are navigating?

Very much so. I was in a discussion at the Serpentine Gallery last year where Hans Ulrich Obrist and Rem Koolhaas interviewed me. At one point, and it was probably Rem who said it, they brought up the disappearance of the West. I said I don't think so. I think it's about

a migratory shift of where economic production might be located. It is pretty clear that the most prominent buildings in Beijing are both "coincidentally" non-American European architects doing really large projects. But, that's not a coincidence. That would be like talking about the Las Vegas Strip as if it was just happenstance – clearly not. Clearly Venturi and Denise Scott Brown were wrong: it's a highly strategic progression of capitalism. In the 60s it might have looked like a lack of planning, but actually what they couldn't see was that it was a very important development, like the concept of sprawl, or how that structure of architecture was a very important breakthrough.

Elements like the strip in Las Vegas are like artifacts in the sense that, retroactively, you can read the underlying structures of the market and social movements that enable them to come into existence. And that's a question I have of China and Beijing: once 2008 passes what is going to happen? And what will we be able to read into it?

This is the thing that I find engaging: one doesn't know how it's going to look in the future and I don't mean aesthetically because I could not care less about that. I am talking about how historically and politically engagement there will be perceived. That is a much more serious question. That's what would motivate me to place myself in that situation now.

So what exactly is attracting you there?

It's this issue of where a politics of engagement will bring us. The fact that there are no foregone conclusions about the place, aside from a massive campaign to bring people there combined with an appropriation of a lot of different talents to mark the city, makes it fascinating; you start to ask who is the Dr. No character lying behind this very deliberate strategy to get people as remote as Steven Spielberg to orchestrate the co-directorship of the opening

ceremonies for the 2008 games, or Rem Koolhaas to do the main production site for China Central Television (CCTV) and so on. I like the idea that there are a number of people working very hard to control the perception of this place which is beyond any of the people who are actually participating and engaged. They don't know the outcome of the projects that they are working on either. They can be optimistic and hopeful that it might lead to a more open structure, but it might not.

The irony of this sort of enterprise is that the audience is also a large question mark. I think of for example the 1970 World's Expo in Osaka – that was a tremendous moment for Japan and in a way an equivalent moment in the sense that they were trying to show the world that they were an industrial nation that was succeeding and was moving into the future perhaps faster than the West. It turns out that the majority of the attendance at the Expo was Japanese.

That would be a disaster for Beijing. But, even then, it's not a waste of time. If you can somehow alter or change perception about a national identity even to itself the effort is redeemable by the organizers. Clearly, in this particular case Beijing is a stage in a much larger context.

Do you think the large construction projects and the national re-branding matter to the rest of us?

A number of people that are engaged in Beijing are definitely progressive liberal thinkers and yes, this influences one's perception of what's going on.

But it's a political paradox: a liberal-minded person can be at pains to function in a context like the United States, for example, apparently the leading democracy in the world, and yet it seems they are having a free-for-all in China.

The way I've heard it described by people who are actively engaged is that there are enormous contradictions. However, there are problematic issues

doing commercial design in any case or being engaged with certain corporations or governments. How different is it really? Naturally, the specifics are very different. (There was a letter written by Mia Farrow to the Wall Street Journal about Spielberg's engagement.) I think everyone who is engaged would hope that it isn't just complicity with a given system, that it might change things and shift the way people function in China. The thing that interests me is placing myself in those types of contradictory situations. Without it I don't think you can make interesting art.

In the past you've stressed, in fact, that you feel complicit with your subjects and in Los Angeles you are literally riding shotgun with some of the very people on which you've trained the camera. It raises a question for cultural practice in general: is complicity the most effective position for an artist?

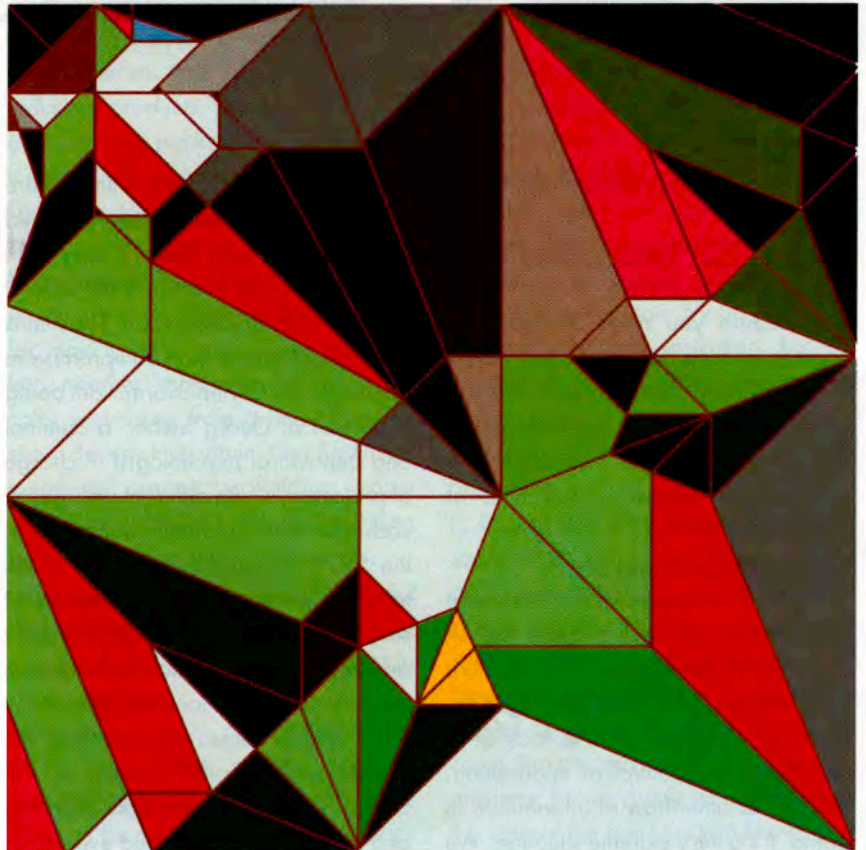
Absolutely. It has been heavily theo-

rized, take Adorno or Berger, that the avant-garde was somehow in an external position; but it actually is debatable historically if that was ever the case. There is no objective position. Therefore there is no criticism that is positioned in an objective place. Certainly there is no interesting art that comes from being objective. I think to admit how complicit we are now with these very late capitalist forms – and, it must be said, in crisis – to me seems like the most vital place we can position ourselves.

In a state of crisis, though, how do you draw the distinction between complicity and engagement?

Complicity would be an executive, probably at a corporation, that would have to perform and distribute the propaganda of that corporation. To be engaged is much more slippery. You don't have the same talk points; you don't have the same agenda – in fact

Wolf [Origami], 2007



your agenda is completely murky. Leni Riefenstahl would be a good example of somebody who was complicit. There is a big difference to having 50 cameras financed by the Nazi regime and documenting a single moment in time than to a self-funded project engaging with 150 loose-floating, different types of institutions or people which you are formulating almost like a tableau of possibilities. Obviously, the more directly you are in the service of an institution or a corporation the more difficult it is to subvert or transform it.

can talk about the aesthetics of it, but really that is beside the point. Even with a project like that, I think a fantastic aspect is its compromise.

Is the issue of compromise drawing you to the story of the 1972 Olympics as a kind of doppelganger for Beijing 2008?

The 1972 Olympics, like any Olympics, is a serial repetitive form and connected with many other cities whether it likes it or not. Particularly interesting is the repetition in the Olympic program of Germany after 1936, capturing another

was absolutely designed to a tee. Then the moment of rupture and how it was solved or not solved, depending on your point of view, is linked to 1936. You have to understand that my films are a form of inquiry: I know there is something with the 1972 Olympics in relation to 2008 that is absolutely central and needs to be articulated before I do the Beijing film.

What about Sieber?

Georg Sieber is still out there projecting the future. He has a company called Intelligence Transfer Systems, which



2008 [Rings], 2007

We'll see what happens with the CCTV building.

I've met CCTV employees who are dreading working there.

Just because you make something a fragmented loop doesn't mean it stands for democracy. Setting up a form to have an ideological function means you are going to get shot down. No artist would believe in this type of allegorical pitch.

Do you think Koolhaas does?

That's their intended explanation and it appeared as such in the recent MoMA show. But it's complicated. It's a structure broadcasting ideas or propaganda, whatever way you want to look at it, and that is the control of information. There is no other flow of information in China. It's a very extreme situation. We

city at a different moment in time where the ideology has completely changed to the point where there is very little police control; in fact this is the subject of a film I am shooting soon. The film is more about failure than compromise in relation to the Olympic form. I am doing a portrait of Georg Sieber, a criminal and behavioral psychologist in charge of projecting all the different emergency scenarios that could have happened in the 1972 Olympics and what to do to solve them. He was in charge of several thousand guys in blue, yellow and red uniforms (which he said was the most effeminate looking police force ever). And of course we can't deny the phenomenal graphic designs of Otl Eicher. There was incredible planning and color coordination and everything

advises private individuals, governments, insurance companies, and makes projections about future possibilities and realities. That being said, you can try to control something all you like, but it is very clear that it's an impossible desire. That's what he was hired to do in 1972 and he resigned the morning that the incidents happened on Connollystraße 31 because it was clear to him that he had no control.

Your most recent film portrayed a similar kind of influential character, ubiquitous as an advisor in Hollywood, but also multifaceted: the actor, screenwriter and director Robert Towne. Can you explain how he has become a model for you?

When I was researching and doing pre-production on *Los Angeles* I was aware of Towne, but I believed the



myth of a reclusive figure who was involved in many projects but never on the front line. I was interested in cutting through all these layers, from director, to producer, to actor, to film studio, but he seemed like an invisible force. At one point I was with Beatty and they were speaking on the phone. I became aware that Towne was in a troubled situation on a film in South Africa. I decided he would be an interesting person to focus on in my work and through the Public Art Fund commission at Lever House and a painting I based on him, we had an initial conversation about why I thought he was interesting and that's where it started. Moving swiftly between different arenas like politics, architecture or commercial design is what I would consider definitive of my generation. I am looking at reality and playing fast and loose with it, as does Robert Towne, using contemporary forms in a way that does not necessarily reflect reality but creates a conspiracy of events. Robert Towne is an example of a methodology of collaboration and cooperation between different arenas and at the same time putting your ego aside, because if you don't there is no way to proceed and get into all types of situations. At the end of the day it's not that everybody wants to believe in the author or the artist.

Is it important that your audience knows you as well as your work?

Obviously, I do think the artist's intentions are important, but I also believe in the idea of an open structure onto which people can pin what they want. I was really interested in Robbe-Grillet as a teenager. I thought it was a great way to proceed with fragmented images or narratives where you start not to trust the author. It's a modus operandi I enjoy.

Or perhaps you dismiss the author because he could be just about anybody.

I find the images in your movies to have that sort of familiarity. You seem to make use of conventional framing technique and familiar camerawork in

the same way that Andy Warhol would take a stock image. When I watch Capital I am looking through a CNN camera or when I watch LA there are moments that I am looking at footage from Entertainment Tonight.

I would agree. Editors have told me that I am sitting on a huge stockpile of images from the films, of buildings, people, cars and things that could be sold. However the absurdity is that they are shot on 35mm film and the perspectives flicker between conventional takes and shots that would never be captured; for instance Clinton crossing the White House lawn yawning and whistling is not something you are going to see with Dan Rather ABC News. No one would ever spend the type of money to film the travertine in CAA's lobby. Making the films is much more absurd and schizophrenic than anybody would care to know.

How do you choose your colors?

Usually I create a palette for each specific series that I am doing. The colors will be based on everything: colors that I come across, like in the Beijing series that might come from industrial products, signage, buildings, or in cigarette packs or in kids' sandals. It's literally from A to Z.

These are colors that you document?

Yes, and each series is very specific: in *Los Angeles* I used a lot of cyan blue which is the color they use for dropouts, for making sets and putting someone into another scenario; the tangerine color was taken from a huge building site in Beverly Hills where they had huge tangerine orange scaffolding; some were taken from LAX; some were taken from various film studio companies.

Is it that you like the color? Or the object the color was on when you found it? Do you like the situation the color evokes in your memory?

Obviously, color doesn't exist in a vacuum. There is an industrial psychology behind the use of color. I'll try to be aware of how I think that's

playing out and I'll see how I respond to it.

Is there a mood to a color?

I don't know if I would call it a mood.

So then is there an intention behind a color?

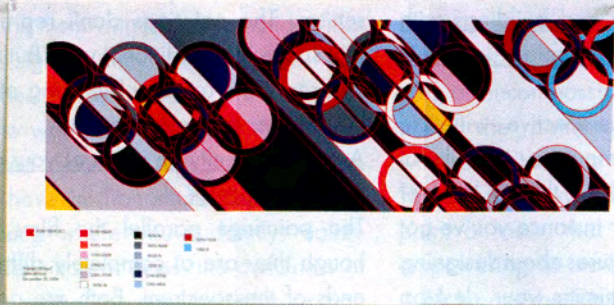
Yes, there is intentionality behind a color, in general I think, not just with my production and images.

If you were to script how you might want me to react to a painting, what would it be?

I suppose I would want to transport you to a virtual place that is beyond a single individual, like an experience of being part of a system that is larger than you. The relationship between a viewer and the scale of the work is very important to me and so is the idea of a language that possibly might mimic propaganda – architecture is ultimately propaganda. To me, that is not a terrible place to be. I don't go up Sixth Avenue in Manhattan and feel like this is garbage. In general I'll think it is empowering to be in that cavern. What was interesting about my Lever House project was the idea of public and private breaking down. It's nice, although perhaps a bit delusional, to go about one's business as if everything is there for the taking, as if everything is public. Not to be anti-individualistic, but the public perception of history, institutions, companies, governments is ours. Someone can try to create a perception of their institution, but the perception exists in the minds of the mass, I mean in the minds of everyone. That is in no way fixed; it can change on a dime.

If, as you say, the painting is a public space, then when your Robert Towne painting was reproduced on the Lever House, that was its rightful place.

Well, the plaza is literally public space. However the building is private. It is owned by a prominent collector; you could go on and say that it's private property. But anybody who believes in the idea of the reproduction knows that



the reproduction has a much longer lifespan than any physical object. That's how I got involved with art in the first place, through reproductions in books and magazines, which ensures its accessibility. The reproduction can exist in multiple places at the same time. In the end, paradoxically, that's why I believe in the seductive ability to make things.

That's why you paint?

Yes. I also believe the reproduction is very politically loaded with the idea that the public realm is ripe for intervention, the same way that graffiti makes a mark on something and the idea of ownership is slightly and irredeemably transformed. Those shifts and those plays are going on in my work and interest me.

Does it matter to you who owns your work?

Of course. I want people to take care of my work. I want serious people who are interested in maintaining the work and its meaning and can provide for it an interesting context. At this point I would prefer it in a museum than in a home.

You live in an extraordinary modernist landmark and you seem to repeatedly film this kind of architecture. What is it about these buildings?

The New York I would want to live in is a cinematic image from the mid-60s. The idea of Truman Capote making drinks with his blender in United Nations Plaza is where I would want to be. Why not place oneself in the same situation as Gordon Parks or Truman Capote or Robert Kennedy: the best of New York is this time warp where you end up with people of different generations coming together in an elevator and having to shoot the breeze. That's how I would define the adrenaline of this city: a fantasy of different times. Also I think the United Nations, which I can see from my windows at home, is a fantastic piece of architecture and it's something overlooked in America and its perception.

People tend to read your paintings figuratively and are able to recognize

painterly perspective, for example, which in fact is partly fed by your associating places and buildings with the work. Can you explain why this isn't quite right?

People confuse perspective with the idea of how computers, in cultural consciousness, make us think in terms of representation. For instance you've got those Steve Jobs lectures about designing a program that mimics your desktop with some sort of spatial representation. That should not be confused with something photo-based. People are constantly looking for representational models. But my paintings function much more on the level of creating a sort of retinal after-image of a way of negotiating or navigating space, people, conversations or experience in general. It is confused perhaps by my titling off a set of corporations in midtown Manhattan or a set of institutions in Washington, D.C. or the sequential

years of the Olympics. There is a level of appropriation there that is like a schism. The paintings don't represent that space in a traditional way. But they can represent a way of thinking about that time or that institution.

Aren't they really an index of your own thinking process?

The paintings parallel the films, although they are at completely different ends of the spectrum. Both are governed by a set of coordinates. The only screenplays or briefs that exist for the films, for example, are a set of coordinates, which is like saying, "I am going to shoot footage off the corner of 34th and 7th avenue at 4:30pm." And a coordinate on a painting would be simply one of several hundred. You set up a system for both the painting and film, and both have a set of rules, but both are open structures in terms of how they can be read, manipulated and used.

*"On what level do you have to be aware of being controlled or manipulated?" SARAH MORRIS in Beijing, production still, 2007, photography by Sean Dack*



And how they get produced?

Yes, but it's not that open – I wouldn't be making them with felt. I like the idea that as a signifier they are paintings. I like the idea that there is a visceral seduction in the work that transports the viewer beyond them. It's like the experience you have in Tiananmen Square or in a place where you suddenly realize the definition of mass, the awfulness of being part of a system that is larger than you. On the other hand maybe there is a certain freedom in that.

You sound like you are describing a contemporary sublime.

Ha! I don't mean to be describing something that prophetic. I am just trying to figure out how to describe the two activities because they are quite schizophrenic. One is extremely fast-paced; you spend a shit-load of money; time is of the essence and that's filmmaking: an extreme amount of work condensed in a very small

space of time, and very high production values. Painting is the absolute opposite, incredibly slow. I don't mean to sound judgmental about painting because obviously that's what I do. It's very monotonous. On the whole it is relatively cheap, even by comparison to silk-screen.

Is it a better business? Do the paintings help support the movies?

They definitely support me. I don't know if they support the absurdity of shooting film. What I am trying to say is that they have a lot in common, a systemic way of working and of looking at color and structure and the ways one can create an iconographic

image or space and also how you can experience those arenas. There is some element of repulsion in front of my paintings. There is something very all-encompassing and dominating about the paintings, this feeling I was describing of Sixth Avenue or Tiananmen Square. Depending on your point of view, that can be extremely empowering or incredibly alienating. I think having both experiences and the struggle between the two is what I find to be motivating.

What is this titled?

It's called 1956. It's from the "Rings" series. I always try to come up with a geometric configuration for the phenomenon I am dealing with. For Los Angeles a lot of it was hexagonal structures.

What did they reflect?

I suppose everything from the idea of a Venn diagram to a lens flare to the case that film comes in – like the colors in the paintings.

What are you working with for Beijing?

I thought the circle was something I could surely never do. I also thought the reference to the expanding phenomenon of Beijing and system of ring roads leads you to experience architecture or place in a very convoluted way, where you never quite know where you are. Also the dust and the smog don't help, since you don't necessarily see architectural form. You know, it becomes like the set of some sort of Antonioni film. The idea of building iconic architecture there becomes slightly pointless. The idea of traveling around a city in a series of circles, and I think they are adding another, goes back to Frederic Jameson writing about the Bonaventure Hotel and talking about not being able to get a reference point on the structure because of the circle, and I think there is something to that with this specific city. And it reminds me of the smell of that very antiseptic cleaning liquid on bronze which is in absolutely every hotel in Beijing. It's impossible to get away from and it's like traveling in

circles. I was interested in playing with all this and using the circle as an element of the composition. And also I was interested in Olympic design and its history. The years are taken from all the different cities and you suddenly arrive at a series or a string of cities that the Olympics represent. This series is going to delineate those places that culminate in 2008.

Are you saying that Beijing is losing its identity and becoming like all these other places?

With a spectacle like the Olympics the specificity of place doesn't matter. There is a great essay by Susan Sontag about fascism, in particular the 1936 Olympics, and how that was used. The aspiration of the specific place plays into the event. You can look at 1972. You can't repress that, but there is an attempt to gloss over those things. And that's something we plan on investigating.

Do you plan on photographing buildings that are not part of the Olympic building program?

Oh yes. The Olympics is just one moment in a string of moments in Beijing. It just happens to be a very difficult moment to document.

You make me realize that where the Eames movie Powers of 10 (1977) runs vertically, that you are doing the same thing only horizontally. You move between different scales of event, different scales of publicity and privacy within the horizontality of the pan shot. So, what might the microscopic things be that you pull in? Like the botox injection shot from Los Angeles, what might that be in Beijing, when you get that close?

I don't want to divulge what that parallel will be.

Come on, whet my appetite.

DNA centrifugation. It will definitely be very science fiction.

