FROM PROCESS TO BRAND

Wired/Weird:
Some Thinkfeel Theory
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WIRED: REVIVING THE NEW ECONOMY

Wired magazine, (9.11.2001): *"Forget the virtual, embrace the physi-cal."[1]*

Blessed with an ignorance imposed by early publication dead-lines, the Wired 9.11 issue was free of any of the obligatory attempts to respond to the 11 September terrorist attacks. It was mired, in-stead, in the search for the successor to the twin economic miracles of the personal computer and the internet. Microsoft's plunge into meat space manufacturing with the Xbox; glamour shots of the tech elite who, no matter their actual physical location, use Eastern Stan-dard time as their default time zone; new realms of location sensi-tive technology that will make wireless the next great venture capi-tal opportunity; the differences in deploying new traffic manage-ment technologies in Singapore and the US; the guy who's solved the 'math of flavor for wine;' and finally, an old hippie who's de-cided a nursing home with intensive surveillance is the answer for his desire for an 'unscripted' old age...

"Forget the virtual, embrace the physical."[2]

That's David S. Bennahum's advice for the wireless industry, in "Be Here Now," from Wired 9.11. A venture capitalist, he thinks that the money to be made in wireless technology will be found in appli-cations that exploit location information. As he puts it,

"Knowing where people are going and why becomes valuable be-cause there's money to be made from this information. For some location services, the future is already here. In Manhattan, there are taxis equipped with rooftop ads that change from block to block. As a cab passes a store, a promotion for that retailer pops up on the screen. ...Just as Internet protocols became the glue that bound multiple technologies—the PC, telecom networks, and local-area networks—into a sum greater than its parts, location information will produce a similar result with wireless. It promises to take dispar-ate technologies—the mobile phone, handheld computing, and wire-less access to networks—and fuse them into a new and compelling medium." [3]

In Bennahum's future wireless technologies carry the potential to become a new infrastructure only if they exploit their relation to the existing organization of cities. Location becomes the 'glue.' The odd coincidence that each feature article in Wired 9.11 promotes a digital technology embedded or engaged in the slow and familiar could be more than another marketing trend. Perhaps there is a con-vergence, a complementarity, between the physical and virtual that we have been slow to acknowledge. Is it a fear of the smooth man-ner of electronic control so far removed from the segmented, stop/start muscle space of the mechanic?[4] Is it because we have a limited notion of matter—much like Henry Adams, who, mystified and fasci-nated by the advent of electric power, observed of his reaction, "For him the details of science meant nothing; he wanted to know its mass."?[5]

WEIRD: RESUSCITATING ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE

Weirdly enough, almost exactly a year earlier, it seemed that *Archi-tectural Record* was in the business of making the new economy a model for architectural practice... In "Tales from the Avantgarde: How the Economy is Transforming Theory and Practice," Michael Speaks announced the emergence of the 'post avantgarde' entrepre-neurial architect.[6] Eager to claim his place at the vanguard of a new mode of architectural practice, Speaks says theory and its caretakers, the architectural avantgarde, are too 'slow' to compete with 'change managers' of the new economy and calls for a practice defined by "conceptual athleticism"[7], opportunism and risk-taking. Can you hear the unmistakable echoes of the popular business books of the eighties, reacting to recessions and the Japanese 'threat', instructing managers of the post-industrial economy to save themselves by be-coming entrepreneurs?[8] With the unfair advantage of hindsight (re-member Enron?), Speaks' notion of an architectural practice mod-eled on entrepreneurial 'change managers' becomes particularly prob-lematic. He makes the post avantgarde architect into one more prod-uct of that invisible hand which operates markets as some earthly manifestation of divine will. The hazards of this 'market-driven' model have nohing to do with putting architectural practice directly into the midst of economic forces—that's actually an invigorating idea. The problem with his model is that he marginalizes architectural ex-pertise by falling victim to a platonizing pathology. Ideas are better.

The virtual is superior. The material and immaterial are at odds. Remember, the invisible hand depends upon the idea that it is unencumbered by matter.

Any notion of architectural practice, if it is to depend upon claims to a distinctive set of techniques and range of expertise, has to abandon intellectual models that depend upon competing categories of the material and immaterial. Why fall into the trap of endless, futile attempts to establish the primacy of one over the other? Leave Kenneth Frampton and Bill Mitchell to argue with each other. As a material practice that works through a variety of media, architecture depends upon a reciprocity between things that seem stable and things that seem ephemeral and weightless. Perhaps we could to find a way to sell our expertise in creating continuities between the material and immaterial, instead of anxiously trying to stake a claim for the superiority of one realm over the other.

CONSTRUCTS: AN EXPANDED FIELD

Maybe Speaks was trying to make the new familiar. As Rosalind Krauss puts it in "Sculpture in an Expanded Field," "The new is made comfortable by being made familiar, since it is seen as having gradually evolved from the forms of the past. Historicism works on the new and different to diminish newness and mitigate difference"[9]

Krauss's essay, published in October at the end of the 70's, reacted to the efforts of art critics to formulate a historical paternity for the sculpture that had emerged in the '60s and '70s. Borrowing the Klein diagram from structuralist theory, she proposed a scheme for understanding Smithson, Miss and others which "presupposes the acceptance of definitive ruptures."[10] The version of her diagram described here borrows its structure but changes its terms and its dynamics.

Building replaces sculpture at the base of the reformulated diagram. 'Marked sites' become fixtures, 'site-constructions' become infrastructures, 'axiomatic structures' become geographies. These are
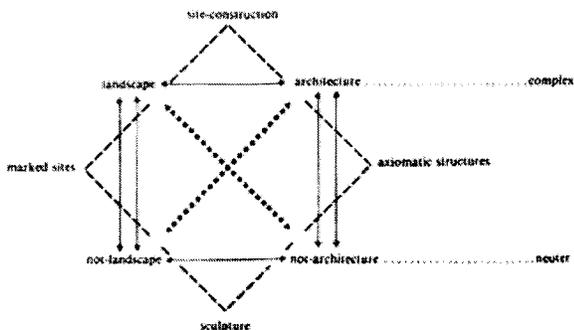

Figure 1. Krauss, R. "Sculpture in an Expanded Field." The Anti-Aesthetic. Ed. by H. Foster. Seattle: Bay Press, 1983. p. 38.

not meant to be replacements or alternatives to Krauss's terms, because the poles or practices that set up Krauss's system have been changed as well. This change in dynamics makes it impossible to link the terms I am describing directly to hers. While she sets up a tension between opposing categories of landscape and architecture, my diagram uses a gradient between object and 'quasi-object' or net to establish a field—the limits of which are marked by buildings, fixtures, infrastructures and geographies. The particular conditions of this field are distinct from the situation mapped by Krauss's diagram.

The object/notobject gradient has the following effects or trajectories: from figured and bounded form to informe and media understood as forms of information; from orders based hierarchy to orders based on chaos; from optical to 'rational' operations and tactics; engaging a range of strategies that maintain difference. The net/notnet gradient has the following effects or trajectories: from relational constructs made of dependencies (think street grids) to relational constructs made of independencies (think fishnets); from organizations that emerge to organizations that converge; from affectual to ambient operations and tactics; engaging a range of strategies that create continuity. The field effected by these gradients has both smooth and disjunctive zones, engaging, in Somol's terms, "a coincidence of extremes."[11] The interaction between constructions (buildings, etc.; intensities or moments of convergence) and gradients (object/notobject, etc.; forces or flows) are related, again, as Somol would put it, in a "plenum of matter."[12]

Fixtures are the equipment you need to move an impulse (not attention or information) from one phase or place into another—like our brains, they are analog processors. They mark or engage the
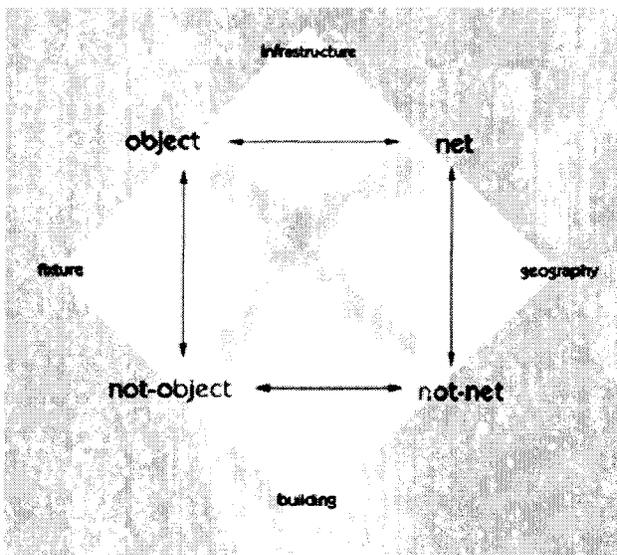

Figure 2. After Krauss, an expanded field for architecture.

forces and materials that define a territory or terrain and can bring a sense of the instability of matter into our experience.[13] Infrastructures, as Allen characterizes them, "organize complex systems of flow, movement and exchange."[14] Geographies seem like infrastructures but they depend upon existing flows of matter and force, engaging these flows, rather than managing them. And buildings, located by notobject and notnet, are not figures or arrays of connections, but a double negation that maps out exterior and interior.

Fixtures have the qualities of machine and organism, they are intensive and can be iconically technological; Banham is their spokesperson. Infrastructures can be open or closed like software, they are extensive and often depend upon repetition or patterns that engage the social and political; Allen has been their chief spokesperson lately, but Tafuri could be their patron saint. Geographies have the qualities of surfaces and topographies, engaging actual ecologies rather than organizing artificial ones;[15] MacKay and Jacobs are their unfashionable promoters. Buildings are empty vessels, intensive and definite, sometimes nostalgic like the monuments of dead empires; Rowe and Frampton try to make them be everything.

OPERATIONS IN A FIELD: A THINKFEEL SENSE OF MATERIALITY

Fields of organizations and orders, open and closed relations—these are material conditions which can direct a certain way of building that connects form and inform, material and force, activated by logics of sense and event. While this suggests a change from both modernist and post-modernist architectures, it turns our attention to the habits of cities because they bring us into intimate and immediate contact with logics of sense and event. It becomes possible to avoid nostalgia and its companions, identity politics and communitarianism, by a pragmatic attention to the effects and interactions of everyday urban fabrics.[16] You can regard the sidewalk as a geography/infrastructure with a particular materiality that creates a certain exchange of information. It is important for what it does, not for its celebration of density, small scale or community. In many ways, this attitude toward the city, as an emergent organization dependent on a generative complexity, is closer to the mathematics that compelled Jacob's ideas[17] than the interpretations of her work developed by the New Urbanists and their allies.

Two conditions of contemporary urban centers—the densification and intensification of the extensive relationships established in global economies, and the 'disjunctive syntheses' that result—demonstrate the potential affinity between the logic of global cities and this notion of architectural expertise as a field combining matter and force. Saskia Sassen, among others, has produced a considerable amount of research which indicates that urban infrastructures are not neutralized by new electronic technologies. Even though financial markets exist in electronic space and produce a dematerialized output, new digital technologies create a demand for complex centralized functions dependent upon flexible, responsive, highly specialized, information-based services. These law, finance, and mass media services need non-standard, highly interpreted information. The exchange of this high order information must be directly integrated with daily work life, and ironically, proximity becomes critical for the new economy. As Sassen puts it: "The city becomes the best organizational form to optimize technologies that neutralize time and space."[18] Because cities have become 'a frontier zone of de-nationalization' and 'strategic sites for the constitution of a new digitized economic sector' as Sassen observes, we live in a time where certain localities are, actually and materially, the site of the global.[19] Her research creates a vision of the urban interstice as information flow—not post-modern scenography, not palliative landscape, not critical scapeland.[20]

Wireless communications systems, embedded circuitry, other technologies of pervasive and ubiquitous computing, can't sit only in the domain of venture capitalists and Singapore technocrats. Certain technologies (Larry Smarr's evanescent and ubiquitous computing environments, for example)[21] can give us the means for first understanding and then using the emergent orders of the city. Why should the federal highway initiative, 50 years old, be the last great innovation in city infrastructures we recognize, especially when they have a critical influence on the conventional domains of architectural practice?

But it is not simply an issue of new economy gadgetry. Kerry James Marshall's canvas banner paintings announce and undo identity[22] through an overcoding that embeds (doesn't collage) one kind of information in another. These 'disjunctive syntheses'[23] effect a 'resensation' of identity as something closer to a practice, less of a category optimized for marginalization. The paintings are fixtures and work like Massumi's description of an analog process, where "there is a 'continuous transportation of an impulse from qualitatively different medium into another. Electricity into sound waves. ...Or vision into imagination."[24] In his Gardens series, Marshall paints those Chicago public housing complexes that use the word "garden" in their names (Stateway Gardens, for example). When you look at these things you understand the fabric of the canvas as something pliant, ready to change shape—there are no stretchers, the paintings hang limp. The figures are flattened and oversized, an advertisement for something. Any iconography is embedded in the drippy mess of its making, dependent upon a substrate that's ready to shift. We are immersed in sense-formation [or sense-(in)formation] as Marshall makes this immediate conduction between a marginalized culture

Figure 4. *Crossed Stacked Firewood, 2000. Christine Tarkowski.*

Figure 3. *From the "Gardens" series, Kerry James Marshall.*

and iconic images of American domestic life. The synthesis of these 'disjunctions'—city/garden, banner/painting, sign/image, text/texture, utopia/distopia—are an act of thinkfeel, a sense logic.

When Tarkowski wallpapers a handicap ramp she asks us to experience the instability of matter. The materials—the matters—of the everyday urban interstice as regulated by accessibility regulations and the particular limits of our bodies have a new range of experience. Her silk-screening techniques make depths on the surface—the image dissolves into texture once you move close enough to use the ramp. The status of things, techniques, territories, get changed.[25] The photographic origin of the images contribute to the sense of one kind of real reciprocating with another kind of real. Images become material; effects emerge through structure and pattern as a photograph gets manipulated, abstracted, enlarged, reduced,
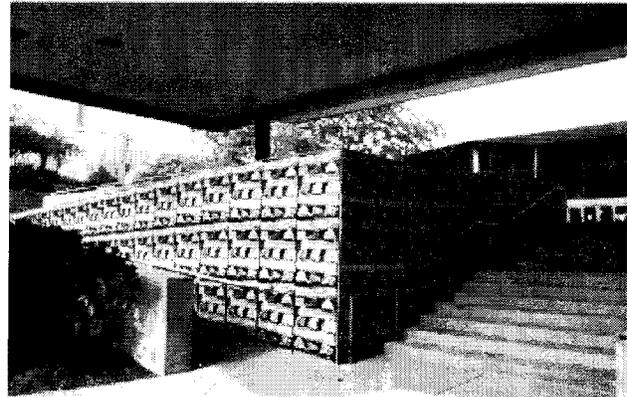
reproduced, repeated, rendered into pattern, made tactile. These patterns on flimsy substrates become strategies, new organizations of the familiar, new modes of possession. They endure in hostile terrains, quasi-objects, funny, weird, beautiful. More disjunctive synthesis, at another scale—a second skin, camouflage for architecture.

Other tactics can use the zones of blind smoothness in the expanded field. There are the improper but vigorous habits of street culture—skaters, for example. Skaters depend upon an attention to the feedback between force and matter, generated by bodies and boards and surfaces.[26] The feedback makes an analog relation between emanation (something emitted/radiated by matter) and sensation (something received by matter).[27] This play between emanation and sensation is a type of experience far removed from both the phenomenologist's desire for transcendence and the contemporary casino designers' attempt to commodify experience. Compare St. Peters or the Bellagio with the intensive experience, the 'found physics', of Simparch's Basin project. Both and neither an installation and a performance space, the basin combines the logics of building, fix-

ture and infrastructure to change our visual experience of gallery space from the optic to the haptic.[28] The basin divides the space into two floors. If you are below the basin surface, you hear the rumble of the wheels on the ply. If you are above, a spectator, you feel the vibrations of bodies wiping out in the hollow through the frame and its diagram. No matter who you are and what you are doing, you smell the wood. All this happens because of the material and its situation, no narrative necessary. Even when you are a spectator, the unmistakable endorphy testosterone thrill is there, no need to transcend anything.[29] The virtual is in the physical, you don't have to make a choice. And the relation between the two is already ubiquitous and pervasive. Wired has it half right; Architecture Record, all wrong.

A sense, a thinkfeel, of radical materiality—giving time weight, understanding material as energy with the capacity to send, receive and organize information—is one potential of an expanded field of architectural expertise. The idea is to move our work away from the invention of new form or the determination of best form to the development of new techniques and arrays of materials. As experimenters rather than tastemakers or stylists, architects can exercise their expertise optimistically and move beyond the instrumental or
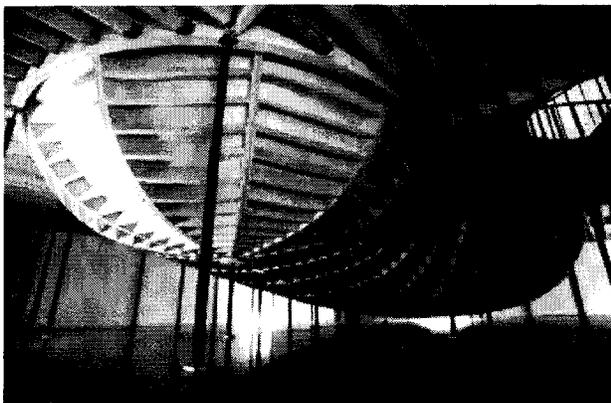

Figure 5. Basin, 2000. Simparch.

palliative interventions characterizing current urban planning policies and building practices.[30]

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Wired. (9.11.2001).

NOTES

[1] Bennahum, David. S. "Be Here Now" *Wired.* (9.11) 162.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid. 160.

[4] John Rajchman. *The Deleuze Connections.* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000): 71. "Can we do for digital devices what Man Ray, Jarry, and Tinguely did for mechanical ones, when they invented strange procedures to expose a sense of times and space prior to mechanized operations?"

[5] Henry Adams. *The Education of Henry Adams.* (New York: The Modern Library, 1931).

[6] Michael Speaks. "How the New Economy is Changing Theory and Practice." (*Architecture Record.* 12.2000): 74-77.

[7] Ibid.

[8] See the series of books published by McKinsey consultants Kennedy and Allen, starting with *In Pursuit of Excellence,* the best selling business book of the eighties.

[9] Rosalind Krauss. "Sculpture in an Expanded Field." (*The Anti-Aesthetic.* H. Foster, ed. Seattle: Bay Press. 1983): 31.

[10] Ibid. 42.

[11]R. E. Somol, *In Form Falls Fiction: Misreading the Avantgarde in Contemporary Architecture.* (Dissertation, Committee on the History of Culture, the University of Chicago. 1997): 248.

[12]Ibid. 239.

[13]When Diller and Scofidio play with the assumptions we map onto new technologies, the electronic in particular, they move beyond Baudrillard's substitution of 'screen and network' for 'scene and mirror' to define a field of relations. In projects like the Brasserie, a restaurant in the Seagram's Building, they make the screen into a fixture which embeds the experience of electronic communication and information—disembodied sensation, animated surfaces— into the social exchange of a fashionable bar. The screens give you eyes behind your head, your potential loss of privacy suspends criticality, and image delays give everyone in the space a chance to be a voyeur to their own experience. Diller and Scofidio let us inhabit the fields of forces generated by electronic technologies. The materials—the matters—of the everyday urban interstice as regulated by accessibility regulations and the particular limits of our bodies have a new range of experience.

[14]Stan Allen. *Points and Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999)

[15]Ibid.

[16]It is possible to see urban situations as an engaging complex of emergent systems that perform as a relational construct that is all at once mirrored and intensified and attenuated in the net. In the *New York Times* [April 1999], George Johnson, in an article entitled "Searching for the Essence of the World Wide Web," described how researchers at Xerox Park were using the internet as a lab for studying mass human behavior. According to Johnson, the value of the net for social science research derives from its ability to behave like an ecosystem, that is, a self-organizing emergent system where researchers merge techniques from meteorology and sociology. Johnson said that this new way of observing and conducting human interaction occurred because the net does not 'act like physical space.' What does it mean to act like physical space? Is that a question we would ask in the absence of the digital technologies?

[17]Johnson, Steven. *Emergence: the Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities and Software.* (New York: Scribner, 2000): 50.

[18]Saskia Sassen. *Global Cities.* (public lecture, Chicago Humanities Conference, 4 November 1999).

[19]Ibid.

[20]Or, in another vein, John Rajchman. *The Deleuze Connections.* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000): 100. "The great question of the banalization of space in modern societies might then be attacked not by unique or auratic objects, but rather through strategies of singularization that would lighten spaces, releasing vital differences... If then the segmentation of social space permits a geometry of horizontals and verticals within which to chart or locate all social movement, minorities and becomings work instead with diagonals or transversals which suggest other spaces, other movements. To 'diagram' a space is to expose such diagonal lines and the possibilities they open up, ...making a map that is not a trace... In other words, social space can never be fully drawn from Cartesian coordinates since it always 'envelopes' many 'infraspaces' that introduce distances and proximities of another, nonquantifiable sort. In 'developing' such potentials we should no longer think in terms of lines going from one fixed point to another, but on the contrary, must think of points as lying at the intersection of many entangled lines, capable of drawing out 'other spaces'..." And, Sadie Plant: "Without the centrality of agency, culture is neither high, nor ordinary, but complex. It becomes possible to look at cities, cultures and subcultures of every scale and variety as self-organizing systems with their own circuits, exchanges, contagions, flows, discontinuities, lines of communication and bottom-up processes of development. It also becomes impossible simply to 'look' at anything at all. If hypertext erodes the distinction between reading and writing, connectionism challenges the old borderline between theorizing something and doing it, and induces an unprecedented convergence and interconnection of theory and methodology with what were once their discrete objects of study. Theoretical developments leak across disciplines, and also become newly integrated with the complex processes they describe."

[21]J. Markoff. "The Soul of the Ultimate Machine" (*New York Times*, 12/19/2000): 16. The huge computational load generated by ubiquitous communication networks (e.g. traffic management) requires an 'effervescent' architecture where components assemble and dis-assemble as needed.

[22]John Rajchman. *The Deleuze Connections.* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000): 82. "[T]he problem is to create arrangements in space and time in which we relate to ourselves and one another in a manner not subordinated to identity or identification, imaginary or symbolic, not even to the self-recognition of classes. " Diversity and multiplicity are not equivalent.

[23]John Rajchman. *The Deleuze Connections.* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000).

[24]Brian Massumi. "Line Parable for the Virtual (On the Superiority of the Analog)." *The Virtual Dimension.* Beckman, ed. (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).

[25]In other work, materials [building guts, military equip] become a viral infection, producing recombinant camo patterns of reciprocation between visual experience and visceral danger, domesticity and aggression, guy things and the things girls love about guys (some days). They are surface-fixtures making connections between sensation and cognition, playing with scale and images of the natural. Her laborious-dumb-simple image making process polymorphously and perversely takes on what ever it needs to get made. Her techniques switch back and forth between handicraft and digity tech, smoothing out any gap or difference between digital and analog.

[26]J. Kipnis. "Radical Materiality" (Unpublished manuscript, 2000). "all material arrangements to some extent sense all others."

[27]Brian Massumi. "Line Parable for the Virtual (On the Superiority of the Analog)." *The Virtual Dimension.* Beckman, ed. (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).

[28]John Rajchman. *The Deleuze Connections.* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000). Delueze's model of human knowing is not artificial intelligence's 'stubborn logic of recognition and representation' (51) Rajchman sees the optic and haptic as referring to "two different kinds of sign or two different 'spacializations' of vision, which concern, for example, what is taken to be near and far. 'Haptic' space thus anticipates what in the 'intensive space' of the modern work would depart from the figure-ground, eye-hand relations dear to Gestalt psychology—for example, the kind of 'disconnected' spaces explored in modern cinema, or the problems posed by the Chinese wall in Kafka..." (129).

[29]Tony Alva (professional skater) says skateboarding is 'a release of your energy on the terrain'. J. Kipnis. "Radical Materiality" (Unpublished manuscript, 2000). "All material arrangements to some extent sense all others, sometimes barely, but much more often through a richly detailed and elaborate palette of emanations and sensations."

[30]John Rajchman. *The Deleuze Connections.* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000): 128. "[T]he work of art leaves the domain of representation to become 'experience' (or 'experiment')... In the resulting aesthetics, the figure of the experimenter thus takes over for the Kantian Judge."