

NO MORE WALLS¹

Catalog Essay by Fiona Whitton, Director, Telic Gallery, Los Angeles, 2005

Much of the work at Telic is less concerned with the art-object-on-a-wall than the tension-in-space created by an environmental or interactive experience. This work can be kinetic; it often addresses our visitors' senses of touch, hearing, and smell; it encourages viewers to move through the space, to spend time or to actively leave. It is a kind of production that is at once a product of its time and the reflection of an earlier one. Over 60 years ago, Frederick Kiesler created the fantastic Art of This Century gallery for Peggy Guggenheim, which was to coordinate architecture with surrealist art objects such that "there are no frames or borders between art, space, life... [T]he spectator recognizes his act of seeing... as a participation in the creative process no less essential and direct than the artist's own."² This "correlation" between art, architecture, and viewer was an environmental creation that included mechanical-kinetic viewing systems, choreographed lighting and sound, and multifunctional furniture.

Even earlier, in Kiesler's experiments with display windows and theatrical staging, he incorporated light and motion in ways that demanded new forms of drama and related to a new kind of audience. It's this interest in spaces of performance and everyday life that makes Scott Snibbe's work so interesting for us. Where Kiesler's *Space Stage* of 1923 was inspired by dynamic forms from modernism's mass culture—from roller coasters to the circus—Snibbe's *Deep Walls* draws from video games and surveillance cameras. The former required a new kind of kinetic drama, the latter an interactive one where participant and viewer occupy the same stage.

Snibbe treats the gallery as a stage even more directly in floor projection works like *Boundary Functions* and *Near*, where the spaces between individuals are invested with diagrammatic meaning: separating lines and connecting arrows. These installations explore everyday social relations first by illustrating them, thus giving them form, and then by encouraging visitors to play with these forms through improvised bodily movement.

Designing an environment that produces these kinds of interactions is a peculiar challenge that draws from architecture, computer programming, and psychophysiology. It makes use of new materials and technology to give the visitor an almost tactile sense of interaction with immaterial systems that are based on camera vision and projected images. Snibbe's detailed instructions for constructing his installations even recall the drawings Kiesler made for the various viewing devices in *Art of This Century*.

Visceral Cinema: Chien—Snibbe's latest work referencing the surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* by Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel—might even have found its place in the Art of This Century gallery. In what might be a spark of Kiesler's aspiration in *The Universal Theater*—that is, to integrate the audience into an encompassing relationship with the production—viewers of *Visceral Cinema* can use their silhouettes to participate in moments from experimental film history.

Recently, interactive media art has become increasingly institutionalized in universities, festivals, and museums, often pinning its *raison d'être* on the infinitely malleable term "interactivity." Hopefully, we will not allow the history and complexity of this term to be diluted—by privileging the relationship between a person and a machine—for the sake of making a discipline. For Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics," as well as for Kiesler and Snibbe, interactivity is something that happens between people in a space. And, as Kiesler (the self-described "non-architect") theorized decades ago, it suggests a radical cross-pollination of ideas, disciplines, and media that necessarily escapes any genre.

¹ The title of this essay is taken from an early piece of writing by Frederick Kiesler called "Manifesto on Tensionism," originally in the April 1925 edition of *De Stijl*.

² Kiesler. "Notes on Designing the Gallery." 1942.

