

sound

The Conjugate Projekt
Motion-ness

CTA Rapid Transit Train, Chicago

The folks who make up the Conjugate Projekt believe in the continuity of history. Because house music was born in Chicago, the Projekt envisions dance music and DJ culture—the hostile media and municipal government notwithstanding—thriving in the heart of the city. That includes in the most common of public spaces, like a Chicago Transit Authority elevated train. The *el* may be a feature of



Conjugate Projekt, *Motion-ness* photographs by Mike Rosley



Conjugate Projekt, *Motion-ness* dj James Cund

Chicago as widely recognized as the city's distinctive skyline, but riding the train is seldom more than a functional experience. Train car interiors designed for unbreakability and easy washability indicate the CTA as a lowest common denominator kind of space. So when the Projekt arranged to throw a party on a six-car *el* train, taking riders all over the city to the beats of eighteen DJs in cars flickering by the light of video installations, the self-declared historic nature of the event seemed a reasonable claim.

Despite the occasional turntable turbulence, the DJs kept the sounds pulsating as the train covered territory without the usual stops. After the first hour it was hard to keep track of what lines we travelled and through what neighborhoods we floated. Every glance out the windows revealed the nighttime Loop skyscrapers from a different angle, or observers marveling at the spectacle of a dance party in full swing in an unlit, bass-booming *el* train rushing by. That the Projekt orchestrated this symbolic and literal elevation of an underground subculture to a mobile public stage with the full support of the city infrastructure was admirably subversive. At the same time, the event stretched definitions of collective performance. *Motion-ness* was a complex happening (being, among other things, a benefit for literacy programs) deserving of an encore date, and surely will be remembered as practical idealism at its best.

Dan S. Wang