

The Mass Production of Artwork
Christian Giroux and Daniel Young in
conversation with Kim Förster

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Kim Förster

With your sculpture *Groundcurve*, which you will show for the first time at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, you seem to return to the artistic practice that distinguished your work when you started to collaborate some ten years ago. I'm curious to learn more about how you reflect on the influences and intentions behind your work, and also your thoughts on architecture, urban space and the post-industrial landscape, which inform most of your films and seem to set the ground for the new sculpture. Let me begin by asking how you met, and when and why you decided to work as an artist duo.

Christian Giroux

Daniel and I are ten years apart in age. I met Dan when he was just finishing high school. I had moved to Toronto, to start afresh after spending a lot of time on the west coast of Canada. I went to the University of Victoria, where I studied with Mowry Baden, who came out of the late 1960s California scene. His emphasis was on the phenomenological and the performative. Mowry was counterbalanced on the faculty by Roland Brener, who was a student of Anthony Caro's and had a highly resolved formal position.

Chris Burden, *Victoria Falls Bridge*, 2003,
stainless steel reproduction Mysto Type I Erector
parts, wood base, 62 x 198 x 21.5 cm





Mowry Baden, *I Can See the Whole Room*, 1994, fabric, aluminum, plexiglass, 251 x 203 x 130 cm

Daniel Young

Is this where you always say that all the sculptors in Canada come out of the University of Victoria?

Christian Giroux

Well, that's true for Canadian sculptors like Kim Adams, James Carl and Marla Hlady—to name a few. Famously, Charlie Ray worked with Roland Brener, and Mowry Baden had Jessica Stockholder and Chris Burden as students, but here I've fallen into the trap of overemphasizing their accomplishments as teachers. They have both produced incredibly distinct and powerful bodies of work and should be judged on the merits of their own contributions.

Kim Förster

Were you primarily trained in sculpture?

Christian Giroux

I studied painting and sculpture. My ideas formed around sculpture from studying with these powerful, dynamic figures.

Daniel Young

Dominating?

Jessica Stockholder, *Vortex in the Play of Theatre with Real Passion*, 2000, Duplo, theatre curtain, work site containers, bench, theatre light, inoleum, tables, fur, newspaper, fabric, paint, dimensions variable



Christian Giroux

Dominating but benevolent. I actually never studied directly with Brener, but his influence was unavoidable.

Daniel Young

And you guys were on the edge of the world in Victoria.

Christian Giroux

Well, we were cut off by this mountain range of major artists: Jeff Wall, Stan Douglas, Ken Lum ...

Daniel Young

Ian Wallace, Roy Arden ...



Jeff Wall, *A View from an Apartment*, 2004-5, transparency in a lightbox, 167 x 244 cm

Christian Giroux

And my favourite, Rodney Graham.

Kim Förster

Were you also influenced by those artists?

Christian Giroux

No, the funny thing is, I had a total sculptural bias. We learned to resent the Vancouver scene. Victoria was marginalized, and my professors showed in Toronto or California. Vancouver rejected them. This is funny to recount now, as it is an old battle, not one I want to fight anymore. When I first met Dan, I still disdained Vancouver conceptualism. Part of my process of working with Dan led me to question some of my old biases.

Kim Förster

Dan, what were you up to when you two met?

Daniel Young

I was organizing a Reclaim the Streets event in Toronto, hanging out with urban activists and artists, anarchists and architects. I was experimenting with psychedelic drugs. I helped Christian with a project.



Roy Arden, *Wal-Mart Store (Tide)*, Burnaby BC, 1996, archival pigment print, 101.6 x 127 cm



Roy Arden, *Wal-Mart Store, (Apple Jacks)*, Burnaby BC, 1996, archival pigment print, 101.6 x 127 cm

Kim Förster

Christian, did you consider yourself a practising artist at that point?

Christian Giroux

I was struggling, teaching a bit, working in artist-run centres.

Daniel Young

I was going to SEED Alternative. Many members of the Toronto art community were teaching or somehow involved in this experimental high school. I latched on to them as the most interesting people I could spend time with. In 1999–2000, because of SEED, Art System (an alternative space) and the Anarchist Free School, which was active at that time, I met the artists Adrian Blackwell, Kika Thorne, Luis Jacob, Jinhan Ko, Jubal Brown and Daniel Borins.

Kim Förster

What exactly brought you two together?



Groundcurve, 2012, acrylic, cast stainless steel, aluminum, racking, components, 239 x 152 x 142 cm

Christian Giroux

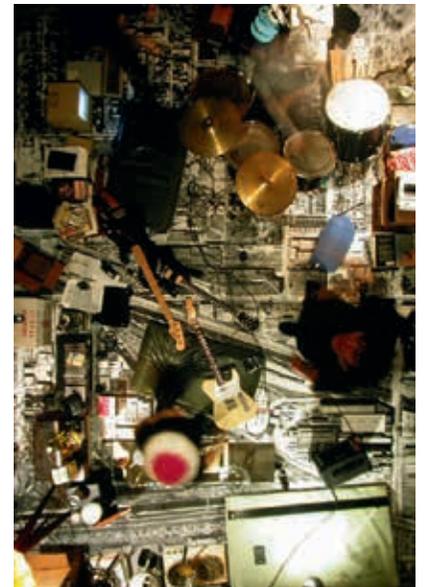
In early 2000 I was given a show at Art System. I told the director I was struggling to produce a new piece using electrical conduit, and he said he knew a young guy who did computer work in a tube factory who might be able to help me out. So the director introduced me to Dan, and Dan took me to the Columbia-MBF factory, partly managed by his father, and we worked on that project over the summer. Almost immediately we began to imagine other projects we could collaborate on. Daniel was eighteen, I was twenty-nine.

Kim Förster

You mention the ten-year difference in age.
How did that affect your work together?

Christian Giroux

All the differences between us have been productive,
not just the age difference.



Kika Thorne, Adrian Blackwell, 160 slides, 1998, floor projection, 160 slides, 304 x 457 cm, 10 min loop



Luis Jacob, *Anarchist Free School Minutes*, 1998-99, 22 framed sheets of typewritten paper, reading area, dimensions variable

Kim Förster

In 2003 you produced *Fullerene*, and in 2004 the two sculptures *Access* and *Excel*. For each sculpture you chose a formal approach, using the cube or the buckyball as principal structures. What was your approach? What were your influences?

Daniel Young

Access and *Excel* were inspired in part by the conversation that was happening in Toronto around the Frank Gehry renovation of the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), and a reading of the critical urban geographer David Harvey—and perhaps, looking back at it now, Fredric Jameson.

Every Building, or Site, That a Building Permit Was Issued for, a New Building in Toronto in 2006, 2008, frame scan from 35mm motion picture film (1.85), 14 min looping film installation



Christian Giroux

The two pieces were united formally a number of ways. *Excel* could fit inside the negative space that *Access* wraps around.

Daniel Young

They were experiments in formal discourse, relating to the production of space, particularly in North America at that moment. In 2004 the cube held a dissident position against the dynamism—or new organicism—within architecture, design and visual culture.

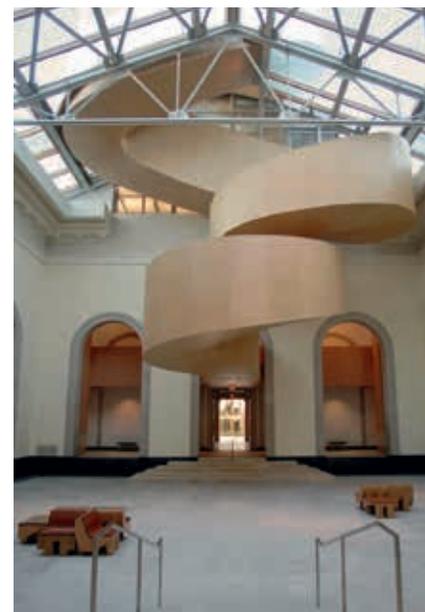
Kim Förster

Fluorescent lighting and the venting system, especially with the addition of air-conditioning units, were two technological developments that in the postwar era revolutionized architecture, at least in North America. They were the main features of the new infrastructure, which guaranteed the total environmental control of hermetically sealed interior spaces. In *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment*, first published in 1969, Reyner Banham called for a new architectural culture, based on belief in technological solutions. He

Excel and Access, 2004, installation view 'YZ Artists' Outlet'



popularized a view of architecture that was not structural or tectonic, but rather looked at the environmental performance of buildings. Of course AC units have had devastating effects not only on interior spaces, particularly office spaces, but also on public spaces, which have become deserted. You are using a straightforward formal approach, drawing on Conceptual Art and Minimalism, and are reducing the content of your sculptural acts to a single idea—taking one architectural element and exposing it. This particular approach is evident in all the sculptural projects you have worked on. To speak about *Access* and *Excel*, why did you select those two architectural elements, which are totally generic?



Art Gallery of Ontario, Frank Gehry's spiral staircase in Walker Court, 2004-8



Access and Excel, 2004, installation view, YYZ Artists' Outlet

Daniel Young

In their conception, I felt *Access and Excel* were somehow gestures opposing the new Gehry renovation, using everyday materials rather than expensive custom-fabricated elements.

Kim Förster

The AGO renovation is luxurious in terms of materials used and spaces developed. Still, there are some formal experiments typical of Gehry with regards to the internal and external staircases, which make the new building slightly deconstructivist in terms of its spatial arrangements and experiences. It certainly provides for iconicity, which probably has had some effect on architectural debates in Toronto. To my mind, your sculptures bring a healthy dose of reality to discussions about architecture, since you take a closer look at generic appliances and apparatus, and at the same time produce them as single objects of interest.

Christian Giroux

At the time, we did describe them as “HVAC satellites,” singular instances of systems turned in on themselves, which become allusive objects. Those two pieces were also very much about our own creative dialogue while we were still finding a way to work together.



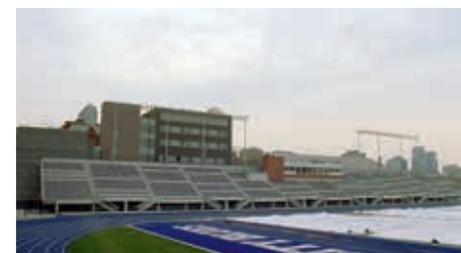
Every Building, or Site, That a Building Permit Was Issued for a New Building in Toronto in 2006, installation view, Prefix ICA

Daniel Young

One thing that I like about *Access* and *Excel* is that we didn't use any paint, just the raw material. Also, they can be repositioned now as maquettes, studies for projects on an urban scale.

Kim Förster

Let's focus more on your recent work—films and sculptures. Not so much in terms of authorship, but with regard to the communication processes you employ. You pose a question—How does architecture relate to urban space?—in works such as *Every Building, or Site, That a Building Permit Was Issued for a New Building in Toronto in 2006* (2008), which looks at one year of new construction in the city of Toronto; *Camera Tracking a Spiral Drawn between the Two Curved Towers of Viljo Revell's Toronto City Hall* (2010), which is about the spatialities of Toronto City Hall, a building that dates from the mid-1960s; and *Reticulated Gambol* (2007–8), which is simultaneously a public sculpture



Every Building, or Site, That a Building Permit Was Issued for a New Building in Toronto in 2006

and a children's playground. To what extent did you employ a shift of spatial scales—from architecture to urban and suburban landscapes—as a productive tool? And where did critical spatial theory come in? When in your artistic practice did you move away from a more sculptural scale towards a geographic reading of topics like mass production and consumption? Dan, you studied urban geography at the University of Toronto, I believe.

Daniel Young

I come from a family where everyone worked in manufacturing. That was how one expressed oneself, or had agency—by making things. *Access* and *Excel* are metaphors. Sculpture is a mode of expression that I felt comfortable with, even though there are perhaps more apt, discursive ways to work with these topics—writing, making pictures with a camera, or drawing. But because of my personal context, sculpture is a natural form of expression. To take one example, my step-father worked in the factory that made the fluorescent tubes we used in *Excel*.

Christian Giroux

Let me add to that. I was taught that sculpture is a vehicle for a heightened subjective experience. This experience ultimately has to do with a consideration of space, and so to this end we were reading Henri Lefebvre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Sculpture is both the model and the means by which one can understand or appreciate the complexities of embodiment. Mowry Baden's work often took the form of an apparatus, and the body figured largely as a kind of gauge, measuring and revealing phenomena about itself. I still find this framework productive, and I remain invested in sculptural craft, but I've also been drawn into discourses about the city and the production of space.

Daniel Young

Looking back, it felt as though architecture, urbanism, and urbanism consciousness dominated the discourse of critical theory during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Kim Förster

Lefebvre's *Production of Space*, first published in English in 1991, transformed English-language geography. Edward Soja and David Harvey's analysis of capitalist urban space and Fredric Jameson's theory of the spatial turn as constitutive of the postmodern experience were transformative not only for rethinking space as a new paradigm in social and cultural studies, but also in terms of literature, art and film. At the same time, we experienced the transformation of urban space—for example, Toronto's expansion since the

Infrastructure Canada, 2010–12, three-channel rear-screen randomized digital video projection from scanned full-frame Super 35 motion picture film, 60 min, installation view, Oakville Galleries



1960s with its many suburbs. I'm thinking of the industrial parks along Highway 401, which resemble the edge cities outside of Houston. My understanding is that film gave you the tools to look at the production of urban spaces with your sculptural works.

Daniel Young

The films make it explicit.

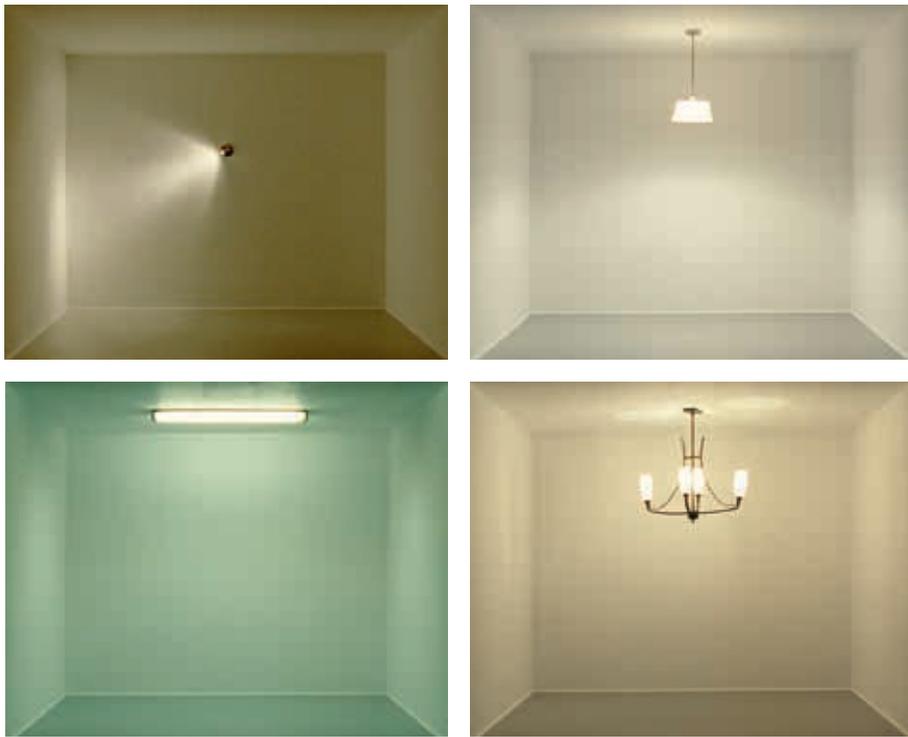
Kim Förster

It is quite difficult to think of your work in terms of a chronology. You seem to have developed projects in parallel, and I'm not sure if it really matters. However, in terms of the spatial scales you deal with, we can see a move from sculpture to film. You started with your immediate urban environment, with *Every Building*. In the follow-up films, *Camera Tracking a Spiral* and, most recently, *Infrastructure Canada* (2012), you frame the urban and the geographic topics differently. You already established a way to talk about the post-industrial landscape, and at the same time you were working



Infrastructure Canada (low-volume ferry, southern Saskatchewan)

50 Light Fixtures from Home Depot, 2009, frame scan from 35mm motion picture film (1.33), fixed projection size of 304 x 243 cm, 13 min looping film projection



on narratives about mass culture and technological systems with your sculptures; for example, the Boole sculptures made out of IKEA furniture and powder-coated sheet metal enclosures hint at global systems of production and consumption, which parallel architectural production and determine the way we live. In addition, your film *50 Light Fixtures from Home Depot* (2010) expands your notion of the generic consumer product. What then is the link between your sculptures and your films? When did you start to think and experiment in cinematic and photographic terms? This is a completely different set of languages, but I think you follow the same approach.

Daniel Young

That is a very complex question. We can tell you how the sculptures and films developed.

Kim Förster

Maybe you could talk about how you defined the topics. Did you consciously decide to territorially expand with your films and artistically explore what Rem Koolhaas coined “the Generic City”—that is, mass-market products ranging from furniture to interior design and architecture?

Daniel Young

I wanted to show people what I thought was some of the content in our sculptures. I wanted to systematically photograph the city. What does one year of new construction look like?

What would the city be with just this one year of added building stock? It was an experiment. We think we know what it will look like, but perhaps we don't. First we were going to shoot it with a digital SLR, then show it as a slideshow—ugly buildings in an ugly format. It didn't work. So we went to the opposite end of the spectrum, working with the most luxurious medium, which is 35mm motion picture film. This technology happened to be available in Toronto. We had access to a good lab, and an experimental film scene, and the film co-op LIFT (Liaison of Independent Filmmakers Toronto), where we rented our equipment. The funding for that project came from the money we made from our first public art project, *Reticulated Gambol*.

Kim Förster

So that happened simultaneously, your first film project and your design for an intervention in public space, both focusing on suburban Toronto?

Daniel Young

All the buildings surrounding *Reticulated Gambol* could have been in the film, but Lee Centre, the site of the play-ground, was built earlier.

Kim Förster

These two works differ not only with regard to your preoccupation with urban space, but also in terms of your approach to particular strands of art history: a documentary style and a site-specific approach. First, I'm interested in knowing to what extent you see your films as field research into vernacular architecture and everyday urban landscapes. And second, would you say that you consciously inscribe your works into art history?

Reticulated Gambol, 2007–8, powder-coated steel, 12.19 x 12.80 x 2.47 cm





James Benning, *13 Lakes* (Jackson Lake, Wyoming), 2004, 16mm motion picture film with soundtrack, 135 min

Christian Giroux

We did see *Every Building* as a kind of typological study of built form that could in some ways inform our sculpture, but it wasn't made exclusively to that end. The film works are more explicitly discursive, while the sculptures are more ambiguous. That ambiguity might be considered frustrating: what we see in the work is not always available to the viewer. But ambiguity is generative; it is part of the power of the work. The films tie our practice into more specific contexts, beginning with the City of Toronto.

Kim Förster

One context you work in is the art historical context. Your films refer to objectification strategies mimicked by Edward Ruscha; they also share some aesthetic qualities with the landscape photography of James Benning. The films of Berlin filmmaker Heinz Emigholz seem to be similar, at least in their approach to portrait

Heinz Emigholz, *Schindlers Häuser* (Roth House, 1945, Studio City), 2006-7, 35mm motion picture film with soundtrack, 99 min



architecture, although he applies a rather idiosyncratic approach to frame the images. Do you aim for a particular discursiveness with your films that you can't achieve with your sculptures?

Daniel Young

Yes, our sculptures are partly inspired by the production of space, by suburban industrial parks, warehouses and condo towers. On an abstract plane, I can see our *Every Building* film and our *Boole* sculptures using the same cognition as in a jumpcut in a film: between the raising of a new big box store and the fabrication of one of our powder-coated aluminum enclosures in a factory.



50 Light Fixtures from Home Depot, installation view, Mercer Union

Kim Förster

Do you understand your work as critical of society and, if not political, at least an act of aesthetic protest?

Daniel Young

Every Building is critical and political. It is a documentary film of a dystopia. What if the city consisted of only one year of construction? At the same time, it is also critical of our model of criticism, an objective document that suggests a criticism of our own Europeanized good taste. Christian and I have travelled to see early modern houses and buildings in Central Europe, but I don't think they offer a model for architecture and development. In some situations there is a communism in the production of space on a mass scale; a lateral distribution of wealth in Toronto has been achieved via home ownership.

Christian Giroux

The film is not a condemnation of all development in Toronto.

Kim Förster

In fact, you seem to embrace the capitalist development of urban space, featuring the urban fringe and celebrating the generic city.

Daniel Young

Perhaps it is a mixture of a guilty pleasure and a negative identification with the big developers: We made another building ... and another one!

Kim Förster

The same intricate relationship with industry holds for your sculptural works, for example, the *Boole* sculptures. I remember you once saying you were getting funding from IKEA, is that right?

Christian Giroux

IKEA donated the stools for our *Andersson* (2012) series because we were asked to produce a piece for a design fair in Toronto.

Kim Förster

50 Light Fixtures is a very sculptural film. You mentioned that you made excessive use of Home Depot's return policies, buying and then returning the light fixtures that you used in the film.

Daniel Young

We tried to have Home Depot sponsor the project, but they have no interest in the visual arts. We returned most of the fixtures. One or two are now in Christian's house.

Kim Förster

So you made active use of the customer rights our consumer culture provides. At the same time, I see *50 Light Fixtures* as a criticism of the white cube, the old story of withdrawing into the self-contained white spaces of the gallery.

Daniel Young

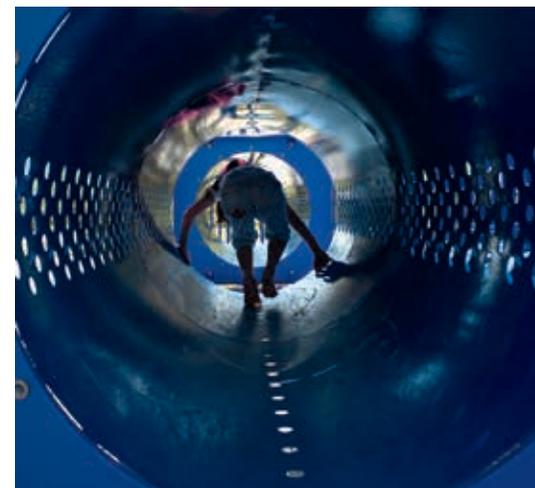
Yes, there's a joke about the white cube within it. I think it was more like the *Every Building* film, but engaging a single architectural element.

Christian Giroux

And it is about the experience of the domestic environment, and the way in which space is articulated and defined by light fixtures.

Daniel Young

50 Light Fixtures also came out of working with the technology, of working with motion picture film. While making *Every Building* we went to the cinema every other day and experienced the possibilities of that medium. Projected motion picture film is really special. Deluxe Labs Toronto has recently shut



Reticulated Gambol



down, so we caught the end of film, just when the technologies were developing even further. For *50 Light Fixtures* we shot with a brand-new film stock called Kodak Vision 3, which had a huge amount of latitude, so we were able to manage both the blacks and the very bright parts with very little burnout.

Kim Förster

In parallel to the production of your films, you worked on other sculptural projects, for example, *Reticulated Gambol* or the *Boole* series. It must have been a productive time for you recently, kind of a Fordist regime of production. You moved back and forth between films and sculptures. *Reticulated Gambol* was your first actual intervention in urban space. As a playground design, it was an artwork conceived to be used. Can you describe how the idea for designing a playground developed, and what your intention was in creating this colourful, matrix-like structure?

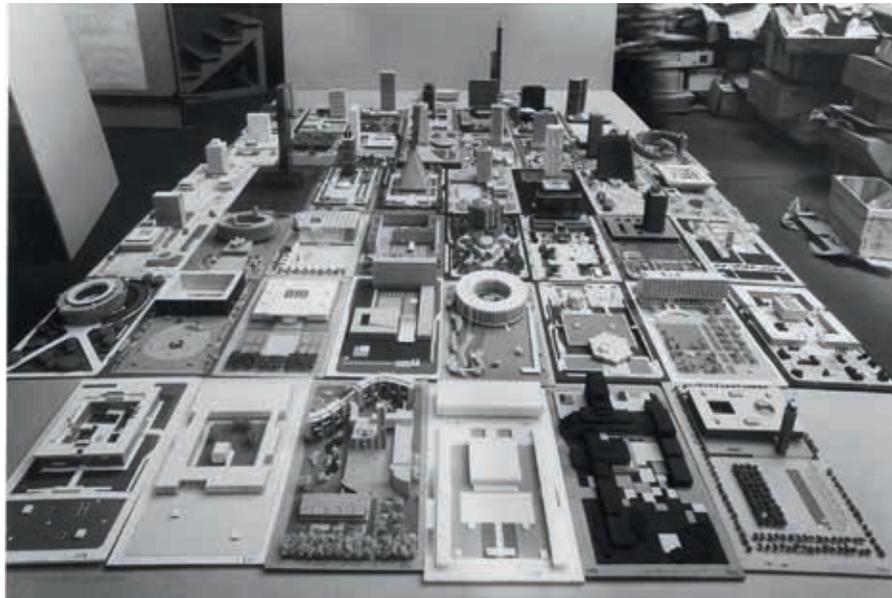
Christian Giroux

The interesting thing about that competition was that we were awarded the commission without having a concept. We were paired up with the landscape architecture team with the idea that the park and the artwork would develop in tandem.

From the beginning we knew we wanted a work that was interactive, that could be integrated into the social operations of the park but would still be an aesthetic interruption.

Daniel Young

All of the ideas we brought to the landscape architects were too conceptual. It is a small space that has 3,600 condominium units surrounding it. There was some political interference. The landscape architects asked us: Where do you want your art? We thought that we could make a playground. We were going to make our own system, but the landscape architects laughed at us because of the Canadian Standards Association codes. They thought it would be very difficult to get the required approvals.



Proposals for Toronto City Hall, 1958

Christian Giroux

So we worked with an off-the-shelf system, making the piece as large as we could, filling the area of land we were given and then reconfiguring the system, inverting its logic. Rather than multicoloured, ours is monochrome. And rather than it being chaotic and composed of many different parts, we regularized it into a grid. We speculated that it would make for a good game of tag, because the piece limits the directions kids can move. And we wanted to make a pavilion that is so imposing that it almost seems as if it isn't intended for play, but is.

Daniel Young

Oh, yeah, it is a pavilion.

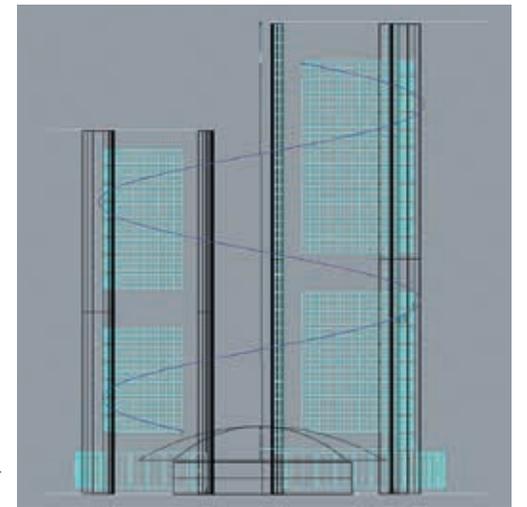
Christian Giroux

I think of it that way.

Daniel Young

Is it an architectural manifesto?

Screen capture from 3D model developing camera path for *Camera Tracking a Spiral Drawn Between the Two Curved Towers of Vito Revelli's Toronto City Hall*, 2010



Christian Giroux

I would never call it a manifesto.

Daniel Young

We are imprisoned within the standardization of mass culture, the Canadian Standards, etc. We can work only within code. The only freedom we have is to show how ridiculous the system is, by way of repetition and monochrome—perhaps dated strategies, but I think appropriate to this situation.

Kim Förster

In the end the playground does not differ that much conceptually from your sculptures and your films. You set up a geometric element or figure as a framework, which you work within, and at the same time this approach reduces the possibilities of expression to a certain number of combinations of frames or angles. Do you use your films as lenses for your sculptural projects or art in public spaces?



Production shot from *Camera Tracking a Spiral Drawn Between the Two Curved Towers of Vito Revelli's Toronto City Hall*, 2010

Christian Giroux

There is a constant dialogue between how the sculptures develop and how the films develop. There is definitely an interchange between the two.

Daniel Young

I feel that the films and the sculptures occupy different parts of my mind. They seem to stimulate different parts of my brain. When we switch between film and sculpture, I feel a certain joy in using a skill set that has been asleep, even though intellectually and topically these projects do speak to each other.

Christian Giroux

There is an internal logic to each of these disciplines, how one body of sculpture leads to another body of sculpture. That is true of the films as well, in terms of the craft of filmmaking, and at the same time the two disciplines contaminate each other. When making *Camera Tracking a Spiral*, our film about Toronto City Hall, we spent a lot of time climbing around the window ledges inside that beautiful curtain wall at City Hall, while looking out at the curtain wall opposite us. That experience partially inspired these new curtain wall sculptures, of which *Groundcurve* is the first.



Lee Center Park site of *Reticulated Gambol*,
February 2007



Camera Tracking a Spiral Drawn Between the Two Curved Towers of Viljo Revell's Toronto City Hall, 2010, frame scan from 35mm motion picture film (1.85), 9 min loop



Construction of *Reticulated Gambol*,
2008

Daniel Young

Growing up in the suburbs of Toronto, I saw these glass-skinned, geometric, glowing buildings—the mass production of space, the generic low-rise suburban office tower. These were the cultural objects I grew up with. I also had the cinematic experience of driving past these buildings on the highway at 120 km/h. Perhaps that is what I'm trying to work through as an artist now.

Kim Förster

Another interesting point to explore regarding *Reticulated Gambol*—before speaking about the curtain wall sculptures—is that it was your first public art project, the first artwork of yours to be commissioned. How did this change the communication process between you and the real world? All of a sudden you had to deal with city officials, standards associations, etc. How has your artistic practice shifted since then?

Christian Giroux

We have always worked well with limitations. Most of them have been self-imposed, but with public work, both the site and, in this instance, the process delimited what we could do. In some ways it is very freeing.

Daniel Young

Reticulated Gambol is an extremely successful public project from the community level. The children love it, but it is still an interruption in the landscape. A friend of ours, Darren O'Donnell,



Construction of *Reticulated Gambol*,
2008

was commenting that it is not a space for adults. It can be hard to get up into that space, and it is just short enough underneath that it is an awkward space for an adult.

Kim Förster

The child's orientation of *Reticulated Gambol* is one of the prerequisites you were working with. The sheer size of the climbing frame and the combination of single elements that compose the roofing probably change how it might be perceived by adults, next to its colour and material.

Daniel Young

Yes, there are some basic qualities to these components that appeal to children.

Christian Giroux

And to the plasticity of their bodies.

Kim Förster

Did you do your homework on playground equipment?

Christian Giroux

Yes, we did. The gold standard has been established by European and German systems, in which each activity is carefully considered, involving balance and cognitive skill-building. In comparison, our system is retrograde, a brutal postwar system.

Kim Förster

Is *Reticulated Gambol* based on a Canadian system?

Christian Giroux

Yes, and that allowed for more intervention on our part. The German systems are so over-designed and "artful" that it would have been difficult for us to make any kind of intervention.

Kim Förster

Will people in Toronto recognize the single components from other playgrounds?

Christian Giroux

Yes, the corkscrew climbers, the crawl tubes.

Kim Förster

But the size of the whole structure is unprecedented?

Christian Giroux

Well, its success has more to do with the colour and the ordering of the components, but it does seem to be on a different scale from what you normally see.

Kim Förster

What distinguishes it from other works of art is that it is totally generic, in terms of its industrial production. Compared with the other sculptures you have made, it is also the largest one. Looking at the *Boole*

sculptures—the assemblages you made out of IKEA designs—I have the impression that you overdid it. I was wondering if that was a reaction to the catalogue of IKEA products, or to the presence of IKEA furniture in your own or your friends' apartments? Why did you eventually stop with the *Boole* series? And was it difficult to stop? It looks obsessive to me.



Research image, Triple Metal Products, Scarborough, Ontario, 2006

Christian Giroux

I think we succeeded in expending the energies we brought to it. Before the *Boole* series we were copying forms like space satellites, or using simple Platonic solids, but with the *Boole* works we were generating abstract forms for the first time. In part we were influenced by time spent in Brancusi's studio at Centre Pompidou in Paris, as well as an exhibition of maquettes by the Japanese architecture office SANAA. We tried to adopt Brancusi's classic modernist equation, which blurs the line between the plinth and the object, and between the craft of the furniture maker versus the vision of the artist. We wanted to reformulate that equation outside of a modernist discussion of the spiritual, outside of craft and within the contemporary experience of mass-produced objects and the methodology of the industrial prototype. The IKEA pieces gave us a physical base to build on and a colour palette and volumes to work with.

Daniel Young

Did we go shopping at IKEA, before we made the sculptures?
Just go shopping for what we wanted?

Christian Giroux

Well, I started by making drawings, but yes, we did go to IKEA.

Daniel Young

We were also influenced by spending time in the Triple Metal factory located in Scarborough, a suburb of Toronto, working with fabricators who made all the sheet metal components for the satellites. All of these abstract components looked to me like art: they had aesthetic value. Also the abstraction within that industry is interesting, because sometimes they didn't know what they were making these components for. There is a very established system of sheet metal components, and these parts are in everything—cars, coffee makers, computers, refrigerators. All these little parts that have been bent and punched.

Christian Giroux

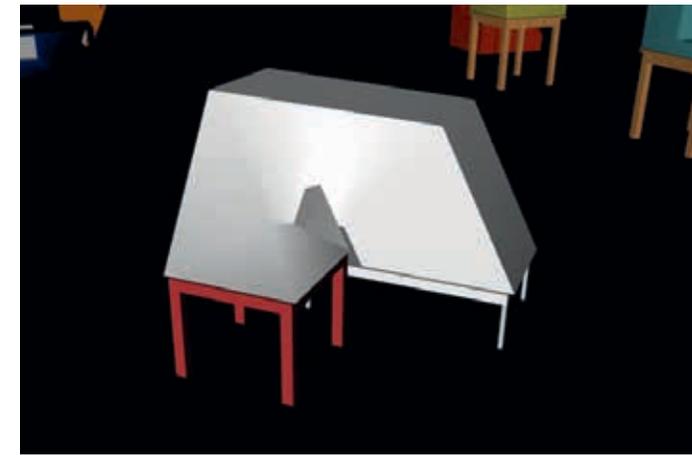
It also marked the moment when Daniel and I started to use the same software and began communicating back and forth with computer files.

Kim Förster

So at one point you started to use computer-aided design (CAD) for conceiving and designing your projects, for communicating back and forth via renderings, making comments on them, etc. I assume before that your projects were all handdrawn?



SANAA, exhibition view, Arkitekturmuseet Stockholm, 2007



Christian Giroux

Yes, earlier they were hand-drawn, but there were also a few maquettes, some vector drawings—a really ad hoc mix of things. Since 2007 we have focused on working with a small number of software tools, so we can quickly work back and forth.

Kim Förster

How did the use of new design technology change the way you were developing ideas? So far I have seen your renderings as part of your communication process. Do you consider it art?

Daniel Young

Well, it has raised a number of questions that we have not yet fully worked through. Sometimes the renderings look so close to the final project that it has an uncanny effect. Maybe in future projects we will deal with this. How did this change how we work? We can make twenty-five different compositions; we delete some and save others.

Christian Giroux

It has had the effect of democratizing the work between us.

Kim Förster

Has it led to a mass production of artwork?

Daniel Young

There are many ironies in the way mass production relates to the things we have made, where the first one costs ten times what the second item would cost, because of the economies of scale. The set-up charge is for an entire production run, but we will often make only one object. We definitely have fancies of mass productions of artwork.

Kim Förster

It has previously been argued that IKEA can be seen as a continuation of the Bauhaus, since they inherited the idea of mass production of furniture and interior design with the result that everybody can afford it.



Bonsai, 2008, powder-coated aluminum enclosures, milled IKEA, rubber bumpers, 94 x 175 x 132 cm



Concept rendering, marker on vellum, 2006

Mao, 2008, powder-coated aluminum enclosures, IKEA, rubber bumpers, 80 x 80 x 80 cm



Today the same might hold true for the art market. The apparently democratic communication process of digital design on the one hand helps you to visualize and communicate ideas, and on the other hand it seduces you to design excessively. This limitlessness is a basic principle in our current form of consumerism, with its false promises of mass customization. As artists, does that allow you to purchase IKEA products and use them in your work?

Christian Giroux

This is not a direct answer to your question, but we decided early on that the position we wanted to occupy was closer to that of the prototyper, distancing ourselves from both craft production and the singular genius who makes unique objects by hand. It was important for us to distance ourselves from that traditional formulation. Our work is less personal in this way. It looks like something that could be mass-produced or is part of the pervasive condition of design and manufacture in which we are all embedded.

Daniel Young

But they look like art.

Christian Giroux

Yes, they are art, but produced from a hybridity with a prototyping proposition.

Daniel Young

We will always be running away from art, but we will never quite escape it.

Kim Förster

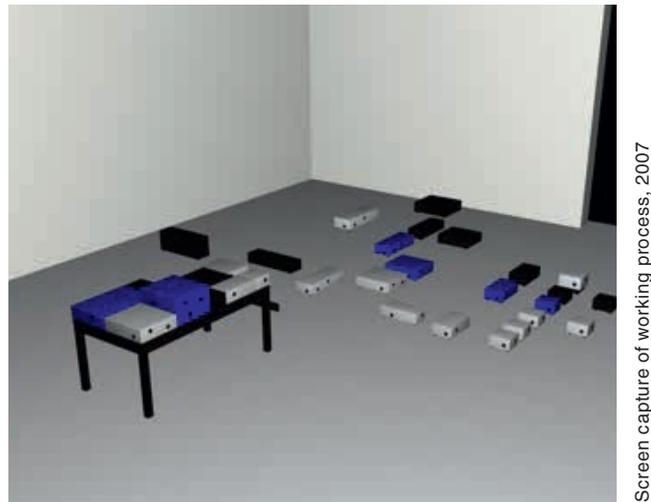
One distinguishing feature is the cutting that you apply to some of your work. In one of the texts on your practice, this has been referred to as a strategy comparable to that of Gordon Matta-Clark, but on a micro-scale. I wonder what made you cut those objects in the first place?

Christian Giroux

But Gordon Matta-Clark did it by hand. We used a machine.

Kim Förster

That would be the logic behind the *Boole* series, that it is all machine-made? Is that your signature as an artist duo, to make art look like industrial products and vice versa? Matta-Clark used the cutting to highlight certain places and buildings that have been devalued—for example, abandoned office buildings, factories or warehouses—pinpointing deindustrialized landscapes that have fallen out of the economic system. He also protested against the neglect of the housing stock.



Screen capture of working process, 2007

Daniel Young

Matta-Clark was also cutting through the separation of spaces.

Christian Giroux

And he cultivated a masculine image of the heroic producer.

Daniel Young

There are a number of energies within the *Boole* series. We wanted to violate the IKEA, to chip away at it as much as we wanted to build off it. Some of the cuts are precise to within 0.001 of an inch, and we added aluminum enclosures that are fabricated to within 0.003 of an inch. They were carefully designed together.

Christian Giroux

Our cuts are bloodless, being computer numerical controlled (CNC), but one can still read some aggression in them. Of course aggression is part of the reading of Matta-Clark's work, like when he shot out the windows at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York, and Peter Eisenman equated it with the Kristallnacht.

Kim Förster

In my social and cultural study on the Institute, I argued that Eisenman somehow had to react to *Window Blow-Out*, as the performance was retroactively titled, being the Institute's director. You have to keep in mind that the mid-1970s was a troubled time. The Institute around Eisenman, in the wake of the financial and fiscal crisis, was struggling to define the new architectural scene. Matta-Clark was the self-proclaimed outcast and the SoHo art star by that time. Eventually, after being diagnosed with cancer, he shifted away from the metaphorical and sculptural to the social with his *Loisaida* project, a constructive project for local teenagers in the East Village, which

the art historian Alan Moore has written about. Still, the question remains how and why you specifically apply the cut. Your artistic strategy seems to be more post-modern, but in the classical sense. You seem to prefer the quote and the collage as techniques, constantly appropriating and remodelling your themes.

Daniel Young

It is like chopping off a limb.

Kim Förster

Yet you seem to keep a photo of that chopped-off limb in your wallet, in memoriam, to fight the phantom pain. This might be the right point to start talking about *Groundcurve*. Christian, earlier you said that the idea for *Groundcurve* first occurred while you were filming *Camera Tracking a Spiral*. Also, Dan once mentioned that he picked up a book on curtain walls and that you were studying various structural systems and were looking at the formal qualities of surfaces. What is special about *Groundcurve* is that you combine the curtain wall with a racking system as the main structural feature. Why bring together those two architectural elements—the curtain wall of an office building and the racking system of a distribution centre?



Brave New Waves, 2010, powder-coated aluminum enclosures, milled IKEA, rubber bumpers, 185 x 185 x 41 cm

Daniel Young

The project came out of the University of Toronto Scarborough public project that later developed into *Interregnum: Corner Displacement for John Andrews* (2011). I was toying with the idea of making a curtain wall, an array of glass and mirror to play with the light in the atrium, but that project did not go in that direction. To get Christian onto the same page, I bought a copy of Scott Murray's *Contemporary Curtain Wall Architecture* (2009) and gave it to him.



Research image, interior detail, Scarborough College, Toronto, 1963, John Andrews, architect

Christian Giroux

Well, it wasn't quite so cause-and-effect. In the same way that *Mr. Smith* (2011) evolved out of research on the work of Tony Smith, it was while I was reading about the miraculous industrial production of flow glass that all of the research and time spent looking at these buildings started to coalesce into an idea of form and began to evolve through some drawings. The introduction of the racking systems stems from another kind of sculptural desire.

Daniel Young

Maybe it came from when you installed racking systems in our storage? When I was a child my stepfather was contracted to install industrial racking in what was the largest logistics centre in North America at that time. It was a very similar system to what we have used in *Groundcurve*.

Christian Giroux

In part it comes from using these practical materials, but it comes out of many things. Maybe the curtain wall sculptures are a vehicle to play out sculptural desires as well as to talk



Research image, main hall, Scarborough College, Toronto, 1963, John Andrews, architect



Interregnum: Corner Displacement for John Andrews, 2011, powder-coated aluminum, 1186 x 805 x 271 cm



Exterior, Scarborough College, Toronto

about the production of space in the city. There is a dialogue between the miniaturized, unreal or fictional scale of the glass and the spider clamp system and the real-world scale of the grey racking that has as much to do with the play of scale in a work by Richard Deacon or Tony Cragg as it has to do with creating an allegory for how spaces are produced in the real world. These desires butt up against each other: on one level the racking is purely pragmatic, but on another level it represents the generic of rational ordering and standardization, which colours how we look at the fetishistic quality of the glass and the repetitive technical systems that form them into a coherent plane. What I think is interesting about curtain walls is that you have the frame of the building itself, and then you have a truss system that supports another frame that in turn supports the glass.



Mr. Smith, detail

Daniel Young
Screens...

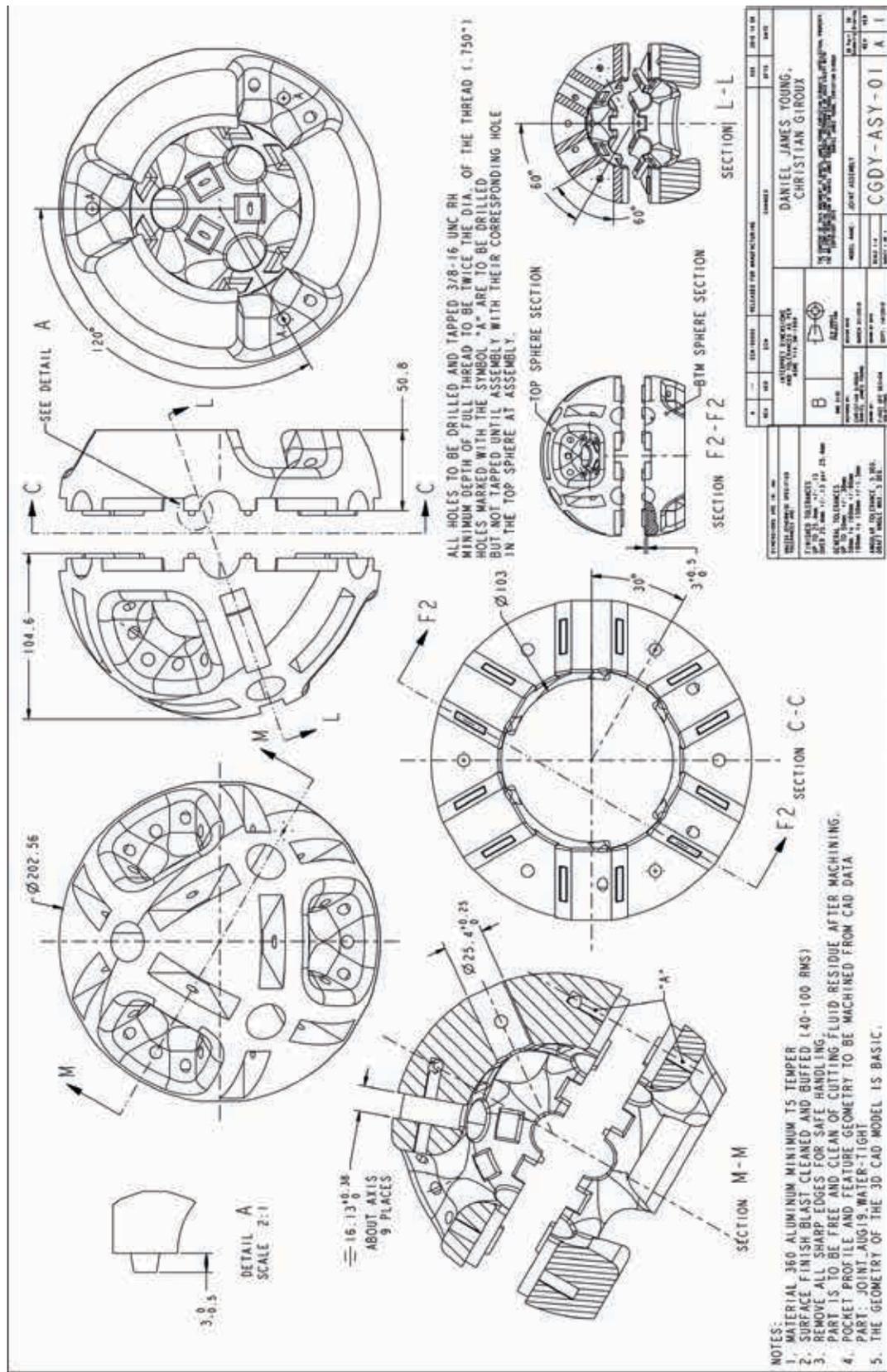
Christian Giroux
Screens or planes. So you have an object that formulates a relationship between volume, structure and surface in a way that is literally transparent.

Kim Förster
In *Groundcurve* you also seem to explore the debates about the curtain wall that are prominent within a certain architectural discourse on the facade. To my



Mr. Smith, 2011, plywood, cast and machined aluminum, dimensions variable

mind an interpretation of the curtain wall should also include the notion of “speculative cubage wrapped in exterior wallpaper” put forward by architectural historian Reinhold Martin in his essay “Atrocities. Or, Curtain Wall as Mass Medium” (2001) in which he proposes an economically critical reading of architecture. What I find intriguing about *Groundcurve* is that it is exposing two different spatial transformations—the development of the central business districts in the downtown areas of North American cities on the one hand, and of logistics landscapes on the other hand—and at the same time it is pointing out their relationship. Although to some extent you are mainly experimenting with materiality and detailing, it is exactly this linkage that makes your sculpture interesting in discursive terms. The sculpture also counters the argument that mirror facades conceal the interior logic of capitalism. Instead you propose that, since they are tied to distribution centres, all office buildings support global capitalism. In *Groundcurve*, the curtain wall and the racking system are inextricably interwoven and provide insights about



Mr. Smith, technical drawing, 2010

not only the construction of the facade but also the structure behind. I wonder whether this act of disclosing, of making visible—of looking at the two fundamental architectural elements that manifest the capitalist production of space—is random or intentional?

Christian Giroux

I'd like to mention Annette Fierro's *The Glass State* (2006), in which she discusses the *Grands Projets* of successive French presidents and the allegorical importance of the curtain wall for the French state in opening up its institutions to the public view. I'm also interested in the axiomatic tradition within sculpture—going back to Minimalism and Sol LeWitt—which resembles architectural models and is concerned with a kind of structural transparency. I don't think a viewer will see these curtain wall pieces in such symbolic or allegorical terms, but for those with an interest in the critiques of contemporary architecture, I believe this is also available in the work. I'm more familiar with Reinhold Martin's *The Organizational Complex* (2003), in which he discusses the power of the curtain wall to communicate an underlying organizational logic, whether it is that of IBM or the US government.

Kim Förster

In Martin's cultural reading of office architecture as constitutive of what he terms "the organizational complex", referring to the industrial and military complex (and one might add the academic complex), his main argument is that the curtain wall as a technological system and a mass medium is always productive, defining office spaces as social condensers. Thus, office buildings were constitutive of a new logic of organization, and the birth of the society of control.

Christian Giroux

Implying an interchangeability or adaptability of the space behind the wall.

Kim Förster

Yes, but specifically those horizontal networks generated by that interchangeability, which were typical of the post-industrial society. And it also produced a new worker subject.

Daniel Young

But Martin is also talking about mass culture.

Kim Förster

The Organization Man (1956) by William H. Whyte not only analyzed corporate culture, but at the same time also identified the new subject of the consumer. In terms of architecture produced under the imperative

of mass production—with the standardization of elements and construction and the ubiquity of glass and metal as materials—one aspect I find intriguing in your work, is that the curtain wall is not just the hand-crafted architectural element, an artistically designed facade of an iconic building. There is a certain structural logic of the module being an image and an instrument at the same time, an architecture of mass culture, which has social and technological effects.



Edward Burtynsky, *Houston*, 2004, colour print, dimensions variable

Christian Giroux

But for contemporary architects, the curtain wall is also the one place where they can exercise some autonomy or agency.

Kim Förster

In one of Reinhold Martin's most recent essays, "Financial Imaginaries" (2011), he conceives of architecture as a concrete abstraction of the circulation of capital, comparable to money itself. This means that, if you consider architecture as a mass medium, you will gain less insight if you continue to look at architecture from the perspective of art history, as a singular artwork, without taking into account its various contexts and contingencies. Rather, with regard to larger social and cultural transformations and in a geographical sense, architecture should be critically analyzed as fixed capital. I guess the same should hold true for art and the art world.



Camera Tracking a Spiral Drawn Between the Two Curved Towers of Viljo Revell's Toronto City Hall

Daniel Young

But can't one take the position that it's all an abstraction of money or exchange?



Richard Deacon, *Keeping the Faith*, 1992. beechwood, epoxy, 75 x 175 x 170 cm

Kim Förster

That is the point. I wonder why you are dealing with the curtain wall and the racking system in *Groundcurve*. Both elements refer to dated architectural debates. The curtain wall, for example, was extensively discussed as new to office building in *Architectural Record* in the mid-1950s, and articles on distribution and storage centres were published in *Architectural Design* in the 1970s. Architects were given agency to design both distribution centres and office buildings of quality and functionality. I wonder whether it is productive for a critical reading of *Groundcurve* that within the architectural and geographical debates of the last decade there has been a tendency to historicize and politicize these debates on the industrial parks and logistics landscapes of the 1960s and '70s. How do you make sense of those urban landscapes which determine all of our lives?

Daniel Young

You are in your car, driving along the highway, and you see the glass box of a suburban office building and the opaque box of a warehouse. We are colliding the two. In the opaque box, a steel structure keeps the walls and roof together, and then there are a bunch of little steel structures that have palettes and boxes for distributing goods, either to manufacturers or to consumers.

Christian Giroux

They are both familiar systems. I wouldn't say that the work came into being from the need to bring these systems together in a grand polemical enterprise, but I think they fit together in a number of provocative ways.



Apple Retail Store, Fifth Avenue, New York City, 2012

Daniel Young

It is a way of working we have already realized in the *Boole* series, bringing together two different systems—here, IKEA and formed sheet metal—and facilitating a conversation between them. Each system has different patterns of being in the world and different origins; they both represent a different contemporary quality. This project realizes a compositional assemblage in which we have a conceptual and material collision. I think we wanted to make a material addition to the discourse of the curtain wall system, in the same way that with *Mr. Smith* we were able to make a material addition to the spaceframe discourse. No one had made a joint system that could accept either a strut or a panel. The curtain walls are so incredibly sophisticated nowadays.

Kim Förster

As a technological system—for example, as structural glazing—or as an architectural image?

Daniel Young

Both, but now any system innovation requires a major investment. There is a huge amount of detailing required. We have very little agency within this material discourse. So rather than

innovating, we are taking a step back and are embracing a very generic and commodity form of the curtain wall.

Kim Förster

What exactly are the single components, what are the materials that you are using?

Daniel Young

We are using cast and machined stainless steel. And we are working with the spider clamp—the discourse that Martin develops about the curtain wall as representing the commodity form—it its generic form as a raw material that we are copying and scale-shifting.

Kim Förster

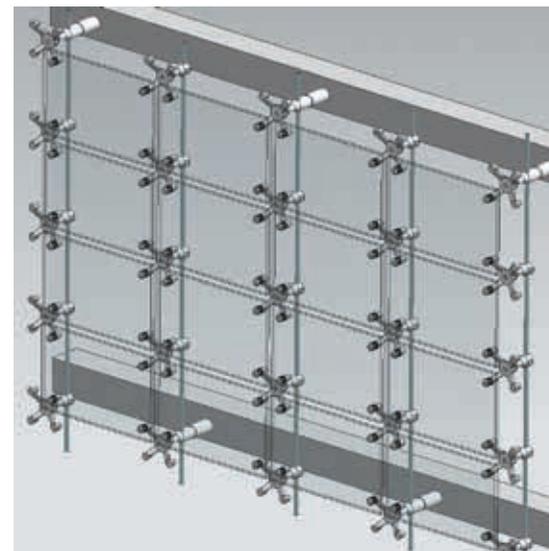
And where does the racking system come from?

Christian Giroux

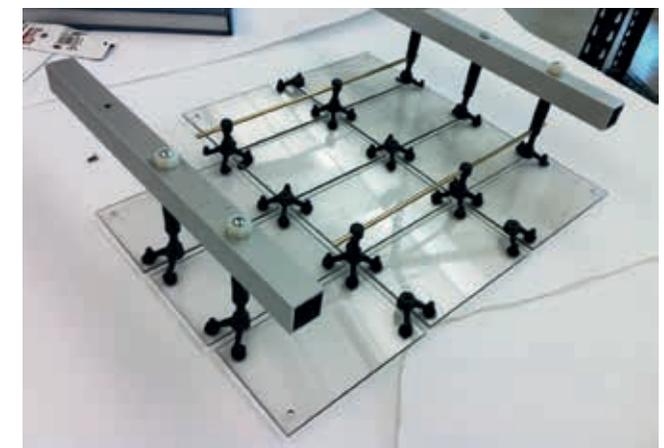
It is a standard form of commercial racking.

Daniel Young

The subject matter addressed with these sculptures is not even a question of architecture. It is more a question of the production of space.



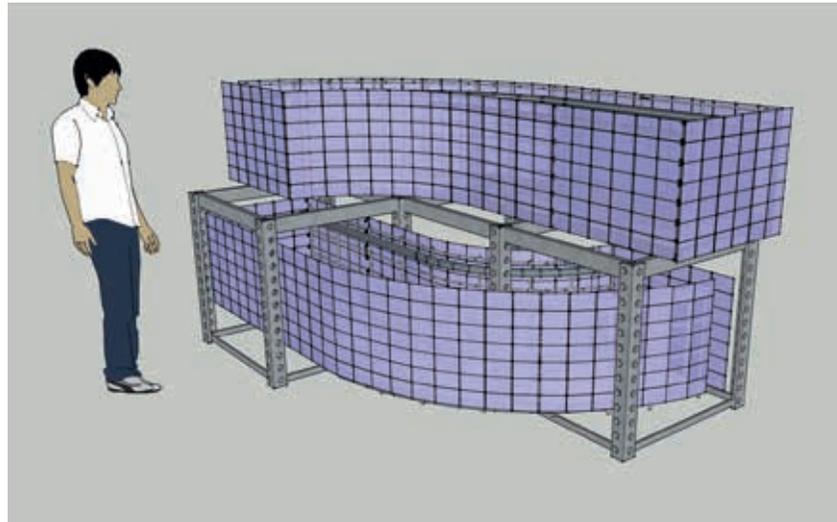
Curtain wall digital prototype, 2012



Curtain wall prototype, 2012

Groundcurve, the social experience of post-industrial landscapes. How do you deal with the human subjects, aside from the art gallery visitor? Are you trying to influence or manipulate the development of new subjectivities? Take, for example, your renderings. You are showing potential viewers as generic figures, who in the end are also consumers.

Christian Giroux
Those are for scale.



Groundcurve, digital mockup, 2012

Kim Förster

You can always claim they are in there for the scale of the sculpture. But if the rendering is already part of your artwork, then these figures are too.

Daniel Young

That is our audience. We would not claim the rendering to be part of the artwork; it is part of our process.

Kim Förster

You are blending out the notion of the subject to some extent, and I wonder whether those subjectivities in question are actually designed and defined by our new working conditions and consumption patterns, and also the commodification of architecture and urban space, which could and should be addressed in the art world. By creating a clash of administrative and distributive components you seem to problematize the transformation of our immediate geographies by enabling people to look at the structure and construction.

Daniel Young

There is also an additional visual desire that I think we are realizing with this body of work. In a modern sense of



Geoffrey James, *Scotiabank Building*, Sudbury 2012, digital image, dimensions variable

architecture, a new building is being built, and they haven't built the interior walls; there are just floor plates. There is no pollution yet. It is perfect, a monument to itself and the productive capacity of our economy. With *Groundcurve*, we don't even have floor plates. The sculpture is just a building envelope.

Christian Giroux

These pieces are not models for buildings. They are more like objects that quote architectural types.

This is an edited transcript of an interview in Berlin on June 4, 2012.



Peter MacCallum, North Yonge Street Series: Sheppard Avenue
Looking West Toward Yonge Street, 2010, black and white print,
dimensions variable

Toronto City Hall under construction, 1964





Camera Tracking a Spiral Drawn Between the Two Curved Towers of Viljo Revell's Toronto City Hall, Groundcurve, exhibition view, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2012

Chris Burden
Victoria Falls Bridge

Victoria Falls Bridge is based on an actual railroad bridge in South Africa which spans a gorge over the Zambezi River and the celebrated Victoria Falls. Before the bridge was built, the Zambezi River was the only break in the Cape to Cairo Railroad line. When this bridge was built at the beginning of the 20th century, it was a triumph of modern bridge building and the scientific papers were full of tales regarding the groundbreaking engineering achievement in spanning the falls.

This edition of the *Victoria Falls Bridge* is built using reproduction Mysto Erector parts (a very early, 1913, metal toy construction system) fabricated in stainless steel for greater strength and corrosion resistance. The Mysto Type I Erector system is based on a single girder, complete with rivet detailing. A box beam can be formed using 4 girders and 2 nuts and 2 bolts. This strong, but light, box beam is the basis for the entire building system. With just a few basic parts, it is much simpler, though less versatile, than the Meccano and Erector construction systems.

Kika Thorne, Adrian Blackwell
1:1 over 1:300

1:1 over 1:300 is an installation consisting of a slide projection on the floor of a 304 x 457 cm (10 x 15') room. The projection fills the floor, so that when you enter the room you step on to and obscure a portion of it. The projection itself superimposes images at two scales: 1:1 the scale of the people in the room, which depicts life in an artist's studio apartment and 1:300 the scale of a grid of aerial photos of Toronto. The superimposition raises questions about the artists' agency over local space and their effect on the city that surrounds them.

You enter a darkened room; a slide projection covers the floor from wall to wall. The first images are of a sunlit maple floor. Ghosted figures carry sheets of aerial photographs into the space until they cover the entire floor. A railway cuts the map on the diagonal, separating residential from industrial, in a downtown

Toronto neighbourhood in which the artists both live. As you look around the room, the slides dissolve, boxes appear; the inhabitants unpack, making a home in the city. Urban planning is enacted according to the exigency of domestic events. Dinner is made, night comes, day breaks: the rhythm of three days punctuated by work, leisure, food, love, band practice, friends.

Luis Jacob
Anarchist Free School Minutes

Anarchist Free School Minutes is comprised of a series of 22 framed pages, installed around a reading area that features current anarchist and activist publications. The framed pages contain the minutes for the organizing group of the Anarchist Free School—a collective community-education project that operated in Toronto from 1998 to 2001. These minutes are framed and presented in the gallery in a static, homogenizing manner that contrasts sharply with the variety of voices presented within them.

The organizing group of the Free School came together as one of the results of the Active Resistance anarchist gathering in Toronto during the summer of 1998. How do individuals within a group define their various needs and desires, in relation to a project that binds them in common? How do people collectively round up their resources and skills, elaborate the terms of their ideas and language, and achieve methods for getting tasks done?

Anarchist Free School Minutes depicts the process of a collective's birth, as individuals develop a process for speaking with each other, making collective decisions, reaching agreements based on consensus, and working with disagreements without recourse to hierarchic power. The minutes of this collective describe—in the voices of the various people who participated—this process of the collective's coming-into-being.

Presented in the art gallery, *Anarchist Free School Minutes* shares in the spirit of artist-run initiatives, do-it-yourself participatory ethics, and democratic cultural activity.



Groundcurve

Image credits

Page 5
Chris Burden, *Victoria Falls Bridge*, 2003, courtesy of Gagosian Gallery

Page 6
Mowry Baden, *I Can See the Whole Room*, 1994, courtesy of the artist

Jessica Stockholder, *Vortex in the Play of Theatre with Real Passion*, 2000, courtesy of Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Page 7
Jeff Wall, *A View from an Apartment*, 2004–5, courtesy of the artist

Page 8
Roy Arden, *Wal-Mart Store (Tide)*, Burnaby BC, 1996, *Wal-Mart Store (Apple Jacks)*, Burnaby BC, 1996, courtesy Monte Clark Gallery

Page 13
Kika Thorne, Adrian Blackwell, *1:1 over 1:300*, 1998, courtesy of the artists

Luis Jacob, *Anarchist Free School Minutes*, 1998–99, courtesy of the artist

Page 15
Excel and Access, photo: Peter MacCallum

Art Gallery of Ontario, Frank Gehry's spiral staircase in Walker Court, courtesy of AGO image resources, © Art Gallery of Ontario 2012

Page 16
Access and Excel, photo: Peter MacCallum

Every Building, or Site, That a Building Permit Was Issued for a New Building in Toronto in 2006, installation image, Prefix ICA, photo: Peter MacCallum

Page 19
Infrastructure Canada, installation view, Oakville Galleries, photo: Toni Hafkenscheid

Page 21
Reticulated Gambol, photo: Cheryl O'Brien

Page 22
James Benning, *13 Lakes*, courtesy of neugerriemschneider

Heinz Emigholz, *Schindlers Häuser*, courtesy of the artist

Page 25
Reticulated Gambol, photos: Cheryl O'Brien

Page 26
Proposals for Toronto City Hall, courtesy of City of Toronto Archives

Page 33
Construction of *Reticulated Gambol*, photos: Jamie Sass (contractor)

Page 36
SANAA, photo: Nikolaj Alsterdal, courtesy Arkitekturmuseet Stockholm

Page 38
Bonsai, photo: Peter MacCallum

Page 38
Mao, photo: Peter MacCallum

Page 41
Brave New Waves, photo: Cheryl O'Brien

Page 42
Research image, interior detail of Scarborough College, photo: Cheryl O'Brien

Page 43
Interregnum: Corner Displacement for John Andrews, photo: Lee Towndrow

Pages 44 and 45
Mr. Smith, photos: Guy L'Heureux

Page 48
Edward Burtynsky, *Houston*, 2004, courtesy of the artist

Page 53
Richard Deacon, *Keeping the Faith*, 1992, courtesy of the artist

Page 54
Apple Retail Store, Fifth Avenue, New York City, 2012, photo: Lee Towndrow

Page 59
Geoffrey James, *Scotiabank Building, Sudbury 2012*, courtesy of the artist

Page 60
Peter MacCallum, *North Yonge Street Series: Sheppard Avenue Looking West Toward Yonge Street*, 2010, courtesy of Diaz Contemporary

Page 60
Toronto City Hall under construction, courtesy City of Toronto Archives

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