MIND THE GAP

Curated by

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Introduction

Mind the Gap examines the residual spaces of cities: spaces left over as a result of zoning, unclaimed spaces that are taken over for use by marginal communities, “dead zones” deemed un- or underdeveloped by master planners who intend to take over common grounds, and the spaces between spaces that are the unintended by-products of urban and architectural design. This exhibition presents work by artists that considers these residual spaces and so-called “urban voids” as places of particular interest, as sites for invention and do-it-yourself intervention. Through sculpture, photography, video, performance, and urban-scale architectural interventions, these projects amplify and animate the urban void as a space for renegotiating the increasing circumscription of the public sphere.

Recent debates in New York City and elsewhere about the governmental use of eminent domain in annexing public land for private use have pointed to the diminished public control over broad swaths of urban centers. The artists included in this exhibition exacerbate this tendency by occupying, altering, or otherwise testing the motivations and conflicting interests behind urban planning: they ask who formulates such plans and who benefits from them. Hosted by Smack Mellon Gallery in DUMBO, Brooklyn, *Mind the Gap* is located on one of many waterfront areas in which cycles of deindustrialization, blight, and gentrification—patterns in which “dead zones” feature prominently—have been enacted and challenged. *Mind the Gap* foregrounds such contestatory practices.

—Eva Diaz and Beth Stryker

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The New Public Art: Encounters in Privatized Space | Eva Diaz

Public art is virtually synonymous with the culture of cities. Apart from roads and parks, most public space is pedestrian and urban, and can therefore be a site for art in ways that are conducive to spectatorship. Yet the many demands on space in the scarce and dense land of central cities often foreclose alternative uses; these spaces are generally highly regulated and restrictions impede their use as sites of and for public art. Alternatively, when urban sites do feature art, it is art very narrowly defined—decorative, monumental, or both. The highly bureaucratic process of gaining official approval for public art often curtails artworks that may be interpreted as adventurous or controversial. And generally art in the public arena that has been executed through "legitimate" channels does not address itself to concerns that stem, in any sort of self-reflexive manner, from urban culture.[1]

As Chantal Mouffe has argued, the primary feature of democratic public spaces is that they are always subject to diverse, often contentious interpretations about their use (as opposed to private or autocratic spaces, where unilateral control can be exercised).[2] The circumscription of public art as ornamental, large-scale sculpture neutralizes or avoids the social differences and divisions constitutive of "the public." As public spaces become constrained by processes of private development and existing areas become monopolized by the wealthy in processes of gentrification, bland, innocuous public art is often the default scheme in remaining spaces.

The works in this exhibition ask more of public art, questioning who decides the locations for public art and asking what its forms of public address might be. In the absence of reliable venues for this more robust notion of public art—that is to say, dedicated spaces in which to encounter such artwork—artists' urban interventions are often unexpected, clandestine, and unauthorized. The city is the prime zone for contesting tendencies toward privatization because, more than anywhere else, events in the city are subject to mass spectatorship and public scrutiny. This new public art occupies and alters interstitial sectors of the city, testing the conflicting motivations and interests behind urban planning, and examining the attendant restrictions on public uses of space as represented by current models of urban planning.

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Geographer Neil Smith argues that gentrification is a process in which private development makes incursions into areas that have been intentionally devalued. To Smith, gentrification is part of a larger pattern of uneven development that characterizes spatial politics under capitalism. To accomplish the ever-increasing growth that is paradoxically required to maintain urban economic stability, impediments to expansion must be removed. The high value assigned to some areas diminishes the value of others, thus encouraging speculative investment in low-value areas. Aging urban structures on previously high-valued land become less desirable and efficient.[3] Such depreciation eventually leads to a rent gap in which land is worth more than the profits earned in rent from the increasingly derelict buildings located on it. Even well-maintained structures are cheapened when they are bordered by buildings that have been disinvested by owners. As Smith writes:

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[1] Creators of land/environmental art such as Robert Smithson, Walter de Mana, and James Turrell aspired to a condition of rural public-ness, though most often this required their purchase of the land, thus taking it out of common control, but allowing it to be publicly accessible.

[2] See Chantal Mouffe, ***The Democratic Paradox*** (London: Verso Press, 2000).

[3] For example, existing low-lying structures are devalued until speculation about the future income of a high-rise structure leads to their replacement.

> The logic of uneven development is that the development of one area creates barriers to further development, thus leading to an underdevelopment that in turn creates opportunities for a new phase of development. Geographically, this leads to the possibility of what we might call a "locational seesaw": the successive development, underdevelopment and redevelopment of given areas as capital jumps from one place to another, then back again, both creating and destroying its own opportunities for development.[4]

The frontier of gentrification's uneven development is often pioneered by artists moving into previously undesirable neighborhoods, tipping the balance of the "locational seesaw" toward the next speculative drive. Yet certain artists participate in this process critically, marking sites as never neutral, and revealing how space is scrutinized by private interests for possible development in even the most destitute areas of the city.

Sancho Silva and John Hawke examine the process of exploitation that characterizes gentrification. They troll the outer boroughs of New York, erecting small interventions in abandoned lots and derelict streets. Using materials familiar from public works projects and construction sites—orange netting, traffic cones, two-by-fours, and plywood—they build structures of provisional form. Some interventions merely demarcate space—a few cones connected by orange tape—and others contain rooms and discrete spaces, which often lack an evident function. Visiting the sites repeatedly over the course of days and weeks, Silva and Hawke chart the alterations, vandalism, and often wholesale destruction and removal of their interventions by parties claiming ownership or control of the site. The artists' investment in these sites, which involves tidying up and occupying neglected spaces of the city, can occasion anxious responses that strengthen private use and ownership. As their structures are removed by others, Silva and Hawke find that fences are patched up, lots are boarded off, and "For Sale" signs emerge where once ambiguous zones existed.

In their "Bus Stop" (2005), Silva and Hawke's structure resembles the temporary tents erected at building sites. A modest hut constructed of a wooden armature with a plastic skin of orange netting and a small window, the shelter houses two benches. Originally constructed adjacent to a forlorn bus stop, it was immediately appropriated by riders as a bus shelter. Although unauthorized, the structure mimicked the visual codes of sanctioned interventions such as building renovation projects or street construction. This similarity, and its placement in a relatively disinvested and remote area, allowed it to remain intact and masquerade as an official, city-sponsored intervention. After monitoring and maintaining the hut for months, the artists decided to dismantle the structure, which had begun to disintegrate as the result of weather and frequent use.[5] The lack of investment in dilapidated neighborhoods is part of the logic of gentrification; it allows public infrastructure to deteriorate until it is hardly functional. Silva and Hawke challenge this disinvestment by reviving common uses of neglected, overlooked spaces.

Gordon Matta-Clark was also interested in marking spaces neglected as the result of urban planning decisions; for his 1973 *Reality Properties: Fake Estates*, Matta-Clark purchased slivers of land that were created by inexact surveying practices in Queens. Matta-Clark visited his tiny parcels and photographed the

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[4] Neil Smith, ***The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*** (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 88.

[5] The artists then erected the "bus stop" in the Smack Mellon gallery, its interior repurposed as a screening room for a video about its prior tenure as a street shelter.

overlooked alleys and overgrown plots, underscoring their liminal nature and the residues of human use that were suppressed in accompanying legal deeds and lot maps. Alex Villar makes similar pilgrimages to the ubiquitous odd lots that litter the city, spaces that are absurdly ill-conceived and frequently disregarded. Villar literally inserts himself into these interstitial sectors, sliding his body into the crevices that result from cordoning off ostensibly useless spaces. In his six-minute color video "Temporary Occupations" (2001), Villar transgresses the typical codes of urban life, invading areas that are demarcated for little reason other than that they are privately owned and therefore can be isolated from pedestrian circulation. In one segment of the video, for example, he leaps from the sidewalk over a fence into a sliver of ground that abuts a building, briefly occupying a shred of land in lower Manhattan to which no one, including its owner, has access.

Villar's gallery installation hyperbolizes the contortions he himself undergoes in these irrational, left-over spaces. The viewer must traverse a structure of pipe fittings and net, much like negotiating the scaffolding that is a familiar and virtually permanent feature of urban space. Like the silent injunctions of such structures to passersby—"Walk here, don't walk there!"—Villar arranges the viewer's encounter with the video as a course through space. Siegfried Kracauer once remarked that the indelible feature of urban modernity is the danger and complexity of its technologies. The city is full of pitfalls: cars and trucks to avoid, light signals to obey, platform gaps to mind, sidewalks of pedestrians immersed in tech prosthetics to circumvent. The variety of obstacles presents the urban populace with a tangled weave of constraints. Thus the labor of urbanization is twofold, comprising both the construction of sophisticated infrastructures and the efforts of the population in coexisting with this equipment of modernity. Because architecture and other constructions (fences, scaffolding, curbs, etc.) are immobile, their design facilitates and simultaneously restricts the agency of passersby. These impediments to free movement become naturalized as fixed structures, though they result from particular social needs and desires and are constructed by people. "Temporary Occupations" marks these spaces as the result of specific gestures toward privatization and enclosure. As Rosalind Deutsche writes, this demarcation of space as socially organized is the premier function of any public art: "For public art, the objective of altering the site require[s] that the urban space occupied by a work be understood, just as art and art institutions had been, as socially constructed spaces."[6] Countering the ever-increasing policing of public space, Villar's work challenges the definitions of the public sphere, encroached as it is by naturalized regulations and restrictions.

Another highly restricted space, one also susceptible to appropriation, is radio waves, and piracy of these spaces constitutes a preeminent residual site in the city. Some of the most closely guarded instruments of state and commercial power are television and radio networks, which are patrolled by regulations about who and what can be transmitted on air. Access to the audiences of mass communication is zealously safeguarded by the FCC in the United States, and breach of such control is considered piracy; radiowave resources are artificially delimited so that they can be licensed at great expense to corporations which are usually private. The recent controversy over Howard Stern's indecency and his move to the as-yet unregulated zone of satellite radio underscores the political volatility of the airwaves.

The artist team neuroTransmitter utilizes as their medium radiowaves and the tools related to their transmission. Their "com_muni_ports" are mobile radio transmitting, sound recording, and mixing equipment

[6] Rosalind Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 61.

housed in backpack form. In a performance staged near the gallery, they use these portable units to transmit low-frequency, close-proximity broadcasts that remain just within the range permitted by the FCC. Because the com_muni_ports record and remix as they travel throughout city space, the sounds that nearby listeners pick up with radios tuned to specific frequencies (such as 88.1 FM, though the frequencies used depend on available bandwidth) are a spectrum of urban encounters. The com_muni_port is pedestrian in the fullest sense of the word. Interviewing passersby, playing music, and interspersing everything with ambient noise, it represents a localized, mobile encounter with urban space and culture.

In what they term a "frequency" performance in the vicinity of the gallery, neuroTransmitter comments on the drastic changes in spatial configuration wrought by gentrification in DUMBO. Traversing an itinerary that includes a recently constructed children's playground and renovated buildings with astronomical rents, "frequency" uses the airwaves for proposing alternative histories of areas that experienced rapid deindustrialization and a withdrawal of private and public investment, and are now subject to master planning outside the control of community agencies.[7] By intervening in established distribution networks of mass media communication, neuroTransmitter allows for a redefinition of what can and should be heard on radio. In aggressively rethinking the politics of the street, neuroTransmitter joins a legion of artistic interventions that expands notions of where art can exist and whom it can address.

An intervention of a different sort is Jan Baracz's "Little Thirst" (2006), which consists of metal cages housing several commercially-available plastic water bottles. Chained to lampposts, the diminutive cages sit on the street, patiently awaiting retrieval. Their industrially-produced appearance intimates a mysterious official function. Not at all provisional, the cages seem intentionally placed, their proprietary status denoted by a chain and padlock. These quixotic objects amplify issues of property and containment—the water is enclosed in the bottles, the bottles are nestled in their precisely tailored cages, and the cages are secured to street lamps. Yet the work renders the question of ownership both familiar and strange. Cities are full of objects—dogs, bicycles, newspaper dispensers, and trash cans—attached to their infrastructure. But "Little Thirst" presents a peculiar challenge to the familiar retinue of chained urban objects, and in this climate of increased security, even a curious but benign object is suspect.

"Thirst," an earlier incarnation of "Little Thirst" from 1999, was located outdoors in a lower Manhattan parking lot near a busy intersection in the then-vibrant art district of Soho. A massive chain link fence cage housed three thousand gallons of water in jugs, elevated on wooden pallets. "Thirst" occupied a publicly visible site, though in actuality Baracz had rented a privately-owned parking space for one month. The massive scale of the work, and the way its chain link and pallets partook of the aesthetic of commonly-found urban structures, belied its ambiguous function in the city. Its smaller cousin, reincarnated in 2006 near the Smack Mellon gallery, traffics in the same uncertainties. Is it a trove of water, there in case of emergency? If so, access to it is resolutely private; though it is sited in the public realm, it is padlocked and protected from illicit use. In the event of an emergency, however, isn't the public entitled to basic necessities like water? The increasing privatization of basic resources—water central among them—is part of a larger neo-liberal project of subjecting everything on earth to the logic of market exchange. Baracz's interventions multiply the circuit of private ownership to an exponential degree; his dystopian objects foreshadow a world in which water is chained down and no one is given a key.

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[7] The DUMBO Neighborhood Association, for example, is fighting to preserve DUMBO's historic architecture against attempts to build luxury high-rise apartments on the waterfront. The zone around the proposed Brooklyn Bridge Park extension is also being contested, as it essentially creates a private park for high-rise residents along the waterfront.

Geographer David Harvey has noted, "As we collectively produce our cities, so we collectively produce ourselves. Projects concerning what we want our cities to be are, therefore, projects concerning human possibilities, who we want, or perhaps even more pertinently, what we do not want to become."[8] The city can embody aspirations of advancement, civilization, order, and control. Yet in processes of suburbanization, white flight, and deindustrialization, the city comes to represent countertendencies of mayhem and confusion, symbolizing the failure of urbanism and its descent into chaos. Italo Calvino figured the city as midway between hope and panic: "With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear."[9]

Kyong Park's video "Detroit: Making It Better For You [a fiction]" (2000) documents the effects of the massive deindustrialization, depopulation, and campaign of fear that has afflicted Detroit for decades. Like Smith, Park argues that the disinvestment of certain areas of urban space from the 1960s onwards is a concerted capitalist effort to spatially reorganize inner cities by annihilating community bonds and devaluing existing structures. Park's two-channel projection travels through the condemned buildings, derelict homes, and empty lots that characterize Detroit's once-dense urban landscape. An insistent voice-over narrates the distressing story of the fears and greedy desires that piece by piece disassembled what was once one of America's largest cities. Detroit suffered massive deindustrialization, particularly of its auto industry, which was enticed overseas by low-wage, non-union labor. This contributed to substantial depopulation: Detroit has lost over half its population in the last fifty years. Park's film depicts striking vistas of urban acreage—sites of demolished neighborhoods—now reverting to prairie, interrupted by decrepit signs and incongruous fire hydrants on streets where not a house remains.

This is a badlands of ravaged office towers, gutted houses, and endless acres of vacant land. Yet unlike the uncharted "wasteland" beyond city limits that represented, in previous eras, the liminal space between country and city, this is a wasteland within city limits, one whose intact infrastructure will facilitate future rebuilding and reinvestment. And, as Park notes, the scorched earth ruination of urban Detroit *is* being reversed—it is being bought and rebuilt, not by previous residents, but by a completely different demographic. That the constitution of this new demographic absents all minorities and working class neighborhoods, according to Park, is no accident.

As cities such as Detroit suffer drastic depopulation, inner city inhabitants are being relocated to remote suburbs. In 2000, Lise Skou and Lasse Lau founded the collective C.U.D.I. (Center of Urban Culture, Dialogue and Information) in Vollsmose, a suburb of Odense, Denmark. A large-scale housing project loosely modeled on the utopian workers' shelter schemes of Le Corbusier in France and Ludwig Hilberseimer at the Bauhaus, in Vollsmose a stand of high-rise apartment buildings emerges incongruously out of the countryside. Skou and Lau lived in this complex for more than a year, using their apartment to initiate C.U.D.I.'s projects, host an artist residency program, and house a community-based art gallery.

The trajectory of urban planning that led to the creation of mammoth, remote housing compounds represents inflexible architecture—a heavy up-front investment in a physical plant that then decays out of sight. Vollsmose's isolation from the fabric of the city—a long bus ride to stores, jobs, and anything beyond basic services—created a *banlieu* climate of remoteness and separation that fostered a general lack of investment in social communities. That the inhabitants of Vollsmose were predominately foreign-born Turks contributed to a pattern of leveled aspirations, moving immigrant poverty out of the city center and into depressing communities both racially and spatially segregated.

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[8] David Harvey, ***Spaces of Hope*** (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 159.

[9] Italo Calvino, ***Invisible Cities*** (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1972), 44.

In relocating to Vollsmose, C.U.D.I.'s members recognized that parachuting in an outside notion of "culture" could easily be construed as patronizing or at odds with local community structures. Yet C.U.D.I. soon realized that the populace had little interaction with non-residents. The racial and cultural differences between Vollsmose inhabitants and the larger city government meant little advocacy of community needs. In a series of two dozen projects undertaken during their residence, C.U.D.I. often acted as intermediaries between various state agencies and the Vollsmose building inhabitants.

The spatial organization of Vollsmose was rigidly structured according the initial designers' specifications. Yet in the three decades since its construction, unauthorized or unanticipated uses of space countered initial architectural plans—interior courtyards were deserted due to the scopic intensity of exposure to hundreds of facing apartments, and balconies were used as laundry and storage areas. In their "Path Project," C.U.D.I. identified another such unofficial use of space—a trail across an empty field that was created as a shortcut in favor of an inconveniently located, sanctioned foot path. In proposing to local governing agencies a lighted, paved path, C.U.D.I. undertook a modest intervention that recognized the adaptability of space by its users. Their struggle and eventual failure to implement the path proposal, even though it was endorsed by residents, made obvious the inhabitants' lack of autonomy in governing their surroundings.[10] Yet in their proposition for greater flexibility in the built environment, the "Path Project" attempted to channel the diffuse motivations of a community that aspires to more welcoming and democratic spaces.

City sidewalks, unlike the trod-upon grass of a makeshift footpath, cannot easily record the movements of people who traverse them. In 1997, Nick Crowe, Graham Parker, and Ian Rawlinson developed a series of two twenty-four hour performances that took the form of one hundred separate walks through lower Manhattan. Each walk was accompanied by soundtracks played on personal stereos, with a live guide piloting individuals through various prearranged paths in the city. Through alleys and into vacant buildings and open shops, the walks disrupted instrumentalized urban uses of time and space with a meandering ramble through the city.

The audio portion of "Mugger Music" asked participants a series of prerecorded questions about where listeners lived and for names of other people they knew living in the same city, which were then preemptively answered by various anonymous voices. According to Parker, "The word 'city' was constantly repeated so that one question went: 'If you could leave this city tomorrow and go and live in an another city, what city would that be?'"[11] The itinerary incorporated several staged interactions—participants acquired objects through gift or purchase and heard the guide rehearse various readings. During the walks, the guides alternated between distraction and engagement, ambivalently positioning participants in a social form—the guided tour—that generally stresses chipper certitude. The routes were fixed, the audio recordings repeated, and the encounters with features of the city unvaryingly replicated, yet each walk was in fact a unique experience that varied according to the time of day and the participants' perceptions of the seemingly haphazard format.

In its original incarnation, "Mugger Music" benefited from the ambiguous environment of the financial district, a site overdetermined by its daytime uses as a global capital of frenetic business activity and

[10] As Skou remarked, "Space today is not ruled or created by the public but by organizations with a certain interest or authorities with a certain interest." Dialogue between C.U.D.I. (Lasse Lau and Lise Skou) and Big Hope (Miklos Erhardt and Dominic Hislop), February 2002 (http://www.bighope.hu/info_texts/interview_cudi.htm).

[11] Email exchange with the artist, February 26, 2006. Parker continues, "The questions were devised and used in the Manchester version and one of the principle reasons for adapting the work for New York was the fact that that city's name occurred repeatedly in responses to that last question."

then virtually abandoned by evening. In the intervening years drastic changes rocked the area—September 11 most terribly and lastingly—marking space in lower Manhattan with new and different civic and historical valences.[12] Additionally, the expansion of the real estate market has seen downtown high rises increasingly repurposed for residential use, extending the commercial climate of the area beyond bankers' hours. Parker's "Mugging Musician" (2006) revisits the first project nine years after its first performance, teasing out both the sweeping and slight alterations in nearly a decade of change. Undoubtedly the city itself has been transformed by both seismic changes (such as September 11) and in small, less noticeable ways. Commercial structures originally on the performance route have been destroyed or no longer function as they once did; vacant buildings enlisted as part of the first performance are now occupied and hence less available for covert traffic.

"Mugger Music" challenges, in its very title, codes of urban conduct that emphasize detachment in the face of the sensory bombardment of the metropolis. Rather than rehearsing anonymity and psychological distance as conventional conditions of urban life, a stranger in "Mugger Music" directs participants through the interstitial zones of the physically densest parts of the city, at times in the latest hours of the night. "Mugger Music" initiates a hybridization of space, moving from a hustle-bustle perception of the city to one marked by encounters with the quotidian and the easily overlooked. Yet it is the peculiar built environment of lower Manhattan that augments the work's charge, as its relentless perpendicular thrust leaves slivers of marginalized space, including the street itself, available for reinterpretation.

Erving Goffman, in his landmark 1959 study of social conventions, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, argued that the appearance of naturalness or un-self-consciousness belies carefully constructed and rehearsed codes. The "front" story of a particular behavior is always promoted with "back" performances that support a seamless façade, "concealed practices which are incompatible with fostered impressions."[13] To Goffman, it is not necessary to judge the more authentic performance—the cultivated one or "the one the performer attempts to prevent the audience from receiving." Rather, the crucial issue is "that impressions in everyday performances are subject to disruption. We will want to know what kind of impression can shatter the fostered impression of reality."[14]

In many ways architecture can be seen as such a performance, with its fronts and backs, façades and interiors. To hyperbolize such an analogy, consider, as does artist Stephen Hilger, homes in Beverly Hills—buildings constructed with presentation very much paramount. Like much Los Angeles architecture, homes in Beverly Hills are meant to be viewed at driving speeds, and many are characterized by a style of overweening majesty that strives for taste and distinction. Suburban mansions with pristine facades, decorative turrets, and imposing columns are set back on wide, leafy boulevards; here faux Tudor manors, Federal-style town homes, pseudo-Spanish haciendas, and overgrown rural cottages are found cheek by jowl. This is an architecture of display that wants to be recognized as wealth. (Undoubtedly Beverly Hills houses the very wealthy, yet this public demonstration can and should be distinguished from the gated communities and estates of the hyper-wealthy, insulated as they are by long driveways, dense hedges, and a great deal of acreage). Surrounded by the accoutrements of refinement, the fostered impression, to use Goffman's terms, is one of immaculate poise.

Yet Beverly Hills is actually two cities, a "front" city of impeccably maintained homes and a "back" city that covertly services the front illusion. For the area is riddled by a series of hard-to-spot back streets, often mere alleys, that have an ambiguous and interstitial relationship to public roads. Wandering the alleys of Beverly Hills, Hilger has photographed their graffiti, security signage, crammed garbage cans, unaesthetic carparks, and overgrown vegetation; the construction workers, maids, gardeners, pool keepers, and maintenance staff who work nearby; and the alleys' most indelible feature, narrow, high walls that denote a claustrophobic refusal of inspection that the front façades encourage. Hilger represents these spaces, which are easily overlooked though technically part of the city, in an archive of horizontal format images that mimics the horizontal expanses of the imposing fortifications. In one image, a resident is seen peeping warily over a fence, challenging the roving cameraman and, by extension, the viewer's spectatorship. The street, once the very definition of—and now one of the only remaining zones of—public culture, is here uninviting, surveilled, and privatized, virtually inaccessible but to the rich and their employees. One could argue that this back story of Beverly Hills is the condition that all suburbanization in some manner represents—the rejection of the public and pedestrian in favor of publicly-funded streets traversed by atomized individuals in private cars.

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[12] The memorial functions of the site seem to have been surpassed, however, by its touristic and consumer possibilities.

[13] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 64.

[14] Ibid., 66.

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In the early part of the twentieth century, Russian philosopher Viktor Shklovsky explored what he termed "habituation" as a process that renders perception automatic and unconscious. As he wrote, "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception."[15] The artists included in *Mind the Gap* similarly question the habituation of perception, particularly the ways in which controlled uses of public spaces are naturalized in processes of privatization and regulation. The perception of space is more valenced than is commonly assumed, and a close analysis of the subtle forms of restriction and closure taking place is needed. So much city space is overlooked because it is familiar. Given the marginalization of art in the public sector, and the necessarily covert nature of many public interventions, the works in *Mind the Gap* attend to the overlooked, and question what is known and unknown about the spaces surrounding us. This troubling of familiar sites of and for art is one of the hallmark features of the new public art.

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[15] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 279–80.