“Mo’ Pixels, Mo’ Problems”
Institutionalizing street artists without killing their street cred

by

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ABSTRACT

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The old drive-in theater is dead, so where do car culture, projection technology, and provisional communities converge in contemporary culture? On the street. In a parking lot. Around a second program. Three forms of guerrilla projection occur in three different urban conditions. But are the conditions mutually exclusive? Could guerrillas play together in overlapping urban instances? Can an institution cultivate these street artists without killing their street cred? It would take a new institution.

Rumors of expansion at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston have pointed to property occupied by its parking garage as a potential site for new construction. But the parking garage may already be an ideal platform for the descendents of the drive-in. Framed by the limits of the existing garage, this thesis project proposes a small number of interventions to expand the potential for guerrilla occupation. The result is a moving target museum.
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INTRODUCTION

The drive-in theater of mid-century America represented a convergence of projection technology, car culture, and provisional communities. At the drive-in, projection technology temporarily turned the suburban parking lot into something else: a space having a density of occupied objects that couldn’t be anything but urban. A sleepy suburbia was drawn out from the shadows of the night by the glow of the silver screen. Neighbors sat between strangers, coworkers shoulder to shoulder with competitors, townies next to tourists. Each car loaded with bodies—talking, sleeping, singing, eating, romancing—bordered on both sides by more cars, more bodies, more life. From where we sit today, it seems multitudinous; the collective pattern of simultaneous actions was far more important than any one family or car.

But the drive-in is dead. Escalating land values, the proliferation and miniaturization of personal electronic devices, and the changing relationship between Americans and their cars are among the many factors one could attribute to the downfall of the drive-in. Though the drive-in has all but disappeared, projection technology and car culture are as important as ever while provisional communities have taken new shape in the digital information age. Three contemporary convergences of this trio are worth note: the drive-in hybrid, the mobile movie, and the projection bomb. Each variation could be considered a guerrilla act: an unsanctioned seizure of space and time by a coordinated group of people.
TOTAL NUMBER OF DRIVE-INS BY YEAR

5043 sites (in 1958)

397 sites (in 2006)

*Collected from a series of tables on several different webpages hosted by driveintheater.com.
THE DRIVE-IN HYBRID, MOBILE MOVIE, & PROJECTION BOMB

The drive-in hybrid is the same drive-in as before but the concession stand is supplemented or swapped out by a more lucrative second program. The parasitic drive-in needed another host, which it has found in elephant farms, beer gardens, motels, adult video stores, water parks, trailer parks, semi-professional hockey stadiums, swap meets, and Chevy dealerships among other programs. Most of these hybrids happen at the edge of the suburbs, just outside of major cities and mostly in the West and Southwest. Ozoners, as they are called, are mostly the traditional drive-in patrons, often nostalgic or more interested in a night out with family or friends than a pure cinematic experience.

The mobile movie is the next evolution of the drive-in. Still suburban, guerrilla mobile moviegoers find themselves in major post-war cities, where blank building façades abut dark, empty parking lots. Without permanent program or location, the mobile movie transforms derelict darkness into prime public space. MOBMOV.org gives detailed instructions on how to convert a car into a self-powered and self-contained video projector/radio broadcaster, while providing a virtual forum to help users find mobile movies in their cities. Members of the MOB MOV are notified of time and location a few days before a showing via email or text message. A few minutes before the show, the “driver” pulls up, turns on his passenger-side projector and FM radio transmitter, then starts the production.

The most highly evolved of the guerrillas is the projection bomber. Projection bombs, like mobile movies, replace the permanent physical address of the original drive-in with a virtual one, leaving bombing sites to spontaneity and/or strategy. Some bombings are designed responses to specific building elevations, while others are more
like tags, personalizing both public and private space throughout the city. But with the projection bomb, provisional communities are as important in the production of content as they are at its reception. Bomb media is often constructed from a call for submissions via email or text message in the studio or on the street. The site of projection bombings is most commonly large, prominent building façades—a new canvas for graffiti artists, once limited by the spray can to that within reach. Innovators in the use and development of laser and projection technology and instigators of social interaction and mass communication, projection bombers consider themselves artists.

**A CONVERGENCE OF CONVERGENCES**

Are the urban and suburban models mutually exclusive? Could mobile moviegoers exist in an urban context? If so, where would they park? Is there enough street life in the suburbs for the projection bomb to register any effect? Even if these guerrillas did overlap, would they play together? What space could accommodate them? What new convergences might their interactions produce? Perhaps, a convergence of guerrilla artists could generate a new kind of art.

This thesis invites a museum into a parking garage in order to create the space for a convergence of convergences. A latent piece of infrastructure, the garage is a threshold between the urban and suburban, ideally suited to absorb an influx of guerrilla art. This is a new type of museum—participatory and relevant for its relationship to the street. It is to be a street gallery, open to the public for parking, projection, display, curation, creation, exploitation, and critique.
MOVING TARGET MUSEUM
A MOVING TARGET MUSEUM

It is a moving target museum; a new institution that accommodates street artists in a space juxtaposed to the white box of the traditional museum next door. The location is the parking garage at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. The foundations for the garage are oversized to hold three additional floors of parking, should the garage need to expand. With the help of a crane, these additional ramps can be added without disrupting the flow of traffic. I propose extending the columns as if the additional ramps were in place, while making the crane a permanent agent of the museum. But instead of infilling with parking ramps, nothing is added but an opportunity for expansion. Here, scaffolding in the form of lightweight Vierendeel trusses and aluminum grating is introduced as a rapidly deployable, reconfigurable, systematic way of defining space, should it be needed. Giant curtains—Lars Lerup would call them sloppy organs or optics pouches—and enormous pieces of fabric serve as mediators of sound, light, and weather, allowing for more intimate projection spaces and more surface area in the vast openness between the widely-spaced columns of the garage. In the words of Mr. Lerup, this is the ocean of endless surfaces: a new mechanical zoohemic theater. Atop the newly extended columns sits a new mega screen, with its back to the skyline. Another mega-shape.
The moving target museum is important to suburbia—to Houston—and to artists. For the city, it promotes a healthy, participatory gathering of a diverse group of people of varying age, class, race, and educational background. In the same vein as websites like flickr, YouTube, and social networking sites like Facebook, the moving target museum is a free platform for sharing of personal information and gathering around it. At the same time, the museum challenges the condition of artists in the digital age while expanding the canvas for those whose careers have not yet or may never land within the white walls of the traditional institution. This is the moving target museum:
Pay parking attendant as you leave
MOVING TARGET MUSEUM

5 ft
THE OCEAN OF ENDLESS SURFACES

LARS LERUP, STIM & DROSS / ZOOHEMIC THEATER
Maximize the event space experience.
"Rick! Use your LEFT hand!"
"No, his was green."

MOVING TARGET MUSEUM
"Seagulls?"

"I do have a twin."

"One."

"Three."

"Four."

"Five."

"Six."

"Seven!"
"There, next to the blue one."