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DREAMLAND

OUT OF SPACE—OUT OF TIME

Diana Thater

This book is divided into two parts: one which focuses on interior commissions and the other on exterior commissions; one looks at the private and the other at the public; one looks at those that were realized and those that were not, thus remaining drawings or ideas. All of these versions of the commissioned, or *situational* artwork, are part of the continuum of my practice. The scales of these pieces vary greatly – from large-scale works viewable to many people from a great distance (Shaw Tower), to those that are extremely personal and rendered on a domestic scale (three works made in private homes for the express purpose of the owner viewing the work on their own). However, all rely on the interaction of the individual who ultimately contemplates works of art alone. These installations are celebrations of the solitary subjective experience.

The works documented here reference film, painting and architecture as well as those phenomena that are not made by man for contemplation but by accident or carelessness. Witness the massive California wildfires documented in 2003 and turned into an artwork titled *White is the Color* – the event is reconstituted as a cloud study and the true meaning of the word "sublime" is revealed – it is comprised of both beauty and horror. Some viewers have read the work as simple videotapes of clouds, but they do not know my work well (years ago those same viewers mistook the wolves occupying my work *China* for dogs) – "natural" clouds could never do, just as the nearly chaotic sculpted clouds on the altar of the Karlskirche or those painted clouds in the dome should never be read as "weather" but as the *mise-en-scène* of a theatrical encounter with the otherworldly. And like these large-scale baroque works, my "public artwork", though it exists in the public realm, is not about the public but for the public.

All works of art are one-to-one experiences. They are forms of direct address from subject to subject, artist to viewer. These works acknowledge this relationship as they address the viewer alone: in the dark and in the quiet. A public street does not compromise the intended viewing conditions of the work. As one comes upon an artwork that rises 45 stories above a street on the façade of a high-rise or across the front of a massive convention center, one steps into one's own relationship to these spaces and enters a profoundly lonely place and time. An artwork addresses each viewer slightly differently and no one can be sure that another shares his or her understanding of the work they may view simultaneously, side-by-side. The possible presence of the group only makes the individual that much more conscious of his/her own isolation (see further: alienation, Modernism, B. Brecht, J.P. Sartre et. al.) Alienation – the "modern" condition – seems quaint now. Yet the culture of "experience" makes its presence more real, every time advertising and mass culture producers try to repress it. And the more they try to crush our physical singularity in favor of the narcissistic notion of individuality, the more it stands out.

Artworks cannot address groups of people and create identical simultaneous meaning for all, nor should their makers intend them to. That would be fascist. *That would be telling* and not making. The kinds of artworks presented here are those made within given architectural situations. They wrap, climb and illuminate the architecture in myriad ways, not one creates a narrative to be agreed upon, and all privilege the phenomena of darkness and light – illumination and its source as content – and thus as a meaning-making device. And what kind of meaning is produced? The answer is not easily ascertained, but lies somewhere between the sublime and the beautiful. As well, the answer concerns the production of the *affect* – that thing to which every true artwork must aspire – a meaning that lies somewhere beyond the sum of its parts. While combinations of color, light, image, shape and form create exquisite images in the world, the isolating affect of the actual experience should approach the sublime.

The beautiful is the pleasurable and the sublime is horror-based. These come together in Edgar Allen Poe's "Dream-land" where the narrator, lost in a lonely dream, realizes that the dream of which he is conscious places him outside of space and outside of time. Such an experience cannot reasonably exist except in the dream world or in the realm of the artwork.

## Notes

- 1 Edgar Allen Poe, "Dream-land," *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allen Poe* (New York: Random House, 1975), 967-69.
- 2 *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, ed. Angela Carter (London: Virago, 1990,) xxi.
- 3 Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, "Art After Deconstruction," Lecture given in Brisbane, Australia, September 24, 2004. 2-3.
- 4 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53.
- 5 (Burke 73) It must be noted that Burke's book was published in numerous editions in the United States prior to the Civil War and greatly influenced ideas of the American Sublime. (Notation by Jennifer West)
- 6 (Burke 113-114)