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FRAMES FOR LIFE:

THE PUBLIC ORGANIZATION OF PRIVATE EXPERIENCE

(A series of panel discussions, Dia Center For The Arts, New York City, April-May 1991)

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The assumption underlying the program is that, in the city of the 90's, a person is not himself, not herself; life is art, somebody else's art, and is therefore framed: individual actions are framed by and grounded on three kinds of public conditions, three kinds of 'public art' -- the tangible (architecture), the audible (pop music), and the visual (movies).

These are arts not confined to a particular location, or within a particular class, but arts that cross cultures and are 'out in the world,' and part of everyday life. Not only are they available, they are imposed. They appear everywhere, as if out of nowhere (the built environment, the buildings and plazas and parks you can't help but walk through; the music that comes out at you from the speakers in front of the stores you walk by, or from the sound-box a passer-by carries in the street or on the subway); or they appear in places that can be entered, still relatively cheaply, by people of different classes and social backgrounds, and that mix those people together (the rock-music club, where people crowd together as if at a party, or a political rally; the movie theater, where people sit together in rows as if at a church) -- in this latter case, the art keeps persisting outside of the specific location, in the form of movie posters and commercials and billboards, in the form of the song you can't get out of your head. These arts are the world; they function as ground, as backdrop, as air for behavior and experience.

Each panel will be a conversation among practitioners of these three public-art disciplines: architecture, pop music, and movies.

The hypothesis of the panels is that these disciplines analyze and organize the abstractions of time and space, so that these abstractions become publicly understood and, so, privately usable. The disciplines function both as active instruments, intermediaries, in real space, and as ideas, assumptions, stored in the back of the mind.

Architecture encloses time inside a place, and breaks up space into particular places. Architecture is considered here as the idea and instrument of structure.

Whereas architecture makes a place, music is placeless; you enter architecture, whereas music enters you. Music makes a pulse for time, and breaks up time into rhythms; installed in a place, music functions as background music, whether for a celebration or a revolt. Music is considered here as the idea and instrument of atmosphere.

Movies import, into your place and time, another time and place. Movies transport you out of your place and into theirs. Movies multiply space and put space into time, and speed places up or slow places down. Movies are considered here as the idea and instrument of image.

This structure, this atmosphere, this image, function together as a support, as a model, for plot and action in everyday life. These frames function as politics, and bias time and space. The panels will argue how these different manipulations of time and space shape a person's attitudes and intentions in time and space and about space and time.

The focus of each panel is the target audience of these disciplines: the person pared down to a body, variously mediated and in various guises. The premise of the panels is that architecture, pop music, and movies function as a series of experiments, performed on the body, that construct the person.

Panel 1: Body Odor.

The body brought down to basics, the body 'as it is,' the body in close-up; the body as skin and flesh and bones; personal space, privacy, and the ownership of the body; the body as object of desire, and instrument of disease; skin as housing for the body, the body as housing for an interior space, a psychological space...

Panel 2: The Decorated Body.

Clothing and camouflage and armor; the presentation of the body to others; the body designed to be seen, the body as spectacle; the body designed to be read, the body as sign...

Panel 3: The Homeless Body.

The body as it moves from place to place and from person to person; the body as a dot on a diagram, or a point on a map, or a figure in a landscape; the body as vehicle, as mobile home; the body leaving home, the body looking for a home, the body out of the body...

Panel 4: Body Politic.

The body as one unit in a mass of bodies; the body constructed by race, class, and gender; the body with a history, and the body in the news; the body out of the house and into a nation; the body as combatant, the body as instrument of change...

Panel 5: The Exploding Body.

The end of the body, the body out-dated in an electronic age; the place of the body in an electronic age of placelessness; the body as an information system, the computer as a body; simulated bodies, and virtual realities...

That was then, this is now. Things changed. Because of the difficulties of co-ordinating person with subject, and person with person, and person with particular time-slot, the five panels were reduced to three, and the order of panels was changed.

Originally, the panels were designed to lead up to a big bang: from the body confined in its odors to the body exploding out of itself. The direction of the panels was: from in to out, from here to there,

from something to nothing.

So, now, accident and circumstances re-orient theory, and the theory shifts. Our new starting point, tonight, is not the body so much but the body already dissolved: a field for a new body, or re-body.

2. THE FIRST PANEL: THE EXPLODING BODY.  
Architecture: Zaha Hadid; Movies: Atom Egoyan; Music: Blixa Bargeld (Einsturzende Neubauten). Moderator: Jack Womack.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE EXPLODING BODY

Some analogues for the exploding body:

Exploding Body Number 1: The body in a fun-house mirror -- by extension, the body in any mirror, with the implication that there can be other mirrors, in other directions, and at other angles.

Exploding Body Number 2: The slashed body, the body riddled with holes, the beheaded body.

Exploding Body Number 3: The body pressured by a doctor, a psychiatrist, a police interrogator, a husband.

Exploding Body Number 4: The body that goes inside out, the pregnant body, the cancerous body.

Exploding Body Number 5: The ventriloquist's dummy, the echo, the audio tape recorder.

Exploding Body Number 6: The body in an airplane taking off, the body in the clouds, the space-suit on the moon.

Exploding Body Number 7: The body in orgasm, the electrocuted body.

Exploding Body Number 8: The body spinning in the middle of the grid-system of a city.

Exploding Body Number 9: The body transcribed into a wall of video screens, the film cut, the sound so loud that it bursts an ear drum, the remote-control device.

An art, then -- whether it's movies, music, architecture, public art -- can, on the one hand, deal with the condition of the body-having-been-exploded: it can analyze it, narrate it, set up a structure for it. Or, on the other hand, the art can choose to cause the condition: the function of the art might be to make a body explode.

3. THE SECOND PANEL: BODY POLITIC.

Architecture: Rem Koohaas; Movies: Alex Cox; Music: Shazzy.  
Moderator: Ellen Willis.

INTRODUCTION TO BODY POLITIC

Our story up to now...

Because of circumstances and accidents of scheduling, our first panel turned out to be The Exploding Body.

So the premise of the plot is: the body dissolved, the body separated into particles, the body thrown into multiple video images and echoed in multiple audio tape loops. The exploding body is the technological version of an out-of-the-body experience.

Since there's no body left to target in on, no body left to do the targeting, the exploding body might be said to be beyond politics, or at least outside of politics.

To consider the body in terms of politics might be said -- under the auspices of the exploding body -- to be a regression, a safety device, a nostalgic urge to order, a desire to bring the prodigal body home.

Whereas the exploding body is blown up out of existence and, hence, out of definition, the political body -- and each of those bodies grouped together as the body politic -- is an attempt to re-define the body, to define the body in terms of class, race, and gender.

The exploding body as the freed body -- the body freed from itself, freed from the tyranny of the whole and open now to a multitude of parts -- can be ridiculed as fantasy. The body blown to bits is the body freed into bits; but the technology of explosion is not free, and resides in the hands of a political power. The realm of the exploding body is science-fiction; the realm of the political body, and the body politic, is the realm of the gangster movie, the detective novel: the plot of politics is to find the body, uncover the murderer, discover causes, and uproot prejudices.

The body inhabits architecture, sees movies, hears music. The body, the politically vulnerable body, is bent by architecture (the body is inhabited by architecture), lulled into sleep and dream in the dark space of the movie theater (the body is seen by movies), made to pulsate with the music it can't get out of its head (the body is heard by music). Architecture, movies, and music deserve to be labelled danger zones.

The danger of architecture is that the built environment, in order to be built, has been allowed to be built; the building, institutionally allowed to exist, functions as a representation and confirmation and justification of that institution. The hope

of architecture is that a building might dig under an existent building, and undercut its foundations -- that a building might attach onto an existent building, like a leech, and take it over -- that a building might be a vehicle capable of moving on before it's been atrophied into its location.

The danger of movies is that, when you're sitting in the dark for so long, sooner or later you'd better get up, or you lie down and die. The hope of movies is the movie on video cassette: each person can manipulate the movie on his/her own time -- each person, then, out of the privacy of his/her own home, can telephone another person, the persons together can compare their personal movies, their personal versions of the same movie, as texts and theories for action.

The danger of music is that the music in a club functions as group hypnosis: since music enters you, as a pulse, as an atmosphere, rather than you entering it, as a place, the music is instilled and installed in your body, as a program. The hope of music is the mix of musics on the street, coming from different directions and different sound-sources: one voice contradicts another, you can't listen to any one of them long enough to be a true believer, you can't be with any one of them long enough to be a husband or a wife. On the one hand, the walkman engenders privacy, and self-enclosure; on the other hand, the walkman functions as a walkie-talkie, the means by which one person in the body politic throws out messages to another person in the body politic.

The danger to politics, the break-up of politics -- the fly in the ointment, the one that got away -- might be sex: the desire that crosses party lines, the mix of bodies in spite of mind-sets. The danger to politics is the architecture of the bedroom, sex-mood music, pornographic movies.

An art -- whether it's architecture, movies, music, public art -- can choose to be an instrument of politics, and function as a carrier of propaganda; or it can choose to be about politics, and analyze propoganda; or it can choose to be politics -- an occasion where propogandas collide, as in a public forum.

#### 4. THE THIRD PANEL: THE HOMELESS BODY.

Architecture: Ron Herron (Archigram); Movies: Jim Jarmusch; Music: Sally Tims (The Mekons). Moderator: Greil Marcus.

#### INTRODUCTION TO THE HOMELESS BODY

Our first panel, The Exploding Body, posits a body blown apart at the seams, a body that's not a body of anything anymore, the body become a body of thought.

Our second panel, Body Politic, recovers the body and subjects it to systems of meaning, systems of class, race, and gender.

This third panel, The Homeless Body, sends the body away. This third panel, the last panel, is a way of saying good-bye; the homeless body is the body that always says good-bye. The homeless body comes to visit, not to stay.

The sequence might be seen like this: from the body exploded, and thus destroyed, to the body saved, and given a reason to exist, by politics. The body now is sent out on a mission; it wanders, without a home, but with a message, to the ends of the earth.

Or the sequence might be seen like this: from the body exploded, and thus freed from itself, to the body re-constituted, as a safety measure, by politics; from the body exploded into a new world -- of electronics or after-life -- to the body that can't face that new world and takes refuge in the old world of political boundaries. The political constraint makes a cage, a cell, but at the same time it makes a home. The body is released now from prison, or thrown out of the house; the homeless body is up for grabs -- the homeless body is out on the streets, where it takes what it can get.

The location of the political body is the city, where the contact with and the pressure of other bodies forces discussion, argument, and a potential revolution. The location of the homeless body is the park, the enclave within a city, where the body withdraws and takes time out, and dreams or plans a new city.

If the occasion for the political body is life on earth, then the occasion for the homeless body is outer space.

The Homeless Body is somewhere between The Exploding Body and The Body Politic. It's the body that's neither electronically dissolved nor politically determined. It's the body that remains whole but is on the loose and on the run. If politics restores the body, and preserves it, whether as victim or victimizer, then The Homeless Body is the body that's given one more chance, one last chance to get away from it all. The body is a wanderer as long as it's not a believer; The Homeless Body is the body with no strings attached.