

Projects 17 : Elizabeth Diller, Ricardo Scofidio : the Museum of Modern Art, New York, July 1-August 15, 1989

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The Museum of Modern Art
New York
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17



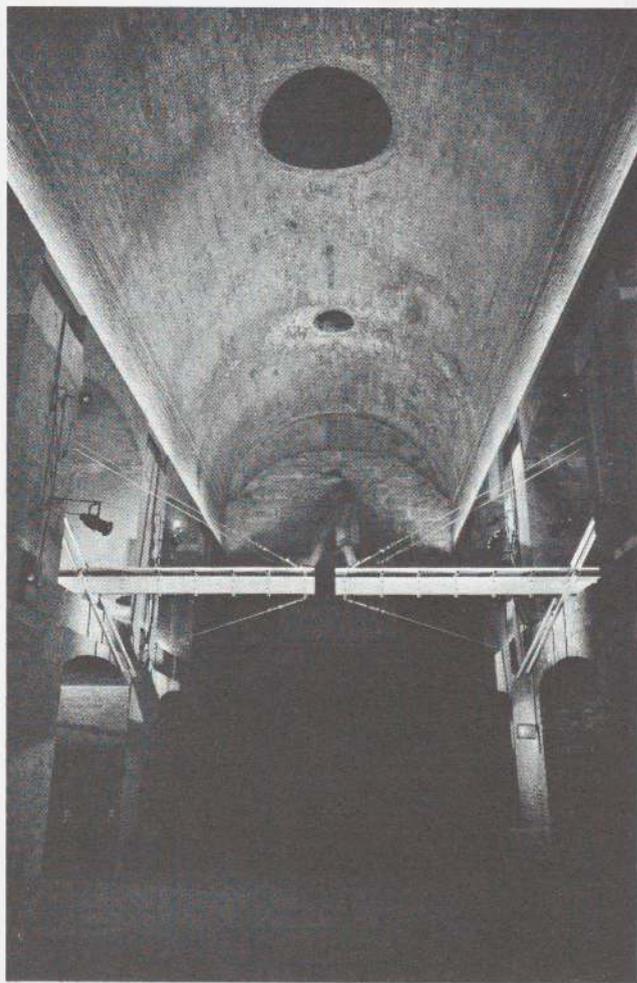
the withDrawing Room: versions and subversions. 1987. Installation at The Capp Street Project, San Francisco. Photo: Ben Blackwell

elizabeth diller
ricardo scofidio
para-site

Since 1979 Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo

Scofidio have worked together on numerous architecture projects. While their collaborations include designs of houses and a gallery, Diller and Scofidio focus on temporary installations that provide a framework for their architectural explorations. These multimedia and interdisciplinary projects are studies of space that comment on particular contextual conditions. In *para-site* Diller and Scofidio examine the Museum building as a *para-site* or surrogate site for their architecture, while at The Capp Street Project in San Francisco (1987) they reevaluated domestic life within the confines of a house. In all of their site-specific installations, Diller and Scofidio attempt to defy the hard-edged boundaries of architecture and to endorse the diverse resources that influence it.

In this installation, video contributes significantly to the viewer's experience of the space as he or she observes on monitors different sites beyond the Garden Hall Gallery. Six surveillance cameras are mounted on metal rods and are attached like parasites to surfaces over the main entrance and the escalator, points of transition in the Museum. These cameras transmit fragmented images of Museum visitors to monitors in the gallery. Hanging from the ceiling and walls, constructions comprised of convex mirrors, chairs, and structural elements contribute to the aggressive character of the space and seem to defy gravity.



Bridge. 1986. Installation in the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage, New York

Diller and Scofidio use spatial devices in *para-site* to orient and disorient the viewer. Video cameras and monitors orient the viewer within the context of the Museum while mirrors and upside-down chairs disorient. In their installation for The Capp Street Project in San Francisco, with *Drawing Room: versions and subversions*, tables and chairs were elevated or sawed in half, for example, to reevaluate the idea of comfort in a domestic environment. In the Capp Street Project piece, dotted lines implied a second floor; in *para-site* they halve the room vertically and provide a point of reference for the viewer. Within the gallery, structures are interrelated by invisible lines created by the viewer's gaze from one component of the structure to the next.

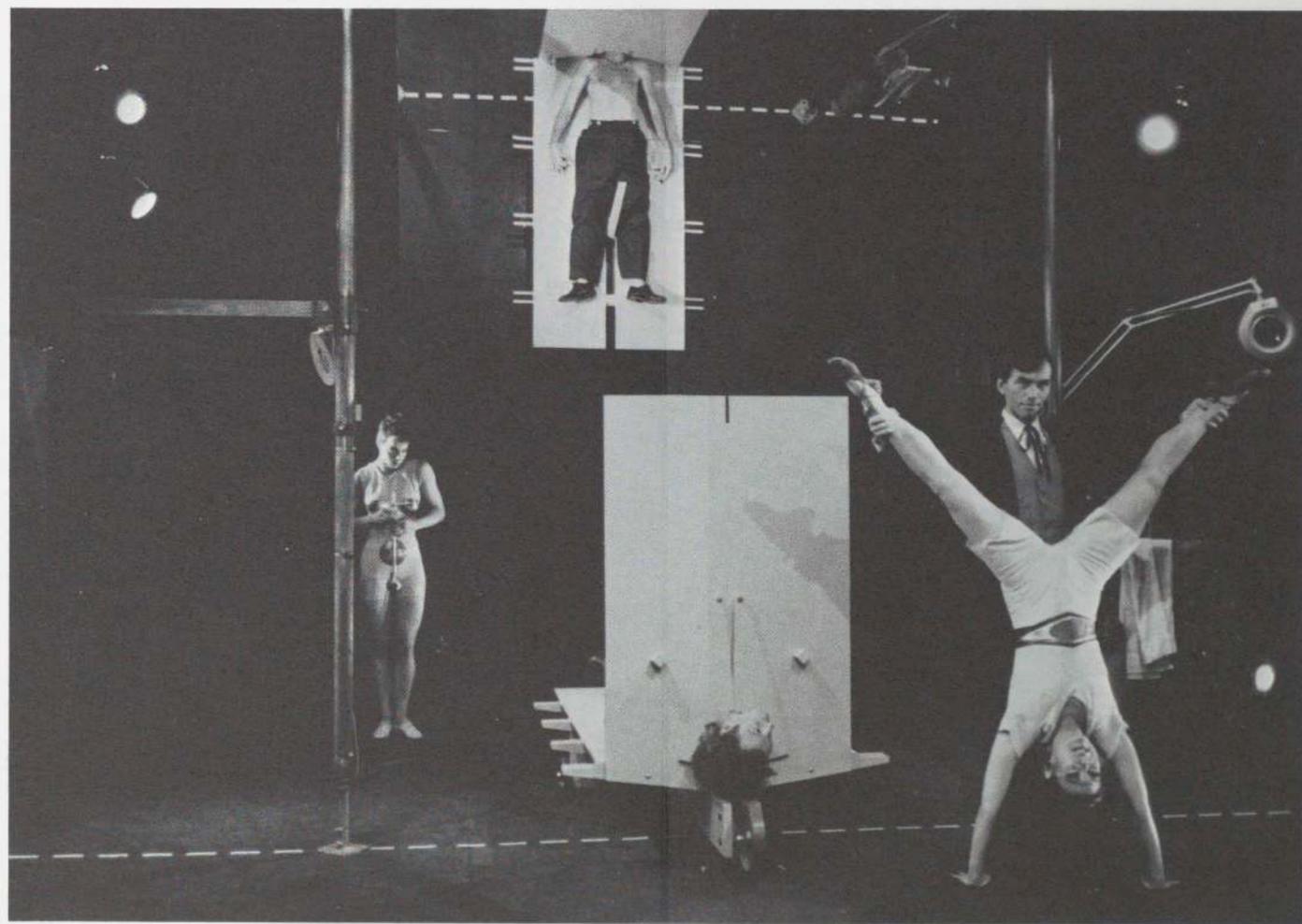
The human body as active participant or as viewer is central to the work of Diller and Scofidio and recalls the performance-art tradition of the seventies, particularly the art of Bruce Nauman. In *Bridge*, Diller and Scofidio's installation in the Anchorage of the Brooklyn Bridge (1986), the performer ultimately completed the piece by spanning the gap between two cantilevered units: the human body became the bridge. Museum visitors are the performers in *para-site* and activate the piece by their movement through the revolving and garden doors, and on the escalator. The viewer participated more passively as voyeur in *The Rotary Notary and His Hot Plate*, performed at La Mama E.T.C., New York, in 1987 and inspired by Duchamp's *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. In this piece, only the viewer could see the entire action on stage due to a panel that divided the female ele-

ment, the "Bride," from the male element, the "Bachelor." Similarly, visitors to *para-site* are voyeurs of Museum activities as they watch others pass through the camera's field of vision. Here the effect is unsettling as the voyeur soon anticipates the moment when his or her body is scanned and recorded by hidden cameras.

Diller and Scofidio go beyond conventional architectural practice. Their interdisciplinary approach is reminiscent of that of the Bauhaus and is closely aligned with that of The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, where they currently teach. At Cooper, courses are taught by poets, writers, and other artists, and the curriculum focuses on not only the pragmatic but the psychological aspects of architecture.

More in keeping with architectural tradition, Diller and Scofidio emphasize the structural nature of the materials they use in their projects. This is evident in the finely crafted and highly technical quality of the constructed elements in *para-site*. Diller and Scofidio pay close attention to their materiality and to the rigorous detail of connections and joints. In the four structures over the revolving doors, for example, metal pieces are carefully soldered together so that connections appear more like legs of an arthropod than junctures in a tripod. Chairs are dissected, and embedded with strange objects such as metal type and protruding rods.

For Diller and Scofidio, *para-site* is an exploration of the ways in which the body can participate in a



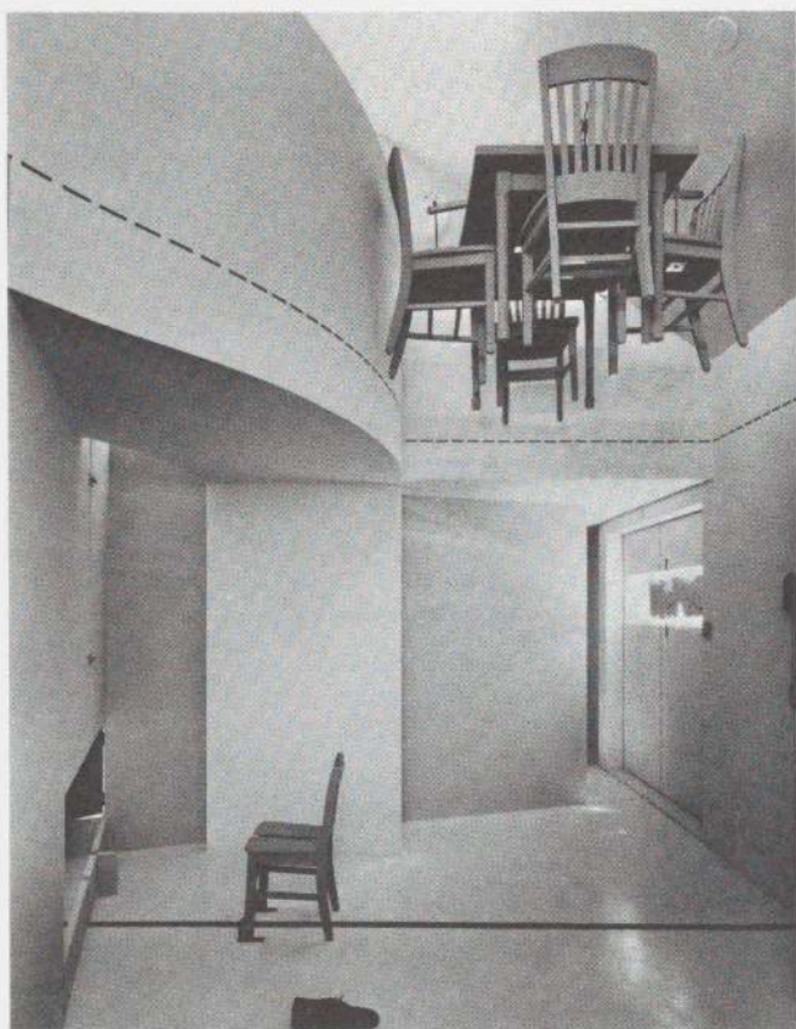
The Rotary Notary and His Hot Plate. 1987. Installation for a performance at La Mama E.T.C., New York. Photo: J. Vezuzzo

given spatial situation. By means of video monitors that record the movement of visitors within the Museum, normal views of the body are transformed as the viewer observes other visitors from above, obliquely, and in sections. The structural supports for the video machinery complement this scientific scrutiny of the body and create a highly technical and disturbing environment, one that is measured by the machine and not by the human body.

Matilda McQuaid
Curatorial Assistant
Department of Architecture and Design

Diller and Scofidio are grateful for a research fellowship from the Chicago Institute for Architecture and Urbanism, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

Designed to present recent work by contemporary artists, the new **projects** series has been based on the Museum's original **projects** exhibitions, which were held from 1971 to 1982. The artists presented are chosen by the members of all the Museum's curatorial departments in a process involving an active dialogue and close critical scrutiny of new developments in the visual arts. The **projects** series is made possible by a generous grant from the Lannan Foundation. Additional support for this exhibition has been provided by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and The Lyda Ebert Family Foundation. Video equipment has been provided by the Sony Corporation of America.



the withDrawing Room: versions and subversions. 1987. Installation at The Capp Street Project, San Francisco. Photo: Ben Blackwell

biographies

elizabeth diller

Born Lodz, Poland, 1954. Resides in New York

education

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York. Bachelor of Architecture, 1979

ricardo scofidio

Born New York, 1935. Resides in New York

education

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York. 1955

Columbia University, New York. Bachelor of Architecture, 1960

selected individual exhibitions

1988

Galleri Rom, Oslo

Institute of Contemporary Art
of the University of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia

1987

Storefront for Art and Architecture,
New York

*body buildings: architecture facts
and fictions*

The Capp Street Project, San Francisco
*the withDrawing Room: versions
and subversions*

1985

Art on the Beach, New York,
organized by Creative Time
Gate

selected group exhibitions

1989

Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt
New York Architecture

1988

Gallery Nature Morte, New York
Art and Capital

1987

La Mama E.T.C., New York
The Rotary Notary and His Hot Plate
(with Creation Production Co.)

1986

Milan Triennale
Il progetto domestico

Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage, New York
Bridge
(with Creation Production Co.)

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McAnulty, Robert. *Diller + Scofidio* (brochure). Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art of the University of Pennsylvania, 1988

Phillips, Patricia. "Hinged Victories," *Artforum International* (New York), vol. 26, no. 10 (Summer 1988), pp. 106-109