

Martina Leeker

## Surrounds, Be-Ins, and Performative Participation: Shady Sides of Art and Interventions

2017

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/2071>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version

Sammelbandbeitrag / collection article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Leeker, Martina: Surrounds, Be-Ins, and Performative Participation: Shady Sides of Art and Interventions. In: Howard Caygill, Martina Leeker, Tobias Schulze (Hg.): *Interventions in digital cultures. Technology, the political, methods*. Lüneburg: meson press 2017, S. 21–43. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/2071>.

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen 4.0 Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Share Alike 4.0 License. For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

[ 1 ]

# **Surrounds, Be-Ins, and Performative Participation: Shady Sides of Art and Interventions**

**An Interview with Fred Turner  
by Martina Leeker**

**Beginning in the 1940s, a group of former Bauhaus designers, American artists, and American intellectuals sought to intervene in cultural and political transformations. To revisit that history is to see how art and political power can become entwined, even when artists have the most democratic of intentions. In the 1940s, Americans built multimedia environments—democratic surrounds—which they hoped would help generate liberal democratic personalities by training audiences to curate their own aesthetic experiences. In the 1960s, these environments gave rise to an artistically grounded psychedelic Be-In and to a new holistic participation in a world**

**of electronic media. In both cases, however, designers, scientists, artists, and politicians hoped that media would become both a means of liberation and a mode of control. This history leaves us with the question of which aesthetics and art forms could support a more democratic mode of engagement today. By working through the history of interventions and the arts, this conversation aims to reveal lures and traps that should be avoided in contemporary interventions.**

Martina Leeker: Nowadays, we see hype around artistic interventions as well as about art as intervention, both being considered practices to generate and develop a public sphere and the self-determined capacity to act. But we learn from the research in your books, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (Turner 2006) and *The Democratic Surround* (Turner 2013a), that art is not a priori “good,” in the sense that it is not per se democratizing, bringing more capacity to act, to resist, or to change conditions for people. Thus, before doing interventions with artistic means or art as intervention, it is important to do a historical checkup concerning the politics of interventionist artwork since the 1940s.

Fred Turner: The books together trace a history of the intersection of art, counterculture, and technology from about 1940 in the US to when the Internet goes public, which is about 1993. It’s about a 50-year arc. What you see in that period is a constant back and forth between the art world and the technology world. They’re not separate; there is a very similar class of people working in both spaces and there

are a whole series of spaces where they intersect with each other.

During World War II, artists began to develop multi-image environments and a really rich environmental sensibility. It went on to have a big impact on how we thought about computing later. But in the 1940s it was pre-digital. It was a way of trying to make a really democratic medium. At the time, many Americans believed that one-to-many media such as film, cinema, newspapers, and radio reflected a top-down, authoritarian mind-set. A certain set of artists and propagandists wanted to build a surround. They wanted every individual to be surrounded by images or sounds so they could be free to choose what they wanted from that environment. That idea migrated into the technical world through Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson (Turner 2013a), who were involved in both wartime propaganda efforts and were central participants in the Macy Conferences<sup>1</sup> that brought us cybernetics. By the late 1940s, when Norbert Wiener was working on cybernetics, he was thinking both technically and with models of environmental communication that actually come from Bauhaus refugees to American propaganda, and from there, through Mead and Bateson, to cybernetics.

And that's just the first of many kinds of intersection points. Later, during the 1960s, Billy Klüver's<sup>2</sup> group, Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), brought engineers from the Bell Telephone Laboratories (Bell Labs) together with painters and performance artists in New York. Even before

- 1 The interdisciplinary Macy Conferences were held from 1941 to 1960 in New York, within the cybernetic conferences from 1946 to 1953. (Pias 2003)
- 2 Billy Klüver was an engineer at Bell Labs. He founded Experiments in Art and Technology with artist Robert Rauschenberg in 1967. Klüver started to collaborate with artists such as Jean Tinguely at the beginning of the 1960s. His aim for engaging in the collaboration of engineers and artists was to make technology more human.

that, people like the architect, systems theorist, designer, and inventor Buckminster Fuller were bridges between the worlds. Buckminster Fuller patented the geodesic dome in 1952 and sold it to the American military to house radar for the Defense Early Warning Line, the DEW-line. It then became the preferred housing of back-to-the-land commune builders in the 1960s and early 1970s. So, it's a kind of back and forth between the arts and technology. And I think that's what we're seeing in many art worlds today.

ML: What is the socio-cultural, the political and the epistemological impact of this back and forth of art and technology, even military, and what are the kind of problems it brings for combining art and interventions?

FT: In the late 1930s and early 1940s, American sociologists, social thinkers, psychologists, anthropologists, and political leaders were all students of what was called at the time "culture and personality anthropology." They believed that every culture had a kind of dominant, modal personality and that families trained children to match that personality. So, people thought, for example, that Germans had a kind of authoritarian personality style and that somehow Hitler had latched on to that. People also believed that media, meaning movies, radio and the like, were like extensions of the family. After you grew up and left home, media did the work of continuing to form your subjectivity in ways that were appropriate to your culture. Thus, they believed that German media would need to be more authoritarian, while American media were meant to be more democratic.

And this was partly how Americans explained to themselves the mystery of Adolf Hitler. Until the late 1930s, Americans really believed that Germany represented the pinnacle of European culture. When Hitler became chancellor in Germany, Americans were just mystified. How had the most cultured nation in Europe turned to this guy for leadership?

One of the most popular answers was that somehow Hitler had mastered the mass media. He had somehow built a kind of mediated system for taking Germans away from their rational cultured selves and just melting them into an authoritarian mass.

As World War II got under way, American leaders thought to themselves, "Okay, look, we need to have morale, like the Germans have. We need to be as strong as the Germans. But we can't make our citizens into authoritarians." So, there was a big debate in the Roosevelt administration. One side said, "Joseph Goebbels, he's doing great. We should do what he does and if our citizens become authoritarians, too bad. We'll fix that later." It's terrifying, but that was a real discussion. And then there was another side, and it was led by a group called the Committee for National Morale, which Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson were part of. This side said, "Now look, we need to find a democratic kind of morale, and we need to build a media form that will sustain it." They theorized democratic morale using a mix of democracy theory and personality theory. A democratic person, they said, was someone who could choose their own experience, who had a uniquely integrated set of experiences, who could embrace others who were very different than themselves, across racial lines, across lines of sexual preference, across national lines—in other words, a cultured, cosmopolitan liberal. That person had to be made. And they believed that the best way to make them with media was to surround them with images or sounds from which people could choose the elements that were most meaningful to them. As they chose those things, they would be practicing the styles of perception on which the democratic personality depended.

The members of the Committee for National Morale didn't actually make media. But in 1942, at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, their ideas became the basis of a propaganda exhibition called "Road to Victory."

It was designed by Herbert Bayer, a Bauhaus figure who had recently immigrated to the United States, together with Edward Steichen, the photographer who would go on to create, from 1951 till its opening of 1955, what almost certainly remains the most widely seen photography exhibition of all time: “The Family of Man.” “Road to Victory” was an image environment with pictures of America hung over people’s heads, down by their feet, at every level. People were meant to walk through it together, yet have unique, individualized experiences, to choose what they wanted to see and to see it in their own way. They were meant to be individuals together—that’s the liberal ideal, that’s the American ideal in that period, that’s the democratic mode of morale. Bayer and Steichen hoped that by creating these surrounds, they would give people the “freedom” to define themselves as individuals and as citizens, simultaneously.

Now of course from our own time we can see that these surrounds are *surrounds*—people have choices, but the choices have been set for them ahead of time. They can only choose among the images that are there. They can only choose among the perceptions that are available to them in a setting that’s been curated. I would argue that that’s a lot like our media environment today. We have lots and lots of choices but all of them carefully curated.

ML: This means that we can’t thoughtlessly take the aesthetic dispositive of surrounding people with multi-optional media environments as a method of intervention today because it is based on a problematic understanding of democracy. It is about a kind of elitist curating; some people know what is good for mankind better than others. So, we have to make do with an ambivalent aesthetic-political endeavor because on the one hand it trains decision making and individuality and on the other, it is based on regulation and control. But I’m surprised that you mentioned the exhibition “Family of Man”

by Steichen in this context. Was it really democratizing considering, for example, what many critics have said were the heteronormative and racist implications of the exhibition?

FT: The generation of art critics from the 1980s have made the case against “The Family of Man” very powerfully. They have called it racist, sexist, and nationalistic, even neo-colonial. But if you go back and study the actual responses to the show in that period and look closely at the images, you’ll find something quite different. Abigail Solomon-Godeau (2004), for instance, is a very famous art critic and she said that there are no pictures of black people and white people holding hands together. That is not actually true (see Turner 2012). She said that there were more denigrating depictions of African-Americans than white folks. Again, not true. I went through and counted them. Pictures of Africans are there; they were taken by African photographers. “The Family of Man” presents a much more egalitarian world than most critics think today. Yes, it has the kind of family ethos that we found to be a problem in the 1980s and 1990s, but in its own time it was seen as very radical.

Let me give you an example. Near the center of the exhibition, there was a now-famous image of a polygamous African family in rural Africa living in a couple of huts. To the critics of the 1980s, it looked like a denigrating image. It primitivized Africans and it privileged heteronormativity, they believed. Critical voices say: “Look, there are no queer people in this show, there are just straight people, they’re having families.” Okay. If you go back and read the response to the show, people who saw the show were amazed. For them, the polygamous family image actually opened up the possibility of different ways to organize sexuality, ways of being different than they were. Steichen asked his audiences to identify with polygamists. He asked white Americans to identify with Africans and African-Americans. This is 1955,



just before the civil rights movement starts. It is the peak of the Cold War and a deeply racist time in America.

Another example: in the center of the show, there were four very large images, each maybe 10 feet tall. One of these images has Japanese people in traditional costumes, another has Italians, another has Russians, and another has impoverished white Americans. I cannot tell you how difficult it was, 10 years after World War II, for Americans to look at a large picture of traditionally dressed Japanese people over their heads and to be asked to identify with them. You know, my grandmother was still so angry about World War II and what the Japanese did that in 1988 when I bought a Toyota, she didn't talk to me for two weeks.

So, I think that if you go back and look at the material of the time, "The Family of Man" is actually a much more open show than the critics of the 1980s and 1990s have suggested. It looks closed to us now, but at the time it opened the doors to lots of different ways of being—prominently including anti-racist and antisexist modes.

ML: But it was this multi-perspective and multi-media environment that had this doubtful notion of democracy you speak about. This must be seen as a problem?

FT: I think that in the early 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, the multi-image environment, the multi-sound environment that I call the democratic surround, were forces for good. They were designed to produce democratic subjects and they were closely associated with a series of egalitarian political movements that we've forgotten. We've forgotten that in the wake of World War II there was a radical push for homosexual rights, very publicly. In 1941, a number of American intellectuals pushed very hard against American racism. They said look, if we're going to go to war against Germany and German racists, we have to fix our own race problems at home. We've forgotten those things. We

remember the period between 1945 and 1955 as a period of increasing repression, of containment, psychological, political, racial, all of it. That's just not accurate. Or at the very least, it's not the whole story. It was a much more conflicted and open time. What actually happened—and it's even sadder—is that as the 1950s went on, the surround form lost its original political associations. After World War II, the form traveled to two places: it went to the art world and it went to propaganda exhibitions in Europe. These exhibitions were designed to promote American politics but also American commerce, and they appeared around the world. As they did, their original political ambitions melted away. The surround became an architecture not for a new politics, not for a new egalitarian social system, but for consumer choice. The anti-racist and the pro-sexual diversity critiques of the 1940s and early 1950s simply melted away.

You see this most dramatically in the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow. The exhibition was a showcase for the surround mode of display. The designers and architects Charles and Ray Eames offered a seven-screen multi-image slide show called "Glimpses of the USA," and "The Family of Man" was shown there, alongside huge displays of American consumer goods—everything from books and records to washing machines. Those who built the American National Exhibition hoped that audiences would conflate consumer choice with political choice and so conclude that democracy would improve their lives.

A similar process took place in the art world. The happenings of the late 1950s and early 1960s borrowed heavily from the aesthetics of the democratic surround. Yet they left the expressive politics of the 1940s off the stage. When I looked at archival pictures of happenings, I was completely surprised. I thought they would be radically open, radically diverse. On the contrary: with very few exceptions I saw young, white men dominating environments in which there

were very few women at all. What women there were, were often naked underneath wet sheets or layers of whipped cream. They had clearly been made to be watched as objects of sexual desire. I can remember seeing no more than one or two people of color in a hundred images. The happenings were heteronormative, white, male environments. But they've been celebrated as environments of theatrical choice. Spectators got to choose what they paid attention to; they were surrounded by the imagery. What actually happened—it's so sad—is that the politics associated with the surround form in the mid-century, in the 1940s, disappeared across the 1950s. It became a kind of consumerist politics by the early 1960s, in propaganda exhibitions and art alike.

This had a real impact on psychedelic art in the 1960s. The art started to become deracinated, depoliticized. It became about personal experience. It became about consciousness. Young, almost exclusively white, almost exclusively middle-class Americans now began to offer up psychedelic media, LSD, and countercultural technologies as tools with which to achieve a new consciousness. But they did it in environments that were racially segregated. The communes of the 1960s were almost exclusively white; they were often dropped in the middle of areas where there were Mexican Americans or Native Americans who were ignored and pushed away. They ended up replicating the kind of contained American society that the 1960s ostensibly pushed against. So that's where the breakdown happened: in the 15 years after World War II ended.

ML: We have two similar problems for art as intervention. In the 1960s, a *depoliticization* of the artistic "democratic surround" took place, whereas in the 1940s/1950s we see a political and economic *instrumentalization* of artwork going for the "surround." Concerning the political instrumentalization, I also think of the exhibitions of the abstract expressionists

in the USA and in Europe, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, which was connected to the CIA (Saunders 2000). These were supposed to show the world: this is American art, this is against Hitler fascism and socialist realism. So, art figured as a kind of weapon in the Cold War.

FT: And that happened to the surround form as well. I found a document in the United States Information Agency archives and it shocked me. It was a declassified document from the early 1950s that explained how to use media abroad. We needed to act like psychotherapists, it argued. We needed to assess the psychological condition of the foreign people—were they democratic or not?—and we needed to stage a media intervention. Then, we needed to measure and see if our intervention was effective. Starting in 1956 during the International Trade Fair in Kabul, Afghanistan (Turner 2013b),<sup>3</sup> and for a decade thereafter, this is what we did: we built these multi-image environments in places where we thought people might not be democratic, and then we tested people as they left the building to see if they'd actually been changed. It started in Afghanistan (Turner 2013b)<sup>4</sup> and by the time it reached Moscow in the 1959 American National Exhibition, it was a very sophisticated process. We had notebooks; we had translators who kept track of

- 3 "The high-tech dome, the cutaway plastic farm animals, even the arrays of multi-sized photographs—all were built to channel Afghan desires for modernization in a Western direction. The environment was designed to offer visitors a range of choices as to where to place their attention, from a set of objects that had already been selected by invisible experts." (Turner 2013b)
- 4 "Collated by researchers and delivered to their American managers, Afghan responses to the exhibition could shape the design of future exhibitions, and perhaps even that of American policy toward Afghanistan and other nations.... In this way, visitors became elements in an extended feedback loop. By measuring audience responses to the exhibition, American officials could feed them back into the next round of exhibition design. Each iteration of the cycle would in turn, in theory at least, intensify the psychological impact of the next exhibition." (Turner 2013b)

Russian visitors' questions. We even had a computer there that recorded the questions that people asked as they moved through the exhibition. It's astonishing. This kind of surveillance I think foreshadowed our world. We live in a world in which we are invited to have experiences all the time, but we are very carefully monitored. You know, living in America these days can feel a little like living in a supermarket with spies.

ML: So, we had artistic interventions by means of multi-media environments for a regime of capitalist-democratic beings in the 1940s and 1950s. This demonstrates that we have to consult the history of artistic interventions and their entanglement with politics and economy if we want to make interventions in digital cultures. Studying their genealogy should prevent the same mistakes from being made. Is there something in the concept and practices of multiple perspectives that we could keep as a democratizing method?

FT: I think we can keep the structure. The multi-image structure, I would argue, was extremely political in the 1940s and 1950s. It's powerfully political. "The Family of Man," you know, had about 800,000 visitors in the first months that it was open. It's been seen by millions of people over the years. Heck, its catalog has sold nine million copies, it's still up in Luxembourg, still on display. I'm not sure, but I don't think it has ever *not* been on display somewhere—since 1955. So that show had an impact.

I think the question to ask ourselves now is, with what institutions are we partnering, and what happens when we partner with those institutions? Also: what are we asking our viewers and our audiences to do or see? Are we confronting them with things that make them uncomfortable? Are we asking them to identify with things that matter? One of the legacies of the people I've studied that bothers me is that when they did "The Family of Man" and these other

image environments, they often asked viewers to have a kind of one-to-one identification with a person in an image. The individual was very much the center of the action there. That is the nature of liberalism. But I would ask: what kind of media can we make now that let us find a third place between commercial or state institutions and sort of collaborative liberalism? Is there something in between in there? And that I don't know, but that's what I'd be looking for. I think the form itself is more flexible than we give it credit for being. I think a lot of it is how we deploy it.

ML: Let's follow up with the kind of interventions artists did in the 1960s. We see the movement "Art and Technology" as the non-profit organization Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) you mentioned in the beginning, or the hippie artist group around Gerd Stern, the Company of Us (USCO) (Turner 2013a). They had been intermingled with Marshall McLuhan's research in media (McLuhan 1964) as well as with industry and technology, especially with systems engineering. And they shared an interest in LSD (McLuhan 1969). Their aim was to change people's consciousness and make them more open to the world, integrating them into their technological environment. What should we learn for today's interventions from this environmentalization of perception and cognition, this kind of becoming dazzled, going with drugs, opening one's mind, and all this done by the artists, trying to offer LSD-like experiences to their recipients with artistic means in order to help them adapt to the new electronic world? Do we come from an epistemology of multi-perspectives in the 1940s and 1950s to one of being dazzled, drugged, and opened in the 1960s?

FT: Openness is a word that was very meaningful in the 1950s and 1960s, but also very deceptive. When we think back about McLuhan, when we think about acid and we think about the 1960s, we're looking at a time when people became what Buckminster Fuller called "comprehensive designers."

What Fuller said we needed to do was to take the industrial resources around us, pull them out of their industrial context, and use them to transform our minds and thereby our societies. LSD was one of those industrial resources.

The second thing that we have to see is that artists, like many American citizens in that period, were utterly fascinated by technology. So, when they took LSD they were doing two things: one, they were in some sense opening themselves to a new consciousness; and two, they were also just literally doing what the American military and industrial complex was already doing. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the military had built computer systems to scan the far side of the globe, to see as far as they could. The military understood the whole globe as a system that could be monitored. Well, you know, in 1966, after the three-day Trips Festival in Longshoreman's Hall in San Francisco, Stewart Brand, a famous 1960s figure and founder of the Whole Earth Catalog, sat on top of a roof in San Francisco and wondered why he couldn't see over the curve of the world. He hoped that LSD might help him do it. You know, that kind of thing is very powerful. It's a sort of weird imitation of military-industrial power.

The third factor, which is again something we forget now, was that electronic media in the domestic space were incredibly new. Television was only about 20 years old in the late 1960s. It totally changed things. Everyone used to have a big radio in the living room. The whole family could sit around and listen, that was one thing. But when you got a little record player and you could take it into your room and dance alone, that was a different thing. That was a big deal. And when you could get an automobile or a car and drive and be free that way, that was also a big deal.

So, I think one thing that McLuhan was doing was marrying the kind of system-oriented sensibility of elite military industrial thinkers to the new experience of consumer

technologies that many people were having. And a lot of Americans, but especially hippies, who bought into Fuller's idea of comprehensive design, tried to use those new technologies as ways to gain the kind of insight, vision, prestige, and legitimacy that the military industrial experts had in that period. Now, this doesn't speak very well for many artists at the time. And that's a problem. And I don't know how to think about it. I admire a number of the artists from the time a great deal, especially USCO, but at the same time I can see them at least playing with fires that were lit in the military. And playing with technologies that had other purposes. It looks to me like they are playing at being the kinds of people who are on the edge of destroying the world.

ML: The episteme of a resonant "Be-In" became crucial within the artists' interventions of the 1960s. It meant that we are an integral part of the technological environment. Where did this Be-In come from, and do we inherit traces of it in today's performative technological environments, with miraculous and mysterious self-organized technical things and infrastructures?

FT: I think all those things owe their origins to cybernetics. And I know that Gerd Stern of USCO first learned of cybernetics through a draft of Marshall McLuhan's book "Understanding Media," which he got at a party from John Cage. So, I know these folks were reading it. And you know the key cybernetic insight, in Norbert Wiener's version of cybernetics at least, is that the world is a constantly communicating system of information. Things are just patterns of information that happened to have acquired solidity, and you yourself are just a pattern of information that has acquired solidity for some period of time. The essential cybernetic insight is that the entire world is communication. It's just literally information. When we move our bodies in the world, Norbert Wiener describes them as information systems seeking feedback. We are like little machines. We bump into the chair, we bump



into the table and we learn that oh, this is the table and I'm me—I should go in another direction. In the 1960s, the idea that human beings were both communication systems in their own right and elements in a global system of information scaled right up. It became an almost mystical notion that everything was interconnected. Everything was one. As USCO used to put it, "We Are All One." It's a technology-enabled vision of being in constant intercommunication. And of course, that's also the vision behind the Internet, behind the World Wide Web and a lot of Silicon Valley today.

ML: If we are still in, the question may be: how to come out again?

FT: Yeah, how to come out is a great question. I think we have to be careful too, in a contemporary sense, not to think that the "Be-In" (being in) is the political statement that people in the 1960s thought it was. You know, in the 1960s there were really two countercultures. One was focused on doing politics to change politics, and we can call that the New Left. And the other was a sort of technology-enabled consciousness movement, mostly concentrated in a series of communes in the late 1960s. The Be-In is mostly in that second group. It's the tool or the technique that grows out of USCO's 1966 show at the Riverside Museum in New York (Turner 2006, Turner 2013a). Within the logic of the Be-In, we have only to put ourselves in the right environment. We can then understand ourselves as collaborative citizens, as parts of a system, and we can then begin to act in right ways. That's tremendously naïve. There's a desperate urge to just avoid politics completely. And when you avoid politics like that, you take up technology and consciousness, sure, but you also take up consumerism. You take things, you buy things, you eat things, you wear styles. And this is another place that the politics of the 1940s left us when they faded away. You just can't solve the problems besetting America by dropping acid and seeing patterns.

ML: Let's compare the Be-In of the 1960s with today's situation. In the 1960s, systems engineering was the important technology, which made an environmentalization of media, and the artists' Be-In could be seen as an answer to this shift to self-organized and self-referential techno-social systems. Today we see the transformation of systems into the infrastructure of ubiquitous computing, pervasiveness, and invisibility, in which everything is fine, like here in Silicon Valley. I would like to pursue the question of the heritage of the 1960s Be-In.

FT: We imagine ourselves as free in that world and we imagine our interactions with that system as completely individuated. When I pick up my iPhone, I think, "Oh, it's just me and my phone. I'll call somebody I like and I'll make a connection and that will be good." No! Apple's watching, other companies are watching. Even as I make a private phone call, my data are traveling who knows where. I am constantly engaging with institutions and I don't know who they are. That's not okay.

I think to understand what's going on now, we have to go back to the 1950s and 1960s and to the rise of a kind of managerial figure. This is a figure who appeared in industry and also in the arts. It was the person who designed the system and managed the system. When we talk about artists making systems art, what they were doing was things like the Pepsi Pavilion, done by E.A.T. for the World's Fair "Expo '70" in 1970 in Osaka (Turner 2014). They were designing environments in which people could experience their place in the system, just as the 1960s counterculture said they should, but also where the artist could be a computer-based manager of people's experiences. They were factory managers; they were bosses in a new kind of factory. And we happen to have a new kind of factory now. And the terms of that factory were set back there, in that mix of management discourse and artistic discourse. And that is something that we have to hold against artists of the period. I think we have to say, you

know, at some level you collaborated in the development and legitimizing of a new mode of control, the mode of control we inhabit now.

Okay, so, that's the negative. The positive is, you know, Silicon Valley is not Berlin in 1939. There is a lot of power here, but it really is quite flexible. It's quite elitist, it's moderately racist, certainly sexist, in the technology world anyways, and these things are all true and they are all problems, and I don't see people building environmental technologies today of a kind that will help liberate us in the way that so many Americans tried to in the 1940s. But at the same time, I don't feel dominated directly in the way that I might have in a more fascist era. I do feel dominated though. And this is that thing, this is that mode of management that the surround form pioneers. I am free, but I am free in terms that are constantly being negotiated and set for me invisibly by managers, who work for states and companies. And my devices, my digital technologies, enlist me. They automatically make me a citizen in countries that I never voted to join.

ML: This managerial figure as a contradictory constellation of management, control and a free individual reminds me of the concept of a self that we might inherit from the 1960s. David Tudor invented, for example, an ambivalent concept of control and the loss of control as model for a self in the performance series "9 Evenings. Theatre and Engineering," organized by Billy Klüver and Robert Rauschenberg. In his piece "Bandoneon! (a combine)" he enabled a self-composition of the sound system, which he finally controlled by a switch device, interrupting all the sounds if he wanted to. Or Yvonne Rainer's piece at "9 Evenings": in "Carriage Discreteness" she instructed the performer via walkie-talkie to transport things on the stage in order to generate the impression of a freely self-organized system.

FT: Yeah! And that's a quintessentially Cold War American view. What did the president of the United States want to do in the late 1950s? He wanted to open up and set free the communist peoples of Europe; the captive peoples of Europe. I would argue that what David Tudor is doing in that sense is something like what John Cage was doing in his music and what Eisenhower was doing in politics. In the space of artistic intervention, in the space focused on the subjectivity of the listeners and the audience, the artists and engineers of "9 Evenings" are attempting to liberate sound in a way that is entirely parallel to America trying to liberate the minds of former European enemies in that same period. I think it's the same cultural logic at play.

ML: There is another aspect of Yvonne Rainer's performance, and that's paranoia. It was evoked because there seemed to be some invisible control in the well-organized choreography. Maybe paranoia becomes a form of governance, which is perhaps important for us today because we know we are being watched. We know it, but we are interacting nevertheless within our technological environments.

FT: So, in this context, it's worth revisiting Americans' Cold War fears of hypnosis. Think about the movie *The Manchurian Candidate*, done by John Frankenheimer in 1962. During the Korean War, many Americans believed that the Koreans would capture our soldiers, brainwash them and then send them back to be weapons here. And now we hear about ISIS and other groups sending their brainwashed citizens here to attack us, and yeah, paranoia is one thing. But I'm really struck by how "9 Evenings" and performances like it, perhaps the Pepsi Pavilion too, seemed to offer spectators the chance to imagine themselves as active participants in a world of science and technology that was really much bigger than they were. And in the 1970 World's Fair in Osaka, I'd say three-quarters of the exhibitions were immersive environments. You see them over and over again offering a way to

be in control, experientially, of a world that's much too big to control.

ML: I would like to come back to my question: how to get out of it?

FT: Well, in a lot of ways, Facebook is a structured world for permanent and perpetual happenings. Everyone participates. You are surrounded by images. You pick your crowd, and you get to hang there. It happens. I'm happy to report that infrastructures like these are still incomplete. And that's really important. I am pained when I go to a bar and there are televisions all around me. I am pained when I go to a café and everyone is typing on their computer or everyone has their cell phone out. I am really pained when I see young people who should be looking into each other's eyes looking down into their cell phone screens instead. That's just heart-breaking. So, okay. But you can still put it down, you can still walk out into the world.

You asked me earlier how we might resist this encirclement. Artists and engineers often want to take up tools and build something, either to stop what's going on or to bring something new into the world. I think we need to do something much more boring. I think we need to make stronger political institutions. The state and its powers of regulation are really important. You know, here in the United States and Silicon Valley, I see the kinds of inequalities that the tech world brings about. I see what Uber does to its drivers; I'm thrilled that Germany is resisting that. I'm thrilled to see the Germans, French and English bring their regulatory regimes and their civic consciousness to bear and push back on these companies. Because these companies are rapacious and they will expand just as fast as they can. I think that one of the best things you can do is slow them down. Just slow them down and think about them. Watch them for a while and think about them, see what happens. In the States, and particularly in California and Silicon Valley, I

think we've lost the kind of collective civic sensibility that is taken for granted in Germany. We just don't have that here. We have a deep and rampant individualism. Yes, that might be effective for innovation, but that's arguable. I would say the Germans are just as innovative in their industries. It's not good for imagining civic alternatives. For civic alternatives you need a state, you need a civitas—something civic.

My question for artists who want to intervene would be: How do you make a kind of art that draws us to a new civic consciousness, that celebrates the institutions that promote a sustained civic consciousness, and particularly that help you work with people that are different from yourself? That was the original ambition of the Committee of National Morale in the 1940s. It was to build environments that let you sympathize with, empathize with, and collaborate with people of different races, sexual preferences, ideas, and origins. Where are those environments now? I don't need another technology to connect with my friends. I see my friends anyways. Where are the worlds that will help me connect with the ones who are very different than me? Where are the worlds that will sit me down with a refugee at a coffee table and let me talk?

ML: What about art as intervention today? We see for example so-called environmental art engaging in the development of a consciousness for a relational being in the world as a fight against the effects of the Anthropocene. Do you see any traces of the history we discussed here in this movement?

FT: One of my fears with relational art or with practice-based performance is that it still echoes so much of what was done in the 1960s—after the politics that were attached to media environments in the 1940s had faded away. There's a lot of art right now where you enter an environment and you participate in some way and that participation is meant to be sort of political, but you're acting out some version of the

old happenings logic. That's not interesting and that doesn't help. I don't want to see agitprop. I don't want to see the kind of bad theater they had in the 1930s in the United States. But I do want to see art that sparks critical reflection. Not art that asks me to act out and even savor my own subjection to power structures that are bigger than me.

ML: Do you have any good examples for your preference?

FT: I think I would start with non-performative art, as a general rule. I think there is some beautiful photography right now. I think holding still is a good tactic. The power of the still-framed image is only growing in a time where images are moving all the time, circulating rapidly while we too are physically moving. In that context, something that demands we hold still and look is very powerful. There's a photographer named Wayne Lawrence, who published a beautiful book called *Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera* in 2013. Orchard Beach is an area in the Bronx, where very poor people go to the beach. And he just does beautiful, very formal portraits of these people in their bathing suits with their families. You have to see the people in them. You can't not see them. That's powerful—to see people who may not be like you. If you want to make the world a better place, that's what I would go for.

Another model of intervention would be a feminist model from the 1960s. I very much admire the visual artist Carolee Schneemann. And her performance "Meat Joy" in 1964 is a good example of taking the environmental sensibility that had been depoliticized and repoliticizing it. She rolled around on the ground with men and women, most nearly naked, in meat with blood all over themselves, at the peak of the Vietnam War. This was a time when feminism hadn't really been born yet—at least, second-wave American feminism. That's powerful. She gave you something to meditate on that was not a repetition or reclamation of the dominant style.

And I would compare that to some of the environments that we see today that are installed in museums. These new environments are highly technical. They surround us and ask us to integrate ourselves into technical social systems. These new installations are much more like invitations to psychotherapeutic adjustment and obedience than what Carolee Schneemann was doing. So, I guess, what I want to say is that performance itself is not necessarily a problem. But we need to find modes of performance that don't repeat the modes of power that we are already stuck inside.

## References

- Lawrence, Wayne. 2013. *Orchard Beach: The Bronx Riviera*. Munich: Prestel.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1969. "The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan." *Playboy Magazine*, March.
- Pias, Claus, ed. 2003. *Cybernetics: The Macy Conferences 1946–1953; The Complete Transactions*. Vol. 1. Zürich: Diaphanes.
- Saunders, Frances Stonor. 2000. *Who Paid the Piper? CIA and the Cultural Cold War*. London: Granta Books.
- Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. 2004. "The Family of Man: Refurbishing Humanism for a Postmodern Age." In *The Family of Man, 1955–2001: Humanism and Postmodernism; a Reappraisal of the Photo Exhibition by Edward Steichen*, edited by Jean Back and Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, 28–55. Marburg: Jonas Verlag.
- Turner, Fred. 2006. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Catalog*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, Fred. 2012. "The Family of Man and the Politics of Attention in Cold War America." *Public Culture* 24: 55–84. Accessed March 11, 2017. <https://fredturner.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/Turner-Family-of-Man-PC-24.11.pdf>.
- Turner, Fred. 2013a. *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, Fred. 2013b. "Therapeutic Nationalism." *Cosmologies Magazine*. Accessed March 11, 2017. <http://cosmologiesmagazine.com/fred-turner-therapeutic-nationalism/>.
- Turner, Fred. 2014. "The Corporation and the Counterculture: Revisiting the Pepsi Pavilion and the Politics of Cold War Multimedia." *The Velvet Light Trap* 73 (Spring): 66–78.