

The Temporality of the Public Sphere:
Orpheus Descending's Loop between Art and Culture

by Margot Bouman
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Over the summer of 2000, the artist Paul Pfeiffer, with his collaborators John Letourneau and Lawrence Chua, videotaped a flock of chickens on a farm in upstate New York. Using three still cameras, they followed the birds' lives twenty-four hours a day: beginning with incubated eggs purchased from a local supplier, through hatching at around seventeen days, to the flock's move to its outdoor pen, and ending when the chickens reached adulthood, on the seventy-fifth day.¹ From April 15 to June 28, 2001, Paul Pfeiffer's *Orpheus Descending*—the work that resulted from this footage—was simultaneously shown on two of the information plasma screens and video monitors found throughout the public thoroughfares of the World Trade Center and the World Financial Center complex. The first, a *PATHVISION* information monitor wedged between a Hudson newsstand and a Quick Card machine [Fig. 1], was located in the mezzanine defined by a bank of nineteen escalators and the New Jersey *PATH* train turnstiles [Fig. 2]. The second was a plasma screen that placed the video between directional signage and advertisements promoting local businesses and cultural events on the North Bridge, a glass-enclosed pedestrian overpass spanning the World Financial Center and the World Trade Center [Fig. 3].

Over the seventy-five day period, the video played in the World Trade Center as though in real time, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The work was originally intended to be presented as a satellite feed at the World Trade Center, where every day the chickens would be broadcast live; this idea was set aside by Public Art Fund, the project's financial and logistical underwriter, because of its prohibitive expense.² To emphasize the "real time" conceit of the work, the video's outdoor "time environment" was synchronized to coincide with the World Trade Center's. While the first five weeks took place in an artificially lit environment, in the outdoor footage that comprised the latter half of the video, Pfeiffer timed the video sunset and sunrises to coincide with the real sunsets and sunrises outside the buildings: "So you see the outdoor light and the video [light] simultaneously."³ Commuters daily glimpsed intermittent fragments of the pastoral narrative during their brief journey across mezzanine and bridge to and from work.

In an interview with Tom Eccles, director of the Public Art Fund, Paul Pfeiffer stressed that *Orpheus Descending* was "made specifically for an audience that passes through the World Trade Center every day,"⁴ an audience comprised for the most part of workers whose offices were located in the WTC/WFC complex. They had been passing through the center for many years, he went on to say, and would continue to do so for many more: implying an expectation on Pfeiffer's part of an open-ended and cyclical return of this "public" to this space.⁵ In other words, the movement could be characterized as a loop, whose formulation was determined by the space. For Pfeiffer, key to the work's success was its unannounced insertion into and withdrawal from this long, repetitious cycle of coming-and-going, to-ing and fro-ing: "One day the chickens appear in their [the commuter's] path, without any explanation, and then after you kind of get a handle on what is going on, they [the chickens] disappear again." The work's unannounced appearance and disappearance formed a second temporal moment, which Pfeiffer also characterizes as a loop: "It is in fact a very long loop. The finished piece is a series of seventy-five tapes--Tape One says '001,' Tape Two says '002,' and so on. ... On the seventy-fifth day it goes back to 001 again."⁶ Of interest is Pfeiffer's desire to label the work as a loop, linking it both to a larger body of video work investigating the impact of repetitive editing, as well as the conundrum of time tied to a per-hour paycheck.

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Orpheus Descending's promotion and reception split across two central aspects, its temporal mode and its audience. Given Pfeiffer's recent, rapid ascendance, the absence of commentary on this work is notable.⁷ What little critical reception that emerged was marginal to the mainstream art press, focused on its temporal mode, and informed by a tone of trenchant pessimism regarding the potential insight/transcendence that the audience coming to the World Trade Center on a daily basis could derive from it. Put differently, the particular nature of its time, space, and audience, not its subject matter, were considered by the critics who did comment on the work to be the factors governing the work's success or failure. On the listserve of *maARTE*, a webzine dedicated to issues concerning the Philippines and the Filipino diaspora, the webzine's managing editor Erna Hernandez posted the following to the writer Christine Bacareza Balance:

...Pfeiffer continues to place the mundane products of our culture into a context which offers them great significance. In this project commuters will notice a video of chickens grown for our consumption, living through their complete life cycle in real time. The true test of Pfeiffer's art will be to make Wall Streeters bother to stop and look. [my italics]8

In other words, according to Hernandez, Pfeiffer's work would only succeed if its audience stopped in its tracks and paid attention to the "issue" the commentator felt it focused on: the life cycle of food animals we usually only see as dismembered, prepackaged items whose lives, and therefore whose deaths, are uncertain quantities. That this audience will do so is considered unlikely by Hernandez, given its professional (and by implicit extension political) affiliation.

In a June 2001 review of *Orpheus Descending* in *Time Out New York*, a weekly publication dedicated to listing local cultural events, critic Stephen Basilico expanded on this pessimism. His response to the work is worth exploring at length. Basilico wrote, Pfeiffer's work will "never be seen by anybody...in its entirety."⁹ Not because of its structural makeup, as one would assume, but rather because its audience, "the shifting tide of commuters who pass through these buildings on a daily basis" would not stop to look at the work, instead walking "as quickly as their legs could carry them, away from their jobs toward home" and presumably in the other direction in the morning. Contradicting Pfeiffer's description of the work's production process, Basilico tells his readers that *Orpheus Descending* is "linear, unedited and doesn't run as a loop." Its linear structure calls attention to "the endlessly repeated routine of the commuters," a loop these people are "doomed to repeat ... until they retire." Given the attack on the World Trade Center and its consequent destruction approximately three months later, this assumption of an infinite continuity of routine as a foil for Basilico's larger criticism takes on an almost unbearable tone of irony. Because the commuters—the work's intended audience—only catch glimpses of the video, little more is revealed to them "than some chickens milling about." As Basilico goes on to write, *Orpheus Descending* is not just a video, but "rather, it is a complex interchange of people, technology and locale." Because the average commuter lacks "a greater sense of the arena that Pfeiffer is operating in," the work will remain "elusive and confusing." In other words, Basilico dismisses the audience/commuter as incapable of synthesizing an aesthetic experience, by relating the various experi-

ences their senses receive, or absorb, to more fundamental concepts. Where I part company with Basilico is precisely in this identification of the ultimate failure of the video as one grounded in "the public's uncritical disengagement with public art."

Hernandez and Basilico assume, based on its location and the temporal structure of its reception, that *Orpheus Descending's* audience will not absorb the aspects of the work these critics identify as important: respectively, an awareness of the life cycle of meat poultry, and the public's critical engagement with art. They both identify its temporal structure as the work's weak link, in that it further compromises the audience's ability to focus, and then experience enlightenment through the work. Both criticisms presume for public art an activist role, in which it transmits a particular "message" to be read by the public—its audience—raising said audience's consciousness, thereby leaving it improved, or at least educated. As Rosalyn Deutsche points out, this assumes for public art a role at the heart of either representative or participatory democracy.¹⁰ *Orpheus Descending*, in other words, failed because it did not stimulate "participation" from "the people." This in part because of the socio-political profile of its "constituency," but most importantly because it failed to elicit attention from its audience: "Wall Streeters" did not "bother to stop and look," (Hernandez) but rather walked away from the work "as quickly as their legs could carry them" (Basilico). What neither Basilico nor Hernandez consider is that precisely the form of attention they argue prevents the audience from fully engaging with the work is built into it by Pfeiffer. Unlike almost all other works of art (Pfeiffer's other work included), *Orpheus Descending* was intended to be received in fragments over an extended period of time. In other words, he chose these spaces for their temporal as well as their spatial characteristics. The work's structure succeeds in raising the question, does art "in the public interest"¹¹ interest the public?

Orpheus Descending was located neither in a public square, nor a public space designed for leisurely gatherings. Rather, it was placed in two locations that people move through quickly and repetitively. Intended to match the temporal rhythm of the commuters, the video did not require a sustained, conscious engagement. Instead, it was "intended to be seen day after day in passing [in the periphery of consciousness], a barely registering subliminal image."¹² Its intended reception was a "state of distraction."¹³ Critical to the work's production of reception in a state of distraction

are the two loops identified by both Pfeiffer and Basilico: the twice-daily ebb and flow of the audience, and the seventy-five day cycle of the work itself. By drawing the focal point of attention away from itself and toward the otherwise-unremarked upon movement of its audience, together, they foregrounded an ongoing, cyclical process, where tens of thousands of people moved each day through public spaces whose primary functions were transitional. While it was running, Orpheus Descending shifted the emphasis of an activity (the cyclical movement of the commuters) away from *poiésis*, or an activity whose goal is other than the action involved in its achievement (their movement through these passageways is part of their commute to work), to the goal of *praxis*, which is accomplished in the very action itself, in this instance, the act of repetitively moving through that space on a daily basis. In so doing, it externalized a formal component intrinsic to this work and video art in general, by shifting it to one of its everyday counterparts, going to work and returning home. How this shift affects our reading of both the video loop and the *praxis* of everyday life requires some attention and elaboration. This paper explores these two loops—specifically, the transposition of the video loop onto the audience loop—in relation to both the significant body of video loop works that has built up over the last decade (the nineteen nineties), and questions about the public, distraction and attention.

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Pfeiffer, Basilico and Fernandez's respective opinions and uses of the public are shaped by longstanding debates about the public and public space. Both Jürgen Habermas' development of the concept of the public sphere and Walter Lippmann's description of the public as a phantom carries over into current scholarship on the public and its relationship to space, whose address more closely aligns with Orpheus Descending. Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) describes a public sphere that originally developed out of the Kantian formulation, the use of reason in public debate. Within this debate, which took place in the new public spaces opened up early capitalism in the eighteenth century European market cities, the expression of a liberal democratic ideal was won by the bourgeoisie. For Habermas, in the public sphere the state is, in principle, accountable to its citizens, who engage in rational, consensual debate over matters of public concern in public spaces.¹⁴ This "public sphere" no longer exists in the twentieth century, as a result in part of the interpenetration of public and

private by both the government and popular media. In 1927, Walter Lippmann argued in *The Phantom Public* that the "omnicompetent, sovereign citizen,"¹⁵ whose presence underlies the ideal of representative democracy, was an illusion. No private citizen, he reasoned, could be expected to have access to all the information and arguments required to make an informed decision about affairs of state. Given the insurmountable nature of his public role, Lippmann argues, the private citizen used to justify the machinery of governmental rule in a representative democracy is unmasked as an illusion, or a phantom.¹⁶

The term "public space" situates both "public" and "space" at the heart of democracy. In his introduction to the anthology *The Phantom Public Sphere* (1993) the cultural critic Bruce Robbins points out that these characterizations of the public and the public sphere are nothing more than conjuring tricks on the part of their authors, rhetorically designed to haunt us with either an impossible ideal, or historical models to which we should automatically cede moral and intellectual authority. "When Allan Bloom raises the ghost of Greece...he unintentionally offers a juicy Hellenistic term for [Stanley] Aronowitz's 'mythic town square'—the phantasmagoria: an agora...that is only a phantasm."¹⁷ Publicness, these accounts tell their contemporary readership, conjure up the phantasmatic as a quality once-possessed but now lost in the irretrievable past. Current formulations of the relationship between democracy, the public and public space give up the imposition of an all-encompassing ideal that leaves out as much as it includes, preferring rather to consider conditions as they are on the ground. More recent forms of public art take part in these broader movements which, as Deutsche comments, "distance themselves from overall solutions to social problems,"¹⁸ instead finding short term solutions to concrete problems, and are grounded in the axiom of rights. "Rights" as the platform for democracy was first elaborated in the late-eighteenth century with the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the culmination of the French bourgeois public revolution. Democracy was made more or less equivalent to "the people" when the declaration asserted that all sovereign power was to be moved from the monarchy, an institution equivalent to transcendent power, or power that lay outside the social body, to "the people," or within the social body.

But what is "the people?" And how is this power, formerly emanating from a clearly delimited source, expressed? Lippmann balks at the indefinability of this group, and Habermas laments it as a by-now historical

force whose truly democratic influence is spent. Jacques Derrida defined its expression of will, or “public opinion” as the “silhouette of a phantom, the haunting fear of a democratic consciousness” that paradoxically legitimates parliamentary democracy.¹⁹ For Derrida, the public’s phantasmatic form is due to its fickle nature, its changeability, its resistance to governance: “Does it take place?...The wandering of its proper body is also the ubiquity of the specter. It is not present as such in any of these spaces.”²⁰ With this, Derrida perverts both Habermas’ public sphere and Lippmann’s phantom, by considering its fugitive nature as a productive force rather than the downfall of a concept. For Deutsche as well, precisely this irreducibility to any one thing, place or position places “the people” at the core of democracy: “Power stems from the people but belongs to nobody. Democracy abolishes the external referent of power, and refers power to society.”²¹ Nevertheless this power cannot be directly expressed by an entity as amorphous as “the people.” While Derrida refers this power to the ambiguity of public opinion, Deutsche locates it in public space: “The public space...is the social space where, in the absence of a foundation, the meaning of the social is negotiated—at once constituted and put at risk.” This transposition of an otherwise intangible, amorphous energy onto the body of the public space shares the same epistemological territory as Derrida’s inversion of the phantom public, and Tom Keenan’s formulation of the public sphere as something that is always “structurally elsewhere,” and is “defined by its resistance to being made present.”²²

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While these formulations of “the public” find their expression in public spaces, the temporality of the public sphere is left unaccounted for. Consequently, video art is rarely made a subject in the many anthologies published on public art, in spite of the important public video artwork produced by artists such as Krysztof Wodiczko²³ and sponsored by organizations such as Public Art Fund.²⁴ An exception is Linda Burnham, who argues in her survey of community video and performance artists that their experiments since the 1980s have expanded definitions of community art, just as the development of video and performance art in the 1970s expanded then-current notions of “fine” art.²⁵ Burnham’s notion of “public video art” automatically places it first into its medium-specific trajectory, then into a category of “rights-based” public art initiatives that focus on self-identified groups within the larger body public. Neither of these

aspects: video’s art history, and the equation of an activist community with the public, characterized Pfeiffer’s work.

Notwithstanding the lack of a systematic body of written work on time-based public art, public video art projects have emerged. Similar to Pfeiffer, the artist Thomas Glassford’s video work *City of Greens* infiltrated the clips of San Diego California’s visitor attractions that were played on a bank of monitors at an information center as part of “inSITE97: New Projects in Public Spaces.” However unlike Pfeiffer, Glassford’s work maintained a more conventional audience-artwork relationship, by using a predictable narrative spoof that required the focused attention of its audience in order for it to succeed.²⁶ While a transitional audience, its members would have to slow down and stop to watch the work; in part because of the video’s narrative structure, but also and just as importantly because as a public space, information kiosks require people’s attention, unlike the places of pure transition selected by Pfeiffer. Also like Pfeiffer, Arturo Cuenca’s *You Are Aquí*, a manipulated satellite image of the Tijuana/San Diego border region installed as a light-box billboard in Puente Mexico at the San Ysidro border crossing, drew on a “captive” commuter audience, or an audience whose presence and duration was determined by the government demands of customs and immigration, not the artwork.²⁷ Finally, Berlin-based artist Marijke van Warmerdam’s *Dusche*, a permanent installation at Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport features a 35mm film loop showing a man showering. Installed in 1995, it is still projected 12 hours a day.²⁸ Unlike *Orpheus Descending*, the loop that structured *Dusche* has no internally driven end—rather, its latent temporal moment is infinity. All these works share a relationship to their space, audience and temporal moment with a radically different emphasis from either site-specific sculpture, or the video art discussed by Burnham.

A more direct line can be traced between Pfeiffer, Cuenca and van Warmerdam’s work and the communication strategies of commercial signage. Pfeiffer situated *Orpheus Descending* alongside the tools used by popular culture in public spaces to communicate with its target audience. In the North Bridge overpass, the video was shown on two plasma screens between signage directing pedestrians to the US Customs house, the World Trade Center, the subway and the PATH trains, as well as elevators for people in wheelchairs on the east side, and two successive rows of monitors advertising local services and upcoming events such as Barney’s sale, and “Johnny’s takeout

(Fast! Fast! Fast! Sushi).” In the mezzanine at the foot of the elevators the video was shown on the PATHVISION closed circuit TV monitor, otherwise used to show information about the PATH New Jersey trains, between a Hudson newsstand and a Quick Card machine. Below each monitor a plaque was hung, explaining the work in the same vernacular as a plaque marking a site of historic interest or scenic beauty along the highway. Given Pfeiffer’s decision to locate his work in the same space as the commercial and directional signage, rather than interpreting it through the prism of video art history, *Orpheus Descending* can be better understood in part through the work done within architectural theory on the role of vernacular signage. In *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour describe an architecture that is defined more by its signs than its buildings, an “architecture of styles and signs” that is antispatial; “an architecture of communication over space.”²⁹ Commercial signs communicate the function of various buildings instead of the buildings itself, which are reduced to a series of blank boxes: “...the highway signs...make verbal and symbolic connections through space, communicating a complexity of meanings through hundreds of associations in few seconds from far away.”³⁰ These signs resulted in a highly sophisticated tempo-spatial relationship to their audience, that was incorporated by Pfeiffer. Whereas the signs in the strip function like a narrative dependent on the movement of its reader, the car driver, in cinema the audience is standing still and the image is moving. In the World Trade Center, the commercial vernacular, as well as Pfeiffer, borrowed from both languages in order to communicate with a transitional audience. Here, the audience is moving and the image is moving, but in two radically different ways. As Pfeiffer stresses, his work is about a “certain construction of time...*Orpheus Descending* is much less about a linear narrative and more about presenting a mystery, and asking people who see it to grapple with what it means,”³¹ or not.

Like site-specific sculpture, what also completes these video works is their dependency on their respective sites’ publics, a constituency—people who happen to come to the space for reasons other than viewing art—that is more passively defined than the communities described by Deutsche, Raven, and Burnham. Moreover, unlike either the bronze hero on the horse or the modern abstract sculpture, these works are not located in a town square where they can draw on a more easily identifiable public, or in a space specifically designed for public gatherings. Rather, these works are located

in the overpass, the mezzanine, the airport and the border crossing, which, while public, are also transitional spaces. As Douglas Crimp writes in “Redefining Site Specificity,” the relationship between all site-specific art and their sites is “contingent on the viewer’s temporal movement in the space shared with the object.”³² With publicly located video work, two temporal continuums share the same public space: the viewer’s temporal movement through the space, which is in turn layered over a second temporal moment, the time of the work. How these two temporal moments interact to a large part determines each work. Integral to *Orpheus Descending*’s site-specificity was an explicit renunciation of the form of attention and temporality assumed to be critical to the reception of fine art. A video with an exquisitely calibrated relationship to its site’s time environment, it also depended on the constant movement of its audience. On the two occasions that I visited both sites of the work, the North Bridge overpass and the mezzanine bridging the elevators and the New Jersey PATH train entrance, nobody stopped to look at the plaque or up at the monitor. As the chickens were oblivious to the video camera, the commuters seemed to be oblivious to the monitor; the dominant sound in the North Bridge overpass was the reverberation of people’s voices as they conversed while walking.³³ While some people glanced up to the monitor as they walked by (to see what I was looking at) I attracted more attention than the Pfeiffer work, because I was out of place. Rather than walking purposefully, I was “loitering with a purpose” (taking notes) on the edge of the walkway. Like the overpass, the PATH train mezzanine was a transitional area. There also I both felt conspicuous and drew attention from the other occupants of the space, because I was staying in one spot. Indeed, I attracted the suspicion of at least one Port Authority officer.³⁴ A body at rest became a body out of place, and potentially subversive. Unlike the overpass, there were two layers of people present: commuters, and employees of the various businesses and public services such as the Hudson newsstand employees, the Port Authority police, and a New Jersey PATH ticket seller. Both overpass and mezzanine were designed to accommodate a transitional public, both habituated and indifferent to their surroundings. Precisely this act of transition rendered the work site-specific, because its locations, places of repetitious movement, were integral to the work’s completion, refracting the subject position of the exchange back from the work onto the viewer.

This combination of habit and low levels of awareness has been explored at length in Walter Benjamin’s “The

Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” where he distinguished between the state of concentration that art demands from its audience, and the state of distraction in which architecture and popular culture is received. These states are opposed as follows: a “man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it,” while on the other hand “the distracted mass absorbs the work of art.”³⁵ This inverted relationship of absorption “is most obvious with regards to buildings. Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction.” Most importantly, he stresses, this form of reception is embedded in a routine. “Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building,”³⁶ but instead is acquired by an individual who becomes familiarized with the individual work of architecture, or popular culture, through the force of habit, thus acquiring “...the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction.”

Benjamin shifts from a general description of this state of reception to the possibilities it holds out for art: “Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception,” or the process of assimilating a newly perceived idea to a pre-existing core of ideas, thereby understanding it. This state of distraction enables much of architecture’s subliminal influence, and as Benjamin wrote, potentially art’s as well. “Since, moreover, individuals are tempted to avoid such tasks,” he continues, “art will tackle the most difficult and most important ones where it is able to mobilize the masses.” In other words, art received by a distracted audience has a better chance of communicating difficult concepts. For architectural theorist George Baird, this method of communication has potentially insidious effects: “Insofar as the audience is not...in a condition of high consciousness, architecture is readily able to influence its behaviour; without that audience becoming aware, let alone critical of, the social and political manipulations to which it may be subjected.”³⁷

An important distinction needs to be made between the two ways in which Benjamin uses “distraction.” One is a form and the other is a state. The former has been the focus of much, often vitriolic attention from Benjamin’s contemporaries such as Horkheimer, Adorno and Siegfried Kracauer. The former is mass entertainment, such as popular film, or television. The critique of mass entertainment can be summed up as its failure to fit the viewer’s sensory experience into a

system of pure reason, by instead reproducing the conditions that the viewer/worker experiences each day. By doing so, the argument continues, this form of distraction does not produce within its subject a state of receptivity to an aesthetic experience that would provide them with the means to break through her or his conditions of oppression. Rather, it distracts the audience from their conditions of oppression while reproducing their form. The second usage of distraction, most recently examined in Jonathan Crary’s exhaustively researched *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, in part describes the state of mind of a subject who is not really thinking about her or his then-present surroundings. Rather, they are inwardly occupied, their thoughts or attention are elsewhere, thinking about the past or the future; the force of habit propelling them through that space does not require attention from them. They give their surroundings the minimum acknowledgment required to make sure that they get from point A to point B; in other words, Orpheus Descending’s audience. For Benjamin, precisely this latter state of distraction allows it to be seen as other than a reinforcement of the existing conditions of capitalism, rather, a journey into its unconscious. Miriam Hansen writes that while “Freud has altered our awareness of language,” Benjamin demonstrated that cinematic techniques hold the potential to change “our perception of the visual world” emphasizing their “tendency to cut through the tissue of reality like a surgical instrument (I, 233).” In this way they reveal the “‘natural’ appearance of the capitalist everyday as an allegorical landscape...an ‘unconsciously permeated space’” Thus, they do not only fulfill a “critical function but also a redemptive one, registering sediments of experience that are not longer or not yet claimed by economic or social rationality.”³⁸

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Hansen’s elucidation of Benjamin’s cinematic “unconsciously permeated space,” a space achieved through the elaboration of a series of cinematic techniques, does not perfectly map over his elaboration of the reception of architecture as one that takes place in a state of distraction. Nevertheless, Hansen’s argument for the registration of “sediments of experience” unclaimed by “social or economic rationality” proposes a model that goes some way toward shedding light on the aspects of Orpheus Descending that have been under discussion: specifically, Pfeiffer’s insistence that the time of his work is the time of the loop, the failure of the art critics to pay attention to Orpheus Descend-

ing, among the very many works by Pfeiffer that they focused on, and finally the failure of critical work done on the public sphere and public art to discuss “public temporality.” Given the intent of the “artistic” work to command conscious attention, public art has historically forfeited the potency discerned by Benjamin in architecture, in favor of a more direct appeal to its audience. As a result, any debate surrounding the significance of a work of art tends to focus on its discernible ideological relationship to its typical modes of representation, while the focus on a work of architecture instead discloses its subconsciously manipulative effects, or the status of its social or political praxis. Orpheus Descending’s failure to command attention from the critics might in part be attributed to its very success in inserting itself into the temporality of the public sphere, to disappear from consciousness as it were, by entering into the temporal rhythm of the to and fro back and forth from work. Precisely its minimal presence to consciousness, or attention, is due to its disappearance into the public’s temporal rhythm, and brings us some way into this amorphous region. If, as Crimp writes, minimal objects redirect “consciousness back on itself and the real-world conditions that ground consciousness,”³⁹ then the time of the public, I would argue, stands revealed by Orpheus Descending as the time of the loop.

Margot Bouman is a Ph.D. candidate in the Visual and Cultural Studies program at the University of Rochester. Her dissertation investigates the matrices of space/time expressed in video art and video installation art.

1. After the seventy-fifth day, the collaborators killed and ate the chickens.

2. Tom Eccles, from “Orpheus Descending: A Conversation,” in Paul Pfeiffer et al, *Orpheus Descending* (New York: Public Art Fund, 2001), 15.

3. Pfeiffer, “Orpheus Descending: A Conversation,” 23.

4. Pfeiffer, “Orpheus Descending: A Conversation,” 20.

5. Orpheus Descending was defined as a work of public art by Pfeiffer and the Public Art Fund, by which they meant a work of art whose intended location and audience was located outside of the gallery or museum context.

6. Pfeiffer, “Orpheus Descending: A Conversation,” 21.

7. A Filipino-American artist, Pfeiffer rose into prominence in 1999-2000 on the strength of a crystal-line series of tightly edited, miniature digital videos. In *John 3:16* (2000), a digitally manipulated version of a televised basketball game, Pfeiffer kept the motions of a ball in play continuously in the center of the screen, leaving the ball floating magically and erratically in front of a sold-out NBA crowd, simultaneously evoking sensations of movement and quietude. The DVD work *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (after Francis Bacon) (1999) looped a 30-second fragment of a single moment on the basketball court, destabilizing the presumably victorious yell of Knicks forward Larry Johnson into a possible scream of terror or rage, at once reinforcing and undermining his status as a sports superhero. The DVD loop *The Pure Products Go Crazy* (1998), a short clip from the film *Risky Business* (1983), reduces Tom Cruise to a series of mechanically repeated motions, transforming a brief fragment of his character’s adolescent excitement over being home alone into simulated sex with a sofa. *John 3:16* was exhibited at PS1’s *Greater New York* (2000) and *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (after Francis Bacon) and *The Pure Products Go Crazy* at the 2000 Whitney Biennial. Paul Pfeiffer was the first recipient of the Whitney Biennial Bucksbaum Award, an award worth \$100,000.00. This was followed up with a solo show in January 2001 at *The Project in Harlem*, that received mixed reviews. These works, this recognition, and a 2000-2001 residency at the Whitney that culminated in an exhibition of his work from December 2001-2002 were thoroughly covered by the art magazines *Artforum*, *Flash Art International*, *ARTNews*, *Art Newspaper*, *Frieze*, *Artext*, *Art Monthly* as well as *The New York Times*. With the exception of a brief mention in a larger survey by *The New York Times*, no reference to *Orpheus Descending* was made in these publications.

8. “Subject: Fwd: [maARTE] Paul Pfeiffer: Orpheus Descending.” Posted on <http://publ6.ezboard.com/bmaarte> to Christine Baccareza Balance on Tuesday Apr 17, 2001 2:52 p.m. from Erna Hernandez.

9. Stefano Basilico, “Just Another Day on the Farm: Orpheus Descending Suggests That We’re all Caged in Our Hellish Routines” *Time Out New York*, June 7-14, 2001, 56.

10. Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 269.

11. The title of an anthology edited by the art historian, Arlene Raven: *Art in the Public Interest* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989)

12. Public Art Fund Press Release “Public Art Fund presents... Artist Paul Pfeiffer’s *Orpheus Descending*;

A video installation documenting the life-cycle of the chicken at the World Trade Center PATH Entrance” http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/release/pfeiffer_release.html

13. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations* Transl. Harry Zohn, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books 1973), 240.

14. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* Transl. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 21.

15. Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* with an introduction by Wilfrid M. McClay (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997 [1927]), 11.

16. Lippmann, 63.

17. Bruce Robbins, “Introduction” *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), viii.

18. Deutsche, 272.

19. Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe* Transl. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas, Introduction by Michael B. Naas (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 84.

20. Derrida, 87.

21. Deutsche, 273.

22. Thomas Keenan, “Windows: Of Vulnerability” in Bruce Robbins, ed. *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), 135.

23. Such as his 1992 *Alien Staff*, where a video monitor, mounted on top of a staff, displays a pre-recorded narrative showing the operator’s face; his 1994 *Mouthpiece*, a specially designed audio-visual monitor covered the mouth of its operator and substituted actual speech. Both works were designed to be used in public spaces, between strangers. As part of his series of projections onto monuments, in 1998 from September 24-26, Wodiczko’s *Bunker Hill Monument Projection* featured interviews with Charlestown (a neighborhood in Boston) mothers--projected with sound onto the 221-foot obelisk--who spoke of their personal experiences around the themes of violence, freedom and tyranny. The 30-minute projection began at 8pm and ran until 10pm. As part of *inSITE2000*, Wodiczko developed a project seeking to give visibility and voice, through the use of advanced media technologies, to women laborers in Tijuana’s maquiladora industry. The project, grounded in investigation and interviews with the laborers, culminated in monumental live projections of these Mexican women laborers reading their testimonials onto the sixty-foot-diameter facade of the Centro Cultural Tijuana’s Omnimax Theater, February 23 and February 24, 2001.

24. *Messages to the Public from 1982-1987* in Times Square; Pipillotti Rist’s *Welcome to my Glade* ran the Panasonic Video Screen at the South Corner of Times Square every quarter past the hour April 6 through May 20, 2000; Tony Oursler’s *the Influence Machine* (2000) was screened nightly from sunset to 10:00 pm for two weeks starting October 19th in Manhattan Square Park in October 2000.

25. Linda Frye Burnham, “Moments in the Heart: Performance and Video Experiments in Community Art since 1980” in Arlene Raven, Ed. *Art in the Public Interest* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989) 193-208. For more on the relationship between video’s history and art history see Martha Rosler’s “Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment” in Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifier, Eds., *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art* (New York and San Francisco: Aperture and Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990) 31-50.

26. The narrative featured the artist playing a James Bond character, whose mission was to lay down golf greens in urban spaces. For more on this work see Sally Yard’s, “Space on the Run/Life on the Loose: Recent Projects along the San Diego/Tijuana Frontier” *Architectural Design* (London, England) v 69 no7/8 1999, 62-5.

27. According to the *inSITE 2000* conference website, 40,000 commuters pass through the San Ysidro border crossing on a daily basis. “Arturo Cuenca” <http://www.insite2000.org/artistfinal/Cuenca/>

28. ‘Marius Babias, “Als die Bilder duschen lernten: Marijke van Warmerdam bringt die Realitätserfahrung zum Film zurück” *Kunstforum International* no143 Jan/Feb 1999, 274-9.

29. Venturi et al, 8.

30. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* Revised Edition (Cambridge: MIT Press, [1972] 2000), 13.

31. Pfeiffer, *Conversations*, 21.

32. Douglas Crimp, “Redefining Site Specificity,” from *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 155.

33. Someone told Pfeiffer that this quality of accidental occurrence in *Orpheus Descending* made them think of early Andy Warhol films, specifically *Empire*, an eight hour still shot of the New York City landmark.

34. Furthermore, they are not set in spaces that are necessarily public, if by public we mean spaces that are open and accessible to everyone. While *Orpheus Descending* was described as public art by both Pfeiffer and Public Art Fund, the World Trade Center and the World Financial Center were spaces patrolled by secu-

rity guards, who had the authority to control who could or could not be in the space. While the former World Trade Center's site is owned by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the site is leased to a private consortium led by New York real estate developer Larry Silverstein and Westfield America Inc., a shopping mall owner that is part of Australia's Westfield Group.

35. Benjamin, 239.

36. Benjamin, 240.

37. George Baird, "Praxis and Representation" in George Baird and Mark Lewis, *Queues, Rendezvous, Riots: Questioning the Public in art and Architecture* (Banff: The Walter Phillips Gallery and the Banff Centre for the Arts, 1994), 6.

38. Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin and Cinema: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology'" *New German Critique* 40 (1987), 178-224.

39. Crimp, 154.

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