Document generated on 10/12/2024 2:30 a.m.

ETC

# Toronto
## Brian Boigon's Total Recall

Ihor Holubizky

Number 14, Spring 1991

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/36092ac

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

0835-7641 (print)
1923-3205 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Holubizky, I. (1991). Review of [Toronto: Brian Boigon's Total Recall]. *ETC*, (14), 53–55.

Tous droits réservés © Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc., 1991

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

https://www.erudit.org/en/

## TORONTO

Brian Boigon, *Alphabetical Machine Implant*, 1990. Cibachrome, photo collage ; 116 cm x 129 cm. Simpson Gallery, Toronto.

### BRIAN BOIGON'S TOTAL RECALL

ONE INESCAPABLE CONSEQUENCE OF ACCELERated culture in the late 20th century has been its internalized critique. Brian Boigon's architecturally based hybrid projects have functioned, among other things, as well-placed critiques and extensions of practical and impractical modernist theories. His mode of resolution can best be seen in two early installation-site works. *Mondrian's Holiday* (1983) was an open-ended staging of constructed mementos and quixotic diagrams – more of a venture into the inner psyche of Boigon, than into that of Mondrian. A surrealist's reply. *Museum a Go Go* (1984) turned the construction peephole into a view of the host gallery's own state of re-construction and cultural journalism. A documentary.

> "I was speeding along frontiers of pulsing lines, trajecting along parallels, creating great beauty on the move."[1]

In both of these projects, Boigon's "frontiers" lay between the lure of cultural hysteria and the desire to be one of its sirens. In relationship to the orthodoxy of his architectural training, this could also be seen as a conscious act of heresy. In practice, Boigon was staring

at Modernism through the rearview mirror, his foot firmly pressing the accelerator. To extend the metaphor, the consequences of such driving habits can be disastrous, but in the theoretical (and safe) world of visual art, any resulting collision leaves the driver safe to continue. Architecture has given Boigon his point of departure, but there is another aspect to this current work that finds its counterpoint in the indefinable notion of film as "culture".

The mechanical "time" of film is the movement of individual frames, run at a constant speed of 24 fps through a single aperture. A "conjunctive" time appears through narrative (real time is rare in commercial film), or what we accept through the willing suspension of disbelief. Within the ninety minutes of this mechanical time, we can be witness to events taking place over a week, a month, a year or centuries. The third "time" is much more subtle – integrated, if you will, into the narrative and bonded to the mechanical – what is commonly described as its "art". These are technological alterations of perceptual reality : slow motion (time decelerated); pixilation (time accelerated) split screen images (multiple time) ; double exposures (fluid time) ; jump cuts; dissolves. Technology is in itself, however, purely theoretical, and can only be expressed through the inseparable agent of the images (plot, characters and location) and the "art" direction.

Boigon's latest work accesses this locus of devices through photographically based images. He avoids common time-based mannerisms of contemporary photography – the blurred depth of field or time-lapse coding of the surface (more blurring). What we face is sharp but irresolute – an inventory of objects and ephemera, all anticipating action to unfold and apparently lacking the bond of story. But as with film, the "narrative" is conditional.

I have limited my description to only one of the works exhibited, *Alphabetical Machine Implant*, and its unorthodox systems of transmitting meaning. Here, the pictorial plane is defined by the mechanical reality of the fragmentary images – "classical" architecture facades, electronic schematics, Japanese text, a cartoon cat (Tom, from "Tom and Jerry"), sections of threaded spinal rod, a medical-looking instrument, etc., all held together with bits of transparent tape, and a section of film leader with the title, "Universal Leader", shown in reverse – but more on that later. All of this is inconclusive evidence, a core sample of cultural notations, and characteristic of the sources that infect us – sources we have mined at the end of the industrial age.

Boigon's selected route is an allegory of shape-scale shifting. The "technique and technology" is straightforward. Objects and images are laid out on a flat bed, photographed and enlarged to presentation size. But respective scale and physical presence are fluid. The threaded spinal rods are "believable" in a 1 : 1 relationship ("real time"), even though they are greatly enlarged. The transparent tape and "medical" instrument are obviously out of scale. Other images, such as the cartoon cat, Tom, are ambiguous. Here, Boigon leaves a telltale clue to the mystery. Cartoons (hand-drawn and abbreviated representations), by their nature, have a scale that is transmission-dependent. Tom is considerably larger than "he" would be in a television-transmission format, but smaller than in a theatrical-film format. Yet in *Alphabetical Machine Implant*, it all seems plausible, leading us to a possible interpretation of "Universal Leader".

Far from being casual or eccentric, a scrutiny of this material evidence indicates a purposeful (if sometimes sinister) intent that is as determined as, say, Mondrian. But there is yet another twist to the plot. Boigon has alluded to various information systems in the assemblage, but the format – the mechanical time of this "significant" photographic moment – appears grounded or static. Here again, Boigon has avoided the obvious – using the photographic image as the skin of a light-box – the transmission system of "choice" by artists in the past few years. If we think of this device in terms of task lighting, it reveals detail absolutely, not unlike TV News. But Boigon's "underlit" work is full of shadows and veils, made all the more complex and dense through the use of overlaid acetate images. Nothing is as it appears to be. Hitchcock.

A parallel lies in Arnold Schwarzenegger's recent sci-fi vehicle, *Total Recall*. The concept (not really a plot) is transparent. The film starts on Earth, in some undetermined future. A construction worker

(Schwarzenegger) is troubled by recurring "dreams" of exotic and dangerous adventures on the Mars colony. He becomes compelled, through a series of incidents (including an aborted «mind implant vacation» to Mars) to "verify" these visions. Once on Mars, he becomes embroiled in a further series of ambiguous incidents, some of which serve as clarification, while others add to the mystery. Believing that these incidents are real (his reality), Schwarzenegger finds himself in a dramatic conflict with the villain on Mars. Outnumbered and outgunned, his only "weapon" is a device that can produce a perfect holographic replica of himself (revealed earlier in the film). Schwarzenegger apparently walks into the ambush. The leader of the villains discovers the deception too late and cries out, "HE'S GOT A HOLOGRAM !" He has been duped by a light transmission illusion – a cinematic reality.

> "Your body has been digitized into a set of numerical coordinates you can geometricize any time you desire."

Boigon's *Alphabetical Machine Implant*, like the memory conjuncture and techno-posture of *Total Recall*, is not about plausibility, but about transmission systems that distort the facets of co-existent experience and ... time.

> "When we walk right into a restaurant on Mars, We walk right into the middle of the space. No one even knows We have arrived because We were there before we got there."

IHOR HOLUBIZKY

NOTE

1. All quotes are from *Speed reading Tokyo* by Brian Boigon – an illustrated "novel" published in conjunction with his exhibition at P3 Alternative Museum in Tokyo, September 18 – October 20, 1990