

Randall Anderson: Fragments for an Eviscerated Universe

John K. Grande

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Randall ANDERSON: Fragments for an Eviscerated Universe

John K. GRANDE

Vacuous materialism invades Randall Anderson's striding figure at Concordia's new Fine Arts and Engineering building on St. Catherine West in Montreal. The feeling is of a post-historical crunch, an ephemeral accumulation. The whole idea is that this figure is combustible. Its centre is a vacuum that attracts these paper-like appendages... Emptiness becomes less than a metaphor, and the centre is like a vacuous maelstrom.

When Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916), the Italian Futurist painter, sculptor and theorist created *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), he avoided creating straight lines, instead building the sculpture outwards. The sculpture likewise evoked the notion of a man striding through space. The lines emanating from the form were considered to be "lines of force" by the sculptor. The relation between



physics and art were present, if never overtly expressed. Boccioni emphasized the body and its relation to space, and built its shape with a view to the phenomenon of form in space... The notion was that the physical world played the quintessential role in our worldview, in an aesthetics, and the belief was that humanity and this world were inseparable.

Seen in this way, Boccioni's sculpture, inevitably referenced by

Randall Anderson, likewise relates to Picasso's Cubist collage experiments such as *Ma Jolie* (1912) or *Bottle of Suze* (1912)... It is ironic in witnessing Anderson's sculpture to realize that the Cubists innovated with papier collé in their collage works from 1911 to 1912, an era that like ours involved radical transformation of economy and society. While Picasso and Braque used papier collé to integrate real life references (like a bus ticket, fragments of letters from journal or a wine label) into their art, Anderson's papier collé engenders the disintegration of the real in everyday life as a result of high-tech communications, new media, TV, cell phones. Screen-bound life, in a word, actively disintegrates physical geo-specific communities and sponsors web-based ethereal communities in their place. The physical and tactile are denied in this new world, as much as the image dominates, reconstructs our reality in an unreal way. This is what Marshall McLuhan presaged when he commented:

What may emerge as the most important insight of the twenty-first century is that man was not designed to live at the speed of light. Without the countervailing balance of natural and physical laws, the new video-related media will make man implode upon himself. As he sits in the informational control room, whether at home or at work, receiving data at enormous speeds—imagistic, sound, or tactile—from all areas of the world, the results could be dangerously inflating and schizophrenic. His body will remain in one place but his mind will float out into the electronic void, being everywhere at once on the data bank.¹

And so Randall Anderson's striding figure explores this state of art, and does so ideationally, for though this is a three-dimensional tactile white figure, it explains a non-physical state of contemporary culture. Put in an east-west context, something that preoccupies us culturally with the expansion of the Chinese and Indian economies, cory doctorow (very much of our times) has as the main proponent in his novel *eastern standard time*, an up-and-coming interface designer... doctorow writes:

I once had a Tai Chi instructor who explained the difference between Chinese and Western medicine thus: Western

medicine is based on corpses, things that you discover by cutting up dead bodies, and pulling them apart. Chinese medicine is based on living flesh, things observed from vital, moving human.²

Space is eviscerated with Randall Anderson. It is as if there were no space at all in his art, or as if concept were analogous with space, and an emptiness exists without formal space. Anderson refers to his sculpture as "information containers." At Montreal's Parisian Laundry in 2006, Anderson exhibited one of his bulletin boards titled *Clouds*. The bulletin board is a neutral space where information is applied in fragments. Some is removed; still other notices are added in a fluid process. For the actual manufacture of these pieces which Anderson refers to as "ghosts," the whole process began with a three-dimensional optical scan of an actual bulletin board. A maquette is then made on a five-axis milling machine, thus developing a rapid prototype using the latest technology. A mould is subsequently made and the piece is then cast. The actual material for the cast is a resin-based plaster of Paris referred to as Forton. For one of the bulletin boards the Forton was combined with nickel powder. It gave the piece the look of silver metal. Initially exhibited at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany, the information board exists as a topology, a flat world of terrace-like layers. While we know they were once paper, here they become an abstract agglomeration, haphazard, and blank. The blankness has a *tabula rasa* quality. This *Cloud* series are objects *per se*, but objects with an informational *alias*.

Anderson's sculpted figure is like a dematerialised Umberto Boccioni— with no centre—the epitome of emptiness but all covered by sheets of paper, as if he were a magnet for the piles of paper produced by any institution (Concordia University included) in this "paper-less" new-tech age. Of course, the Futurists including Boccioni, with their utopian dreams of the future, were associated with Mussolini the Fascist (whether directly or indirectly, that is not the point) who had a syndicated column in the Montreal Gazette years before

the war. Anderson's paper-covered form is reminiscent of another "ghost" in Terry Gilliam's fabulous 1985 film *Brazil*: the lone renegade figure of Harry Tuttle, acted by Robert De Niro. Tuttle, a rebel furnace repairman interested in subverting the government's clogged paperwork channels, risks his life performing illegal repairs. At one point he is running and a swirl of paper heads directly towards him, until he is absolutely covered in paper and literally vanishes, disappears in it all, or as a result of it all. The allusions in Anderson's sculptures are as much about the dematerialization of contemporary creative culture, and its potential displacement or replacement by engineered metaphors, multi-layered image fabrications, and disingenuous Pop-faddish non-entities. So subversive is it all in these works (the *Cloud* notice boards included) that we can read it all as a disappearance of the very language of interpretation (even the critic's language) whereby art is or was purported to acquire a meaning in the collective unconscious (with apologies to Carl Jung). So the message is "bye bye Vasari, hello Silicon Valley!"

This notion that eviscerated contexts produce a non-context, or that matter and anti-matter are one and the same thing (even when this state is merely described in three dimensions, as sculpture), does not deliver Anderson's sculpture from the potential problem that it is and remains object-based, likely conceptual, and wrapped in an aesthetic even while potentially decaying, or challenging the "substance" whereby traditional aesthetics were produced. The wheel is reinvented yet again... but it is a nice wheel. ←

John GRANDE's *Art Nature Dialogues* is published by SUNY Press (www.sunypress.edu). *Dialogues in Diversity: Art from Marginal to Mainstream* will be published by Pari in Italy.

NOTES

1. Marshall McLuhan and Bruce Powers, "Global Robots: The Dis-satisfactions," *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 97.
2. cory doctorow, *eastern standard time* (New York: TOR, 2004), 11.

← Randall ANDERSON, *Zoom!*, 2006. Cement and Forton. Photo: R. Anderson.