Models for Public Space

An interview with Adrian Blackwell

ANNIE GÉRIN

T he shrinking and impoverishment of public space is now a prominent theme in contemporary debates in art, architecture and urban planning. Since the 1960s, artists and architects, such as Melvin Charney, Gordon Matta-Clark, Dan Graham, Richard Greaves, Ant Farm and ParaSITE, have tackled this pressing issue by deconstructing, reframing and appropriating urban spaces and architecture, as well as by creating impermanent structures and models that serve the purpose of shifting habitual spatial practices. As a visual artist, architect and urban designer, Adrian Blackwell contributes to this tradition. His work focuses on the question of equality, access and democratic exchange in contemporary urban development and public space.

Since 1996 Blackwell has produced a series of art projects that aim at altering existing spaces to encourage common uses. For example, *Public Water Closet* (1998) and *How to Open a Car Like a Book* (1999) create private enclosures within the city. Recent works such as *Light Net* (2004), *Car Pool* (2006) and *Model for a Public Space* (2000, 2006 and 2008) produce temporary locations for collective action and public debate. Alongside these object-based propositions, Blackwell has also engaged in critical documentary work: *Evicted May 1, 2000 (9 Hanna Avenue)* (2001) uses pinhole photographs to record the transformative potential of artists' studio spaces; *Detroit's Underdevelopment: Separation, Divesture, Erasure, Encampment* (2005) draws on three maps to trace the social and political forces that shaped the development of Detroit in the second half of the 20th century; *Factory = Territory* (2005) documents the eastern edge of China's Pearl River Delta with drawings, maps and pinhole panoramas.

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