

## The Afterlives of “Systems Esthetics”

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“A translation issues from the original—not so much for its life as from its afterlife... no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife—which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a change.” These are the words of the great critic of technology Walter Benjamin, culled from his classic “Task of the Translator.”<sup>1</sup> I commence this paper under the sign of Benjamin, and propose that translations of a temporal and spatial variety might operate with a similar logic to the linguistic shifts he describes.

### What was “Systems Esthetics”?

In September 1968 Jack Burnham’s “System’s Esthetics” was published in *Artforum* 7.<sup>2</sup> The essay, which coincided approximately with Burnham’s book length study, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, was one of a variety of texts the art and critic would pen on the subject of art as system.<sup>3</sup> Burnham proposed that a Kuhnian paradigm shift had occurred in Western society and thus, in the part of society known as the art world, change was also nigh: that, to paraphrase the critic, humanity had evolved; no longer were human beings *homo faber*, creators of things,

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<sup>1</sup> This 1923 text was Benjamin’s introduction to a volume of Charles Baudelaire’s poetry.

<sup>2</sup> Burnham’s essays coincide with the afterlife Benjamin’s writings were just beginning to enjoy in the US art world of the late 1960s.

<sup>3</sup> Among these were the following: “Real Time Systems” (1969), the two complimentary texts, pendants of sorts: “Art in the Marcusean Analysis” (1969) and “The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems” (1969), or his *Software* catalogue (1970).

“tools and images”—he tells us, but instead we had become *homo arbiter formae*, the makers of aesthetic decisions. The shift Burnham describes sounds like it maps precisely onto a transition from an industrial production to post-Fordism. However, rather than serving to reproduce the logic of late capitalism in the gallery, the critic called upon artists to “assume a new more critical function,” and do more than act merely as managers of their audiences.<sup>4</sup>

Burnham championed artists like his friends and interlocutors Hans Haacke and Les Levine, in addition to Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, Allen Kaprow, and Mierle Laderman-Ukeles (figs); he as well held up the Gutai group, Otto Piene of group ZERO, and Robert Breer as important early precedents for systems esthetics (figs). In line with the oeuvres of the aforementioned creators, the way the sea-change to systems was to manifest itself in art, came via the production of works that were conceived of as couplings between the user-viewers as well as their surroundings. Though they often rely of the marriage of art and technology—employing new, modern materials—artworks with a systems esthetic are not necessarily forms that technologically determine spectatorship. Instead, echoing Norbert Wiener and Marshall McLuhan, Burnham suggested that artworks should be viewed primarily as mode of communication, both affecting beholders and affected by them.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the critic held, “What people do much better than computers—so far—is to evaluate situations or entities which have significant qualitative differences. Traditionally we have called this esthetics, and also politics.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, Burnham’s systems esthetics is as well systems politics, a way of fighting the system and questioning the status quo.

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<sup>4</sup> Burnham, “Systems Esthetics” (1968) reprinted in *Great Western Saltworks* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), 24.

<sup>5</sup> See Burnham, “The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems,” paper delivered at the Guggenheim in 1969, which would be the basis for Burnham’s *Software* exhibition (1970-71).

<sup>6</sup> Burnham, “Modern Art as a Mediocre Teaching Machine,” *Art Education* 22.8 (Nov 1969): 28.

Burnham's ideas were central to many of the new forms of art (Earth Works, Kinetic Art, Conceptual Art, Tech-Art, Constructivism, Minimalism) that emerged in the 1960s. In his 1968 essay, Burnham located his critical platform in opposition to more conservative voices like that of Michael Fried, affirming that "theatricality" and "literalism"—terms Fried uses to censure Minimal art—might actually be better understood as systems esthetics.<sup>7</sup> Indicative of Burnham's centrality for Conceptualism, his thoughts on systems are brought up repeatedly in the interviews with major artists conducted by Patricia Norvell in *Recording Conceptual Art*.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, avant-garde impresario Willoughby Sharp channeled many of Burnham's notions for his exhibitions *Luminism*, *Kineticism: Systems Sculpture in Environmental Situations*, *Air Art*, and *Earth Art*.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps coming as a surprise to us today, there is even an essay on "Earth Systems" in the catalogue for Cornell-based show. Additionally, in a 1969 video-performance, "East Coast, West Coast" Nancy Holt's east coast artist persona poses questions to her west coast counterpart (interpreted by Robert Smithson), which point straight to Burnham: "Has he read systems theory? Structuralist anthropology?"<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the critic was also one of the first to use semiotics and other structuralist theory to interpret works of art. Long before Rosalind Krauss was plotting art history on Klein groups, Burnham had already diagrammed the *Structure of Art* (fig). While belletristically his writing pales in comparison to that of the Columbia art historian, Burnham's 1971 tome was groundbreaking for its application of new theory.

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<sup>7</sup> Burnham, "Systems Esthetics," 17.

<sup>8</sup> Alberro and Norvell, *Recording Conceptual Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Sharp in some cases may anticipate Burnham. For instance, Sharp's 1966 *Kinetic and Programmed Art*, November 25-December 4, 1966. Rhode Island School of Design, already implies the existence of art as software.

<sup>10</sup> James Meyer describing Nancy Holt's performance as east coast artist in "Another Minimalism," 33–50, in *A Minimal Future?*, catalogue of the exhibition at MoCA, (Los Angeles and Cambridge: MIT/ MoCA, 2004).

The supposed failure of his exhibition *Software* at the Jewish museum in 1970-71, marked the beginning of the critic's downfall.<sup>11</sup> While Burnham continued to write and curate exhibitions during the later 1970s and 80s, he further alienated himself from many in the art world by his argumentative character coupled with his zealous pursuit of cabalistic readings of art and eventual rejection of Tech-Art, which he dubbed in 1980 "the panacea that failed."<sup>12</sup> "A brief meteor" –to cite Caroline Jones; Burnham's star had evidently faded like the works he deemed outmoded.<sup>13</sup>

### **Afterlives of Systems Esthetics (fig)**

During the late 1990s and into the 2000s the proper name Jack Burnham started to reemerge. Art historians Marga Bijvoet and Edward Shanken were some of the first to begin to resuscitate Burnham's ideas. In 2009 Luke Skrebowski completed a dissertation on a Burnhamian field of cultural production, "Systems, Contexts, Relations: An Alternative Genealogy of Conceptual Art." Both Shanken and Skrebowski, along with a variety of other scholars, notably Jones, Francis Halsall, Pam Lee, and to a certain degree Alex Alberro, continue to engage with technology and systems esthetics. Coinciding with these studies and adding to the momentum of systems theory, came the augmented visibility of the writings of Niklas Luhman and Friedrich Kittler.

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<sup>11</sup> See Anne Wagner, "Data Almanac" *Artforum* (Sept 2012). Online. or Matthew Israel, "A Magnet for the With-It Kids: The Jewish Museum, New York, of the 1960s." *Art in America* 95, no. 9 (October 2007): 72-83.

<sup>12</sup> See Burnham, "Art and Technology: The Panacea that Failed," *The Myths of Information* ed. Kathleen Woodward Coda Press, 1980.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, "System Symptoms: Caroline Jones on Jack Burnham," *Artforum* (Sept 2012). Online: <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201207&id=32014> (accessed on October 29, 2013).

For an older generation of art historians, like Krauss and Benjamin Buchloh, an apparently utopian celebration of technology in art was to be viewed with the highest degree of skepticism; among younger critics and historians of art, most of whom had grown up constantly interfacing with personal computers and connected to the world wide web, the notion of the coupling of art and technology seems more provocative than anathema—the historical distance enabling more critical consumption (without the need for outright rejection).<sup>14</sup> In the last half-decade, the production of articles on Tech-Art or scrutinizing systems theory has accelerated in academic journals like *October*, *Grey Room*, or *Art Journal*.<sup>15</sup>

Michelle Kuo (fig), a critic and Harvard PhD candidate working on Experiments in Art and Technology –the Rauschenberg-and-Kluver-led outfit typically abbreviated as E.A.T.—is perhaps the most important example of the new wave of scholars, primarily because of her high-profile position as editor-in-chief of *Artforum*. The periodical and its websites are very influential platforms the dissemination of information and ideas about contemporary art, and thus, for taste-making. As a result, *Artforum* arguably also has an impact on new art and the content of exhibitions. Upon taking the helm of the magazine in 2010, Kuo has increasingly directed the focus of *Artforum* backward (and inwards) to the Tech-Art of the 60s and 70s that had been avoided by many in the Anglo-American art world.

Kuo's own "The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas: Recent Sculpture" (Feb 2007) saw only the second invocation of Burnham in the *Artforum* since 1988 when Thomas McEvilley

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<sup>14</sup> Krauss in particular devotes a section of her *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), see "Mechanical ballets: light, motion, theater".

<sup>15</sup> See, for example: Skrebowski, "All Systems Go: Recovering Hans Haacke's Systems Art," *Grey Room* 30 (Winter, 2008): 54-83; Mehring, "Television Art's Abstract Starts: Europe circa 1944–1969," *October* 125 (Summer 2008): 29-64; Melissa Sue Ragain, "'Homeostasis Is Not Enough': Order and Survival in Early Ecological Art," *Art Journal* Vol. 71, No. 3 (Fall 2012): 78-97.

interviewed the critic (in the past three years Burnham has been mentioned in ten articles). Specific engagements and reassessments of Burnham's contributions to the history of art come in Anne Wagner's discussion of his notorious *Software* exhibit, "Data Almanac" (Sept 2012) or Jones's "System Symptoms: Caroline A. Jones on Jack Burnham," both in a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue on "Art's New Media" (which are hardly still new). These texts and others serve to publicize the notions the critic explored on the pages of the very same journal, allowing them to have currency once again. Indeed, a hyperlink to Burnham's "Systems Esthetics" accompanies Jones's article on *Artforum.com*; presently broken, it nonetheless bespeaks a renewed circulation within the virtual frame of the magazine (fig) (see: <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201207&id=32014>).

The return of systems esthetics is not solely a (hyper)textual phenomenon. The afterlife has also very much occurred within art institutions. To name just a few examples: Daniel Birnbaum's 2009 Biennale "Making Worlds" included a number of works by Gutai and Oyvind Fahlstrom. Otto Piene had a major show at ZKM earlier this year. In New York, Ming Tiampo and Alexandra Muroe's *Gutai: Splendid Playground* at the Guggenheim this year showcased a large amount of the group's work with new technologies and an associated symposium brought Michelle Kuo and Otto Piene (along with Rafael Lozano-Hemmer) into conversation. Piene's *Light Ballet* (1959) was shown at MIT's List Visual Arts Center in 2011, concurrent with a refabrication in its entirety of Hans Haacke's 1967 self-titled show at the same educational institution. We might consider this restaging of systems esthetics by Caroline Jones in relation to the (deluxe) replicas of many of Marcel Duchamp's readymades in the 50s and 60s. In much the same fashion that Arturo Schwartz's collaboration with Duchamp to remake *Fountain* (in 1964)

indicated the truck the Frenchman's art had with the then-current generation of artists, so too does Jones's collaboration with Haacke suggest that artworks as system have returned to the fore.<sup>16</sup>

The New Museum's *Ghosts in the Machine* (2012) as well exhibited works that possess a systems esthetic: Haacke's *Sphere in Oblique Air Jet* (1967), *Blue Sail* (1964-65), Breer's *Floats* (1970)<sup>17</sup>, and Piene's *Hängende Lichtkugel* (1972). In addition to historic works, *Ghosts...* included a spattering of more recent pieces (fig). The catalogue for the show included short essays by curators and—looking rather like a photocopied course-reader—reproduced numerous texts from the 60s and 70s discussing cybernetics and art (fig). The title references Gilbert Ryle's critique of Cartesian dualism, which many of the works also mount an attack on, prompting visitors to engage with them in embodied (not just “embrained”) ways.<sup>18</sup> “Ghosts” of course also implies a haunting, a revived presence of Tech-Art and the associated ideas forwarded in the exhibition.<sup>19</sup>

## What is Systems Esthetics 45 Years Later?

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<sup>16</sup> Skrebowski's “After Hans Haacke” in *Third Text* (January 2013) or the book *In Reference to Hans Haacke* index this state of affairs as well.

<sup>17</sup> To be specific, it was the same series of *Floats* from E.A.T.'s Pepsi Pavilion at Expo '70 Osaka, regarded by many as a low water mark for Tech-Art.

<sup>18</sup> *Ghost in the Machine* has had its own series of afterlives: Arthur Koestler wrote a 1967 book lamenting man's self-destructive tendencies in relation to the nuclear bomb. The Police also titled their 1981 album with the phrase. The anime *Ghost in a Shell* also seems to dialogue with the notion; this too has been further translated and adapted by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno in *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999).

<sup>19</sup> Nina Horisaki-Christens, Andrea Neustein, Victoria Rogers, and Jason Waite, curators at the Whitney Independent Study Program, also showed projects by Mearle Laderman Ukeles alongside those of younger artists whose work engages with systems, like Park McArthur and Sam LeWitt in *Maintenance Required*. The curators even decided to show a copy of *Artforum* magazine, Vol. 9, No. 5 (January 1971), opened to Burnham's “Problems of Criticism, IX: Art and Technology,” a text which, to toot my own horn, I suggested to Horiskai-Christen she read.

Our lives are increasingly mediated and linked into systems; hence, perhaps explaining its appeal, Burnham's rubric resonates with conditions today even more than those of c. 1968. I wish to hold up a critical lens to the work of Cory Arcangel and Allora and Calzadilla, as well as a selection of artists included in PS1's *EXPO:1*, a very much Burnham-inflected show.<sup>20</sup> Despite my choices, the list of artists today whose practice resonates with Burnham's critical platform is near innumerable, and artworks by Sam LeWitt, Ryan Gander, Ryan Trecartin, Lozano-Hemmer, or Park McArthur might just as well be assessed within the scope this paper proposes.

Let us first turn to Allora and Calzadilla's *Body in Flight (American)*, *Body in Flight (United)*, and *Algorithm* (all 2011), artworks that fulfill the call to create interfaces with the public and institution, all created for the Lisa Freiman-curated US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011 (figs). The two furniture-based works involved the translation of first-class airline seats into wooden gymnastics equipment. Members of the US national gymnastics team performed routines (developed in tandem with the artists) using the seats, which could then be "performed" by visitors during the breaks. *Algorithm* surreally combined an organ with an actually working (Bank of America-compatible) ATM. When users touched the keys, a randomized set of sounds emitted from the pipes. Interestingly, perhaps revealing aspects paralleling another text of the same vintage as Burnham's, Lawrence Alloway's "Network: the Art World as System," the duo collaborated with the composer Jonathan Bailey—Kuo's (then-) partner—on the project.

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<sup>20</sup> Since writing the initial proposal for the conference Felicity Scott published "Limits of Control" in *Artforum* (Sept 2013), an assessment of Expo 1 focusing almost exclusively on Random International's *Rain Room* (2013) in relation to "systems esthetics" and Hans Haacke's *Photo-Electric Viewer-Programmed Coordinate System* (1968). In the interest of not rehashing Scott's argument too much, I shall focus on additional implications of *Rain Room* vis-a-vis Burnham.



Burnham's analysis of real-time systems illuminates Allora and Calzadilla's artworks. Discussing parallels between the body's systems of regulation and other systems, the critic contends, "the rudiments of such networks already exist, in the form of large-scale digital computer systems... Telefile, the first online banking system; and SABRE, the first computerized airline reservation system are a few of many operating *real time* systems which gather and process data from environments, in time to effect events within those environments."<sup>21</sup> *Algorithm* and the two *Body*... works re/present these systems, underscoring the links between the world of art and business. Moreover, in both cases the objects are made strange in the gallery environment, interrupting normal use. While they can be consumed uncritically (Maxwell Anderson, director and CEO of the sponsoring institution [the Indianapolis Museum], triumphantly measured the success of the exhibition by the number of dollars *Algorithm* spat out), it seems difficult not to reassess the components of Allora and Calzadilla's projects and your own relation to finance capital and the continued existence of radical class disparities. These differences are manifest, but totally naturalized in-flight; a condition which is true of the Venice Biennale too.

"In a systems context, *invisibility* or *invisible* parts share equal importance with things seen (my italics)," Burnham affirms.<sup>22</sup> Cory Arcangel's much-maligned *Pro Tools* (2011) at the Whitney contained a variety works that resonate(d) with the critic's paradigm. Some of the most interesting engaged the "hierarchy of control" in the institution, exploring what Burnham dubs "boundary situations."<sup>23</sup> Also rhyming with the critic's notion of art as software, in a variety of ways Arcangel reprogrammed the Whitney galleries. One of these was *777* (2011), a

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<sup>21</sup> Burnham, "Real-Time Systems" (1969) reprinted in *Great Western Saltworks*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Burnham, "Systems Esthetics" (1968), 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

reversal of the museum's no photography policy for the duration of his show—which catalyzed a subtle alteration to the Museum's official signage.<sup>24</sup> Arcangel's documentation of this work (fig) reveals the possibility for museum-goers to disseminate and reframe the artist's other works on the internet; photos of his artwork became freeware, not solely controlled by the Whitney. He also flooded the exhibition space with free Wi-Fi, facilitating the circulation of images and information.<sup>25</sup> Arcangel's official website also merits remark: the background, replete with advertisements for Subway, suggests an embrace of commercialism that questions typical rules of decorum (see: <http://www.coryarcangel.com/things-i-made/2011-019-777>). Like Burnham's estimation of Les Levine, Arcangel "is filling a niche in the ecology of art economics."<sup>26</sup> Also upsetting standard operating procedures in the museum—and smacking of the worst kind of hipster irony—the artist screened *Weekend at Bernie's* (1989) at the Whitney (fig), a film he had evidently never seen, projecting it using a VHS player. During the discussion he led after the movie Arcangel mused, "If you go far enough with something it lends a certain power," implying that with the right discursive framing—provided by the privilege of the artist garnished by the institution—all kinds of "ridiculous" things might be achieved.<sup>27</sup>

Arcangel's best "invisible" work is *Real Talk* (2011) (fig). Consisting of AT&T, Cingular, and T-Mobile cell phone signal repeaters and wiring the gallery to an antenna on the roof, it multiplied reception on the fourth floor. The branded transmitters speak to the permeation of capital interests in both the museum and in rudimentary telephonic interaction. The augmented

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<sup>24</sup> An act that recalls Burnham again: "there are artists who work within the art system, and those who work with the art system." See "Real Time Systems," 37.

<sup>25</sup> With free Wi-Fi comes another collision of the museum with economics; this access to information as a "gift" is capitalized on by numerous businesses to encourage consumption.

<sup>26</sup> Burnham, "Les Levine: Business as Usual" in *Great Western Saltworks*, 39

<sup>27</sup> Arcangel, quoted in Lauren Rosenberg, "MY TURN: WEEKEND AT BERNIE'S," July 12, 2011, *Whitney Museum of American Art*. Online: <http://whitney.org/Education/EducationBlog/WeekendAtBernies>. Accessed on October 31, 2013.

capacity for communication did not translate proportionally into more minutes consumed; the guards had not all been alerted to this policy change. Upon receiving—and taking—a call, one of gentleman rushed me: “sir, there is no cellphone use in the gallery; please be so kind as to have your conversation in the stairwell.” Arcangel had succeeded in more than making the normally unseen disciplinary apparatus tangible. I was prompted to engage with the guard—whose labor is on display, but goes unnoticed, and who, by the looks of the insignia emblazoned on his uniform, was worker subcontracted by the museum, a system of employment that alienates guards from the institution and by dint, its contents.<sup>28</sup> He did not understand my assertion that the artist *allowed* me to flaunt the rules, that I was entitled to use my cell. This did not program—and I apologized. Although possibly accidental, this interaction made my own privilege as an educated white visitor visible to myself (the guard sees it every day).

*EXPO:1* was a Tech-Art-heavy, multi-venue show—according to MoMA’s release, “an exploration of ecological challenges”—curated by Klaus Biesenbach, with some input from others.<sup>29</sup> For *Your waste of time* (fig) Olafur Eliasson transported fragments of a glacier from Iceland into the institution, a move recalling Rafael Ferrer’s *Ice Piece* (1969) or Haacke’s *Ice Stick* (1966) (figs). Translated to the gallery, the glacier shards are turned into minimalist sculpture. But even more, the institution’s function as a technology of preservation was made clear. Eliasson surely hoped to provoke a consideration of global warming too. While this work did not generate much of a carbon footprint, as solar panels powered the cooling system, it throws into high relief the climate control in the rest of PS 1, which does have an impact--linking

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<sup>28</sup> Soon after this show Xavier Aaronson, in a rather sensationalist article, would describe the museum’s attempts to thwart his interviews of the guards. See: “No Fluff in Their Stuff: Museum Guards Review the Whitney Biennial,” *Vice*, 2012. Online: <http://www.vice.com/read/no-fluff-in-their-stuff-whitney-biennial>. Accessed on November 11, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> MoMA Press, “EXPO: 1.” May 9, 2013. Online. <http://press.moma.org/2013/05/expo1newyork/>. Accessed on October 24, 2013. Hans Ulrich Obrist was a collaborator for instance.

viewer's body temperature, art, and the museum to our steadily heating planet.

Pierre Huyghe's *Zoodram 5: After Sleeping Muse by Constantin Brancusi* (2011) (fig) is also an artificial environment, a kind of animal ecology far harsher than Haacke's incubation of chickens (*Chickens Hatching*, 1969) that Burnham describes in "Real Time Systems" (fig).<sup>30</sup> The work consists of a tank with fluorescent lights above it, the only source of illumination in the dusky gallery. The glass box, a marine ecosystem, is inhabited by a number of spindly arrow crabs and a large hermit crab, residing in a hollow version of Brancusi's sculpture. Highly aesthetic, the work's beauty comes at a price however: the former creatures are highly territorial and rip each other apart, requiring replacement during the course of exhibition. The zoological cube might not be so different to the gallery around it: an artificial environment.<sup>31</sup> Running with this allegory, read along with Burnham's assertion that artists "reveal psychic truths at the expense of existing societal homeostasis," we might also think that the "animal spirits" of capitalism –famously theorized by John Maynard Keynes--similarly prompt humanity to consume itself (there are very few winners).<sup>32</sup>

*EXPO: I*'s most spectacular component was undoubtedly rAndom International's *Rain Room* (2012) (fig). In a recent assessment Felicity Scott holds, "*Rain Room*'s visitors are not, of course, walking into a cloud of rain. Rather, they are entering into and interacting with a field of data."<sup>33</sup> The "immersive environment"<sup>34</sup> was a "realtime information processing"

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<sup>30</sup> See Burnham, "Real Time Systems" (1969) *Great Western Saltworks*, 30. I of course refer to John Maynard Keynes's naturalizing metaphor about the driving forces of capitalism.

<sup>31</sup> This is Ariella Budick's idea; Budick is apparently unaware of the killer crabs. See Budick, "Expo 1: New York, MoMA PS1, New York – review," *Financial Times/FT.com*, May 21, 2013. Online. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/04046bd4-c1f8-11e2-8992-00144feab7de.html#axzz2jO03VSPE>. Accessed on: October 26, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Burnham, "Real Time Systems," 38.

<sup>33</sup> Scott, "Limits of Control" in *Artforum* (Sept 2013). Online. <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201307&id=42636>. Accessed on: October 31, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

system, filled with falling water that ceases when beholders stand underneath motion sensors.<sup>35</sup> Scott, invoking Burnham and Skrebowski, deftly explores the installation's connections to prior works, reading it as operating at the interstices of determined technology and technological determination. Strangely though, the architectural historian fails to note the fact that the piece was on view "courtesy of" Restoration Hardware (RH), the firm whose gallery represents rAndom International.<sup>36</sup> At the time of *EXPO: I* RH had not opened the doors of their Chelsea location (opening Nov 9), which will mark their foray into the art market. This fact was not lost on the writer at *Blouin Artinfo*, a luxury lifestyle web magazine that targets art collectors, who described the work with the following headline: "'Rain Room' at MoMA Heralds Restoration Hardware's Bold Move Into Art Sales Biz."<sup>37</sup> The long lines to enter the work, which only allowed ten people at a time, made it particularly conspicuous –great publicity for RH. Once again we might turn to Burnham for insights. *Rain Room* possesses the "chic superficiality that surrounded ... many of the kinetic performances and 'light events;'" much like his assessment of the Howard Wise Gallery, the work turned MoMA into an "uptown discothèque."<sup>38</sup> A cool place to go, but not one that provokes much critical reflection.

### **Old Systems Aesthetes Don't Die... (Nor Do They Fade Away) <sup>39</sup>**

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<sup>35</sup> Burnham, "Real Time Systems," 30

<sup>36</sup> MoMA Press, "MoMA PS1 Announces Rain Room at the Museum of Modern Art, a Major Component of EXPO 1: New York," April 12, 2013. Online. <http://press.moma.org/2013/04/expo1newyorkrainroom>. Accessed on: November 1, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Janelle Zara, "'Rain Room' at MoMA Heralds Restoration Hardware's Bold Move Into Art Sales Biz," *Blouin Art Info*. Online. <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/903092/rain-room-at-moma-heralds-restoration-hardwares-bold-move-into>. Accessed on: October 31, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Burnham, "Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art," in Kaspar Koenig, ed., *Hans Haacke: Framing and Being Framed, 7 Works 1970–1975* (Halifax, Canada: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 128-129.

<sup>39</sup> This is para-citation from McArthur's line about old soldiers (here of the avant-garde of art) is most certainly not intended to suggest these artists should fade away. Burnham is also still alive.

Hans Haacke—one of Burnham’s poster boys—is very active and keeps innovating. His recent projects *Castillos en el Aire* (2012) and *Once Upon a Time...* (2010) (figs) betray a continued interest in systems—both pieces link spectators and institutions to the respective political crises in Spain and Italy (housing and extreme corruption and media control). Mierle Laderman-Ukeles (fig), still artist in residence at the New York Department of Sanitation, is producing work too. The maintenance artist, probably best known for her capacity to showcase invisible labor and waste operations, was included in Triple Canopy’s programming for *EXPO School (Speculations: “The future is \_\_\_\_\_”)* (fig), an educational series of speakers—one more afterlife of systems esthetics—that in contradistinction to *Rain Room*, did largely provide visitor-participants with “critical information.” Discussing artworks that investigate waste collection and processing in New York City, Laderman-Ukeles proved that there is still space for an “*Expo-sition*” of politics. Art can be used to interrogate and resist the system.