

IN TRANSIT

In 1993, a three-part series of exhibitions and programs at The New Museum will investigate an emerging sense of the world as an interdependent system, limited though complex. Each exhibition focuses on a different terrain within this global formation, and examines the intricate means by which each is mapped and configured.

In Transit will explore displacement and other forms of involuntary movement within the context of urban settings. **Trade Routes** will address the shifting patterns of distribution, display and exchange in the emergence of a global marketplace. **The Final Frontier** will examine developments in space exploration in relation to the colonial legacy of expansion and the changing understanding of the world's boundaries. Each exhibition will be organized as a collaboration between a New Museum curator and two co-organizers from outside the field of the visual arts.

In Transit, the first of the three exhibitions, on view from January 17 through April 11, 1993, will be organized by Senior Curator France Morin, anthropologist Kostas Gounis, and political economist Dr. John Jeffries.

Displacement has been part of the collective experience of human groups across space and time. Displacement implies involuntary or otherwise coerced movement across geographic or socially constructed boundaries that regulate inclusion and exclusion. The contemporary urban setting abounds with seemingly familiar images of displacement: new waves of migration; political or economic refugees; homelessness; dispossession; unemployment; and the rise of "new settlements" and urban survival strategies. The emergent patterns of movement associated with these experiences have occasioned such designations as "transnationalism," the "underclass," the "new poor," the "new ghetto," "urban nomads," and so on.

Although these symptoms and characteristics of displacement are often identified and discussed, their alleged familiarity frequently banalizes them. Designations such as the "entitled" and the "disenfranchised," the "legitimate" and the "illegitimate," the "placed" and the "displaced" reduce the complexity of the urban experience to simplistic oppositions and assume that categories such as community, home, work, or time are universal.

In Transit begins with the notion that nothing is fixed. Our recognition of different types of displacement, and the vocabulary we employ when describing them, is constantly in transition. Contemporary urban displacements occur against a backdrop of ever-changing forms of global capitalist economic competition that contribute significantly to our definitions of local social activity and interaction. As a result, the nature of everyday practices is constantly defined and re-defined, and is everywhere confined by the interests of power and privilege.

Traditionally, urban places have been conceptualized as a particular form of settlement. Therefore, any change occurring against that norm is understood as "unsettling."

Displacements are also typically understood in terms of a movement away from a place. However, all displacements are preceded by a prior movement to a place -- voluntary, involuntary, or otherwise. Amidst this flux, the "urban" emerges as a place of constant transition and movement.

This project, therefore, identifies the urban experience through a multiplicity of displacements. The symbolic and institutional makeup of the post-industrial city is an ever-shifting, permutable, and often confusing spectacle. Within these urban spaces, people and objects travel along trajectories that are determined by the complex interaction of domination, resistance, submission, and degradation. The forces that direct this traffic are sometimes invisible, sometimes apparent, but always subject to interpretation and representation.

Through the exploration and unveiling of urban displacements, **In Transit** seeks to clarify the politics of space which underlies this social traffic. As opposed to designating and denouncing the causes of urban distress, the project encourages the makers and viewers of the exhibition to consider a diversity of aesthetic, political, social, and emotional re-interpretations of urban spaces as "contested territories." The exhibition suggests possibilities for viewers to situate themselves in both local and global processes of displacement and to re-examine questions of responsibility for, and participation in, these experiences.

Projects in the exhibition may be the work of artists, architects, or performers. We also encourage the work of urban residents who do not identify with any of these groups. Projects may be situated inside or outside the museum space. They may be designed to last the duration of the exhibition, or they may be ephemeral. They may be constructions; they may be "de-constructions." They may take the form of images, objects, or documentation. The following questions are posed to stimulate ideas for projects:

* What roles do race, gender, and ethnicity play in the ways people navigate through urban terrains?

* The experience of displacement may be spatial, temporal, or subjective. How might we distinguish between varieties of displacement? What happens to the boundaries between personal and private space; between socially-ordered time and leisure time; between collective needs and individual desires; between history and memory?

* If displacement implies a notion of a "home" from which one has been displaced, how do we define home? How is the typical American household defined? What kind of "home" is the single room where a dozen men from West Africa live together and work, three months after they arrive in the States, as gypsy-cab drivers in the Bronx or as messengers in midtown Manhattan?

* Without romanticizing phenomena like Tompkins Square or the squatters under the West Side Highway, what are the possibilities for resistance or positive change? How do the construction of space, the circulation of objects, and the uses of time offer opportunities for departures from, and inversions and disruptions of the norm?