

# I ← T R A (N) S I T →

Organized by France Morin, Senior Curator, with anthropologist Kostas Gounis, and political economist Dr. John Jeffries  
The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York January 15–April 11, 1993

John Berger has called our time the century of enforced travel, a century of banishment and disappearances. Certainly, an unsettling mosaic of displacements, of exclusion and profound polarizations, is the enduring legacy of our century.

In a relatively benign formulation a few decades ago, Lewis Mumford suggested that we understand and experience life as an oscillation between settlement and movement. *In Transit* redefines these poles as captivity and displacement and cautions against romanticizing the sense of balance suggested by Mumford's metaphor. The subject of *In Transit* is both the involuntary movement by human beings through urban spaces, and the practices through which spaces are produced, shaped, and represented.

#### *Displacement and the Redefinition of the Urban*

"Forbidden spaces, feared spaces, ignored spaces, redundant spaces contain the materials of our own ignorance in the same way as shared spaces, comfortable or challenging spaces, needed spaces, become the proving ground for defining who or what we are."<sup>1</sup>

*In Transit* begins with the notion that nothing is fixed. As the world has become increasingly interdependent, displacement has become a defining aspect of the urban experience. 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 or coerced. Amidst this flux, the urban emerges as a place of constant transition and movement. Gabriel Orozco's *Yield Structure*, a plasticine ball inscribed with urban impressions, and *Faster, Faster, Faster*, by John Fekner and Don Leicht, are compelling representations of both the processes and consequences of this constant movement.

Space, as both concept and resource, is primary in contests of power in human relations. In line with our society's tendency to turn reality into consumer events<sup>2</sup>, the experience of displacement is regularly banalized into a spectacle that invites

uncritical and sensationalist public reactions through prefabricated sentiments. For example, the domestication of "the homeless" during the 80's—whether through the attempts of the authorities to round them up, or through the innumerable artistic forays into the subject of homelessness that have turned homelessness into performance—plainly testifies to this insatiable appetite for simplification and evasion. Kawamata's *Field Work, New York*, explores and exposes the prefabricated reality of the urban environment—the environment of borderline spaces and marginalized people—by bringing together discarded materials in temporary assemblages.

The complexity of the urban experience is commonly reduced to simplistic oppositions between the "deserving" and the "undeserving poor," the "legitimate" and the "illegitimate," the "placed" and the "displaced." Such contrasts suggest that our ideas about space are somehow natural. They are not. Spatial categories are everywhere defined and imposed through mechanisms of domination, always in the interest of power.

*In Transit* 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 urban spaces, people and objects travel along trajectories that are determined by the complex interaction of domination, resistance, submission, and degradation. The contemporary urban environment is a spectacle that Marcus Aurelius would recognize:

"The idle pursuit of grandeur, staged dramas, flocks of sheep, herds, spear-throwing, a bone cast to stray dogs, bread-crumbs into fish-ponds, laborings and burden-carrying of ants, running about of frightened little mice, puppets pulled by strings. It is your duty then in the midst of such things to show a generous disposition and not be condescending; to understand, however, that every man is worth just so much as the things are worth about which he busies himself."<sup>3</sup>

Through the exploration and unveiling of urban displacements, *In Transit* seeks to illustrate the *politics of space* that underlie this social traffic. As opposed to designating and denouncing the causes of urban distress, the project considers the diversity of aesthetic, political, social, and emo-

tional re-interpretations of urban spaces as "contested territories."

#### *The Experience and Perception of Displacement*

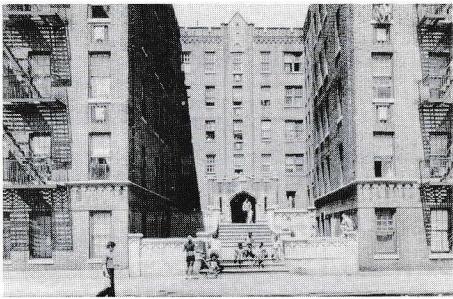
*In Transit* explores displacement through a variety of lenses. The exhibition defines experience in terms of the everyday material practices that govern the appropriation and use of urban spaces. How human beings gain access to urban spaces, how those spaces are occupied, modified, and used, and the circumstances determining which spaces are vacated and recycled for future use—those are examples of everyday practices that *In Transit* tries to expose through the metaphor of displacement.

Urban spaces are constantly reshaped through cycles of occupation, commodification, abandonment, and recycling that are dictated by the "needs" of the highly flexible and elusive capitalist accumulation process. Camilo Jose Vergara's photographic essay on the emergence of the "New American Ghetto" is an exhaustive documentation of the degrading effects of these cycles on the physical and social environment in major U.S. cities over the past two decades. Through the metaphor and reality of the epidemic, Ernest Drucker and William Bosworth, as well as Martha Rosler, map the cycles of devastation and decay that infect both people and the built environment.

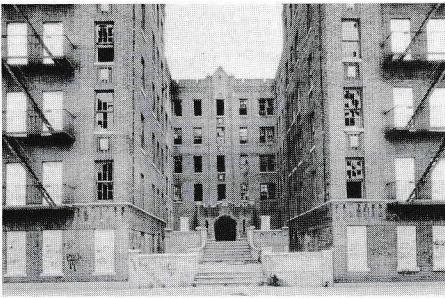
Vergara's work serves as the conceptual and visual link between projects that question and challenge standard categories of experience such as "home," "the street," "public and private spheres," and "empty vs. vacant spaces." Even the presumed permanence associated with the functional design of urban architecture and the materials employed in its construction are brought into question.

The tension generated by the imposition of either the private or public will on the uses of space is amplified by the contrasts between the Success Gardens project, the Casitas project, and the work of Larry Rogers. All these projects are about efforts to reclaim and control urban territories, territories (and their inhabitants) that have been rendered redundant by the mechanisms of urban capitalism.

Devastation due to abandonment gives rise to many different potential users of a barren urban landscape. Street artist Larry Rogers fights with drug traffickers and real estate developers for control of



Camilo Vergara, *South Bronx, June, 1980*



Camilo Vergara, *South Bronx, June, 1982*



Camilo Vergara, *South Bronx, January, 1983*

previously inhabited spaces. The community sees his artwork as a kind of monument; a memorial dedicated to their family members and friends who are casualties of the drug trade.

The project by John Jeffries, one of the three *In Transit* organizers, cautions against naive and romantic notions of the streets as public spaces. In virtually any urban setting, streets are "sacred" and revered spaces that are always available to people for sanctioned and spontaneous celebration, demonstration, and protest. However, which people occupy them and under what circumstances cannot be ignored.

Margaret Morton's *The Tunnel Project* presents a vivid consideration of the multiple and disparate uses of an architecturally given space. The photographs also dictate that they be interpreted through a redefinition of "home." For *In Transit*, the more revealing tensions highlighted by Morton are those circumstances under which someone's home can also be used as a tunnel, not the converse.

Lois Nesbitt's projects, *Atlas* and *Trespassing*, done in collaboration with Aki Fujiyoshi, Glen Ligon, Paul Ramirez-Jonas, Roger Denson, and Simon Watson, address the boundaries and barriers constructed to differentiate between the public and private spheres. Her projects are informed by active and passive practices of inclusion/exclusion across contemporary urban spaces.

The title of Bullet Space's lead-bound poster book, *Your House Is Mine*, speaks directly to the awkwardness associated with the disruptive influences of urban displacements. By dispensing with the niceties that normally serve to quell the rage that goes with displacement and exclusion, *Your House Is Mine* unambiguously asserts that the city is not a community of accommodation but an arena of confrontation.

#### *Imagined Spaces and Identities*

The sense of belonging, the knowledge that we are members of a community, not strangers, is a conscious experience that involves more than the security of physical location. Imagination, memory,

myths, and personal and collective histories are the shifting ground on which we attempt to define who we are.

Mildred Howard's *Stories from Caney Creek* employs memory as a primary resource in her tracking of an African-American family's displacement within the United States. The city/country nexus is alluded via carefully selected fragments that represent materials members of her family used to rebuild their lives. Lorna Simpson and Ramona Naddaff's *Home Deceptions*, an installation of a segment of a "home," is informed by the myths and memories of people in transition. Their work speaks to the formation of immigrant female identity through the idea of past, present, and imagined future homes. Similarly, *Refresher*, a project by the Korean-American artist Y. David Chung in collaboration with Matt Dibble, is a visual analysis of how the artist reconciles his pre-conceived viewpoint with the new place he has entered.

*Home Urbaine*, by Maria-Thereza Alves, refers to the seemingly voluntary movement from the country to the city. Her work calls into question the often unexamined geographic distinction between city and country: What makes the city or the country "a place"? The photographs and objects from Alves's village in Brazil reinforce the significance of experience and its interpretation as we derive meaning from and give meaning to places. From the vantage point of her own experience, this project strongly suggests that for some, "home" is a place and "urban" is a hoped-for state of mind.

Santu Mofokeng's *Lampposts* and Krysztof Wodiczko's *Alien Staff* force the viewer to take seriously the social and political feedback mechanisms that produce, and are produced by, formations of racial, ethnic, and national identities. These two projects, considered alongside others such as Lorna Simpson and Ramona Naddaff's *Home Deceptions*, represents the exhibition's attempt to amplify the dialogue between photography and other more metaphorical works. In fact, *In Transit* does not draw a sharp distinction between the descriptive and the metaphorical. As a case in point, Dorothy Imagine's *Alien Nation* ties identity to both cultural

displacement and the colonial legacy of domination through the science of classification.

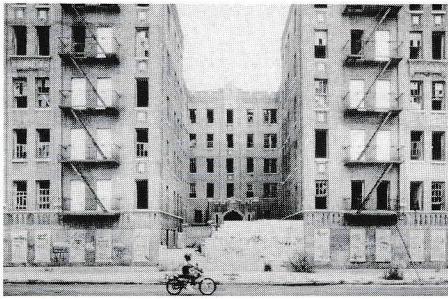
The politics of space with which *In Transit* is concerned is the elusive nature of membership and the mechanisms that define how human communities are constituted through the distribution of resources and status. The tendency to fortify and defend urban space against real and imagined predators is an overpowering sentiment, fueled by an interest in preserving privilege and power. In these times of our global culture, it is prejudice and stigma, not geographic distance, which separate us from one another. *In Transit* is a documentation of this grim reality.

Kostas Gounis  
John Jeffries  
France Morin

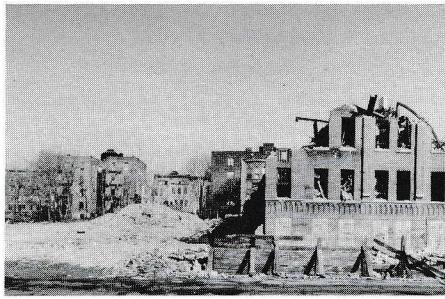
<sup>1</sup> David Harvey, *The Urban Experience*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> Don DeLillo, *Mao II*, (New York: Viking, 1991), p. 43.

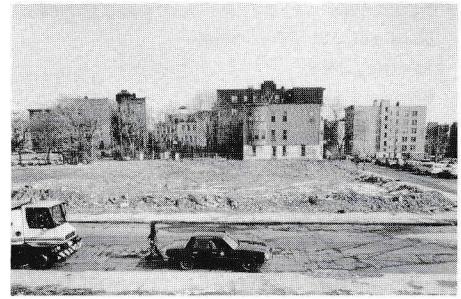
<sup>3</sup> Antoninus, *Marcus Aurelius, Meditations*, (vii. 3).



Camilo Vergara, *South Bronx, September, 1984*



Camilo Vergara, *South Bronx, January 1986*



Camilo Vergara, *South Bronx, March 1988*

#### Works in the Exhibition

Maria-Thereza Alves

*Home Urbaine*, 1992

28 photographs, 28 assorted objects

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

Bullet Space (collaborative team)

*Your House Is Mine*, 1990

Lead-bound book, pedestal, posters

21 inches × 24 inches

Courtesy of the artists

Andrew Castrucci in collaboration with Bessie Bass,

Erik Freeman, John Pitts, and Lee Quinones

*Collaborative Audiotape*, 1992

Audio tape

Courtesy of the artists

Martha Cooper

*Las Casitas*, 1991

Cibachrome color photograph

16 inches × 20 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Y. David Chung in collaboration with Matt Dibble

*Refresher*, 1992

Videotape

5 to 7 minutes

Courtesy of the artists

Ernest Drucker in collaboration with

William Bosworth

*Geography As Destiny*

10–15 color maps

Dimensions variable

John Fekner and Don Leicht

*Faster, Faster, Faster*, 1992

Hand-painted tiles installed on gallery floor;  
wall mural

150 square feet (tiles); 10 feet × 12 feet (mural)

Courtesy of the artists

*Fear, Fear, Fear*, 1992

Black and yellow paint on 6 gallery columns

18 inches × 24 inches

Courtesy of the artists

Mildred Howard

*Stories from Caney Creek*, 1991–1992

6 mixed media works

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Paule Anglim,  
San Francisco

*Caney Creek*, 1991

Mixed media

20½ inches × 24 inches × 5½ inches

*Chance's Prayer*, 1991

Mixed media

28½ inches × 17½ inches

*Conroe*, 1992

Mixed media

21 inches × 24½ inches × 1½ inches

*Jones Creek*, 1992

Mixed media

20 inches × 23½ inches × 1½ inches

*Killeen I*, 1992

Mixed media

30 inches × 26½ inches × 1½ inches

*New Gulf*, 1992

Mixed media

24 inches 23½ inches × 1½ inches

Dorothy Imagine

*Alien Nation*, 1990

Glass and wood boxes containing photographs  
of various types of plants and text, text panels,  
black painted square, shelf, 33 boxes, dimensions  
variable; 3 text panels, 24 inches × 36  
inches; black square, 10 feet × 10 feet; shelf,  
1 foot × 8 feet

Courtesy of the artist

John Jeffries

*Untitled*, 1992

Text, 8 black and white photographs including:

Martha Cooper

*Lower East Side*, 1979

*Lower East Side*, 1979

2 black and white photographs

11 inches × 14 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Helen Levitt

*Untitled*, 1936–1938

*Central Park, New York*, 1936

2 black and white photographs

11 inches × 14 inches

Courtesy of Laurence Miller Gallery, New York

Charles Moore

*Birmingham Riots*, May 1963

*Birmingham Riots*, May 1963

2 black and white photographs

8 inches × 10 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Black Star, New York  
UPI/Bettman Newsphotos

*Springtime in Birmingham*, 1963

Black and white photograph

8 inches × 10 inches

Courtesy of UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos,  
New York

Weegee (Arthur Fellig)

*Summer, Lower East Side*, 1937

Black and white photograph

8 inches × 10 inches

Courtesy of The Center for Creative  
Photography, Tucson

Tadashi Kawamata

*Field Work, New York*, 1992

4 page photographic insert, newspaper stand

11 inches × 16 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Hung Liu

*Women Off-Color*, 1992

Oil and lacquer on wood

16 inches × 24 inches each panel, installation  
size 10 feet × 10 feet

Courtesy of the artist and Rena Branstein Gallery,  
San Francisco; Steinbaum Krauss Gallery,  
New York

Marlene McCarty / Laura Cottingham

*Objections (including Laurie Anderson's Object,  
Objection, Objectivity)*, 1973–1993

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artists and Metro Pictures,  
New York

Santu Mofokeng

*Lampposts*, 1987–1990

11 black and white photographs, text

11 inches × 14 inches each

Courtesy of the artist

*Soweto*, 1987

Black and white photograph

<i>Soweto</i> , 1988	Color photograph 8 inches × 10 inches
Black and white photograph	
<i>Bloembos</i> , 1988	Color photograph 8 inches × 10 inches
Black and white photograph	
<i>Soweto</i> , 1987	Color photograph 8 inches × 10 inches
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<i>Bloembos</i> , 1990	Color photograph 8 inches × 10 inches
Black and white photograph	
<i>Soweto</i> , 1988	Color photograph 8 inches × 10 inches
Black and white photograph	
<i>Mogopa</i> , 1988	Color photograph 8 inches × 10 inches
Black and white photograph	
<i>Thembiisa</i> , 1989	All works courtesy of the artist
Black and white photograph	
Margaret Morton	Martha Rosler
<i>The Tunnel Project</i> , 1992	<i>Transit, Traffic, Flow—Currents of People and Processes in Greenpoint, Brooklyn</i> , 1992
9 black and white photographs	Series of maps and other documentation
5 photographs, 24 inches × 24 inches; 4 photographs, 24 inches	Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist	Courtesy of the artist
Antonio Muntadas	Lorna Simpson and Ramona Naddaff
<i>Home, Where Is Home?</i> , 1990	<i>Home Deceptions</i> , 1992
Audio tape	20 medicine cabinets with text, installation size
Courtesy of the artist	112 inches × 112 inches
Lois Nesbitt	Courtesy of the artists and Josh Baer Gallery, New York
<i>Atlas</i> , 1992	Camilo Vergara
8 inch × 10 inch maps using "found" paper, watercolor, graphite, ink	<i>The New American Ghetto</i> , 1975–(work-in-progress)
Courtesy of the artist	217 color photographs
Lois Nesbitt in collaboration with Aki Fujiyoshi, Glenn Ligon, Paul Ramirez-Jonas, Roger Denson, and Simon Watson	8 inches × 10 inches
<i>Trespassing</i> , 1992	Courtesy of the artist
Lists, various documents, tables, chairs, file cards	Krzysztof Wodiczko
Dimensions variable	<i>Alien Staff</i> , 1992
Courtesy of the artists	Portable public address equipment/staff: wood, copper, mini television monitor, loudspeaker, shoulder bag, video player, battery pack, walkie talkie/ CB radio Dimensions variable
Gabriel Orozco	Courtesy of the artist and Josh Baer Gallery, New York
<i>Yield Sculpture</i> , 1992	
Plasticine ball, street debris	
60 kilos	
Courtesy of the artist	
The Parks Council–Green Neighborhoods	
Program–Success Garden	
<i>Success Garden</i> , 1992	<b>Gallery Talks</b>
10 images, 5 original drawings, text	Saturday, January 30, 2:00 p.m.
8 inches × 10 inches	France Morin, Senior Curator, The New Museum of Contemporary Art and co-curator of <i>In Transit</i>
Courtesy of The Parks Council–Green Neighborhoods Program–Success Garden	Saturday, February 20, 2:00 p.m.
Larry Rogers	Dr. John Jeffries, political economist and co-curator of <i>In Transit</i>
<i>Midblock of Somers at Fulton</i> , 1987	Saturday, April 3, 2:00 p.m.
	Kostas Gounis, anthropologist and co-curator In

Transit and Andrew Castrucci, member of the Bullet Space Collective

*The Curators would like to thank Amalia Mesa-Bains, Jimmie Durham, Exit Art, Thelma Golden, Claudia Gould, Kim Hopper, Dara Myers Kinsley, Conrad Levinson, Kyong Park, Ann Philbin, Gayatri Spivak, Grace Stanislaus, Sekou Sundiata, Bill Swindler, Brian Weil, and interns Sam Pratt, Maria Christina Villasenor, and Mimi Young, without whom this project would not have been possible.*

### Group Visits

*Group Visits are available for adult groups and school groups from grades 7 through 12. Gallery talks for visiting groups stimulate active inquiry about issues in contemporary art and culture through close examination of the Museum's exhibitions. Trained docents conduct talks appropriate to each visit group. For more information, please call Mayda Perez at (212) 219-1222.*

### Hours

*Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday: 12–6 p.m.  
Saturday: 12–8 p.m.  
Monday and Tuesday: closed*

### Admission

*\$3.50 general; \$2.50 artists, students, seniors, members and children under 12, free.*

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**The New Museum**  
OF CONTEMPORARY ART

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