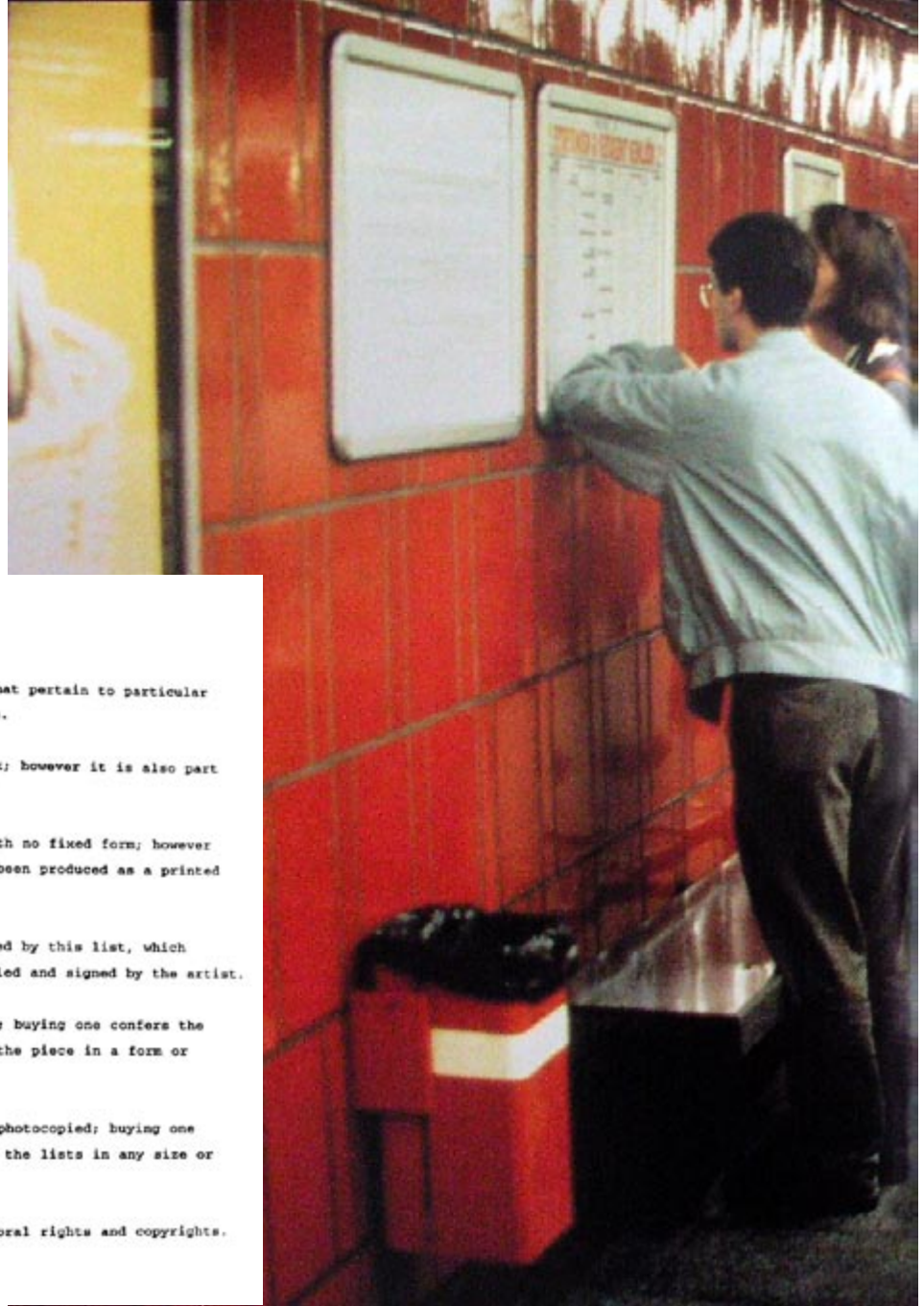
Angela Bulloch's Pushmepullme Drawing Machine (1991), in "Frankenstein" at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery

interactivity and re-ordered regimes

ANGELA BULLOCH

Since the late 1990s Angela Bulloch (b. 1966) has been pursuing groundbreaking fine art practice in the field of interactivity. What is perhaps most surprising about her work is that it is unusual. Most artists working in the 1990s and first half of the 2000s submit to the traditional lap dancer regime of the art museum (you can look but you cannot touch). in other words however avant-garde contemporary art might seem



RULES SERIES

1. The rules are lists of rules that pertain to particular places, practices or principles.

2. Each list is an individual work; however it is also part of a series.

3. Each list is a unique piece with no fixed form; however a collection of ten lists has been produced as a printed edition of 20.

4. Each unique piece is accompanied by this list, which becomes a certificate when titled and signed by the artist.

5. The unique pieces have no form; buying one confers the right to produce or reproduce the piece in a form or medium.

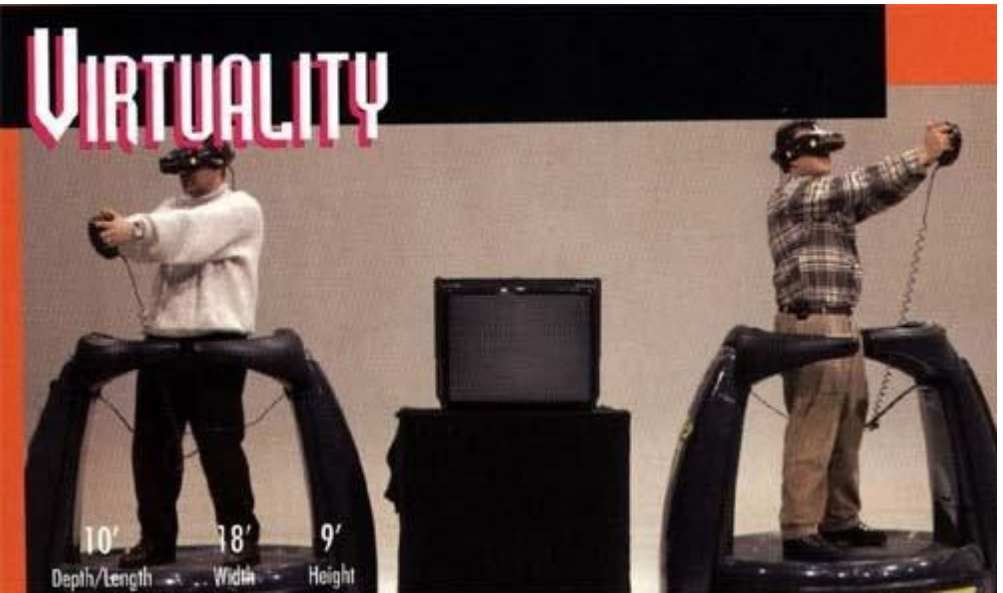
6. A rules series edition may be photocopied; buying one confers the right to photocopy the lists in any size or colour.

7. The artist asserts the usual moral rights and copyrights.

to be it is still ruled by the supremacy of the work of art as precious object: what Walter Benjamin referred to as 'cult value' and 'aura' (Benjamin 1961). Bulloch overcomes this regulatory regime by making her works respond to the presence of the viewer(s).

In her early experiments with interactivity such as *Pushmepullme*, 1991, and *Betaville*, 1994, Bulloch made use of a plotting machine to draw lines directly onto the gallery wall. The machines are activated by the sound and/or movement of people entering into the gallery space. The drawing that results from a number of such intrusions is random and therefore indisputably modern. Although it might be frustrating to some viewers that they cannot control the device more precisely, the fact of the matter is that the resulting design probably benefits from Bulloch placing random input over and above intentionality.

On the one hand Bulloch's interest in interactivity places her in the seminal field of new media fine art, on the other hand her fine art credentials are assured by evident relationships with conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s. This is especially evident in her Rules Series in which she expands her exploration of the regulations beyond the gallery and into many different spheres of modern life. Areas



she has covered include: strippers, bungee-jumpers, waiters and waitresses, the British Parliament, models, and she even devised rules for the handling of the Rules Series (MCA 1997) [see illustration bottom left].

When Bulloch inserts these rules into the zones of everyday life they concern she not only steps outside of the gallery into everyday life but also does so in a way that might provoke some degree of critical social reflection in a world otherwise seduced and narcotized by consumerism.

But as with many artists in this book Bulloch's relationship to the mediatized and consumerized society is not reducible to the black and white politics of the old left. In Trocadero, 1991, Bulloch listed all the entertainments in the Trocadero shopping and entertainment centre on Shaftsbury Avenue in London. Some of the games she lists seem more than simply seductive they seem to reflect and perhaps even inspire some of the interactive activities Bulloch is experimenting with in the zone of fine art. For example she provides an acount of 'Virtuality': 'a virtual reality machine which puts you in control of a high speed fighter lane. … You have two hand controls to control altitude, sideways directions, speed and two types of firing mechanisms. You can also turn your head to look out of the side window of the cockpit' (Kalmár 1998). Or one can read her comments on 'R 360': 'A complex mechanised video machine which you sit in, strap yourself in and remove all items from your pockets. The machine turns 360° circles verti-

Pedestrian Pixel System, 2000. The modular light system was introduced 28 September 2000. Bulloch's intervention comprises fifty-six light units, 50 x 50 cm each, and positioned in four significant locations. Each unit can display approximately 250 colours, which can be programmed to create sequential interplays of colour. As with Bulloch's gallery installations *Pedestrian Pixel System* is interactive. Sensors detect the movements of passers-by and translate them into a 'play of colours'. The speed at which the visitors walk can also be displayed, as frequency and movement become directly visible and readable. The image on the right also shows the way in which such a lighting system can enliven an otherwise dreary exterior (ok-centrum 2000). Photo: Saxinger

cally horizontally and diagonally.' Her descriptions are objective and without overt value judgement but the fact that she focuses on this venue suggests a relatioship between the interactivity explored in arcade games and Bullock's own work. The very fact that the remarkable experience immersive virtual reality can be found in the arcade and not in the art gallery points to the innate conservatism of the world of art, however 'cool' contemporary artists might feel, they are ineluctably weighed down by the mill-stone of of tradition.

But Bulloch pushes against this barrier more than most. And this is evident not only in her attempts to escape museum's lap dancer mentality (you can look but you can't touch) but also in her successful attempts to escape the confines of the gallery. Bulloch's most recent works achieve this by taking her experiments with interactivity into the domain of architectural design. Pedestrian Pixel System, 2000, for example takes Bulloch's interactive aesthetic out of the gallery and into everyday life. And what is remarkable about such work is that it is not a more common phenomenon in the world of art.