

## 9. Ordinary Gestures of Resistance

Ernest Larsen

Cold winter's day. Twenty-third Street in New York. Approaching home. I was having trouble breathing—as I often do. The frigid air cut into my lungs. I was crossing the densely trafficked spot where Fifth and Broadway merge. I made it to the first of the two traffic islands. The Triangle Building loomed on my left. A breathtaking building, if there ever was one.

The previous night the police had completely blocked traffic on Fifth Avenue at Twenty-third Street. A scene from the remake of the 1956 Japanese movie *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*, was being filmed. Last night it seemed all but certain that Godzilla had destroyed the Triangle Building, but somehow the next day it was still there.

Monsters, real estate, and the police are plain facts of everyday life. Since World War II all of us have been forced to believe in monsters. For the postwar Japanese a giant fire-breathing lizard was an apparently imaginary, ultimately reassuring displacement of an unimaginable terror—the real terror we visited upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Many sequels were made in the next few years, including my favorite: *Godzilla vs. the Sea Monster*. The new improved Godzilla, a fantastically superior—that is, infinitely more realistic—being compared with the old Godzilla, invades the island of Manhattan rather than the island of Japan. There's no telling why, except that at any given moment you can pretty much count on at least one fairly realistic monster being loose somewhere on this island.

I step onto the traffic island. There's a woman's red leather glove lying on the concrete. A fine fresh right-handed spot of color. I am not wearing gloves. My hands are cold. Mundane details. They belong here because this essay (only an attempt—to accord with the meaning of the French root *essai*) intends to lay hands on the relations between the province of the everyday and the province of installation. In any other

essay about installation I'd have to cut out such details, drop them—drop them deliberately, not accidentally as this red glove was left behind, fugitive on the island. They would be extraneous, the mere minutiae of everyday existence that are never except by accident elevated into the realm of art-critical discourse. Here, however, such detail may turn out to be indispensable.

The vulnerable red glove turns out to be an installation of a glove, rather than the real thing. But the model is "realistic," probably even more realistic than the new Godzilla, who after all also exists only as a model or a projection—as far as we know. The installation by Ilya Kabakov is, with a trace of irony, titled *Monument to the Lost Glove*. From even ten feet away the small object in the traffic island is scarcely identifiable. The whole point of a monument is to memorialize great events and great people. The ephemeral and the gestural—the movements most characteristic of the everyday—are not supposed to be worth remembering. Across the street in Madison Square Park, there's a monument to William H. Seward, a great man whom no one remembers. My guess is that *Monument to the Lost Glove* exists to invert whatever it is that people (passersby, pedestrians, the explorers of urban space) are supposed to think a monument properly is when they encounter it. Scale, obviously, is the first thing. The glove is to the human scale what the human scale is to the average everyday overwhelming monument.

My first memory: age two, sitting at the foot of the Lincoln Monument. Lincoln was also sitting. We were both sitting, side by side. He was tired, apparently. He sure looked tired. First memories are probably in some vital unestablishable way determining. But the main thing is that monuments situate the viewer in the physical relation of a child—a power relation, the stability and volume of the monument opposed to the fragility and insubstantiality of the human body. First memories are monumental.

Like many much more monumental monuments, *Monument to the Lost Glove* is supported by accompanying text, in four languages (English, Russian, Spanish, and Japanese), on nine etched-steel stanchions nearby. Deliberate overkill—nine to one. No fewer than nine texts memorialize the impermanence of an everyday act—the accident of losing a red glove. They provide nine distinct subjective readings of the loss. Nine intersections, nine musing I's. Or is it more accurate to multiply the nine by the four languages to produce a sizable crowd of thirty-six distinctive fictional viewers speaking to us?

There is nothing official, nothing authoritative, nothing that speaks from a place of power in these multiply inscribed texts. Rather, they invert the legitimizing function that such explanatory texts ordinarily assume, thereby calling into question monumentality itself, and the role that monumentality tends to play in art practice—which is to occupy a place for power, to inscribe power in a place. That legitimizing operation is in practice and by definition singular rather than plural. The nine first-person lyric poems, which are inscriptions of a different unofficial kind, anticipate nine possible encounters with viewers of the monumentally small glove. One such text reads:

Interest in the genuine, the real was lost long ago  
 And it is doubtful that it will return . . .  
 But don't those who say this think that everything will be of second  
 quality as a result of this,  
 It will only be an appearance, a deception, and it will gradually change  
 our nature,  
 Our values, our attitudes and we will become in the world surrounding us  
 Merely apparitions even to ourselves, murky shadows amongst other  
 such shadows.

It seems that the installation aims to valorize the otherwise ephemeral subjectivity of the everyday. Already several aspects of the everyday have suggested themselves: the chance encounter, movement, loss, desire, multiplicity. I shall try to get closer to this, to fill out the idea, as a hand does a glove. The installation seeks out the place where the random attention of the casual passerby already localizes itself, in the movement across a busy intersection, that purposeful (from here to there) but otherwise apparently empty transit from one corner to another. Without pointing a finger, it seems to indicate that the power to ascribe meaning should not lie solely within the dubious province of authority. The anonymous subjectivity of the everyday: the niche in the anonymous viewer's brain into which Kabakov drops a glove. Kabakov positions the apparent randomness of viewing as constituting both a kind of action (movement, touch) and a kind of reflection (reading, hearing oneself and other voices). An act of meaning that is by definition partial and multiple, and thus always incomplete or unfinished. Every day you do some things you did the day before. So, yes, you repeat yourself, but you don't repeat yourself in the same way. The present is the repeated frontier of the unrepeatable.

Still closer to home I pass a new sushi restaurant named Godzilla. A month later it changes its name to Monster, though the name Godzilla still appears on the menu. I don't have to ask the owners why they changed the name of the restaurant. Corporate lawyers have swooped down on the little neighborhood restaurant, just as Mothra, the flying monster, once attacked Godzilla many years ago, when Godzilla was still Japanese. The name Godzilla is trademarked by a monumental corporate entity that is not about to share it with a Japanese restaurant. But—for the Japanese—Godzilla is part of Japanese popular culture. Which means that it has the status of a shared meaning held in common. For the corporate owners of the monster character, creating meaning is beside the point. Or value is the only meaning. The act of seeing can be or perhaps is an act of creating value. The value created is by definition unlimited (rather than partial). One owns a trademark in perpetuity. The trademark is a modern, late-capitalist form of monumentality that literally inscribes the everyday—the kitchen table, a pair of jeans, and so on—invades the moment of the everyday and steals it for permanence, which appears to be in cahoots with power. Power is not so interested in owning the impermanent—unless it's convertible to value. Which seems

to involve the operation of fixing a singular totalizing meaning on an object, a meaning that is true or visible at all times and all places.

A carpenter was at work in the doorway to the brand-new Barbara Gladstone Gallery, which had been relocated from Soho to what had been the warehouse district of West Chelsea, as part of the strategic migration of art capital in New York City. Needless to say, the new galleries are all monumental. I stepped around the carpenter and entered. The impression of a pristine space effectively unspoiled by human habitation, which is invariably the dominant impression constructed and conveyed by the contemporary art gallery, was slightly compromised by this carpenter's presence. The presence of the worker is subtly unsettling in an arena that favors product over process—and thus tends to squeeze out the experience of the everyday. In the background as I write this I can hear Karen Carpenter singing on television. Somewhere way back in her ancestry a carpenter took on the surname Carpenter, lending permanence to the relation between his labor and the inscription of his name. The song she's singing is "Long Ago and So Far Away."

The inaugural exhibition in the new gallery, a space roughly the size of a small museum, was also Gary Hill's first solo show in New York. Why has it taken so long for such a well-known artist to get a solo? His video installations in New York have long received considerable institutional support, especially from the Whitney Museum, which has the deep pockets required for the technology-dependent illusionism favored by Hill. On the other hand, private commercial galleries have long steered clear of video and video installation. Video, even when disguised as an installation, still resists commodification as an art object, thirty years into its history as an art form. Its electronic reproducibility, its immateriality, tends to flatten or negate value. This leveling tendency can even, rightly or wrongly, cast suspicion on the actual value of all art objects—a deliberate intention of most first-wave video pioneers, who disdained or actively opposed commodification. However, video artists who work in a gallery or museum context have increasingly tended to avoid distribution in single-channel formats. Clearly not unaware of video's marginal economic status, they make work that can be readily labeled as installation—and give the impression that they are making an object with some chance of permanence. Gary Hill's solo show in New York appeared to signify a break in the wall of resistance to a certain kind of video exhibition in the galleries of New York. And in fact the year after this show saw a deluge of video in private galleries—nearly always in the form of installation.

I came to see just one of Hill's pieces: *Viewer*. In the gallery's largest room three video projectors mounted at intervals on the ceiling produced a seamless image on the wall. A very long row of day laborers, seventeen men larger than life, standing there barely moving, shoulder to shoulder, staring straight ahead. Silent, waiting. Waiting for what? The longer the viewer stands there facing the seventeen laborers projected there, the larger that question looms. The room can feel very crowded after a while, even though there is only one person, one body, in it.

*Monument to a Lost Glove* inscribed a multiply subjective text into the installa-



tion, situated it in relation to an apparently random encounter, and thereby raised the question of the relation of subjectivity to the question of the real, to the role of subjectivity in perception, to public art and installation, to fear (or loss) and desire, to the instability of meaning, to the construction of meaning as a ceaseless human activity. It takes time to read those texts, and, in the course of reading, the glove changes. You feel the spatial succumb to the temporal. *Viewer*, on the other hand, leaves the problem of subjectivity entirely up to the viewer. Kabakov takes us in hand, gives us a tour. Hill is much cooler. *Viewer* situates the viewer within a suspended moment, or rather within an indefinitely extended moment. The laborers move very little, but they do move, and there's no telling how long they've been there or how long they will continue to stand there, waiting. Only the viewer can change the situation—by leaving.

The temptation when approaching that lost glove is to lean over and pick it up. I succumbed to the temptation. Not because I thought the glove was "real" but because I wanted to touch it, to know what it felt like—the soft leather turned out to be hard, probably some kind of plastic, I decided. You test things like that, as if you're still a small child, apprehending the world in an intellectual-sensual-emotional whole. What is real? What is fantasy? Is reality fantastic? Questions that children of a certain age tend to ask.

Suppose the moment could be indefinitely extended—and you were standing in front of a line of day laborers staring soberly ahead. This gives the moment a definite weight. The way you stand and the way they stand are very different. For one thing, there is no necessity in the way that you stand—while their bodies are filled with necessity, leaving little room for anything else. They will wait as long as they have to for work, won't they? And no matter how long they wait you're never going to put them to work. And that feeling of the moment of waiting that will never end is what seventeen men multiplied by the millions experience every day around the world in the abjectness of wondering whether they'll be able to make their living that day. It's as if they are saying: Are you going to put us to work or are you just going to keep on standing there, staring at me, with that quizzical expression on your face? Kabakov's *Monument to a Lost Glove* deliberately eschews *spatial* monumentality. *Viewer* builds *temporal* monumentality out of the meeting—the subtly confrontational dramatic content of the meeting—between the interested implicated standing body of the viewer, with its relative freedom, and the seventeen standing bodies of the day laborers, with their submission to the compulsory order of things. Within that tension, the category of the monumental turns out not to be irrelevant or absolutely contradictory to the experience of the everyday. The constitutive temporality of video produces this other kind of monumentality, an embodiment in solemnity that the statue of William H. Seward was perhaps intended to produce in its time. *Viewer's* solemnity is not about refiguration in the ennobling bronzed permanence of the body of the (now forgotten) great man, but about what's ordinarily (and repeatedly) forgotten about the anonymous bodies we encounter anonymously in everyday life—produced within the tremulous, breathy immateriality of video, with its convincing impression of present

tense. In Los Angeles, and throughout much of urban and suburban California, you often see day laborers in such groups, if you're up early enough. They stand there, often forming a ragged line, outside strip malls and suburban shopping centers, or at corners where everybody knows they will be. They wait until a shorthanded contractor or landscaper drives up and they pile into his pickup and they're gone. If you're not observant, or if you're not up early enough, you might never know that the day laborers, who are often illegal immigrants, were ever there at all. They are an abundant source of cheap, low-risk, no-obligation labor.

This association may be subjective. Or it might be inescapable. But it was triggered in part by my encounter with the carpenter outside the gallery. Video projection, much more than film projection, which has long been stabilized for viewer consumption in customary venues, plays on unsettling the phantasmatic relation of absence and presence: on the one hand, the bodily presence of the viewer; on the other, the physical absence of what is projected (which quite often are human bodies). Viewers walk into the space of video projection relatively uninstructed. They stand, lean, squat, circulate, but the protocol of viewing is not stabilized. (Consider in contrast the elaborate—elaborately restrictive and disciplinary—protocols developed for movie theaters and refined in multiplexes.) The actual unexpected physical presence of the worker at the entrance to the gallery oddly lent support to the representation of the physically absent workers inside the gallery—the chance encounter that is so characteristic of the everyday as one moves through the city, never sure who or what may be around the corner.

The viewer is not on a schedule. It's not to the profit of the galleries to put us on one—as it is to the profit of the museums during monumental blockbuster shows. It's as if the galleries have yet to learn the discipline of narrative. Video installation work using projection systems has become much more common, migrating from museum spaces to the galleries. When the human body is the crucial projected element, the illusion of presence becomes operative. Such illusionism is magical in a sense that is as old-fashioned as the magic lantern or the pioneer magical films of Georges Méliès. Much of Hill's video projection work depends on the deliberate removal (or sacrifice, in an almost religious sense) of context, of the factual, of much more than a phenomenological specificity, all of which tend to flatten the possibility of contradiction in either a dramatic or social sense in favor of a play between the physical and the metaphysical, the embodied and the disembodied. And it depends finally on the intimate relation of the viewer's bodily presence to the physical beings magically projected on the darkened wall of the museum or gallery. However, this last point can unexpectedly return video installation/projection to the lost moment of contradiction, to the extent that the viewer in his or her full, somewhat less disciplined bodily presence confronts these projected bodies (not present and yet present), bringing to the experience what's lacking in or has been suppressed by the projection—his or her own irreducible specificity, his or her everyday presence.

Such a moment of questioning, of contradiction, is heightened in *Viewer*. Hill's

minimalism, which has often tended to render or to refer to presence as a spiritual quality, is in fact politicized as soon as he brings the "real" world (in the form of the full-size projections of seventeen day laborers standing and facing the viewer) into the gallery space, making present what is ordinarily absent from the pristine space—and what was absent from all the other projection/installations in Hill's show. What this installation suggests is that contradiction, rather than, say, mystery or the spiritual (qualities that underline and reinforce the illusionism of projection), may be in fact well-nigh indispensable to any video installation that has any ambition to resonate in the "real" world, outside the representational spaces of the gallery and museum. Which indicates that this apparently disembodied electronic art form can be as material as any other art form when, like the action of picking up a lost glove on the sidewalk, it is able to fulfill the conditions of confrontation: the temporal clash of subjectivities. This involves such elements as action, presence, time, and deliberate intervention. That's not so much, really. The shock of a monster tearing your heart out is much more costly.

Today I ventured down the block to check the accuracy of a quote from Kabakov's text. It's handy to have the public art you're writing about only a block away. Next to the Triangle Building a two-story triangular billboard had been erected to advertise the upcoming premiere of *Godzilla* a full three months in advance. The billboard was so big it blocked part of the sidewalk and part of Fifth Avenue (at a moment when the city's "quality of life" mayor was inveighing against mere human beings who impede the flow of traffic by jaywalking). The billboard text wasn't as poetic or subjective as Kabakov's: "He's as tall as the Flatiron Building," read the lead line. Then: "from the creators of Independence Day," in smaller lettering above the title, "GODZILLA (TM)." Then the kicker: "Size Does Matter." This suitably self-conscious boast locates the psychic source of this completely unnecessary remake—a male fantasy of compensatory potency, castration anxiety. All of this while across the street there lies that small lost right-handed red glove. Kabakov couldn't have foreseen such a travesty, but it does put the ostentatious modesty of his approach in an even more apt antimemorial light. But this encounter also alerted me to how much alike the new *Godzilla* and *Monument to a Lost Glove* really were: the two works of art, each in their own way, were about the consequences of loss.

The material "abjection of those who must wait" is how Simon Leung, in his essay "Squatting through Violence," designates one side of the power differential that is the primary condition of everyday life.<sup>1</sup> He quotes Maurice Blanchot: "He who is sovereign is the one who does not have to wait." Leung's essay is framed by an anecdote told to him by his brother about seeing at a bus stop in San Jose, California, a number of Vietnamese immigrants squatting rather than sitting at the available seats. Following Marcel Mauss's "study of the technological education of the body," Leung develops a conception of the displaced body in the city that posits it as a possible mode of resistance within "the sovereign moment" and "against the servitude to utility that permeates the timescape of the modern world." To squat rather than sit is to

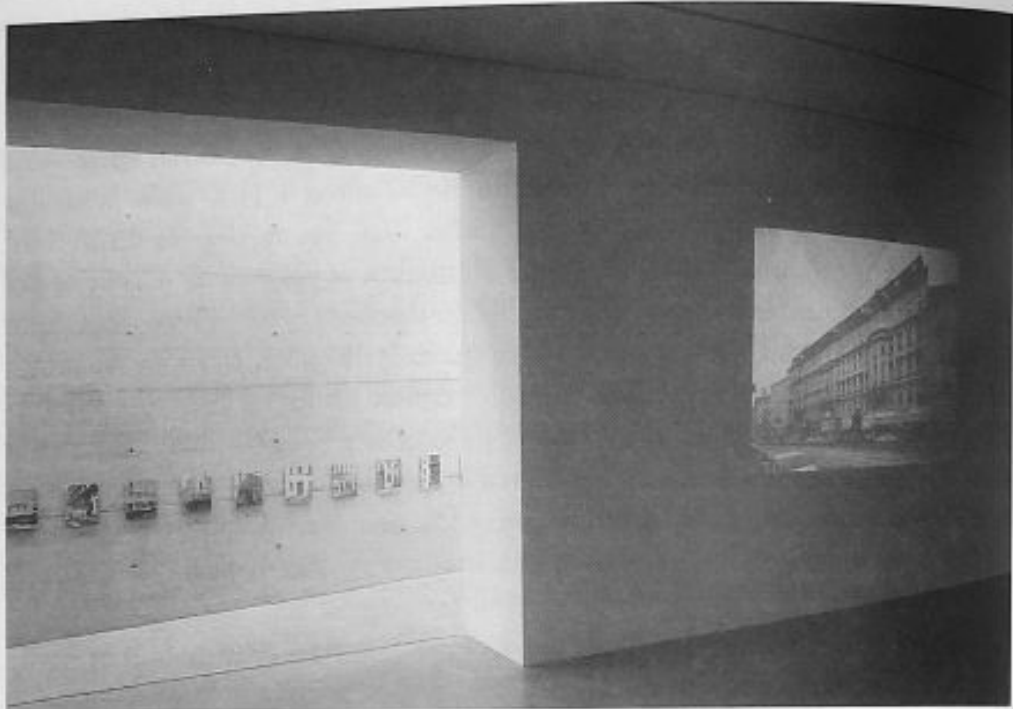


Figure 1. Simon Leung, *Squatting Project/Wien*, 1998, installation view, 131 black-and-white photographs, 131 blocks of text, and a rotating slide projection of 50 images in a room. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

show forth bodily that one is not on a schedule—one can outlast the sovereign in refusing the supremacy of the moment. However, the abjection produced by one's complicitous submission to, rather than resistance to, compulsion is a desolating state of being that overtakes every worker. Every job I've ever had produced that feeling throughout my body, sooner or later—and usually sooner.

All of which makes me think that it may be worthwhile to set the repetitive against the unique (or "the sovereign moment") as a way to produce an account of the specific temporalities that structure the everyday and that therefore would receive displaced if obsessive treatment in certain kinds of installation. My point is that any installation that concerns itself with the production and reproduction of the conditions of everyday life would probably be structured by these temporalities. In other words, the unique is represented by the moment (the particularity of which is by definition unrepeatable), while the repetitive (the accumulation of sameness) slogs through willy-nilly to represent that which is inescapable. Leung gets at this admirably in his meditation on squatting, particularly by framing the moment in its latent potential for resistance. The everyday is structured by unique and repetitive temporalities, and it's within the unique that one glimpses, if only for that moment, escape from the compulsory regimen of existence. In fact, however, abjection stalks both temporalities.

To take up the "abjection of those who must wait" I advert almost vertiginously to the era when I drove a cab in New York City for a living. The abjection of waiting was always a condition of this job. As an irregular I showed up to work and would be forced to wait several hours for a car, never knowing if or when I'd get one. At times I wouldn't



get one—and would have to return home empty-handed, not ab- but dejected, which is to say thrown away. But even when I was lucky enough to secure a cab, the driver's seat still warm from the body of the day-shift cabbie, I would then experience the abjection of driving the empty cab manically up and down the same limited set of avenues, searching for fares for the next twelve hours, racing the same green lights, making inevitably predictable turns, sitting in the driver's seat while waiting in suspended motion for someone to hail the cab. The inescapability of repetition lies at the heart of this abjection/dejection, and twenty-five years later I can still feel it, if I let myself.

To this I oppose or perhaps supplement my one true experience as a day laborer. I was absolutely penniless and abject. I showed up before dawn outside a storefront in Newhall, California. I'd barely slept that night. I had no idea what I'd be doing—I only knew that at the end of the day I'd be paid in cash. My lover and I were living for free in a state campground that was otherwise uninhabited, and we were at the point of stealing food from the local supermarket. If you haven't ever reached that point, you don't know what it is to live. This is the snobbery of the destitute. Anyway I showed up, along with a number of other miserable-looking men. We waited for several hours in a state of not-knowing. Then we were loaded into closed airless vans and transported to a Catholic church carnival in Santa Monica. We were worked for minimum wage without food or drink or a break and then loaded back into the vans and dropped off where we started. It was midnight. I had some cash in my pocket, but my abjection was so intense I scarcely knew my own name. I found my lover not far from the spot where we'd agreed to meet many hours earlier. She saw me, ran up to me, and walloped me across the face. She'd assumed I'd been dead for hours and had

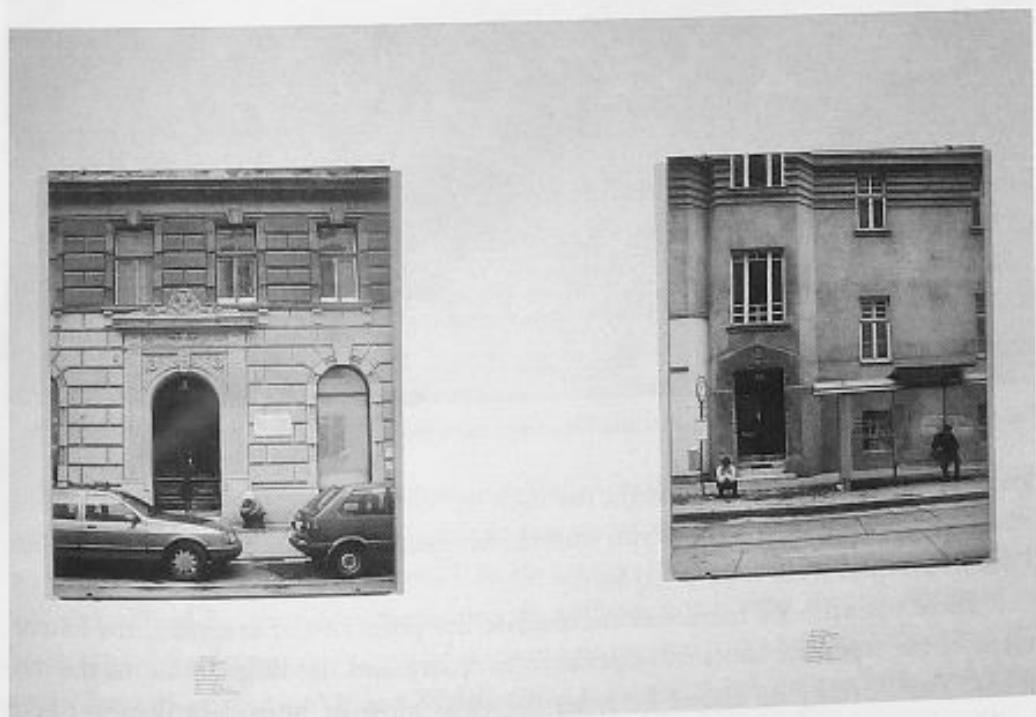


Figure 2. Detail of *Squatting Project/Wien*. Photograph courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3. Detail of *Squatting Project/Wien*. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

given up all hope. The slap brought me back to life again. Suddenly you know who you are when your lover wallops you with the liberating violence of stored-up anguish. I decided to find work some other way.

These two true-life narratives encapsulate the poles of the everyday: the entrapment of the repetitive in its submission to necessity and the desperation of the moment. There's really no choice between the two. Most of humanity lives out both within the compulsions of the everyday. Which is, I suppose, why the work of a so-



Figure 4. Detail of *Squatting Project/Wien*. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

cially coherent or socially responsive installation in its own obsessive-compulsiveness reproduces this structure. The immense but latent violence of compulsion—the repetitive action of running a carnival ride for intolerable masses of laughing children—was crystallized by that slap. Resistance is nothing if it is only mental: we need to break out of the instrumental use of the body and to feel it as a break. Walk across the street. See a glove that isn't there. Walk into an immense room and confront with your body the seventeen bodies of the abject workers who are not working.



Figure 5. Sherry Millner, *Protective Coloration*, 1997. Installation detail. Courtesy of the artist.

The sanctioned public art site which *Monument to a Lost Glove* occupies—as a project of the Public Art Fund in New York—is built around the principle of the more or less random encounter that is itself a condition and major excitement of life in the city. The theorization of such encounters, especially as potential sites or modes of micro-resistance to things as they are, receives perhaps its most intellectually impassioned treatment in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Obviously, a gallery site, a private interior sanctioned space for the exhibition and consumption of art, cannot hope to be quite the same such rich site of encounter. It edits out much, if not all, of the apparent randomness, multiplicity, and heightened potential of contradiction, not to mention the potential for violence. A third, less sanctioned site, privately owned, like a gallery, but publicly traversed, like a city street, is the shopping mall.

As a site for installation, the shopping mall encounters viewers as consumers, active bodies intent on working to fulfill their desire, whether immediate or deferred, without really being entirely sure what concrete form that gratification of desire will take. Shopping, about which we tend to be dismissive for its significance in our everyday lives despite its obvious centrality, nevertheless involves looking, seeking, discovering the shape of desire in the form of a product or sometimes an experience. It tends to be purposive and even more actively sensual in ways that surpass or bypass the walker in the city or the viewer in the gallery.

I once helped to organize and produce an installation show in a small working-class mall in New England. The working idea for the show was encapsulated by its title: *ReSituations*. The notion of the creation of a situation in which installations might function as a point of intervention into the everyday lives of shoppers was to some





Figure 6. Sherry Millner, *Protective Coloration*, 1993. Christina's World Order and video monitor. Courtesy of the artist.

extent inspired by situationist concepts of cultural intervention. The situationists tended to be vague about what they meant by the creation of situations. Nevertheless, one situationist definition of a "constructed situation" is "a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambience and a game of events."<sup>2</sup> Loosely speaking, the four artists (James Montford, Stashu Kybartas, Jacqueline Hayden, and Sherry Millner) involved, along with myself, adhered to this approach, which seems to be about introducing an active principle of fiction into an otherwise generally predictable "real-life" experience. Certainly we were all in favor of seeking out and stimulating that "moment of life" from the shoppers. And the installations provided something of a unitary ambience—a tour through the unexpected that provided the participatory unpredictable outline of a game of events.

In a general way you always know what to expect from everyday life. It is, after all, your point of reference to everything that is not the everyday, but in the moments of specific encounter, you can't begin to know what is really going to happen. So the multivalent responses of consumers were often arresting. However, they're not what I especially remember about the experience. Instead what stays with me are the responses of the people who really inhabited the mall—not the consumers who drifted through the space (behavior that recalls what the situationists called the *derive*) and then left to pursue another ambience, perhaps—but the people who worked in the mall, those who intimately abjectly experienced the repetition of working every day in the mall. Those were the people who took up the installations as their own experience in their own terms, unpredictably. They broke through the unitary ambience of work to adapt the installations to their own game of events.

The people who ran the mall conducted their own personalized docent tours for people they invited, articulating their own takes on the four pieces, staking their own claim. Workers in the mall took the opportunity to avoid the food court during lunch breaks and repaired instead to the novel spaces provided by the installations, hanging out in particular within Sherry Millner's mock-ethnographic *Protective Coloration*, which, although comfortably furnished with chairs and a couch, depicted "the modern American family decked out like a warrior clan" in a full-size bunker/living room, with every element meticulously done up in one of four different styles of camouflage (to the degree that even the well-known Wyeth painting, *Christina's World*, has become *Christina's World Order*, with the eponymous heroine, now armed and dangerous and done up in desert camouflage, crawling toward a farmhouse beset by commandos and helicopter). Most startlingly, each day young soldiers who worked in the army recruiting station (downstairs from the defunct restaurant space we used for the exhibit) would appear in full camouflage regalia amid the *Protective Coloration* installation. They were indistinguishable from the four other camouflage-mannequins who occupied the family bunker room. Observers, naturally unable to tell whether the soldiers were in fact part of the installation as they stood within it, were startled by the uncanny contrast of presence and absence manifested by the living soldier and the nonliving camouflage-mannequin family. The violence of representation at the compulsory

heart of everyday life was here living and breathing—and also “dead,” given the irony of the re-presented violence. The crossover from daily life to art was for a few moments complete.

The qualification “for a few moments” is crucial. The narratives of daily life and of art come alive only in such sovereign moments—in the absence of its permanent transformation, a project that the major theoretician of everyday life, Henri Lefebvre, speculates on briefly but evocatively at the end of *Everyday Life in the Modern World*: “From an intellectual point of view the word ‘creation’ will no longer be restricted to works of art but will signify a self-conscious activity, self-conceiving, reproducing its own terms, adapting these terms and its own reality (body, desire, time, space), being its own creation; socially the term will stand for the activity of a collectivity assuming the responsibility of its own social function and destiny—in other words for self-administration.”<sup>3</sup> If these words, published in the watershed year of 1968, seem almost touchingly naive thirty years later, that response may be more a measure of our own distance from the potential of the moment than a commentary on Lefebvre’s gallant refusal to turn his back on the prospect of change. The gesture, the look, the touch, the shudder, the laugh, the disguise, the intervention—these emblems of spontaneity are what mark the frontier of such change.

In Simon Leung’s *Squatting Project/Wien* piece, the act of squatting marks that same frontier, though for him the act of squatting, as an activity of everyday life, is not marked by its spontaneity but by its repetitiveness within a particular cultural formation. For a show sponsored by the Generali Foundation, which has its headquarters in Vienna, Leung had himself photographed while squatting in front of no fewer than 131 buildings owned by the conglomerate the Generali Group. The Generali Foundation, despite its name, is not a true foundation. Far from being independent of the Generali Group, its budget, staff, building, and so on, are tied to the Generali Group, which is one of the oldest and largest insurance companies in the world. Generali is much bigger than Godzilla, the Asian-identified monster. Size does matter, after all.

It was in the Prague branch of the Generali that Kafka worked for some time. In one of the 131 photos the viewer sees Leung squatting under Kafka’s name—a sign on a door announces a theatrical version of *The Trial* in the midst of being produced in one of the Generali-owned buildings. In a certain sense, then, it might be said that Kafka is still working for Generali. Given the size and the nature of Generali’s holdings in Vienna and throughout the world and the massively increased value of Kafka as a commodity, Kafka will very likely be working for Generali as long as it continues to exist.

Leung says:

My project, *Squatting Project/Wien*, was to squat in front of every building owned by EA-Generali in the city of Vienna, roughly following the logic that this collection of buildings, totaling in worth well over a billion dollars, is a “real collection” of “real estate” for EA-Generali, and can be depicted in relation to a collection of art, which the Generali Foundation also owns. The 131 photographs are installed at the exhibition

space of the Generali Foundation, at about 4 feet from the floor (at squatting eye-level). Each photo is accompanied by text directly below it, giving details of the address of the buildings, the year it was built, the year it was bought, its commercial, residential occupancy, etc. In the middle of this installation was a small darkened room, where I projected 50 slides, each an image of a real estate holding of the EA-Generali in Vienna. These fifty images were published in a real estate brochure by Generali (again, there is an echo of the art collection and the catalogue). Since the room is opened on three sides into the photo installation, one can see the large image of the projection simultaneously with the small photos through the doorways.<sup>4</sup>

A fragile human body posed against one monumental edifice after another. Difference posed against sameness, the one versus the many, the human being versus the collection. The subject versus the object. The mobile versus the immovable.

De Certeau dedicates *The Practice of Everyday Life* "to the ordinary man," saying in part: "This anonymous hero is very ancient. He is the murmuring voice of societies. In all ages, he comes before texts. He does not expect representations. He squats now at the center of our scientific stages."<sup>5</sup> Much as we might regret de Certeau's linguistic erasure of the ordinary woman, it's clear, given de Certeau's meticulous use of language, that his use of the verb *squats* is directly tied to a perception of time in which this ordinary man's physical being in the present tense is nothing if not persistent. Such persistence is itself a kind of mute resistance.

There is no longer in the world any efficacious logic opposed to the logic of the conglomerate. To the logic of the conglomerate is opposed the individual logic of the everyday. The measure and the scale of the everyday is the human body—the body first of all as mute witness in its specific gestural force and containment of violence and submission. The body waits. For food, rest, sleep, the elements, for change. Now what is Generali? Simply an insurance company. Insurance, as everyone knows, is a rigged game of chance. The insurance company always wins the game, always profits almost beyond imagining on the misery and privation of human existence—the frailty of the body. Isomorphism.

The logic of the collection—whether it's a collection of buildings or a collection of art—is the same. Ownership and value are based on the legitimization of violence. Art is no alibi. Art is an alibi nevertheless. Simon Leung ungraciously and yet still graciously bites the hand that feeds him. The presence of the body as witness guarantees us no redress. We are all insured. Everyone who can pay can pay to be insured. And yet. The question to be asked is to be asked about logic itself. Leung's piece is as simple as possible. And as quiet. There is no rhetoric. The text is purely factual. Facts speak for themselves. Some facts, once brought into the light, virtually have the ring of an accusation.

Looking at "the un(der)assimilated Asian body," we are encouraged to think about the everyday act of squatting. We wonder who squats and why—and for how long. Not only because all the photos depict the same squatter but because of the



height at which they are hung on the wall. Which means, for most of us, that to look at the photos we must lean over a bit, push our bodies into a slightly uncomfortable position, lean into the place of the squatter. We must enact another technology of the body. The posture we must assume puts us in a physical relation, not to the object (one of the 131 buildings), but to the subject (the squatter). We enact the relation of persistence to resistance. Our posture obeying the logic of the photographs disobeys the logic of the collection of real estate. It's as if the real estate collection were being cut down to size—which matters, of course.

Antimonumental resituations of the human body accumulate: leaning over to look and perhaps grasp a glove that isn't there, or to stand there being confronted by the long line of waiting laborers, or to find oneself detoured out of the embodied position of the shopper or freed for once from the physical choices available to the worker in the mall.

*Protective Coloration* resituates the aesthetic production of the logic of war within the zone of the reproduction of everyday life: the home. Ironically exploiting the glacial monumentality of the frozen moment of the ethnographic diorama, common to natural history museum display, the installation effectively defamiliarizes the familial, as if it had doomed itself to extinction because of its rapture with violence. The home and the battlefield become one: the home sheds its pacific costume and becomes the training ground for both sanctioned and unsanctioned violence. The metaphor/reality of camouflage, that which must be hidden from view, is pursued to the smallest possible detail, which oddly reveals to what extent the home itself is an ensemble of ritual objects, repetitively used in specific technologies of the body. The unstinting elaborateness of visual transformation produces the conviction of simultaneity. Even the camouflaged mom is caught in the lifeless posture of deploying her chosen weapon, the camouflaged vacuum cleaner.

*Squatting Project/Wien* resituates the vicious concentration of real estate wealth in the urban environment within the same conglomerate's art foundation. The collection of representations of the conglomerate's real estate fits snugly in the art container that fits snugly inside the conglomerate container. The repetitive difference of 131 photographs measures the abstraction of ownership and wealth against the bodies of viewers caught up in a physically determined but individual response to squatting, which they would need to repeat 131 times to understand fully.

Gary Hill, in an elegantly minimal video installation, *Viewer*, produces an unvoiced protest against totality, separation, absence, passivity, and the loss of subjectivity, resituating day laborers in a mute confrontation with the lone viewer. Each of these pieces insists on the viewer's active present temporal engagement, to produce their own physical response to the intolerable, to engage the physical present against the repetitive weight of history. The subjective is offered as antimonumental, various, multiple, unfinished, partial.

*Monument to a Lost Glove* produces its own thirty-six-voiced subjective commentary on itself, along the way demonstrating the ubiquity of the facility of making

meaning as an everyday activity and the inescapable partiality of that voiced subjectivity. Each of these installations demands or produces not only a mental but also an active physical engagement as a condition of participating in the terms of intervention with which they are engaged. "A self-conscious activity, self-conceiving, reproducing its own terms, adapting these terms and its own reality (body, desire, time, space)." Closing the gap, in other words: reclaiming the space colonized by Godzilla and the mayor, the shopping mall and the conglomerate—even the gallery.

Yesterday, which was Good Friday according to the Christian schema, I saw Jesus alive like you and me. Since that doesn't happen everyday, I stopped my rented Fiat right there at the edge of the village green just off the moor in Devonshire. I grabbed the video camera, got out of the car, and videotaped Jesus, dressed in a flowing white gown, as he carried a massive black cross on his back to the gnarled tree in the center of the green. There he stopped. It was raining, windy, and very cold. It had been snowing that morning. My hands were freezing. But I wanted to get some footage of Jesus. It was a moment that might never come again. I haven't been Catholic for a very long time but I knew Jesus when I saw him. Tomorrow is Easter Sunday. Redemption is at hand.

#### Notes

1. Simon Leung, "Squatting through Violence," *Documents* 6 (spring/summer 1995): 92-101.
2. Ken Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 45.
3. Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), 149.
4. Leung, "Squatting through Violence," 92-101.
5. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 3.