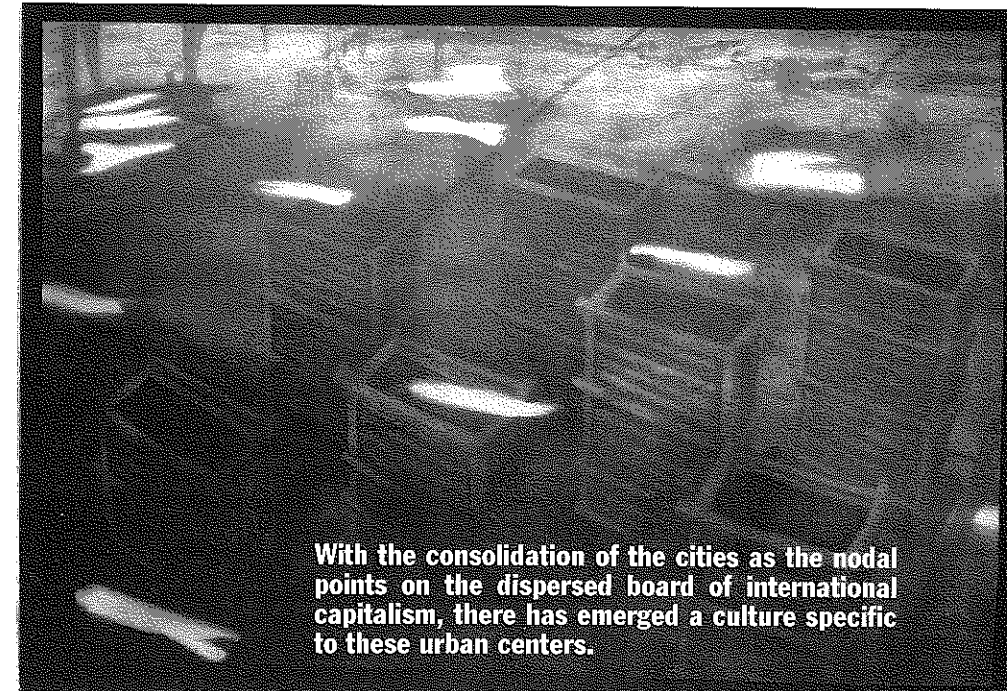"Let's Start Again," Andrew Olcott. From his show entitled "On Architecture and the Body, "Gallery 44, Toronto, November 1994.

The International Urban Elite and the Culture of Instant Transmission

The Nation-State is passé, the mega-city is omnipotent. Alex Ferentzy studies the implications of this shift.

With the consolidation of the cities as the nodal points on the dispersed board of international capitalism, there has emerged a culture specific to these urban centers.

W hat Stepford and Strange in *Rival Firms: Competition for World Market Shares* call a "privileged transnational business civilization," is not merely a passive recipient of social pressures, but is actively engaged in a process of creating culture; simultaneously delineating its identity and establishing barriers to deny entry to outsiders. While many such barriers are spatial and economic, others present themselves as the site of a invasive enterprise at cultural definition. In order to understand these endeavours, we have to clarify the changes and continuities between current practices and those that were apparent in earlier periods. In this way we will be able to specify what is new, what is an exaggeration of previous trends and what assumes a different form in relation to what some have called the informational mode of production.

Michèle White, 1993

I am leading up to that most annoying yuppie phrase of "doing lunch" which goes further than merely having lunch and exaggerates the level of activity yet again.

in his classic essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," George Simmel argued that the sheer number of formal, rational and abstract intellectual permutations that the urban dweller living in a money economy must perform as part of his/her everyday activity, combined with the frequency of encounters with strangers, fosters a mental attitude that is abstract, rationalistic and aloof.

Simmel emphasized the role of money in this process of fostering a rationalistic attitude. Insofar as money represents an abstraction that is rationally manipulatable and removed from where and how its value was produced, it lends credence to a notion of the existence of an abstract reality that is graspable in a rational and detached manner.

Language is the scene of an on-going power struggle that demarcates the above shifts; its refractions of meaning signal intimate political battles. Every GRRRRL knows this. As does that self-named Revolting Hag Mary Daly. To look at current words and expressions it is necessary, yet again, to get a sense of where they come from. Without this historical perspective everything seems simply to fall from the sky for no particular reason.

"To have lunch" is a linguistic device that involves the introduction of a verb between the participants in an event and the event itself. Perhaps it is more obvious in the way that "to dine" becomes "to have dinner." As the verb becomes a noun, it is objectified; it becomes the object of the action and the people become the actors. The event is mediated by the verb "to have" introducing an element of possessiveness into the

utterance. While the event is now possessed, it is also at a greater distance. What is this little possessive weirdness that has come between us and our dinner? In a society that validates the act of possessing it should not be all that surprising that the emphasis should be on consumption rather than on the experience, just as earlier the expression "to take one's dinner" expressed the aristocratic situation. **I am leading up to that most annoying yuppie phrase of "doing lunch" which goes further than merely having lunch and exaggerates the level of activity yet again. The doing of "doing lunch" operates as a signifier of a certain status and a way of being in the world which must push the object of its intentions more harshly than merely having can indicate.** It is also a magical act which attempts to make all the haphazard and non-instrumental aspects of life disappear. Perhaps most importantly, the agreement to do lunch marks a deal between parties that the event will be contained within the codifications of the professional elite. Though they are lunching, there is no need to fear that they will lapse into a temporarily passive state, that the social encounter might be non-instrumental. No, they will do it.

Nike's slogan "Just Do It" universalizes this doing into an order-word. The command to "just do it" sets things rolling and organizes the world by giving this kind of senseless activity priority. It is in relation to this order-word that we must appreciate the rantings not only of GRRRLS and Hags, but also of those schizophrenics who look at the world-order, perceive the order-word, and transform it all into a new whirled order.

This splitting of expressions into their component parts has other related effects, particularly in those areas of human life which can only be expressed in qualitative terms and which Simmel spoke of as "irrational, instinctive and sovereign traits and impulses." I am thinking of moods, emotions, desires, beliefs and delusions. We say "I want an apple" or "I want to have my nipples pierced" or even "I want to go home," and we abstract from these different desires a unified transcendental DESIRE. They are separated from their situation and then reunited in the abstract. Of course this is still Platonic thinking. The myriad different tables participate in the

ideal form TABLE, which is their deepest truth, their essential nature. This is evident in the study of emotions where every anxiety, fear or panic is said to reflect the universal condition of which it is a mere imperfect particular. As we deprive everything of its validity outside of its adaptability to our technocratic purposes, we create a metaphysic out of our very alienation. And because it is a metaphysic it is apparent in our language and unavoidable in the world. We find that we cannot "do it" to the world or to others, without in some sense doing it to ourselves.

This process generates a plane of abstraction (the set DESIRE: Desire of apple, Desire of nipple piercing, etc.) which is available for analysis. We have seen a large expansion of the territory (moods, thoughts and emotions which are of no immediate use-value in our society) which is first problematized -through posing the impossible question "what is your anxiety exactly like?"- and then reintroduced to the process of capital accumulation through the experts' privileged access to the plane of abstraction, where every anxiety, phobia and panic can be clearly delineated and approached in a rational, instrumental manner.

Though I deny their rational character, there is no denying that these planes of analysis have become what David Harvey calls "concrete abstractions." It becomes impossible to approach them from outside their cultural existence, from a purely rational denial of the validity of this presupposition. Quite the contrary, it is here in the power of their cultural existence that they must be encountered.

Such concrete abstractions are no longer understandable in the monolithic forms that typified modernism. They have moved, along with everything else, to a systems-theoretic rationality and so it should not be surprising to find a host of cybernetic terms invading the language of sociability. **I am thinking here of keeping in touch, touching base, networking and so on. They all affirm the importance of maintaining contact, of being a point on the grid. Within this grid there is a space of flows, and we delude ourselves if we think that there is no politics in this grid and that a little seduction will make everything alright.**

The vast territory that is problematized in this manner is also a cybernetic
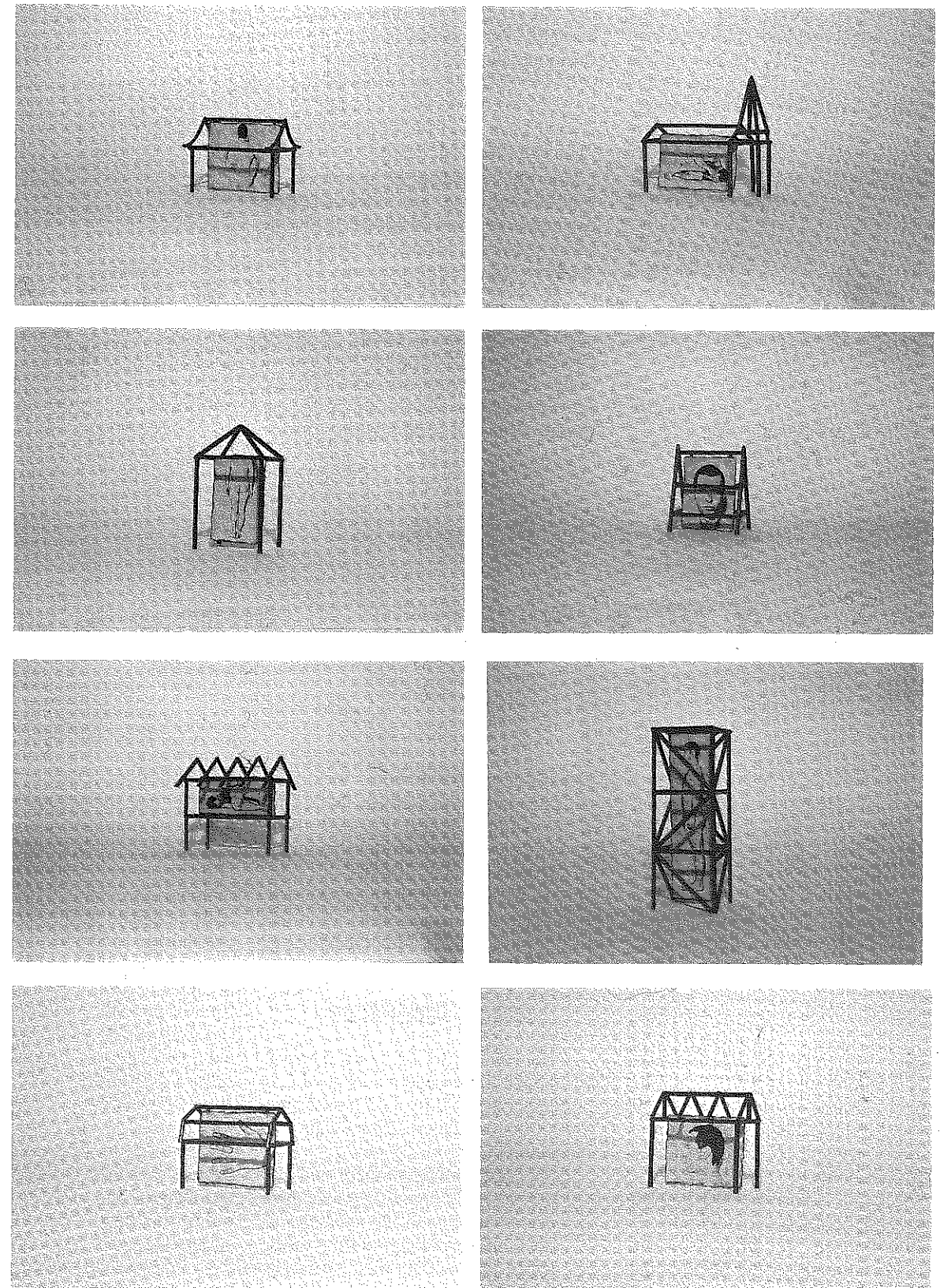
"And We Built," Andrew Olcott. From his show entitled "On Architecture and the Body," Gallery 44, Toronto, November 1994.

grid because we have generated too many overlaps, too many nuances of detail for a simple asylum to hold. The truth of the asylum (as Jean Baudrillard and Donna Haraway have pointed out) is no longer in the seeing, but in maintaining electro-chemical contact. Like the cybernetic chart of information flows, the individual is merely a point of contact, a point of possible feedback, and the new discipline is characterized by being on this grid, and having the truth of any specific point removed from localized access. This is why it is so important to be in a cluster. The point on the grid only makes sense in relation to the flows which surround it; without a decent cluster, these flows can be rerouted without the least consultation with the points in question.

that bar access to the undeserving or to discipline the body into conformity with the dominant aesthetic criteria. The points on the grid must be capable of subtle adjustments to the changing flows around them. As Paul Virilio writes in "The Third Interval: Critical Transition," **...with the revolution of instantaneous transmissions, we are witnessing the beginnings of a type of general arrival in which everything arrives so quickly that departure becomes unnecessary.**
So today's training regimes—aerobics, treadmills, stationary bikes, step-climbers—display a sense of going nowhere fast, denigrating the importance of the journey and affirming the preparedness to change and to adapt to new circumstances. It is this general

tion systems. The new professional-managerial class colonizes exclusive spatial segments that connect with one another across the city, the country, and the world; they isolate themselves from the fragments of local societies, which in consequence become destructured in the process of selective reorganization of work and residence.

In the movement from a money to an information society we see a reduction in the distance between the economic and the social. The number and complexity of abstract-rational calculations increase tremendously in an information economy since the means of information exchange involve learning technically specific processes (using automated tellers, logging onto databases, programming your VCR, playing video-games, etc.) and enacting them with considerable exactness. So it should not be surprising if each of the above elements is best understood as an exaggeration and an extension of earlier developments, rather than as an entirely new form. Taken together, however, they do present a distinct cultural complex which takes its meaning from the shift to an information economy and reflects an attempt to legitimize the views of those groups that have privileged access to the new technologies and its social-economic organization.

The emerging international urban elite expresses its alignment with the dominant orders of the day and is continually poised to re-align itself along the possibilities of its flexible specialization and, from there, to transmit its functional imperative unhesitatingly, with no internal resistance, all the while presenting itself as a clear, smooth package of this same political positioning; it is refined and capable of the most subtle transmutations of its aesthetic or ideational nature. The quest is to be fully immersed in the flows of the grid: to have the channels cleared of all extraneous material and to create a social space out of this same sensibility, to create a society of smooth transmitters.

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The only way to follow through to the question of the truth of an experience is to chart a path back through the grid. But the grid can only be navigated with the kind of educational and social skills which make radical feedback unlikely, or in any case provide the individual with the kind of resources which make unwanted external control improbable, though as the history of psychiatry continues to prove, by no means impossible.

the demarcation of the point on the grid is not merely a negative technique, but also a positive one, involving the creation of culture as much as the denigration of uselessness. But the techniques of this delineation are different. They look different. Their purposes are different. To be sure, there are still all kinds of conspicuous consumption and the presentation of the self is increasingly packaged and codified into specific abstractions of our possible aesthetic aspiration. But it is no longer enough to erect institutions

preparedness that is being inculcated with all our exercise routines. What kind of population is it that is always at the ready but never has to go anywhere? We are, it seems, being prepared for war. This is where Baudrillard has it backwards; it's not that the revolution has already happened, but rather that the war has already begun.

Smooth Transmitters

The grid in question is not merely a technological-informational complex. It is being carved into city landscapes. According to Marvel Castells in *The Information City,*
The new industrial space and the new service economy organize their operations around the dynamics of their information-generating units, while connecting their different functions to disparate spaces assigned to each task to be performed; the overall process is then reintegrated through communica-

Alex Ferentzy writes about the cybernetic asylum.

An exhibition featuring works from over 75 artists to celebrate and remember the charm, talent and generosity of David Buchan, Robert Flack and Tim Jocelyn.

David Morrow's "Couplings," a parody of "HIS" and "HERS" merchandise, features towels embroidered with "TOP" and "BOTTOM" as well as "Stallion" and "Colt."

There are about 5 billion people in the world. 5 billion tears, assuming the average tear to be 2 ml, would be 10 million litres of warm salt water. Cry me a river.

5000000000 TEAR DROPS

John McLachlin's "Slumbering" parodies promotional merchandising tie-ins (usually aimed at children) of television programs and movies. Here pillow cases have the images (head shots) and names of current gay porn stars.
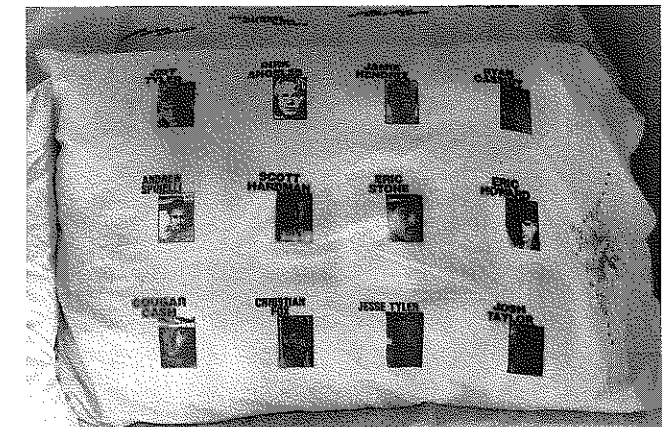
Hamish Buchanan in "Mourning Cap-Veil of Tears" has taken a cap (recent staple of young gay fashion) and attached a veil to it. Definitely hauté couture rather than the off-the-rack prototypes of Morrow and McLachlin...

by Steve Reinke