

tandem which constitute this form of play:the exposure and manipulation of pre-existing signifying practices,a controlled use of phenomenology and situation, and the participation of the viewer, who identifies what has been adapted in the art context from the outside world. It doesn't operate as a carnivalesque release valve. When it is successful I think it instigates a dialectical process which culminates in the awakening of a critical consciousness or awareness.

I will not make anyone suffer through the tedium of reading descriptive breakdowns of this uniquely cultivated form of play as it relates to each of the works in this exhibition. Perhaps my concerns about the appropriateness of this text as a post-script are justified because of my unwillingness to do so — BUT — to spell it out for you the way I see it would compromise a component of play in Jeffrey's work that is crucial for its successful activation — your participation.

Jeremy Todd
06/02/03



Jack Jeffrey
Recent Work

February 1 to March 8, 2003

Post Script is a new initiative of Artspeak,designed to encourage the development of innovative critical writing about the visual arts by Vancouver writers,to provide critical feedback to emerging and mid-career artists and to further enhance cross fertilization of ideas between the visual art and writing community.

Information about this exhibition is available on-line at www.artspeak.ca

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ARTSPEAK
an artist run centre
233 Carrall Street
Vancouver British Columbia
Canada V6B 2J2

T (604) 688-0051
F (604) 685-1912
E artspeak@artspeak.ca
W www.artspeak.ca

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POST SCRIP T

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06/02/03

Jeremy Todd on
Jack Jeffrey

Recent Work

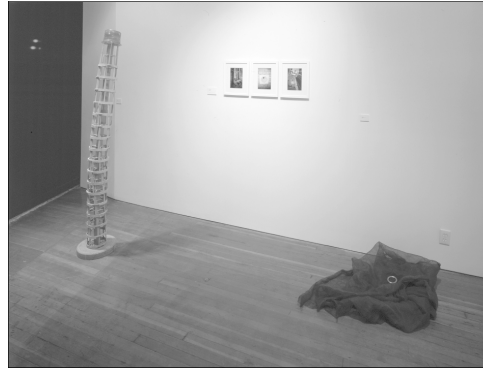


The contradiction between what is and what is made, is the vital element of art and circumscribes its law of development, but it is also art's shame: by following, however indirectly, the existing pattern of material production and 'making' its objects, art as akin to production cannot escape the question 'what for?' which it aims to negate.

— Theodor Adorno, from *Minima Moralia*, 1947.

If this post-script is supposed to be an assessment of Jack Jeffrey's Artspeak exhibition, then I think I've gone off and done something else altogether. I looked at some images of Jeffrey's previous work on the internet and read articles and essays about some of his past exhibitions. I went to his studio and asked him questions. After all of this, and a visit to the gallery the day after the opening, I came to see a coherent strategy in Jeffrey's practice which I want to discuss here.

I think he takes advantage of a paradox so that his activities as an artist can achieve what they do. In order to play with sites and systems of authority, judgment and control, he must maintain the autonomy of the gallery space and covet the privileged position of the exhibiting artist. The objects/signs from everyday life that he adapts in his art (take a look at the show and you'll know what I'm talking about) point back to relations of power that viewers become involved with upon entering the gallery. Jeffrey's dependence on the art context



and the fabrication of objects allows him to ask 'what for?' about these activities vis-a-vis analogous parallels in the world which begins just outside Artspeak's door. Visitors to the exhibition are therefore directly implicated in these relationships. The question of 'what for?' leads to many others: What and who is being served? By who and what? At what and who's expense? There is an active ethical consciousness in Jeffrey's work which makes people think while avoiding any moralizing or didacticism. That's an extremely difficult and exciting thing to do in these times.

His work draws out alienation as a phenomenon in our so-called post-ideological present. Jeffrey pokes and turns over the concrete, often arbitrary, and sometimes pathetic representations which by default stand for the faceless mechanizations of power in society. He plays games with the abstractions and absurdities of modern life (and art) which continue to grow and mutate in the twenty-first century — things like the Law, property, the demarcation of boundaries and borders, a monetary economy, illusions of public and private space and the relationships of subservience and dominance they covertly maintain.

Spatial allusions abound in Jeffrey's work, with play operating as a kind of passage from colonized areas to places of potential or becoming. I think this



might be one of the key reasons why he is regularly asked to exhibit in France and Holland. His practice returns to many displaced concerns of the late avant gardes in post-war Europe, particularly France, and the many artists of the international conceptual art community who were more concerned with social justice than the advancement of their careers. There is nothing, however, which suggests that Jeffrey has any desire to dissolve the boundary between art and life or that his modes of practice will lead, in the end, to a desperate kind of polemical violence or aesthetic and material reductivism. He makes room — a playroom in quotations perhaps — for reflecting on the construction and validation of rationalizations and judgments, both in and out of the art context (while avoiding symbolic abjection and cliché) — an opportunity which is often pushed out of art communities altogether by the bitter and indulgent culture wars of various special interest groups, the profile enhancing dictates of fashion for artists and curators, and the cynical reasoning of art's professionalization. When I found out Jeffrey was a teacher at ECIAD it made me very happy. Who better to instruct and evaluate others than someone who seems genuinely invested in questioning authority? I'm sure this is another paradox Jeffrey takes advantage of.



Everything that once represented an affective, immediate and primitive relationship between man and the world — everything that was serious, deep and cosmic — is displaced and sooner or later gradually enters the domain of play, or art, or just simply becomes amusing or ironic verbalization.

— Henri Lefebvre, from *The Critique of Everyday Life*, 1947.

I've mentioned play more than a few times now but what do I mean by it? I don't know. Just kidding.

Obviously there are fun things going on in Jeffrey's work that are immediately recognizable. There are witty literary aspects to it. There's lots of metaphors, puns, double-entendres, allusions and references (many of which are art historical and require another conversation altogether). There is also an amusing and engaging theatricality in his work. We are put on stage when we enter Artspeak. We end up performing with strange doppelgangers and appendages, containers, screens, windows and other visitors. I think these things operate within a style of play that is meant to point back to the impoverishment of the street from the gallery and vice-versa. Jeffrey has cultivated a situation of convergence between art and everyday life that the viewer grapples with in the hopes of synthesis. I see three components operating in