

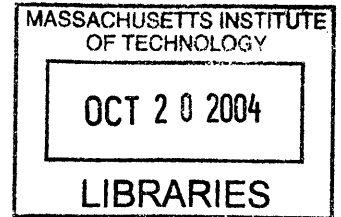
Seeing the Future, Speaking to the Past

————— Nomadic projects and thoughts —————

by
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ROTC

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN VISUAL STUDIES
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Hiroharu Mori

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
on August 6, 2004 in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in
Visual Studies

ABSTRACT

“Seeing the Future, Speaking to the Past” is a collective documentation of the projects which I produced during the time at MIT.

Through my experiences as a foreigner, I have become interested in global nomadic behavior and its effect on the socio-psychological experiences of individuals and the development of new social formations.

In my projects, I attempt to address the issues of alienation, disorientation, and cultural marginality by using video images of performative activities and the deployment of prosthetic devices. Repetition and absurdity are elements that I utilize to encounter the boundaries between detachment and social engagement, perception and imagining, announcement and silence, interrogation and defiance. Through my experiences as a global nomad, I create new vehicles that bridge the disparate cultures I encounter.

Thesis Supervisor: Krzysztof Wodiczko

Title: Professor of Visual Arts



Seeing the Future, Speaking to the Past in progress 2004
Prosthetic device

The title of my thesis, **“Seeing the Future, Speaking to the Past”** is taken from the name of prosthetic device produced in Interrogative Design workshop at MIT. This device contained a binocular in front and two mega horns in the back. The wearer views far sight through binocular and speak to his or her back through mega horn. Thus the wearer functions as metaphysical divider between seeing and speaking as well as become observer of society. This prosthetic device is designed for a person who spends his or her time as a Global Nomad.

Deep Regards to
Krzysztof Wodiczko

Muntadas

Joan Jonas

Sanjit Sethi

Dan Van Roekel

Joshi Radin

Emily C. Dahmen

Lukasz Lysakowski

and

Dan Ichimoto

For my parents and sister.

Chapter 1; A Stranger at Home, A Stranger Outside.

A Stranger at Home, A Stranger Outside.

Why do I need to confront being a foreigner after living in this country for such a long time? Will I never be comfortable being in the U.S.A. as a foreigner? To begin with answering those questions, I would like to define what a foreigner is through Julia Kristeva's writing on foreigners from the book called, Stranger to Ourselves. She defined as it, "Foreigner could recover an identity only if they recognized themselves as dependant on a same heterogeneity that divides them within themselves, on a same wandering between flesh and spirit, life and death." (Kristeva 82) According to Kristeva, the foreigner is psychological divide rather than geographical divide. A sense of foreignness exists within us.

The main reason why foreigners become foreigners is that simply we find ourselves different from others. We look different, think differently, and speak with a slightly different accent. We protect our sensibilities from others, in this case, mostly comes from appearance and language. Those are the most common measurements used to identify foreigners. Foreigners encounter some situations, in which we meet and speak to someone else. In this situation, foreigners see themselves through other's facial expression. Pronouncing a word wrong way produces a moment of separation between others and the foreigner. A sense of foreignness emerges when these moments occur.

I have lived in the US for the last ten years. Ten years is quite a long time for a person who is trying to find a place where he belongs socially. The United States of America is a country of immigrants. People come to this land and find their path and society for various reasons. During my time here, I moved to several different cities, New York, Boston, Baltimore, as well as several smaller North American cities, as a non-immigrant. Wherever I have lived, I had to confront being Japanese, being a foreigner.

During these ten years, I have had a chance to visit my own country, Tokyo Japan, several times. Before visiting my home country, I had a slight hesitation in my mind. How I could be accepted into my own society after spending a significant amount of time being outside. Should I pretend to be Japanese? Or would I be able to meet my old friends and be able to speak as we used to speak?" Those unresolved questions rose before entering into my homeland.

It was a strange experience that I encountered in Tokyo. Speaking my own language was not quite right because English words were mixed into my Japanese sentences. Moreover, Japanese words were not correctly coming to my mind quickly and I could not speak smoothly even. It is a very strange experience and made me, realize that I was thinking in English although I was speaking in Japanese. After these experiences, my friends started to react differently and called me, "American." I looked like other Japanese and I could

assume that everybody recognized me as Japanese anywhere in Tokyo. That is the truth, "I am Japanese."

It was the moment that I become a stranger in both countries and began to question to myself, "who am I?" This act of questioning is the first step for me to realize myself as a global nomad. It resulted in finding my main issue, which I develop through my art practice.

I AM JAPANESE
BUT I MAKE ART IN ENGLISH.

Chapter 2; Global Nomadism

Global Nomadism

A nomad is a person or a group of people who live without fixed habitation. They move from place to place according to the seasons. Generally, nomads are organized in tribal units, live in tents, and occupy well-defined territories.

Nomads have existed from ancient times, especially in Egypt and Babylonia. Mongolians are well known as nomads, and under the command of Genghiz Khan, significantly expanded their territories from East Asia to Europe. Because of the nomads' peculiar non-sedentary behavior, they have had an important role in cultural exchanges.

Although many cultures were traditionally nomadic, nomadic behavior became increasingly rare as countries industrialized. However, recently, this behavior exists again in modern world and can be observed as a new type of living in contemporary society at large. The number of people who often travel internationally for leisure or business has increased dramatically.

Communication and transportation technology have given people the ability to travel and receive information quickly and efficiently, and the ease of the communication reduces the importance of the local. As a result of this condition, people have become less grounded in their local environment and in return have become more globalized. Because of the global scale of nomadism in the 20th century and the collapse of the traditional structure of the family, a working family

may no longer be located in one geographic region. This situation produces people we may call “modern global nomads.”

Modern global nomads are individuals who, spending a significant amount of time in another culture, develop some sense of belonging to both the host culture and the home culture, yet do not have a total sense of either. The identities of global nomads are not defined by geography or region; their identities have been determined by their experience of multiple places. Global nomads have in common the experience of moving multiple times to various countries, an experience which becomes part of their cultural identity. They often know how to respect other cultures, observe and learn from cultural differences. Global nomads can create a home anywhere; even the whole world for them can be reconsidered as their home. One positive aspect of being global nomads is that they often have multiple-dimensional worldviews.

On the other hand, global nomads often feel a sense of rootlessness because they belong simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. Because global nomads are mobile, they often leave behind friends, homes, and cultural identities. As a result, global nomads always feel somewhat detached. Belonging fully to no one culture, global nomads remain marginalized.

Under the development of the communication and transportation technology, the idea of nomadism has become important for contemporary society, and is

reflected in contemporary art. The role of the global nomad overlaps with the role of the contemporary artist since art often mediates communication between different people, cultures, and societies. It seems likely that the idea of the global nomad will lead contemporary artists to create new vehicles which bridge between cultural marginality.

Chapter3; PUBLIC SPACE at Cafe

PUBLIC SPACE at Cafe

It was cloudy in the afternoon. I was running to the café where I supposed to have a meeting with my professor. Once I arrived at café, I looked around and found my professor sitting on wooden chair with a cup of coffee. I sat down in front of him and he looked at my t-shirts and me. He smiled. There was a hand written words on my t-shirts. It's said, "Public Space."

Chapter 4; Aperture / 275 Massachusetts Avenue, MA 02139 U.S.A.

Aperture

This work was originally presented in my studio at 275 Massachusetts Avenue, MA 02139 U.S.A. in 2002. Once the viewers step in my studio, what they see is my studio as the condition which I am still using the space. In the center of the studio, there is a TV monitor hanging from ceiling and showing the video image of the performative act which I am carrying a door on my back. I removed my studio door and carried it from Cambridge across a bridge towards downtown Boston on a specially designed mounting device. The original installation contained seven minuets of video images in the studio without the presence of the door with which I used for the performance. The studio door has been removed and invisible for the viewers.

I attempt to bring out two issues of private space and public space through this project. Physically, the act of removing the studio door from the doorway illustrates and represents the opening, "Aperture" to idea of openings. Crossing the bridge represents the act of connection between people and refers to the relationship between society and the individual.

I was inspired by the structure of the camera obscure not of the functionality but of physical and metaphorical manner. I re-analyzed and re-utilized the structure of camera as a reference. Aperture is a hole, which can admit and control light into the camera so that it can expose subject matter on the film. Aperture also

changes amount of light so that the camera expose the image clearly. Door is a movable barrier installed in the entry of a room or building to restrict access or provide visual privacy. The door generally represents a boundary between one space and another space. It divides one side from other side. It also represents entrance into new space or area.

I was reapplying this simple structure of the camera as well as the door to my project. Thus, the installation constructs a camera as my studio, an aperture as doorway, and a video image as exposed image. I utilized this notion of aperture, which imply and reflected my studio as exposed image of my own private act towards to public.

Carrying a door on back of my body has some sense of symbolic aspect. It looks like hermit crab, which changes his home, "shell" after he is grown. Although it is a solitary act towards society, this performance represents a symbol of Nomad, which I have been dealt everyday life in society.



Installation View
APERTURE /
275 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
USA 2002

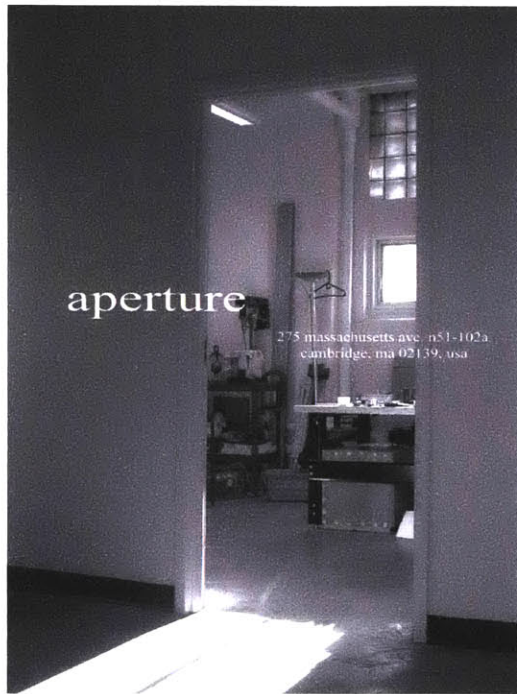


Image of postcard
APERTURE /
275 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
USA 2002

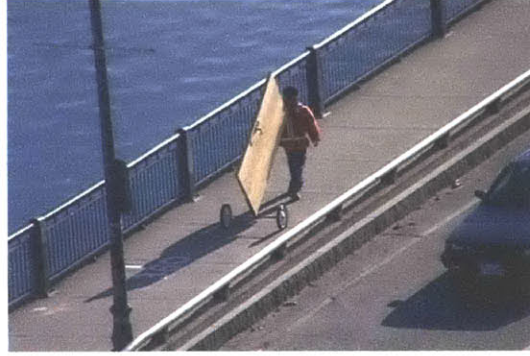
APERTURE /275 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139 USA 2002

Single channel video projection and artist studio

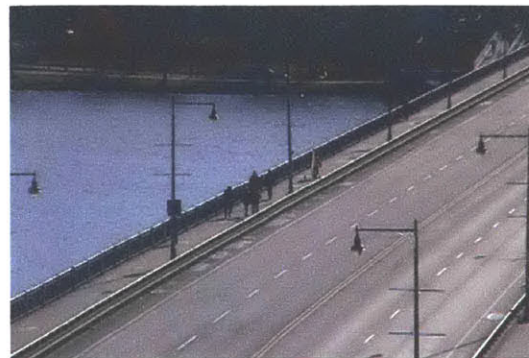
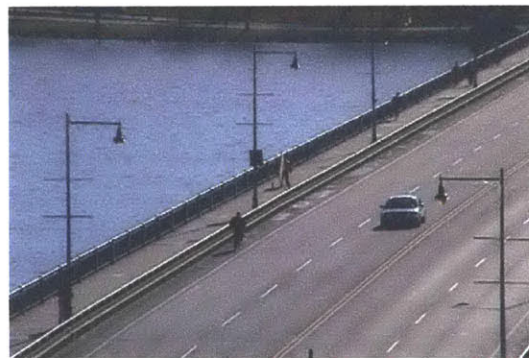
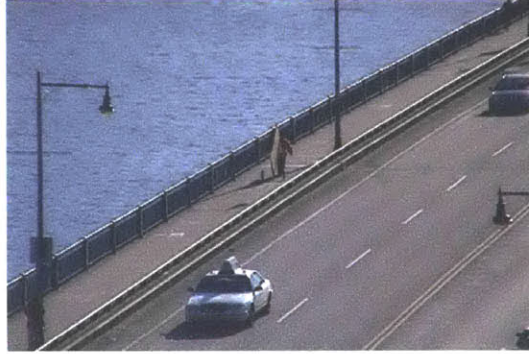
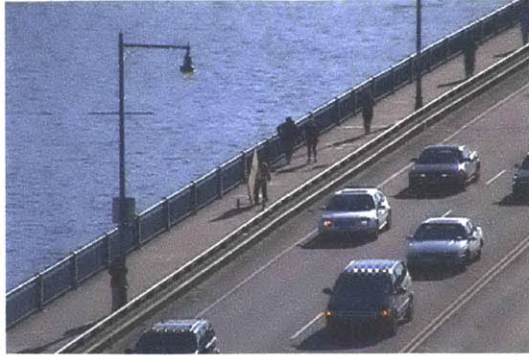
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APERTURE /275 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139 USA 2002
Single channel video projection and artist studio
Duration: 00:06:02;10

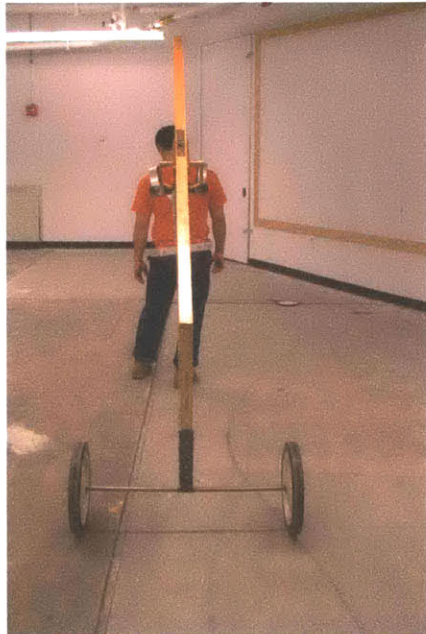


APERTURE /275 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139 USA 2002
Single channel video projection and artist studio
Duration: 00:06:02;10





Device in progress
APERTURE / 275 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139 USA 2002



Device
APERTURE / 275 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139 USA 2002



Device
APERTURE / 275 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139 USA 2002

I DONT WANT TO TALK
THATS WHY I MAKE ART.



Figure 1
Daniel Buren
Photo-souvenirs 1968
Piece of striped paper posted outside

Chapter 5; MONUMENT / ACTIVE PERCEIVER

MONUMENT

I was holding a photograph of a monument taken from the first page of New York Times. In the photograph, flowers covered the monument and people wrote some text directly on the monument.

My professor came up to me and said, "There is a specific time when monuments are activated and animated by the people."

ACTIVE PERCEIVER

People need to engage in order to perceive.

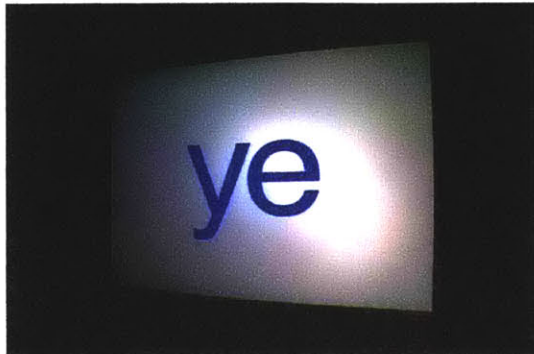
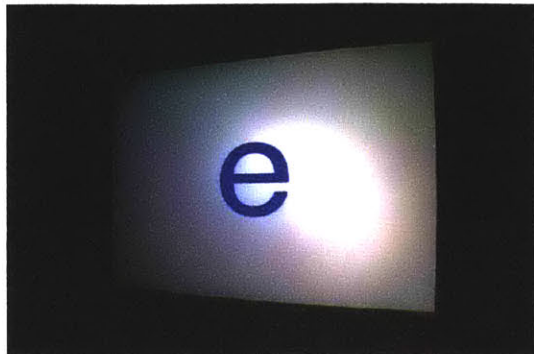
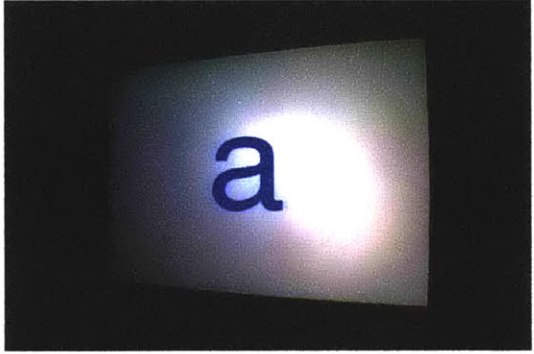
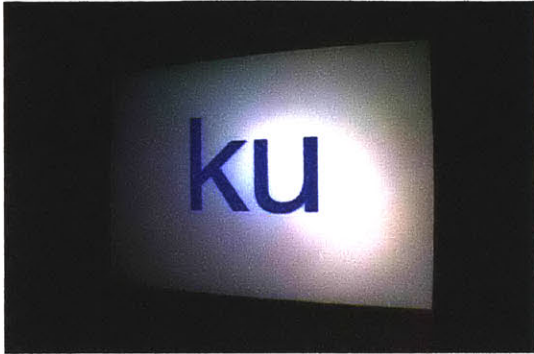
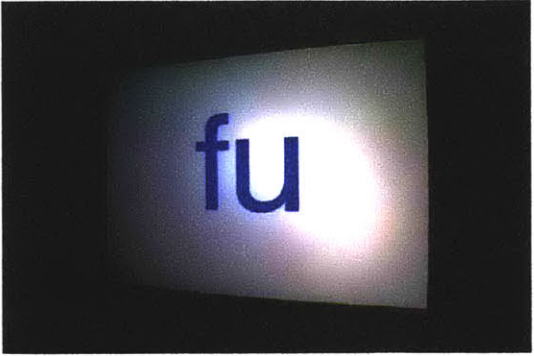
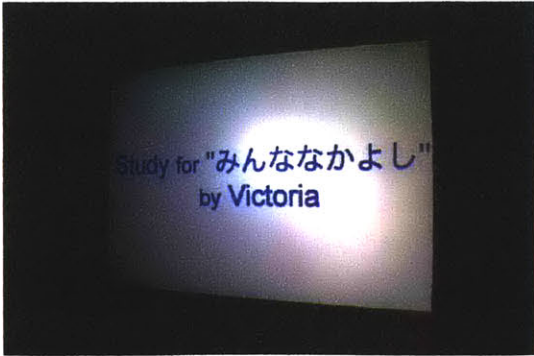
Perception causes changes.

Projects; Shell



Shell 2001
Digital Photography

Projects; STUDY FOR "minnanakayoshi" BY BRUCE & VICTORIA



STUDY FOR "minnakayoshi" BY BRUCE & VICTORIA 2003
Single channel video / sound rear projection
Duration: 00:02:39:24

Chapter 6; LIFE / WORLD

Life/world

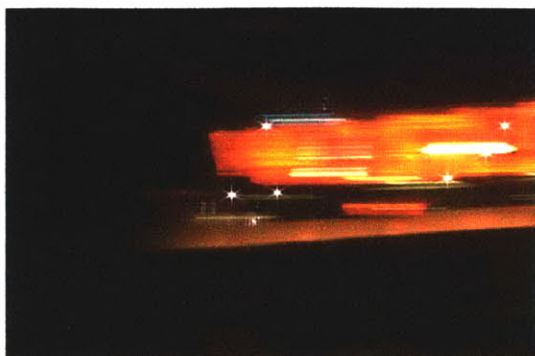
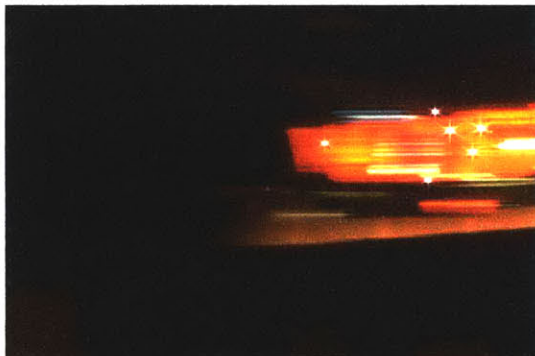
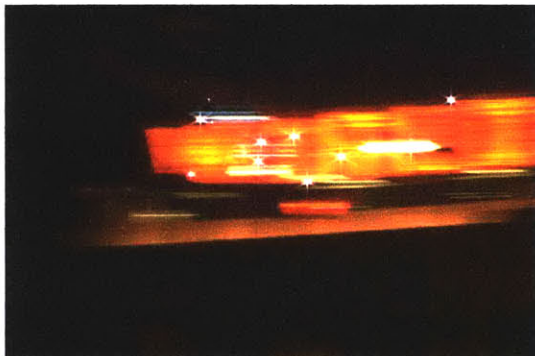
I found two neon signs in a public space in Yokohama, Japan. These two words, “life and world,” were located next to other. After I saw these words, I realized how strange it was to find these words in same public space. I was also moved by the way English words adapted in Japan. English words have been appropriated in Japanese society in such a way that appears in new contexts, completely foreign to America usage. I usually do not use these words together in everyday conversation. I started become interested in the question, “what is life?” and “what is world?” Although these questions do not give any definite answers and it might be outrageous and absurd to ask them, it triggered me to reconstruct them as an artwork.

In this work, I attempt to confront the confusion between Life and the World through visual and linguistic play. There are two video images projected on the walls separately. Two projected video images are synchronized and located in different walls in same site. One image shows neon sign of Life and world through the repetition of camera panning. Another image shows a man standing on a small white pedestal, holding a megaphone, and panning his body back and forth between right and left. The man shouts and announces the words, “life” and “world” through a megaphone synchronized with another video image of the neon signs.

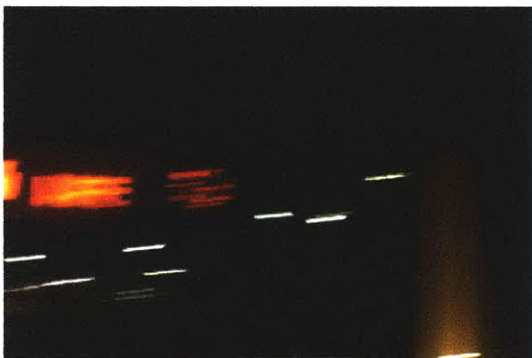
I pronounce the word, "world" incorrectly. This is a typical word for Japanese to mispronounce a letter, "R" and drop the letter, "L." In the video image, it sounds like, "word" instead of "world." I pronounce the words, "life" and "world" as a foreigner. I announce the words, "life" and "world" in a foreign country. To identify the origin of the performer, I incorporate phonetic play in this project. By announcing these words to the public, they become personalized in this work. Re-attempting to focus on the words of neon sign through this performative act shows some issues of adaptation and dislocation.

The site where I stand and announce the words is a part of an American military base where American culture diffuses and dislocates in Japan. I used to play baseball when I was a child there. I chose this location because it is a very familiar place from my childhood but this familiar place is now to express my between-ness. Meaning of the place has been changed as I grow up. After being in the U.S.A., this place becomes parallel to how I exist both in American and Japanese society. This changes makes me conscious about culture marginality and provides me clear vision towards my Art practices.

LIFE / WORLD 2003
Two channel video / sound projected two separate walls in the same room.
Duration: 00:01:34:07



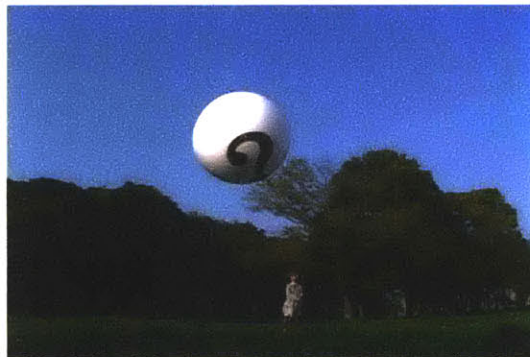
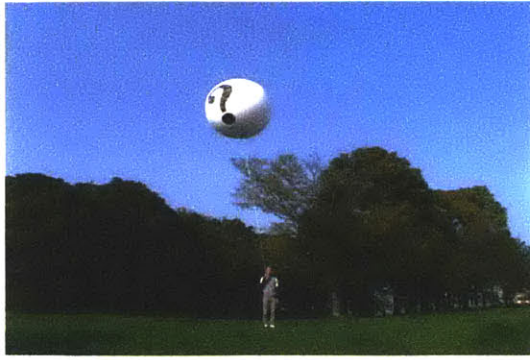
LIFE / WORLD 2003
Two channel video / sound projected two separate walls in the same room.
Duration: 00:01:34:07



HIROHARU MORI IS DETACHED
FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

Projects; A CAMOUFLAGED QUESTION IN THE AIR

A CAMOUFLAGED QUESTION IN THE AIR 2003
Billboard & single channel video/sound
Duration: 00:02:35:23



Projects; far enough



FAR ENOUGH 2004
single channel video/sound
Duration: 00:01:03:01

Is it far enough away for you to hear me?



*Figure 2;
Dimanche - La journal d'un seul Jour,
November 27, 1960,
featuring the photograph of his leap into the void

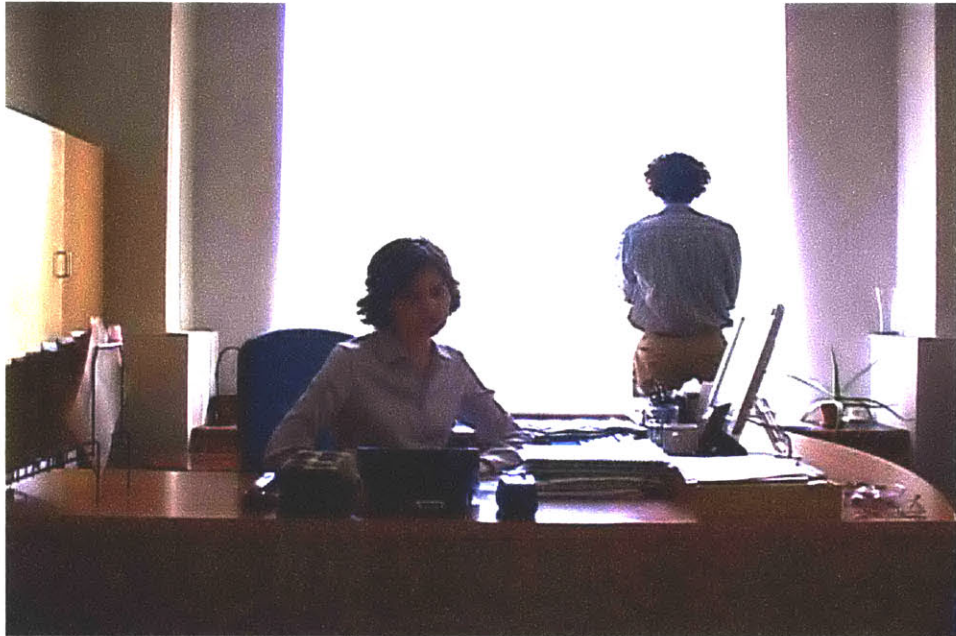
Chapter 7; The Office



THE OFFICE 2004
Single channel video / sound
Duration: 00:03:41;00



01:00:05;04



01:00:08;07



01:00:13;05



01:00:19;29



01:00:28;22



01:00:36;04



01:00:44;02



01:00:51:03



01:00:53;26



01:00:59;03



01:01:01;22



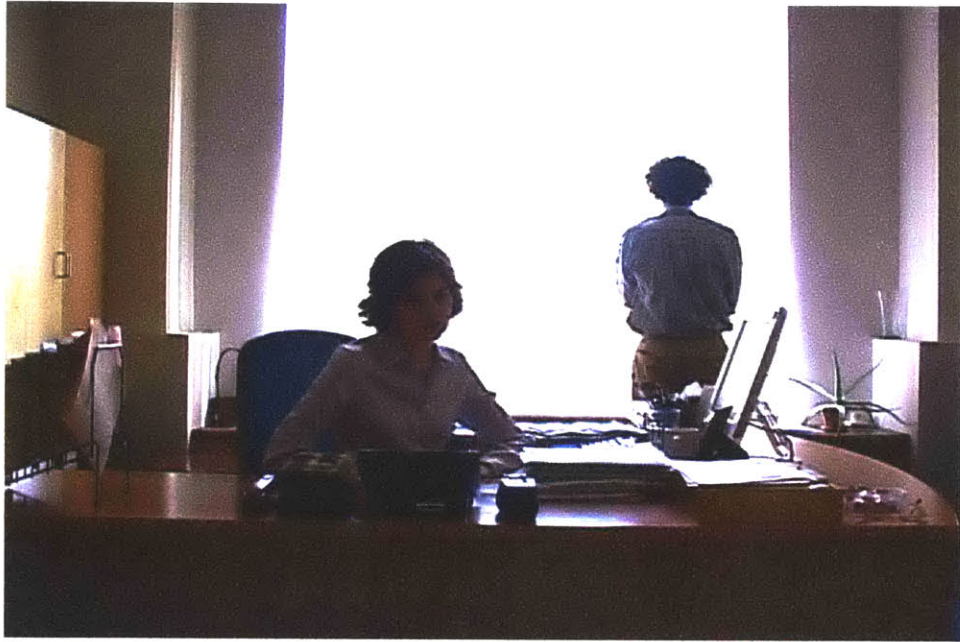
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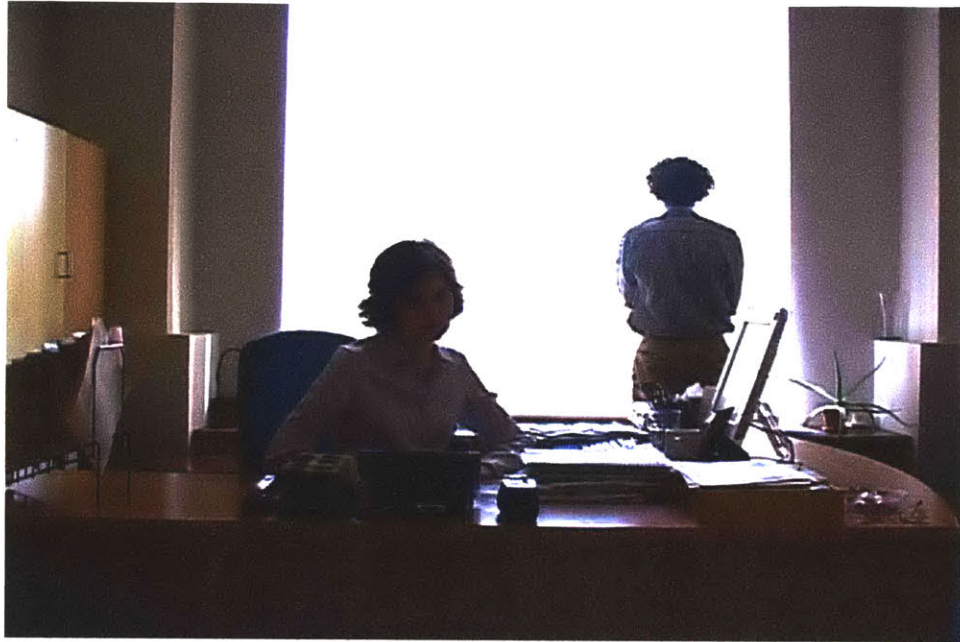
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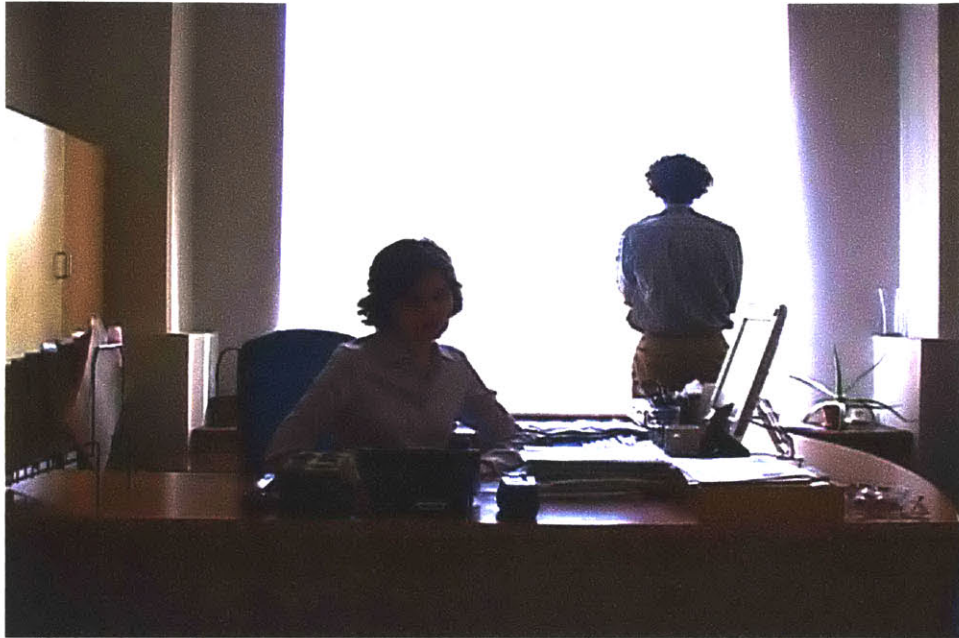
01:01:19;02



01:01:28;00



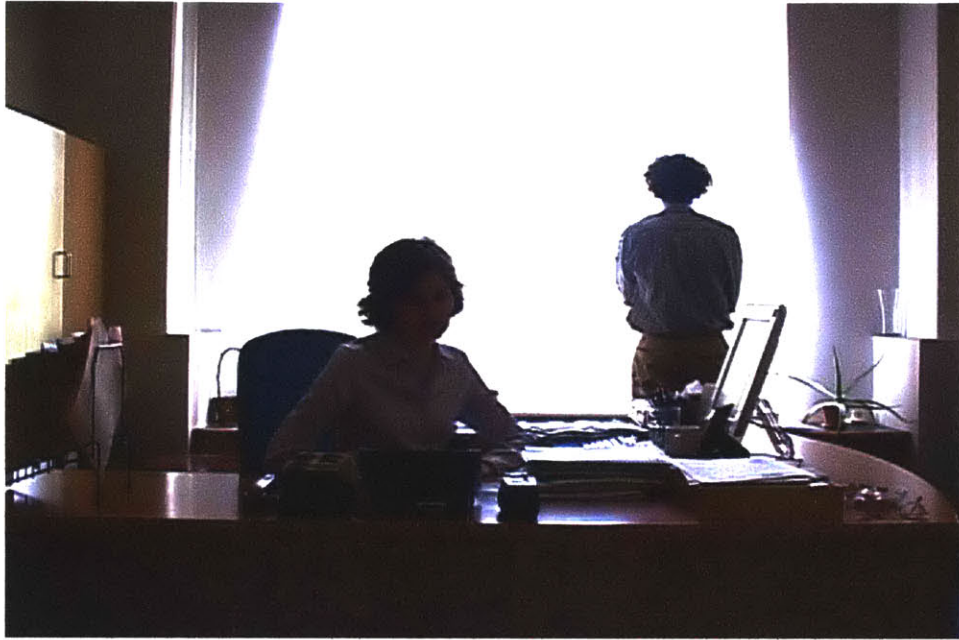
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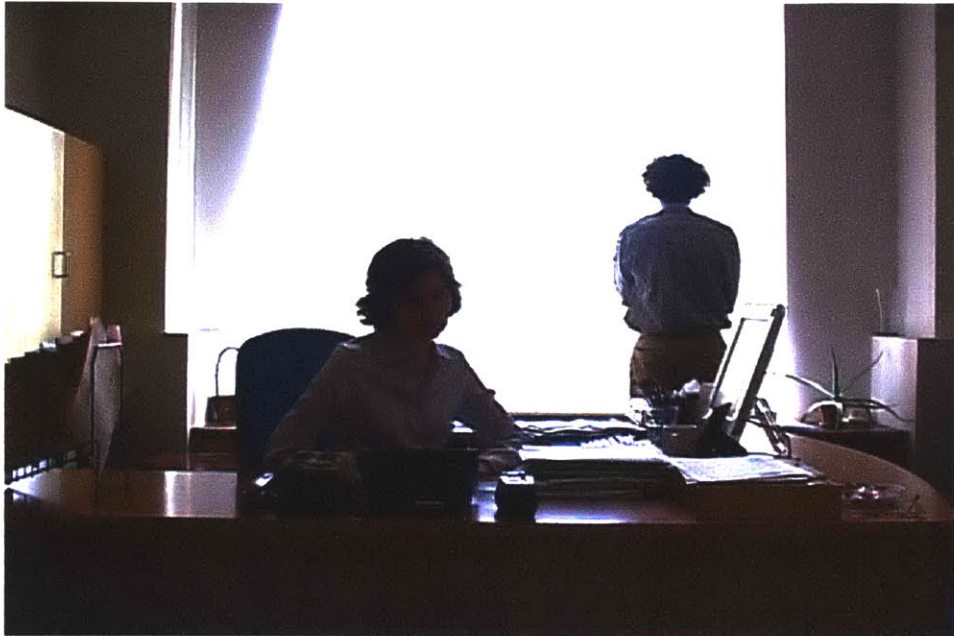
01:01:44;09



01:01:53;05



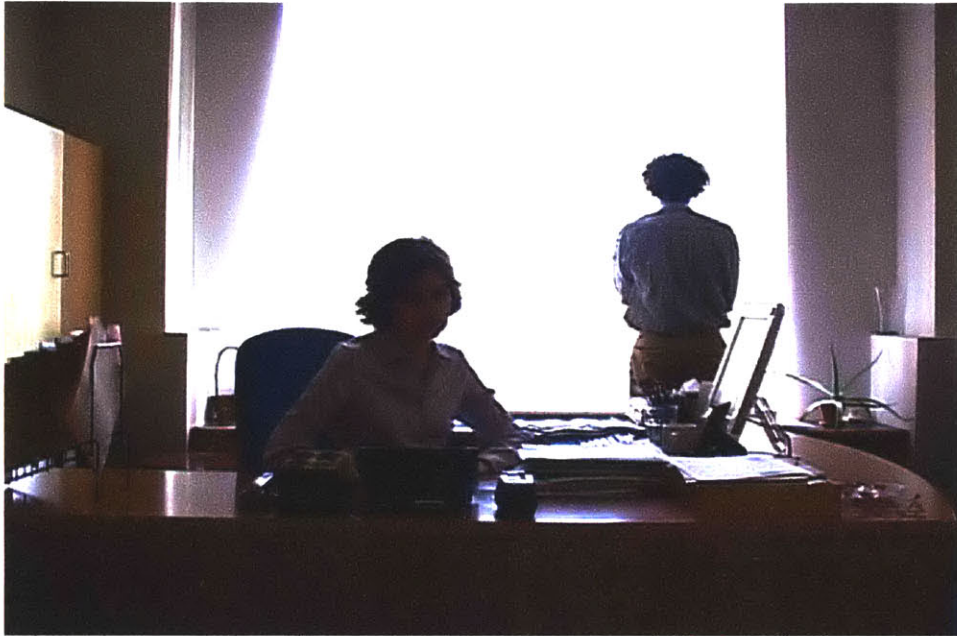
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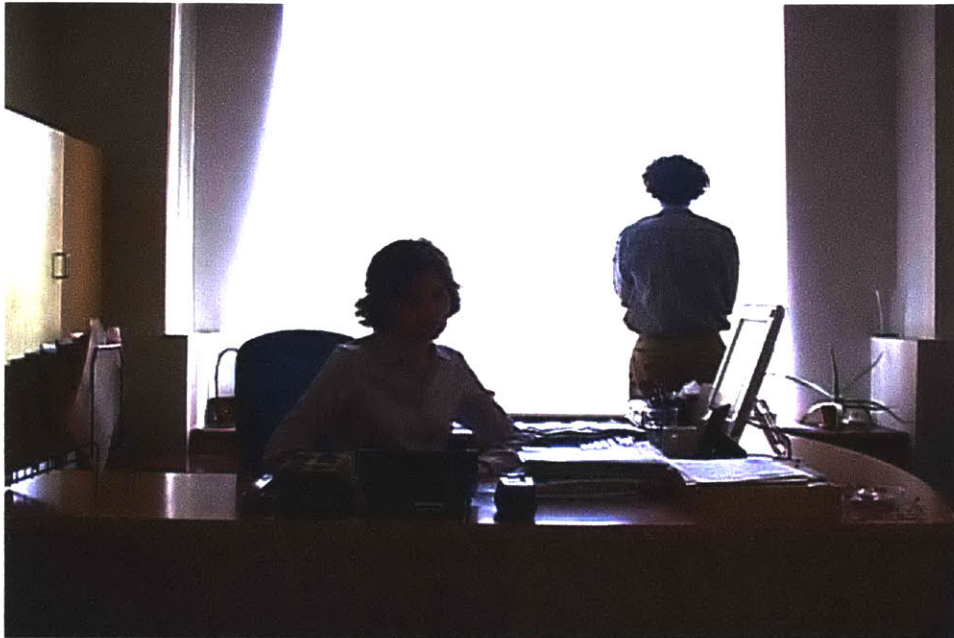
01:02:01;10



01:02:09;20



01:02:16;23



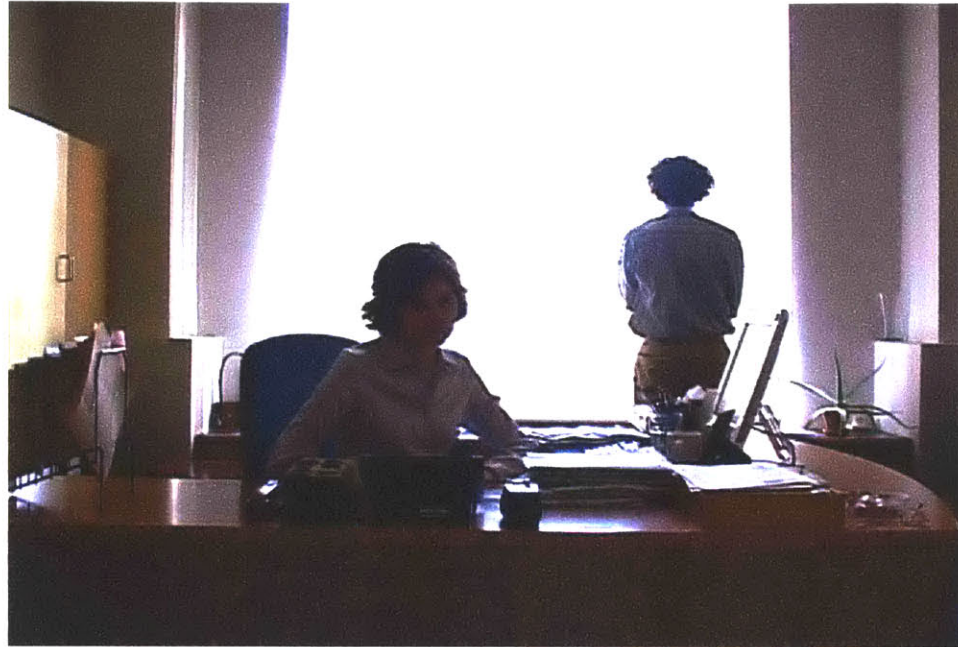
01:02:25;02



01:02:36;06



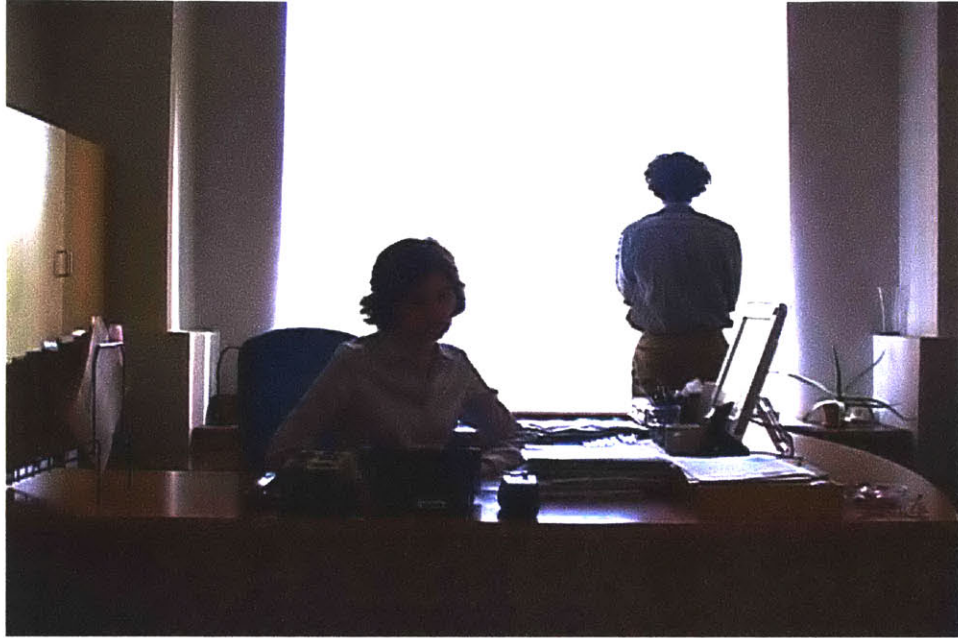
01:02:46;26



01:02:52;20



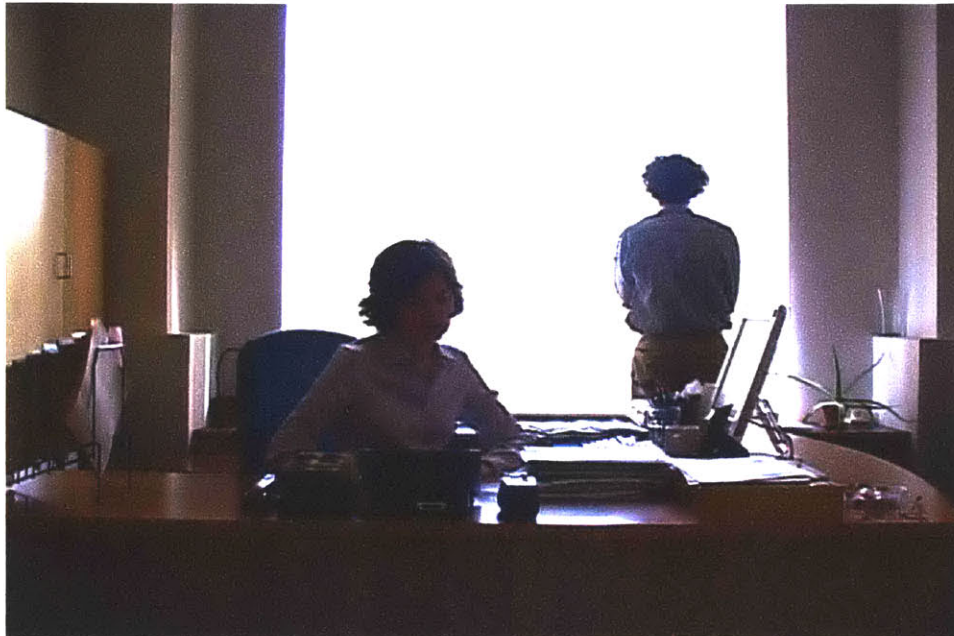
01:02:57;24



01:03:08;12



01:03:17;28



01:03:27;06

Projects; Dribbling

Dribbling 2004
Single channel video / sound
Duration: 00:01:46:00



Projects; UNTITLED / metal-shop



UNTITLED / metal-shop 2004
Single channel video / sound
Duration: loop

Projects; After a painting



After a painting 2004
Single channel video / sound
Duration: loop

Reference

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Image Reference

Figure 1. www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/features/kuspit/kuspit5-27-3.asp, 8 April, 2004.

Figure 2. Godfrey, Tony. (1998). *Conceptual Art*. London: Phaidon Press Limited. p. 70-71.