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Unevenly

“Series of Vulnerable Arrangements” (Version Utrecht)

Installation, various devices of senses, 2006

- Light element: “Relational Irrelevance”

Floor lamp with diameter of 35 cm, ca. 190 cm high, Spotlight, timer

- Humidity element: “Handful of obscurity”

Faran Industrial Co., Ltd, Humidifier HR-25, Metal String, digital timer

- Temperature element: “Possible Synonym of Squandering”

Two pieces of Infrared Heaters and Timer

- Wind element: “Anonymous Movement”, 2006

Wind machine, Floor Fan FS020 ‘Tornado’, ca. 150 cm high, diameter of 70 cm, timer

- Scent element I and II:

“Almost exhausted” (‘Wood Fire’)

“Becoming into time machine” (‘Fresh Linen’)

Two kinds of Smell - burnt (‘Wood Fire’) and fresh laundry (‘Fresh Linen’), which are distributed by two scent machines with a sensor, ‘ScentPop’

Trilogy

Single Channel Video Projection

- “Unfolding Places”

Single Channel Video Projection

London, Seoul, DVD, ca. 18 min. Colour, Sound, English, 2004

Voice-over: Helen Cho

- “Restrained Courage”

Amsterdam, Frankfurt, London, Seoul, Berlin, etc. DVD, ca. 18 min. Colour, Sound, English, 2004

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- “Squandering Negative Spaces”

Brazil, DVD, ca. 29 min., 7 chapters, Colour, Sound, English, 2006

Voice-over: David Michael DiGregorio

“Dehors”

Slide Projection in loop, 2006

Two sets of 81 Colour Slides, Two slide projectors, Kodak Dissolver

“DIN A 4 Whatever Being”

Light-Shadow Piece on the Wall

Wood and plaster, ca. 30 x 21 cm

## Community of Absence

Exhibition "Unevenly" at BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht  
23. 4 - 23. 6. 2006

To the casual observer, Haegue Yang's works can be easily misunderstood as simple ready-mades. Her works come into existence through the artist's deliberate act of erasing, misplacing, or rearranging ordinary or trivial objects in slightly odd ways. Yet for those who engage in the deeper complexities of Yang's work, an unfamiliar territory will be disclosed; a place where one can enter and observe the distance between oneself and the organizing social structure of those objects and where one is revealed at once a social and singular being. Haegue Yang discusses some changes evident in her most recent artistic practice, how she pursues the creation of a kind of "communal space" in her work, and her upcoming exhibition at BAK with curator Binna Choi.

Binna Choi: It seems to me your work involves intense conflict between what one could call social critique on one hand, and on the other, a deep personal, radically subjective and emotional charge. The Storage Piece (2004) could be an emblematic work. You shipped the number of your previous and "homeless" works-objects from different parts of the world to the gallery and piled them on a crate just as unpacked. The presence of that "sculpture" looked holding lots of seemingly unavoidable discords, between the need of art system and the need of artist, between the audience's expectation and the artist's etc.

Haegue Yang: Storage Piece is certainly a crucial work in terms of how much I have risked exposing self-references and consequently the anxiety I had. I faced an ironical contrast between the lack of space to store works and the offer of space to exhibit and reacted to it by displaying that conflicting situation through interchanging and juxtaposing these two circumstances. It resulted in an absurd accomplishment of public expectation for an artistic expression and a false solution for private problems. Meanwhile, I intended some kind of conspiracy could take place as well in that neither of these problems were solved, and remained in the end non-negotiable and irreconcilable. Ironically, this gesture has reintroduced my works into the cycle of commodity exchange as the work was sold to a private collector. I think that further stresses the conflict you commented on.

BC: What is interesting to me is that with producing Storage Piece you started to incorporate the verbal statement and also shifted towards the private-ness. It can be strongly sensed in your two video essays Unfolding Places (2004) and Restrained Courage (2004). In both works, the voice over speaks in first person and reflects on her own vulnerable condition and observations in a confessional tone. The narratives communicate the sentiments of solitude and alienation. However it appeared to me that there is a contradicting logic of empowerment as your observation is so intense and you make utterance.

HY: The contemplative way of looking at the environment in my videos is indeed quite personal. When I think about it now, private sentiments of aloneness and vulnerability turned to be very important, although I was not necessarily consciously working with the confessional aspects in these works. It is because this kind of feeling can allow others to "participate" in his or her individual experience and the shared sentiments create a kind of an interlaced texture of people. That is also how I think now about the question how to integrate the political in the sentiment, or in other words, how to express one's sentiments without losing political position. I am cautious not to limit either of these concepts in order to generate enough space to react to the rational, seemingly "liberal" capitalist society, and be critically aware how quickly the "political" becomes nothing but fashionable.

BC: Certain silent stance, "oblique" attitude you seem to take facing the politically embedded reality can be elaborated in this respect? In Restrained Courage, for example, one of the most disturbing moments is that the narrator watches a homeless beaten by police and leaves the scene after a while without any intervention. Then, she reflects on how painful it was to be a helpless bystander.



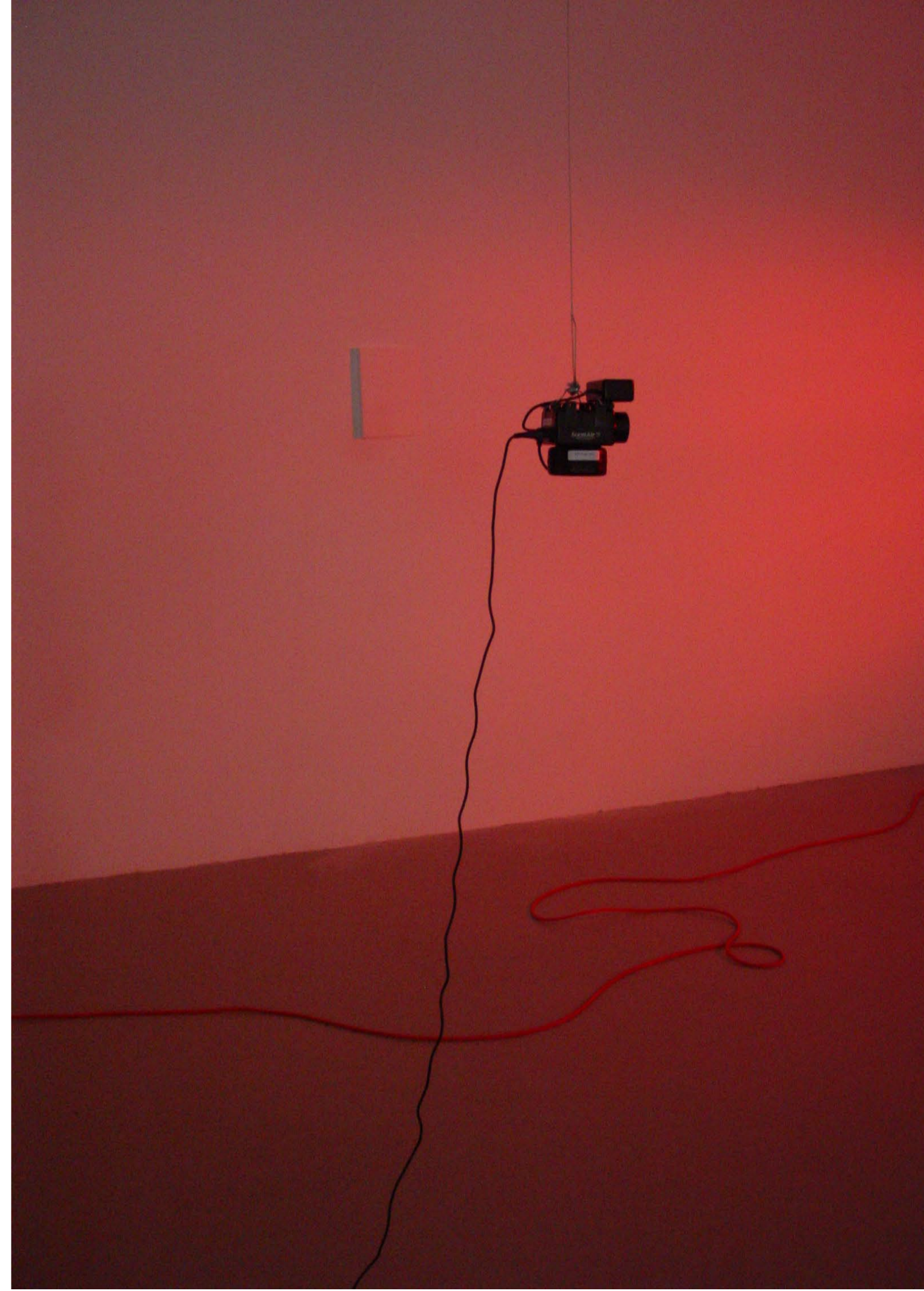
HY: This notion of “oblique” intrigues me. You may easily imagine that the political environment in South Korea in which I grew up was extremely politicized and politically polarized. However, I remained uninvolved in any specific political movement or activity, even if most of my surroundings, including my family, were directly committed to the leftist progressive movement. What in the world makes me take such a distance to so many urgent political issues and events around me? I keep a kind of territory where my position could not be fully definable or cultivated, therefore instrumentalized by anyone else. It is a “territory” where one can become a “poet-activist” whose potential is to act radically. This radical action doesn’t immediately accord with the commonly recognized concept of democracy and it even appears often in the non-political realm. Yet, in this sense I am truly interested in how one could be a political being. What you observed as “oblique” in my works is thus derived from this process—an attempt to be engaged without dogma. Some of my works can be seen from this aspect as well, in which I try to hold a silence as “invisible” aspects of political and aesthetical events. *Illiterate Leftovers* (2004) is an example. It resulted from the non-verbal ritual of communication via fax, in which only mechanical traces of the machine are drawn on each sheet. My desire and willingness to “act of speech” is transformed into highly controversial “silent speech,” which demonstrates a shared procedure of speech, but does not record any legible/visible message to share.

BC: For me one of strong subversive potentials in your work lies in where “the act of speech” and silence meet. But I wonder how your choice to film your new work in Brazil connects to this potential. In previous video works, the places shown are rather “collected or adopted” by your hand held video camera along as you happened to visit and pass by. But this time you made a “decisive” choice for where to shoot.

HY: As I have been drifting through so many places, a strong desire has grown to commit myself to a place, to which I could devote emotional attachment as well as intellectual respect. But this place is something to be distinguished from intellectual circle or party of shared tastes or interests. So I wanted to take Brazil as a metaphoric place for me, a distant, unfamiliar location where I would like to see how one could overcome the simple distinction between this community and that, or between “home” and “no home.” I want to undergo this trip in search of a community—I would call it a “community of absence,” following Bataille, a “community of those who do not have a community.” As I have imagined in making two previous videos work, it will be still “speaking” to solitary individuals, who live on an island but dream of a community. In other words, I am thinking of a community of plural hers and theirs that share nothing but ongoing self-examination with a strange kind of optimism. It should be rather imaginary—not utopian-one, and located outside of detectable and visible territory, maybe somewhere in my mind.

BC: Together with these videos, you think about creating conditions that could accommodate your notion of community for your exhibition at BAK. You plan to use a set of technical devices that include heaters, humidifiers, electric fans, or scent atomizers. It seems to me you apply the same method as we have seen in your work: rearranging common things in awkward or “uneven”—as you said before—way, while these elements are captured in your videos. But what I see as noticeable difference is that you choose elements with little “social” significance and you want to appeal more to senses. I mean using immediate bodily senses, which were mostly limited in your other works.

HY: I want to react to how “neutral” the spaces of exhibition are supposed to be: a sophisticated location for culture based on a Western, postmodern model. I would like to play with the notion of conditional settings for spaces for art and to address the viewer’s physical senses, extending on the notion of “sentiment” I spoke about before. I want to deal with a more immediate dimension of the “sensible.” What you experience as hot, cold, humid, smelly is both physically and socially determined, enveloped in one’s possible projections. I would thus like to open a hospitable platform for senses and thus offer a great deal of immediacy and accessibility to the audience. In doing so, I intend to create an uncanny but “(in)common” setting where the somewhat fragile and vulnerable idea of the “community of absence” can be performed.





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**Video Trilogy**

**“Unfolding Places”**

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**“Squandering Negative Spaces”**

Single Channel Video Projection

Brazil., DVD, ca. 33 min. Colour, Sound, English, 2006

Voice-over: David Michael DiGregorio

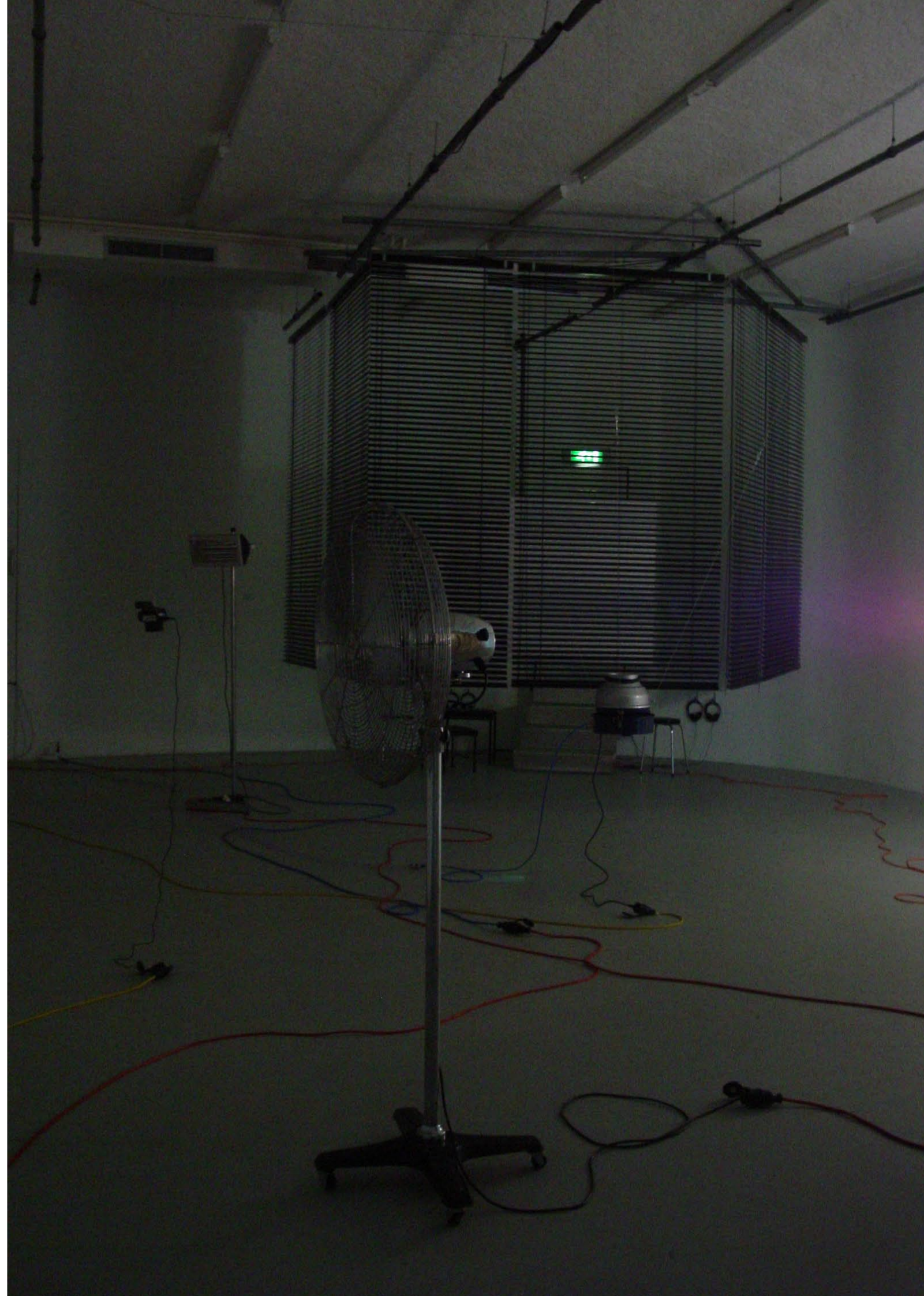




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- Light element: "Relational Irrelevance"

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Haegue Yang-BAK, Utrecht

“Fog machines, scent dispensers and origami; sci-fi tower blocks and urban detritus”

by Emily Pethick

(November Frieze, London)

In *Unavowable Community* (1983) Maurice Blanchot finds ‘community’ in the distance between human beings that can only be captured in a dissymmetrical experience of the other, which allows for ‘unknown spaces for freedom’ to exist in the moment of coming apart. The value of community lies in difference rather than commonality. Haegue Yang reflects upon this notion in her recent exhibition ‘Unevenly’ at BAK, Utrecht, in her search for ‘a community of those who do not have a community’ – something she imagines might be characterized by ‘heterogeneity, ongoing self-examination and a recognition of its own vulnerable and transitory nature.’

For *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements* (2006) Yang gathered an incongruous group of large modified electrical devices in BAK’s main exhibition space. Ranging from electric heaters to fog machines and scent dispensers, these carefully placed machines clicked on and off at intervals, triggered by the movements of visitors, releasing intermittent bouts of glowing warmth and faint wafts of vapour and breeze. Redundant in their functions, and with no particular relation to one another, the objects stand as an oddly animated group, connected by a sprawling system of wires and a shared power source, giving visitors common sensory experiences that link the collective back to the individual through the differing personal associations brought to each encounter.

The displacement of everyday objects is a regular feature of Yang’s work, as is her reflection on the conditions within which they have been brought together. In 2004 Yang was faced with the return of a number of her works from different locations around the world, and the fact that she had nowhere to store them. At the same time, she was offered a space to exhibit, so she resolved the situation by shipping all of the works to the gallery and stacking them, unpacked, on a palette to form a new work. *Storage Piece* (2004) suspended these works in limbo between arrival and departure as a wry reflection of her own personal circumstances.

Yang’s video works offer a more intimate take on the life of an artist for whom mobility is a necessary condition. Installed behind screens at BAK, *Unfolding Places* (2004) and *Restrained Courage* (2004) form the first two parts of a trilogy of video works that mixes documentary footage with introspective scripted narratives, recited as monologues by anonymous voices that might stand in for Yang herself. Fluidly shifting between everyday scenes in public spaces in cities such as Seoul, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and London, a parallel narrative unfolds in which the subject recounts isolated incidents that reveal her disjointed relation to her environment. A sense of distance and alienation marks each of these encounters, where instances of people getting lost, or publicly abused are met with her own silence. Recounted over seemingly unrelated footage – such as the movements of strangers on the streets, views from moving windows, at points interjected with flickering lights and brightly coloured origami sculptures floating in puddles – the slippages between the subjective and objective, public and private are reinforced in the separate lines of voice and image.

In the final part of the trilogy, *Squandering Negative Spaces* (2006), Yang travelled to Brazil, an unknown yet decisively chosen place, in search of ‘a community of absence’. This time the artist intended her position of ‘otherness’ in order to investigate the process of approaching a foreign culture from the outside. Yang’s camera follows a succession of unremarkable in-between spaces, non-places, puddles and stray objects, finding the subjective within the cracks and moments of disjuncture in the urban framework, bringing to mind Blanchot’s notion of a community that finds freedom in moments of rupture. Her accompanying thoughts again stray from the trodden path and resist assimilation, every now and again diverting back to Korea, finding a tension between the immediacy of the unknown and the overly familiar that lies in the back of the mind.



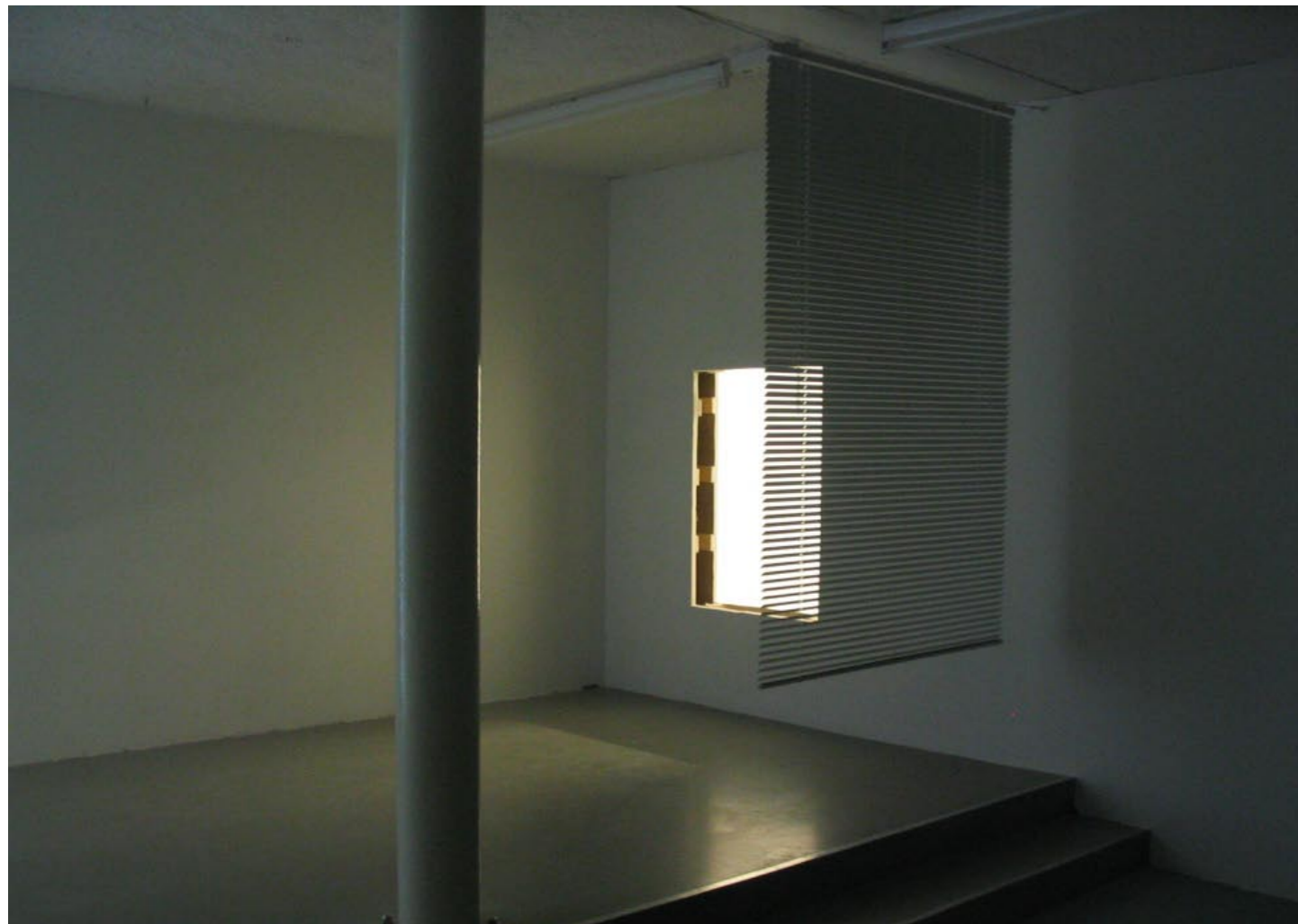
“Squandering Negative Spaces” 2006, Single Channel Video Projection

Far from the cracks and urban detritus of Brazil, in the adjacent space, a very different model of community is portrayed in *Dehors* (2006), a series of slides reproducing full-page Korean newspaper advertisements of drawings of future apartment complexes. Photographed against the light, other articles of the newspaper show through the image from the reverse side. These partially obscured gleaming sci-fi towers of the blocks of flats reveal a constructed idea of community that is similarly imagined, but at the same time entirely absent from the minds of developers, begging the question as to whether a social structure can be arrived at from the top down.

While the perpetual mobility and lack of belonging in Yang’s works create detached melancholic narratives, the non-arrival seems to also produce a thought process that prevents things from becoming bound. Objects are not kept in fixed positions, but are removed from their contexts and realigned in different relationships. It is this sense of disjointedness, in which things do not appear natural or ordered, that gives an openness to Yang’s work, allowing for connections and relations to arise – as she states herself, ‘unevenly’ – creating the space for a dissymmetrical notion of community to emerge in the negative spaces between people and things, and a singular, yet connected being.

“Unfolding Places”  
Single Channel Video Projection  
London, Seoul, DVD, ca. 18 min. Colour, Sound, English, 2004

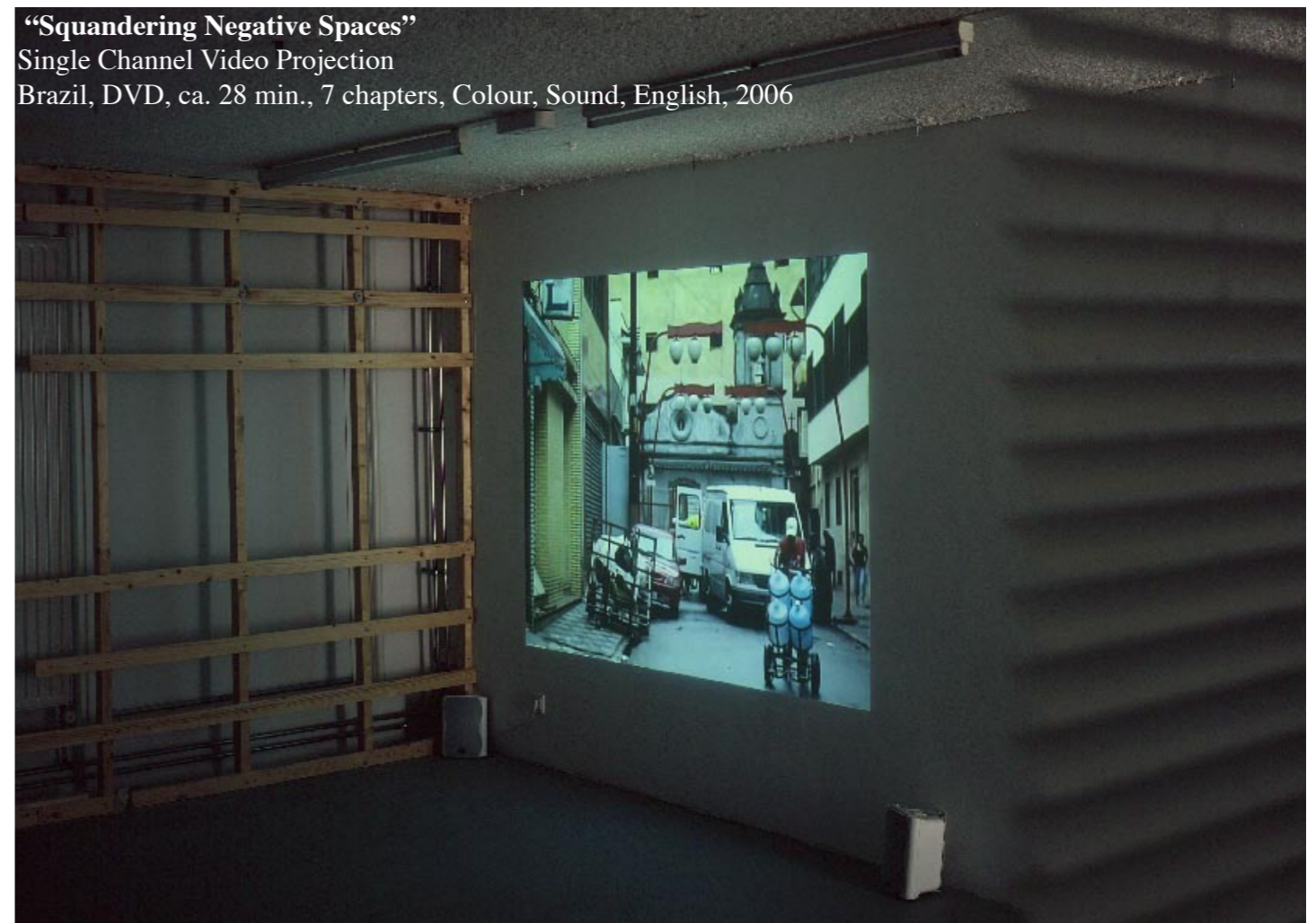




**“Restrained Courage”**  
Single Channel Video Projection  
Amsterdam, Frankfurt, London, Seoul, Berlin, etc., DVD, ca. 18 min. Colour, Sound, English, 2004



**“Squandering Negative Spaces”**  
Single Channel Video Projection  
Brazil, DVD, ca. 28 min., 7 chapters, Colour, Sound, English, 2006







“Dehors”  
Slide Projection in loop, 2006





