LE CORPS JOUABLE, MARC FOURNEL, VIDÉOS ET INSTALLATIONS.

DAGAFO and [Séquence] are pleased anounce the launch of The Playable Body, Marc Fournel, videos and installations at OBORO on March 26, 2010 from 5 to 7 pm, 2001 rue Berri, Montréal.

The Playable Body, Marc Fournel, videos and installations is a publication about the artistic work of Marc Fournel from 1995 to 2009 that comprises texts in English and French by authors Fabrice Montal, Caroline Seck Langill, Jean Gagnon, and Mike Phillips. The monograph also includes a short text by the artist about the enigmatic titles of his works. The hardcover book is illustrated with color photos.

The Gallery [Séquence] in Chicoutimi and DAGAFO have collaborated for this publication. Volumes, essays, and critical articles on works of contemporary Quebecer artists whose approach is based on new media are rare. This edition makes us discover a particular figure in the landscape of media art, while at the same time contributing to the necessary documentation of these artistic practices.

Marc Fournel, after some videographic productions between 1995 and 1998, begins to more systematically explore the application of informatics and softwares, particularly open-source softwares. Since 2004, he has devoted himself full-time to his artistic research, which has allowed him to produce a number of works, but also to develop his informatics tools and instruments. His artistic work has been presented nationally and internationally, notably at OBORO in Montreal, [Séquence] in Chicoutimi, Interacess in Toronto, at the International Festival of Video Art of Casablanca, at L'IRCAM in Paris, and at the Foundation Telefonica in Buenos Aires.

DAGAFO is a non-profit organization founded in Montreal in 2007 by Ricardo Dal Farra, Jean Gagnon, and Marc Fournel. DAGAFO supports, develops, and produces projects—by means of exhibitions and publications —that foster cultural exchange and relations on a national or international level. DAGAFO thanks [Séquence], Chicoutimi (QC) and i-DAT, Faculty of Technology, University of Plymouth (UK) for their collaboration in this publication, as well as the Canada Counsel for the Arts for its financial support.

[Séquence] is an important regional center in Saguenay for the production and presentation as well as the development of media art and new media in Quebec. The center's implication in the development of international relations has allowed it to put in place a strong network of exchange, presentation, and production of media art works. [Séquence] would like to thank: DAFAGO, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, the Conseil des Arts de Saguenay, and the city of Saguenay.
Available after book launch through the website of RCAAQ: http://rcaaq.org/librairie/

Pay No Attention to that Man Behind the Curtain.

Mike Phillips.

Somewhere under the skin (but tangibly close to the surface) of our travels down this yellow brick road has been the mutual concern for the fate of the artist in the face of all consuming institutions (academic, Research Councils, Arts Councils, Arts Organisations, and the increasingly thrombolite-like self institutionalising curator). To play out the adventure through the agency of the heart of the beast – actually two beasts, Hexagram and i-DAT, (as friendly and playful as these beasts (or maybe sub/demi-beasts?) has been ironic, subversive and entertaining... not to mention highly productive.

First contact was made through the Hexagram Jury at what must have been one of the coldest places on the planet (temporarily at least). A -40°C (with wind-chill) face-slicing-razor-blade snow encrusted Montreal at the end of January 2007 provided a backdrop. My Grade 4 CSE (that's not very good - it really isn't – but no 15yr old should have a French teacher called Mr Condom) French was severally tested by the mind blending discourse much of which cunningly ignored the elephant (éléphant) in the room (not my bad French) - the mutually destructive but desperately needy nature of the institutions relationship with individual creative practice. The evolution of Hexagram's mission was fascinating to both of us - to Marc as the rogue outsider simultaneously magnetically attracted and repulsed and my own fraught pilgrimage for sustainable and productive models. It was exhausting but in between the frostbite and brain freeze, one or two microbrews illuminated a synergy.

It was not until the April of the same year, in a radically transformed Montreal – burning white to muddy green - during the Planetary Colegium Summit (http://www.planetary-collegium.net/) (also supported by Hexagram) that we consolidated this synergy, assisted by a lunch of escargot. The conspiracy was hatched for Marc to invade Plymouth with the support of i-DAT and a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts. The focus of the excursion would be to explore the potential of the Arch-OS system and the Immersive Vision Theatre, two resources in i-DAT's toolbox, to support Marc's creative endeavours. The CCA application was well received and a timeline was mapped out for a formal engagement.

By way of introduction i-DAT, the vehicle for our collaboration, aspires (with some success) to act as a catalyst for creative research and innovation across the fields of Art, Science and Technology. i-DAT's agenda focuses on creative, practice based research, developing new 'tools' for production, dissemination and participation that challenge traditional models of creation and consumption, and embrace the shifting relationships between audiences and cultural producers (artists, designers, curators, galleries, etc). Marc joined us, from an institutional perspective, to help realise these goals.

As a practitioner, as an artist, Marc creates a problem for academic institutions. Apart from the generic and fundamental right and purpose of all artists to create problems for institutions, practicing artists and academia do not mix well. He operates on an edge balancing precariously between the studio, the gallery and the research institute, fighting the gravitational forces that threaten to suffocate through over definition. i-DAT positions itself somewhere in the middle of this milieu of uneasy dependencies, facilitating relationships with researchers and professional practitioners as well as engaging with the necessary peripherals and accessories. For i-DAT Marc highlights the importance of credible practice

and rigorous interaction with research, not as a binary but as a holistic integration. It is not just the material and the process of being digital that has changed; it is the whole educational/professional landscape that is shifting.

One might hope that with this shifting landscape some of the old disciplinary enclaves would collapse. The territories occupied by different disciplines (Art, Humanities, Science and Technology) seem far more permeable to the osmotic pressure of change than those sub-disciplines within Art and Design. It is not just the mental and psychological territories that need to rupture under these pressures, the physical territories of the studio and the gallery need flexing. Marc has eagerly demonstrated the power to do more than flex these artificial walls, preferring to dismember and reversion space through the conjuring of rich experiences through a blend space and technology and playful interaction.

The redefinition of the gallery space through acoustic reverberations, behavioural transgressions and spatial dissections suggests unease and even dissatisfaction with the 'White Cube'. The rebellious nature of Marc's installations is both a celebration of the audience and an invitation to break the collective illusion of the artificial environment. It is their participation that defines the relationship with the work, not the delusion of a neutral architecture. Work such as Tontauben (2004) and Flock (2006) generate a dialogical relationship between the participant and the work which although located within the gallery space rapidly dissolves the white cube into a playful dynamic. Whilst Omega (2007), a cross between a sensory deprivation tank and a diving bell, is ominous but tantalising, its clinical haunting pulsing presence seductively occupying the space, cutting through the gallery like a massive silver reverberating pastry cutter.

The technologies employed in Marc's work are clearly visible - speakers, mirrors and mechanics - and yet the experience of their use makes them invisible. The interactions have been lovingly seduced the from behind the green curtain, no smoke and mirrors here. Well actually several mirrors, but mirrors which reveal their presence and function, no secrets which breach a trust with the participant. There may be some 'magic' components, the locative technologies themselves play with a level of invisibility only revealed through the behaviour of the participants, but these elements are deployed with a frankness and pragmatism that integrates them into the experience on a level with the mirror and the speaker. The behaviour of the user and the seamless interaction with the environment and objects (thrown balls, furry balls or reflected symbols) creates a level of honesty and familiarity which transcends the mass of wires, servo motors, transducers and software that drives them. To make these things disappear is a skill few artists fully utilise. To engage them within a dynamic and sustainable installation requires the artists to transcend theatricality, anticipating, embracing and cultivating human behaviour rather than forcing and constructing it.

An aspect of Marc's work that is invisible but indivisible from the mechanics and electronics of his experiences is the code that glues it all together - in itself a set of behaviours constructing behaviour. Marc's collaboration with i-DAT developed a set of relationships between Arch-OS and the IVT (Immersive Vision Theatre). Once the technicalities of the real time building data had been fathomed, Marc moved on to engage with the Full Dome environment. Full Dome environments are fraught with problems; from the physics of the space (here we are talking about an 8 metre Dome with a 25 degree tilt) to the technologies that drive them. i-DAT has been working on the development of the IVT with the Experiential

Learning CETL (Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning). The University of Plymouth's old William Day Planetarium (built in 1967) has been reborn as a 40 seat IVT, a transdisciplinary instrument for the manifestation of material, immaterial and imaginary worlds. The 'Full Dome' architecture now houses a powerful high-resolution projector fitted with a 'fish eye' lens to wrap data, models, video and images around its inner surface. The 10 speaker spatialised audio system enables the modelling of acoustic environments as well as playback through virtual speakers, ie more speakers than physically exist. The IVT is being used for a range of activities, from cross disciplinary teaching to cutting edge research in modelling and visualisation.

And Arch-OS itself, a tool for manufacturing experience was elegantly handled by Marc insight and skill. Originally built within the Portland Square Complex (i-DAT HQ) under the rubric of 'Intelligent Architecture' the Arch-OS system provides a set of tools which more critically cultivate a more intelligent behaviour in the buildings users. Through a process of revelation the impact of human behaviour within the building is manifest through audio visual installations and mobile broadcasts. The flow of people, data, networks and energy are mapped through a server cluster and dynamic databases streaming through a 3D architectural 56 speaker system and 10m high LED matrix exposing internal processes. In the midst of this milieu of technologies with the power to generate transformative experience in the user/viewer/participant Marc felt very much at home. It was interesting witnessing Marc revealing the common genetic ancestry running through his installation work and Arch-OS.

Coupling Arch-OS and the IVT has been an ongoing battle, it is not a problem to link the two (standard xml feeds), but to manifest the real time data in the dome environment requires a flexible data visualisation engine that is accessible and open. Tools like Blender, Unity 3D, Uniview and Quartz Composer all offer solutions but few provide the flexibility to dynamically control external components. So Marc wrote a new one!
(http://ciam.dyndns.org/~mfco/fr/?q=fisheye) Did I mention he likes to play with PD? The GEM object renders a fisheye distortion map for use within a full dome environment. Through collaboration with Mathieu Bouchard and support from Pete Carss at i-DAT Marc solved the problem by generating an open tool. Again a pragmatic engagement that is typical of the collaboration, a problem that generates a solution, but a solution that becomes an open tool for further investigation. This brings us back to the Holy Grail qualities Marc possesses, the ability to collaborate, not just in the here and now, but through an active engagement with a culture of open source, to collaborate with a future potential.

The outputs of these intensive activities over a relatively short time are themselves interesting. The GEM object, the bytes and bobs of code and the electronic prototypes reveal and enable a new set of potentials and define parameters for new behaviours of audience engagement. As tools they provide open opportunities for others to engage with and extend the project. Within these prototypes and fragments of code the shape of a form can be seen, something emerging that possibly redefines Marc's previous projects. As the form defines itself the ingredients, characteristics and algorithms become more apparent: architecture, code, projection, reflection, behaviour, participation, reciprocity and playfulness. This is a behavioural morphology that can be seen running through Tontauben, Flock and Omega. Although contained and restrained by the gallery space these works contain the explosive ingredients that are now evolving through these open systems. Freed from the splints and casts of the gallery space this new dispersed form is embedded and distributed.

Data, code, behaviour and experience, a series of transpositions in the dematerialisation of the artist. The technologies now employed in Marc's work are instruments that enable this alchemical transformation, instruments that disappear through their ubiquity.

It is fascinating, looking back, that our initial contact so elegantly manufactured by Hexagram should have created such a perfect match of an individual with an institution. Intuition, fate or destiny, Marc was something of a Holy Grail for i-DAT; an artist who has a commensurate understanding and vision of the potential of digital practice. As an Arts Organisation i-DAT has supported many artists to make the leap from where art schools leave off and digital practice begins. Part of our core mission is to actively engage with transdisciplinary activity, a mission we thought might focus on the 'trans' bit between art, science and technology. Somewhere in our rhetoric we refer to the 'digital' providing a Rosetta Stone that will magically unlock a portal between disciplines. All too often the digital dialogue between disciplines has been the easy bit, it works, digital (in particular data) is a point of disciplinary convergence, what we hadn't factored in was the struggle we would have engaging artists in the process of translation.

There are numerous noticeable exceptions (Hexagram, the Planetary Collegium, i-DAT and Transtechnology, to name an obvious few). It is difficult to identify the ingredients that create the barriers, maybe it is something to do with the materiality (or immateriality), the temporality or the lack of a defined technology (technology that can do anything as opposed to the camera or printing press that can do the 'one thing'...)? Whatever it is, too many interactions force a relationship that requires the organisation to facilitate rather than collaborate. Not that there is a problem with this, it is why we exist, but Marc provided an opportunity we were only too happy to embrace. Once the vagaries of Arch-OS and the peculiarities of equirectangular projection and full dome environments were mastered the collaboration was more than illuminating for both parties, an experience that has changed all of our subsequent behaviour.

In pulling aside the curtain Marc has achieved a level of artistic sophistication that can be seen from a number of perspectives; historically his pedigree is in the brave 'technic' tradition of the likes of EAT emerging from more analogue times; in a contemporary context of the Naughties he defines a clear but generous position in the struggle between the artist and the academic; underpinning his practice is a negotiation between open and closed systems, a rubric which in itself enables a critical engagement with and contribution to the future. But primarily Marc's practice is the subtle art of crafting human behaviour through a materiality of hearts brains and nerves.

Perth, Munich and Plymouth November 2009.