

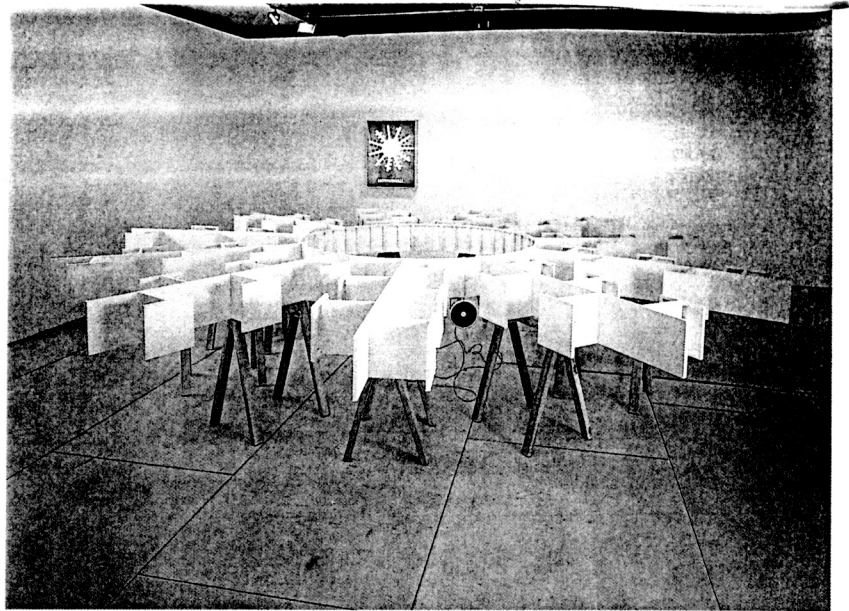
David Schafer

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1997 marks the “birthday” of Hal, the ship’s computer in Stanley Kubrick’s 1968 classic, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. A diabolical manipulator with devious corporate agendas, Hal was some evil mother. In David Schafer’s version of the future, the mother is a mall—and while not exactly evil, “Mother Mall” is, at least, diabolically bland.

Comprised of a large-scale model and a series of wall pieces, this installation turns late-modern consumer culture into a vast, quasi-organic vessel, a hypothetical *Über*-mall that sustains multiple subject positions but only as interchangeable commodities. The model sits in prime position near the entrance of the room, a casual, white circular structure with radiating galleys resting atop a ring of sawhorses like an amateur carpenter’s back shed project. It is eerily devoid of detail, a replica synthesized from incomplete data. As if truly transported by the raptures of commodity fetishism, this crude contraption resembles a mother ship, a prototype for intergalactic travel in the not-so-distant, marked-down future. Referencing the dystopias of both sci-fi and suburbia, it is a lesson in flow control—an overarching synthetic maternal, organizing, advising, advertising, comforting, controlling and delineating the denizens who circulate in its simulated biosphere.

The wall pieces—which include digital print-



DAVID SCHAFER, “MOTHER MALL.” INSTALLATION
DETAIL.

outs on paper, painted aluminium signs, and a light box of the plan of the mall—variously appropriate found fragments of text gleaned from the white noise of mall-speak. The familiar language of car magazines, *TV Guide*, teen ’zines, grocery store flyers, heavy metal lyrics, and journal articles on “how to be a successful artist” are interspersed with Smiley faces and those distinctive dots from the plastic wrap around Wonder Bread. All of the excerpted material is unremarkable, posing a passive and rather mute subject whose desires are about as riveting as warmed-over food in a bain-marie.

That the *mélange* includes texts about being an artist is strategic; here, the artist is no less pathetic than anyone else. Schafer’s actual work, however, confounds the disavowal of mastery. The prints are by Muse-X, a digital print shop that is the twenty-first century equivalent of a master lithographer’s workshop, with whose help Schafer has produced a handsome set of commodity forms for this post-object show. The author lives—albeit to make exquisite jewels out of someone else’s banality.

In “Mother Mall,” past, present, and future merge into something that is beyond postmodern, too ambivalent to be oppositional, and as seamless as the Muzak that plays softly, insistently in the background—not piped at all, only emitted from the low-tech speakers hung in plain view from the lower edge of the model. With its multiple radiating arms and softly humming lullabies, “Mother Mall” is a perfect degendered matrix, all-encompassing, homogenizing, and dispersed into the body corporate: an artificial life.

Margaret Morgan