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ALICE AYCOCK

ESCAPE FROM REASON

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will be making a chronological survey of Alice Aycock's career from its beginnings in the early 1970's to the present day.

I will look at her sources, the main themes and preoccupations and the main theoretical underpinnings of her work.

While taking this diachronic approach, I would like to stress that perhaps a better description of the development of her interests would be a centrifugal growth rather than a linear progression.

Themes become increasingly inclusive, expansive and universal. Subjects that can be found in early works are explored and developed from piece to piece. Elaborate networks of interrelated ideas develop which she weaves from one work to another, frequently over years.

Aycock uses a myriad of sources in each work. I will suggest that deciphering and tracing these will only give a partial meaning of the work. One must look also to the way these ideas are brought together, that is to their relation or the structure of the complex formed.

In this way we will learn something of Aycock's thought processes, and I suggest that this is the ultimate meaning of her work.

I will follow the development out of minimalism when she started to make participatory pieces. She was sometimes seen at this stage as a "land-artist", but the structures more than their site-relatedness was her predominant concern. Her career progresses through "theatrical works",then more technologically based "machineworks" to the present pieces based largely on cosmological diagrams and board games.

Through these major stylistic phases, Aycock deals again and again with subjects such as the house, the labyrinth, memory, the city, the forces of the universe, history, science, magic, madness and the mind.

Aycock, especially in the earlier years of her career made use of the main aesthetic theories current at the time. I will relate certain theories to certain phases of her career where they are of predominant relevance. This may suggest a successive taking up and then discarding. In fact the theories continue to be held throughout her career. Phenomenology is prominent in the early architectural works; structuralism and systems analysis prominent in the later architectural and "machineworks".

In the later stages of her career, Aycock frees herself from direct indebtedness to these theories and develops her art more wholely in response to her own personal fantasies. Her obsessive need to fantasise is the major driving force in all her work.

I will propose that Aycock works mainly by employing dualities, bringing them together as she synthesises her varied eclectic source material. The dualities are however not reconciled but held disjunctively in tension. The overlaying of multiple strands of thought bring many dualities to play in any single piece producing a network of forces that activates the work.

The dualities beg resolution at a higher imaginative plane. The disjunctions force us to search deeply and widely, to try and "bear down", as Aycock does, to resolve the dualities, paradoxes and, often I think, incompatibilities that have been juxtaposed.

Often, it seems, this effort will be in vain, but this is not a failing in Aycock's art.

I suggest that of all the dualities that she uses, her overriding preoccupation is that of rationality versus irrationality.

Aycock says that in her work she wants to deal with the problems of her age. In this question of rationality and irrationality I suggest that, like many artists, even from the beginning of the "Enlightenment project", which now seems finally to have failed. She has sought to counter, the threat to man's humanity from rationlism and positivism.

CHAPTER 1: INFLUENCES AND SOURCES

Alice Aycock came to prominence in the American art world at the time of the aesthetic dominance of minimalism during the 1970's when artists like Robert Morris , Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Richard Serra were making far ranging formal and conceptual investigations. In particular Aycock was most directly influenced by the ideas of Robert Morris who was her tutor at Hunter College, New York and who oversaw her M.A. thesis.

In looking at Aycock's minimalist influences and early development, I will focus in particular on Robert Morris. After looking at Morris' mainly phenomonological theories of this period, I will then discuss Aycock's subsequent move away from minimalist concerns. This estrangement can be seen in the context of a general move away from modernist formalism begun by minimalism and taken up by the new generation who continued the move from the typical detached formalist, contemplative gallery object.

Aycock's move from minimalism can also be seen as a result of the inherent tendencies in her artistic make-up that were incompatible with minimalist theories and restrictions.

MINIMALISM

In their catalogue, "Sitings", Hugh Davis and Roland Honorato (1978) attempt to trace the origins of the work of four "post-minimalist" artists, Alice Aycock, Richard Fleishner, Mary Miss and George Trakas, who they see as having architectural concerns and site relatedness as common features. They try to show how their work has evolved out of minimalist concerns with contextual space which eventually led to land-art. Bearing in mind some of the problems in considering "minimalism" as a distinct art historical category at all, (Berger, 1990) briefly stated, their proposted historical development is as follows.

They see that the minimalists' geometrically based, reductive, impersonal forms or "primary structures" served in a move away from the typical modernist studio objecy with its formal considerations and its supposed detachment and automomy.

Minimalists were increasingly interested in an "engagement of space" by the object eg. Carl Andre's Lever (1) whose positioning and resultant architectural integration "lifts" or "energises" the entire surrounding architectural space.

Robert Morris' generalised forms (2) when placed in a room were both conceptually and physicallly dependant on the architecture.

Not only was the physical contextual space becoming more important but the interaction of the sculpture and the viewer was being reexamined. Morris stressed his sculpture as being an object in a situation one that virtually by definition includes the beholder. (Berger 1990)

The agressive way in which their large scale and direct engagement confronted the spectator was anathema to formalist critics. Clement Greenberg in his essay The New Sculpture in his book Art and Culture (1961), for example championed the contemplative, modest, self-contained objects that emphasised pictorial and illusionistic possibilities.

Michael Fried in Art and Objecthood (1967) recognised the confrontational interaction between this new sculpture and the observer.

Fried criticises minimalist or "literalist" art for what he describes as its inherent "theatricality" which he characterised in terms of a particular relation between the beholder as subject and the work as object. He saw that this relation takes place in time, that it has duration. "The beholder knows himself to stand in an indeterminate, open-ended and unexacting relation as subject to the impassive object on the floor or wall". (Fried, 1967) He stated that this theatricality was "at war with art" and denounced this type of objecthood and temporality.

Modernist critics considered that the object of art should transcend the literal shape and its base material. Because minimalist or "literalist" art relied on actual shape, literal presence became the principal goal of "literalist objects". This in their terms placed in question the "purity" of these structures as art.

Morris in opposition to this modernist, formalist theory advocated a radical revision of the critical vocabulary, one that rejected formalist metaphysics in favour of emphasising this new discourse of "real experience".

The theorietical underpinnings of Morris' writings at this stage were those of phenomenology. Indeed phenomenology is the main theoretical consideration in Aycock's early architectual works.

PHENOMENOLOGY

The phenomenological method was developed by Edmund Husserl at the turn of the century in his book "Logical Investigation" (1900) It claimed to redeem philosophy from academic abstractions by enabling us to return to the origins of ideas in our concrete lived experience.

Morris Merleau-Ponty in "Phenomenology of Perception" applied this method to the question of our bodily relationships to the world (Kearney 1986). He aimed at a return to origins of knowledge by examining how the world first appears to human consciousness prior to the objectifying constrictions of our conceptula judgements ie. the world is an experience which we live before it is an object we know in some impersonal or detached fashion. we must return to that original realation between man and the world which precedes the conventional separation of our experience into opposite poles of subject and object ie. to the pre-theoretic, pre-reflective experience in the reciprocal relationship of the genesis of man by the world and of the world by man. "It is through our bodies as living centres of intenionality that we choose our world and that our world chooses us". (Kearney, 1986)

As such phenomenology is an existential attempt to restore reason to its "true spiritual vocation as the transcendental production of meaning in and through the human life-world" (Kearney 1986).

Robert Morris expresses these phenomenological ideas in his essay The Present Tense (1978) He focuses on the immediate lived directness of experience. He recognised that this experience is embedded in the very nature of spatial perception. He was investigating, as would Aycock, sculpture that incorporates multiple views, separate spaces, even protracted distances, creating a constantly changing spatial experience extended over time. "Images, the past tense of reality, were giving way to duration, the present tense of immediate spatial experience." He speaks of "the intimate inseperability of the experience of physical space and that of an ongoing immediate present." (Morris, 1978)

In 1971, Morris built Observatory (3) A earthwork compass built into the land, a culmination of his phenomenlolgical researches of the late 1960's. The compositon of enclosures, courts, ramps, site lines and various gradients asserts that the work provides a physical experience for the mobile human body. It requires the viewers physical participation over time defying comprehension through the passive visual confrontation permitted by "object sculpture".

He said he was "concerned with spaces that one enters, passes through, literal spaces not just a line in the distance, but a kind of space the body can occupy and move through". (Yard 1986)

This phenomenological immediacy of direct experience, of "real space" that the body can pass into or through, is the basis of Alice Aycick's early work, for example, one must crouch in the confines of Low Building with Dirt Roof, for Mary (7), find ones way through the labyrinthine Maze (6) or climb the towers or crawl in the underground tunnels of Project Entitled 'The Beginnings of a Complex ...' (9) They provide revelation of meaning over time as the body moves through the structures. They require the use of senses other than the visual eg. kinaesthetic (Bloomer, 1977).

Observatory may be considered a culmination of Morris' researches into phenomenology, but it also marks two important developments that would be central to Aycock's work. Firstly, there is the emergence of work that explictly bridges the gap between art and architecture. Although as seen in (2), this had been conceptually implicit. Secondly, Observatory is concerned with history, a favorite source anf subject for Aycock.

Perhaps seeing a dead end in a purely phenomenological approach to art, Morris and the next generation of artists active in the early 1970's, like Aycock and Trakas, reintroduced cultural and historical references into their works while retaining phenomenological human body scale.

By the mid 1970's, Aycock was conflating her structures with a mesmerising multitude of references eg. quotations from medieval art and architecture, ritual sructures, personal fantasy and real or imagined reminiscences of childhood.

THE PIG OF KNOWLEDGE

The ancient Greek tombs, medieval and Renaissance images, childhood terrors, science and schizophrenic hallucinations are just some of the sources of Alice Aycock's work. The electronic chip may seem the basic element behind Large Scale Dis/Integration of Microelectronic Memories (10), an architectonic site work of 1980 but closer investigation reveals a kaleidoscopic pattern of sources. Aycock says in uncharacteristically straightforward terms about this piece "It is about enclosures and solitude and deprivation. It is also an amusement park, an lunatic assylum, a prison, a house, a cemetery, a market-place, a battlefield, a labyrinth, a paradise ...." (Fox 1982) One could add a memory, a brain, a universe ...

Similarly, her piece The Angel Continues Turning the Wheel of the Universe (13) is based on an Aztec game and a World War 1 tactical plan, among other things.

This ploy can be understood in one way as a result of a natural investigative propensity in Aycock. "There is a part of me that makes the pieces to find something out, much as Piaget did in his kind of research (Morgan 1985).

In an interview with Stuart Morgan (1985) Aycock recalls how age 12, she realised "that if I read enough books I would discover the secrets of the universe. I put myself through a concerted effort to synthesise every piece of information that came in, to add it to the stream". Later she was to utilize this investigative and synthetic tendency in her art.

From her learning experiences during her B.A. at Douglas College she made her decision to become an artist. "Ideas and practices were brought very close together, where art became suddenly a method of aquiring knowledge in a very broad and interdisciplinary way" (Poirier 1986). She realised that any knowledge she could gain could be used in her art. "When you are ravenous for information you are a Pig of Knowledge" (Morgan 1985) This goes some way to explain her avidly broad researches and the spectrum of her source material.

This apparently rational, scholarly approach represents one side of Aycock's personality. It is evident in her admiration for the minimalists who influenced her early work. About Robert Morris she said; "He pursued art deadly seriously with a kind of seriousness that only a scientist would have. He pursued it in a manner that had to do with a quest for knowledge. He used art as a kind of probing device. What attracted me about the minimalist artists was that they presented themselves more like intellectuals. I remember feeling, here's a bunch of guys who know mathematics." (Poirier, 1986)

Her own art she says "always has to pose a question almost in the way science does. Otherwise I'm not really interested."

The image of the artist as intellectual, enlightened, rational and scientific investigator may have been a dominant aspiration during her early years, but Aycock was not to be content with the rationalist exploration or the restrictions of minimalism. Explaining her early move away from minimalism she said, "in a sense formal issues have never been a concern of mine. They have just been one of the ingredients of the cake." (Poirier, 1986)

Initially Aycock owed a debt to the highly controlled experimental approach of Robert Morris, but really they couldn"t be less alike, and Aycock was to turn increasingly to the other side of her artistic character and develop subject matter that was intensely emotional, literary, open to irrational experience and complexity and dominated by explicit personal fantasy.

The other side of Aycock's personality aspires not to the artist as intellectual, but to the artist as irrational, romantic and mystic.

Incresingly, the avidly researched, apparently scientific approach is put to essentially fantastic ends.

Characteristically "The Pig of Knowledge", ravenous for information, is no simple pig. We should not be surprised to discover that "he is also the diagram of how Doges are elected, he's an attack system for a medieval fortress in Europe, he's chicken story." Indeed "he is not a pig, he is a bird." (Morgan 1985) This counterpoint is an appropriate symbol for Aycock's magpie errudition, her butterfly mind on its flight of fancy.

What then are we to make of all these sources?

As I will be posing in more detail in the conclusion, we should not expect to find adequate elucidation of the themes or meaning of Aycock's work merely by attempting to identify the sources. They serve more as raw materials for Aycock's imagination, and I will propose that this, not the sources is the real subject of her art. It is the nature of their free associations rather that their immediate import that will provide meaning. Initially they should act for us, as they do for Aycock, as a springboard for fantasy.

CHAPTER 2: ARCHITECTURAL WORKS

Let us now look more closely at Aycock's early architectural works, a phase of her career which extends from the student days up to the more theatrical works of circa 1979.

STUDENT WORK

Aycock's student work was mainly concerned with time based and process work displaying change. Clay consisted of troughs of cracking earth. Cloud Piece (4) was a set of photographs of a cloud formation gathering an dispersing. (Lippard,1973) Sand/Fans, consisted of four industrial fans equidistant from a pile of sand blowing at the force of the prevailing wind outside. In Stairs(These stairs can be climbed) (5), she seems to echo the minimalists articulation of the gallery space and the use of the stacked module but here, participation is emphasised.

PSYCHOSCULPTURE

Participation is a key feature in Aycock's first major outdoor work, Maze (1972), (6) which was influence by Aycock's masters thesis - An Incomplete Examination of the Highway Network User/Perciever System 1971. I will comment more fully on this source later.

Multiple references are becoming evident in her work at this stage and other sources for Maze, include her 1970 trip to the beehive tholos tombs of Greece and thoughts on the legendary labyrinth of Crete.

Maze, a labyrintine piece, consisted of five six foot high concentric rings made of wood planking with three random openings into which the spectator had to enter and wander to the centre. In the process he became temporarily disorientated , lost and trapped within the structure.

Memory, an ongoing theme with Aycock, is linked to the labyrinth. Only by using memory can one efficiently extricate onself again. It is necessary to remember the corridors and cul de sacs traversed along the circuitous route to the center in order to find one's way out.

As with Morris' Observatory (3), Aycock, building with a minimalist alphabet of pure form, is open to the use of "impure" associations, be they cultural, historcal or biographical. The labyrinth motif with its ideal fusion of form and meaning, bearing as it does a wealth of mythological and ritualistic associations, became very popular at this time. For example Robert Morris' Passageway (27) and Labyrinth (28); and Richard Fleischner's Sod Maze (30) and Michael Ayrton's Arkville Maze (29).

Despite these cultural associations, in Aycock's labyrinth, the phenominological aspect is still dominant in this early stage of her career.

After Maze, Aycock made Low Buiding with Dirt Roof (for Mary) (1973.) It was a memorial to the sudden death of her twelve year old neice. Again spectator participation and threat are involved. The piece consists of a confined interior 30 inches high covered by a roof supporting seven tons of dirt. Anyone entering it has to accept the risk of the roof caving in on them in this claustrophobic space.

As often in Aycock's work, she deals witn a dualism which acts as a point of tension, begging resolution at a higher imaginative level. Here we have a space that is secure and protective whilst being threatening and suffocating.

Like an imploded attic and cellar, the space carries all the connotaions these aspects of the "house" imply. These ideas of the "house", Aycock would have been familiar with from reading Gaston Bachelard's Poetics of Space. (Bachelard 1969) & (Frankel 1983).

On entering the piece there is an immediate psychological response due to the physiscal confinement, followed by a later symbolic response or memory response when the many associations can be conflated with the initial experience.

One of the key elements underlying these early works seems to be the terrors she experienced as a child. She remembers the fear of falling into a void of blackness. "It was a fear of death".

This experience was recreated in Project for a Circular Building with Narrow ledges for Walking (8). It is based on a well in Orvieto designed by Sangallo. (Fineberg 1990). Aycock's well like structure is 12 feet in diameter and 17 feet deep. The participant is required to climb down two sets of deep stairs without bannisters in order to reach the lowest ledge. One experiences vertigo and claustrophobia at the same time.

At one level these pieces act as therapy. By devising situations in which a potential danger existed, Aycock felt that she could control those fears. By recreating or re-inventing the terror she could live through it. "I could play with those basic feelings of fear and literally project myself into a state of fear like an actor does" (Poirier, 1986)

She sees this therapeutic role also in the storytelling she learnt at her grandmother's knee. "If you could make those awful things into a story then you could control them. (Poirier, 1986) (As we shall see, Aycock uses stories as an important adjunct to her later works.)

This sense of danger pervades most of her early work and resurfaces at a time of personal emotional turmoil in her "blade pieces" around 1982.

There seems to be a perverse delight in luring the spectator into potentially hazardous sistuations like traps. Aycock recognises this danger as essential to her art. "It's got to be there or else it doesn't feel right." (Osterwold, 1983)

At this time Aycock co-opted the label of "psycho-sculpture" or "psychophysical spaces" for her work. "It was the only way I could think of to descibe the fact that the physical experience set off a psychological one or that it was a combination of the two." (Poirier,1986)

Much of the inspiration of this aspect of the early work comes from Bruce Nauman's Corridor Pieces (31) of 1970 in which a feeling of estrangement was generated and as Aycock says "you were really confronted with yourself". (Poirier,1986)

Aycock's participatory structures demonstrate another aspect of "the systems aesthetic", an aesthetic prevelant in the late sixties put forward by Jack Burnham, one thesis of which was that art contains survival value. It presents problems and challenges paralleling those of everyday life but that here occur artificially within an area that is "psychically insulated" from the environment. (Burnham, 1986)

Morse Peckham best articualtes his view that art is a rehersal situation for the disorientaion and the disorder of real life in Man's Rage for Chaos. (Peckham, 1965) Peckham proposes that man values and seeks order in all aspects of his life. He proposes that art's usefulness is not in depicting this order and so giving reassurance, but that art provides the opposite to order - chaos. Art in a safe environment provides us with exercises in dealing with the disorder, disorientaion and disjunction that we face in the real world. "Art is the reinforcement of the capacity to endure disorientation so that a real and significant problem may emerge. Art is the exposure to the tension and problems of a false world so that man may endure exposing himself to the tensions and problems of the real world." (Peckham,1965)

Aycock echoes these ideas - "In my work as a whole structure contitutes a set of directions for a performance." These "performances/experiments force us lilterally to act, to m;ake decisions, to take risks, to grapple with danger and fear all within the false world that is similar to but not congruent with the real world." (Aycock,1977)

Having emphasised this psychological aspect of Aycock's work, it would be wrong to see her early work as simply "psycho-sculpture". As always, there are other underlying preoccupations. To elucidate some of these, we will return to her first major work, Maze, (1972).

MAZE AND THE MASTERS THESIS

The form of Maze was influenced by Aycock's masters thesis, An Incomplete Examination of the lHighway Network User/Perceiver System (1971) which was overseen by Robert Morris.

It was an extended consideration of how highway systems could be analysed, drawing mainly on phenomenology and information and systems theory, but also typical of Aycock, incorporating a synthesis of quotaions from anthropology, music criticism, the psychology of perception and the philosophy of science.

Though scholarly in tone, it bore traces of Aycock's later disjunctive writing style - It's three epigraphs were quotations from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (Joyce, 1977): Norm and Pathology of I Relations by Erwin W. Strauss and a lesson by Mr Barnes, her brother Billy's biology teacher.

The appropriate terms for her definition of the highway system were culled from structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss, who in The Savage Mind (Levi-Strauss, 1977) referred to "the necessary" and "the contingent" or "the structure" and "the event". The highhway structure was "the necessary structure, one's passage through it, the contingent event."

Aycock explains how "a road system is designed so that when you act in it, an event takes place and it is structured in terms of your body and your entire perceptual system because you have to move safely on it." "I decided to build art that had that kind of quality." (Aycock,1977)

"I would set up a structure to generate an event and that event would be the perceiver's interaction with the structure." She was unable to build a highway system "so I built a maze which is a model of a road system; it is a metaphor, in the way that for example your circulation system might be used as a model for a road system."

Here Aycock refers to a similar use of the circulation and highway metaphors by Italo Calvino in his novel "t-zero". (Calvino) Aycock is attracted to Calvino's metaphoric use of "the city" in later works.

For further discusson of the return to the metaphor and its basis in allegory as an underlying characteristic in postmodernist art, see also Craig Owens essay "The Allegorical Impulse (Owens,1980)

COMPLEX AND STRUCTURALISM

In 1977, Aycock produced Project Entitled "The Beginnings of a Complex ... Otherwise Titled This is My Opening Farewell" (Hereafter called Complex) installed temporarily for Documenta 6 Kassel, Germany.

Unlike earlier self enclosed single units, Aycock is here interested in dealing with the relationships between a number of different elements. This interest in relation stems from her reading of the structuralists, Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Foucault and Piaget (Morgan, 1985).

Structuralism studies surface relations between basic elements of a language (in the broad sense of the term) to identify "deep structures" (Levi-Strauss, 1966).

These in turn indicate (in Levi-Strauss's theory, if not the other structuralists) universal mechanisms of the human mind. This, we will see, is an ultimate impluse in Aycock's work.

In Complex, several towers and a facade vie with one another for attention. This "city" or "complex' of heterogeneous structures again offered a gamut of sensations ranging from claustrophobia/phyllia or acrophobia/phyllia. An underground network of tunnels, through which one had to pass in order to gain access to the towers, connected the seemingly unrelated structures. These hidden tunnels functioned not only as a labyrinth but also as an invisible network that ordered and fused together the disparate units. The labyrinth as a system of organisation now supplants the labyrinth as structure that we saw in Maze.

Aycock, as stated, read and took ideas and terms from structuralist anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss - in particular taking on board his idea of the necessary structure and the contingent event. Here she reiterates how she sees the highway and her metaphor for it, the maze, as a structure that constitutes a set of directions for a performance.

She introduces the idea of disorientation influenced in part by theories of visual perception (Bloomer,1977), relating this disorientation to driving on the highway. She proposes that while driving and constantly taking in and processing the rapid influx of information, from moment to moment, things shift in and out of control from orientation to disorientation. This disorientation she calls disjunction.

The highway she describes as a path through the heterogeneity of the world, linking the idea of the highway with that of the labyrinth, but she describes it in turn as, a theatre and a stage set. This allows her to bring in Foucault's concept of "theatre of theatre" (Foucault, 1986).

The highway she says is a theatre from which spectators view the world which is a kind of stage set on which the drivers (actors) move. This reflects Foucault's "theatre of theatre" - "A double orientation in which each element is doubled thus forming a renewed exchange of the real and the illusionary which is itself the dramatic meaning of madness." (Foucault, 1986). Madness, we will see, is a favorite preoccupation of Aycock.

She continues with the image of the stage but now switches to a different theoretical source. "Structure", she says, "can be a stage for the world to enact itself on with all the risks that acting in the world involves. We can hear the echoes of Peckham's notions of the survival value of art, how art is a safe area of practice apart from the real world.

Jack Burnham's development of systems analysis and information theory pictures the highway as a netwok and this leads in the essay, by association, to a favorite metaphor of the conduction or circulatory system, and of the metaphor of mind and brain. This metaphor re-connects with Levi-Strauss's ultimate structuralist aim of understanding the mind by analysing the structure of relationships between myths. Aycock is interested in analysing the structure of the mind by examining the relations between structures in her architectural complex.

She quotes one of her favorite fictional authors typically a "magical-realist", Jorge Louis Borges (Borges,1974), who describes the six dimensions of space;left, right, upwards, downwards, backwards, forwards which, by relating our bodies to gravity, we use to orientate ourselves in the world and which we use to experience the highway and architecture of even the simplest kind.

Here she is again stressing the use of senses other than the purely visual, which we use in the appreciation of space. For example, the importance of the "haptic sense", a combination of position sense and kinaesthetic sense, is re-emphasissd in our phenomenological experience of architectural space. (Bloomer,1977)

Aycock shows her appreciation of the phenomenological and symbolic natures of "the house" from her reading of Gaston Bachelard's The Poetics of Space, (1969) in her understanding of attic and cellar.

She takes a more behavioralist turn next, describing how from the cellar and the attic, (a typically Gothic juxtapostion much used by Akycock) one can derive four behavioral responses represented in the form of continua namely from claustrophobia to claustrophilia from acrophobia to acrophilia. Aycock is interested in the transition from one to the other and the tension in the possibility of holding two extremes simultaneously and the effect this has on us. In terms of orientaion,"the continuum from phobia to philia can be seen as a movement from orientaiotn to disorientation and back again".

Here Aycock introduces the concept of disjunction which she sees as the split between a set of directions and the ability of the perceiver to perform them. These disjunctions in human perception are times when there is no clear point of view, those moments when the world is out of joint, topsey-turvey, upside down," situations that fascinate Aycock, situations that she both fears and enjoys.

This disjunction the uncertainty, the ambiguity she says can be articulated "using the conventional vocabulary or sign system of architecture, doors, walls, roofs, ladders, floors, chimney shafts, wells, platforms - as a set of directions for a performance (as a structure for an event). It is possible to create a vocabulary of disjunction. This vocabulary of disjunction is in the tradition of Bosch, Piranesi, Boullee, Ledoux, Lequeu, Smithson and many others." (Aycock,1977)

So far I hope it is clear that, as with multiple sources for her architectural structures, Aycock attempts to synthesise the wide ranging theoretical influences into a seemingly logical "essay". She jumps rapidly form one toopic to another trying to weave topics together, sometimes by the flimsy thread of the superficial meaning of a word.

Just as in Complex, where she wants to build a complex structure that will tell of the behavior that led to its being built with its particular relations, so in An Essay, we see a complex relation of ideas under which we may decern Aycock's method of working, her need to synthesise. Aycock begs us to make a structuralist analysis.

This I think is the main point to take from the structure of An Essay. However, before we get to "the problem", we can profitably return to one of Aycock's ongoing concerns - language.

There is no doubt that Aycock achieves a state of disjunction in most of her work up to and including Complex. In Complex, one traverses dark claustrophobic underground passageways. One then climbs the inside of a narrow tower to a platform where one finds oneself suddenly exposed and vertiginous, in a sense free but still really trapped.

Whether Aycock producs an effective "vocabulary" that articulates this disjunction and to what use she puts this vocabulary is less clear.

Aycock aims at a vocabulary of disjunction, an ambition clearly related to the structuralists, "descended" from Ferdinand de Sanssure eg. Levi Strauss, Barthes etc.

Barthes defined a "serious" structurslist as one who made "serious recourse to the lexicon of signification." Whether we can call Aycock's attempts to use her vocavulary of disjunction serious structuralism is a debate I have no room to pursue here. I suspect not. Aycock, while going to great length to raise the idea does not seem to then fully use it. She tends, also to take only as much as she needs of a theory to stimulate her work and I feel that is what happens with her interest in structuralism.

THE PROBLEM IN *COMPLEX*

Aycock moves on to consider what is really the new problem she wants to face in *Complex*. "The problem seems to be how to set up the conditions which would generate the beginnings of a complex."

She has built a complex of several heterogenous structures. She wants to link them so they function in a group, like a city of buildings. However her interest is not so much in how the stuctures might relate but rather in what forces might act to bring about the arrangement of these sturctures in their eventual relations to each other. Aycock wants to build the complex but does not want to resort to an apriori grid.

In a sense she wants to let the structures develop their relationships out of their own natures.

She has been intrigued by how the medieval town or walled city developed out of need for protection and close proximity; how the amusement park stalls are arranged to give maximum enticement for the patrons to try rides and spend their money or how the Mbuti pygmies build their huts and position their door-ways towards or away from particular neighbours.

In other words, how social, economic and political needs give rise to particular arrangements of social architecture. I think it should be noted that these examples do not show a structuralist "linguistic" analysis or method but a more superficial,behavioral, anthropological approach.

She again states, "the problem seems to be how to set up a structure which would develop out of the web or labyrinth of human behaviour patterns." We should ask "out of whose labyrinth of human behavior patterns?"

Aycock realises that one can analyse a social architectural complex to reveal the social, economic or other needs that led to its particular pattern. However Aycock wishes to put this analytical process into reverse. She wants not to analyse but to create a comlex and, "not from an apriori grid" but one that will evolve out of and be structured by human social behavior. This seems to me a much more difficult proposition.

In starting with human behavior, one must ask whose human behavior will she start with? Whichever group she chooses, surely she must first analyse that group's behavior to know how to build the structure. She might even analyse their structures so as to later recreate them. This may be an interesting circular argument but it is hardly what Aycock states she is after.

She does not want ot use an apriori grid. What exactly then can she start with? Herself? Her own behavior, fears and obsessions; her own imagination; her own need to create? This I think is the only real generative need that could spawn this Complex, and to that extent we can say the piece works but from the terms in which Aycock stated her intentions I feel she set herself a theoretical problem that she found impossible to solve.

THE RATIONAL VERSUS THE IRRATIONAL

Whatever about criticism of a "disjunction" between the theoretical aims and the actual structures involved in Project, we can certainly say that in the Essay section of the booklet, Aycock is at her most rationalistic. It is an attempt to make sense to us of the synthesis she has made of the theoretical underpinnings to her work. As we have seen from her comments on the Minimalists she admired when at college and from her avidity in learning this rationalist side to her is an important part of her make up. But always, and increasingly so as her career progresses, the irrational interests become predominant. As always however, it is never a question of either/or but of holding to two at once and enjoying and using the energy of the paradox or dualism.

This duality of the rational and the irrational is the major concern of Aycock's. It can be seen in the actual structuring of the booklet complex itself. The rationalistic An Essay is sandwiched between two "irrational" pieces of writing.

Firstly there is an introduction, the angry rantings of someone insinuating past hurt in a scream of pain and self pity denying and projecting feelings, dealing with fear "by out-facing it". "I will wear you out by thinking of you", reflecting Aycock's attempts to deal with phobia by flooding herself with the fear she dreads.

Then follow a Play in One Act After Modern Times by Charlie Chaplin. A play in which time, space, places and people become mixed as in a dream. It is a long flow of possible architectural references and influences in her work, so long and varied that the images blurr. She repeats again and again "But there is still a great deal more to it than that". Behind these references the brooding but enticing figure of death. "Today death stands before me like a cure for an illness, like a walk after suffering."

Ending the booklet is another piece of fantastic writing For Granny (1881-) Whose Lamps are Going Out. A short lecture on the Effects of Afterimages.

It is about stories, sometimes filched from other stories, like how her grand-mother's were filched form Gulliver's Travels; they were not really her own. Where did Gulliver get his stories?

It is about change, periods of transition, about causation in history, how the Great Plague caused Newton to flee to the country where he discovered the Law of Gravity and how it led to the Industrial Revolution. "The story starts at the beginning of the war, but at the end of everything else. World views change, poof! the stability of the Newtonic world is gone with Michelson-Morley and the speed of light." Aycock seems to be commenting on modern man's insecurity in a time of great changes in world views, fuelled by science.

MICROELECTRONIC MEMORIES

Before abandoning architectural concerns, Aycock produced Large Scale Dis/integration of Microelectronic Memories (10) in 1980 at Batterseylandfill - an expanse of sandy wasteland on the fringes of lower Manhatten, New York.

She explores favorite themes of the city, memory and the labyrinth. She combines two approaches found in her earlier work.

Firstly, creating architectural spaces we can actually enter and experience phenomenologically and secondly, employing structures that stand as models or metaphors for society; possible cities, universes or the mind.

It is a tri-partite complex echoing the tri-partite concept of memory, culled from Robert Fludd (Yates, 1966) (33). It consists of, firstly, a framework of a building standing on stilts like scaffolding; secondly, a cluster of colourful walls built form discarded doors; and thirdly, a wheel reminiscent of an amusement park carousel.

Each of the units evolved out of the imagined activities of a character drawn from the artist's world of make believe. A central chasm (the lonitudinal fissure of the brain? or Neitzsche's chasm or abyss?) neatly bisects the elevated building. Each half is divided into a maze like grid of cubicles opening off corridors. She imagined the labyrinth to be the result of a streetwalker reconstructing from memory all the rooms she had ever visited. The cubicles may be compartments for storing memories, places we have visited. Feelings of claustrphobia diminish as we reach the central canyon, but its opposite, agrophobia and vertigo increase as we reach the narrow exposed ledges that protrude into the canyon form either side. We must decide if we will risk jumping the chasm, frustration vying with desire.

The walls flanking the elevated building are built from old doors. The wall set at angles to each other also form a maze and are reminisant of a movie set, but there is not the claustrophobia or danger of the chasm. This structure we are told is a product of an imaginary woman's memory (perhaps the centenarian whose mind will be rejuvenated by The Rotary Lightening Express - a later work). The lady is attempting to reconstruct the important events of her life. Each year of the woman's life is designated by a street and each week is represented by a door. The old woman hopes that, "out of her memory and forgetfulness" as recorded in the streets and doors, a pattern or sign will emerge eventually revealing the story of her life. Aycock is influenced her by Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities.

Invisible Cities is a novel of fantasy in which the Kublai Khan and Marco Polo discuss the cities within Khan's empire in an attempt "to isolate the invisible order that sustains them" and "to determine the model underlying all cities." (Calvino, 1979)

The third element is a tilted wheel, a merry-go-round perhaps or a roulette wheel but also we are told, a Copernican diagram of the universe. It introduces the element of chance and order in life; the probability of winding our way through the labyrinth or metaphorically of recalling our own past.

As mentioned the tri-partite structure represents the tri-partite nature of memory as developed by the Greeks and made popular as the "memory theatre" of Robert Fludd. The Art of Memory as practiced by the Greek rhetoricians consisted basically of associating ideas or words with particular places in an imaginary building . To recall the ideas in sequence, in ones mind's eye, one strolled around this building and the places one passed through brought the ideas to mind by association.

Although Microelectronic Memories is still participatory and is to be experienced physically, it is more open than. for example, Maze. Its openness allows us to read it visually and for the structure to be visually manifest as an abstract mental contruct, the old woman's memory. There is a move away from the purely phenomenological to the visual and metaphoric. The use of the labyrinths changed from a structure which shaped our experience to a representation of a system of organisation (as pointed out in Complex).

This shift in emphasis from the predominantly phenomenological may have been prompted also by her experience on visiting Complex where she was disquieted to see the large crowds going through the gymnastics that the pieces required to be fully appreciated. "I wanted something much more private." - not the adventure playgroung she witnessed. (Poirier, 1986)

In Aycock's next "theatrical" phase, audience participation was excluded but the eye is still encouraged to wander through the sets. In the absense of the participant, Aycock begins developing fantasy protagonists to carry out the actions.

CHAPTER 3: THEATRE AND FANTASY

FLIGHT OF ANGELS

This theatrical period in Aycock's career contains perhaps her most poetically engaging work. I will consider three pieces.

Explanation, An, of Spring and The Weight of Air (12) is a theatrical stage for an invisible protagonist, Eunice Winkless, a circus performer specialising in high dives on horseback into a pool of water. She was seen by Aycock as somebody attempting to defy gravity, an individual trying to leave the ground and fly through the air like a bird, (38).

The elaborate title has appending notes and a story also accompanies the piece. These literary appendices become more prominent in Aycock's work.

Consisting basically of a large sphere raised on stilts, the psychological effect of its upward pull works wonderfully in expressing one of its main themes, levitation. Other references include Jaipur Observatory, the hot air balloon, the celestial spheres, Orville Wright's test flight of the Kitty Hawk and an "angel in a red dress on a yellow cloud". This angel refers to Tadeo Gaddi's Renaissance painting of the angel's Announcement to the Shepherds (36) (Smart, 1978).

This angel also appears in The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe Despite their Ugly Souls, Part 2, In Which The Angel in the Red Dress Returns to the Centre of a Yellow Crowd Above a Group of Swineherds (13).

Aycock explains "I became intrigued by the angel because of its body, it appeared to be levitating. Figures in medieval paintings seem to be off the ground as though they were just hovering, not confined by the laws of gravity as we are." (Fineberg, 1990)

These references are concerned with air, flight and our relationship to the heavens. A realm of the mysterious, mystical and unknown, the sky is the point of contact between the physical and spiritual worlds and flight is seen as a means of mediating them.

Aycock explains her interest in the medieval world view. "I felt the Middle Ages were involved with desire, with wishing, with imaginging, with trying desperately to do something which had to do with levitation or flight. It could be called a 'state of desire' which was a state I could identify with as I was attempting to make my art to push it further than I could actually go to get somewhere that I hadn't quite thought of yet."
(Fineberg,1990)

"To me, states of desire have to do with magical states and using unscientific means. There are magical ways of dealing with the world. This also seems to me to be related to certain ideas in science, advanced physics, quantum mechanics, where there are phenomena under investigation that defy human logic." (Fineberg,1990)

The Central Machine (14) suggests elaborate scientific apparatus that is intened for a religious hysteric obssessed with catching a supernatural blue rain. Also referencing flight and the heavens, it introduces the attempt to mix science and magic that is such a prominent concern of this period in her career.

SCIENCE AND FAITH

Magic and science, the alchemical and the evangelical are just some of the heady mixture in How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts, (15) a highly theatrical, stage-lit installation.

It included cranks and wheels suspended from the ceiling, a galvanic battery attached to a glass jar containing a live bird and an elaborate base served as a stage.

At various times during the exhibition, the gallery attendant would sit on a central bench and blow bubbles, a metaphor for the illusive nature of ghosts (the nineteenth century secularisation of the angel) and for the mysterious way memories, which Aycock sees as ghost-like, re-surface and then fade away.

The title came from a book published in the eighteenth century when static electricity was first being investigated and scientists thought they could use electricity to ressurect the dead.

The bird in the glass jar represents the spirit of free flight and liberated imagination. Birds share the heavens with angels and to the medieval mind were just that much closer to God. (Tillyard, 1972)

An art historical reference to the bird is Joseph Wright of Derby's Experiment with an Air Pump, (1768) (37). A child cries as the bird in the glass jar dies while the air pump evacuated the jar. Science brings progress but perhaps the spirit is killed. Joseph Wright, a member of the scientific "Lunar Society", (Briggs, 1979) was one of the first professional painters to directly express the spirit of the birth of the Industrial Revolution, a period which fascinates Aycock. He commemorates the birth of modern science from the superstitions of the past.

As usual it is the change from one period to another which attracts Aycock. What was to be a gain for science was to lead to a rationalism and positivism that was to deplete mans idea of his own humanity. Aycock's preference is for the preceeding period of alchemy and magic and she would hold the English Renaissance mystic, alchemist, physician and pantheistic theosophist Robert Fludd (Godwin,1979) against Wright's championing of scientific rationalism. By focusing on the point of transition Aycock can hold these incompatiblities in tension.

Aycock attempts to hold together the dualism of rational science and irrational faith. Raised a Roman Catholic, she remembers visits to the vast cathedral where gold orbs swung and miracles were preached. She purposely combines contradictory belief systems in her works. Scientism, Christianity, Pantheism and Buddism are just some of the belief systems she references. The stage floor of Ghosts, for example, is a tantric diagram of the universe. Her concern is less for the contents of the belief systems than for the idea of the belief itself.

Transmutation of all types excites Aycock. She dreams of its possibility in the future. "There is no way we are going to make these long space journeys to stars unless we can change our material form." (Poirier,1986)

ROMANTIC MADNESS

The theme of dematerialisation occurs in a writen addendum to How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts. These writings are records of the hallucinations of a schizophrenic patient, N.N., referred to in Geza Roheim's study Magic and Schizophrenia. Here we see her empathy with someone who seemingly has the ability to defy logic and project himself into all kinds of situations. "The way he wanders through space and time and through history and ideas, in a naive way, is very attractive to me." The way he makes associations between his eating beef and World War 1 is "very attractive". "He is a naive seer who doesn't have boundaries. He is free the way most people aren't free." (Poirier, 1983)

One might wonder who is the naive one here, but we should realise that Aycock's concerns are not for a full understanding of the schizophrenic condition, but rather she sees a model for the freedom of the artist's imagination in N.N.'s world of fantasy, ilusion and irrationality. She implores artists to be open. "They can't say to themselves 'Oh, I can't think this or I can't imagine that because that's bad or that's weird.' They have to kind of respond, empathise in an open way."

Concerning her own work,she says that the writings of N.N."suggest the kind of thinking, with the simultaneous insertion of multiple levels of diverse matter, that I go through when I make a piece.(Finebreg,1990)

One can sense perhaps Aycock's frustrations she may have felt especially in her early days when she was moving away from the predominant modernist ethos in the early '70's where the later fantastic aspects to her art would have been proscribed.

Of N.N. she says, "He became the character that I tried to project myself further into to really almost lose my human consciousness and to be more of a force than a thinking being." She identifies with some of his delusions. "He says he can move through walls." Aycock fantasises, "sometimes I visualise myself being not a human being but more like a particle that can move through the wall or whatever." "Reading about schizophrenia gave me access to being inanimate.| Now she can become an "inanimate force" in the later machineworks eg. Savage Sparkler (16). "He lost the difference between reality and fantasy." I suspect this is Aycock's ideal state.

Here we see Aycock's supremely romantic vision of freedom of the imagination to the point of madness. We must also ask is this any more that a tendencey to escape the world, a mystic retreat into the self.

CHAPTER FOUR MACHINEWORKS

ILLOGICAL MACHINES

From the stage-like theatrical pieces, Aycock went on to make work of a more mechanical nature. Grouped with then husband Dennis Oppenheim and Vito Acconci, they produced a major exhibition called Machineworks. (Larson,1981)

Aycock's pieces, when they moved out of the architectural "house" imagery with its patently human history, began to occupy a more confounding realm, a realm of universal forces and supra-rational order. This process, started in the "stage" pieces, continues in the machineworks.

The catalogue essayist to Machineworks noted a change from the typically modernist ambivalent but primarily optimistic relationship to the machine as an infinitley perfectable technology which paralleled perhaps their infinitely perfectable art.

PIcabia and Duchamps proposed a view of the machine as metaphor that is closer to Aycock and her contemporaries. These artists look on the machine as a metaphoric extension of thought itself.

If imagination is perceived in terms of a pattern of thought that has its own systems of production,distribution and invention, then a machine that fulfils those functions can easily become a metaphoric/physical analogue of thinking. Larson calls this post conceptual imaginary machine art, "poetic analogues for thought."

Of her work of this period Aycock says, "It's a very subjective attempt to deal witn technology. I have this book called Magical Experiments, and that is the way I see it. A machine is a tool and the tool is a mental extension of your body and sometinmes it becomes so removed that you no longer understand how it reflects on the structure of the mind. It's that that I'm interested in, the structure of the mind." (Fineberg, 1990)

COSMIC FORCES

Aycock's machines are fuelled by nothing less than the infinite energy that runs the universe. They are intended to work by that power and so reveal that power. They are designed to induce awe and wonder at this power and faith in it. Although we have been taught that machines are instruments of linear thought, engines of logic guided only by purposeful mechanical principles, there is no rational purpose devined from the goings on in Aycock's machines.

They are preposterous and mysterious contrivances that seem propelled not by measured and rational formulae, but by madness, madness understood in its classical or prophetic sense, as a state of inspiration. The same force that drives the machine drives its creation and conception in the artist; the artist serves almost as a medium through which the awesome animating energy flows.

Aycock relates all of her machines to a tradition of cosmology and cosmographic representations of the physical and conceptual structure of the universe. This may be in the form of a medieval system of spheres, or tantric beliefs in interpreting spheres.

Her machines are simultaneously manifestations of and metaphors for the cosmic forces.

Hoodo (Laura) (17) is based on several cosmological drawings. One is an alleorical diagram by 17th century English mystical philosopher Robert Fludd, depicting the universe as a Monochord.(32) Another is a Tantric diagram depicting the regions of the head represented as a series of ovals and half ellipses penetrating the cosmos. These gave the visual and conceptual basis for the spiralling forms and moving circles of this piece. The various elements are not quite integrated but are poised disjunctively and illogically.

The central hypnotically swirlling sphere resembles a kind of wind driven rotary ventilator for chimneys. This "mother image" as Aycock describes it, creates an updraft that she likens to the "ether wind", an all pervading, massless medium hypothesised by archaic physics as the force that propagates the electromagnetic fields that radiate through and energise the universe. Aycock's deliberate use of an erroneous concept both parallels Robert Fludd's indifference to the growing rationalism of his time and, more significantly evokes the unfathomable mystery of the energy source of the universe.

Yet aycock admits her machines are incapable of delivering the ghosts and angels and magic promised by their conjuring titles. There is a tragicomic aspect in their anthropomorphism and grand failure. They remain chimeras of the force of which they partake and which they are said to represent. At their least, they are artifice; at best, they inspire wonderment at the unknown forces that oganise them and if this force is only the imagination of the artist, then they tell of Aycock's supremely romantic vision of art.

BLADE MACHINES

Around 1982 Aycock designed sculptures that included scimitar like metal blades which in most cases were activated by a motor. "I was looking for a primitive image that would have the power of what technology means but also refer back in time."

In so doing she was led to ponder the subjects of food gathering and preparation. She came to realise that both involve violence. The instrument that made a particularly vivid impression on her was the cruisinart "It is both creator and destroyer."

The blade machines emerged at a time of crisis. In 1979 Alice Aycock met Dennis Oppenheim. They married in 1982, but separated by the end of the year and are now divorced. In the same way that her early pieces had dealt with fears she wanted to control, so the blade machines evidently symbolised a threat to her emotional security. Once again art became therapy.

The rotating blades set up the duality of fear and attraction, dominant in her early work. Aycock associates the danger of the relentlessly sweeping blades with cosmic questsions and thoughts on eternity and the infinite.

The real danger of the blades opens up a feeling of vulnerability, which in turn evokes and magnifies such thoughts.

One machine is called The Glance of Eternity (18), a phrase from Nietzsche, "that moment when you are confronted with your own mortality."

Creation and destruction likewise underlies "The Solar-Wind" (19) which also derives fom the cosmic diagrams of Robert Fludd (34). Aycock ponders "What if there was this force that was neither good nor bad but mindless, a kind of raw source of power, much like the sun, and as it moved it created all sorts of things.

CHAPTER FIVE: LATEST WORK

MODES OF PRODUCTION

After a break from art for the birth of her son, Harley Christopher, in 1986, Aycock returned to the art scene with a major exhibition, Complex Visions, in 1990, (Fineberg, 1990).

It is a feature of Aycock's development that corresponding to the main stylisic phases of her career, she has drawn on different techniques to stimulate her imagination and so to produce her structures.

During the early architectural work, apart form relying on phenomenological theory, she delves into childhood memories and fears, generating structures to confront herself with those remembered fears. For example, Project for a Circular Building With Narrow Ledges for Walking (8).

In the "theatrical stage', from Microelectronic Memories (10) on, she imagines her "invisible" protagonists in various situations eg. the centegenarian remembering her life; the levitating angel in The Angel Keeps Turning the Wheel of the Universe (13).

In later theatrical sets and in the machineworks, she imagines herself to be the impersonal, inanimate force of the universe, in The Solar Wind (19), or an invisible atom in How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts (15).

This increasingly impersonal trend away from feeling and more towards idea, continues into her latest work, where her imagination is used to generate three dimensional structures from cosmological diagrams and scripts.

With this progression I feel there is a decrease in the emotional empathy that was natural to the personal resonances of the early work. The later work has a colder more detached feel, appropriate to the increasingly impersonal realm it deals with.

In most of the latest work, however, I feel that, in the technique of simply three dimensionalising, Aycock has minimised the power of her fantasy form which her best work stems.

DISORIENTATED WORLDS

One of Aycock's most outstanding recent structures is Three-Fold Manifestation II (20). Three skewed amphitheatres stand one on another, like Brancussi's Endless Column, or Jacob's ladder. Aycock quotes sources such as Gropius' design for three theatres; astronomical diagrams she has rendered three dimensional: the whirling forms of earlier works eg. Hoodo Laura (17) and the DNA helix. She speaks of Renaissance paintings where people "walk off to paradise through a whirling hole in the world."

This theme is repeated in the "stair" piece The Descent and Reascent of the Soul II (25). This piece merely reiterates the step element of The Angel Keeps Turning the Wheel of the Universe (13).

The desired "but unattainable experience" of getting to heaven. Little is new apart from the trilogy of cosmologies in the one piece.

Three dimensionalising and combining cosmologies features in A Representation of the Second World, Plan, Isometric and Section (26), structures that embody the different cultural concepts of the universe.

GAMES

The "game of history" and the "game of science" have long been themes in Aycock's work. Part of this concern with games may stem, I think, form Morse Peckham's analysis of game theory as a metaphor for art (Peckham, 1965). The role of the "challenger" and of "respondant" is likened to the "artist" and "perceiver". A game functions by producing an unpredicted situation which the respondant can meet only by solving a problem. He proposed that art also offers a problem, but not to be solved. "The artist presents the unpredicted, he offers the experience of disorientation", which is the purpose of art, as he sees it.

The New and Favorite Game of the Universe and the Golden Goose Egg, looks like a spiral board game of all the microcosmic schemes of earlier pieces. The totle seems to hint at Aycock's acknowledgement of the passing of world views with all its uncertainty. Perhaps also it refers to the passing of artistic fashions which, like all fashions, may excite us only for a while. The Dice Game for Diverse Visions (22) is based on astronomical instruments and compasses. On one side is a roulette wheel on the other side, faintly engraved, cosmological diagrams that are wiped by a wiper. She juxtaposes "the unattainable side" against the "profane side".

Again we can produce multiple layers of duality and many interpretations. Risk and chance within the rules of the game are opposed to ordering strategies that may be unlasting or false.

LANGUAGE

Language hs been a concern of Aycock's since the early structuralist influences of Complex, when she wanted "to find the root of verbal and visual sign-making, (Morgan, 1985). It is treated in this three dimensionalising way in the drawing The Garden of Scripts, (Villandry) (24).

POSTMODERNIST CONSIDERATION

From the development of Aycock's career which was initially so closely alligned to the theoretical concerns of the times, for example, systems aesthetics and phenomenology in the 1970's, and because she had taken many ideas from the structuralists, I wondered if Aycock's aesthetics would develop through post-structuralism to postmodernism.

After an early divergence from minimalism, after taking on metaphoric and multiple cultural references and after developing "literalist" theatricality, Aycock was certainly quite un-modern in high-modernist terms.

However, in her own way she has held firmly to the idea of an avant-garde. She sees her won work as always trying to break new ground. "I don't make sculpture to reassure myself of what I already know; I make it to find out something I don't." (Fineberg, 1990)

If one considers for example, Hassan's list of differences between modernism and postmodernism, we can see that Aycock falls predominently in the Modernist camp (Harvey, 1989). Her work is romantic and symbolic.) She aims to purposefully synthesise, there is a totalization. She wants her work to by a paradigm. She sees her work as metaphoric as opposed to metonymic; one senses depth and a metaphysical transcendence.

Although there could be said to be postmodernist characteristics eg. a playfulness, a use of participation, a disjunctive quality, I am sure we would be right to say the overall positioning is modernist.

Aycock herself has recently said, "The search for a kind of synthesis - you know a paradigm - haunts me and causes me to continue. It's a quest that seems somewhat archaic right now, because we are inundated with the notion that the avant-garde is dead, that the ability to innovate, in the way that Cubism innovated or Constructivism innovated, is impossible today. And I would say that I feel myself up against this wall and yet it's a quest that I don't and cannot forget because it's what really compels me." "I think that the notion of the exhaustion of ideas is absurd." (Fineberg, 1990)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have tried to trace Alice Aycock's development form minimalist beginnings. I have described the various stylistic stages of her career: architictural, theatrical , the machineworks and the cosmological structures.

At the same time I have indicated the main theoretical underpinnings to her work. The most prominent being Phenomenology and Structuralism.

While taking a diachronic survey of her career, I have suggested that it might be better seen as having a centrifugal development. Recurring themes have been developed from piece to piece, over years. The scope, expanding constantly, widening the realm of her concerns from personal beginnings to the later cosmologial interests.

Themes such as the house, the city, the labyrinth, the heavens, history, universal causality, cosmologies, worldviews, madness and the mind are reworked and recombined in different pieces throughout her career.

In looking at the multiple sources that are such a feature of her individual pieces, I have stressed the need to look beyond their immediated import to see firstly, their use as stimulation to her imatination and material from which it can take flight, and secondly, that quite apart form the individual meaning of an individual reference, it is the synthetic universalising quality of Aycock's endeavor that may be considered the real meaning of the work, the underlying theme. It is what it says about the working of Aycock's own artistic endeavour that is most meaningful.

I have shown the various strategies Aycock has used to stimulate and focus her imaginative powers relating different techniques to different stylistic phases.

I argue that her work functions in th main, by using dualities, often incompatiable, juxtaposed and held in tension. That these act as spring boards for further thought.

We have seen how the overlaying of dualities leads to a tense network of ideas and problems indicating the complexity of the world as Aycock sees it.

Again and again we witness Aycock attempts to get her mind around the complex multiple ideas she brings together and her attempt to hold them together, if not to fuse them. Her art is one of attempted synthesis.

In the failure to reconcile may lie Aycock's success in reflecting not only the opposing side of her personality, the rational and the irrational, but in reflecting one of the problems of our age.

It is my thesis that it is this overriding duality of the rational and the irrational that is the characteristic of Aycock's art.

As outlined in chapter one, we can sense that part of Aycock's personality would be at one with the leaders of the "Enlightenment Project". This is Aycock's rational, scientific, investigative, intellectual side.

However, as the rationalism, scientism and positivism led to a determinism and to a negation of man's idea of his full humanity, to the point of nihilism, so the other side of Aycock's nature rebels aginst this philosophical development. Man's loss of freedom under rationalism is countered by the romantic vision of a freedom that has its base in irrationality, be that in the realm of fantasy, madness or mysticism.

Aycock juxtaposes the rational and the irrational irreconcilably. She yearns for their reunification. This may be seen in four ways.

Firstly, there is her nostalgic vision, back to the Middle Ages when, as Aycock sees it, one "could think in such illogical ways" (Fineberg, 1990); when alchemy rather than science rules, when magic rather than scientific causality was revered; when a theocentric rather than a homocentric vision allowed man the concept of an ordered universe with his place in it assured.

Secondly, there is the romantic escape to madness where the rational and irratinal fuse and it is proposed we can be free of rationalism's constraints. Aycock champions the schizophrenic's thought processes as a mode for the artist.

Thirdly, there is the mystical escape. Aycock seems close to this in her dematerialisations into her machineworks as she identifies herself with the forces of the universe.

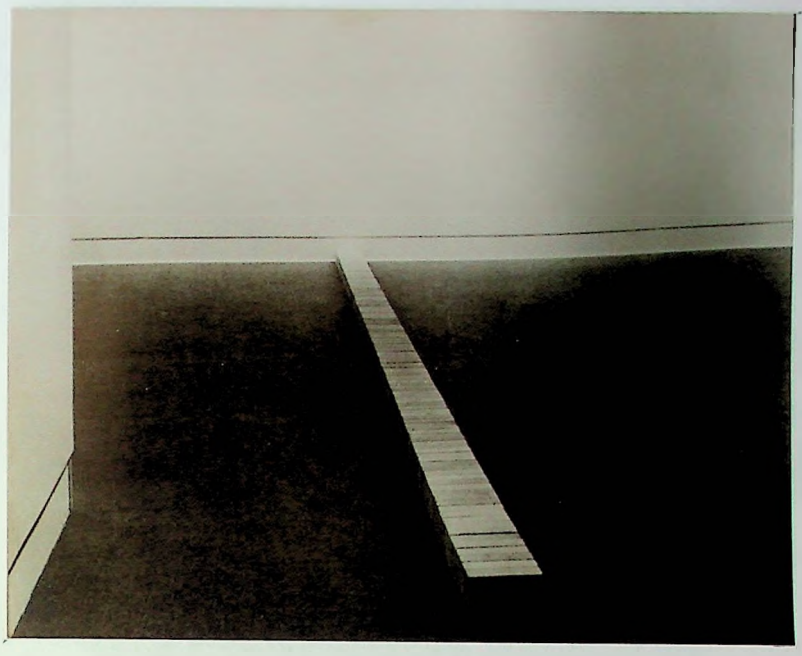
Fourthly, Aycock sees a reuniting of the rational and the irrational at the frontiers of science, in subatomic physics. It is cold comfort however, that the rationalism of science has undermined the rationality of its own nature.

Aycock seems to yearn for an all encompasing cosmolgy, belief system or world view. I do not feel that her superimposition of contradictory cosmolgies is, overall, a cynicism. The desire is always frustrated, but Aycock holds to the desire and the frustrating incompatabilities only accentuate it, in a type of exquisite pain.

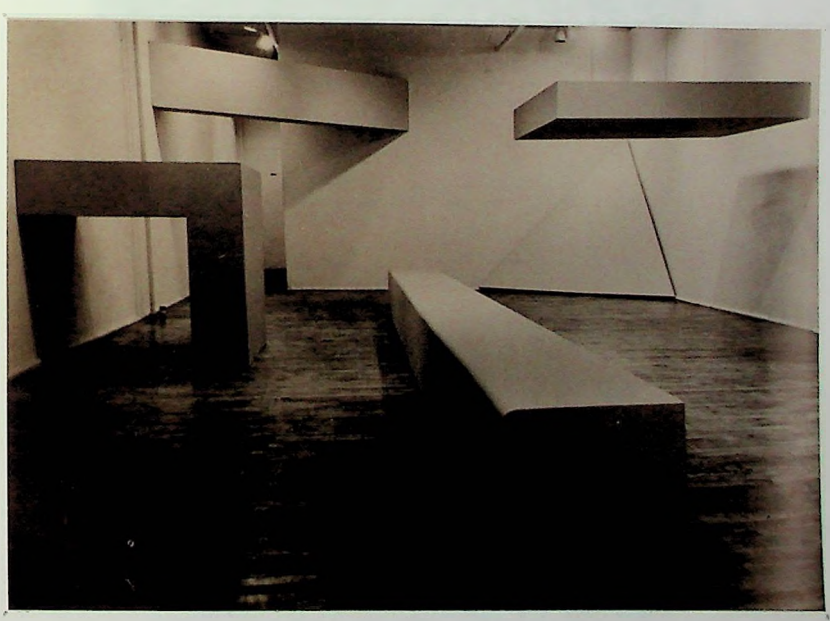
This may be the expression fo the tension between the two sides of her own nature and of the plight of modern man's unwillingnesss to forsake his self centred rationalism, which he has found to have destroyed the value of his own rationality.

Aycock expresses her insecurity and disquiet at the lack of a stable world view, "Poof! The Newtonian world has gone." What next? Paradoxically, Aycock focuses always on the point of transition, at once the locus of the instability but offering, if only during the change, a point of contact between two worlds. We can see in this, perhaps, the paradox of how Aycock is attracted to what she fears; how she must try to escape that which she desires.

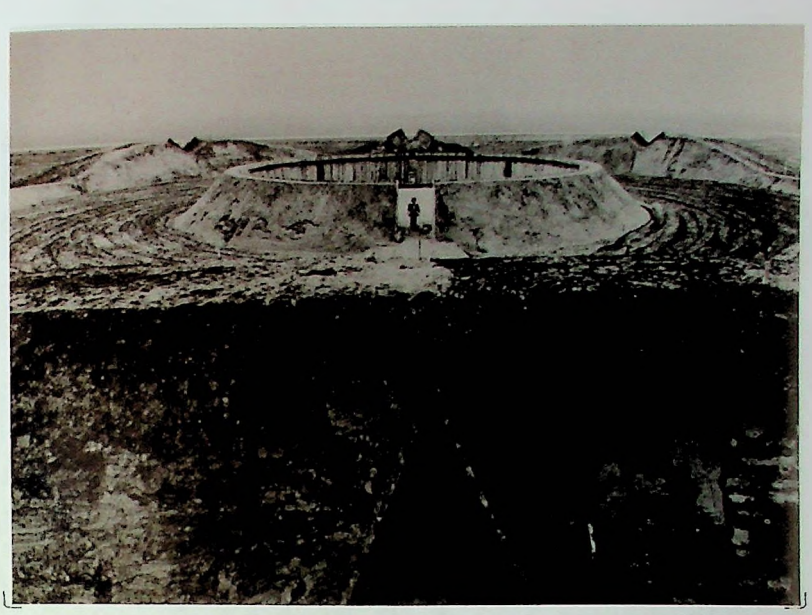
ILLUSTRATIONS



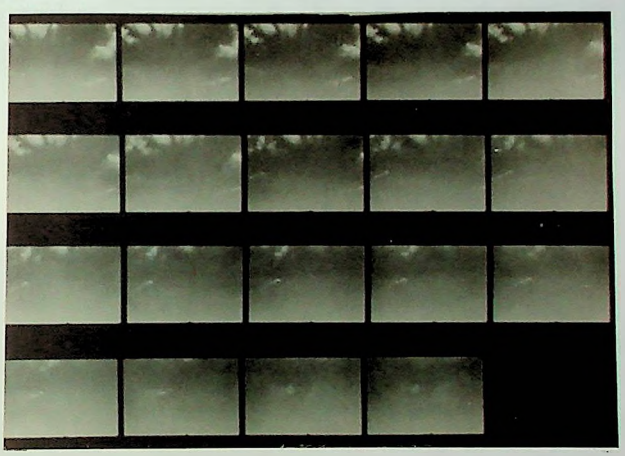
1. Lever (1966) by Carl Andre



2. Generalised forms (1964) by Robert Morris

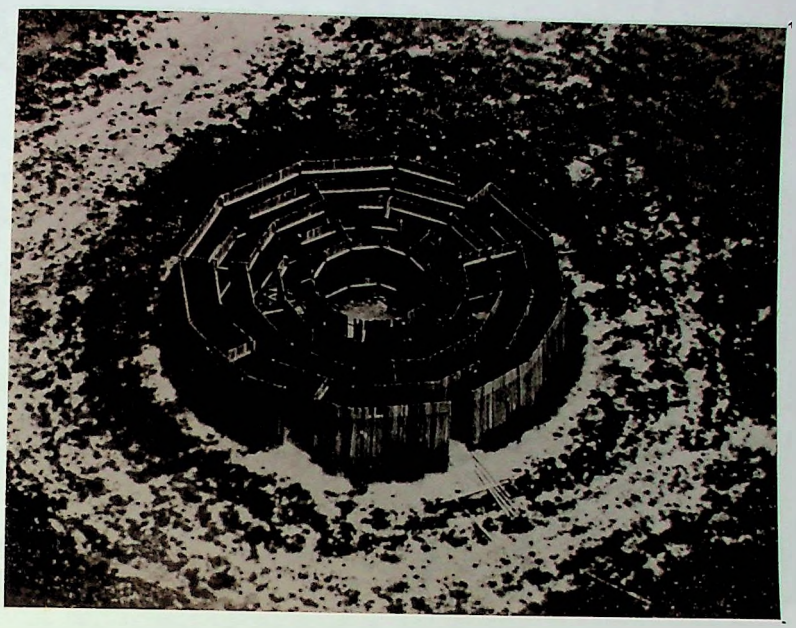


3. Observatory (1971) by Robert Morris



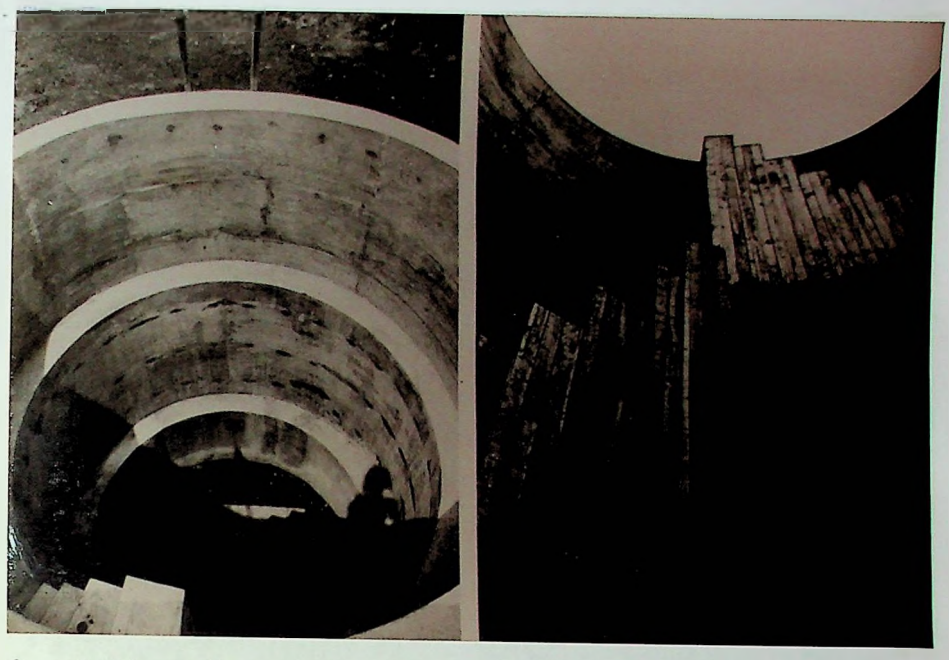
4. Cloud Piece (1971) by Alice Aycock

5. Stairs (These Stairs can be Climbed) by Alice Aycock



6. Maze (1972) by Alice Aycock

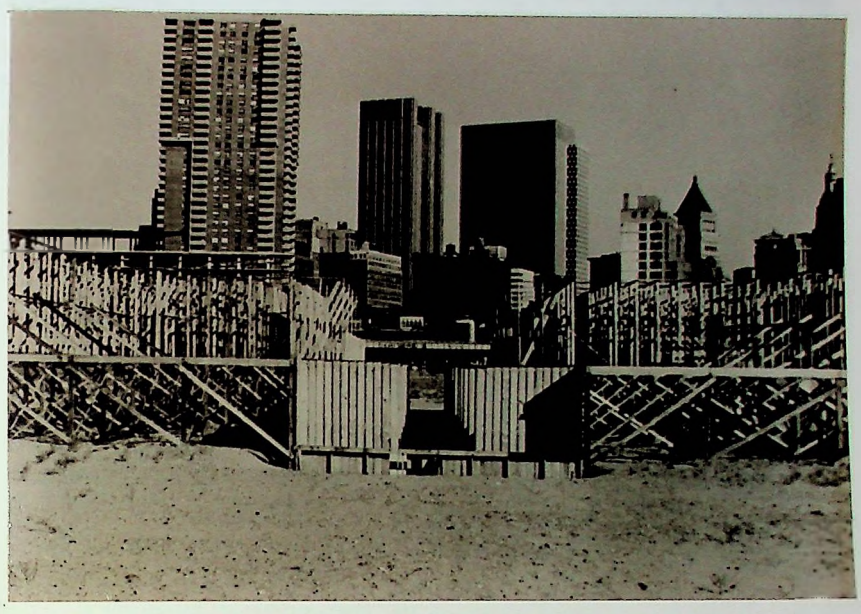
7. Low Building with a Dirt Roof, (1973) by Alice Aycock For Mary

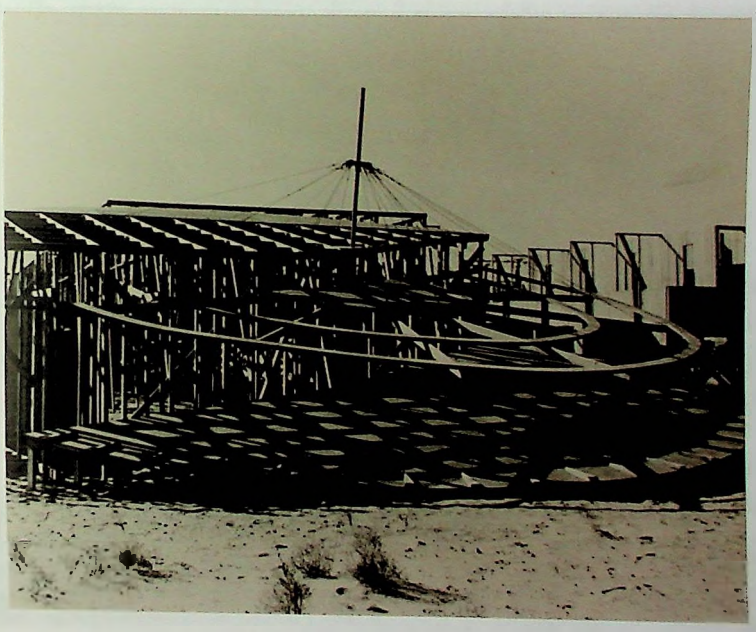


8. Project for a Circular Building with Narrow Ledge for Walking (1976) by Alice Aycock

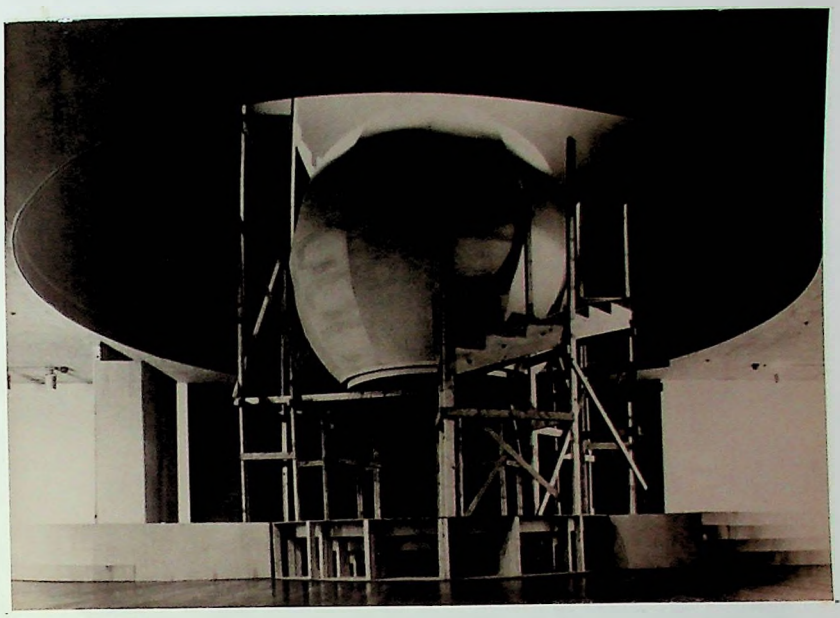
9.

Project Entitled "The Beginnings of a Complex ... Otherwise Titled This is My Opening Farewell" (1977) by Alice Aycock

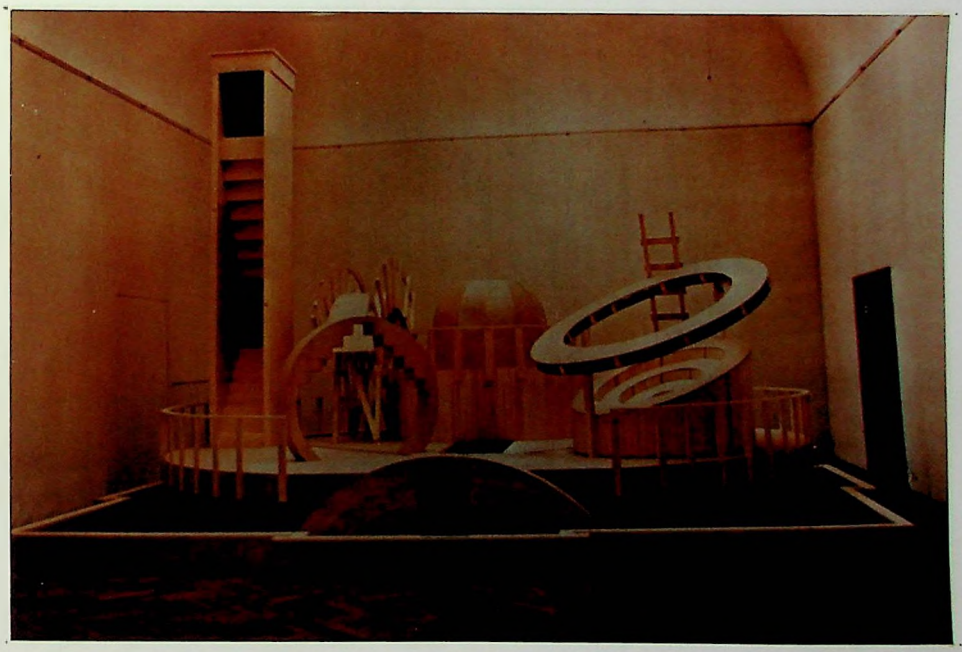




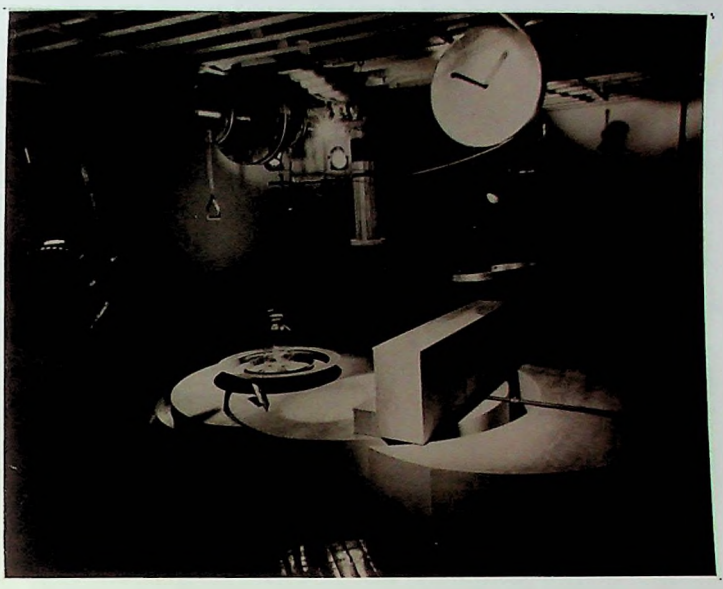
10/11 Large Scale Dis/Integration of Micro-Electronic Memories (1980) by Alice Aycock



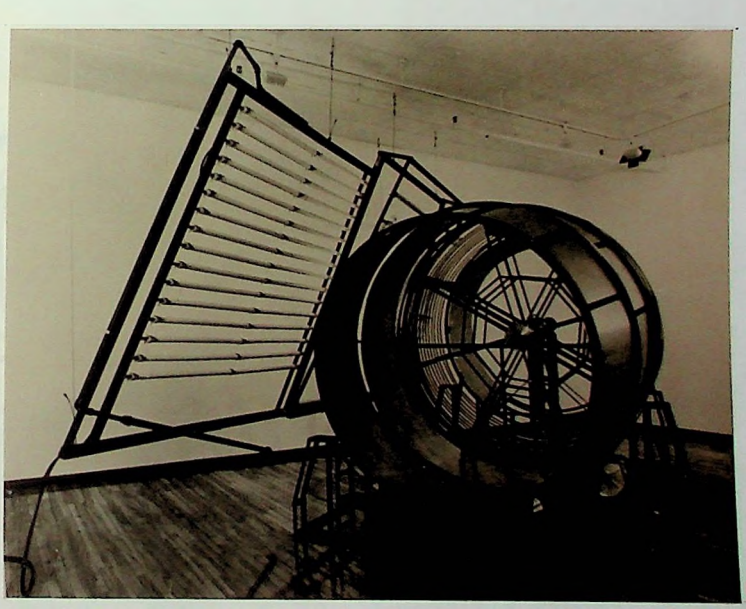
12. Explanation, An, of Spring and The Weight of Air (1978) by Alice Aycock



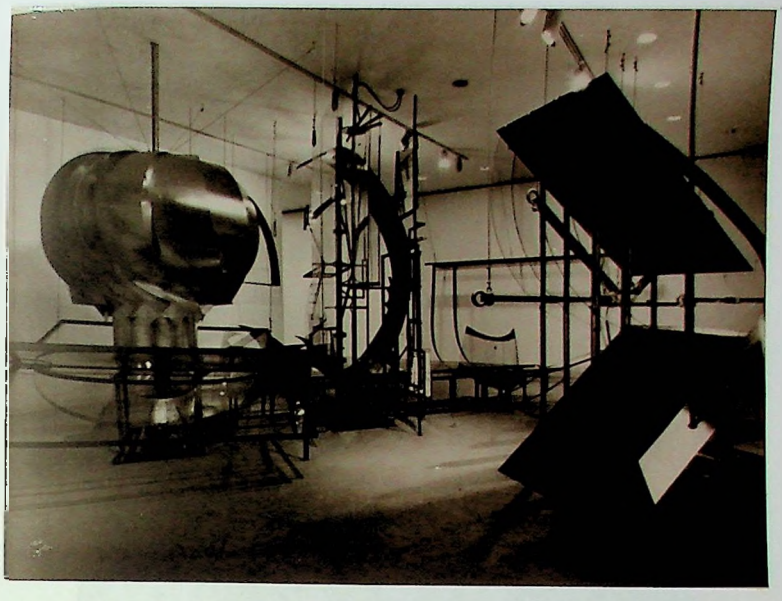
13. The Angel Continues Turning the Wheel of the Universe Despite Their Ugly Souls (1978) by Alice Aycock



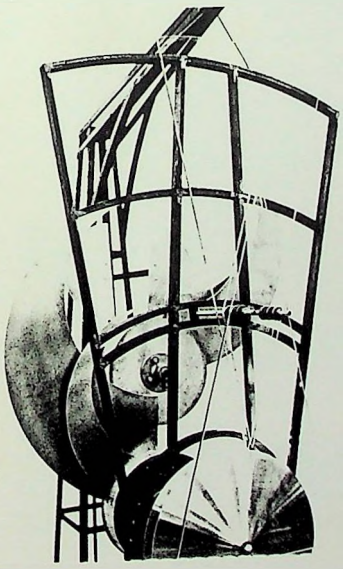
15. How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts (1979) by Alice Aycock



16. Savage Sparkler (1981) by Alice Aycock



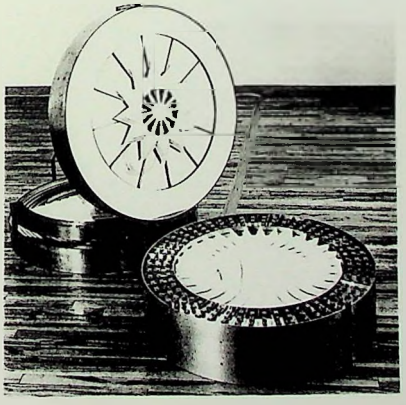
17. Hoodo Laura (1981) by Alice Aycock



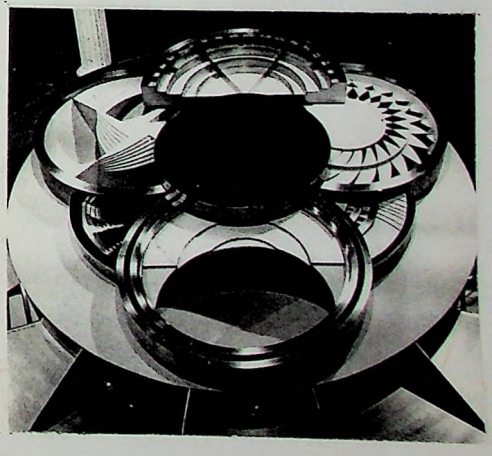
18. The Glance of Eternity (1981) by Alice Aycock

19. The Solar Wind (1982-83) by Alice Aycock

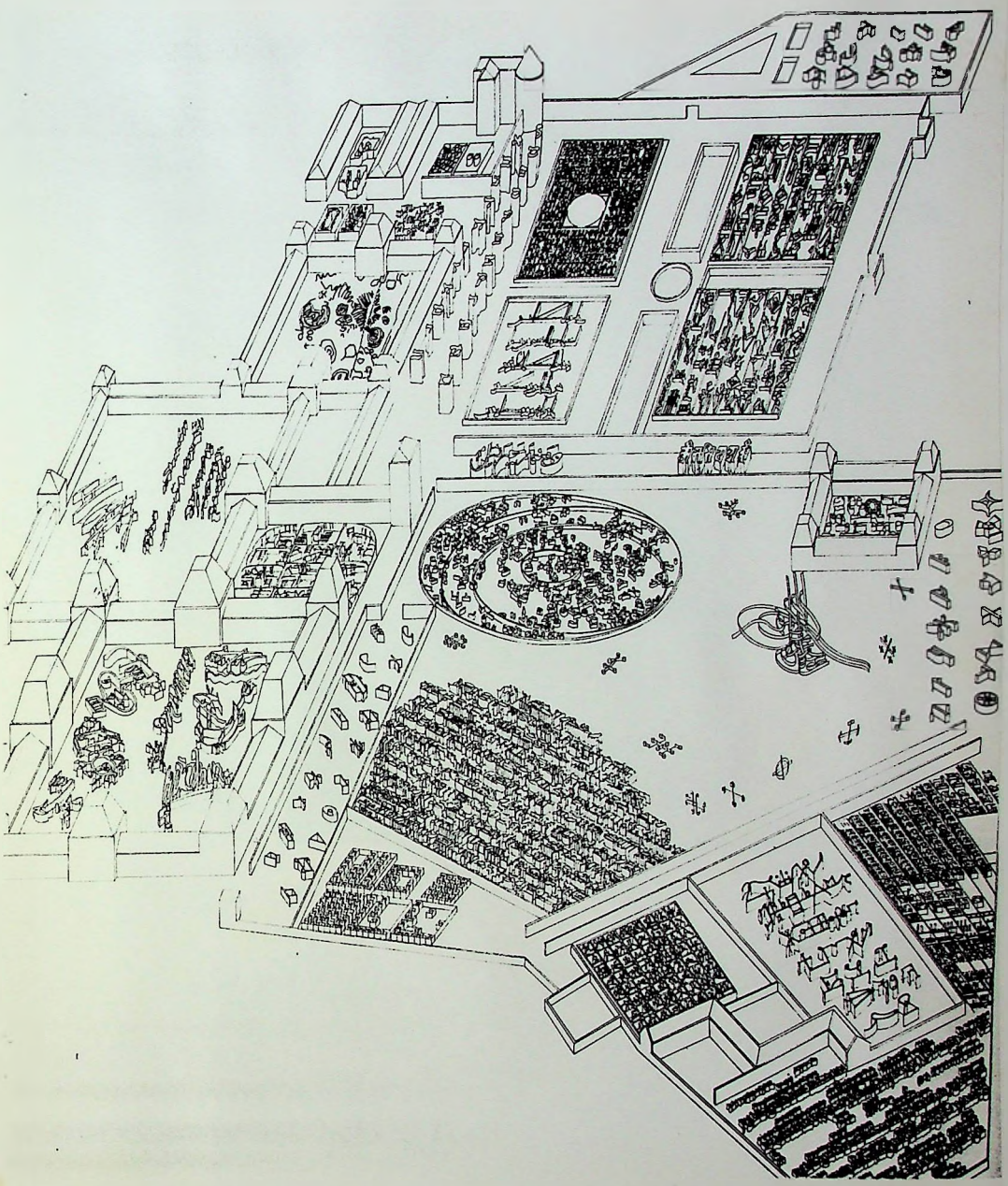
20. Three-Fold Manifestation II (1987) by Alice Aycock



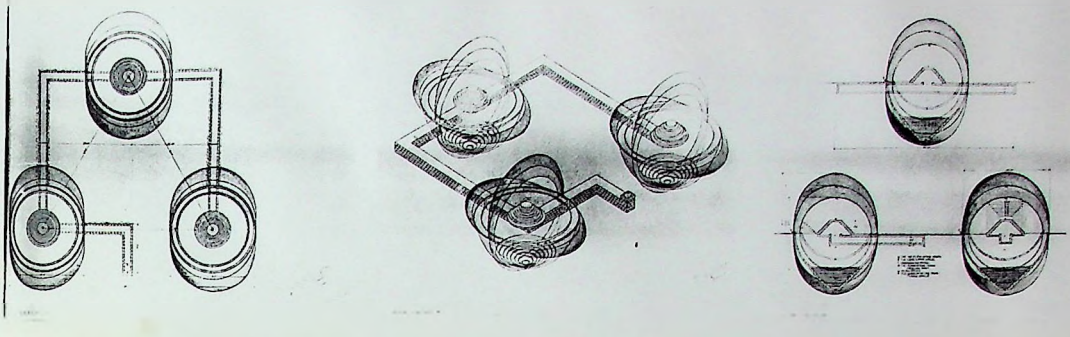
22. The Dice Game for Diverse Visions (1986)



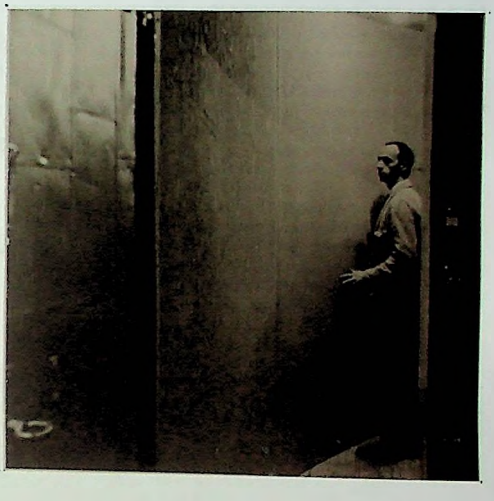
21. Three-Fold Manifestation III (1988) by Alice Aycock



24. The Garden of Scripts (Villandry) (1986)



26. A Representation of the Second World Plan Isometric and Section (1984) by Alice Aycock



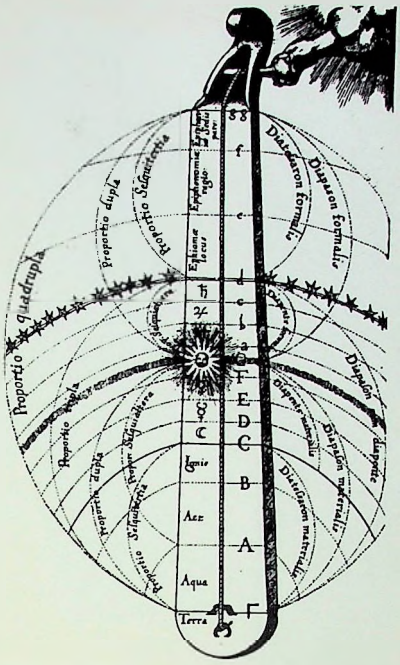
27. Passageway (1961) by Robert Morris

28. Labyrinth (1974) by Robert Morris

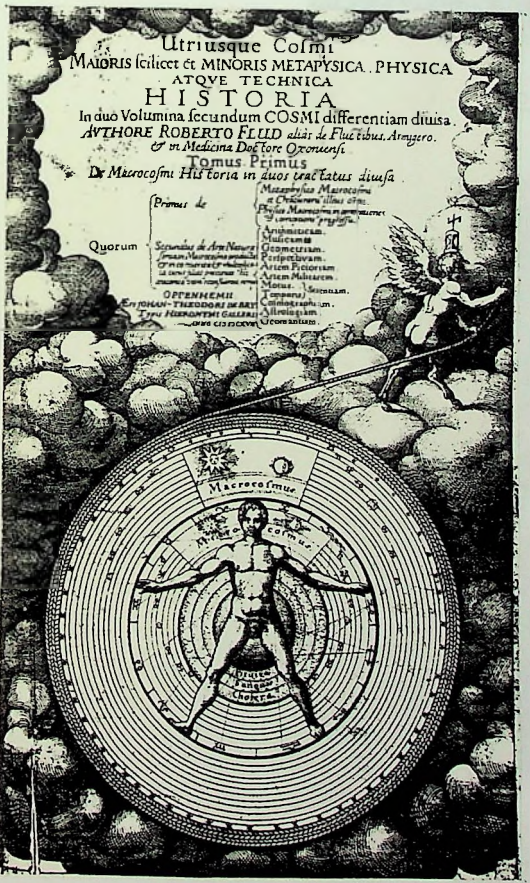
29. Arkville Maze (1969) by Michael Ayrton

30. Sod Maze by Richard Fleishner

31. Green Light Corridor (1970-71) by Bruce Nauman

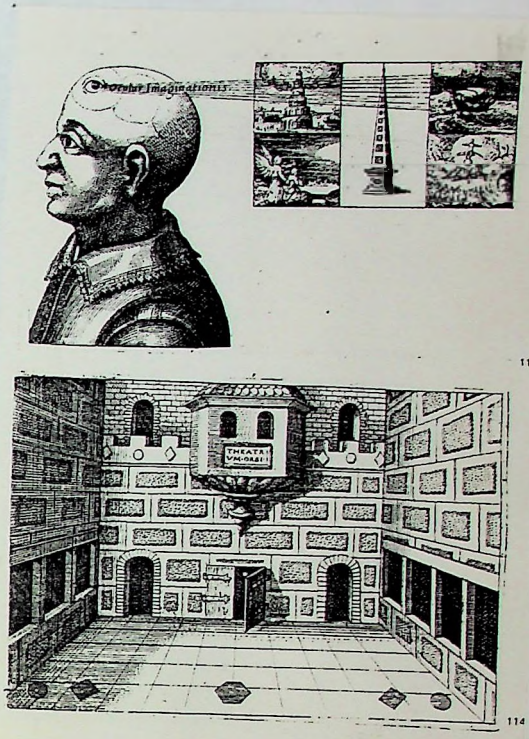


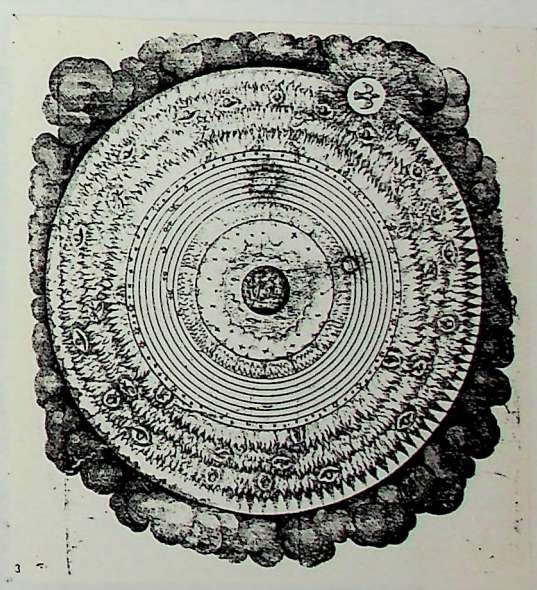
32. Mononchord



34. Cosmological Diagram

33. Memory by Robert Fludd





35. Solar Wind by Robert Fludd

36. Announcement to the Shepherds by Taddeo Gaddi

37. Experiment with an Air Pump (1768) by Joseph Wright of Derby

38. Eunice Winkless' Dive Into a Pool of Water Pueblo, Co. July 4, 1905

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