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# SUSPENDED TIME

TERESA STOPPANI  
2015

*Suspect Terrain*<sup>1</sup> nests on the street side of Socrates Sculpture Park, as far as possible from the waters of the East River. Yet the threat it evokes does not come from the water, even if the park itself is a very fragile site, floating on infill land subtracted from the river and subject to floods, and straddling the man-defined boundaries between Astoria and Long Island City, Queens. We are not far from a broken line (“Brooklyn”) of glacial movements, but this terrain is an artificial deposit where glacial sediments transported from as far as Canada are mixed with man-made rubble. Nothing is autochthonous here. The park is a site of deposits that welcomes stranded flotsam, and it now instigates the seasonal occupation by art installations and public events. Here sits Heide Fasnacht’s piece, both sheltered and exposed, artificial on the artificial, a painted plywood reconstruction of a sinkhole in which a quintessential house is half engulfed.

Man-made is most likely the accident that *Suspect Terrain* evokes, in a quiet tension that tricks

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<sup>1</sup> The work takes its title from John McPhee’s book *In Suspect Terrain* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984), a narrative on the effect of plate tectonics on the making of the American North East.

the eye as well as the foot. The light structure of the work sits like a broken eggshell, erected and apparently held together by the sinking house that, drawing it into an illusory depth, keeps it from shattering down on the ground. Too big to be a doll's house and too small to be used in any way by humans, the house at the center of this puzzle remains impenetrable, even the openings in its surfaces only suggested by an optical black and white. Is this **midsize** house really sinking? Broken patterns of raster dots painted on plywood and raised broken panels surround the sinkhole, making it difficult to distinguish what is



flat surface and what is depth, while the relationship with the ground remains ambiguous.

*Suspect Terrain* intentionally does not dig into the ground, even if it may look as if it were sinking. It is not a hole. It sits lightly on the ground, its pull into a possible depth entirely illusory, a graphic artifice on a safe flat platform. Yet, the tensioned relations that are intrinsic to the piece are doubled by its precarious and ambiguous relationship with the terrain. Could this three-dimensional representation (the sculpture in the park) of a bi-dimensional representation of a sinkhole (the newspaper photograph from which Fasnacht worked) actually sink into the ground, that is, physically engage with movement and become four-dimensional, thus ultimately completing and undoing the artwork?

While the possibility of the physical accident exists, albeit remote, it remains conceptually impossible, as an intellectual surface of separation much more robust than its plywood floor lies between the work and the land underneath. This ground is not a concrete screed gallery floor, but an equally artificial, uneven and compacted

terrain, and *Suspect Terrain* might indeed sink into the park. And yet it does not, its depth only simulated by the vertiginous black dotting on the white surfaces. And while we can step inside this work and walk on it, we realize more and more that this physical space is indeed a representation of suspended time.

The space of *Suspect Terrain* is an image of an image of a space in a specific moment in time, but it is far from settled or from being an aftermath. The underground cavity and structural collapse it only suggests, is in fact a dynamic and unknown event whose full extent remains invisible. The momentary stasis of the representation belongs only to its image, not to its space. Contrary to the frozen deflagrations of Fasnacht's earlier works, here we don't know what might happen next. Is this work performing the climax of this event, or its denouement? Has it come to rest? Or will the house find its buoyancy and rest suspended?

Heide Fasnacht's early works concentrated on those nearly ungraspable thresholds of deflagration that are suspended between the burst of the

explosion and the moment of the fallout when gravity ultimately prevails and the denouement of the phenomenon becomes in a way predictable for the observer. Edward Albee has observed that Heide Fasnacht's work "has always been about time – early, the tension of materials wanting release", then in the early 2000s "the capture of the released at a moment never to be repeated." Fasnacht's work "freezes" that which cannot really be captured, is, in itself, an event which can never be recaptured, for it is already past that which we experience."<sup>2</sup> Writing in 2004, Albee wonders where Fasnacht's work might go next, and *Suspect Terrain* indeed provides the answer.

After the sudden explosions of erupting volcanoes (1997 and 1999), the burst of sneezes (*Sneeze*, 1997, 2001, 2004), scored building demolitions (*Hotel Demolition*, 2000 and 2001, and *Demo*, 2001) and airplanes blown up in flight (*Exploding Airplane*, 2000), all frozen in Fasnacht's images and sculptures,<sup>3</sup> *Suspect Terrain*

2 Edward Albee, 'Time Frozen', in Heide Fasnacht: Strange Attractors, Anderson Gallery Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, Richmond VA, 2004, 6-7.

3 Teresa Stoppanni, 'The Architecture of Explosive Slowness', Lo Squaderno. Explorations in Space and Society, no. 26, December 2012, Space – Time – Speed, 9-14.



Above: *Demo*, 2000, Polychromed Neoprene, Styrofoam, 112" x 125" 120"

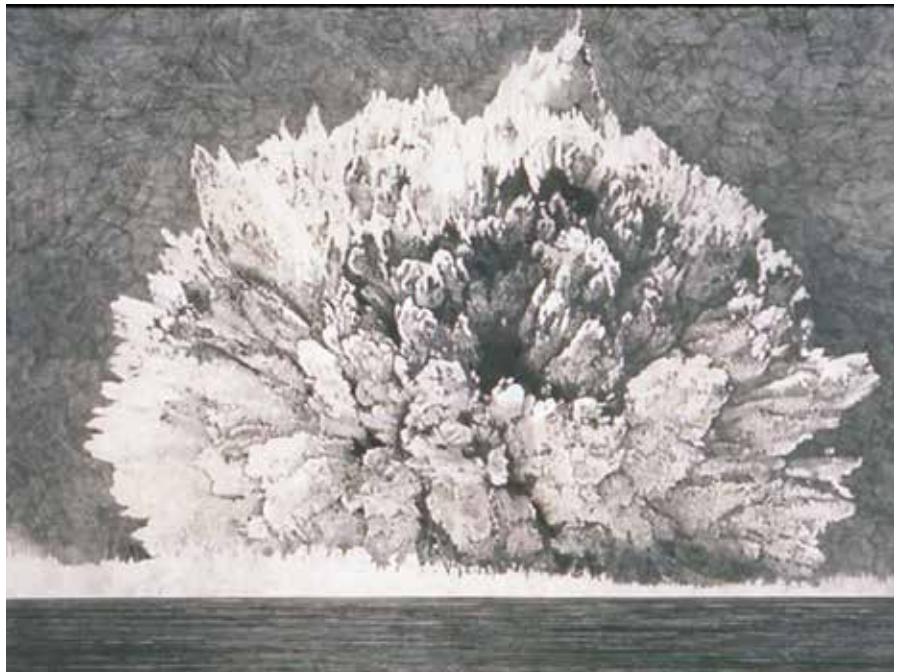


Above: *Exploding Plane*, 2000, Graphite Acrylic over Neoprene, Dimensions Variable (approx 20' sq)

dilates time into a suspended sinking which condenses material in a slow centripetal implosion as the terrain swallows the house. Here we no longer witness the expansion of a deflagration in the air, but the tension between opposing forces – densification and gravity – and material states – solid versus hollow ground.

Slow time had already featured in Fasnacht's earlier works like *Rain on Window* (2001-02), or in the mysterious *Precipitation* (2002-03), which transformed water condensation in a magic suspended field of polyurethane stalactites and stalagmites. *Suspect Terrain* continues this process of slowing-down and tensioning-in, while articulating and complicating its relation with the ground (the rubble infill) and with the site (the sculpture park).

*Suspect Terrain* is no earthwork, yet it plays with the slow dynamics of tectonic plates and their man-made surface alterations. Inserted in a cyclical dynamic of emergence and subsidence the event that it portrays is the paroxysmal expression of the fact that the earth moves and is far from solid and still.



Above: *Blast*, 1997-1998, Graphite on Paper, 22" x 30"

Below: *Sneeze I*, 1997, Philadelphia Museum, Graphite on Paper, 40" x 60"

The model house of *Suspect Terrain* could indeed completely and quickly disappear as if in quicksand, or, although more unlikely, it could surge back up again. Abstracted from life, cleared of human traces, belongings and clues of identification, the house becomes nobody's and everybody's. Removed here are the onlookers of the original photograph, and we are now them, tricked by the dizzying patterns of the black raster dots arranged to suggest both depth and movement. Time is not frozen, but both dilated and suspended at once, in a way that breaks the sequencing of events and the commensurability of chronological time. Here we do not know what we might expect to happen next. What is exposed and vulnerable in this work is ultimately us, viewers who can walk in and onto the work but remain spectators of the unpredictable.

-- Teresa Stoppani





