



YOU

Kevin Hamilton

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Kevin Hamilton:
on rhythmanalysis and art

One of Felix Gonzalez Torres' multiples consists of two posters, stacked in thousands and free to take-away, a text reading on the first, "Somewhere better than this place" and on the second, "Nowhere better than this place." Between this somewhere and this nowhere is an incursive — and extraordinarily expansive — space and time; critical, entropic, full, empty, blank to the world and, at the same time, describing the whole world in geo-social terms.

Gonzalez Torres, designing his stacks of posters for a gallery floor, was alluding to the potential of the gallery to invoke — and revoke — the complex aspirations of contemporary art as it plays with its own social potential and, equally, faces the disillusion of uselessness so often called up as a retort to such. That which Doreen

Massey would call the critical time-space of "in-between" (between somewhere and nowhere in Gonzalez Torres' case) is regularly used as a pacifier in such a debate: As long as things are in-between they might retain a type of criticality born out of a refusal to submit to geopolitical or psycho-social categories (this is the basis of much work that is described as institutionally critical in current terms). But this no longer seems adequate. Kevin Hamilton invokes the work of the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre as a potential response to this problem of the in-between as the retentive site of redemptive artistic fantasies and names his show for one of Lefebvre's most challenging notions, that of *Rhythmanalysis*.

For Lefebvre any concept of in-between space does not exist vacuously but rather as a mode and apparatus of production in itself. Space and time were for him productions —

Breaking, 2004, DVD-audio and speaker array (physical version).

The project sounds a short, very loud alarm at random intervals of less than an hour. The effect is one of certain and impending attack.

attributable to both capitalism and, fleetingly, to the creativity of those who choose to attempt to reproduce space themselves (in this manner his work comes close to, and is influenced by, the Situationist International, of which he was initially a member). Lefebvre liked rhythm because it created a contradictory — and thus productively dialectical — relationship between that which he called "logical categories and mathematical calculations" and "the visceral and vital body."¹ For him, just as capitalism's rhythm is one of constant production, so the body is both polyrhythmic and eurhythmic. But political power



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Krannert Art Museum, 2005,
electronics, fire bell.

“rhythms” individuals, groups, whole societies — creating mobilizations and putatively musical organs for its own use. “Everywhere,” he says, “where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm” in which repetition, connections between linear and cyclical processes, public and private action, growth and decline are manifest in both an organic and non-organic way.²

As a concept that complicates the in-between space-time in which any potential for art to be critical might rely, rhythmanalysis is interesting in that it suggests that such a lacuna is both full of coerced action (in the form of governmentalized rhythm) and potential invention. Rhythm, in music, speech, daily movement, dance, at

work (think eugenics), as well as in the so-called “rhythm of life,” displays this double potential of both inventing and being subject to the inventions of nameless others. As a description of the problem of art’s criticality this seems initially viable. For every claim a contemporary artist might make to a critical space and time outside of the institution/market/funding mode to which he or she is accountable, he or she may be hauled back in via the synchronicity of his or her rhythms while at the same time being credited for new modes of production.

One of the attractions of the in-between is that it seems to imply a lack of stasis (through its time-space connection, in which, diachronically, nothing static might occur). Rhythm fills the gap with yet more material: The space-time becomes dense in a philosophical and potentially political sense. Yet a simple lack of stasis, even one filled with rhythm, is not critical —

or is it? These are Hamilton's concerns in both this and previous works in which he has sought that critical space and at the same time has attempted to articulate his aesthetic and thus ontological imbrication within a systematic institutionalisation of the same.

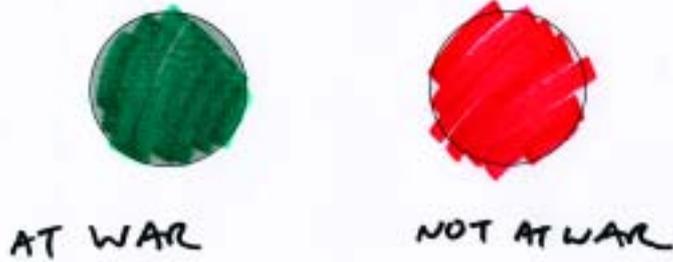
In creating banks of "status indicators" in the gallery, each of which answer a superficially simple question and each of which indicate a level of (fictional or not) surveillance of everyday life, Hamilton has produced a faux "command central" (to use his term) in which generalized and specific routines (sometimes believable, sometimes ludicrous) on a global and local level produce a rhythm that is both governed and invented. From "Are you keeping your voice down?" to "Is there daylight in Baghdad?" the questions are answered anonymously by a green or red light flashing on and off (this is rhythm production in

Agent Tracker, 2006,
PDA, electronics, daily image upload.

both a literal and conceptual sense). The implication of the answer being wrong — or being subverted — might suggest that the artist still has a critical role to play, a role in which the reinvention of factual material might be a method of what Lefebvre would call the invention of new rhythms:

"All becoming irregular (or, if one wants, all deregulation, though this word has taken on an official sense) of rhythms produces antagonistic effects. It throws out of order and disrupts; it is symptomatic of a disruption that is generally profound, lesional and no longer functional. It can also produce a lacuna, a hole in time, to be filled in by an invention, a creation."³





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Thus art is left with this device of rhythm formation, in which pure invention, in a Deleuzian sense, might throw structures out of order, create lesions, or engender what Bruno Latour would call “matters of concern” instead of “matters of fact.” In pathological terms, a lesion, multiplied, generates an eventual breakdown, a dysfunction of the body usually ending in death. In political terms of course, and in the terms used by Lefebvre, such lesions are necessary to any useful revolution. The question is not qualitative but quantitative: How many artists does it take to start a revolution? Many and

none might be the retort, or, more probably, that an artist need simply to work in Lefebvre’s lesional mode to alter the rhythm of everyday life.

So what is wrong with redemptive artistic fantasies? Gonzalez Torres’ multiple returns the debate to Lefebvre’s initial concerns: between somewhere and nowhere and the ways in which lived experience, as opposed to readily-produced modes of living, might alter spatial understandings, and spatial histories. Yet the artist’s “nowhere” takes the debate out of the philosopher’s hands for, like Hamilton’s

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improbable dualities, it introduces questions of social change to the realm of fantasy. It also grounds them in a type of desire that might be mapped by a different sense of rhythm in which a relationship between the “lived” and the “produced” invents a wistful longing that is perhaps counter-revolutionary in nature: a longing for things not to change but simply to be better.

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¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 14.

² Lefebvre, *ibid.*, p. 15

³ Lefebvre, *ibid.*, p. 44.



Kevin Hamilton, *Call to Call*, 2003,
generative video, audio for two monitors

More than 80 different 90-sec clips randomly playback as synched pairs on two monitors. The two spaces appear to connect or disconnect through an iterative investigation of rings, answers, busy signals, hang-ups, dead lines, and ignored calls.

*Image on cover: **The Other End**,
live online project at www.theotherend.net*



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Barbara Wiesen

Director and Curator



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Kevin Hamilton is a researcher and instructor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. His work and teaching examine such topics as walking as an embodied critical practice, collaboration and remix culture, and the political uses of liveness and telepresence. His recent exhibitions, public projects, and festival presentations include the Dutch Electronic Arts Festival, New Forms Festival(BC), ISEA (San Jose, CA), CiberArt Bilbao, Multiplace(SK), Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, and the Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art. Online recognition has included features by Chicago's Bodybuilder and Sportsman Gallery, V2's Fusedspace competition, and the Artbase at Rhizome.org. In 2005 Kevin co-organized *Walking as Knowing as Making*, an experimental and international symposium series at UIUC; he also curates for a new media exhibition and commission program at the Siebel Center for Computer Science in Urbana, IL. With a background in painting at the Rhode Island School of Design, Hamilton completed his graduate studies at MIT's Visual Arts Program in 2000.

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www.cod.edu/ArtsCntr.gallery.htm



SOMEONE ELSE