

## James Carrigan

"The spatial uncanny... [is] displayed in the abyssal repetitions of the imaginary void.... This endless drive to repeat is then uncanny, both for its association with the death drive and by virtue of the 'doubling' inherent in the incessant movement without movement."  
Anthony Vidler, 'The Architectural Uncanny', 1992

James Carrigan's works are new types of spatial environments, which combine installation, radical design and architecture. Carrigan's projects include fully realised mobile constructions alongside propositions for site-specific interventions; both are intended to literally and metaphorically animate spaces. His series of proposals, one of which is included in 'Theatrum Mundi', are a means of envisaging ambitious or large-scale installations which push at the limits of what is technically feasible. Being realised as representations – whether as maquettes or verbal / textual descriptions – they reside in the spectator's imagination as essays in the architectural uncanny. 'Machine 3.1', here, is an exquisitely realised maquette, which though only 1:50 scale, illustrates the complexity and ambition characteristic of Carrigan's projects. His proposition in 'Machine 3.1' is a wholly site-specific one, made for the exhibition space of the former Wapping Hydraulic Power Station. Working with an industrial space that is exceptionally tall as well as over-sized presents particular difficulties: articulating such a volume requires intervention at the level of structure rather than the placement of objects. Carrigan's proposal directly interferes with visitors' normal use of the space. At first, the machine blocks the main entrance so that the audience has to enter from the side to gain access. His intention is, as he notes, to create "a very aggressive insertion that wholly accommodates the viewer, yet forces them to change their normal use of the building."

In the tradition set by Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark, 'Machine 3.1' intentionally confuses the distinction between container and object, artwork and environment. The artist's development of this tradition is, put broadly, to demarcate the limits of the space by mobilising the element of it that is inherently static and earth-bound, the floor plane. Carrigan's proposal is to set the entire floor surface into motion, or rather a reinforced plaster cast of the area. This construction would, at full scale, be both fragile and sublime, brittle yet monstrous. Like Rachel Whiteread's casts, it is seen as an indexical sign which bears every surface indentation, imperfection and incident of its process of making. The cast begins by hugging the ground like a second skin, concealing the floor itself. Laid face to face, it is a kind of ghost-double of the floor.

The artist's transformation of the space involves ten crane-like members supporting a steel-frame structure at the ceiling. The purpose of this gigantic armature is to raise and lower the cast from the ground to the roof. The continual work that 'Machine 3.1' performs is both uncanny and unnerving: adapting Vidler's terminology it undertakes "repetitive stages toward infinity" – a Sisyphean labour with no endpoint and no purpose. Moreover, Carrigan's armature turns the world upside down: when raised, the cast mirrors the floor. Removing the co-ordinates of the horizon line sets the entire building into a permanent state of metamorphosis. However, the gentle pace at which the cast moves accentuates our sense of the sculptural properties of the container we inhabit – of its weight and monumental mass. Every element of 'Machine 3.1' is designed to combine gravity and grace in unexpected measure: if the ascension of the plane is accompanied by a visceral thrill, its descent is tinged with physical threat and danger.

'Machine 3.1' draws from diverse strands of modern art from both ends of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, linking installation with the story of mobiles, and looking back at radical design from constructivism to deconstruction. First and foremost, the artist's works are poetic enterprises, although their poetic register is one of uneasy lyricism. From one perspective 'Machine 3.1' can appear to be the missing link between László Moholy-Nagy's 'Licht-Raum Modulator' and Gregor Schneider's psychologically charged explorations into the domestic uncanny. Like Moholy-Nagy's work, Carrigan's expands and contracts a given space through the poetic deployment of modern, industrial materials. And like Schneider's house-projects, the work takes on a more than parasitic relation to its container: it overwhelms it, forcing one soaring space to be consumed by another claustrophobic one. Carrigan evokes similar sensations to Schneider, yoking wonder and apprehension.

The artist's means also recall the tradition of sculptural automata in 20<sup>th</sup> century art. The artist insists on the autonomy of his work so that we are required to respond to it in imaginative terms rather than through pragmatic or practical questions. 'Machine 3.1' recalls Jean Tinguely's

mobiles / machines: though whereas Tinguely works with 'found' and outmoded objects, we might say Carrigan reorients the meanings of 'found' and outmoded structures. Both artists create machine-type constructions which fulfil fruitless and endlessly repetitive tasks, which are futile yet fascinating. Formally 'Machine 3.1', like Tinguely's late sculptures, lacks a single compositional focal point but rather envelops us in its environmental presence. 'Machine 3.1' is at root an experiment in the production of space, but it also recalls a third tradition – that of artist-designers' monuments, or at least anti-monuments. The majority of traditional monuments – statues, in particular – are single static vertical objects, being akin to exclamation marks in their function to punctuate space. By contrast, Carrigan's mobile horizontal plane recalls Vladimir Tatlin's similarly structurally ambitious works. Tatlin's famously unrealised 'Monument to the Third International' is, like 'Machine 3.1', a kinetic sculpture at the scale of architecture. Like Tatlin's at least for the time being, Carrigan's work requires the spectator to complete it imaginatively.

**'Machine 3.1'**, 2005, mixed media. Supported by Arts Council England and Complete Fabrications.

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