



**FRIEZE
PROJECTS**

**FRIEZE
TALKS 2006-2008**



3 Lakewood, California, late 1940s

Courtesy the artist

Something for Everyone 2008

Fritz Haeg Artist

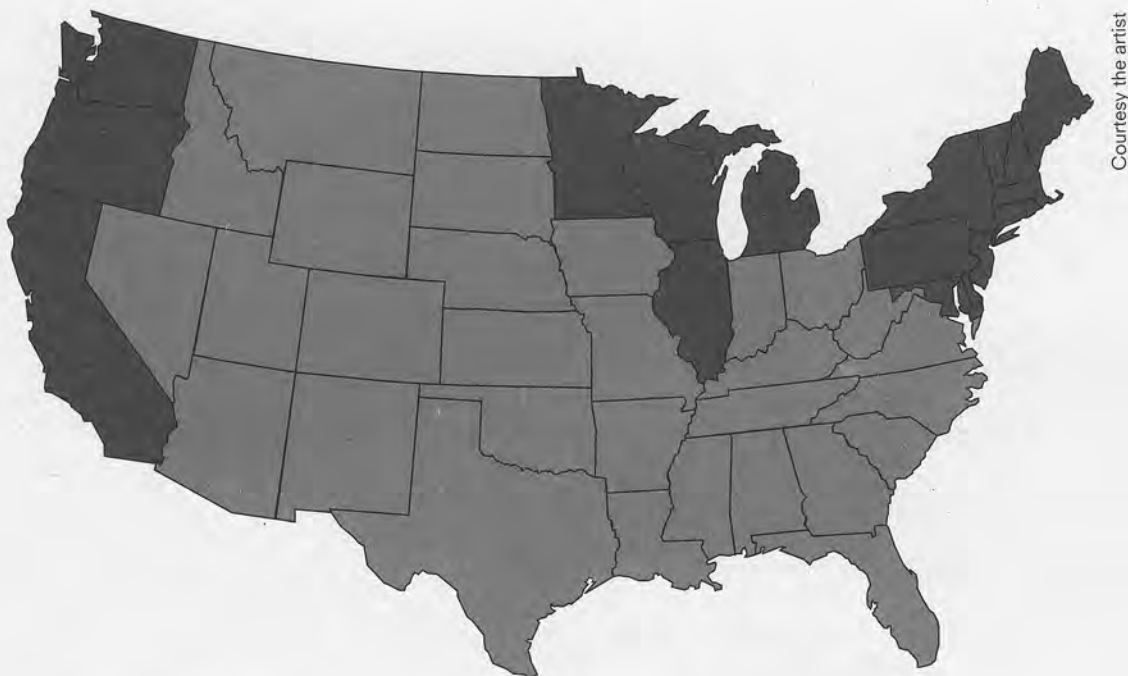
In his lecture, Fritz Haeg explains how and why he began to make work for the whole population and how his practice now encompasses ecological salons, radical gardening and environmental activism as well as writing, exhibiting and performing.

Jennifer Higgle Hello everyone. I'm Jennifer Higgle, co-editor of *frieze* magazine, and it's my great pleasure today to welcome Fritz Haeg. Likening his complex practice to a system of crop rotation, Fritz Haeg works between architecture and design, although currently his preferred clients are animals, and his practice encompasses the happenings and gatherings of Sundown Salon, the ecology initiatives of Garden Lab, including *Edible Estates*, and other various combinations of building, designing, gardening, exhibiting, dancing, organizing and talking. His first book, *Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn*, was published by Metropolis Books and distributed by DAP earlier this year. As Bradley Horn wrote in the pages of *frieze*: 'For architects, Haeg is an artist; for artists, he's a landscape architect; and for the homeowners whose front lawns he wants to transform into vegetable gardens, he is an environmental activist.' He's produced projects and exhibited work in countless museums and galleries around the world, and has variously taught in architecture, design and fine art programmes at Cal Arts, Parsons School of Design and the University of Southern California. In 2006,

he initiated Sundown Schoolhouse, a self-organized educational environment originally based in his geodesic dome in Los Angeles. Fritz's talk today will explore populous projects, insular bohemia, activist art, passive entertainment, network communication, social strategies of isolation, and the potential roles for today's artist in a fractured society, but I suspect he'll talk about a lot more than that! Please welcome Fritz Haeg.

Fritz Haeg Thank you. When I received the invitation to do this talk, before I did anything else, I came up with the title: 'Something for Everyone'. You might run through in your head all the possible meanings that expression has in terms of survival and diversity, but I really like it as a way of looking at the work I've been doing for the last few years.

I want to start with is this electoral map from the 2004 US presidential elections [fig. 1], which is really appropriate now because we're on the eve of another election in the United States. At the end of 2004, having just finished a lot of complicated projects that had occupied me for a few years, I spent an extended



1 Electoral map of USA, 2004

period of time away from LA, where I've been living for the last eight years, and went to Australia for six weeks of emptiness to consider what I wanted to accomplish with my work. Then the election happened and I saw this map. In the United States, we were supposedly split into two groups: the Democratic blue zone of the cultural élite on the coasts and the interior conservative Republican red zone. I came back from that trip with only one thought or impulse: the desire to make work for the whole country. This desire to address a broader audience also grew out of a disillusionment with the contemporary art and architecture and design world, which sometimes seems to have become little more than an insular discourse among a small group of people. I think there is an urgent need for us to step outside of our disciplines and step away from our immediate peers, and take what has been learnt in that small world of a particular discipline out to a broader world. I had no idea how I was going to achieve this, but my first thought was to do something symbolically in the geographic centre of the country, which is Kansas.

Americans, along with people in some other countries, have all bought into the idea of the front lawn:

this ornamental space upon which we present our homes. It was originally sold to us in America as a democratic space that we were all collectively tending together. Any lapse in tending that space is seen as a moral lapse: if you don't mow your lawn, you're a bad person! If you grow up in the American suburbs, you know that tending the lawn is this amazing ritual that happens on the weekends, when you hear all the lawnmowers going. It sounds like democracy: everyone's out there doing their part to maintain continuity and control. Lawns prevent eccentricity; they keep down local particularities that we are uncomfortable with. Yet, they are also spaces that no one feels comfortable in: the person on the street doesn't feel comfortable stepping there; the people whose lawn it is certainly don't feel comfortable going out there and doing much.

We dump pesticides and then turn on the sprinklers, toxifying the groundwater, and we mow the lawns with two-stroke fuel mowers, creating this polluting, wasteful space that we don't even enter into [fig. 2]. Yet, although these front lawns in particular have very little function, we have 30 million acres of lawn in the United States: it's our country's largest crop.



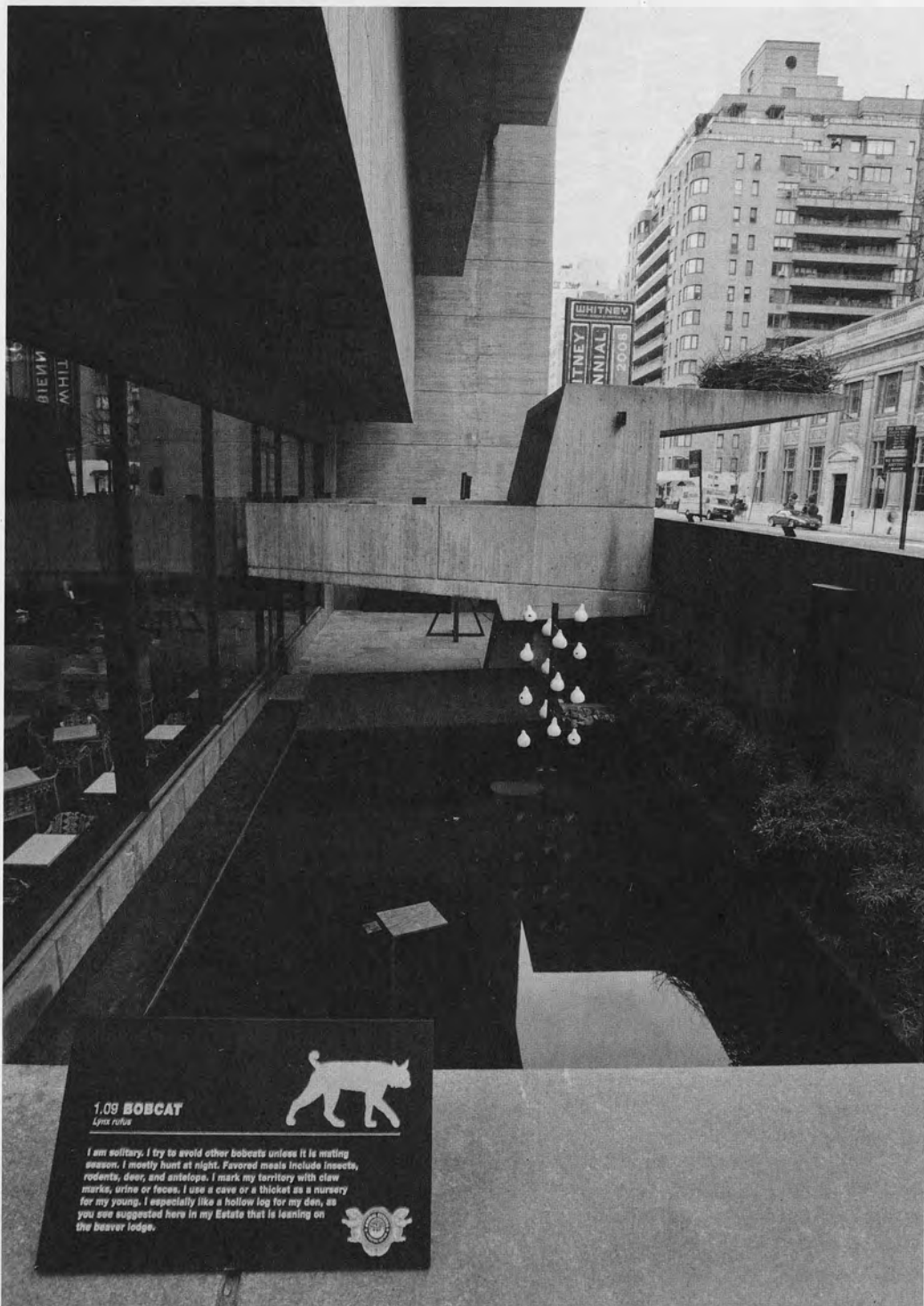
2 Fritz Haeg, Photo of front lawn sign, USA

After my initial thought of wanting to do something for everyone, I felt it was important for me to find a particular physical space that we all shared, one that cut across all geographic, economic, political and religious boundaries, and I decided to reconsider the front lawn and I hoped, by making an alternative prototype, to propose a whole new way of living that could emerge out of it. Here, for example, is what happened in the late 1940s in Lakewood, California: an entire city built for 70,000 people in just three or four years [fig. 3]. It might remind you of Le Corbusier's Radiant City [1935]. Although Le Corbusier did not manage to fulfil his dream of building any of his proposed Radiant Cities around the globe, you realize when you look at how we're living today that, in fact, we're living in them everywhere. I love this quote from Le Corbusier: 'The cities will be part of the country.' I mean, wow, really? The possibility for grafting these two things on top of each other without either losing anything is the great dream and hope of the suburbs. 'I shall live 30 miles from my office in one direction under a pine tree.' Great, who doesn't want that? 'And my secretary will live 30 miles the other way from it in the other direction under another pine

tree. We shall both have our own cars, we shall use up tyres, wear out road surfaces and gears, consume oil and gasoline, all of which will necessitate a great deal of work, enough for all.' It's this beautiful manifesto about something for everyone, and it shows the best of intentions, I suppose. But when you read it today, it's like a nightmare; a nightmare that was organized and played out in a very logical, well-intentioned way. It shows what happens sometimes when you actually live in these grand Utopian models.

So, this is our American dream. I'm really interested in how we're all living, and I'm interested in finding those moments – almost like acupuncture points – where if you press on something, or make a very strategic move, it somehow ripples and affects the way we're all living on a really broad level. My project is focused narrowly on this little bit of grass between the house and the street, but I'm really interested in all the levels of isolation that have been engineered by this way of living. Where our food comes from now, for instance, is so remote from where we're actually living. Our food is grown in these really remote locations and then trucked to us. Or it's shipped from the other side of the planet. We're

4 Fritz Haeg, **Animal Estates 1.0: New York City**
Installation view at the Whitney Biennial, 2008



Courtesy the Whitney Museum of American Art

living in cities where all evidence of our survival is invisible or hidden. When we talk of waste, we say we're throwing it 'away', but there is no 'away', really: it just goes somewhere that we don't see. In a small village a few hundred years ago, you were very aware of where things were coming from and where your crap was going. But today we live in this wonderful bubble where stuff comes out of nowhere and our crap goes somewhere we don't know. And it's all great – until we reach the limit. Then, we start to understand what happens.

Early shelters in North America were always one room – the tepee or wigwam – and all activities would happen in that one space. Later, a division was made between the parlour, the kitchen, the hall and the upstairs, where you would sleep. Over time, we slowly felt the need to divide things, and just as it played out in the home, it also happened in our cities. Of course, today it's like exponential fracturing: every minuscule activity now needs its separate cell and container within which it can happen. And then you go outside and there's something for everyone. You can drive down any residential street in Los Angeles and see a wonderful global survey of style from the last 100 years. Officially, of course, the lawn is private. In fact, it's quite public, because what you do there says who you think you are, and what kind of face you're going to present to the world.

The English estate is really where we see the birth of the front lawn. It was a way for the owners to demonstrate their great wealth by saying, 'I am so rich that I can take this otherwise valuable farmland and just use it as an ornamental space to present my amazing home, and then I'm going to hide the plants that produce food.' It's the beginning of this fracture that says productive food gardens are ugly and meant to be hidden, and the only things that are acceptable to be presented to the public are sterile ornamentals. If you go back further, of course, that isn't the case; we see beautiful evidence of French kitchen gardens, and monastic courtyard gardens, which also produced

food. Then, if we step further forward a bit, in London we see victory gardens, including my favourite one, which was created in a bomb crater. During the First and Second World Wars, there was a real effort to get Americans to grow some of their own food, and it was quite successful: 80 percent of Americans were growing some of their own food by the end of the First World War. But it dried up immediately after that, which was the last time there was a real oral tradition about how to grow food passed down from one generation to the next in one particular place.

In 2005, I began the *Edible Estates* project, of which there have been seven editions so far. My initial goal was to divide the country into a grid of nine squares, and in each square do one regional prototype garden: removing a family's front lawn, replacing it entirely with an edible garden that was co-designed with them, and then broadcast the story of that garden in as many ways as possible. The first one was in Salina, Kansas. Over a weekend, I worked with the family and some volunteers to make the garden; six weeks later, the okra was already blocking the house's view from the street. The garden was commissioned by a local organization, the Salina Arts Center, and the project was documented in videos, books and a brochure, so people could find out what was going on.

All these gardens have been commissioned by art galleries and museums, and I've become really interested in how these institutions can be used as invisible staging grounds for works that go out into society, without people even having to know where they came from. I hold on to the identification of this project as art very loosely, and when *Edible Estates* is written about in the mainstream press, they rarely mention that the gardens were commissioned by arts organization, and that's fine. When someone reads in a newspaper that a garden is art, then a whole other chain of conversations happen that maybe aren't particularly productive, or that I don't really care about. So I'm fine if it just goes out as a garden, and people can discuss it how they want.

The next garden I did was in Lakewood, California. It took me about four months to find this family – a computer programmer and his two kids – and they were perfect. I look for families that are active gardeners, but who also live in streets of endless lawns, where doing this project will be a radical intervention in some way. They had also been keeping a blog about the egg production of their hens in their backyard, and all of the people that I work with are meant to be local spokespeople in a way, so the homeowner's entire blog from the first season of this garden is in the *Edible Estates* book. When this garden was completed, you would be driving past these endless lawns with not a sign of wildlife anywhere. Then, in the distance, before you even saw the garden, you would just see this little cloud of bees and birds and butterflies, this little urban wildlife preserve.

There is also a garden in London, which was commissioned by Tate Modern last year in collaboration with Bankside Open Spaces Trust, and whose owners are the residents of council housing estates. I created a swirling design that could uniquely be appreciated from above, which is how the residents and gardeners would see it from their flats every day. It is reminiscent of the royal parks, with their curvy raised flowerbeds, but instead of being ornamental, this is a productive garden. I was there for an afternoon a month or two ago, and families were just hanging out, tending the food with their kids. There was an installation in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, an HQ or resource centre for the project, with a huge table for people to sit around and study books and a video about the project. I try to broadcast the story of each garden in as many ways as possible: in the gallery, in printed materials, online and via videos.

The book *Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn* documents these the first four gardens in the series with stories by the actual garden owners who I worked with. The challenge was to create a book for a varied readership: artists and art world people would read it, because the project has obviously been

situated in the art world, but then gardeners, radical environmentalists and foodies would all be looking at the book, too. And that's the problem with the notion of 'something for everyone': you can never please everyone. But, I love the idea of doing something you believe in, something both hopeful and doomed, and taking it as far as you can, even if you know it's impossible. Some common complaints about the book included homeowners wanting more 'how-to' information, or art people wanting to hear more of the conceptual underpinnings of the project. In particular, professional gardeners complain that the gardens are ugly, but it was very important to me that the gardens were a little ratty and real, something that anyone could imagine doing themselves. I hate aspirational design magazines that imply you're supposed to strive for this impossible perfection, and to buy things to be able to achieve it. I think this part of our society is going to undo us.

As we Americans began to conquer our continent slowly from one end to the other, we developed this idea of manifest destiny, the sense that this beauty and abundance was endless, permanent and our God-given right. Artists went to the American West and sent stories back in the form of massive paintings that you could stand in front of and imagine yourself there. These were the stories of our dreams, and they represented infinite prosperity. But they also represented something to be conquered, because the West was, of course, wild and presented all of these barriers to occupation that the East didn't. There's a wonderful academic book called *Tending the Wild* [M. Kat Anderson, 2005], which tells the stories of local southern California peoples before the European settlers arrived. When the colonists came and saw the way they lived, they didn't understand: since they couldn't see any rows of crops, they thought these people were just lazily lolling around in this Eden. In fact, this seemingly wild southern California landscape they were entering into was a massive, tended garden. The people living there were trimming and planting

5 Fritz Haeg, *East Meets West Interchange Overpass Parade*, 2008
Commissioned by the Indianapolis Museum of Art



Courtesy the artist

things, and setting strategic fires: this was a managed landscape that they were eating from.

I was in Alaska a week and half ago, and you really feel like it is the western limit. There are so few people there, and there are still bears wandering around; they're still in survival mode. I took a little walk to the glacier and I saw a grizzly bear coming towards me. If I hadn't turned around, that bear would have probably eaten me, because it's October and it's time to fatten up to hibernate. These situations are increasingly rare, where we have an immediate sense of being in peril from something 'wild'. Then, we were driving down a suburban street and saw a moose, which is very common there: Alaskans don't even look twice if a moose walks down the street.

This brings me to the new project I've been working on this year called *Animal Estates*, in which I create homes for animals in cities. Originally, I thought of it as an architecture project in which my clients were animals instead of people. It specifically relates to urban wildlife — to the animals that lived in cities before we got there — and thinking strategically about how we want to welcome them back. The first edition of the project took place in New York for the 2008 Whitney Biennial [fig. 4]. I worked with a local landscape ecologist, Eric Sanderson, who's been doing this intense research on what the island of Manhattan looked like on 10 September 1609: the day that Henry Hudson arrived. He's reconstructed where the rivers were, what insects and plants were around, where the rock outcroppings were. He came up with a list of the animals that used to live at the corner of 75th Street and Madison, the current location of the Whitney Museum. He could tell me very specifically that beavers used to live there, and then, based on his knowledge of what trees and other vegetation were there, I developed a list of 12 animals that would move into homes that I provided for them. *Animal Estates* flags were flown to celebrate these model homes — a nest three metres in diameter for the bald eagle over the entry

portico, a nest box for the flying squirrel, a black nest box for the barn owl that ended up looking a bit like a mini-Whitney Museum, and a beaver pond and lodge in the style of Marcel Breuer's Brutalist architecture of the museum. Bronze plaques were installed on the pavement overlooking the estates, to tell the story of these 12 animals. It was aimed more at people on the street than those in the actual museum.

I invited a different person to do a guided tour or performance every week about one of the animals. These ranged from a local turtle expert to a folk-singer friend, Emily Lacy, who performed songs she had written about the flying squirrel in the Whitney Museum café. There are a lot of 'ladies who lunch' in the café on weekdays, and they weren't really ready for folk music about flying squirrels, but Mary Tyler Moore happened to be there that day and was thrilled because she is an animal activist who had protested the removal of the nest that a couple of red-tailed hawks had constructed on top of her Fifth Avenue co-op just a few blocks away. The wonderful performance artist K8 Hardy came as the bobcat and held a press conference with video cameras. It was fantastic to have a lot of the kids in the audience, suspending disbelief and raising their hands asking questions like: 'Bobcat, what was it like to be at the top of the food chain?' And K8's reply, 'Well, I couldn't eat the other contestants — that was in my contract — so I had to eat the rats and bats.' I think with these projects there's a tendency to collapse under the weight of a very dry, earnest environmental altruism, which I'm not interested in. But I love revealing the stories of these animals that used to live on this exact same piece of land and look at it in as many ways as possible.

With that in mind, I also invited 12 dancers to write scores of movement inspired by each of the 12 animals. Every animal in the project had a postcard that you could buy at the museum. On the back is written the score of movement — for instance, 'fingertips become the tips of feathers dipping into water' for the wood duck — that you could take home and

perform yourself. On the front are images of a nearly naked male model in the various poses from the animal scores throughout the museum. Again, this is something for everyone, since some of the gay men visiting the museum didn't notice anything else about the *Animal Estates* project except for these sexy post-cards, collecting the whole set of 12 and hopefully hanging them up at home.

Every week for the duration of the show, they moved through the museum, one at a time, performing all 12 animals. It was important that these were not performances; they were ceremonial activities that happened very quietly, with one person moving through and acting them out. If you knew they were happening, you could follow them, but most people didn't know exactly what was happening. The animals were performed at the strata at which they used to live – from the eagle on the top floor galleries, to the beaver on the lower-level bookstore. For one day in the nearby Park Avenue Armory, all 12 dancers performed all 12 animals together in a circle, and then split up for workshops where everyone could learn all the scores of movement.

I have also just finished doing an edition of *Animal Estates* in the Netherlands, at Casco Projects in Utrecht. Initially, I thought the project was going to be about the five animals I'd identified, but I found the most amazing animal experts there, so the project's actually more about them. There were portraits of them in the gallery and we made a video documentary about them. Tienieke de Groot was an expert on common swifts. She talked about how all the older buildings in the Netherlands, which are full of holes that the swifts can nest in, are replaced by modern buildings that are impervious, without these cavities for the returning birds. On the post-cards for this project there are instructions on how to make your own *Utrecht Animal Estate*, such as a very modest pond in the back yard for the green frog. One part of the *Animal Estates* project is the urban wildlife repository, materials on local urban wildlife

are added from each city that it travels to, so that it is constantly expanding.

I go to each new city with the *Animal Estates* project with the very general thought of welcoming animals back. But then, after visiting and meeting people, the project becomes localized and very specific to that place. On talking to local experts in Portland, I got really excited about the snag, or dead tree. Up to 40 percent of urban wildlife in the Pacific Northwest depends upon dead trees to live in, and I began to think about how uncomfortable we are with this idea of death in the landscape. In landscapes managed by humans, dead trees are removed as if they're useless detritus. In fact, there's more life supported by a dead tree than a living one, and they serve a profound function that is lost on us life-obsessed humans. The dead tree then became the inspiration for the Portland Animal Estate structure that I created – which I think of as this luxury, multi-unit residential tower – custom-designed for seven native Pacific Northwest animal species with the advisement of local animal experts. The bats need warmth, so they go under these south-facing, black-painted louvres that absorb the sun. The snake can sun himself on these rocks on the south side, and then go underground into the box, which is a hibernaculum. This little magenta tube is for the bees to enter. Portland prides itself on being a progressive and environmentally conscious town, and I wanted to engage with that somehow. We created this poster, which was distributed in town, challenging other residents to build their version of the Animal Estate, with the prototype in the gallery serving as an inspiration. Some local art colleges assigned it to their students as a project; many third-graders did drawings of their snags; some people built snags on their properties and documented them. Some of these materials were displayed in the show and then added to the *Animal Estates* repository.

In San Francisco, I was really excited about what was already happening in town, so that project, in collaboration with the San Francisco Museum of Modern

Art, was more about four animals that people had already made amazing homes for. Pier 39, for instance, used to have boats, but almost 20 years ago the sea lions arrived and took over the docks, which they soon sank. They had new floats specially engineered to support all their weight – hundreds of sea lions at a time will be on one of these. Sometimes the project is not about creating something new, but just pointing to a human-made animal home that's already in town, and saying: that's an Animal Estate, so let's tell that story and make it visible.

The SFMOMA project was focused on a series of weekly events and activities for which I invited fashion designers, writers and dancers to do different projects over four weekends. There was a parade that led to a dance of animal movements by dancers from Anna Halprin's Sea Ranch Collective. Anna Halprin is a dancer I was just turned on to a few years ago, but she epitomizes everything that I think is beautiful about West Coast artists. She's in her 80s now, and she's been in the Bay Area for decades, having made a conscious decision not to go to the dance capital, New York, but to go out into the woods in Marin County, northern California. Her whole practice is about non-professionalism; it's about looking at the reality of the world we're living in and responding to it in very direct ways. Her work is not choreography that's performed by other people in theatres; it's activities that happen in public space. She works with non-dancers, people from the street, so it's not about any precise movements; it's often about people gathering together to take back certain public areas of the city.

I've been on the West Coast for the last eight years, and that's where I've found all my richest inspirations. One by one, as I start to find precedents of artists that have gone before me, I discover they are inevitably people that have been on the West Coast at some point. Today, on the east side of Los Angeles where I live, there is this wonderful community of people who are a little bit off the radar and have had this opportunity to make work outside of any real

commercial activity, inspired by what people are doing in a spectrum of disciplines, and with a real sense of camaraderie. Machine Project, in Echo Park, is a good example of this. There is everything from sewing workshops to poetry performances, and their annual fry b-q party; it's hard to define, but everyone who lives around there has a very warm place in their hearts for Machine Project and goes religiously to whatever eclectic, unexpected events are presented.

Which leads to the salons that I've been having in my geodesic dome in Los Angeles from 2001 to 2006. When I first moved in, I started a series of events by inviting people from the local community I've described to do things there. There was one called 'Knitknit', where everyone just hung out and made things with their hands all day; there were more conventional literary salons, where local writers would read; and there was one for kids where we had a mud pit. Each event was a day in which we focused on an activity, although no product necessarily came out of it. It started out very local – my neighbourhood, my community – but, as the events evolved, I realized it wasn't just about geographic proximity, and often more about this network of people thinking about some of the same things. So, for instance, the London-based collective Janfamily heard about the salons through a friend, got in touch with me and organized an event as they were passing through town. I had never met them, but they stayed at my place for a whole weekend doing this project in which we embroidered messages to each other on our clothes.

I'm going to finish by talking about some of the parades that I've been doing lately. Actually, it's weird because I don't even like parades that much, but I'm really interested in the idea of them as a strategy for temporarily occupying our streets and other public spaces in our cities. I worked with students from Cal Arts to develop *This River is Our Parade* in Valencia, California, where we created an event along the Santa Clara River – one of the ten most endangered rivers in the United States, and the only remaining natural

riverbed in southern California, although almost nobody in Valencia is aware of that. There was no budget, and it was rather loosely organized with an open-call, welcoming whoever showed up and who ever happened by. I'm very active with my website, so I posted up the whole story of it well in advance. An environmentalist who had seen it on the website got in touch with me. She was so excited: 'I've got frog costumes. I've got signs. What do you want? I'll show up!' We had random suburbanites who were just walking by; we had radical environmentalists; we had a lesbian performance troupe passing through town in their van; we had this meeting of all these people for this sad little river that we all shared, which some people didn't even know was there, but which for that one day we were focused on. The termination point was under a freeway overpass – possibly the least valuable space in the entire city of Valencia – but I loved how, for that one moment, this underpass became reclaimed as our little ideal covered performance amphitheatre.

My most recent parade, for the Indianapolis Museum of Art, took place just a few months ago. It was called the *East Meets West Interchange Overpass Parade*, and was actually made up of two parades heading towards each other [fig. 5]. Everyone from the east side of the United States gathered on the east end of the parade route, and everyone from the west side of the United States gathered on the west end of the route, and then they marched and collided over a freeway overpass. Actually, when this freeway was built, it split the city of Indianapolis in half, isolating one neighbourhood from another. I designed two huge banners for east and west for each parading group posed for a portrait in front of their banner. The banners were made from a particular material that would get really dirty – to show the footprints of everyone that stood on them. With 'EAST' and 'WEST' written on them in big letters, and with an arrow pointing in the direction that they would be heading, the banners were then lifted up and carried

by six people to lead the two parades. So, these two parades marched and met on the freeway overpass ... and, well, I hadn't really organized or decided what would happen when they met. It was a mess. Some straggled on to the other sides. Some people didn't know there was another parade heading towards them, so they were surprised when they met the others. But the interesting thing was that it wasn't like a war, with these two parades having a showdown; it was more like each parade became the audience for the other parade, which I hadn't expected at all, and they waved at each other as they passed by. If you're in a parade, you can't enjoy it or experience it. Here, each person in the parade had another parade to watch and, because there wasn't much audience on this loud freeway overpass, the two parades were simultaneously audience members and paraders. When it was all over, the banners were processed to the museum and put on display in the gallery.

To close, I'd like to give you a little preview of what I'm thinking my next project will be: it's a garage project. Almost every home in the United States has this space, where we supposedly keep our cars, pointed towards the street, with a big door opening on to a huge piece of pavement leading to the street. A lot of people don't use this space for its intended purpose; garage bands and start-up computer companies are just two examples of other uses. And maybe in a few years we won't even have cars – by choice or not – so what will happen to this space? This project would propose turning these garages into self-run retail spaces and community centres, such as yoga studios, or sell their home-made jam or yarn from it, or have a massage parlour. I want to do a series of these garages around the United States, each one being a model for how someone could reclaim their garage and reappropriate it in some way.

**This talk took place on
Saturday 18 October 2008 at 5pm.**