

# White Wall / Black Hole System: drawing lines between cinema and architecture, galaxies and souls.

## Adrian Blackwell on *medicine* by Kika Thorne

*medicine* is a deceptively simple work. 90 black elastic cords stretch from the four edges of the gallery’s entrance wall to a two-inch diameter black hole at the center of the facing wall, over sixty feet away, forming a horizontal cone with a rectangular base and a circular apex. The cone divides the cubic space of the gallery in two. When a visitor enters they are inside the cone. Then, if they choose, they can step through its defining lines, and into the gallery’s remainder. Although it constitutes three quarters of the gallery’s volume, this space is the cone’s leftover, cut into triangular shards, so the viewer feels pressed between the bungees and the gallery’s walls, floor and ceiling.

At first, the sculpture appears to be highly cinematic. Its black lines perfectly describe the throw of a projector, as if an invisible film were being projected from the rear of the gallery, filling its front wall. But in this work the emphasis is placed on the form of the projection itself, rather than its cause, the projector, or its effect, the image projected. In this way Thorne’s piece directly references and literally multiplies Anthony McCall’s 1973 abstract film - *Line describing a cone*. Thorne’s project is also highly architectural as both a constructed space and a linear drawing. Her work is a spatial intercession that renovates the existing architecture completely, but, like Fred Sandback’s sculptures, hers is also a drawing in space; its straight lines form a projection in another sense, virtually delineating space just like an architect’s drawing.

Walter Benjamin famously connected architecture and cinema through their common reception in a state of distraction, but architecture and cinema are also bound together through the fact that they are each perceived perspectivaly. Martin Jay has argued that discovery of perspective initiated a new “scopic regime of modernity.” The technique itself was invented by the architect Filippo Brunelleschi, while he built the Florence Cathedral, and codified as a method by the architect Leo Battista Alberti in De Pictura. For these designers, perspective proved that the new mathematical emphasis of architectural form could in fact be perceived by its users. This new way of drawing was a means to link subjective perception and the objective forms of architecture. It is clear that today photography, film and video persist as its living descendents, but more than the others, film has a unique relationship to perspective, because it constantly repeats the act of projection that is perspective each time it is shown. It is no surprise then that *medicine* resonates not only with cinema and architecture, but also with early illustrations of perspective that literalize its projecting lines, such as Albrecht Durer’s famous images of perspective machines.

At one level, Thorne’s oeuvre might be traced as a migration from cinema toward architecture. But her first significant film works in the early 1990s such as *Discovery of Canada* and *You = Architectural* already focused on this intersection, emphasizing the relationship of interior spaces to affective bodies. In these films, protagonists caress architecture and fall into or out of windows. Films from the later 1990s like *October 25th+26th*, *1996* and *Mattress City* moved out into urban spaces, conceiving of architecture not simply as the line that separates public and private, but also a way to form public and political spaces. While the earliest works deconstructed architecture’s complicity in the concealment of the sexual politics and domestic violence, outing this separation through the publicity of film, the later works literally place private domestic elements, such as shelters or beds, outside in the public spaces of the city, tending toward full exposure. Just as *medicine* literally draws lines between cinema and architecture it attacks and negates these media as well. Like Richard Serra’s interventions in streets and squares, or Michael Asher’s within interiors, Thorne’s architecture obstinately cuts the normative space of the gallery as white cube, forcing an intimate and physical interaction with a fragmented space. The piece also acts as a filmic negative, in which light and darkness are inverted, but in this case not only the film is reversed, but the entire cinema. It is in these resistances to the very media that she engages that the critical dimension of Thorne’s work emerges.

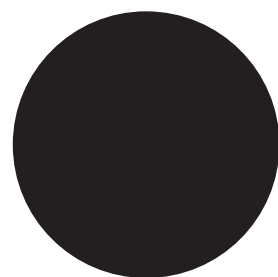
If Thorne’s work of the late 1990s and the first half of the first decade of the new millennium focused on the issue of homelessness and a criticism of neoliberal precarity, since 2005 and her move toward sculpture as her medium, her work has increasingly focused on planetary problems. Her first suspended piece, *Singularity* (2006), was a pink and black lycra model of the event horizon and singularity of a black hole, a collapsed star, whose maximum mass coincides with minimum volume, such that even light is unable to escape its gravitational pull. The singularity is the technical name for the center of the black hole, that non-place whose pull is irresistible. With *medicine*, Thorne revisits this subject matter in relation to her ongoing interest in the material crises of our planet, the work conjures the possible end of both space and time – the end of worlds.

When a body passes across the event horizon of a black hole, its choice of direction is limited such that no matter which way it turns, it travels toward the singularity. In their *Introduction to Civil War* Tiqqun argues that “The only substantial freedom is to follow right to the end, to the place where it vanishes, the line along which power grows for a certain form-of-life. This raises our capacity to then be affected by other forms-of-life.” The black lines of *medicine* are also a metaphor for the convergence and gravitational pull of what Wittgenstein called “forms-of-life.” Thorne follows Lucretius in believing that bodies each have their own gravitational pull, that gravity is the body’s soul, the pull that causes them to swerve toward one another. She is interested in the inclination (the clinamen) of a specific political project, a specific set of ideas, a trajectory of research, and the pull of other souls. These lines converge because they move toward a subjective truth. If that truth is dark in our times, or even the end of time, we have no choice but to follow our projects toward it.

This conception of freedom is directly opposed to the flexible personality of the Postfordist subject, whose freedom of choice provides distraction from her or his pathologies. *medicine* is an image of a dark sun, its brilliant rays shining black. In her work on depression and melancholia, Julia Kristeva uses this image as a metaphor for what Jacques Lacan named a *Thing*. For both of them the *Object* of desire is assimilable into both our language and our imaginary world, by contrast a *Thing* is too *real* to grab hold of, “a center of attraction and repulsion,” both too material (too physically traumatic), and too empty, as the absent cause of our desire and depression. An eclipse is both too bright to look at, and an image of the sun crossed out. As Kristeva says it is “insistence without presence, a light without representation.” She argues that the depression caused by the *Thing* is a fall, into the unknown. “For those who are depressed, the *Thing* like the self is a downfall that carries them along into the invisible and the unnameable.” In his recent work Franco Berardi (Bifo) theorizes the dark light of the “happy depression” of contemporary capitalism. He is interested in the current coincidence between the rise of clinical depression and the economic depression that the global economy continues to fall deeper into and sees both depressions as productive resistance, as slowdowns of the incredible speed of capitalist production. Depression itself should be seen as a pause, a stop work action in a time when the soul itself has been put to work. It is the contemporary equivalent of the Workerist call for the refusal of work.

Through the gallery’s glass doors *medicine* presents itself as a façade. Inside it presents itself as a face with one eye – a white wall with a single black hole. For Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari faciality is a diagram for the operations of both signification and subjectification: its white surface accepts inscriptions of meaning, its black holes are repositories for our unconscious thoughts. Together they form an abstract machine that fuses two distinct systems of control, two semiotic regimes, a spectacular and ideological structure of significance that historically circulated through the mass media of buildings, on the walls of palaces and churches, and now circulates through filmic and digital screens; and a system of subjectification, that was tied closely to the disciplinary apparatuses of architecture, the interiors that people were stuffed into – prisons, schools, hospitals – and is now self-inflicted through the affective powers of today’s communicative media. The white wall / black hole system shapes our souls, starting from our mothers and father faces, and moving quickly to the face of god – the Christ face.

But *medicine* is at the same time an attempt to dismantle the face, to pull the hole off the wall and break through the wall. As has already been pointed out, Thorne’s work cuts through the despotic signifying regime of the gallery’s architecture, and at the same time it turns on the lights, surprising cinema’s docile, staring subjects. In place of the face of Christ, the white man’s face, the capitalist face, *medicine* produces what Deleuze and Guattari call a “probe-head,” an asignifying assemblage, a convergence machine that connects itself to the inhumanity of both humans and things, travelling along approaching inclinations, no matter how unknown and terrifying their destination may seem. For Lucretius, philosophy was the *medicine* of the soul, and poetry was the honey that made it palatable; for Thorne art is the *medicine* she needs to follow the line along which power grows for her specific form-of-life.



Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media, Michael W. Jennings, Brigit Doherty, Thomas Y. Levin eds. (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 39-40.  
Martin Jay, “The Scopic Regimes of Modernity” in Vision and Visuality, Hal Foster ed. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 3-28.  
Tiqqun, Introduction to Civil War (New York: Semiotext(e), 2010), 25.  
See Jason Smith, “Soul on Strike” in Franco “Bifo” Berardi, The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy, Francesca Caddi and Giuseppina Mecchia trans. (New York: Semiotext(e), 2009), 9.  
Julia Kristeva, Black Sun, Leon S. Roudiez trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 13.  
Ibid., 15.  
Franco Berardi (Bifo), Felix Guattari: Thought, Friendship and Visionary Cartography, Giuseppina Mecchia and Charles J. Stivale trans. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 9-15.  
Workerism or Operismo, was an anticapitalist movement started in Italy in the early 1960s, theorized by Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri and others, and associated with the journals Quaderni Rossi and Classe Operaia.  
Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, “Year Zero: Faciality” in A Thousand Plateaus: Brian Massumi Trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 167-191.  
For a description of “probe-heads”, Ibid., 190-191.

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Art Gallery of Windsor: Srimoyee Mitra, curator of The Wildcraft, Fall 2012. Srimoyee and Kika have been in conversation since September 2011.  
This discreet component, *medicine*, on exhibition at the C Gallery, serves as a control, and part of the process toward the making of The Wildcraft.  
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No Reading After The Internet. NRATI: cheyanne turions will facilitate a conversation within this sculpture on August 7 at 19:00.

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