

# BODY MOVIES

**B**ODY MOVIES is a large-scale interactive intervention in public space. It is the sixth in the series of “relational architecture” installations I’ve designed for cities in Europe and America over the past 7 years. These pieces have been exploring the intersection between media technologies and urban environments. Pieces in the series normally involve the transformation of emblematic buildings using projections, sound, 3D sensors, networks and robotics. Relational architecture can be defined “as the technological actualization of buildings and public spaces with alien memory.” My work is not an attempt to reinforce or undermine essential power narratives of a site, but rather to create situations



Computer interface for BODY MOVIES.



"The Shadow Dance," engraving  
by Samuel van Hoogstraaten, 1675.

where buildings may temporarily decline their roles in the daily urban performance of identification. I am interested in connecting disparate planes of experience so that new "alien" relationships may emerge. This is why I call my work "relationship-specific" rather than "site-specific." I look for ad hoc, artificial readings of our surroundings. The pieces provide a starting point for eccentric readings without a pre-programmed outcome in terms of what people should or should not do. A relational architecture piece should be, by definition, out of the control of the author.

BODY MOVIES was commissioned by V2 for the Cultural Capital of Europe Festival in Rotterdam. From August 31 until September 23, 2001, the Schouwburgplein square in Rotterdam was transformed by the projection of huge interactive portraits on the façade of the Pathé Cinema building. Thousands of portraits taken on the streets of Rotterdam, Madrid, Mexico City, and Montreal were projected using robotically-controlled projectors located around the square. However, the portraits were only visible inside the projected shadows of local passers-by, whose silhouettes measured between 6 to 66 feet high, depending on how far people were from the powerful light sources placed on the floor of the square.

When the Schouwburgplein was empty the portraits could not be seen, since the light sources completely washed them out with strong white light. A camera-based tracking system monitored the location of the shadows in real time, and when the shadows matched all the portraits in a given scene, the control computer issued an automatic command to change the scene to the next set of portraits. In this way the people on the square were invited to embody different representational narratives as well as create their own shadow play. Up to 60 people took part at any given time, controlling 11,000 sq. ft. of projections and creating a collective experience that nonetheless allowed discrete individual participation. BODY MOVIES acted as an ephemeral structure through which the participants self-organized. Rather than public space being defined strictly by architectural design or by corporate branding, BODY MOVIES situates such space and those who occupy it, in a conversational mode with the space itself.

The installation's use of shadows as an interface directly references Samuel van Hoogstraten's engraving "The Shadow Dance" which appears in his book *INLEIDING TOT DE HOGESCHOOL DER SCHILDERKUNST*. Produced in Rotterdam in 1675, this engraving depicts a minute source of light placed at ground level and the shadows of actors taking on demonic or angelic characteristics depending on their size. The optical devices deployed by Dutch masters of *trompe l'oeil* and anamorphosis are the starting point for a piece that investigates the crisis of urban self-representation. BODY MOVIES transformed the cinema building into a stage for reverse-puppetry, attempting to create an anti-monument of alien presence and embodied relationships.

