SINGAPORE
BIENNALE
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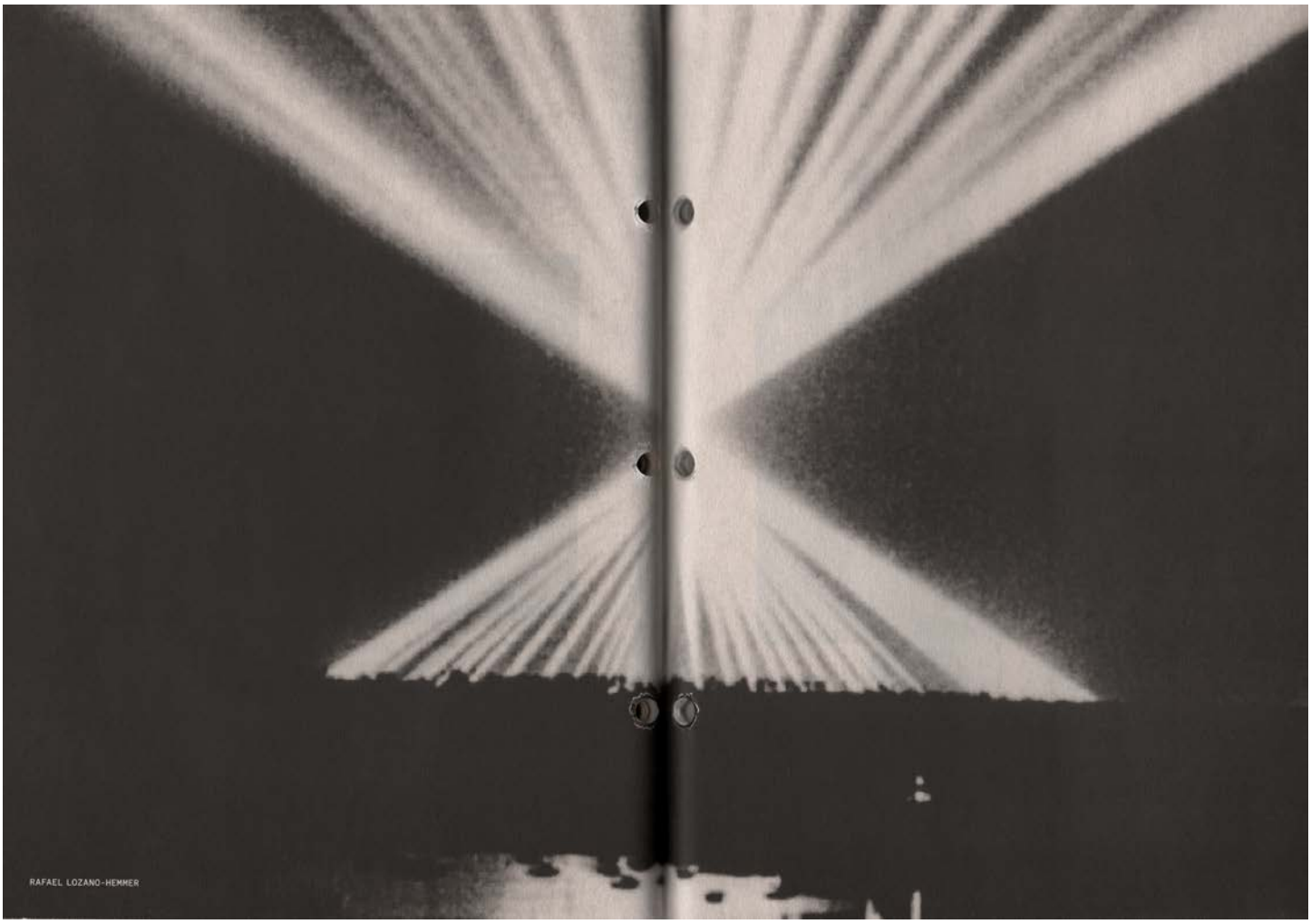

Graham, Beryl, “Amplification” *Singapore Biennale 2011,* exhibition catalogue, March 13-May 15 2011, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore. (english)

RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

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Amplification

Art using contemporary technologies often struggles with a critical response which is based on a dichotomy of cultural meaning: these technologies are fluffy 'hands-on fun for kids' — entertaining enough but essentially shallow — a gossipy world of mass media chat rooms, networked bitching and vapour theory; alternatively, these technologies are military-industrial nightmares of command and control — networks of iris-scan surveillance, genetic mapping databases, smart bombs, and shock-and-awe commercial advertising. Lozano-Hemmer's body of work has been acutely aware of these inherent meanings of technology, from private to public, or from intimate and moving experiences to spectacles of command and control. *Standards and Double Standards* (2004), for example, is a gallery installation where a set of men's belts turn to face the viewer in the room; a sinister installation on a claustrophobic scale, inferring domestic surveillance and violence. At the other end of the spectrum of scale, his huge publicly-controlled searchlights in public spaces makes specific reference to Nazi light-shows and spectacles. The ability of technology to amplify the voices or actions of a little person has been one well-used by both entertainment and the military: the theatrical spotlight seeks out celebrity and advertises expensive nightclubs, but the searchlight also controls and targets those who are deemed to be in the wrong place — such as border crossings. Lozano-Hemmer's *Body Movies* series (2001) use spotlights in public spaces so that little people can appear as huge shadows, and can then play out scenes of violence where big shadows crush smaller ones, or behave in rude or playful ways.[1] If, using a tiny intimate mobile phone, the public can move huge searchlights, then what is the responsibility of that power? Are those people with the biggest shadows, the loudest voice (or the widest mass media corporation) always going to crush the smaller ones?

As theorist Jennifer Gonzalez points out, this also places technologies on the disputed borders of public and private, and at the centre of issues of 'embodiment'. If a non-citizen has been through USA entry procedures, then their fingerprints are now recorded. As a Mexican-Canadian who has also lived in Europe, Lozano-Hemmer has crossed particularly disputed borders and would be aware that some people are more recorded than others. Again, there is a particular tension here between the individual and the group: Gonzalez also explains that: "Race has traditionally been thought of as a 'quality' of individuals, therefore reducible...to a property or mere set of appearances that one can theoretically 'move beyond'. But race is not a property; it is a relation of public encounter".[2]

In acknowledging the intensely negative aspects of both technology and interaction in his work, and by exploring those tensions between individuals and the group, and in particular the complex 'relations of public encounter', Lozano-Hemmer has admirably addressed the current issue of taking interactive work beyond saccharine 'hands-on fun', and into spaces where conflict can be faced.

Beryl Graham

1 A chapter on systems of interactive and participative art, including some discussion of Lozano-Hemmer's work, is in Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2010.

2 Jennifer Gonzalez, 'Race, Secrecy and Digital Art Practice', *The 'Do-it-Yourself' Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*, Anna Dezeuze (ed.), Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2010, pp. 185–205.

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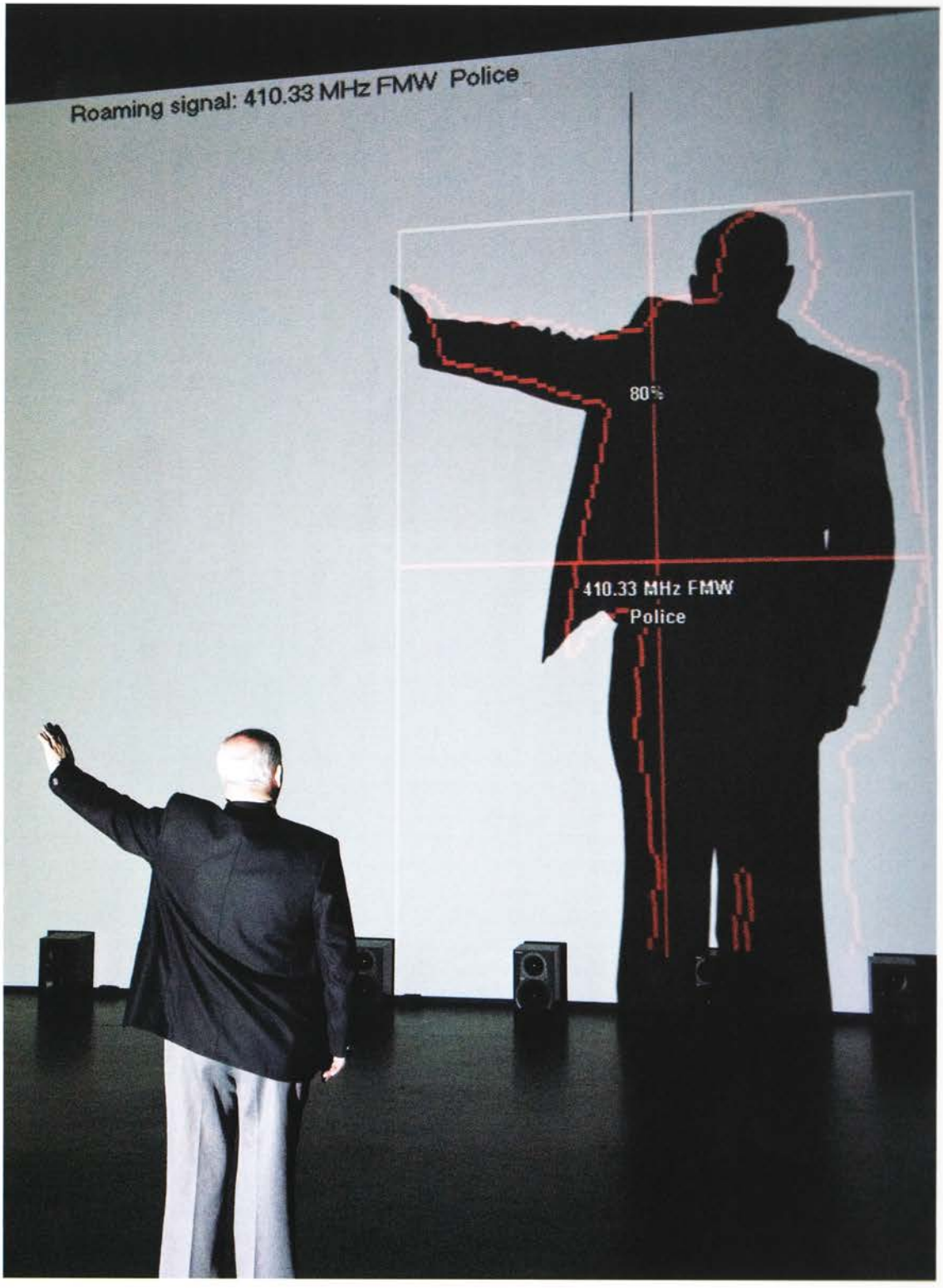
Frequency and Volume: Relational Architecture 9, 2003
Projectors, cameras, computers, radioelectric scanners, antennae, radios and 48-channel sound system
Dimensions variable