

**Laura Kurgan**  
New York, September  
11, 2001

dried up, at least if you're looking for satellite imagery of Afghanistan, since the US State Department has reportedly bought up all the rights.

State surveillance has certainly not disappeared with the fall of old-fashioned Big Brother regimes like the STASI. The switch from analogue to digital cameras and the awesome processing power of computers, enables data to be gathered and analysed on a massive, worldwide basis. Peter Cornwell's intelligent virtual surveillance cameras, that track visitors to the exhibition and respond to their behaviour, gives a hint of what today's technology is capable of. Surveillance has become dataveillance; it is no longer the eye that sees, but an artificial brain, operating autonomously, like the US Government's Echelon system that automatically monitors and filters phone calls, faxes and e-mails, or the global trade in information, covertly gathered via cookies on the internet and credit card transactions, about our private lives and consumption patterns. The ubiquity and pervasiveness of virtual spaces of information and the speed and complexity with which data can be created and manipulated are not only beyond perception and comprehension, but increasingly beyond human control. ■

**Michael Gibbs** is an artist and a critic based in Amsterdam.

## ■ Paul Noble

**Maureen Paley Interim Art** London  
November 1 to December 2

Cain, the Western world's first murderer, was also said to have been the founder of its first city. Since Biblical times, then, evil and the creation of a new urban centre have been twinned, moving in tandem right up to recent times with Celebration, USA: the perfect hometown founded in 1996 by that most sinister of American institutions, the Walt Disney Corporation.

Nobson Newtown, Paul Noble's ongoing (since 1998) urban vision in pencil on paper, seems founded on this very understanding: new towns are hell. Located in a featureless site somewhere between an abandoned quarry and a dustbowl, these pictures look like Escher drawings set in a post-nuclear landslide. So far there are about 30 buildings and places in Nobson Newtown, among them the Nobspital; the Nobslums; the nobjobclub and Paul's Palace, the Architect's House. Places yet to come alive on paper include the Mall, Ye Olde Ruin and the town monument 'Welcome to Nobson'. Drawings on view at Interim Art this time are the *Public Toilet*, 1999, and the squatter camp, *Acumulus Noblitalatus*, 2000-01. Here, polluted rivers are crossed by spongy, springy, giant penis bridges, a detail verging on Bosch-like weirdness that

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*then* part1

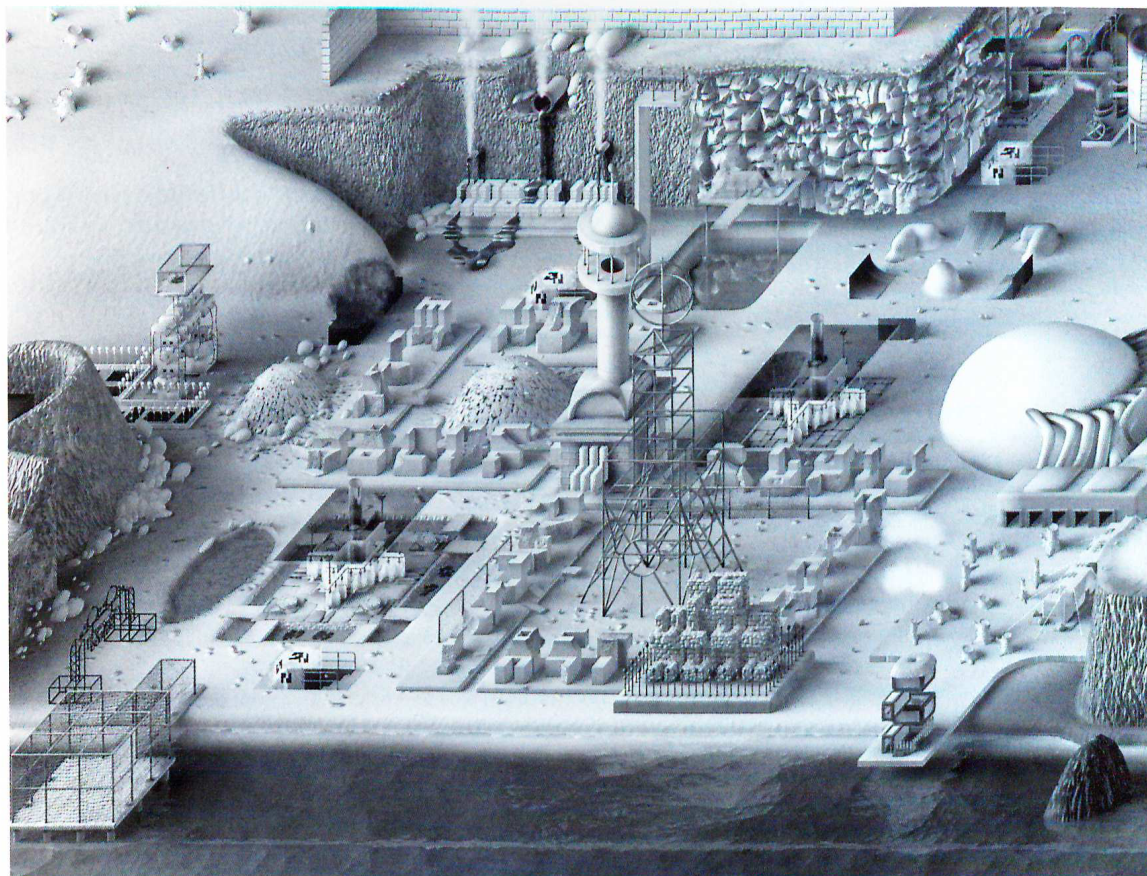
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**Paul Noble**  
*Unified Nobson*  
 2001  
 DVD projection

suggests this is *The Garden of Earthly Delights* gone very wrong – just like most planned cities.

None of Nobson's architectural wonders have any urban connection to one another; they each emerge isolated from this barren earth on separate sheets of Arches paper, boldly spelling out their function in immense, semi-decipherable, raised letters. Most of the grand urban planners of old, from Leonardo da Vinci to Baron Haussman, conceived of their cities divinely from on high, organising the whole city in broad master strokes. Instead Noble shapes his city in a more piecemeal fashion, in much the same way as Frank L Baum constructed the Land of Oz. These are accumulations of separate sites, backdrops for separate events in no particular order. In fact, this is probably a more accurate representation of how we actually experience and enjoy a city – after all, who cares how messy the whole arrangement might look from the heavens? Does it matter that Munchkinland was just a tacky garden suburb of Emerald City? No.

In an old interview, Noble spoke of his interest in humour, but appreciated that one of the fortunate things about being an artist is that 'you don't have to be actually funny'. Nobson is like Paul Noble's lifelong running quasi-joke, close in spirit to the work of Richard Prince or John Baldessari, who also spent years toying with humour but always managed never actually to make anybody laugh. Details from Nobson might occasionally

prompt a chuckle – like the cemetery called 'Nobsend', or the compulsive logging resulting in a forest of stumps – but you have the sense that, long after the initial joke wore off, Noble just kept on drawing, shading, building little bridges and ruling lines. What is it that keeps this crazy place going?

Just as Baum planned to write only one Oz book and spent the rest of his life writing 17 sequels, Noble too seems to have hit upon a successful obsession. One assumes it might have started casually, like a teenage doodle drawn distractedly on the back of a school notebook that then sprawled outwards uncontrollably, unchecked, ad infinitum – just like suburbia. The new video on view here, *Unified Nobson*, 2001, suggests that Nobson and its creator have found fresh impetus to explore uncharted ground, so to speak. The whole city now hums like an efficient sewage plant; rhythmic puffs of smoke beat time and steady waves lap on smooth Nobson shores. The town, it seems, is starting to breathe life, to experiment with movement thanks to the miracles of computer animation not available when Nobson was first conceived. What next? Will brand-new cyber technology eventually allow pencil people to move about Nobson, inhabit its funny shoebox houses, wander its grey fields of alphabet soup and sit beneath its tentacular street lamps? And will its citizenry one day revolt, angry that Nobson has no school or college, no gallery, no

## THE KIOSK PROJECT

**NINA SAUNDERS FOREVER**

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cinema, no stadium, no place of worship, no Tate Modern and no pub?

Probably not: for there are no people in Nobson. This is a graphite ghost town inhabited by absentee lumberjacks and mutant cows. Cain is said to have built his city because he needed a place to hide from punishment; Paul Noble punishes no one, not even cartoon people, by forcing them to live in his magnificent, hellish creation. ■

**Gilda Williams** is a writer and Commissioning Editor for contemporary art at Phaidon.

## ■ Andrea Zittel

**Sadie Coles HQ** London October 29 to December 8

**43a Commercial Street** Birmingham  
October 31 to December 2

Economical, compact, portable and located within walking distance of Birmingham city centre, Andrea Zittel's most recent design for an inner city apartment reads like a town planner's model for sustainable living. Throughout October 2001, the American artist lived, slept and worked in a neglected warehouse building on the edge of Birmingham's prestigious Mailbox development – a canal-side complex of designer boutiques, exclusive apartments, café bars and restaurants. Within the rather shabbier surrounds of the ex-warehouse the artist installed *A-Z Cellular Compartment Units*, a stackable, collapsible home comprising ten 12' by 4' living units that subtly parody the pricey executive flats located on the neighbouring Mailbox waterfront. Curated by Ikon Gallery in collaboration with independent curator Nigel Prince, the artist's proposal is attractive if somewhat idealistic – squeezing a three-bedroom luxury home with all mod cons into a space the size of a basic inner city bedsit. From the exterior, the wardrobe-like containers of her construction have a sleek Habitat familiarity, combining satisfying lines and surfaces with an exacting Minimalism that recalls the utilitarian designs of the Bauhaus and the geometrical exactitude of Russian Constructivism. Zittel's belongings are placed

with wendy house precision around the interior space – trainers under a bench near the entrance, apples and fresh ginger alongside the tiny gas-ringed stove. Peering into the compartments through circular portals her possessions seem altered in scale, miniaturised and distant as if seen through the glass of an 18th-century cabinet of curiosities or the windows of a doll's house. Inside however, once accustomed to crawling between the interlocking units, the viewer's sense of scale shifts and the space feels vast, luxurious even.

Having spent several nights living in her self-styled suite, Zittel talks enthusiastically of the potential to expand the piece, envisioning an entire neighbourhood of units and imagining ever-new functions for additional compartments: a swimming pool perhaps? Or a terrace? In the 20s, Le Corbusier promoted his low-cost, high-density designs for living with similar enthusiasm. But where Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin for Paris involved ripping out much of Paris's historical buildings to install his monolithic skyscrapers, Zittel's vision creates a lighter, more temporary intervention which would co-exist with the present fabric of the city – enhancing rather than obliterating the architecture she finds there.

As in earlier works such as the *Escape Vehicles*, exhibited at 'Documenta' in 1997, Zittel takes a determined stance against the depersonalising effects of mass-production, rendering her designs utterly customisable. Each of the *A-Z Cellular Compartment Units* can be stacked and rearranged in any order allowing individual taste and circumstance to determine the final form of the work. Zittel's interest in personalised design commenced in the early 90s, when she acted as a pseudo lifestyle consultant to colleagues and began devising the *A-Z Living Units*, an ongoing series of furniture and living spaces designed to maximise comfort and freedom for specific individuals. The latest in this latter series, the *A-Z Homestead Unit* – exhibited concurrently with the Birmingham show at Sadie Coles HQ, London – is a response to a particular community and to a particular historical event. Constructed at the most westerly of the artist's two studios, situated in the Californian desert region near Joshua Tree National Park, the work is a response to the Five Acre Homestead Act – a legislation

**Andrea Zittel**  
*A-Z Homestead Units*  
2001

