Is it complete?

As he changes into fourth gear, from nowhere a row of fountains bursts out of the road. Before he can react, his car crashes through the water obscuring his view through the windscreen. Reflexively he flicks the wipers on, checks the road in front and looks into the rear view mirror as the fountains rise and fall in the distance. His heart is beating audibly to his own ears.

As she walks along, her phone starts to buzz and she quickly reaches into her pocket to grab it before it starts to ring. Just as she flips it open, a large silver form just to her left expands and rises up above the height of the trees. She stops. Her eyes remain fixed on the imposing form as it gradually slows and settles into a new position. The phone beeps and vibrates in her hand and she looks to see if she recognises the number of the missed call. Someone somewhere has just had a parking violation ticket stuck to their windshield.

On top of the car park, the gang of lads stand, staring up into the dark sky. Taking another swig from his bottle of Italian beer one of them sees the small dots of light they have been waiting for and places the bottle on the floor. The rest all follow suit and prepare to run. Whooping with excitement they see the lights on the ground coming towards them and NOW! They turn and leg it across the tarmac. As they reach the other side of the rooftop and hit the barrier, the lights zip off into the distance across the road and the square and to the other side of the houses. Looking back up into the sky the aeroplane seems to be moving so slowly and they can hear it now; a low rumble as the row of street lights below stands still and dark.

We are in the small city of Chelmsford in Essex in the South of England, just 30 miles north east of London, south of Braintree and west of Maldon. 157072 people live here and drive 51405 cars. The town is traditionally known for its radio development and manufacturing industry and was powered by Bradwell Power Station on the Essex Coast until last year and now has a tender out for a new supplier of electricity. The Chelmsford that you are currently inhabiting, though, is a possible version of the town, a future projection as filtered through the visions of Pinsky Projections.

Pinsky Projections have placed proposals for seven alterations or additions to the centre of Chelmsford. If these proposals were to be followed through Chelmsford would become something else, some-

thing other than it currently is. We would be inhabiting an adjusted Chelmsford; new Chelmsford; neo-Chelmsford, post-Chelmsford; Art Town formerly known as Chelmsford!

When the car ran into the fountains rising across the road it was because enough toilets had been flushed to trigger a unique urban feature proposed by Pinsky Projections. As the flow of sewage subsides, the fountains fall again or move on along the street with the flow of sewage. Was the driver the intended receiver of the artwork, a victim of a badly considered prank or perhaps a participant in an experiment of social engineering? Was his life being enhanced by his involvement in this artwork or was his life being put at risk?

Can we ask those same questions of the woman momentarily distracted from answering her mobile phone as she walked down the street? She wasn't in any particular danger although distraction on a public highway could be seen as hazardous. Just think of the Wonderbra advertisement that supposedly caused crashes and traffic jams. The large silver form that startled her and kept her gaze was a public service point representing an economic and territorial ebb and flow that is usually kept hidden from view. When the silver form grows, the gross revenue generated from parking offences has in-

creased. The two other forms next to it also change shape and size depending on the number of traffic wardens employed at that moment and the overall net surplus or deficit of the parking regime after paying for staffing costs. But the form of this public utility is akin to public monumental sculpture albeit in organic futuristic clothing. This utility looks like an artwork. Is this what the first Henry Moore sculpture looked like when it was placed into a public space? Or is this the future for representing publicly accountable departments to their taxpayers?

In the case of the fast-moving street lights responding to an aeroplane passing overhead, is this phenomenon meant to fulfil a gap in the recreational activities of the youth of Chelmsford? Is this also an artwork? What other service could the ground level announcement of the flight path of an aeroplane provide other than entertainment? Perhaps the lights keep a tally of how many planes, at what time of day, at what speed, height and volume of noise. In this case the lights could become a tool for local activists trying to stop the flyover of aeroplanes arriving and landing at a nearby airport. When the lights go out forever has the artwork served its task? Is it complete? Or does it enter a new stage of pure entertainment, representing ghost planes and the loss of a daily shift in sonic levels?

The world has had many projected futures often played out within the genre of science fiction, which is commonly used as a tool for commenting on and critiquing the current social climate by the author. What seems to be the ultimate goal of these projected futures then is to actually shape the future but not through an act of prediction or prophecy but through making clear the problems and faults of a current regime, governing body or environmental practice. Potentially, these fictional futures could become visual models that transform society. This could be to larger or lesser degrees through shifts in aesthetic judgement or through the introduction of laws to prevent things from occurring that haven't even threatened to occur yet or on the larger scale let's say the instigation of a preventative war! So in this case then does the science fiction count as prophecy? If prophesying is actually the ability to shape the world towards a future that you desire, then is urban planning, architecture, design, art or even a military coup an attempt by an individual or a group to become a prophet?

Before the fountains or the lights or the sliver forms arrived they were prophesied by the set of proposals posted around Chelmsford. These were visual and textual outlines for what might occur. The format of Pinsky Projections' proposals seems far away from any standard view of a prophet though. These proposals are more like an architect's or an urban planner's vision. Someone in an office at a desk with a computer has produced these. This seems hardly the environment for re-inventing the world! Unless, of course, you can begin to see the office as an allegorical model for the mechanisms of the world and mankind's struggle to control and dominate the environment.

So let's say that these utilitarian anomalies are artworks. This then must mean that Pinsky Projections are taking on the role of the artist. Are Pinsky Projections proposing that all urban planning and social adjustments are art activities or are they perhaps proposing a radical new type of these activities? Pinsky Projections are engaging the city of Chelmsford in a dialogue. Perhaps this dialogue is part of a naïve attempt to transform Chelmsford into some kind of utopia? Or is this an example of the artist using a strategy that reflects a utopian underpinning? The notion of dialogue informing/generating/being a part of utopia is not a naïve idea in itself, just a utopian idea. If the strategy is just based on a utopian idea this may be an interesting critical tool for reconfiguring the city; as utopia is of course a critique of world reality in relation to potential future achievements. Perhaps Pinsky Projections are using art to show Chelmsford how to be more successful!

Utopia as the completing of now or Chelmsford as an incomplete utopia? Yes, definitely, Chelmsford is an incomplete utopia.

So if Pinsky Projections are proposing to transform the city of Chelmsford from their office, that office should be a state of the art, symbolically futuristic and completely transparent. The people within the office should be visible and accountable through their every action and decision they make. Just imagine an office space, a gleaming glass cube, tall and wide, sitting in the middle of a public square. This, of course, is a reality in neo-Chelmsford Art Town. But it's not the miracle workers of Pinsky Projections laying out the future in the office, it's Chelmsford's civil servants setting an example to the city from the very heart of the machine.

In 1978 an American artist called Dan Graham proposed an Alteration to a Suburban House. "*The entire façade of a typical suburban house has been removed and replaced by a full sheet of transparent glass. Midway back and parallel to the front glass façade, a mirror divides the house into two areas. The front section is revealed to the public, while the rear, private section is not disclosed. The mirror as it faces the glass façade and the street, reflects not only the house's interior, but the street and the environment outside the house.*

The reflected images of the facades of the two houses opposite the cut-away fill in the missing façade.' Graham states that the house can be read alternatively as art or as architecture also saying "In the context of its residential surroundings, it might be read simply as an eccentric, do-it yourself home modification." But he also goes on to acknowledge that for him it is always also a reference to the high architecture of Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson's glass houses set in isolated, private, wooded estates. Mies and Johnson's transparent architecture is not meant to be actually visible by anyone other than those invited to view it by their inhabitants, essentially becoming merely an extension of the way a connoisseur examines a work of art. Graham's Alteration to a Suburban House explodes the given conventional signs and symbols by which people in a community express themselves. Disturbing existing public and private codes, the partially revealed interior and reflected exterior place extreme pressure on the relationship between private inhabitants and their social environment and particularly the spectators gaze. But Graham's Alteration to a Suburban House never actually happened. It exists as a model. Is it complete?

Recently in an episode of Eurotrash featured a new house made of glass located in mainland Europe. Inside this house is an attractive young lady (pos-

sibly a porn star as I recall.) living out her days in full view of the public highway. Actually, there is a 6ft fence running around the building but that doesn't stop the press, along with other eager spectators, from bringing their own step ladders and filming her every activity. And there are no mirrors separating a private space in this house, everything is on view. Is her life being converted into a porn film so that those who can't make the journey can watch in the comfort of their own non-transparent homes? Is that where high architecture is meant to lead?

Dan Graham's realised and proposed installations pioneered the middle line between privately and publicly owned space, paving the way for a society of social pornography made acceptable by the current Big Brother culture of 24 hour surveillance TV programmes. Is this what a scheme of prodding, wiping clear, filling in or clarifying social situations has led to? Pinsky Projections' Visible Management glass office certainly pursues a number of the critiques of society's hang-ups and opaque dealings revealed by Graham whilst also glamorising, even fetishising, the mundane but possibly heroic and vital dealings of the office workers, the city shapers, the future definers. Oh, the sheer beauty of the transparency of official council activities! Where does all that tax payer's money go to? What do the 2356 civil servants in Chelmsford do with their

time? How does the office make Chelmsford, Essex or England tick over? What effect is this office going to have on Chelmsford's chances of becoming utopia?

Prior to Graham's proposals, in 1966 in England, John Latham proposed a radical repositioning for the artist called The Artist Placement Group (APG) and also, perhaps contradictorily, proposed to stop using the term artist and instead replace the term with that of Concept Engineer and the less dramatic but more enlightening term Incidental Person. Latham along with Barbara Steveni, Jeffrey Shaw, Barry Flanagan, Stuart Brisley, David Hall and Ian MacDonald Munro carried out a series of projects where they sought to be involved in an organisation working as an Incidental Person with the possibility that an artwork may or may not emerge from such an encounter. The fact that there may not be a material outcome was part of the radical nature of their enterprise. The APG set out to demonstrate that 'Context is Half the Work' by allowing themselves to be tangential towards their own previous concerns as an artist as well as to the context within which they found themselves. The Incidental Person was to be involved in all decision making activities by the management or Board members, to be allowed to have the same amount of say as any other member and to be paid the same amount as

well! The Incidental Person could find themselves in an office just as often as they could find themselves in a fabrication plant or a prison. The Incidental Person could potentially affect everything and they did to greater and lesser degrees up to the point that the organisation shifted its aims towards involvement in Government in the early 1970s .

Pinsky Projections could be seen as Incidental Persons brought into a situation from outside to affect change. A call must have been put out- INCIDENTAL PERSONS REQUIRED TO HELP CHELMSFORD BECOME UTOPIA. Arriving on the scene from a new tangent, Pinsky Projections are chosen and immediately begin to engage with the context, the workings of the whole city, the people, the politics, the utilities, the public art, in short everything. To deal with the heritage of the city as the Birthplace of Radio in relation to the enormous influence of Marconi on Chelmsford, simply choose an empty site, design and produce a building that is in itself a version of the thing you are trying to remember and pay homage to. The building becomes a radio, a fully functioning 1937 Zenith six-valve radio, only 100 times larger than the real model. As you drive by, perhaps your car is compelled to receive the sound track of a distant era, whatever station you were listening to is overridden by proximity to the Transmission building. You are compelled to experience the history of the town through the development of technology. Perhaps the grey suits of the workers sitting in the glass cube office aren't so grey after all. At least one of them could be an Incidental Person tweaking with a constituent element of the city's fabric or even a whole constituency!

I forgot to mention that bit earlier about the sound didn't I? Even though the man's heart was racing after his encounter with the fountains it soon settled down and his ears tuned into the smooth croons of Freddie Buckle and the Belt Boys from way back in the mid 30s. The Incidental Person's approach to Chelmsford sets the heart racing just so it can calm it down again, filling in for everyone to feel the rush of life. But is this what was meant to happen? We could be saying that things that seem incidental actually affect everything. But it would be part of the suit's responsibility sitting in the office to calculate the effect of all the new developments, events, alterations and provocations emerging around Chelmsford Art Town, wouldn't it?

How do we calculate the effect of art? By whether the man driving the car survived his crash through the fountains or by the time it took the woman to answer her phone? If the street lights artwork helped local residents to rid the town of overflying aeroplanes, is it a success?

It seems to be a dangerous game calculating the effect of art. Any criteria in relation to art that allows the possibility of defining it or setting up restrictive parameters to how it can come into being or how it can be funded offer a number of negative scenarios. To divine positive research in relation to measuring the impact of art on a person or a situation is a broad and important area of activity but often the success of an artwork is defined in relation to how many people know about the idea. You can agree or disagree with the premise and often this doesn't actually affect whether it has been successful or not. In Neo-Chelmsford Art Town there isn't a single member of the population who doesn't know that their town has been adjusted by art. They hear it, see it, feel it, are attracted to it and sometimes avoid it but you can't avoid the art's very existence and the fact that the artworks' existence makes you approach your daily life with a different level of consideration from the day before. Do the artworks make Chelmsford complete or the lives of the people within the town complete? Not yet, well maybe some lives, but they clearly do acknowledge a continuing striving towards a completeness of an individual, an office, a town, a nation, a civilisation and an ecology.

I give you then, Pinsky Projections; artists, inciden-

tal persons, prophets, urban planners and world builders with their feet firmly on the ever shifting ground.

Gavin Wade

1 - Dan Graham: Buildings and Signs, ed. Anne Rorimer, 1981, The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago and Museum of Modern Art Oxford, page 35.
2 - Ibid.
3 - Picture Window Piece 1974; Public Spaces/Two Audiences 1976, Venice Biennale; Video Projection Outside Home 1978; Video view of Suburbia in an Urban Atrium 1979-80, CitiCorp Building, New York and Cinema 1981.
4 - At this point APG became O+I and are still active although activities are not publically declared at this point. The Tate Gallery now owns the APG archive; I'm not sure how accessible it is. For further information on APG see John Latham, Report of a Surveyor, 1984, Tate Gallery London and John Latham: The Incidental Person, his Art and Ideas, ed. John Walker, 1995, Middlesex University Press.