

Talking with Maximilian Goldfarb  
next to a construction site, in a corporate garden park  
which honors Thoreau

CLEMENTINE CUMMER



**Clementine Cummer:** Our original idea was to go for a walk and ask some questions related to being out in the street – as a provocation or as a support for conversation. It also seems to me that being out in the street is a big part of your work.

**Maximilian Goldfarb:** It tends, as you said, to be a good provocation for conversation – having things that are not contained, accidental, fluid.

**CC:** So is that the aspect of being out on the street that draws you – things being accidental?

**MG:** There are certain things that I respond to, that I find in a public area – mostly an urban area – but it's not just the accident. The word is maintenance; the ongoing changing of place. Material maintenance and social maintenance.



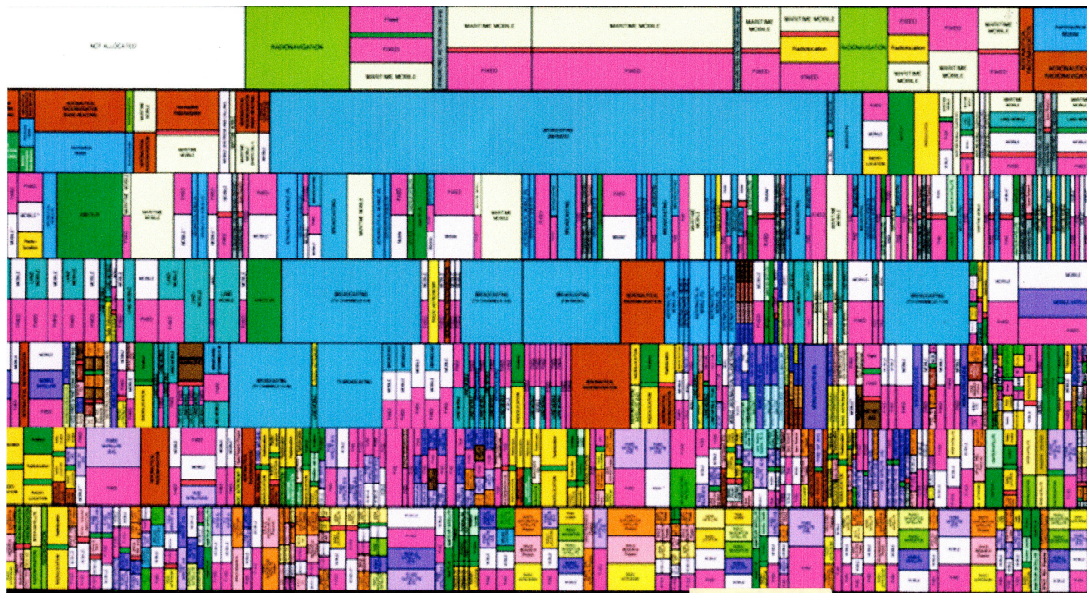
Landscape Photographs taken by  
Maximilian Goldfarb

**CC:** Interesting. So not really the dramatic moments of when say something new gets built or something gets demolished but the smaller scale of change?

**MG:** It's that kind of process when things are revealing their own interior, buildings under construction or roads ripped open due to some kind of innovation or maintenance of the infrastructure that I'm interested in. Things that are in that less-defined state or exposed state, not that they're not dramatic but they're under-perceived maybe – I think that's partly where my fascination with listening to the radio frequencies comes from – that connection between a closed off perception of your surroundings & this idea of this constant activity that is unseen, constantly being tended to, controlled, maintained in all of the crevasses around you.



Landscape Photographs taken by  
Maximilian Goldfarb



United States Radio Frequency Allocations Chart

**CC:** They seem like really different processes to me – the making of something versus the maintaining of something – and I’m really curious about that – the way you think about the word maintain. It seems to me that it means something different to you than it does to me. To me the word maintaining is usually about ‘maintaining the status quo’ or maintaining something so that surfaces are clean. But it seems to have a different connotation for you. I always think of maintenance as actually hiding the places that might be revealed.

**MG:** It’s the energy of that maintenance. Something in a so-called finished state reflects only a particular period of time. The material is part of an impermanent larger condition- the activity and the kind of elaborate process that goes into what you’re seeing as concealing... I became interested in these radio transmissions, especially police, emergency, EMT, fire, etc., more because of the really abstract and endless narrative that they implied to me. I felt like it was a connection from what I was seeing more in terms of being expressed thru the material, the kind of utility language that blankets everything in an urban zone.

**CC:** So the utility language would refer to the street work that you did – using the cones or using the street markers, the painting on the street?

**MG:** I was taking that visual language as a departure point, using it to spell out some other ideas rather than just pointing a finger at something I was looking at.

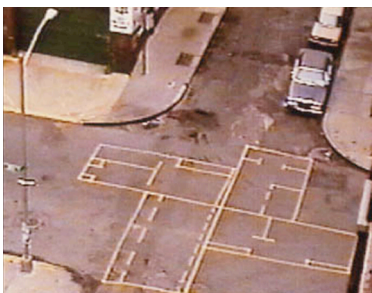
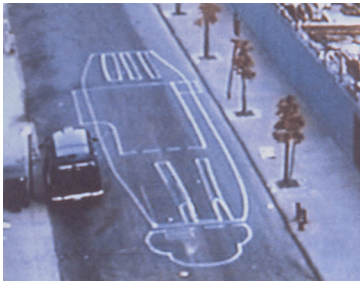
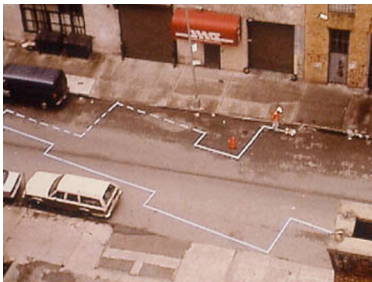
**CC:** When you were working on those street drawings, did you see yourself as a performer?



Decoys installation: cast ultracal road markers



Installation still of *Decoy Exchange*



26<sup>th</sup> Street Plan, *Manufacturer Territory I, Quatrefoil*: enamel drawings on asphalt. From ongoing *Unauthorized Public Works Projects*.

**MG:** I didn't conceive of them as performance, but the moment that I stepped outside in a uniform I realized that was an aspect of that – immediately that was clear. I'd never done what I had considered to be performance before that and I wasn't familiar with those terms in relation to how I was thinking. But after then perceiving everything about the process, even though I had thought of them as being drawings –the result of the project that we're talking about – these territories, these architectural spaces that were being superimposed on the street – I was seeing them as drawings that were dependent on that space – part of their meaning was dependent on that space. But in making them I had to come up with a way to cloak myself as this kind of generic, municipal worker and so I had the uniform of one and I made a couple of gestures and props that I saw would justify my working in that kind of [public] space. Carrying barricades to block off a road – I encountered pedestrians & traffic. And those things responded to me the way that they would respond to someone who was authorized to be doing the work that I was doing. So, as simple of a shift as it was, it resulted in this performance of playing a part in order to accomplish a task.

**CC:** Are you still interested in that work?

**MG:** I'm always interested in that work. You mean that process or...?

**CC:** Yes. I mean, do you remain interested in your own work – or how do you relate to what you've already done?



Video still images of the artist making *Territory* drawings.

**MG:** I think for me that invisible element was the most interesting.

**CC:** How do you mean?

**MG:** The idea of becoming invisible at least within the actual activity of performing those drawings. I was interested in how something can be – at least for a moment -totally reacting against something and disguised or becoming some sort of invisible participant in that same thing – or that same place... I'm realizing how absurd a lot of this stuff is. This thing I'm building right now, this generator. It's kind of this contraption and it is really kind of cobbled together. And on one hand there's this earnest, survivalist mentality: being able to take care of the things that you need and make what you need and to be responsible for how these things function. But at the same time – what it would look like to operate this radio station? It seems insane, it seems like it would look really quite silly – and squeaky and very much not seamless.

**CC:** Are you working w/ the radio sound now – the police and the radio transmissions?

**MG:** I've been collecting a lot of transmissions. Its not an archive – it's just a collection of layers of those transmissions as a material that I'm thinking about.

**CC:** Those transmissions are coming through all the time – will you make work out of the recorded sounds or will you make work out of new sounds that are coming through live?

**MG:** I don't know if I have a distinction yet... The beginning of the work was really getting into being a radio operator, without thinking of my studio, and my identity as an artist... I became interested in this radio organization with a network that's set up for the public service side of amateur radio – it's a communications network that facilitates disaster relief. I am interested in that model... Then, when I was going to work at the Police Department & getting inundated with all this input and having some kind of hand in responding & dispatching officers, -going through this procedure of documentation – I found it very much like what I was just starting to do on my own. I like that moment of urgency.

**CC:** Urgency. So is that a model for you, as an artist?

**MG:** There's something about that that I like – but as a totally independent agency. That could potentially be useful.

**CC:** So putting yourself or your station out there as a resource that's potentially useful? There's a reality there of – it seems to me that a fireman believes on some deep level that he's needed, in case of fire, and that that's essential to all of that energy, to that drive, to that readiness, to that preparation, to that urgency, to that – being ready for collapse. And I'm curious, as a fellow artist, if you have a similar belief that there's this driving need that would provoke you to be “ready” – to make your radio station, to make your work, that would be comparable to – comparable in terms of motivation...

**MG:** Are you telling me to get a job?



Maximilian Goldfarb discusses development of Fairview Plaza area with local resident of Greenport, NY.