



## A Bag for the CCA

Atelier Big City

THE BAG WAS one of a series of constructions undertaken between 1999 and 2000 that fell somewhere between the lines of furniture and architecture, decoration and structure. It was meant to present a temporary union between an architectural practice (Atelier Big City) and a client (advertising agency Ogilvy); between architecture and advertising. The event was the 10th anniversary party of the Canadian Center for Architecture.

The bag was built of vapor barrier, plastic tape, chalk chord, paint and RONA plastic hooks. Nothing would stick to the vapor barrier and the work was disintegrating as we progressed. When inflated, the bag would grow, it was hoped, to an ample 24 feet by 12 feet by 4 feet, suspended in a position above the dance floor. The large volume, with its delicate vapor

barrier connections, required a simple but coordinated hanging strategy. Like an inflated Gulliver, it could only be supported (without ripping apart) by a network of dozens of chords passing from inside to outside without puncturing the bag.

Inside, a video screen would feature loops representing a virtual history of advertising. Surrounding the projection, architectural slogans and commercial logos, painted on vapor barrier, would intersperse.

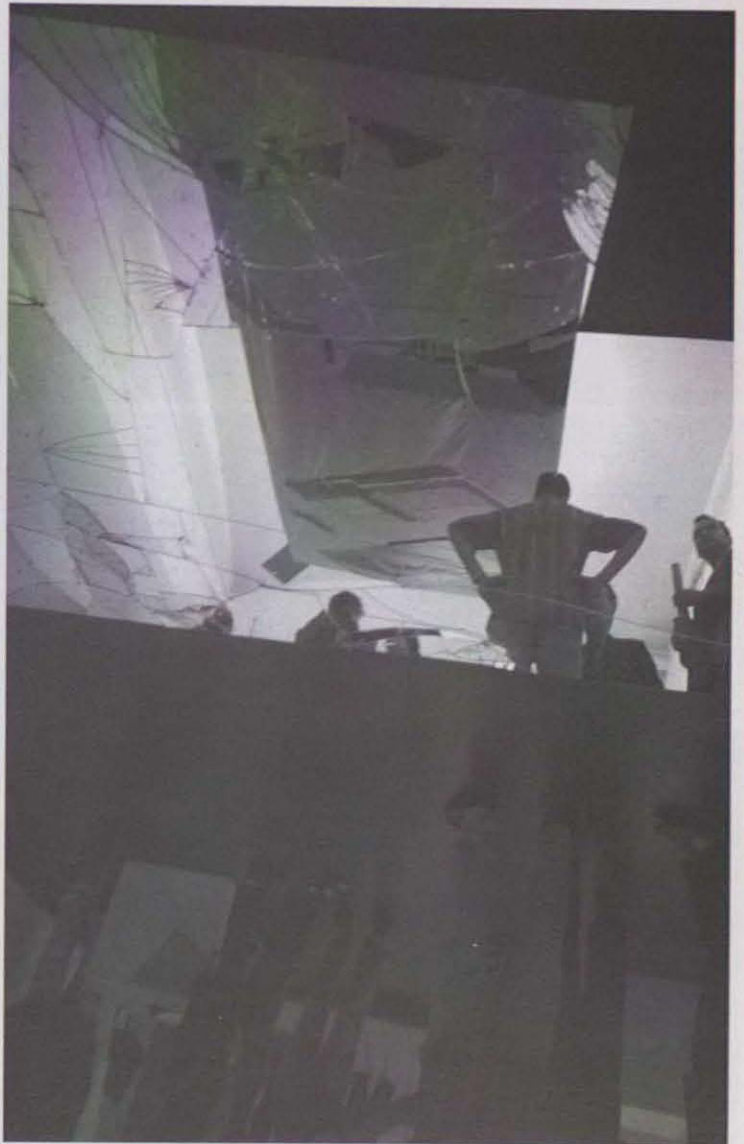
Before these signs were placed in the bag, they had hung around the studio looking like they were waiting for planes to pull them through the sky. Each of these internal messages was positioned to fit inside the deflated bag in such a way that when the bag became inflated they would superimpose and animate its interior. Though the painted signs would never completely dry on the vapor barrier, they were eventually dragged into the bag by intrepid volunteers; other crew members looked on as spotters in the event of suffocation. The signs were placed on the grid of internal plastic hooks, and the bag was smoothed out. Everything had to roll flat for transportation to the site. There would be no test. It was too big to inflate in our studio.

Inflated on site with a leaf blower, it shook like a house of jello. It was the first time any of us had seen the final form. We looked at it with a mixture of happiness, amazement and confusion. Some of the signs worked perfectly, but many had stuck together. And many of the connecting hooks were snagged or undone.

An incision was made on site in the bag. We crawled in to make some final adjustments and last-minute corrections. It was reminiscent of scenes from the Hindenburg, of repairs made to a giant torn bag of gas. It was a mixed bag for a long time. On the night of the party, it was big. Like a mirror ball, the bag for the CCA was a mid-air, celebratory thing, animating the dance floor. Silently above the dancers' heads we screened the pitches for American Express and IBM.

And like the partygoers, its robustness diminished as the night wore on. It had been impossible to make the bag airtight, and so it gradually became limper as the evening progressed. At one point in the evening, a section bent forward and partially collapsed — something like nodding off to sleep. That was near the end of the party.

*Atelier Big City's Randy Cohen, Anne Cormier and Howard Davies work and teach in Montreal.*



*Image from the "Sack of Rome."*

