Renée Green
GALERIE NAGEL DRAXLER | BERLIN

Renée Green’s Free Agent Media (FAM)—an ongoing enterprise covering a wide range of time-based projects, from lectures to excursions—turns thirteen this year. To celebrate, Green created “United Space of Conditioned Becoming” in Berlin. (“Number 1” took place at New York’s Participant Inc during roughly the same time period; Green describes the pairing as a test of the differences between the two exhibition sites.) Both versions of “United Space” presented excerpts from recent FAM productions, mostly videos and films, from Vienna Periphery Walk, 2000, to Secret (Part 1 to Part 3), 2005 (part of the 2006 Paris exhibition “Unité d’habitation”).

The works could be seen at several viewing stations: four large monitors on a long table, a DVD “jukebox” linked to a projector, eight portable DVD players with headphones sitting on as many table and chair sets, and a flat monitor in the window. Apart from this formidable collection of moving images, there was an MP3 player with an audio selection and a glass vitrine filled with FAM memorabilia: flyers, books, posters. Not one to forget the ceiling, Green hung twenty-seven brightly colored banners—a festive Space Poem, 2007, celebrating late heroes (writer Joe Wood Jr.), slogans (“I” AM STILL ALIVE), and enigmas ( HUGE HOLES). The work seemed less like a poem than like a suspended filing system with floating classifications hovering over our heads like thought bubbles following characters in a comic strip.

Green has described FAM as a “dream (production) company,” which fulfills the wishes of the people it represents in its productions, from Paul Robeson to the participants in a knitting bee. While honoring her many subjects, Green’s films seem closer to the dream work described by
Freud—more associative method than wish fulfillment. The results may appear as so many DIY documentaries, with realistic subjective effects that give the viewer the impression of reading the artist’s visual diary, if not reliving her travels. Yet Green tends to frustrate any attempt to extract mere information from her work by withholding what many would consider to be the most obvious facts. Take *Relay: Something More Powerful than Skepticism*, 2005, which begins with a moving shot filmed from the inside of a car driving into a parking lot—presumably Green on her way to meet skepticism’s conqueror, who turns out to be an eloquent specialist, talking in a garden about the history of utopia. Intertitles flash fragments of the conversation to come without revealing the identity of Green’s interlocutor. Our frustration soon becomes rapt attention, however, as attentive listening replaces our tendency to ignore the image as soon as we consume its information.

The four large monitors were placed one next to another, as in a fitness center, while the jukebox offered a collective viewing experience somewhere between those of a cinema and a dance floor. The neat row of tables and chairs set with DVD players recalled a classroom or a language lab; the window screen, visible to passersby, could have been mistaken for a commercial video displayed in a shop window. Listening to the MP3 player, one could have leaned against the wall like a commuter waiting for a train. While documenting her interests, Green conveys them in popular settings that involve the viewer’s body before capturing the imagination.

—Jennifer Allen