Renée Green created what might be called a “temporary autonomous zone” in her recent Swiss Institute show. While Platform showcased her recent work, and that of certain collaborators, with slides, texts, CDs, and videos, she also opened the space to people from other “platforms” who came in for evening colloquies.

The word platform, as it’s now used in the art world, means a place to exchange ideas and make connections. Some of them manifest physically, like the 16 Beaver Group, with its space near Wall Street. Others, like Nomads & Residents, float from one spot to the next. Operating outside art-world institutions and funding sources, these are the disinherited grandchildren of the alternative space.

One evening, Green hosted an Italian artist who spoke about his platform, Arreste, an artists’ initiative headquartered near Rome. As Cesare Pietroiusti showed a slide from an Arreste event at the Venice Biennale — an artist from Turkey talking about his Web site — something clicked. Green’s show was actually about the new global conversation, set in a world of artists without borders.

In her own work, everything begins with travel, with relating to the foreign, with questioning the false dichotomies between “here” and “there.” An American who works mostly in Europe, Green’s projects and exhibitions have now taken her work to every continent but Antarctica. She’s most interested in that threshold area where two (or more) cultures come into contact and hybrid forms emerge. For example, her installation “Import Export Funk Office, 1991-93” looked at the dissemination of hip-hop into Germany, and Frankfurt School critical theory into Southern California. Her projects trace the circulation, the translation, the mutation, and sometimes the disappearance of information that result from this process.

While New York is home (and she’s affiliated here with Pat Hearn Gallery), Green has been working in Europe since 1991. She teaches conceptual art in Vienna, has galleries there and in Cologne and
Milan, and is currently working on new projects in Portugal and the Netherlands. She speaks Spanish, French, some German, some Portuguese, some Italian. She thinks she’s drawn to Europe, in part, because so many different languages and cultures are concentrated in a relatively small area.

One of the tapes at the Swiss Institute was an interview with a Viennese artist, Jun Yang. Born in China, he’s an Austrian citizen who refused to do his required military or civil service after the government was taken over by the crypto-fascist Jörg Haider. So Yang can’t be a resident anymore and lives in quasi-exile. He mentioned that his two brothers have Belgian nationality and speak Flemish French. One of them has two daughters who speak only Dutch. Green’s interested in Yang, in part, because he’s an example of the modern border crosser, or perhaps border inhabitant.

Green’s investigations into cultural artifacts can seem almost ethnographic. Her study of The Hague, *After The Ten Thousand Things*, included hundreds of photographs relating to Parliament and the museums at the center of town, along with the local McDonald’s and the people of many nationalities walking around. But it isn’t ethnography, since, as she points out, “I don’t have any one group I’m looking at.”

While her work is about questioning categories, Green feels that people sometimes misinterpret her by concluding that, as an African American, she must be interested in critiquing stereotypes. One influential critic wrote, for example, that Green “reversed ethnographic roles” when she interviewed German music critic Diedrich Diederichsen about hip-hop for the “Import Export Funk Office” piece. Green says she is not interested in role reversal, but in transculturation. “There’s always an exchange back and forth between cultures,” she says. For example, hip-hop in Germany first imitated American models, then became its own unique hybrid.

“The thing with Diedrich had to do with mutual interest.” He had a huge collection of African diasporic literature, for example. “The kinds of exchanges that are made are not binary,” says Green. “They’re much more circuitous and complex.”

It figures, of course, that the person with a Web site called freeagentmedia.net would not want to be pinned down to any category. Does she call herself, for example, a conceptual artist? No. A nomad? No. From a “character profile” appearing on the back of one of her books: “Where she might be from is very dependent upon the language she speaks. She’s been asked at various times and in various places whether she’s from Martinique, Puerto Rico, Guyana, Jamaica...”

“The thing that runs through all my work has to do with projections,” says Green. “People’s projections onto others. My own projections. Then how they alter. I constantly seem to return to that.”

Currently Green is working on a project in Lisbon called *Returns: Tracing Lusitania*. Lusitania was the name for Portugal in Roman times. She does not regard this as the search for a lost culture, but for “something embedded, something there that people don’t necessarily see.” She is also looking at Portugal’s colonial history, which is, of course, a repressed or avoided history that also left traces.

Green has often addressed history as a construction or “chance operation.” Her video *Some Chance Operations* tracks the locations in Naples used by the filmmaker Elvira Notari, who produced over 60 features there between 1906 and 1930. Only three of her films survive. *Some Chance Operations* is not a documentary, but a meditation on memory and uncertainty.

These themes come up in a more personal way in Green’s video *Partially Buried*. In 1970, Green’s mother was a graduate student at Kent State University, present on the infamous day four student protesters were killed by National Guardsmen. Her mother remembered nothing. The video is really about all kinds of loss. Green is “going home” here. (She grew up in Cleveland.) But, of
course, how can one really return? Then, at Kent State, she hunts down the site of earth artist Robert Smithson’s *Partially Buried Woodshed*, also built in 1970, and since torn down.

The video *Partially Buried Continued* mixes photos her father took during the Korean War with Green’s video footage of some of the same places. She also focuses on another moment of historical trauma: South Korea’s Kwangju massacre and the people still trying to investigate it. For Green, the video is about “ways in which one’s associations to history, location, and genealogy become caught up in a subjective web which makes it difficult to separate history from fiction.”