

## Jane Prophet - Brief Article | ArtForum

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### THE WAPPING PROJECT

The Wapping Project, managed by the Women's Playhouse Trust, is one of London's more ambitious attempts to turn a former industrial building into an arts center. It is located in a Victorian hydraulic-power station, which has been an occasional venue for concerts, performances, and installations since the early '90--the best known being Anya Gallacio's *Intensities and Surfaces*, 1996, a thirty-four-ton block of ice that melted during the course of the show. What were formerly the boiler and filter rooms have been converted into exhibition and performance spaces, and a restaurant was created in the engine and turbine houses, with tables spread out amid the old machinery.

The inaugural exhibition in the restored yet still ramshackle boiler house was a site-specific installation by Jane Prophet titled *Conductor*, 2000. The floor was flooded, and 120 electro-luminescent cables, each twenty-six and a half feet long, hung suspended from ceiling to floor in neat symmetrical rows. The space was blacked out, and the greeny blue glow of the cables was reflected dimly in the water below. Once every half hour a surface vibrator pump, mounted in a specially lit side room at the rear of the space, set the water rippling. The viewer observed all this from a small balcony abutting the entrance door and cantilevered just above the water.

The use of cables and the title *Conductor* allude to the fact that the network of underground pipes emanating from the pumping station is now used to carry fiber-optic telecommunication cables. This interest in new technology is in keeping with Prophet's work as a teacher and researcher into digital and electronic media. Yet the installation seemed ambivalent about the possibilities of technology. The fineness of the cables and their "allover" patterning was momentarily charming: They could have been warm-water jets in a massive shower room or lengths of brilliantly colored thread on a loom. But after a while, the regimented way in which the cables were distributed became oppressive, and their fineness started to set one's teeth on edge, as if they were made from glinting piano wire.

One might have begun to suspect that it was really we, the viewers, who were the conductors, faced by an inoperable and unmanageable stringed instrument. Eventually, the thin slivers of light played tricks on our tiring eyes. The electroluminescent cables seemed to sway from side to side, merging and separating. *Conductor* felt like a tantalizing optical tease, a sort of subterranean Bridget Riley for the installation age: The cables at once tied the space together and made the sharpest of incisions in it. When at last the concealed vibrator pump started up--making a primitive churning sound--we wondered whether this might not be the setting for some elaborate and exquisite torture. Thank God you could head for the restaurant and buy a drink!

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