

no more potlucks

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EDITORIAL

Le thème : chance.

Chance is said to be one of the most mysterious paradoxes of human existence. It's a huge concept – and a perfect theme to launch year 3 of NMP.

Chance is the mysterious and unpredictable. It seems to have no assignable cause. Chance is a force assumed to cause events that cannot be foreseen or controlled. Chance is luck. Good luck. Bad luck. The luck of the draw. The falling of the dice. The way the cookie crumbles.

Normally we'd go the superstitious route and explore the dark side of the chance given that this is the 13th issue. Superstition : « le chiffre 13 est porteur de malchance. » But as we launch year 3 of NMP we feel good—lucky even—and we're not in the mood for threatening associations. We are very grateful to have such amazing contributions to kick off 2011. Thank you to all the contributors for this issue as well as everyone who submitted work in 2009 and 2010—we know you work long and hard to produce something special.

Chance ou hasard : absence de cause pouvant être prévue, comprise ou infléchie. Concours de circonstances inattendu et inexplicable. Tout ce qui existe est le fruit du hasard ...

Sur la couverture, la photographie de Catherine Bodmer. Bodmer est interviewé par Mathilde

Geromin, qui est avec NMP depuis ses débuts. Proche de l'idée de transformation et de la dimension du temps, Bodmer discute d'intervention artistique, du réel et de l'invention.

Chance, as a concept, derives from Latin's cadere which means to fall, and from cadence in music, a fall in pitch. Etymologically, chance is also as a verb meaning "to risk".

Stephen Lawson speaks with Alexis O'Hara about the art of improvisation, and within the process, those necessary reflections on sabotage and failure.

Chance as possibility or probability... and the "distribution of life chances."

In a terrific interview with Lucas Crawford, Chris Vargas discusses the place of lucky accidents in his filmmaking process, mainstream trans representation, where to take Barbara Walters on a date, and the code word for "love and eternal life."

Momoko Allard, NMP's valued publishing assistant, speaks with documentary filmmakers, Ameesha Joshi and Anna Sarkissian, about women boxers in India, and the chances, choices and sacrifices the women who train to box make to get in the ring. Traveling light, Joshi and Sarkissian detail their filmmaking experience in India: trust, travel and translation are key components.

To both the numerologist and the tarot reader, 13 is a number of transformation. According to a blog I read as research for this editorial, the number 13 usually leads to “a destruction, a tearing down of the old structure” but it’s a kind of change that is “followed by a rebuilding in a new, often better form. It is never an easy process, and requires hard work and persistence to see it through.”

RM Vaughn is back for another round, and this time shares with NMP his insights on Tarot card reading, extra-natural events, and performance art.

Regular contributor of NMP, Elisha Lim, and first timer Pilar Gallego contribute beautiful illustrations to issue 13.

NMP’s video curator Dayna McLeod speaks with Amir Baradaran about his latest video installation project, *Transient*. *Transient* interrupts New York Taxi TV’s regular programming to capture, challenge, and transform the everyday ride in 6,300 taxicabs for approximately 1.5 million passengers in New York City.

Finally, in a short anecdotal essay, Erica R. Meiners explores immigration contexts in the U.S., and the “lucky few” that may be eligible for U.S. citizenship, through her very own experiences of border crossing.

Si vous donnez plus de 30 \$, vous obtiendrez un abonnement d’un an à la revue en ligne, vous aurez accès à tous les numéros déjà publiés, et votre nom sera mentionné sur notre page de remerciements.

Vous pouvez également vous procurer tous les numéros de la revue en version imprimée : des exemplaires en couleur et reliés peuvent vous être livrés par Lulu: <http://stores.lulu.com/nomorepotlucks>

Thank you to M-C, as always, for everything, in every way. Thank you to Dayna McLeod and our regular contributors for keeping up the amazing quality of NMP. Big thank-you to everyone who attended the Meow Mix – the Sala was packed! Very special thanks to Miriam Ginestier for organizing all the Meow Mixes and for being so generous and just generally an awesome person. Huge thank you also to Meow Mix performers: Jackie Gallant, Erin McGregor, Nathalie Theoret, Alexis O’Hara, Jessica Salomon, Emilie Roberts, Jordan Arseneault, and Julie Tamiko Manning. Thank you to our very own Dayna McLeod for her amazing MCing of the event. Thank you to all the volunteers and technicians, too. Another special thank you to Sarah Williams and Meredith Fowke for your generous bidding on print issues of NMP.

Stay tuned for issue 14, March 2011, for which the theme is “animal”... As always, do comment on the articles - contributors are thankful for this.

Dear readers, we are still and always committed to bringing forward an auspicious and serendipitous magazine bimonthly.

Mél Hogan



LA LENTEUR DES IMAGES

Catherine Bodmer | Mathilde Geromin

Catherine Bodmer est une artiste qui évolue dans le milieu des arts visuels depuis une quinzaine d'années. Sa pratique se compose d'installations, d'œuvres in situ et de photographies. Intéressée par les croisements qui existent entre l'art et la vie ordinaire, Catherine est comme l'herbe qui pousse dans les craques du goudron d'une route rectiligne. Elle en perce tranquillement la carapace pour laisser libre cours à ses expérimentations et pour fragmenter en beauté les phénomènes et lieux du quotidien.

Mathilde Géromin: En quoi consiste ta pratique?

Catherine Bodmer: Pendant longtemps, j'ai travaillé en installation, le plus souvent in situ, et depuis plus récemment, je travaille avec la photo. Mais peu importe le médium, je me suis toujours intéressée au processus. Comment un geste peut-il se matérialiser sur un support ou dans l'espace ? Comment une image prend-t-elle forme ? L'idée

de transformation et la dimension du temps ont toujours été là, au cœur de mon travail.

En installation, j'ai travaillé beaucoup avec des matériaux comme l'eau, la poussière, la poudre de savon. Ce sont des matériaux qui sont instables, vulnérables et qui peuvent suggérer l'idée de réduction ou d'élimination d'une chose. Il y avait là aussi l'idée de réduction des moyens artistiques, de transformer quelque chose en presque rien, et vice versa, de prendre le « presque rien » et de le transformer en quelque chose.

MG: Comment se produit cette transformation?

CB: Par exemple, dans l'œuvre intitulée Bounce, j'ai fait diffuser de la vapeur d'eau à partir de grilles dans plusieurs murs de l'espace. J'ai ajouté derrière les filtres une feuille de Bounce (normalement utilisée dans les sècheuses) pour diffuser une odeur familière de propreté. Je voulais renvoyer aux espaces blancs des galeries soit disant



neutres et purs, et faire le lien avec une expérience plus quotidienne et banale associée à la buanderie. En ramenant le banal (le presque rien) dans la galerie d'art considérée comme un lieu "sacré", je demandais ce que peut vouloir dire 'purifier' dans un contexte d'art...

Les notions de quotidien et de transformation sont également présentes dans mon travail de photo. Admettons que c'est l'hiver et que je pars de la maison jusqu'à mon atelier, je remarque ces tas de neige qui s'accumulent un peu partout sur les bords des routes et des stationnements. Du début à la fin de l'hiver, ils prennent toutes sortes de formes, de textures et de couleurs. Ça me rappelle de véritables montagnes. Pour moi, c'est comme des sculptures d'une beauté très singulière, que j'aurais souhaité fabriquer moi-même. Mon réflexe a donc été de les documenter pendant un certain temps et de témoigner des transformations qui s'y opèrent.

À partir de ce moment là, je me suis tournée vers les images par désir pour le bidimensionnel. J'ai quitté l'espace comme matière et je suis passée à un espace plus mental, à l'espace de l'imagination.

J'ai continué à développer l'idée des montagnes en créant un parallèle entre les bancs de neige et des montagnes célèbres qui représentent complètement le contraire: la majesté, la pérennité, le défi, l'ambition. J'ai associé aux images des histoires sur la colonisation des montagnes, sur les catastrophes qui s'y produisaient, ainsi que des descriptions romantiques présentant la montagne en idéal et en utopie. Tout en affirmant la beauté singulière de ces monticules de neige sale,

abandonnés contre une clôture de métal d'un stationnement, ça m'amusait de collapser cette idée grandiose de la montagne.

MG: Comment est ton nouveau travail en photo?

CB: Au début, j'utilisais des caméras jetables et ça correspondait à mon idée de favoriser une technologie élémentaire. Ensuite, j'ai utilisé une caméra 35 mm pour aller chercher plus de détails. Les détails ressortaient comme quelque chose de plus intéressant dans l'image et je voulais m'y attarder un peu plus. J'ai donc commencé à numériser les films pour pouvoir intervenir directement dans la trame de l'image. Depuis un an, je travaille avec une caméra numérique.

Je ne veux pas tomber dans le piège des « compositions Photoshop » trop évidentes, car le traitement numérique permet toutes les folies. Les modifications que je fais sont donc très subtiles et modestes et concernent surtout l'arrière plan de l'image.

MG: Qu'est-ce qui t'intéresse dans l'intervention?

CB: C'est un processus intuitif que j'intègre dès le début. L'idée de modifier une image répond à mon besoin de la questionner et de la rendre ambivalente par rapport aux expériences du réel. Bien que l'image puisse correspondre à une réalité que je reconnais, il s'y trouve la suggestion que cette réalité ne peut être fixée, qu'elle peut changer demain et après-demain. Une image est toujours aussi une invention.



On le sait, la photographie n'est pas une preuve de la réalité, donc elle devient pour moi un matériel plastique comme un autre. C'est là où la photo rejoint mon travail en installation, c'est la matière photographique, les pixels, les zéros et les uns qui deviennent malléables. C'est aussi comment on vit la réalité, on la perçoit différemment à différents moments, et on la transforme avec notre propre regard, expérience, désir...

La particularité dans mon travail c'est que j'ai envie que l'image soit plausible jusque dans le moindre détail, mais en même temps d'y semer une confusion. J'ai souvent l'impression que je regarde dans un microscope quand je travaille. Je m'approche et j'opère dans différents coins de l'image, minutieusement. Dans l'ensemble, quand une image est travaillée ainsi, ça produit de petits déplacements, comme des obstacles ou des incongruités. Je veux provoquer des hésitations dans la lecture ou une curiosité d'aller voir plus loin pour comprendre ce qui se passe. C'est comme si on lisait et on construisait l'image en même temps.

MG: Quelle est ta relation aux sujets photographiés?

CB: La recherche d'un monde idéal ou du paradis perdu est un thème qui revient souvent. J'ai une attirance pour les lieux négligés, comme les terrains vagues, les jardins abandonnés ou les parcs mal entretenus. J'aime observer les transformations graduelles de ces endroits. Ce sont pour moi des lieux ouverts à l'imagination parce que la définition par rapport à leur usage ou à leur statut est devenue floue. J'ai envie de souligner ces états

de transition qui deviennent pour moi des zones de liberté.

Dans mon travail plus récent, j'utilise souvent la symétrie comme principe de base. Je recherche des symétries « naturelles » dans l'environnement. Après ça, je crée des effets de miroir et de dédoublement avec les moyens de Photoshop, et je m'amuse à confondre les deux. Il y a une sorte d'idée d'équilibre et de perfection, mais qui n'est pas parfaitement symétrique. C'est comme créer une boucle dans l'image, mais en laissant des ouvertures. Ces ouvertures sont importantes pour moi pour que l'imagination puisse embarquer. C'est comme s'ouvrir à une autre dimension.

MG: C'est quoi cette dimension?

CB: C'est ce qui nous permet de réfléchir sur nous-mêmes. Bien que je m'intéresse à la contemplation, il faut qu'il y ait des obstacles, qu'il y ait des doutes. Ça prend des petites choses sur lesquelles on trébuche. Et pour moi, ça s'opère dans les détails et dans l'arrière-fond. C'est peut-être mon côté obsessif, mais je ne peux pas faire autrement.

Il y a l'idée que la contemplation n'est plus une façon adéquate pour comprendre le monde dans lequel on vit, et que ça prend des positions plus radicales, politiques. Mais j'y vois quand même un intérêt, surtout dans la lenteur du regard que ça implique. Ralentir devient pour moi un geste politique, et synonyme du refus de la consommation rapide et sans conséquence. Ce n'est peut-être pas visible pour tout le monde, ça prend une



certainne volonté de s'attarder et de regarder. C'est comme un engagement.

LES ZONES LIBRES D'ÉCHANGE

MG: Ton engagement dans ton oeuvre est similaire à celui dans ton milieu. Raconte.

CB: Quand je parle des monticules de neige ou des lieux en transition, c'est parce que ce sont des lieux qui ont un potentiel de transformation et c'est ça qui m'intéresse. C'est peut-être la même chose pour les structures dans la société où il y a encore quelques zones libres qui, je pense, intéressent tous les artistes parce que c'est là où on peut agir.

Ces zones libres sont comme ces terrains vagues où il n'y a pas encore de construction planifiée et

qui semblent n'appartenir à personne, et que les citoyens commencent à utiliser à leur façon, de manière improvisée. Une certaine anarchie et créativité peuvent s'y installer, ce qui est absolument nécessaire dans le tissu urbain ou dans la société. Alors j'essaie de trouver ces terrains vagues dans le milieu de l'art aussi.

Ce que j'ai découvert en arrivant au Québec, c'est que ces zones libres en art semblent complètement officielles et intégrées dans le fonctionnement de la société. Toute la culture auto-gérée des artistes, créée dans les années 70 et 80, s'est tellement incrustée dans le milieu qu'elle est maintenant financée par de l'argent public. Je trouvais ça incroyable de trouver un système d'art basé sur des principes anarchistes d'autonomie et d'horizontalité. C'est sûr qu'aujourd'hui on s'est éloigné du « grass roots ». Ça fait déjà 30



ans et plus que ces structures existent, et elles se sont diversifiées. Certains centres sont devenus des mini-institutions plus hiérarchisées. Mais je crois quand même aux fondements des centres d'artistes auto-gérés, qui nous laissent encore plein de possibilités d'agir.

Dans cette diversité d'auto-gestion artistique, je m'intéresse surtout aux centres qui sont restés proches de l'idée du début, permettant aux artistes de ré-inventer ce qu'il y a à faire selon leurs désirs, leurs énergies et besoins du moment. C'est là que j'ai envie de m'engager et d'aider à structurer et à mettre sur pieds des projets. Étrangement, mon engagement se manifeste beaucoup dans le milieu de l'art-action sans que j'en fasse moi-même. Je m'intéresse à ce milieu parce qu'il semble y avoir plus d'ouvertures et de prises de risques que dans le milieu plus traditionnel et plus

« discipliné » dans lequel mon travail artistique s'inscrit pourtant. C'est un peu contradictoire, mais je suis à l'aise dans cette zone-là et il est important pour moi de travailler avec d'autres à la préserver et à la faire évoluer.

Une autre contradiction est sans doute l'autonomie réclamée et le fait qu'on reçoive cet argent public. Ça vient avec une responsabilité, et on se demande jusqu'à quel point on se laisse embarquer dans une histoire rigide et compliquée de bureaucratie car il faut faire des rapports, rendre des comptes. Mais on réussit à monter des projets qui nous ressemblent, on partage, on discute, on est d'accord, on n'est pas d'accord, il y a des débats. Le fait d'avoir en main les outils pour questionner et expérimenter est un acquis incroyable et ça serait stupide de ne pas s'en servir. Mais je crois aussi que d'inclure l'auto-réflexion est super



essentiel et que sans elle, il n'y a rien qui se transforme réellement.

Après ça, je retourne dans mon atelier et je regarde dans mon microscope.

D'origine Suisse, Catherine Bodmer vit et travaille à Montréal depuis 1996. Depuis une dizaine d'années, elle s'implique activement dans le milieu des centres d'artistes auto-gérés de Montréal. Elle a travaillé en tant que coordonnatrice artistique à La Centrale/ Galerie Powerhouse (1999-2002) ainsi que chez articule (2004-2009), et elle est également membre fondatrice de l'événement international VIVA! Art Action qui a lieu à tous les deux ans à Montréal. Depuis 1997, son travail artistique a été présenté dans de nombreuses expositions individuelles et collectives à travers le Canada, ainsi qu'au Mexique et à Taiwan. En 2008, elle a reçu le Prix du Duc et de la Duchesse de York en photographie du Conseil des Arts du Canada, et en 2010, elle a effectué une résidence à Mexico dans le cadre du programme des ateliers-résidences du Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. www.catherinebodmer.com



Originally from Switzerland, Catherine Bodmer lives and works in Montreal. Over the last ten years, she has been actively involved in artist-run centres in Montreal. She was the artistic coordinator at La Centrale/ Powerhouse Gallery (1999-2002), at articule (2004-2009), and is a founding member of the international event VIVA! Art Action taking place every two years in Montreal. Since 1997, her artistic work has been presented in several individual and group exhibitions throughout Canada, as well as in Mexico and Taiwan. In 2008, she received the Duke and Duchess of York Prize of Photography of the Canada Council for the Arts, and in 2010, she participated in an art residency in Mexico City supported by the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. www.catherinebodmer.com



Mathilde Geromin aka Lamathilde est une artiste de video-performance-son, franco-canadienne qui vit et travaille à Montréal. Après des études de cinéma, une maîtrise en linguistique, Lamathilde retourne à ses premières amours l'image et le son. Son travail porte sur l'identité à travers le genre et la sexualité. Depuis 1999, son travail a été montré dans de nombreux festivals et galeries à travers le monde. Entre autres Pink Screens - Brussels, Festival des films gais et lesbiens - Paris, London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, Mix Festival – New York. Depuis 2004 Lamathilde fait partie d'un collectif de performance WWKA (women with kitchen appliances). Depuis 2008, elle collabore avec Coral Short sur des performances telles que, Sexnoys (Vancouver), Social (Montréal).



REDISTRIBUTING LIFE CHANCES: THE FANTASTICAL HOMOTOPIAS OF CHRIS VARGAS

Chris Vargas | Lucas Crawford

At a time when the word transgender has graced the televised lips of Oprah and Tyra, Obama and Tilda, and Hilary – both Clinton and Swank – it is perhaps time to pause and take stock of the ways in which our bodies have gained traction in the representational world of lights, camera, and action.

Chris Vargas, an Oakland filmmaker, allows us the opportunity to do precisely that. With a queer taste for speaking back to mainstream trans representation, Vargas takes on Barbara Walters, the Mormon world headquarters, and the Human Rights Campaign with equal humour and aplomb. One gets the feeling while watching Vargas' sharp and witty critiques of – and alternatives to – lukewarm assimilation-based gay politics that his worlds are worlds worth inhabiting. I want to watch TV specials that substitute Vargas for Thomas Beattie (*Extraordinary Pregnancies*); I want to frolic with him among FTM songbirds and beachballs after flashing a myriad of American landmarks

(*Have You Ever Seen a Transsexual Before?*); I want his satire of pro-imprisonment gay white men to become reality to more and more of us (*Criminal Queers* with Eric Stanley).

However, Vargas' films suggest that these chancy worlds are already thriving, when and where the aesthetics and politics of queer representation are themselves turned inside out. In his collaboration with Greg Youmans, *Falling in Love with Chris and Greg*, for instance, Vargas shows that replacing assimilation politics with an equally programmatic and predictable set of queer politics is not necessarily an easy or useful answer. As he says,

My character in *Falling in Love ... with Chris and Greg* [is] a caricature of a self-righteous, dogmatic radical queer, one who walks the party line uncritically and who non-consensually forces his boyfriend into an open relationship. I have been on dates with this person. It was hard.

Vargas takes no refuge in old solutions. With a fresh lens on the world, he instead gives us cartoony, fantastical, absurd places and laughter. (Indeed, don't bother trying to watch *Have You Ever Seen a Transsexual Before?* without giggling.) He and his collaborators thereby hammer out a hard-won vision of queer and transgender futurity that is neither hokey nor hopeless.

Below, I ask him about the ways in which he has helped pull trans representation back from the dead-end realm of water-cooler office talk to the hot realm of serious (and seriously fun) hot tranny business.

Lucas Crawford: In *Extraordinary Pregnancies*, you edit yourself into Barbara Walters' interview with Thomas Beatie. What was it about his representations of trans life – and the media coverage to follow – that motivated this piece?

Chris Vargas: Thomas' pregnancy story fascinated me because of the way he presented an FTM trans narrative to a mass media audience. The whole affair initially made me really uncomfortable, because while Thomas was unapologetically rejecting gender conventions—by identifying as a man and having a baby—he was also reproducing a very normatively gendered, heterosexual picture of himself and his family. There were so many interesting contradictions. Then, after reading his autobiography, as well as countless transphobic news items about him, not to mention many mean-spirited forum discussions (trans and not), I realized that in many ways he failed. He did not gain the acceptance and sympathy from straight, non-trans people that he wanted, and many FTMs

were angry at him and rejected his experience as unrepresentative. I identified somewhat with Thomas, though I was still suspicious of his intentions. Nonetheless, I wished he could get some revenge for enduring all that he did. So I made *Extraordinary Pregnancies* in an attempt to convey these compassionate yet critical feelings and fantasies of alternate outcomes.

LC: Where would you take Barbara Walters on a date? I mean, she's a bit of a chaser, right?!

CV: You're right, she is a chaser! First I'd like to take Barbara Walters to a soft, sandy beach for a long walk at sunset. Then we'd go to nearby hotel overlooking the water, where a nice romantic candle-lit transgender sensitivity training was taking place in one of the hotel's plush corporate conference rooms. That interview with Thomas was horrific! Barbara could've definitely done a bit more homework before barraging him with those awful questions. She was relentless!

LC: She was! At a time when gay youth suicide has taken such precedence in the press, I find myself thinking back on the 20/20 episode Walters did that addressed transgender youth (*My Secret Self*). There's this part where a mother tells a supposedly tragic story of her child asking her, "when is the magic fairy going to come and, you know, change my genitals?" Given that your films make magic and alternate worlds seem so very possible, I wonder if you ever think about youth as a particular audience you're trying to reach. Is there a place for the "childlike" in your work?

CV: I don't think the work I make is so different from fairy tales, you're exactly right. The videos do imagine alternate worlds and possibilities. When Eric and I toured around *Homotopia*, I met a lot of young people who were excited and/or shocked by the politics of the movie. It made me realize that many young queer people want to know that there are worlds for them to struggle for, beyond what little marriage and the military can offer them. With the recent rise in media exposure of gay suicides (which may or may not be statistically more than usual) and the huge homophobic backlash that I see taking place, I started to question myself about the work that I do and the part it plays in the broader queer conversation, particularly in relation to queer youth. In one of my lower moments, Greg stepped in and pointed out that for me in my youth in Los Angeles, it wasn't the culture of WeHo (gay for West Hollywood, i.e. Boys Town) that was important to me—though seeing my high school sociology teachers there fagging-out was one of my highlights. It was in the queer subcultures that I found myself, among latino punks and goths, in campy John Waters movies, doing psychedelic drugs at desert "parties" (raves). I wanted to see other options and other possibilities for my future; I assume young and old queer people still do as well.

LC: I think of the moment in "Have You Ever Seen a Transsexual Before?" where the character flashes Las Vegas, flops onto the bed, and proceeds to a fantasy world. It's a moment that feels filled with loneliness, imagination, casino buffets, energy, and release. I have two questions here: first, can you talk about that moment in the film – what are the emotions

happening there? And secondly, can we create better "life chances" for youth without educating them that everyone gets a fair and equal chance to become the president? What role does film play here?

CV: That Las Vegas scene is the last place that I flash and ask the video's titular question (sans tits) *Have You Ever Seen A Transsexual Before?* This is also the scene right before I enter into my magical world of animated beach balls and responsive wildlife. That moment marks a point of exhaustion in my and the video's project of FTM visibility, the video is about the politics of visibility but also about the limits of it. Like many people know, being uniformly "out" and "visible" is not always the safest or best option, and if we have the option, we pick and choose how we present our queerness to the world. There is a sentiment in that video that prefers the project of fantastical utopia over baring one's scars to an ambivalent straight world; it's about choosing to imagine something better over struggling to gain inclusion into something potentially mediocre. I think there are multiple narratives that could be pulled from that video, that's just one.

LC: "Chance" is a strange word. When I hear the word chance, I think of "luck" and the popular idea that everybody in our culture has a chance. Thankfully, many (including trans theorists Dean Spade and Craig Willse), use the phrase "uneven distribution of life chances" to talk about how oppression is reproduced. How does *Criminal Queers* in particular critique the idea that our world is a world of fair chances?

“ I must admit that many of the films and videos that I've made were results of pure chance, or lucky accidents.

CV: The movie *Criminal Queers* takes up issue with the fact that queer and transgender, and specifically queer and trans people of colour, have and continue to be impacted by relentless police surveillance, harassment and imprisonment. On one hand, this doesn't sound like a circumstance of "chance" (or accident) that there exists heavy policing and punishment of people's bodies that don't conform to normative races, genders, and sexualities. And on the other hand, the access to resources (education, employment, housing, healthcare, etc.) that offer the privilege to live free of this kind of surveillance and harassment is evidence of an unfair distribution of life "chances".

My co-director Eric and I were responding to the fact that, as a community, transgender people have been and still are overwhelmingly targeted by institutions of policing and imprisonment, in short the Prison Industrial Complex. What many people understand as the first rumblings of a gay liberation movement were actually responses to

relentless police harassment of queer bars and street culture. *Criminal Queers* is situated within this history and asks why the gay movement today is dominated by liberal ideals that tend to ignore the huge injustices that non-affluent LGBT people still face. Also, I think Eric and I are very excited by the growing Prison Abolition movement in the U.S. and queer and trans people's integral role in it.

LC: In *Criminal Queers*, there's a scene where some folks are fundraising for bail, and they bust a bag of golden loot out of an HRC safe. In 2006, you made stickers for Against Equality that read "HRC Hates Trannys" and "HRC is not your friend." How have they earned such a special place in your critical heart (and art)?

CV: I made those stickers for an action that Gay Shame organized in San Francisco called "HRC Sweatshop Playland." The event was meant to bring attention to the Human Rights Campaign's exploitation of sweatshop labor to produce much

of the merchandise sold in their stores. The action also coincided with the moment when the HRC was endorsing an ENDA (Employment Non-Discrimination Act) bill that neglected to protect transgender or any gender-variant people. They also have more corporate and affluent gay money, and stolen jewels, than they know what to do with, so we decided to do them a favor and take some off their hands. Fictitiously, of course.

LC: Is filmmaking an art of chance?

CV: I must admit that many of the films and videos that I've made were results of pure chance, or lucky accidents. Honestly, I never plan that well but my collaborators and I have been more or less lucky in the chances that we take, especially shooting out in public. Film and video for me is all about chance, and knowing how to dig through bad footage and bad performances to find treasures. I think the biggest chance I've ever taken as a film and video maker is putting myself in front of the camera.

LC: I have noticed that we share an affinity for the word "tranny." What does it mean when you use it?

CV: "Tranny" means love and eternal life. It's part of my 1990s third-wave feminist-dyke affinity for reclaiming derogatory terms. I know many people feel uncomfortable with it but I don't. Tranny is love! Tranny is life!

LC: Sing it.

Lucas Crawford is a performer, organizer, and Ph.D. candidate in English at the University of Alberta. His obsessions include transgender, architecture, twentieth-century fiction, perfumery, and food. Lucas' writing on these topics has appeared in or is forthcoming from Women's Studies Quarterly, Meatpaper, Saveur, Seattle Journal for Social Justice, the Routledge Queer Studies Reader, and elsewhere.

Chris E. Vargas is an MFA candidate in UC Berkeley's Art Practice department. With collaborator Greg Youmans he creates the video sitcom series Falling In Love... with Chris and Greg, and with Eric Stanley he is the co-director of the movie Homotopia (2006), as well as its forthcoming feature-length sequel Criminal Queers (2010). chrisevargas.com



The Illustrated Gentleman



disha



michele

Michele tells me that it's been a really long time since she's felt uncomfortable shopping in the men's section. Other people's reactions used to bother her when she was in mainstream spaces, she said, so she would make slight concessions to try and fit in a little better to avoid the drama. She might have shopped in the men's section in a mixed department store but she wouldn't take her chances in a store that only sold men's clothing.

Now she really doesn't care. She says she's much more comfortable in her body than she used to be, which has really changed the way that she dresses and the way that she shops. Her style has evolved over the past few years, and these days she's all about the fit. She delightfully describes her look as "half dyke/half fag." I guess you could also say that I'm a bit of a dandy sometimes."



shin

Shanieke "Shin" Peru makes me proud. I've always loved watching macho music videos and thinking "I can dress like that." But you know I don't turn out looking like the chiselled picture of Lil Wayne. I turn out looking like one proud hot fat gaylord. So I felt so lucky to learn about Shin. She's the artist that outfits celebrities including Usher, Ne-Yo, Nas, Kevin Liles and Jamie Foxx. She also describes her personal taste as androgynous and inconsistent: "I love mixing masculine and feminine... I get excited taking the most masculine article of clothing and transforming it into something sexy." It blows me away. I'm not just dressing like Ne-Yo, I'm dressing like you Shin. Thanks.

THE ILLUSTRATED GENTELMAN

Elisha Lim

Elisha Lim was born in Toronto and grew up in Singapore, in a Catholic convent girls' school overrun with queers, many of whom inspire their first graphic novel 100 Butches. Elisha finally came out in Berlin, and embarked on a sharp learning curve of feminist squat houses, queer trailer parks, transgender pride parades and an Ethical Slut reading group. Elisha was thrilled to be named "Artist in Residence" by Curve, a "Queer Woman to Watch" by afterellen.com, and to run their strips in magazines like Diva, LOTL, CapitalXtra! and NOMOREPOTLUCKS. One of their biggest thrills to date is to be the first exhibit at Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue's inspiring brand new Feminist Art Gallery, aka FAG.

Elisha's first book 100 Butches will be published next year and the 2011 Wall Calendar "The Illustrated Gentleman" is currently on sale at <http://www.etsy.com/shop/elishalim>



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REALNESS, 2009

Pilar Gallego

Using fashion as a point of departure, New York-based artist Pilar Gallego juxtaposes highbrow postmodernist queer and feminist theory and the lowbrow aesthetics of art movements to comment on the social construction of gender binaries and the ever-shifting continuum between butch, trans-masculine, and male identities. Influenced by the theories of Hélène Cixous, Gallego challenges the singularity of how contemporary men's high fashion is marketed by creating an alternative language of masculinity and exercising a uniquely butch visual vocabulary. Her caricatures of masculine archetypes alternate between the familiar and hyperbolic, light-hearted and grotesque, absurd and edgy—leading the viewer into a comically rendered world of murky relationships and subverted absolutes.

Gallego utilizes a distinct DIY and street-focused approach in her choices to paint on found materials and to reference popular fashion magazine layouts in her images. She resists the male-dominated artistic histories of graffiti, pop, and tattoo art movements by celebrating punk sensibilities and feminist politics of women's art movements, in particular folk art.

Pilar Gallego is a Brooklyn-based artist, curator, and queer community activist. She is interested in exploring and developing a visual language that speaks to and of gender, feminism, and minority representations. Pilar is a graduate of Pratt Institute, where she studied fine art and creative writing. She has worked with Leslie/Lohman Gallery as co-curator of Pink & Bent: The Art of Queer Women, with the Sylvia Rivera Law Project as organizing committee member for the Annual Small Works for Big Change Art Auctions, and as curator of various queer film & video screenings. Pilar hopes to build community through art.



UPRIGHT STANCE, JAB FORWARD: AN INTERVIEW WITH AMEESHA JOSHI & ANNA SARKISSIAN

Ameesha Joshi & Anna Sarkissian | Momoko Allard

Ameesha Joshi and Anna Sarkissian have been working on With This Ring, a documentary film about the Indian national women's boxing team, since 2006. They sat down with me for an interview last September, just after their return from the 6th Women World Boxing Championships in Barbados.

Momoko Allard: The two of you have been working on this documentary on women boxers in India for about four years now. How did you first come to this project?

Ameesha Joshi: I first got the idea for this film in 2005 at the World Press Photo exhibition. There was a photo there of an Indian woman boxing on the beach in Madras. I was immediately intrigued. I went home and googled as much as I could. There was hardly anything on the web about these boxers, but what I did find out about them was absolutely fascinating. They were from the poorest parts of India, they were world champions,

and they were completely undiscovered. Being of Indian background myself, I knew some of the cultural and social pressures they would be up against. It's still a traditional society and overall, it's not acceptable for a woman to be boxing.

MA: The Indian women's boxing team has been world champion or close to the top for several years now. How did they get so strong?

Anna Sarkissian: India got a head start with their boxing program 10 or 11 years ago, well before a lot of other countries. They have a tradition of government-funded training camps for many of their sports, and they kept up that tradition with women's boxing. The boxers train intensively at these camps around ten months of the year, six days a week, two to three times a day. International coaches have made comments about the team's impressive boxing technique and it's in large part due to their rigorous training regime. They just work very hard.

MA: While they're training, are they completely supported by the state?

AS: Their food and accommodations are paid for, health care is paid for. Education is paid for if they want it, although they don't have much time.

AJ: The training camps are set up in certain places in India and become their home. We stayed with them in their hostels, and we saw the accommodations in which they have to live and train. It's pretty simple by North American standards. In some places, the food is substandard and the electricity and water often cut out. They deal with mosquitoes, hot weather, monsoons, all kinds of conditions.

MA: How does boxing interface with economic classes? What backgrounds do the athletes usually come from?

AJ: They usually come from poorer communities. Universally, people from poorer backgrounds tend to get into boxing because it's a fairly cheap sport to get into. Many of them can't afford a formal education, and it's very much a ticket out of poverty for them. The Indian police and railway reserve a certain percentage of jobs for successful athletes. If these boxers get a medal, even on just a national level, they have the possibility of getting one of these jobs. It's almost like winning the lottery because it's a cushy government job with a pension. They would never have access to a job like this otherwise. It gives them financial independence and the ability to support their families, which many of them do.

MA: Starting with your title, *With This Ring*, the focus in this film is on gender and the gender expectations that these women defy.

AS: The title is an allusion to marriage and the choices and sacrifices that they make in order to be boxers. Many of these girls should have been married five years ago and yet they're training full-time at a boxing camp, which is pretty unacceptable from society's point of view. In many ways they're marginalized because of that, with their short hair, tracksuits, and so on.

MA: You saw one of them wearing a shirt that said "Not all girls are stupid, some of them don't get married."

AJ: I came across a boxer wearing that t-shirt when I visited a training camp for the first time in 2005. It made an immediate impression on me. But what really struck me was the sheer number of boxers, about forty or fifty women from around 18 into their late 20s, all training at the same time. It's quite an impressive visual. I hadn't seen girls like that before in India. We've interviewed a lot of them and a question we'd always ask was, "Do you want to get married?" Many of them just laughed and said no, the last thing they wanted was to be a housewife.

MA: But some of them are married?

AS: Just a handful out of forty are married. They get a taste of independence once they go to the training camp. For the first time they can travel on the train by themselves to and from the camp. They have spending money and can buy their own

mobile phone. Getting married is like reverting back to the old ways that they're trying to avoid. For many of them, marriage is on their mind because it's what society expects of them, but they'll say, "not now, not now."

MA: One of the main characters you're following in your film, MC Mary Kom, is married, and is even raising children while she continues to box. Tell me a bit about her.

AJ: Mary is pretty phenomenal. She recently made history by winning her fifth world championship. She's from a small village in Manipur, which is a very poor state fraught with all kinds of corruption. She had a very poor background and she had to hide the fact that she was boxing from her parents in the beginning. But she has this indomitable spirit, and many say that boxing is more mental than physical. She succeeded despite all kinds of difficulties. She took a year and a half off of the sport to give birth to twin boys, and then came back to win her fourth and fifth world titles.

MA: How does her partner deal with it, and how do they manage parenting while she's boxing?

AS: Mary would tell you that she hit the jackpot with her husband Onler. He's extremely supportive of her career and really encourages her to box. She financially supports him and her extended family, so that's a fairly convincing argument in favour of boxing. Both of their families help take care of the babies when she's away at competitions and training. They also run a boxing academy out of their home. It's really a family effort.

MA: Were there ever times while working on this film as visitors in a different cultural context that you had to reconsider your own gender?

AS: I would say, in terms of the way people responded to us, they would talk to us as people. But I think that we had a special status because we were foreigners. I don't think Indian women would receive the same type of respect or help. They would not be taken as seriously as we were. I noticed that men would talk to us and then say something quite derogatory to a woman, telling her to go do something as if she were a maid. We were almost in a separate category, as outsiders.

MA: Was there any situation in which your gender did become an issue or a barrier?

AJ: Actually, Anna and I have discussed how much it has only helped us to be women making this. We could be in closer proximity to the boxers. We could stay with them in their hostels. At some point I found that Anna became invisible no matter how close she stood to them with her camera. As women, we were less of a threat. We took that for granted at first, but we came to realize that it's an advantage.

MA: Was it difficult to gain access to the team?

AS: I would say yes and that would be an understatement. There was major confusion in the beginning about what we were doing and about the access we'd been given. Originally the boxing federation said "Yes, come, no problem. We support your project." But somehow that wasn't communicated to the team or the head coach.



When we got there in 2006, we presented ourselves and explained that we'd come all the way from Canada to film them for the next six weeks. They said, "Well ok, you can film us for today and that's it." Over the next two years, we gradually built a relationship with them and tried to explain the purposes of our project so that they would understand that we were there to promote boxing and their stories.

AJ: Despite gaining their trust, which we've finally done, it has still been a long road. Access to the boxers is very meager. They have so little free time. They have one day off a week, and understandably, they want that day for themselves. They want to shop, and they want to see their families, so it's pretty tough to coordinate an interview and even then, you have to find someone who can help translate. It's not simple.

MA: How did you manage the language barriers?

AS: With great difficulty. I can't stress how much of a barrier language can be. It took us so long to establish relationships with the boxers on a day-to-day basis because of it. Even if we'd had the money to have a translator with us twenty-four hours a day, having another person there would really change the dynamic. They could be an intrusion. They could be adding their own personal bias when they ask the questions and when they translate them back to us. We did have some translators working with us, but it wasn't easy to manage. As a result, it's kind of a mishmash. Sometimes, we had no idea what our subjects were saying. Sometimes it was half-English, half-Hindi. We would have some

of the questions translated ahead of time by one of Ameesha's family members. We've been really lucky to find translators in Canada who have been working for very little money out of the kindness of their hearts because they believe in the project. We couldn't have done this without Meenakshi Malhotra, Likla Devi and Geetanjali Dagar, among others.

AJ: You're left to try to read everything else but the spoken word. There's no other option. It's not ideal.

MA: And how did you deal with the technical obstacles of working on the move, far from home?

AS: We were on a really tight budget. We traveled like backpackers, so we had no choice but to have very little equipment and to be able to carry it ourselves. We kept it simple and barely even had a tripod. We just had a camera, microphone, headphones, and a boom pole.

MA: How does that show itself in the end aesthetics?

AS: I'm not sure that you'll see it necessarily in the aesthetics, like in the composition. But I think it's a feeling that you'll get because our presence will be felt in the film and the way that we made it, with just the two of us. We're hoping to make quite an intimate film that will be poetic and personal.

MA: The demo clips I've seen are really beautiful. They're not at all what I expected from a

documentary about boxing. There's a strong sense of joy and pleasure in the sport.

AJ: Thank you. Anna is doing all of the cinematography. I was familiar with her shooting style from our collaboration in film school, and I was very happy when she wanted to be a part of this project.

AS: Originally, Ameesha's idea was to contrast training with traditional dance, which has influenced the way we've filmed the boxers. I love composition in depth, so you'll see that a lot. The way they move, their grunts and shouts, plus the stark contrast with their surroundings – it's easy to find an interesting image.

AJ: Especially when they're working in unison, the sound and the image, it hits you. When they're all shadowboxing, you have fifty fists punching through the air at the same time with just breaths escaping from their mouths. It gets at your heart-strings when you're watching it. Sometimes you just know certain things are going to translate onscreen.

MA: Going through production, and now post-production, do you have a certain audience in mind?

AS: That's always the struggle because we want to attract multiple audiences. We want to please the boxers because they're putting so much into it. At the same time, we want an international audience to see it and to find out more about them. And then there's the Indian audience that's probably the most important because they aren't accepting

of women's boxing and they don't know much about it. We have to find a balance between these three different groups.

AJ: And there's always the compromise with the broadcaster, depending on who they are. We'll have to wait and see what those compromises are going to be.

MA: Women's boxing was just recently accepted into the Olympics. You're hoping to release your film just before the 2012 Olympics?

AJ: Yes, we figured it's a good time for our film to be released, since women's boxing will be in the Olympics for the first time and our main character is expected to win a gold medal. We want it to be seen by as many people as possible, so marketing wise, that's our strategy.

MA: And in the meantime?

AS: We've been charting our progress online on our production blog. We have a growing community on Facebook and we publish a lot of photos on Flickr because we're interested in involving people in the process of making the film. We don't just want the film to come out, people to see it, and then it dies. We'd like it to have a life.

<http://withthisringfilm.com/>

<http://citizenshift.org/blogs/women-boxers-in-india/>

All photo credits: With This Ring



*Ameesha Joshi graduated with a B.A. in psychology from the University of Waterloo in 1996 and worked in the software industry for several years. It wasn't until 2001, while living in Halifax, NS, that she discovered her interest in filmmaking and directed her first short, *The Red Glove*, about an amateur woman boxer. While making the film, she developed a real appreciation for the sport. She is currently in the third year of her master's in film production at Concordia University, and much of her work is inspired by her cultural background. Her next documentary project will be about laughing clubs in India.*

Born and bred in Montreal, QC, Anna Sarkissian is an independent filmmaker and writer with interests ranging from sustainability and gender, to citizen engagement and identity. Her work has been screened

at the Canadian Parliament, festivals, and on national television. She received her bachelor of fine arts from Concordia University's Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema in 2005 and is currently pursuing her master's in social anthropology at the University of Oxford. She is fluent in French and Spanish and struggles to get by in Hindi, Italian and Arabic.

Momoko Allard is a visual artist living in Montreal. She is currently at work on a dialogue-based video project about her relationship with her grandmother, their experiences of gender and sexuality from different generational and cultural perspectives, and the communication barriers that shape their understanding of each other. www.momokoallard.com

COLLABORATING WITH THE ACCIDENTAL: ALEXIS O'HARA AND THE ART OF IMPROVISATION

Alexis O'Hara | Stephen Lawson

<http://nomorepotlucks.org/article/chance-no-13/accidental-improvisation>

Alexis O'Hara is a trilingual interdisciplinary artist based in Montreal. Her practice exploits allegories of the human voice via electronic improvisation, video and installation. Much of work, be it video, photography, song or interactive performance, has examined issues around exhibitionism & modesty, the public face of human emotion and cognitive science, all couched within the slanted

framework of a distinctly feminine strength. In 2001, she released a book of poetry entitled (more than) *Filthy Lies*; and in 2002, her first album, *In Abulia* (Grenadine Records). Several mini-CDs followed. In 2003, she began an exploration of interactive documentary performance with the project *Subject to Change*, followed by *The Sorrow Sponge*, both projects involve wearable

electronics and direct interaction with her audience. She recently undertook her first contract in musical composition for dance, scoring the 20th anniversary gala for Montreal's center for live art practices, Studio 303. Her eclectic performances have been presented in a variety of contexts, from spoken word to live art festivals, new music symposiums to "women & technology" events in Slovenia, Austria, Mexico, Germany, Spain, The United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Belgium and across Canada and the US. She has shared the stage with such diverse artists as Diamanda Galàs, Ursula Rucker, Henri Chopin and TV on the Radio. SQUEEEEEQUE, her sound installation tours Germany, France and Holland in 2010. In 2010, for the second year running, she accepts the challenge launched by artist Dayna McLeod and is producing one video a week. Alexis' 2nd full-length CD, Ellipsis, will be released on &records in November 2010.

Video-a-week challenge: http://52pickupvideos.com/HTML/OHara_grid.html

Tour dates, mp3s and videos:
<http://www.myspace.com/alexisohara>
<http://www.alexisohara.com>

Since 1988, Stephen Lawson has continuously traversed the discipline-defined boundaries of theatre, music, new media installation, television/radio, print and video.

Upon graduating from the acting program of the National Theatre School of Canada he became a co-founder of the Winnipeg-based performance

troupe PRIMUS (1989-1998) which created/toured numerous original productions, taught workshops and carried out artistic exchanges internationally. During this period Stephen also coordinated and participated in an annual environmental theatre production in the small agricultural village of Nocelle, Italy.

Stephen's work as a director has been primarily focused on large-scale contemporary music pieces and he has produced several video art collaborations that have been screened internationally. He has developed cultural commentary work for print (magazine and newspaper), radio (documentary formats), and television as well as having worked on many radio dramas for CBC radio as an actor, writer, and director.

Stephen moved to Montreal in 2001 and since 2002 he has been collaborating with multidisciplinary artist Aaron Pollard (2boys.tv) creating and touring transmedia performances, installations and videos throughout North America, South America and Europe. He is the 2009 recipient of the Canada Council Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award recognizing outstanding mid-career achievement in the field of Integrated Arts.
www.2boys.tv



THE SKRYVINERS

RM Vaughn | FASTWÜRMS

I am an atheist, and.

I am an atheist, and I am deeply superstitious. I am an atheist, and I collect totems, good luck talismans, and my cat's whiskers. I am an atheist, and my home is cluttered with figurines depicting deities both fantastic and mundane – from multi-limbed she-killers to humble, wooden-shoed saints. I am an atheist, and I am fascinated by all manner of mysticism, divinatory practices, and magycks.

I realize this position, this fetishizing of the supernatural, is a contradictory one for a non-believer. Let's just say, I am an atheist, and I dislike being scolded about my contradictions. As the great Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1841, "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds".

I cannot believe in a Supreme Being, for all the usual smarty-pants intellectual reasons, and for many more idiosyncratic reasons, most of which pertain to my body size and disappointing hair.

However, I fully support the proposition that, in heightened or mystically constructed circumstances, humans can and do share extra-natural events (a term I prefer to supernatural, which has been ruined by cheap 'Ghost Hunter' reality TV shows and the like). The human mind strikes me as especially geared, locked and loaded to create

symbolic systems, fantastic or mundane, in order to explain the many mysteries of, well, the human mind.

In other words, I see mystical symbols, deities, talismanic objects, and incantatory practices as catalysts for extra-natural communications between humans, not as shortcuts to some larger-than-us Other.

My belief in the power of such symbolic transactions has greatly increased in the last few years, mostly through, of all things, performance art. (God help me, to abuse a phrase.)

In the last three years, I have been a reader in an ongoing project devised by the Creemore-based artist collective FASTWÜRMS, who are also my good friends. The project, entitled *Skry-Pod*, marries Tarot card reading, an ancient practice of divination, with contemporary information-delivering technology (an iPod) – thus creating moments wherein participants interact with each other in a timeless space, a magical somewhere/when fueled by two historically distinct technological systems (the Iron Age tactile and the Microchip digital), both alleging revelatory powers. Medieval meets Macintosh.

To further enhance the experience, FASTWÜRMS's expert set decorators staged environments conducive to extra-natural transactions between readers and strangers.

All *Skry-Pod* readers were given beautiful, luxurious capes to wear (I was especially Pantomime-ish in mine: a middle-aged Harry Potter), and we read from inside tents constructed of elaborately coloured, comforting granny-knit Afghan blankets. Candles sparkled everywhere, and we readers were encourage to bring totems that spoke to us to adorn our tables – crystals, fragrant plants, perhaps a bingo parlour Troll Doll, whatever worked.

The result was overwhelming. At the first event, part of the 2009 Nuit Blanche, the team of readers, ranging in age from early 20s to well past 50, and ranging in experience from long-time Tarot enthusiasts (such as myself, I bought my first pack at 17) to chipper novices, were swamped.

No, that's not a big enough word – we were tsunamied. I did at least 100 readings in about 14 hours. And I was the slow one. People lined up for hours for a few moments with my mystical, all-seeing self. On another occasion, at a summer event at the Power

Plant, the crowds were less frantic, but no less intense. And I gave some very credible readings, for an atheist.

Here, then, are the three most important things I learned from participating in *Skry-Pod*. First, when you create a space, even with minimal props and an age-old performative dynamic (the reader and the seeker at the hushed table), it nevertheless allows and encourages strangers to open up to one another. Theatre is powerful.

Second, crazy people love to have their fortunes told. You'd think they'd know better. What to say to a crazy person: You're crazy, your future is your own to make, real or otherwise? I guess one could console them with the idea that such an existence is actually a state of grace, but I limit my time with the insane, having been raised by one of their number. (For instance, one woman sat down for a reading, and after I told her the many things I saw in the cards, she looked up at me and said, "You didn't answer my question", to which I replied, "I'm sorry, would you care to tell me your question?" Her answer: My mother was murdered seven years ago, I want you to tell me who did it.)

Third, I look bitchin' in a cape. Capes cover a lot of Nature's cruel mistakes.

As this issue of *NOMOREPOTLUCKS* is considering the role of chance, there are some obvious questions we need to address.

Chance plays a huge role in Tarot reading, particularly at such public events. Who you read to, who picks you (or avoids you) as a reader are questions constantly at play. But the big conundrum, once the table is set, is always the same: do the cards presented to the questioner arrive purely by random shuffling, and therefore it becomes the job of the reader to interpret this random order, or do the cards arrive in a sequence determined by extra-natural forces, such as a mental connection between questioner and reader?

Chance is everywhere in Tarot transactions, and yet once one gets down to the reading of the cards (an activity I consider a shared one between reader and questioner, not one that positions me as an authority figure), the idea that the encounter is determined by chance and chance alone is quickly tossed aside by all parties. Everyone sees themselves in the cards, everyone knows there is more going on than a metaphysical game of Go Fish.



Sometimes the cards are so accurate, the questioner can only believe he or she has had a level of agency in their selection and arrangement, one beyond the mere shuffling of the deck.

To parse out this seeming contradiction (there's that fucking word again), I consulted the *Skry-Pod* creators, went to the caped wonders themselves. As ever, FASTWÜRMS are always ready to illuminate, charm, and (yes!) contradict themselves, or at least their own aesthetic paradigms.

No dogma-plagued hobgoblins, FASTWÜRMS have minds as wide as a Creemore night sky, and can (and do) build tents big enough to hold any number of delightfully un-foolish inconsistencies.

Emerson would have loved them. I sure do.

RM Vaughn: What role does Chance play in *Skry-Pod*?

FASTWÜRMS: Chance is a dynamic element in the *Skry-Pod* performance: Tarot cards as a rational structure with irrational content. Aleatory systems are by definition irrational.

RMV: Why did you choose to load a Tarot deck onto an iPod?

FW: What attracted us to the iPod was the possibility of using algorithm-generated chance vs. the 'true' random outcomes of card shuffling. (This is our enactment of a somewhat arcane philosophical problem in mathematics.)

In real-world gambling this is a pragmatic problem. We discovered that in high stakes Las Vegas card games, they still default to a process of complicated human hand shuffling instead of trusting their very expensive state-of-the-art card shuffling machines.

RMV: So, Chance is, counter-intuitively speaking, reliable?

FW: The essential interaction of irrational and chance elements in creative systems like evolution, the formation of the solar system, the birth of the universe, this is what *Skry-Pod* reflects and generates in the psyches of participants.



RMV: Let's talk about the collision of performativity and confessional spaces in *Skry-Pod*.

FW: Both provide a ritual structure, a safe consensual environment for strangers to share and exchange irrational and personal information.

RMV: Why did you choose to load the Crowley Tarot Deck onto the iPods, as opposed to a more familiar one, such as the Marseille Deck?

FW: We chose the Crowley deck because the card images were created by Frieda Harris. They have a more complex synthetic structure: 1,200 visual symbols included in the 78 cards!

RM Vaughan is a Toronto-based writer and video artist originally from New Brunswick. He is the author of eight books and a contributor to over 50 anthologies. His videos and short films play in galleries and festivals across Canada and around the world. Vaughan comments on art and culture for a wide variety of publications and writes a weekly visual arts column for The Globe and Mail. <http://www.rmvaughan.ca/>

FASTWÜRMS is the shared authorship of Canadian artists Dai Skuse and Kim Kozzi. Formed in 1979, they mingle media, disciplines and art forms to question nature, the environment and issues of power.



THE GAZE FROM THE REARVIEW MIRROR: AMIR BARADARAN'S TRANSIENT TAXI RIDE

Amir Baradaran | Dayna McLeod

Amir Baradaran's New York taxi video installation project, Transient, interrupted Taxi TV's regular programming during New York City's Fashion Week in September 2010, transforming everyday cab rides for approximately 1.5 million passengers in 6300 taxicabs. The cab drivers' steady gaze in their rear-view mirror was captured from the back-seat through the plexi-glass partitions to fill these screens in 40-second clips. "The yellow taxicab presents a striking paradox: the car itself is one of the most visible icons of NYC, while its drivers, many of whom are minorities, seem invisible. Recent media reports have inundated commuters with articles portraying taxicab drivers as an 'other' class, erroneously intimating that some three quarters of all drivers actively prey on their fare. Even though these reports have since been reassessed and somewhat retracted, they have created a climate of distrust. Baradaran's reactive installations emerged from this context." [1]

Dayna McLeod: What does the plexi-glass partition represent for you in your New York City taxi installation project, *Transient*? How did this project start?

Amir Baradaran: *Transient* began from observations made as someone new to the city of New York. Riding around in cabs, I was fascinated by the antagonistic stagecraft created by the partition, by the way it created -this is a Canadian expression- two solitudes. It engenders this really perverse economy of vision, the driver and passenger looking in completely different places. More, within the cramped space of a cab you have two totally different modalities: a space of work and a space of leisure. So I started to research the working conditions for cab drivers in the city and the economics of the medallion system and was shocked. It was this confluence of provocative social choreography and exploitative economic structure that was the impetus for the work.

DM: Can you talk about the working conditions that New York City taxi drivers experience, and what impact, if any, these conditions had on *Transient*? How does the iconic presence of the New York City yellow taxicab influence your project?

AB: The thing that really shocked me was the speculative price of medallions that are traded like stocks. Drivers can no longer afford to own the cab they drive because medallions cost around a million dollars. So drivers start their day in the red and it often takes them half or three quarters of their shift to break even. That is why the majority of them work 12-hour shifts, often restricted by one or two plexi-glass partitions. The city has been cutting back on rest stops for taxis which means drivers can't even find a place to use the bathroom. Long sitting hours and the lack of facilities has translated into dramatically higher risks for kidney diseases. Drivers are 60 times more likely to be killed on the job and 80 times more likely to be robbed. These difficult working conditions have lead to a shift in driver demographics whereby the majority is constituted by recent immigrants and people of color. Interestingly, New York is literally driven by Muslims as they represent half of the driver community. The sub-text to the piece are these peculiar working conditions of taxicab drivers. But I'm not an academic nor a politician. I feel my role is to open up spaces of speculative experience. I didn't want to create something where the viewer walks away satisfied by their brief moment of empathy with a driver. Even though the work is so site specific, I wanted something that disorients and produces a line of flight, something that would exceed the stratifying architecture of the cab.

DM: What was your working relationship like with the taxi drivers? How did you approach them? Were they afraid of participating?

AB: I would just go out with my team, hopping from one cab to another, and approach drivers at taxi stands. Though most were enthusiastic about the project, many drivers wouldn't speak to me on-camera about working conditions, for fear of repercussions and because of ongoing negative media representation. Consider a sampling of headlines from the *New York Times* over a single week in March 2010:

"NY Cabs Gouge Millions Out of Riders"
(City Room Blog, March 12) [2]

"Cabbies Cheat? Riders Express No Surprise" (page A26, March 13) [3]

"Taxi Rip-off" (page A26, March 17) [4]

DM: What was the response like to *Transient* by passengers? How did you document this response?

AB: I actually sent out my team to record people's reactions to *Transient*. It was really varied, from people who were disturbed by the piece to people who had really thoughtful responses to people who just didn't care for it. I was just pleased that most people seemed to find it really provocative, really thought-provoking.

That said, my interest with *Transient* was in creating a set of conditions that would make the passenger aware of the space they were in, to activate

the space and bring attention to the nature of their commute and the possibilities for transformation therein. Within that reflective space, I didn't really have an agenda or desire to dictate the viewer's reactions.

DM: What form does the project take now? (How) will you show *Transient* in the future?

AB: Well, a body of photographic work (on-going), called *Choreography of the Liminal*, emerged from *Transient*. A selection of prints from this series (along with the *Transient* videos) were shown during Miami Art Week as a part of *Voyeur*, an exhibit organized by Young Patrons of the American Friends of the Louvre. As well, I've re-edited some of the video footage into a new three channel, rear projection installation. And I've been slowly piecing together a documentary on NYC cab drivers.

DM: Your performance, "The Other Artist is Present" (2010), was intended as both homage to Marina Abramovic's oeuvre and as a critique of the media hype and questionable metaphysics of The Museum of Modern Art exhibition of her work. Were you nervous approaching Abramovic on her turf? What was your performative exchange with Abramovic like?

AB: Of course I was intimidated, it's Marina Abramovic! I have loved her work for so long (as I said in Act I of *The Other Artist is Present*). And I was especially nervous because what I was doing wasn't just homage but a pointed departure from her performance. That said, what I take from her work is the need for joyous seriousness and serious joking. Making art, making other ways of

seeing and understanding, is so important, but must ultimately be driven by a love for world it seeks to expand.

DM: Have you been in contact with Abramovic (or her publicity staff) since?

AB: After my performance, she sent her documentary crew to interview me. I would be honored to be in further contact with her.

DM: What's next for you? What are you working on?

AB: Another technology-based crazy infiltration, this time in France. The remote opening will happen during a big event here in New York by the end of January.

References

- [1] http://amirbaradaran.com/ab_transient_intro.php
- [2] <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/nyregion/13taxi.html>
- [3] <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/15/nyregion/15taxi.html>
- [4] <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/17/opinion/17wed3.html>

Amir Baradaran is a New York-based visual and performance artist. Born in Tehran and raised in Montreal, his first sketches took root in his grandfather's philosophy and the harmony of his mother's poetry. Baradaran's artistic practice is marked by a recurring exploration of the cross-section of race and gender. www.amirbaradaran.com



MINDING MY IMMIGRATION BUSINESS: THE PRICE OF THE TICKET

Erica R. Meiners

I have lived in the U.S. for over ten years, and now, unlike the 15 million or more undocumented people living and working in the U.S., I am eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship. Debating this application pushes me to remember many of my border crossings into the U.S., if not obsess about the business of immigration.

One example: In 2007 I needed to leave Toronto quickly. Growing up in small-town British Columbia taught me that the bus is the cheapest and the most reliable last-minute way out of town. So I walked to the Bay Street bus station, paid my dollars, and got on a bus that—compared to those of my younger days—seemed luxurious. Velvety seats that reclined, the hum of some kind of a fresh air system, a ride with shock absorbers, and no cigarette smoke. The bus traveled through the bucolic Niagara peninsula and arrived in fewer than three hours at the Canada/U.S. border, located near the city of Buffalo.

At the border, we emptied out into a long room, almost sterile except for the U.S. customs and immigration officers and the silver tables for a “baggage check.” As we waited for our turn to be questioned, and perhaps searched in a public line-up, other officers with a dog boarded the bus. Everyone was quiet.

Even with the power of a permanent residency “green card” (“May Be Revoked by the Department of Homeland Security” written on the back), my interactions with the border have taught me well:

- Never talk back.
- Never ask questions.
- Try to look less freaky.
- Never say you are a professor, say “teacher” as it less threatening to (white) men who work the border.
- Cover the tattoos.
- Keep yourself in check.

With these corrections, I have the opportunity to pass into the U.S.

But I need to interrupt my typical story with a contextual snapshot of the immigration situation in the U.S. With the 2001 merger of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) into the then *new* Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) became the largest enforcement agency in the U.S. With a workforce of over 17,000, a 2008 budget that exceeded 5 billion, *The Washington Post* (2007) identified that:

With roughly 1.6 million immigrants in some stage of immigration proceedings, the government holds more detainees a night than Clarion Hotels have guests, operates nearly as many vehicles as Greyhound has buses and flies more people each day than do many small U.S. airlines.[1]

These numbers have increased under the Obama administration, which deports approximately 1,100 people a day, an increase of almost 25% since 2001.[2] Detention is toxic: holding people—*some indefinitely*—in unlicensed facilities, often with poor ventilation, poor nutrition, inadequate health services, and twenty-four-hour fluorescent lights is extremely hazardous and can kill. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has identified that 107 immigrants have died while imprisoned by U.S. immigration since 2003 as a result of confinement conditions, poor access to medical treatment, and other physical and emotional stressors.[3]

Yet, immigration policies and practices have always actively punished and criminalized particular non-conforming and non-white bodies and communities in addition to creating aliens and disposable non-citizens. This often seems difficult to remember in the current moment, when recent state legislation such as the Arizona SB 1070 Bill, innocuously titled, *Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act* (requiring all “aliens” to carry proof of legal status in Arizona at all times) has received international attention for seemingly ushering in a new era of policing that actively targets communities of colour. But SB 1070 is no anomaly; this is a nation where the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that made Chinese ineligible for U.S. citizenship was not repealed until 1943 and wider immigration from China was not available until 1965.[4]

In *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America*, historian Margot Canaday documents past cases of people rejected at the U.S. border for bodies or comportments that demonstrated non-conformity. These things included: beardless men, men with defective penises (“a bad economic risk”), those with “oddity of dress or unusual decoration on clothing”, or facial expressions that predict sexual degeneracy. And, let us not forget the useful classification of “public charge” that disqualified unattached women based on “a lack of economic resources” which, according to Canaday’s research, always indicated a susceptibility to perversion underlying economic poverty.[5]

Building on this evidence of historic exclusion and stigmatization, with over 400 private and public

immigration detention facilities nationwide, and a southern border that resembles a large militarized prison zone, immigration is an intimate partner with the penal system in the world's largest prison nation, where 1 in every 100 U.S. citizens is behind bars.[6]

Many Federal initiatives work to detain and deport non-citizens. In the last decade, the Federal 287(g) program enabled local and state police to act as Federal immigration authorities, tying local law enforcement to Federal agencies to raid work-sites and homes. In another program, "no match letters" were sent to employers when employee social security numbers (the U.S. equivalent of Canadian social insurance numbers) did not match the documents held by the Federal government, resulting in the harassment and subsequent termination of employment for those workers. And, while the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2009 that those in possession of fake social security numbers could not be charged with "aggravated identity theft" (with a mandatory two-year prison sentence) this fear continues to circulate.[7] While almost all of these programs target migrants from the south (not Canadians), this national context of aggressive border enforcement schools us all, and well.

Back in Buffalo, when it is my turn, I am questioned. I am white and my hair hangs a little below my ears, I look reasonably like my passport identified gender, I have on a relatively clean-looking shirt and not much luggage, I have a card that signifies full-time employment in a recognizable profession, and I have a permanent address in Chicago, if not a useful way to get there at the moment.

The rest of the bus is lined up and I watch the last few Latinos and their luggage get pulled apart.

Visiting a cousin? Who? What is their address? What is his job? Where are your return tickets? Who are you visiting? I thought he was your cousin? What is your job?

Uniformed men and women bark these questions—staccato, direct, repetitive—with no generosity in the tone or in the stance. The questions are asked over open suitcases, and like bright fish guts, shirts and underwear and belts dangle over the table. The men are not clear in their responses, and I recognize the particular confusion triggered by fear, authority, translation problems, and public humiliation. Instead of taking a stand and risking my own border crossing or yelling *don't fucking scream at them*, I stay mute.

While this unfolds, the rest of the passengers from the bus wait in silence. Some seem to be trying not to "witness", while others watch the inquisition openly. The interrogation is public and it is ordinary. After almost an hour of waiting, people do more than mutter and shift feet. Some go outside to have cigarettes or lean against the glass, others move outside to make phone calls. When it became clear that the bus would not move until all the passengers were cleared, I follow the lead of an older white woman: I grab my bag and walk to Buffalo, abandoning the bus, and those on it. I do not defend the men detained, despite their detention seeming unreasonable to me. I am also fairly certain that no one will stop me as I walk into the city.

I relate this story, in part because it is so ordinary and such a typical example of the kind of structural violence performed by borders, but also as a marker of my acquiescence, or, to misuse the beautiful words of James Baldwin, this is the price of the ticket for those of us lucky to get access.[8]

Getting in, making it across the border, exacts a price. This particular trip into Buffalo, and probably others, leached something out of me. Not that I was ever a romantic outlaw, but I did have a few years of minor border drama because I didn't know the rules of behavior and I thought I wouldn't have to conform. The consequences—a missed airplane, stopped by internal border checkpoints when I did not have papers, public humiliation, grilled about who I live with and what I do, waiting in secondary rooms and different lines—taught me well. I think about what to wear. I carry copies of all kinds of documentation and my business cards. I learned how to use the particular privileges available to me, how to pass across the borders, and I am quiet. I mind my own business.

While there can be no comparison, I have worked and organized for almost ten years alongside men and women in Chicago who are undocumented, including many who fight for legalization. Conservative estimates suggest that 15 million people live in the U.S. without papers. As the majority of those I work with are from poorer nations south of the U.S., these men and women relate stories of border crossing and employment that repeatedly include structural and interpersonal violence, economic exploitation, and resistance. These make my experiences insignificant.

I was locked in a van. I spent weeks cramped in the basement of a house. We walked for days. I could not afford to eat. I clean for 14 hour shifts and am paid fifty dollars. I was raped. I lost my mother. I left everything and everyone I know behind. I live in a room in the basement with no light. I hid my money in my underwear and I was still robbed. I do not make minimum wage. There were fifteen of us in the truck and I was the only woman. I was alone for three months. Why should I finish high school? I have not seen my family or my friends for twelve years. My sister and I were just left alone. I have been sent home three times. I am afraid to go to the doctor. I never go to the airport or the train station.

Immigration-produced conflict, depression and anxiety are also a persistent reality at my day job. I work at the most affordable and accessible four-year university in the state of Illinois (as of 2010, one of ten states across the U.S. with policies that permit “in state” tuition and enrollment regardless of immigration status), a recognized “Hispanic Serving Institution” (a Federally designated category that refers to institutions that enroll over 25% Latino students). Yet students (Latino and not Latino) continue to disclose to me that they are undocumented, working under the table at much less than minimum wage, to support mothers, brothers and sisters, and to pay cash on the table for tuition. Many also actively politically organize. Along with many million others, they have no future of legal status in the U.S., because no viable pathway for legalization has been made available since 1986, excepting the DREAM Act.

On December 18, 2010 the Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act, popularly called the DREAM Act, was rejected, again. The many permutations of this Act have essentially offered two promised pathways to legalization for select youth of “good character,” who were brought to the U.S. before the age of 15 and have completed two years of military service or two years of community college. There are many criticisms of the DREAM Act from those of us invested in legalization. In addition to being a de facto draft, the DREAM Act chisels out the most sympathetic population of “students” and “youth” from the larger body of undocumented people living and working in the U.S. Circulating the false trope of innocence may purchase a possible pathway for young people, but not for their “criminal” parents or day labourers or domestic workers or queers. But even with these criticisms, only the heartless would not be moved by the young people across the U.S. who are outing themselves as undocumented, organizing, going on hunger strikes, fighting their deportation and much more.

Yet, as versions of the DREAM Act have been introduced over the previous ten years, clearly enough citizens *are* heartless. The backlash against immigrants, specifically communities of colour, has escalated in the recent economic downturn, spawning Tea Party conservatives that scapegoat “illegals” as the cause of everything from escalating crime to declining property values. Amnesty, a component of previous comprehensive immigration reform bills, is an impossible word or practice today. In particular, those undocumented were targeted through the recent healthcare debates and persistently blamed for the supposed rising

cost of health services in the U.S. In 2009, when Obama outlined his healthcare plan in a live speech, broadcast nation-wide, he stated that it would not provide coverage to “illegals”, to which Joe Wilson (Republican Congressman from South Carolina) yelled in response, *You lie!*

The rage of the Tea Party—an overwhelmingly white, heteronormative, nativist movement that successfully fielded candidates across the U.S. in the 2010 elections and attracts thousands to its rallies—is fiercely directed towards the undocumented. From organizing in solidarity with Arizona’s SB 1070, to supporting vigilantism on the U.S. border, Tea Party participants are pushing back on immigration, closing borders, and even advocating to strip citizenship from those born in the U.S. to undocumented parents. Tea Party organizers effectively trigger broader public feelings or anxieties around a potential loss (of whiteness, economic status, heterosexuality, patriarchy and other privileges), and channel this into effective political organizing. Feelings are always political and social, individual and collective, and intimately related to public policies. George W. Bush and his administration appropriated mourning—loss, fear, anger—in declaring a “War on Terror,” and further privatized the last vestiges of the U.S. social welfare state through his “compassionate conservatism.” The Obama campaign unstintingly deployed “hope”. The Tea Party similarly works within this framework of harnessing public feelings.

Our quietness—perhaps sadness and depression, has no measure in the face of the Tea Party mobilization. Yes, people are still organizing for

pathways to legalization and to stop deportations. But, while Dreamers (the name given to young people advocating for the DREAM Act by mainstream media) hunger strike, march, and out themselves as undocumented in mainstream media and in public forums, there are no nationwide immigration rights rallies like the 2006 “May Day” that turned out millions in urban centers across the U.S. Most pundits now speculate that with the changes in the House and Senate in the 2010 elections, immigration reform that includes an amnesty component has no possibility until at least after 2012.

Applying for U.S. citizenship seems akin to participating in (gay) marriage in the U.S.: endorsing a system that offers benefits for the very privileged few, at the cost of demonizing many. Even for those able to legally access naturalization in the U.S. (perhaps like myself), grounds for inadmissibility still include a laundry list of “vagaries”: being a member of *communist party or other totalitarian party*, having a *criminal background*, a *physical or mental disorder associated harmful behavior*, being a *prostitute* or practicing another *commercialized vice*, the ever-popular engaging in *acts of moral turpitude* (enacted as a bar to entry in 1891 and never enumerated), *endangering U.S. foreign policy*, likely to become a public charge, and on and on. The ban for entry for those HIV-positive, in place since 1986, was only lifted on January 4, 2010. The message—past, present and future—is still *queers, aliens, ex-cons, diseased bodies, perverts, dissidents, and non-conformers* are not welcome. And these are my people, except when it is not convenient to stand up for them, such as at the border.

So, with the burden of privilege, always cloying, I debate citizenship. The borders are not stable, my immigration pal lawyer tells me, following up with the reminder that I have no rights in the U.S. without citizenship. *So what if you have to swear allegiance, what else do you swear about every day?* In response to her, I think: *Sure, agree to bear arms, screw the decade of counter-recruitment and anti-militarization work to which you have committed yourself.* But she is a friend, kind, looking out for me, minding my business.

Organizations:

American Friend’s Service Committee <http://afsc.org/>
Critical Resistance <http://www.criticalresistance.org/>
GenderJust <http://www.genderjust.org/>
Immigrant Youth Justice League <http://www.iyjl.org/>
Queers for Economic Justice <http://q4ej.org/>
No One Is Illegal:
<http://nooneisillegal-montreal.blogspot.com/>
<http://toronto.nooneisillegal.org/>
<http://noii-ottawa.blogspot.com/>
<http://noii-van.resist.ca/>

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