

Volume 27 Number 2 \$5.50

ART MEDIA POLITICS



# FUSE

MAGAZINE

## Institutional Hauntings



ACRONYM-ious (or, Clive Robertson on the new artist-run centre association)  
Annemarie Adams on 20th century hospitals in the 21st century  
Andy Patton on the strange case of Ron Benner's disappearing gardens

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4 more issues.



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*The Future is Now*  
Holly Ward

*Extruded Expanded*  
Michelle Allard

YYZ Window:  
*Public Displays of Affection*  
Cecilia Berkovic

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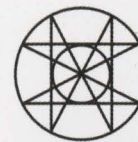
Chris Arnoldin and Su-Ying Lee, Florencia Berlnstein, Cecilia Chen, Julie Flala, Maxine Heppner, David Hoffos, Gwen MacGregor, Sarah Peebles and Rob Cruickshank, Vessna Perunovich, Lisa Deanne Smith, Gene Threndyle, Colette Urban, and Sonya Shönberger

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# Littoral Documents

May 16 to September 26, 2004

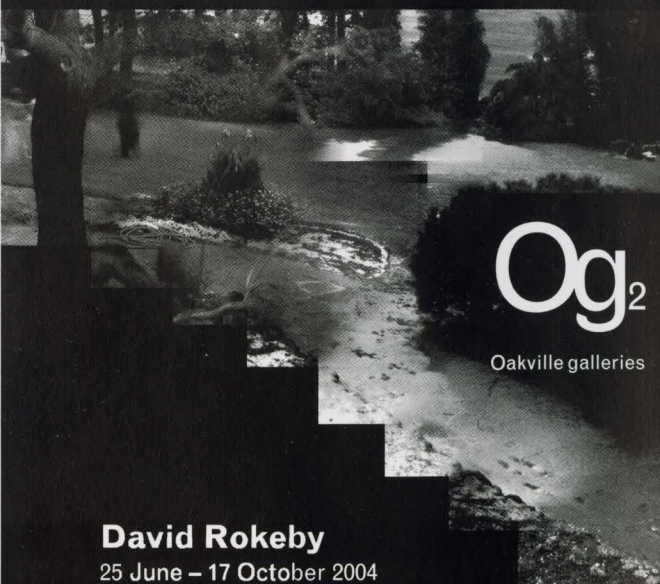
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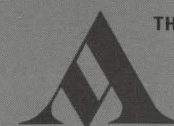
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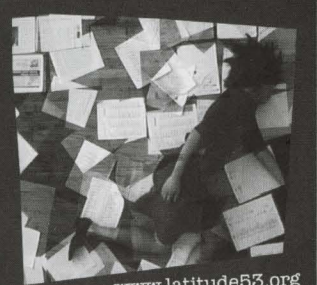
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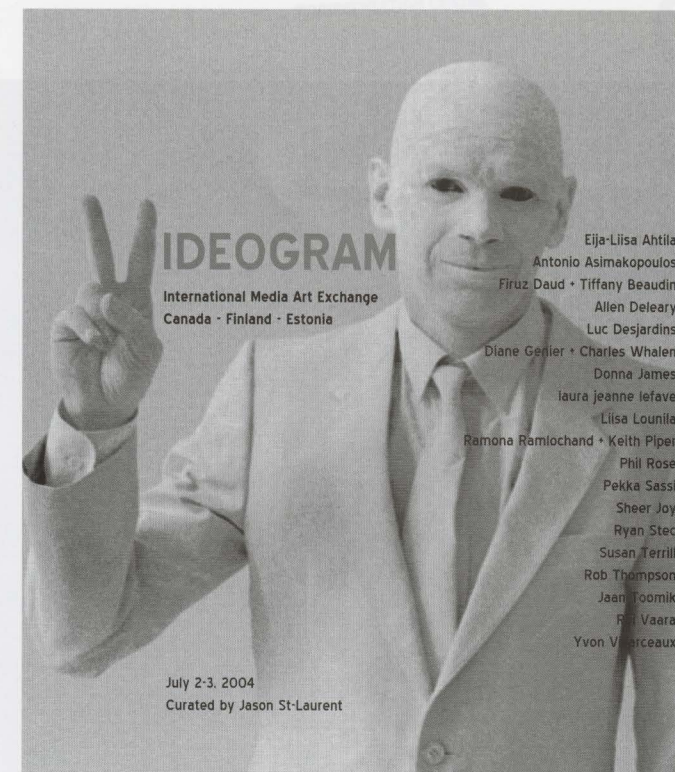
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Volume 27 Number 2 June 2004

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Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



CENTRE DE DOCUMENTATION  
ARTEXTE  
DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

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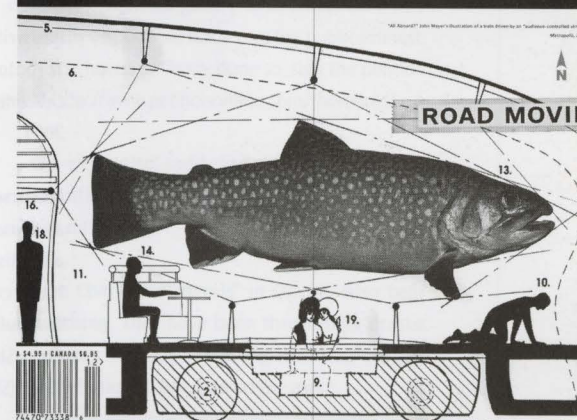
## Column



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## Short Fuse Artist Project

**Cover:**  
Anna Schuleit, *BLOOM*, 2000, installation.  
Courtesy: the artist, Photo: John Gray.



## contributors 27.2

**Andy Patton** is a Toronto artist.

**Annmarie Adams** is associate professor and Dawson scholar, school of architecture, McGill University. She is the author of *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women, 1870-1900* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) and co-author of *Designing Women: Gender and the Architectural Profession* (University of Toronto Press, 2000). She has just completed a manuscript, *Modernizing Hospitals: Edward F. Stevens and the Architecture of Medicine, 1893-1943*.

Fuse contributing editor **Clive Robertson** is an artist and critic teaching at Queen's University. In the next twelve months, he is publishing two books: one of published and unpublished letters to the *Globe and Mail*, the other an essay collection of his writings on arts policy and self-governance. He is also working with Modern Fuel on "Then, and Then Again," a historical document exhibition of his performance, media art, curatorial and publishing collaborations 1970-2004, available for touring in 2006.

**Arthur Renwick** is a participating member of the Haisla First Nation who was born and raised in Kitimat, British Columbia. He is a graduate of Emily Carr College of Art and Design in Vancouver (1989) and received an MFA from Concordia University in Montreal (1993). He has curated art exhibitions at the Power Plant in Toronto and the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. His artwork has exhibited nationally and internationally, and is represented in many private and public collections. Currently he resides in Toronto and teaches part-time at the Ontario College of Art and Design. His artwork is represented by Leo Kamen Gallery.

**Vid Ingelevics** is a Toronto-based artist, writer and curator who teaches at the Ontario College of Art and Design. His curatorial projects and artwork have been exhibited across Canada and throughout Europe and he has written on art for a wide variety of publications. In 2003 his curatorial project *Dig/Dug*, featuring seven Toronto artists, was presented at Toronto's Koffler Gallery and his project *Camera Obscured: Photographic Documentation and the Public Museum* is on exhibit at the Sprengel Museum, Hanover, Germany until May 2004.

**Jeanne Randolph** is an educated bum living in Winnipeg expending her brain on intellectual projects such as a final edit of her most recent book on art and the ethics of luxury, and contemplation of two new projects, a treatise on "the post-verbal yada yada yada" and a collection of parables on English grammar as architecture haunted by feeble ideals. Recent essays written for books edited by Anthony Kiendl include *Obsession, Compulsion, Collection* (Banff Centre Press) and *Space Camp* (Dunlop Art Gallery), as well as for Annie Gérin and Garry Sherbert's *Canadian Cultural Poesis* (Wilfrid Laurier University) and Sharon Kivland's *Transmission* volume three (Sheffield-Halam University, UK) will be published before too long.

**Andrew James Paterson** is an interdisciplinary artist and writer based in Toronto, with a particular interest in pictures that imply elements not literally in the picture.

**Roslyn Rosenfeld** is a freelance writer and curator based in New Brunswick. She is currently curator for *ConneXXion at Ste-Croix*, a exhibition of on-site installation opening June 19 near St. Andrews, NB, marking both the 400th anniversary of French settlement and the twentieth anniversary of Fredericton's artist-run centre Gallery Connexion.

**Richard William Hill** is an independent critic and curator and is associate editor of Fuse.

## editorial

History, even recent history, has a habit of getting away from us. We lose (and gain) so much from one generation to the next that the horizon of the present can seem like a site of constant struggle.

We are torn between what will be held in our short memories and what will give way to the future. Many of the articles in this issue insist that the things we choose to remember, preserve, or re-invent are crucial to our future. There is a politic to memory that will often fiercely resist forgetting, that will speak up angrily from the margins when it appears to have been all but stamped out. Fuse has long been a place for such voices.

In this issue, Annmarie Adams takes us on several tours of abandoned hospitals. She argues that their history and ongoing potential has been making a spectral return through the works of artists that haunt their empty halls. Adams not only engages these issues thoughtfully, she gives a tactile and evocative sense of the feeling we have invested in hospitals as sites of healing, illness and death. The abandoned hospital has a particular resonance in Canada, where we continue to cling to healthcare as a remnant of the promise of a benevolent state.

Clive Robertson provides a recent historical context for the *InFest* conference on artist run

culture. He brings a depth of experience to a discussion of the new national association of artist-run centres that emerged after *InFest*. Robertson reminds us not only of past pitfalls and opportunities, but of the values that lead to artist-run culture in the first place. Do artist-run centres have a future as truly alternative spaces? Or will they go the way of mainstream institutions: breeding a generation of 'professional' curators who can't tell the difference between critical writing and a press release or a socially engaged practice and a social event.

Andy Patton argues that the destruction of Ron Benner's garden at Harbourfront in Toronto erased a history too important to lose. Richard William Hill takes on Gary Michael Dault's wilful amnesia toward Aboriginal history.

For some time Fuse has sounded the alarm when Canadian arts organizations find themselves in trouble. For over a decade most of these troubles have been the result of declining public investment. At the time of publication these are the latest crisis points:

This spring Newfoundland was gearing up for the opening of the new provincial art gallery at The Rooms, when the Tory government suddenly postponed that opening indefinitely. Leaving a newly completed gallery to sit empty is neither fiscally responsible nor serves the public interest. If you haven't already done so, sign the petition at <http://www.petitiononline.com/therooms/>.

We were also saddened to learn that Arts Atlantic has ceased operations due to financial difficulties.

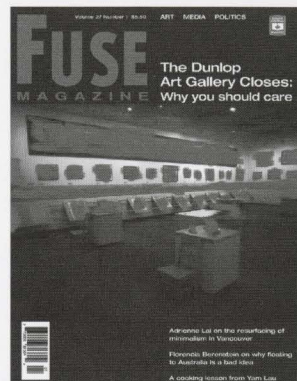
Jean Charest's "Liberals" in Quebec also bear watching. They have been threatening drastic arts cuts, but may be waiting until after the federal election to bring down the axe.

On a more positive note, after a threat to nearly decimate arts funding in Ottawa, public outcry turned around city councillors, who voted unanimously not to cut the arts budget. While \$3 plus change per capita may not be ideal levels of municipal support, it is better than 57¢.

— the editorial committee



## letters



**FUSE has received an overwhelming response to our issue on the closure of the Dunlop Gallery in Regina. We can only hope that the retreat has ended and we are seeing the spirit of broad public debate returning to the arts. That debate has won the Dunlop and the Regina Public Library a temporary reprieve until the end of 2004.**

Dear FUSE,  
I think the term "cultural worker" is really dead and gone. For one thing, it cuts out people like me, who never think of what they do as work. You need to cast your net wider. Work is an out-dated concept.  
*AA Bronson, Toronto*

Dear FUSE,  
I meant to write to you before now to congratulate you on a splendid issue. I read it cover to cover as soon as it arrived and, as I've said to a number of people — it takes FUSE to do something so important that should have been done by major publications across the country and wasn't.  
*Vera Frenkel, Toronto*

Dear FUSE,  
As a winner of the Hamilton Arts award *and* the arts librarian at the Hamilton Public Library, I was distressed to read about the closing of the Dunlop, a gallery space I'd hoped we would more closely emulate.  
*Paul Lisson, Hamilton*

Dear FUSE,  
I just read all of your articles in the new FUSE. It is with deeply conflicting emotions including rage, despair, hope, pride and comfort that I commend you all for weaving your thoughts, memories, wisdom and emotion into the words that make up each of your pieces. I also commend FUSE for dropping everything and putting their attention to this situation. I hear that bookstores all over town are sold out of the magazine! Bravo! Well done!  
*Noreen Neu, Regina*

Dear FUSE,  
I am much more supportive of artistic expression than most people I deal with in my Bay Street job, but I think you should be careful about making bold statements such as this one: "This crisis is one symptom

of a growing threat to public culture posed by the globalization of capital." Are you experts in culture *and* economic theory as well? That's pretty impressive. Honestly, I don't care much about Madonna's views about the situation on Iraq and, with all due respect, I don't turn to artists for insights into the effects of the globalization of capital, and I think you should think twice before making sweeping generalizations that are comparable to many many people's simplistic views about art.

Good luck with what you do best: art.  
*Bernard Lette, Toronto*

Dear FUSE,  
I am writing in support of your campaign against the closure of the Dunlop Gallery and the Regina Public Library branches. I was born in Saskatchewan and grew up in Regina. As a young person growing up on the Prairies these institutions were my first and only contact with the world of art. A world that I have subsequently come to call my own. I find it difficult to believe that any civilized country in this world would sanction such closures. Worst of all, a country that I represent proudly all over the world. My country.

I am a painter and now live in Madrid, Spain. By now everyone is more than familiar with the events of this past Thursday, March 11. I live no more than 500 metres from Atocha Station and was woken by the four explosions there. I cannot say that I recognized them as explosions but the ceaseless sounds of sirens alerted us that something was terribly wrong. What for me added to the pain of that morning was that I was to open my first solo exhibition here in Madrid that evening. I had shown in several other locations in Europe but this was to be my first exhibition in my new home. My initial thoughts were simply to cancel the opening. I had no desire to even think about doing what I considered at the time a trifle in the face of the days events. I waited for a call from the gallery to postpone the opening. That call did not come. We were to go ahead as

planned. To me this seemed like insanity, but having spent the past five years in a country where terrorism is a daily concern I have come to admire the Spanish resolve not to allow acts of terrorism to prevent them from continuing life in as normal a fashion as is possible. The devastating bombings of the Cercanias pushed that resolve to its very limits. Never the less the show opened and the people came. For more than three hours that evening the gallery was packed to the limit with people not talking about terrorism, not talking about bombs, not talking about death tolls. They were talking about art. I recall at some point during the evening coming to this realization and truly appreciating the power and significance of art for the first time. When we left the gallery late that night we stepped into the cool air of an early Madrid spring. We also stepped back into the overwhelming tragedy that is days later still incomprehensible.

For this single reason and a million others it is in its own right tragedy if a single gallery or just one library anywhere does not open its doors for us tomorrow. I humbly ask that you add my name to those who support this cause and if there is anything more that I can do to help save our precious culture please, be in touch.  
*Charles Malinsky, Madrid, Spain*

Dear FUSE,  
Thank you for shining the spot light on the Dunlop closure.  
*John Reichert*

Dear FUSE,  
Keep up the good fight, FUSE folks, for authentic Canadian culture and the Canadian way of living and creating for a better world!  
*Rowland Marshall, Seaforth, Nova Scotia*

Dear FUSE,  
Get a grip, it's probably a good thing these galleries [*sic*] are closing if the public can't pay for it then the gallery is not serving the public interest. As an artist myself I'm tired of the whining from my own community to ask others to subsidize their proffession [*sic*] and their poor art. If we lay off automotive workers we say the car market is down, but if we close galleries we say society is sick. Move on take anger therapy and try not to be a follower and typical conformist in the arts community. Be original. No wonder your art does not sell.  
*WM*

Dear FUSE,  
I am a former Winnipegger, and so know how important such spaces are to folks from the Prairies. I was also was invited to be a critic in residence at the Dunlop in 1991, and it was an absolutely amazing experience. The fact that the gallery was connected to a public

library in the depressed downtown region of Regina was vitally important, for it was a real locus for all types of people who might wander in to find a book, read a newspaper, rent a video, see a film in their wonderful screening room (I think they were pioneers in their vision of what a library could be and do)... and then would find themselves confronted by really innovative programming in that public gallery space was the best "publicity" for contemporary artists imaginable. I loved working there and I loved what they were doing and so was incredibly distressed to hear of its closure.

I am both delighted that you are organizing this event, and deeply saddened that this is happening.  
*Kim Sawchuk, Montreal*

Dear FUSE,  
I received my Dunlop issue yesterday. It felt like *déjà vu* all over again, as I recall discussing the demise of the Nova Scotia Arts Council with you just before your excellent NSAC issue appeared.

I teach as well as working at MSVU Art Gallery. Often I've had occasion to assign FUSE articles on censorship. Has it struck you, as it has me, that the suppression of arts organizations and services to artists is, in practice, censorship?  
*Ingrid Jenkner, Nova Scotia*

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## John Greyson on Bill C-12

*A letter that was read on Greyson's behalf at a press conference on Bill C-12, organized by the Canadian Conference of the Arts, the Writers Union of Canada and the Ontario College of Art & Design, held at OCAD 8 March 2004.*

My apologies for not being here today, but the imminent passage of Bill C-12 has taken over my life. I'm up day and night, making lists, getting ready for a knock at the door. It's about my film *Lilies*.

Ever since the passage of the existing child pornography law of three years ago, I realized that *Lilies* is by their definition kiddie porn, despite its PG-13 rating, representing as it does the occasionally semi-nude antics of three teen-resembling schoolboys in a bathtub with some rope. These images, so the law says, evidently lead to the inexorable inflammation of pedophilic tendencies. However, I haven't been unduly worried. For three years now, I've kept a shopping bag of various Genies and other statuettes by the front door, ready to mobilize a defence of artistic merit if the cops ever came calling.

Now with Bill C-12, I realize such arguments will be inadmissible. I have sadly packed my statuettes away and started making lists. I figure if I'm gonna go down, I should at least take a few fellow kiddie-pornographers with me.

So first I've listed the cast and crew, especially Danny and Jason and Matthew, all twenty-something actors who sinisterly insisted on playing their adolescent characters as — adolescents! And then Linda (costumes) and Stephen (make-up) who perversely made these characters appear to be — seventeen, as

scripted! As for the funders, well, I remember all too well Alliance Atlantis perversely encouraging the elaboration of St. Sebastian motif, while Telefilm Canada called for more "lyricism" in the bathing scene. Needless to say, Bill C-12 holds no truck with motifs and lyricism.

Then there's Showcase, and the CBC, and Blockbuster Video, and the various provincial funding agencies, and the various high schools where it's been screened and all the viewers and ushers and people selling popcorn, who I suppose will constitute one vast pedophile ring in the eyes of the court. I'm sure my 75-year-old art-loving Auntie Maureen never thought she'd be facing such charges when I invited her to the festival screening, but what can I do? We can't expect the law to make exceptions for art-loving aunties.

If Bill C-12 is passed, I've decided to get it over with and rush right down to 52 Division and turn myself in. My only worry now is that there's going to be a long line-up. What if I'm stuck behind Atom Egoyan, or the cast and crew of *Degrassi Junior High* or worst of all — Alice Munro? Think of the hours it'll take just processing her!

Every now and then, I allow myself a fantasy: that Parliament will defeat C-12, and throw out the kiddie porn law, and recognize that it is the censorship and suppression of sexuality, and not the representation of it, that enables exploitation. But then I remember: it is just such fantasies that must be guarded against. It was just such seductive, poetic and aching fantasies in *Lilies* that got me in this jam in the first place.

John Greyson

**(With the calling of the election, Bill C-12 was relegated to history. It can be expected that a similar bill will be introduced in the fall. Our collective summers would be wisely spent thinking about the bill's draconian implications. —eds.)**

## On the Destruction of an Artwork

by Andy Patton

1.

Something about an artwork is revealed when it's destroyed — something that perhaps had been hidden when the work existed.

But it broke my heart to hear, in mid-November, that they'd started dismantling Ron Benner's garden, *All That Has Value*, at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre. The letter-writing campaign had failed, just as we'd failed to stop the destruction of his beautiful *Trans/Mission: Corn Vectors* at the McIntosh Gallery in London.

*All That Has Value* began with a suggestion by Janice Gurney that Benner apply to Harbourfront's Artists' Gardens program. Benner's project was approved and enthusiastically

supported by Diane Bos, who was then curator at Harbourfront. Though each garden was meant to last for only one year, Bos renewed its lease on life year after year from 1992 to 1999. This continued under Patrick Macauley until this year. Bos deserves a lot of credit, for coming up with the Artists' Gardens project — but also

for recognizing the value of *All That Has Value* and exempting it from expiry. In an email to me, she explained that the garden was kept alive because "it was a great concept ... in a challenging location with lots of traffic and he kept evolving it for many years." It was obviously recognized as something unusual right from its inception.

There were two main elements to the garden: a large billboard that listed a huge number of economically valuable plants native to the Americas, and in front of it, a selection of those plants, beautifully tended, and lush in summer





Ron Benner, *All That Has Value*, 1993-2003, garden installation. Courtesy: the artist.

and fall. Each of the plants was attended by a small metal sign that gave the plant's name. On the billboard, the work's title in English had the Spanish interpolated within it: "TODO LO QUE TIENE VALOR"<sup>1</sup> The Spanish text, itself a translation from the Aztec language Nahuatl, describes the conquest as seen by the conquered: "all that has value was counted as nothing." So the garden was at once beautiful and elegiac, a record of the agricultural bounty that the soils and the peoples of the Americas brought forth, and a suggestion of what had passed away with that conquest. There was something else — hardly noticeable at first, a text scattered throughout the list of plants. It was the name of the book that supplied a core list for Benner's work: "J. C. TH. UPHOF, ECONOMIC BOTANIST TO THE BOARD OF ECONOMIC WARFARE, WASHINGTON, D.C., DICTIONARY OF ECONOMIC PLANTS, LEHRE, WEST GERMANY; J. CRAMER PUBLISHERS, 1968." Just a quiet reminder that this agricultural plenty was also a means of war — which returns us, I suppose, to the conquest.

This isn't the place to examine the work in detail, but I want to indicate a few points of interest. The first is that the very idea of a garden depends on what Craig Clunas describes as "the split between economic and aesthetic

horticulture," by which we see "the discourse of the aesthetic banishing any hint of the economic."<sup>2</sup> In order to exist as an aesthetic category, the garden has to be distinguished from the farm — since both are places where plants are grown. The garden, as a retreat from the stresses and strains of the world, is a site within the larger culture where plants are tended and cherished for their beauty, rather than economic gain. Benner's garden is such a site. Yet the billboard reminds us that for some, plants have only economic value. The plants growing along Queens Quay, and the plants listed, were recognizable as a jumble of the useful and the purely aesthetic. Benner's garden quietly refused to take part in the dichotomy on which the idea of the garden is based. The second point is one George Grant made; that, in the garden, "the realm of history [is] distinguished from the realm of nature."<sup>3</sup> Obviously gardens, like China's famed *Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician* in Suzhou, are retreats from history into nature. But Benner's was not. Anyone reading the billboard or the plaque identifying the garden could find that its title was a reference to the conquest. The garden allowed history to enter its precincts.

And now the garden itself is history. But its destruction raises the question of why it was allowed to continue in the first place. Was it because it turned out to be something genuinely beautiful? Beauty is an experience of emancipation, and I remember, when it first appeared, that many commented that it seemed at odds with the rather scraggly appearance of many Harbourfront gardens. Was it the scale of its ambition? A garden that really was an artwork, that picked its way through the distinctions on which the idea of the garden depends? That too can be a kind of beauty, though of the invisible sort. Certainly this garden taught many of us about the continent that we now inhabit. Certainly it became a catalyst for discussion. Over the years I've often seen Benner, there to tend the plants, talking over various elements of the garden, aspects of agricultural economy, or the history of the Americas, with tourists, visitors to Harbourfront or passers-by. Whatever the reason its lease was

first renewed, with each year the community of people who involved themselves with it grew, and their support made it more likely that the garden's life would be extended.

Harbourfront was perfectly within its legal rights to destroy the garden simply by not renewing it — which is what happened. The obvious question is, why now? I wrote twice to Harbourfront curator Patrick Macauley and never received a reply. In the absence of any stated reason, all I can do is speculate. Benner was told that *All That Has Value* would be coming down because a marquee had to be put up. When he enquired further, a board member denied this, saying he knew nothing about any sign. Did someone complain that it was anti-American? No one from Harbourfront has even suggested that, though it would have made a useful cover story. Was the garden destroyed as part of Harbourfront's improvement program? If so, you'd have to ask how Harbourfront is improved by the loss of such a beautiful work, and why a new site for the garden couldn't be found. Obviously this has nothing to do with the renewal of Harbourfront. Any guessing also has to be tested against the backdrop of the destruction of the *Trans/mission: Corn Vectors*

garden in London. Why did it disappear as well — when its site was not being improved, and when the grounds of the McIntosh are still populated by other artworks, most of no particular note? Only one of Benner's gardens now exists, *Trans/mission: African Vectors*, on the grounds of the Gairloch Gallery in Oakville, where it will remain for two more years.

*Corn Vectors* stood from 1997–2001.<sup>4</sup> Again, the gallery never intended to permanently maintain it. (The question needs to be asked: if a work turns out to be more successful than you'd expected, why not deepen your commitment?) A few pieces of sculpture still populate the McIntosh's grounds, but Benner's garden has been replaced by two wooden benches. Benches! On this model of commitment to art, the Prado would be getting rid of *Las Meninas* to make room for sofas! It can be argued that the McIntosh Gallery's dismantling of *Corn Vectors* was worse than the destruction of the Harbourfront garden, since the McIntosh has an explicit educational mandate. The gallery knew, for instance (because I wrote to tell them), that *Corn Vectors* was being taught to art students at Western as an example of a different relationships of artwork to its site, of artist to artwork, of artwork to the inhabitation of time. Why was it taken down too, a year earlier than the garden at Harbourfront?

Perhaps the answer is merely practical: the gardens require ongoing maintenance. Unlike Cecily Moon's *Susannah Moodie* garden at Harbourfront, which still continues, Benner's are not self-maintaining. They require that plants be tended, pruned and replanted. The billboard at Harbourfront or photos in *Corn Vectors* have to be periodically remade. But none of this is particularly onerous. In the case of Harbourfront, the Artists' Gardens project, which sustained Benner's garden all this time, still continues. In the absence of any obvious compelling reason, the answer must be ideological: these works were at odds with the categories by which we understand the value of artworks.

Ron Benner, *Trans/mission: Corn Vectors* 1997-2001, garden installation. Courtesy: the artist.





tion. But these are expected *not* to endure, and so the demand on the institution is fortunately brief. The works are scheduled, then simply go away, part of a speedy economy of spectacles, consumption and the discarding of the past. Artworks are *either* timeless or temporary. But Benner's gardens are neither.

This isn't the Western way. We insist on the conquest of time through art — or failing that, easy disposability. In his book on the preservation of historical cities, Anthony Tung wrote:

exact replication has long been held important, were an exception. First constructed in the third century, they have been torn down and renewed every twenty years, or about sixty times. The continuity of the social and general physical presence of landmarks — the perpetuation of their spirit — was the primary objective, rather than exact duplication of the historic object.<sup>16</sup>

This social and physical continuity is the crux of the matter. If you think of a conventional painting or sculpture, or even a videotape, it's easy to see how well they suit our institutions, by demanding little in the way of upkeep. A painting is stored perhaps in the vault of the AGO, then taken out for an exhibition, then stored again. It doesn't require much ongoing attention, since it maintains itself. To be more accurate, it maintains itself, barring accidents, for periods that are often longer than a long human lifetime. Eventually, it will need cleaning at least. One day, a few centuries on, it may require restoration. But Benner's gardens do not, and therefore they *oblige* us.

Tung's examples are a glimpse of a non-freedom, an obligation extending across generations. "There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one," wrote Walter Benjamin, trying to restore the value of the past to a revolutionary Marxism that like capitalism, had rejected the past at an enormous human cost. Harbourfront and the McIntosh also rejected that sense of obligation. I'm still amazed that neither institution made even the slightest attempt to work with those who loved the gardens in trying to save them.<sup>8</sup> But this is part of the refusal of obligation. To involve themselves with a community outside the institution would limit the autonomy of the institution.

Let me put it a slightly different way. Thinking of the two gardens, why should the two institutions be blamed because a work, which was planned to be temporary, turned out to be something exceptional, or that a small self-assembled community sprang up around it? In a familiar critique, Jonathon Crary points out

that, "What is important to institutional power, since the late nineteenth century, is simply that perception function in a way that insures a subject is productive, manageable, and predictable, and is able to be socially integrated and adaptive."<sup>9</sup> In this case, it's not perception but an artwork that is the issue, yet the point is the same. The longer the gardens endured, the *less* manageable they became — since more and more they were felt to belong to a loose community existing outside institutional control.

Benner's *Corn Vectors* garden was the site for an annual feast, using food to catalyze social bonds between both strangers and friends. The corn, tended carefully all spring and summer, was harvested in the fall and roasted. Free roast corn and smut (a delicacy for many First Nations) were served to any and all: passers-by, friends, students, art-lovers, university workers, and faculty. Both of these activities were, as any fan of the Situationists or any anarchist will recognize, de-alienating events in which normal strictures that limit public behaviour were temporarily dissolved and a right to the city celebrated. On the grounds of the McIntosh Gallery, food was suddenly freed of both the fast-food chains that dominate the campus and the profit motive.

I think it became clear at this moment that the *Corn Vectors* really was meant as public art, just as all of Benner's various interactions with people passing by the Harbourfront site showed that work to be public. Henri Lefebvre speaks of a right to the city which is a, "a superior right" that includes "the right to inhabit," and, he continues, "the right to the *oeuvre*, to participation and *appropriation* (clearly distinct from the right to property) are implied in the right to the city."<sup>10</sup> Without this appropriation, or participation, or some other assertion of a right to the work, then so-called public art is not truly public. The work must be open, somehow, to those who receive it. Otherwise, like Jenny Holzer's LED displays in Times Square, they remain autonomous works placed in public view, a pseudo-public art, just as the infamous "internal street" in the Toronto Eaton Centre was never truly (or legally) a public space.

Perhaps it's necessary to distinguish different types of work, all of which are called "public art" in order to make the point more clearly. A work like Serra's *Tilted Arc* (and likely Matta-Clark's architectural cuts) could be thought of, perhaps, as "private public art." Though situated in a public space, it is addressed to the individual, since the work is perceptual and must be experienced individually. In this sense Holzer's public LED spectacles might be called "public art" since they broadcast to the same mass passive public as politicians and advertisers, and often utilize the same media. So would the poetry in the TTC, which is an ad for the poet and the sponsoring organizations. A work like Benner's garden could be called "communitarian art" or "civic art" since it seems addressed to the formation of a community (which is not the same thing as a public). Sadly, only the second kind of art, "public art" like Holzer's, seems to be acceptable. Perhaps because it reiterates the realm of the mass, passive, public it feels legitimate to us.

The Situationist top dog Guy Debord has written that we've become a "society without community."<sup>11</sup> The destruction of the two gardens are sad episodes, two small ways in which a society without community is accomplished. *Is the job of our institutions to ensure that communities don't form?* Maybe it's worthwhile having our eyes opened, to see that there's little art-institution commitment to a genuinely public art. That is, unless you understand "public" as meaning just the passive reception of messages: political speeches, television, advertising; unless you think we should be grateful just to have art plopped into the great outdoors.

I'll cheer myself up by ending with something Benjamin wrote. I'm not sure he was right, but his view is full of hope. After all, though I never had the chance to see any of Matta-Clark's cut pieces, they still acted as ideals for me. Now *Corn Vectors* and *All That Has Value* are gone. Perhaps they can still serve someone else, someone who never saw them at all ...

"Nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history."<sup>12</sup>

#### Notes:

1 Benner's title is taken from the manuscript, Anonimo de Tlatelolco, in Mengin, ed. *Native Chronicles of the Conquest, Corpus Codicum Americanorum Medii Aevi*, 1, fol#33.

2 Craig Clunas, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (Durham: Duke University Press), 1996, 80, 89.

3 George Grant, *Time as History*, Massey Lectures, 9th series (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), 6.

4 For more about *Corn Vectors* garden and what it implies for the role of the artist, see my article, "Ron Benner and the Ecology of Limitation," in *Foodculture: Tasting Identities and Geographies in Art*, ed. Barbara Fischer (Toronto: YYZ Books, 1999), 129-137.

5 Quoted in Paul Mattick Jr., "The Old Age of Art and Money," in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*, eds. Jody Berland and Shelly Hornstein (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 66.

6 Anthony M. Tung, *Preserving the World's Great Cities: The Destruction and Renewal of the Historic Metropolis* (New York: Clarkson & Potter, 2001), 373-374.

7 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 254.

8 Among those I'm personally aware of who wrote Harbourfront to plead for the garden were AGO director Matthew Teitelbaum, curator Barbara Fischer, collector Salah Bashir, independent curator/archivist Fern Bayer, collectors and philanthropists Alan and Phyllis Cohen, PhD candidate in art history Ryan Whyte, artists Luis Jacobs, Amelia Jimenez, Janice Gurney and myself.

9 Jonathon Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 4.

10 Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 173-7.

11 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 121, 137.

12 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254.



Ron Benner, *Trans/mission: Corn Vectors* 1997-2001, garden installation. Courtesy: the artist.

2. Joseph C. Choates put it baldly when, in 1890, at the opening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's building in Central Park, he called upon the wealthy "to convert ... the rude ores of commerce into sculptured marble, and railroad shares and mining stocks — things which perish without the using, and which in the next financial panic shall surely shrivel like parched scrolls — into the glorified canvas of the world's masters."<sup>15</sup> Here sculpture and painting are valued explicitly because they are timeless and durable, and thus preserve both financial and cultural value. Today most art institutions are more hip, and are used to temporal art forms such as video, performance or installa-

"Almost every concept in the Western vocabulary of preservation — permanence; ease of maintenance, replication, and replacement; authenticity — had a fundamentally different philosophical meaning to the Japanese. A primary difference was that continuation of major wooden monuments in Japan was ensured through periodic maintenance. As in China, important buildings were disassembled and rebuilt several times during a century. ... During reconstruction, stylistic changes were sometimes introduced into historic structures. The Shrines of the Ise Prefecture, whose





# Reviving the Dead:

## Art and the Twentieth-century Hospital

by Annmarie Adams

There are few places as creepy as an abandoned hospital. For about five years now, I've been seeking out "dead" hospitals as part of a research project on the architectural history of Canadian hospitals. It's not the eeriness that should interest me. Still, the combination of peeling paint, hanging wires, broken wheelchairs and beds, and empty elevator shafts is hard to shake. Unoccupied hospital corridors and stairwells seem darker than others. Former operating rooms, especially when surgical tools remain, are spine-tingling. Even non-threatening hospital spaces such as cafeterias or hospital grounds can be scary when deserted. In late January, I visited an Art Deco tuberculosis sanatorium called Mount Sinai in Ste-Agathe-des-Monts, Quebec. It was full of snow and ice, making the slippery corridors that lead to vacant elevator shafts particularly ominous. The hospital's most significant interior space, an elegant domed temple on the uppermost floor, had recently lost its copper cladding, making it appear even frailer.

Filmmakers continue to evoke the sinister atmosphere of the old hospital. *Session 9*, a horror film of 2001, features a very scary abandoned hospital. As a cleaning crew removes asbestos from an abandoned mental hospital, strange things happen. Stephen King's new fifteen-hour made-for-television series, *Kingdom Hospital*, is set in a terrifying hospital with a bizarre cast of characters. Is it entirely fictional? The television network's website about the show ([www.kingdomhospitalofmaine.com](http://www.kingdomhospitalofmaine.com)) ominously directs visitors to a "real" Kingdom Hospital, complete with driving directions, staff profiles and a simulated earthquake. In fact, hospitals are often

used as film sets during the interim between abandonment and re-use or demolition.

What makes abandoned hospitals so much more frightening than other derelict buildings? I once thought that real, empty hospitals were unnerving because of their former functions as sites of sickness and death, but visits to numerous abandoned hospitals have convinced me of the opposite. These once busy, vital, dynamic and essential institutions are creepy when vacant because they once teemed with life. Their potential to heal is what seems dead, replaced by an inert, comatose state that seems more terrifying than death itself.

Abandoned hospitals have also become the content of and site for contemporary art. Poignant themes about hospitals have been showcased in recent art and theatre projects ranging from photography to performance art and including architectural and virtual (web-based) installations. Although public misunderstanding of the architecture of the modern hospital has seriously hampered opportunities for its re-use, artists play a leading role in re-imagining the modern hospital—and thus in helping North Americans address the problem of reviving dead hospitals for re-use in the twenty-first century.

The misunderstanding? It's the notion that current and emerging trends in healthcare delivery cannot fit in buildings designed before their time. Hospitals are often declared obsolete because their

Lorraine Oades, *L'Hôpital*, 2001, video still, Courtesy: Lorraine Oades.



patient populations dwindle (for example, war veterans) or the diseases they sought to cure are considered eradicated (such as tuberculosis). Across Canada, the justification for this abandonment of historic hospitals, even those designed as recently as 1994, is the so-called revolution in healthcare delivery. High-tech healthcare, patient-centered medicine, ambulatory care, an increasing acceptance of alternative medicines and other emerging "improvements" from the perspective of healthcare planners, have made twentieth-century facilities seem obsolete. Ironically, many of these modernist buildings were designed to be ultra-flexible but the potential for modernizing or renovating them is rarely explored. In Montreal alone we have, after all, transformed a hockey arena into a movie theatre, an Olympic velodrome into a zoo for exotic plants and animals, and a convent into a college. Could the best re-use scenario for an old hospital be a new hospital?

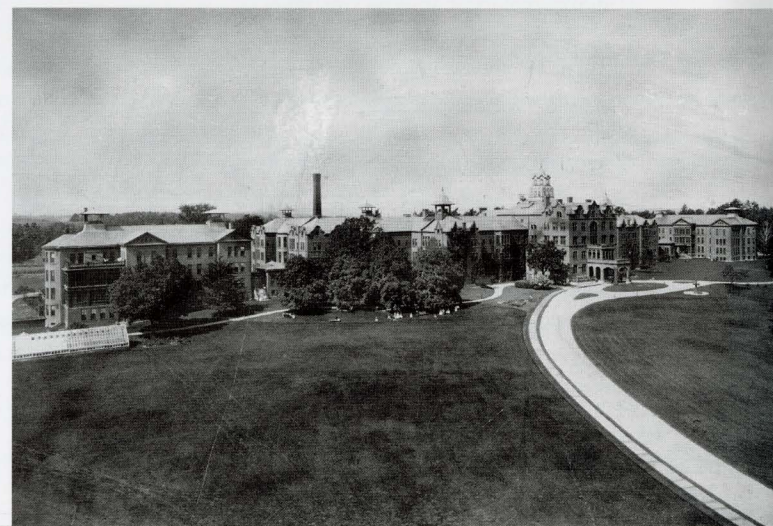
During the 1990s, at least twelve Canadian cities saw the closure of major hospital buildings. These robust structures were declared obsolete for lack of patients or because of advances in medicine, underlined by institutional mergers and changes in the delivery of medical care. In Montreal the issue of hospital re-use is particularly acute, as two so-called superhospitals are slated to replace eight historic institutions by 2010. Known as healthcare centres rather than hospitals, these mega-institutions draw on postmodern architectural principles such as contextual sensitivity (fitting into the neighbourhood) and historicism (drawing on past architectural styles) to diminish their real scale and soften the hard edge of medical technology. They also presume (and even encourage) visitors and staff to arrive by car, as they are typically surrounded by a sea of parking, like a suburban mall.

The new institutions for Montreal have been planned for over a decade, yet no viable plans have been published for the re-use of the city's historic healthcare architecture. The McGill University Health Centre, or MUHC, will replace the Montreal General Hospital, the Montreal Children's Hospital, the Royal Victoria Hospital, the Montreal Chest Institute and the Montreal Neurological Institute. Nearly simultaneously, the Université de Montréal's new hospital, known as CHUM (Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal), will see a new home constructed for Hôtel Dieu, Hôpital Notre-Dame and Hôpital St. Luc. In total, more than six-million square feet of former hospital space may

come on the Montreal real estate market at roughly the same time.

This gratuitous move from the modern to the postmodern hospital, I would suggest, has not come cheaply. Calgary, Toronto and London, Ontario have recently demolished important hospitals. The Calgary General was imploded in 1998; Toronto General Hospital's T.J. Bell building was quietly demolished brick by brick in 2002 (a process documented on the internet) and London's Westminster Hospital vanished over the Christmas holiday of 2002. Meanwhile, the Grace Hospital in St. John's and the Halifax Infirmary sit empty and rotting.

Public reaction across North America to these significant architectural losses has been both slow and disorganized. A recent issue of *ACT*, the magazine of the Toronto Region Architectural Conservancy, focuses on the challenges of hospital re-use in Canada's largest metropolitan area. Montrealers held effective public hearings on the future of the Old Port in 1979 and the Hotel Dieu in 1992, yet there have been no public hearings over the merger and construction of the superhospitals. During the early months of 2001, public hearings of a sort were held to allow members of the public to offer ideas for the re-use of the hospital sites. The suggestions ranged from university residences, to chronic-care facilities, community clinics, a centre for Alzheimer's patients, a sports-medicine centre and a drug-treatment facility. A developer from Colorado attended and actually offered to buy all the McGill hospitals, promising to develop the Royal Victoria as a philanthropic institute for peace, presumably funded by profits generated from his development of the other sites. The "public"



Archival photograph used for Anna Schuleit's poster for *Habeas Corpus*. Courtesy Anna Schuleit.



Anna Schuleit, *BLOOM*, 2000, installation. Courtesy: the artist, Photo: John Gray.

hearings process was wholly financed by the MUHC and participants were interrupted by the chair if they dared to criticize the larger project. And while hospital planners produce reams of reports justifying the new health centre, a mere thirty-six pages comprise the re-use report.

Artists and playwrights are way ahead of architects, planners and developers when it comes to re-imagining the twentieth-century hospital. Theatre productions on the theme of hospital life in old and new architectural settings include Montreal theatre group Porte Parole's production of *Santé* in 2002–03, a series of bilingual documentary plays concerning healthcare and healthcare institutions in Quebec, as well as Geoffrey Reaume's performance and book, *Remembrance of Patients Past: Patient Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870–1940*.<sup>1</sup> Reaume's study was made into a play with the collaboration of psychiatric-survivor actors under the direction of the Puzzle Factory, Friendly Spike Theatre Troupe. As a historical study, the book is one of the few to deeply probe the patient's perspective.

New Hampshire-based artist Anna Schuleit has also explored the drama of hospital closures by staging innovative, grandiose installations to mark the closing of historic asylums in New England. She organized *Habeas Corpus*, for example, a sound

installation intended to "close" the Northampton State Hospital in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 2000. The architecture of Northampton is the epitome of Victorian hospital design: picturesque, romantic, asymmetrical, peculiar and beautiful. On November 18, 2000, Schuleit installed hundreds of speakers in the empty asylum to blast Johann Sebastian Bach's *Magnificat* through the institution's empty wards. Crowds gathered around the enormous asylum to participate in the event. Just before the playing of the *Magnificat*, a panel of experts had spoken about the history and future of mental hospitals, including first-person accounts by former patients. These events, all organized by Schuleit, were intended to provide private, emotional closure regarding a public, institutional closure.

Schuleit's most recent project, *BLOOM*, is no less grandiose and equally positive. Harvard Medical School and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts commissioned her to fill the historic Massachusetts Mental Health Center in Boston, which closed in November 2003 after more than ninety years of operation, with 28,000 potted flowers. The hospital's basement floor was covered with 4,900 square feet of sod. "This will give people a chance to say goodbye though a sea of flowers,"<sup>2</sup> the artist told *The Boston Herald*, noting that psychiatric patients are much less likely to receive flowers from visitors



Halifax Infirmary before and after. Photographs by Nicole Hill and Annmarie Adams, 2001.



than other hospital patients and suggesting the vibrant colours of *BLOOM* might offset the grayness typically associated with mental illness. Photographs of the event show how the life and delicacy of the flowers set off the bare, hard surfaces of the empty hospital.

In their upbeat perspective, Schuleit's artistic events are a form of architectural therapy. They make us feel better about abandoning important places. Her efforts are also intended to offset demolition, making staff, patients and even developers recognize the value of historic hospital architecture. After more than twenty years of discussions, the enormous Northampton site, for example, is likely to become Hospital Hill, a mixed-use residential development (see: [www.massdevelopment.com/press/11012002-01.aspx](http://www.massdevelopment.com/press/11012002-01.aspx)).

Schuleit's final results are very much informed by her artistic process. She visits each site numerous times before the concept is determined. For four months prior to *BLOOM*, she occupied a former office in the hospital that overlooked its interior courtyards. This gave her a unique opportunity to witness first hand the five-storey hospital as it was being decommissioned. Her projects are also therapeutic in that she invites wide participation. In both *BLOOM* and *Habeas Corpus*, Schuleit conducted dozens of interviews with residents, doctors, nurses, social workers, interns and patients, many of whom took part in the artistic venture as volunteers. This encouraged participants to feel a sense of ownership in the artistic endeavour, as well as avoiding what Schuleit describes as "the typical disconnect between 'the artist' coming from the outside, imposing his or her work and then leaving"<sup>3</sup> after a project's completion.

Despite the short time frame for *BLOOM* — only four months in total — Schuleit became deeply involved in the life of Massachusetts Mental Health Center. She admits that her involvement in the Northampton project was more difficult in this regard since the site had already been closed by the time she began to plan the installation. Former patients and employees had long been disconnected from the site, and thus had to come back together just for the events, which required much more time. For both projects, Schuleit thoroughly documented the architecture of the hospital in photographs, including under-appreciated aspects such as sub-basements, power plants and attics. She then undertook drawings for her installations.

What's fascinating is how Schuleit's "practice" is close to becoming *de rigueur* in the closing of these New England hospitals, almost like a family tradition. This is perhaps due in part to the more media- and community-based aspects of her approach. She sells posters and seeks donations, for example, to fund her installations. The potted flowers from *BLOOM* were donated to psychiatric hospitals and shelters throughout Massachusetts following the installation. Schuleit also produced a glossy brochure for *BLOOM*, including photographs of the installation and the old building, essays by herself and others, and a list of donors to the project. This brochure, like the symposia that often precede her installations, is one of the ways Schuleit's work borders on the theatrical. It certainly goes beyond the typical exhibition catalogue.

The empty hospital has been equally inspirational to artists in Quebec, although they appear less concerned than Schuleit about architectural-heritage issues. Organized by galerie Articule in Montreal, *Hôpital*, a site-specific exhibition held at the abandoned Hôpital Bellechasse in Montreal's Rosemont district in 2001, was more about the "occupation" of an empty hospital than about its impending closure or demolition. For a month or so, twenty artists occupied nineteen rooms of the hospital's fourth floor. A far cry from the gallery-based arts scene in Montreal, *Hôpital* was very much about displacement, discomfort and even discharge.

The setting was both ethereal and ideal, since the modernist hospital, constructed in 1962, had been empty since 1997. And because the building is such a classic example of postwar modernism (high-rise and sleek), the feeling is uncannily *déjà vu*. Each room assigned to an artist was rich with signs of its former occupant. All had marks on the walls where single beds once rubbed, just below fluorescent light fixtures. On the ceilings were the now-empty tracks that had once held curtains, offering patients some degree of privacy in semi-private rooms. And those ubiquitous vertical blinds on the hospital's large windows — just thinking about them conjures up the quiet clacking sound they make when the wind blows.

Peeling paint, stained toilets and these types of sounds and smells were points of inspiration for the exhibit. Jo-Anne Balcaen, in room 409, for example, focused on the colours and smells of the modern hospital. A small diffuser wafted the scent of peppermint through the brightly lit container of the room. "The hospital

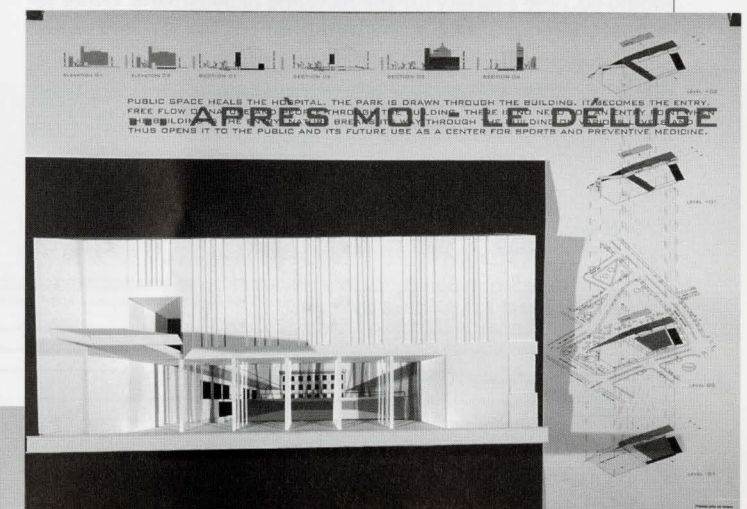
soothes and suffocates at the same time," explained Balcaen, who also served as the exhibition's coordinator. This notion of discomfort also appealed to Mathieu Beausejour. Visitors to room 403 were supposed to feel claustrophobic, as the artist crammed the space with empty cardboard boxes.

Among the most powerful works in the show was the pair of rooms occupied by Lorraine Oades. In room 414, a surveillance camera recorded the entry of visitors, broadcast on one of two monitors suspended like hospital televisions. Next door, a scale model of the Bellechasse, purposefully constructed of disposable materials (corrugated cardboard), contained a third monitor showing dissolves of previous visitors to the room, superimposed on an image of the current occupant. Unlike Schuleit's work, there was no attempt to uncover details on the actual patients or staff who once occupied the room. In 2001, the ghostly visitors to room 414 were those who came to see the exhibition.

What's haunting us here? The lively and life-filled past of hospitals was omnipresent in *Hôpital*. But perhaps this sense of haunting is magnified in the case of postwar modernist buildings, like the 1962 Hôpital Bellechasse, which may also seem to be haunted by the ghost of their own optimism. Its nod to the efficiency of the office tower, its clear plan based on functionalist zoning, and even the hospital's funky concrete entry canopy speak to a moment when modern progress and the state's benevolence were linked and

taken for granted. Yet now we are faced with fragility of that benevolence. As a result, the sight of abandoned hospitals has a particularly compelling impact. Oades' intervention without its postwar context would not have had half the punch.

Only six months after *Hôpital*, "Charrette 2001" occurred, an annual exercise organized by the Canadian Centre for Architecture, that was about re-use, rather than inhabitation of the hospital. One-hundred-and-twenty-eight design students and graduates from all four of Montreal's universities brainstormed post-abandonment uses for the Montreal Children's Hospital (MCH), scheduled to move as part of the McGill superhospital. The winning scheme, by Anja Aichinger, Michael Hoehenwarter, Joanna Kozrya, and Christopher Wodzicki, a mixed-use building



Anja Aichinger, Michael Hoehenwarter, Joanna Kozrya, and Christopher Wodzicki, the winning scheme of "Charrette 2001". Courtesy: School of Architecture, McGill University.



Hôpital Bellechasse, Montreal. Photograph: Annmarie Adams

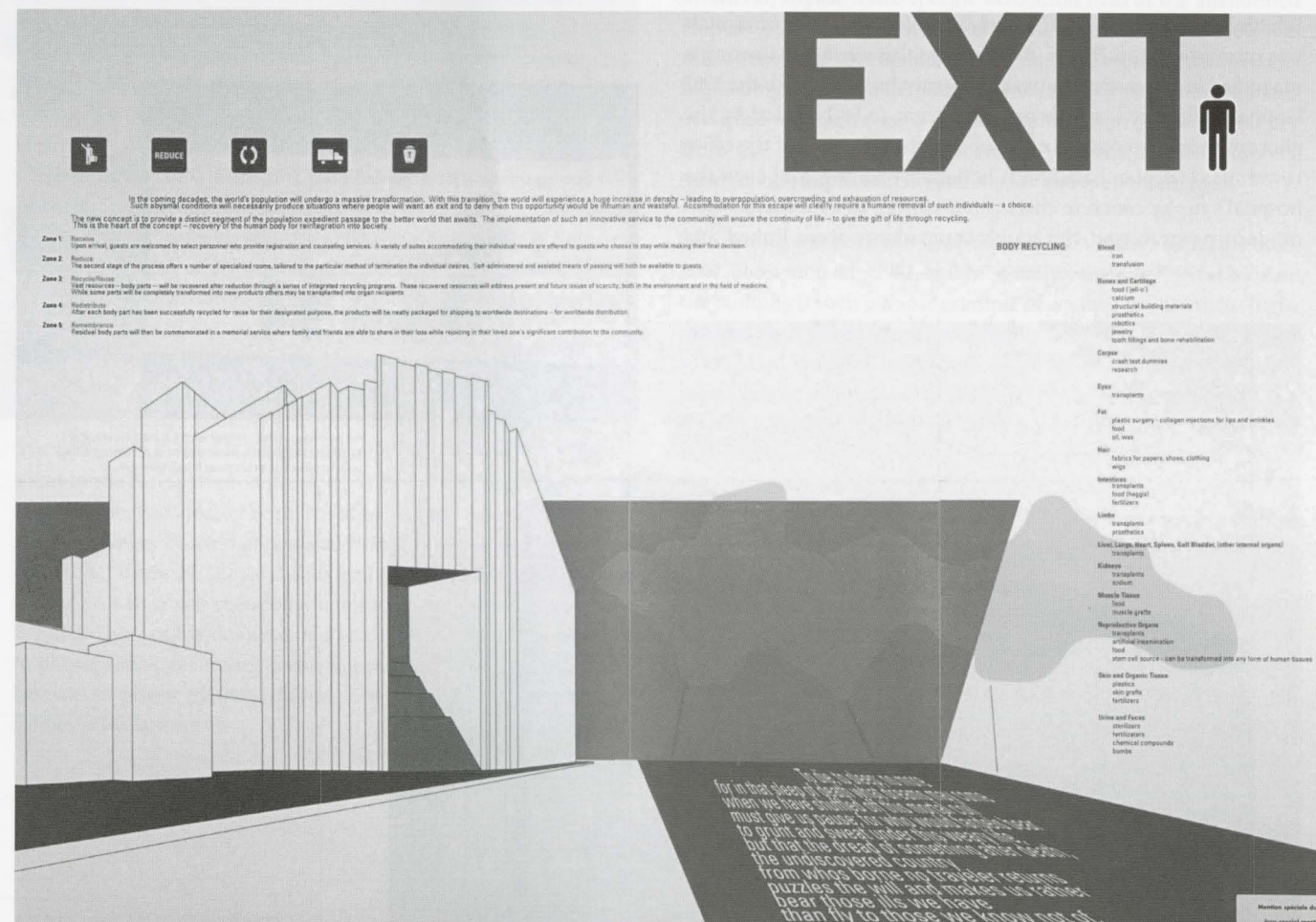


including a centre for sports medicine, re-imagined the MCH as a series of ramps. In this proposal Cabot Square, the green space just north of the hospital, extends right into the centre for sports medicine, creating a new partnership between the city and the institution. A poetic interpretation of the hospital as a model of the city got second prize. Superb sectional drawings suggested that the site's transformation would take place in carefully choreographed stages over four years. Beginning with "Animation" in 2005 and ending with "Subtraction" in 2008, the former hospital site is pierced, perforated, deflated and partially deleted to transform from a medieval fortress to a sophisticated mixed-use development in "organic evolution." Recycling was the main idea of the project that received a special mention. In this bold graphic scheme titled *Exit*, designers Karen Hui, Israël Noël, Andrew Ensslen (McGill University) and Daniel Riopel (UQAM) suggested that the MCH should become a facility for the recycling of body parts. Other re-

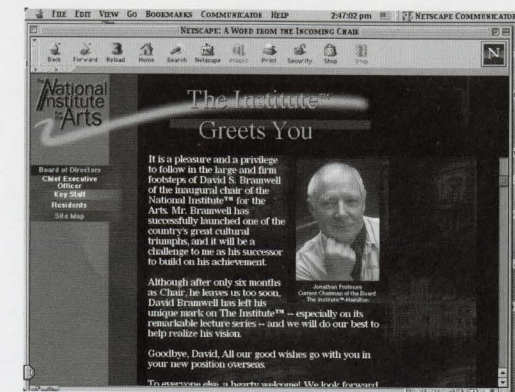
use ideas postulated by the thirty-three teams ranged from an urban zoo to a circus headquarters.

This transformation analogy is one that would likely appeal to Toronto artist Vera Frenkel. Her “The Institute: Or What We Do For Love” holds up for scrutiny the both the irrational closure of hospitals and the undermining of the cultural sector. On a deliciously ambiguous website, not unlike that for Kingdom Hospital, [www.the-national-institute.org](http://www.the-national-institute.org), Frenkel houses aging Canadian artists in vacant hospitals under the auspices of a government program to retrain bureaucrats as caregivers. The virtual site is a (fictional) abandoned hospital in Hamilton, Ontario, where the forty residents (real and imaginary) eat, sleep, play, fight and even answer random questions.

What makes Frenkel's institute so real are the bothersome details,



Karen Hui, Israël Noël, Andrew Ensslen and Daniel Riopel. *Exit*, Courtesy School of Architecture, McGill University



just like in real bureaucracies. Residents are warned not to park outside the Sculpture Studio, for example, without the proper “On Delivery” stickers. Secretaries are busy revising expense-report forms, which they use to justify the slowness of reimbursements. Memos focus on minutiae. Meanwhile, visitors can watch the real demolition of real hospitals, such as the Calgary General, accompanied by cheerful piano tunes. And people like me (in fact, me) give lectures on the architectural history of hospitals.

The internet has given artists like Schuleit and Frenkel (not so much those in *Hôpital*) a powerful new medium to “occupy” real and imaginary buildings. Schuleit juxtaposes her drawings and the final installation on the web, collapsing time and space, and offering a version of the experience to those of us not fortunate enough to attend her events. Frenkel and King, on the other hand, are highly dependent on web visitors, since their hospitals are only partially based on real places. They fully exploit the realism of the website to enhance the ambiguity of their invented institutions.

Still, politicians rarely listen to artists or famous writers. Even hospital planners seem unaware of these diverse projects. Why hasn't a real *charette* been organized to generate ideas for Montreal's major healthcare institutions? Why don't the hospital planners who are so quick to abandon old buildings interview staff and patients, as Schuleit has? Is the prospect of an empty Royal Victoria Hospital, a bizarre-but-beautiful Victorian building of more than three million square feet looming empty just above McGill's campus, frightening only to me?

Even scarier is the way the demolished buildings “reappear” as architectural ghosts in the new hospitals. The entrance to the T.J. Bell pavilion, for example, now sits in the midst of the four-storey Patient Court, a strangely located interior public space in the new

Vera Frenkel, *The Institute*, ongoing project, screen captures, Courtesy: the artist.



Clinical Services Building that now occupies its site. Similarly, MUHC planners have suggested that the architectural image of the hospitals they want to abandon might be reflected in the mega-institution. One of the most disturbing documents thus far produced by planners is the footprint of the current hospitals joined together on the new site in a rather meaningless collage. Will the castle-like silhouette of the Royal Victoria Hospital be perceptible on the new site? It's highly unlikely, nor is it desirable. As a MUHC consultant proudly pronounced at a major conference on health-care architecture in 2003, "You've got to break a few eggs to make an omelet." Eggs, hospitals, whatever. Will the superhospital be a delicious omelet, or just a mess of scrambled eggs?

It's unlikely that I'll ever shake the memories of walking through puddles inside the old Halifax Infirmary or shivering in the empty, unheated theatre of Mount Sinai. My worst empty-hospital encounter was entering London, Ontario, from Highway 401 and suddenly coming upon a bulldozer demolishing the central pavilion of the old and much loved Westminster Hospital. I can still hear the awful sound of the steel shovel hitting the brick wall, somewhat muted by the whirring of the tractor engine. Oh for the *Magnificat*, Frenkel's bureaucrats or Oades' video camera. All in the name of medical progress — but at what cost?

Notes:

1. Geoffrey Rheume, *Remembrance of Patients Past: Patient Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).
2. *The Boston Herald*, 13 November 2003.
3. Personal email from Anna Schuleit, 23 Feb 2004.







Despite much to be praised, there was a telling absence at the *InFest: International Artist Run Culture* conference. What was missing was a rigorous mapping of the connections between past and current issues: an engagement with what-in-all-of-this matters for artist-run culture. Perhaps in our haste to look internationally, we are missing an opportunity to reconnect with past Canadian efforts not just in terms of art-making but in terms of cultural production. Since the dissolution of ANNPAC/RACA (Association of National Non-profit Artists' Centres/Regroupement d'artistes des centres alternatives) a decade ago, some understandings of the movement-as-project appear forgotten. An exploration of this history might be one way to open a discussion on a "common politics" that recognizes what is critically *distinctive* about this movement's organizations and, as importantly, what administratively is not.

The history of the artist-run movement demonstrates how possible it has been to create new organizational models for production, display and dissemination. While we can claim that we have helped reform traditional art institutions to some degree, the processes of professionalization we have embraced in turn have reformed our own organizations, erasing certain functional and ethical distinctions. The same is at least as true for our service organizations, which are encouraged to mimic both parliamentary democracy and standard models of arts administration lobbying, while attempting to hold onto aspects of social movement politics.

Many, but not all, of these changes result from funding pressures, and it is the "not all" that is worth contemplating. So by "distinctive" I want to suggest a gap between the criticality and sensibilities expected of our art work, and the norms we bring to the social organizations we construct and inhabit. These problems have aesthetic, cultural and ethical histories, and for brief periods "solutions" have appeared; moments when we share common understandings of what it entails to "work with and for each other." "Artist-run" should not be read as an exclusive or segregationist category, but a description of a particular choice: the construction of communal working relationships that are different from cultural producers making their own way in the "art world." Necessary engagements with other communities, audiences, critics or curators make most sense when they are seen as providing services and challenges for artists that other entities cannot or do not want to provide.

*InFest* took place at the Emily Carr College Institute of Art & Design at the end of February. It was effectively organized by Keith Wallace and Sadira Rodrigues for the Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres (PAARC). Promotional materials declared that *InFest's* goal was to "build upon FESARS (First European Seminar for Artist Run Spaces) in Stockholm (1999) and *Space Traffic* in Hong Kong (2001) as international events that focused on issues of interest to Artist-Run Centres."

*InFest's* sold-out discussion forums and their accompanying informal break-out discussion groups were organized into four themes: "Mutations: What are Artist-Run Centres?"; "Survival of the Fittest: Funding and Artist-Run Centres"; "Migratory Patterns: Internationalism and International Exchange"; and "Metamorphosis: The Artist as Curator." In the forums *InFest* succeeded at delivering convivial opportunities for information sharing. The forum respondents, Warren Arcan and Judy Radul, both contributed performative examples of critical poetics. Within differing geographic contexts and severities of political turmoil, reports of "artist initiatives" ranged from various authorings of social and cultural "connective aesthetics," to artists as conceptual and aesthetic consultants-for-hire, to full-blown mainstream institutional curatorial practices.

An opening address by François Lachapelle, head of the visual arts section of the Canada Council, focused upon the attainment of "two equal entities of the visual arts" in Canada: art museums and artist-run centres. This state of equity, he argued, is found in the similar number of art galleries and museums and artist-run centres currently funded by Council and a similar number of "exhibitions on contemporary art produced each year" by both entities. Lachapelle's suggestion of art institutional equality served his "wonder[ing] if the the artist run centre movement is willing any longer to locate itself as simply an *alternate* system to the art

museums, or one that is *parallel* to the traditional curator-dominated art world." This is followed by a proposition (or perhaps a policy command) signalling that: "...the future of artists' centres in Canada is tied to their capacity to be more than alternate [or] parallel. They must locate themselves in the Canadian imagination in terms of their own public authority."

Lachapelle's call for a mainstreaming of artist-run culture enters a much contested history of the present. When the Canada Council proposed naming a program "parallel galleries" in the late seventies, the term was rejected by artists centres. The fixation on exhibitions, while understandable from a visual arts perspective, undermines what has been produced differently and distinctly within artist-run centres in terms of social, cultural and aesthetic interventions. It is not only a "Canadian imagination" and an incoming reminder of a need for public support that should be concerning us, but also the renewals of our own organizational imaginations and how this "parallels" or diverges from current funding-agency plans.

With a new national association, the artist-run movement should not abrogate its responsibilities to rewrite arts-funding policy to better fit its needs. With other representative organizations, it should insist on structures outside of juries where the implementation of such changes can be negotiated. The idea that funding

Looking Back

while *Moving Forward:*

A response to *InFest: Artist Run Culture*  
and the formation of a new national  
association of artist-run centres

feature by Clive Robertson



clients are merely readers of rule changes is rejected both by professional associations of gallery and museum directors and by those who see an artist-run movement in terms of participatory citizenship formed through processes of re-defining particular sets of rights and responsibilities.

Unlike public and university galleries, and despite their frequent facelifts, domestic art museums — many of which were instigated by artists societies — have changed comparatively little in the last thirty years. Policy changes at the Canada Council permitted museums with contemporary collections and displays to qualify for operational funding.<sup>1</sup> This occurred despite widespread perceptions that, allowing for exceptions, domestic art museums do not know how to hire, promote or keep new expertise. They rarely excel at buying contemporary art, or displaying or interpreting such art for “informed” or “uniformed” audiences. They are overmanaged, they fetishize common exhibition and publication processes and their programming repetitions would embarrass market-driven AM radio. Worst of all, they don’t know how to equitably collaborate with external resources, whether these be artists, curators, critics or academics. The only aspect of such museums that is explicable is their devotion to acting as insular state-symbolic sites, often encumbered by private monies, for purposes of archival and collection building, trusteeship and preservation. If this is “professionalism” it remains a form of professionalism more to be avoided than imitated by artist-run centres.

Aside from the big promises of “lasting impact” and a “sense of stability,” InFest announced “an opportunity for the public to become more acquainted with an aspect of the artworld that may be unfamiliar to them.”

The Canadian experience of conferences like *InFest*, with their long history of expected peer-speech opportunities, is that they are opportunities to review and compare paths in order to move beyond sameness and repetition. Guest speakers commonly are invited from within the domestic ranks of newer and more established practitioners, from those abroad (frequently) with less experience and infrastructure, and from those either from here or abroad assessed as having significantly more intellectual or institutional capital.

This year’s *InFest* was not merely building upon international events like FESARS and *Space Traffic*, it was also the third in recent domestic conferences produced by “regional” artist-run associations. *InFest* was preceded by *Convergence* in Ottawa, 2002 (ARCCO) and *Off-Printing* in Quebec City, 2003 (RCAAQ). This momentum led to the launching of a new, post-ANNPAC/RACA national association of artist-run centres after an absence of a decade.

The upbeat introduction to the conference program stated that:

with growing communication systems making international exchange more accessible, *InFest* marks a timely stage for evaluation of artist run culture and provides the opportunity for individuals from Artist Run Centres representing a broad diversity of nations to meet, share ideas and concerns, and to strategically position themselves within the international arena. The outcome will have a lasting impact on their future achievements, and bring a sense of confidence and stability to those working in this thriving cultural field ... *InFest* is the largest gathering in North America of representatives from Artist Run Centres around the world. Spanning five days, it includes exhibitions, discussion forums, a networking session, Artist Run presentations, public tours and an assortment of social events ... generating a sense of community that transcends national borders ...

Aside from the big promises of “lasting impact” and a “sense of stability,” *InFest* announced “an opportunity for the public to become more acquainted with an aspect of the artworld that may be unfamiliar to them.” The substitution of vague optimism for an explicit politic in the conference goals gives a sense of how much has changed since the international conference for artists, *Strategies for*

*Survival: State of the Arts/The Art of Alternatives*, in 1987. *Strategies* was organized by the Vancouver Artists League and attended by ANNPAC/RACA members gathering in Vancouver for their AGM. Then, the issues being faced were:

... the increasing pressure towards privatization and the push for viable cultural industries; cutbacks and inadequate funding; artists participation in the jurying of grants; threats [through censorship] to creative freedom and [political] arms length policy; and pervasively poor living and working conditions [relating to initial discussions on federal Status of the Artist legislation]<sup>2</sup>

*Strategies* and *InFest* both sought to compare and contrast other national models of collaboration, patronage and artistic freedom. *Strategies* invited guest speakers from the US, Holland, West Germany, Britain, Belgium, Poland, El Salvador and Canada. Defining one’s own conditions and opportunities by looking elsewhere in and around the contemporary art world can entail comparing achievement or success, or over-worrying the health or reputation of national output. (The latter is not particularly a Canadian woe. Reflections on inadequacies of artistic output is an “earner” for art journalism and criticism in places like the US and Britain.) Additionally, opportunities for both national and international comparisons provide temporary relief from localized concerns, repetitions, routinizations and contestations.

*InFest* attracted speakers and participants from Australia, Korea, Hong Kong, South Africa, Holland, Argentina, the Philippines, Mexico, Austria, Britain, the US and Canada. Following the first session on artist-run centres and their mutations, a group from Britain told me they came expecting an “International” rather than a “Canadian” conference. This reminded me of Martha Rosler’s question: “What is ‘international’ after modernism?” Problematizing concepts of “international” or “global” includes asking how we understand a relationship between theory and the local. In Stuart Hall’s thinking this draws attention to “how we choose to understand theory and politics or the politics of theory. Not theory as the will to truth, but theory as a set of contested, localized conjunctural knowledges.”<sup>3</sup> Theory so noted therefore sets up parameters of what we can and cannot hope to know or learn through these brief international exchanges. Part of this

knowledge specificity is about culture and policy, the extent to which we are governed by public and private arts and cultural policies and how we chose to set up alternative structures to govern ourselves within such frameworks. This is not just about different material opportunities between regions or countries, but about how we theorize practices, how theory’s coherence is only local. So for example, proclamations from art criticism or art history purporting to be within an “international discourse” are useful to the extent that their locality is acknowledged and then taken into account.

## Artist as Curator

The *InFest* discussion forum “Metamorphosis: The Artist as Curator,” chose not to address past and present difficulties that occur when artists, independent curators and critics share meagre resources and projects in their attempts to develop paid practices. A desire by artists to take back critical and curatorial responsibilities — particularly in hybrid forms of art making — were priorities within artist-run centres at different stages of their development. It should be admitted now that such political exchanges within artist-run centres, and their spill over into a reshaping of public and university galleries, have successfully moved Canadian contemporary art discourse forward. One of the reasons artists developed skills as curators and critics within artist-run centres was a recognition that they could not afford to be Cinderellas, waiting to be taken to live in castles by fickle princes or princesses who may only want one date or may not show up at all. If artist-run centres were to be identified as a home for emerging practitioners a question soon arose of where this specific momentum of artist-initiated culture building stops. Were there to be artist-run museums and retirement homes? If this a proper question to put to present artist curators, then we have learned that the proper answer cannot come from art museums themselves. Critiques of museums and art fairs passed on from a previous generation of artists and critics gave an impetus for Canadian artists and independent curators to take on this sprawling D.I.Y project of national and international exchange.

At *InFest*, the “metamorphosis” suggested a field of independent curatorial practices by artists and others that range from modest neighbourhood-specific community projects to being responsible for alternative and mainstream international art fair selections.<sup>4</sup>



A review of the "Artist as Curator" session could have included an assessment of the audience's affirmative laughter and derisive chuckles when listening to Matthew Higgs, a fanzine and artists-editions editor who is now a high-profile art critic and curator. Session moderator Laiwan stated her artist-curator interest in "empowerment, capacity-building, survival and agency," a position implicitly shared with fellow panelist, Stephen Hobbs from Johannesburg. Laiwan acknowledged a similarity between her experience growing up in apartheid Rhodesia and Hobbs' experience in apartheid South Africa. Matthew Higgs, who had introduced himself earlier with a nod to his British working-class background and later as someone who "grew up under Thatcher," responded:

I don't sympathize with empowerment, survival, battle, frustration and struggle. This essentially seems to be a defeatist or negative position. The idea of us being outsiders I don't agree with at all. I do not recognize that concept [in the art field]. I'm an optimist. I genuinely cannot believe how exciting life is everyday. ... I don't see any struggle in the field we work in ... the field we work in is largely fuelled by the spirit of generosity.

Higgs leaned heavily on the purpose of artistic work "as a looking for or thinking about what doesn't exist in the world," to explain why "my practice as a curator is largely selfish. I make exhibitions that I want to see ... I spend almost no time thinking about who the audience might be for the work I do."

Current museum curators of modern or contemporary art are hardly likely to make the "fuck the audience" public statement that Higgs did. However, using the rhetoric of selfish concern for art or artist's intentions as an excuse to bracket out issues of empowerment or struggle has very much been the standard bailiwick of male art-museum curators everywhere. There was enjoyment to be had from Higgs' self-critiques, including his remarks about artist-curators being "failed artists." But while Higgs' personal ascension from Joy Division fanzine editor to the ICA and beyond is, for some, inspirational, it perhaps stretches the usefulness of a boundary-less concept of artist-run culture.

I came from the "residual" winter of Ontario to the "emergent" spring of Vancouver equipped with a mini-disk recorder and a

"relic." The latter was a battered copy of the newsprint publication, *The New Artsspace*. It was produced for the first international conference attended by both Canadian and American artist-run centre/space representatives, organized by LAICA (Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art) in 1978. At that conference Canadians didn't get to present, but they did intervene as participants and profiles of a number of Canadian artist run organizations were included in the conference publication. Here is a *New Artsspace* quote from Alanna Heiss, then-director of New York's P.S.1/The Clocktower on the subject of curating in alternative spaces and art museums:

The curator, especially in an alternative exhibition setting should recognize a primary responsibility to the artist, a secondary responsibility to the art, and a tertiary responsibility to the audience. For museums — with their contrasting economics, architecture and perceived — the schedule of priorities is some permutation of this. Museums, to a greater extent than alternative spaces, in the audience business, a business that often includes subsuming a work of art to the composition of a room or theme. Alternative spaces are in the artist business — the business of allowing an artist to make coherent statements which take precedence over the location and circumstances of exhibition, and to then get personal and direct with his or her audience.

While I think the idea of an artist taking precedence over the "circumstances of an exhibition" is an important institutional reminder for artist-run centres or museums, my FUSE editor rightly adds "it would be worth reminding people that there are artist-run practices that have seriously taken up the problem of audience and community without falling prey to the museum market model of getting 'customers' through the 'turnstile.'"

### Staking out positions

I think after thirty years of "artist-run (centre) culture" it is healthier to admit that artist-run centres are simply a way of stabilizing artists' collective initiatives. Such organizations were (and I assume are) quite happy to program rather than curate, to coordinate rather than to edit. Curating and editing imply other purposes, gatekeeping being one them, that we ought to consider to be at odds with artist run values. Artist-run is not only or even a

personnel question. It is an ethical refusal by artists not to anthropologize or market other artists or to use artists merely as ingredients for other recipes and theses; not to exploit expressions of difference while stripping away their politics. Such refusals by artists assert an *alternative* to what has and is being done consistently and effectively elsewhere in the fields of contemporary and historic art management. Perhaps this speaks to what matters in artist-run culture as a formation I see functioning best when its internal organization and its external relations are better understood and conceptualised. Raymond Williams, whose sociology of culture distinguishes between social institutions and artists formations, wrote that the "proposed or actual" external relations of independent formations with other organizations could be "specialised, alternative or oppositional"<sup>5</sup> While not wanting to disclaim the necessary imaginings of what can be, I think an overly expanded sense of artist-run culture tells us too little about what artist-run centres are and how they position themselves.

"Now does it follow that cultural studies is not a policed disciplinary area? That is what ever people do, if they choose to call or locate themselves within the practice and project of cultural studies [is cultural studies]? ...

Although cultural studies as a project is open-ended, it can't be simply pluralist in that way. Yes, it refuses to be a master discourse or a meta-discourse of any kind. Yes, it is a project that is always open to that which it doesn't yet know, to that which it can't yet name. But it does have some will to connect: it does

have some stake in the choices it makes. It does matter whether cultural studies is this or that. It can't be just any old thing which chooses to march under a particular banner."

— Stuart Hall<sup>6</sup>

While acknowledging that artist-run centres have been many things over three decades, I don't think they can be any thing. In part this view resides in the demands made upon them, and the responsibilities they take up — including their quite specific (and potentially infinite) policy engagements. I include another snippet of Hall's account of what is worth asking about the development of cultural studies because I see the task of re-thinking the political aspects of value and belonging of artist-run culture, (or the artist-run movement, or the specificity of Canadian network of artist-run centres) in similar ways. Hall writes about the project of cultural studies in its different "unstable" formations and histories emphasizing that "there is not one politics inscribed in it. But there is something *at stake*..." The particular task of engaging with a history of the present includes registering the tension between "a refusal to close the field, to police it and, at the same time a determination to stake out some positions within it and argue for them." This dialogic approach to theory disallows a closing of knowledge while recognizing that politics is impossible without what Homi Bhabha calls "social agency [as] an arbitrary closure." This closure, Hall explains, is the result of a need to take positions (never absolute, never final) within a practice that "aims to make a difference in the world."<sup>7</sup>

How might this form of project analysis be relevant to our own field of artist-run culture? I presuppose that the plane of artist projects, artists collective initiatives and in particular artist-run centre culture is a practice that aims to make a difference in the world, that has, as Hall says, some points of difference or distinction that have to be staked out, that really matter.

### Centers and Margins, Centres and Peripheries

In responding to *InFest* I want to refer to what I think I know about how the term artist-run centre came to be used. This invitation was provided by Laiwan, who said: "If there are artist-run centres,



there must be artist-run margins." I plan to add to what is implied in Laiwan's statement, but first I think it useful to ask what identity or concept of power was implied in the earlier usage of the word centre? Why was the full phrase "artist-run centre" selected? (Why hasn't anyone ever asked this question?)

The archival record of this etymology is vague and the circulation and taking up of concepts by artists spaces and artists centres remains difficult to pinpoint. I hesitate to insert here what can only appear to be an authorial claim. The term "artist-run centre" became generally accepted sometime between 1976 and 1978. Canadian artists spaces/galleries had their first national meeting and decided to form and name an association of "artists centres" in 1976. Marcella Bienvenue and I (as representatives of The Parachute Center for Cultural Affairs in Calgary) contributed separate essays for ANNPAC's first *Parallelograme Retrospective, 1976-7*, edited by Barbara Shapiro. These were the only texts that used the specific phrase "artist-run centre."

French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou's popular idea of a network (proposed with George Brecht in 1968) influenced Canadian artists groups like General Idea, Image Bank, W.O.R.K.S and many others. It included the proposal that against a history of art metropolises and dictates, the obsolete (historic) avant-garde should be replaced by an "Eternal Network." Anywhere you lived and worked "was now the centre."

Paul Woodrow and I co-founded the group W.O.R.K.S (We.Ourselves.Roughly.Know.Something.) in Calgary in 1972. W.O.R.K.S instituted international network exchanges of performance and process-based work as "World Festivals" and "Conceptographic Readings" in a sense proving (through national and international art press inclusions of our projects) Filliou's assertion. Except that Filliou never used the term "centre" in his proposition. After saying "there is no more art centre in the world" he instead chose the word "place." "Nobody can tell us where the place is — where we are is where things are taking place and although we may need to meet at times or gather information at certain places — the network works automatically."<sup>8</sup>

Parallel networks were soon made visible through published contact lists of artists and artists projects that W.O.R.K.S accessed for its

exchanges. Among them were the artist publications *Catalyst*, in London, England, and by 1972, *File* in Toronto. Another route to the adoption of the term "centres" comes from a small outpost of the correspondence art network: Klaus Groh's International Artists Cooperation based in Oldenberg, Germany. Groh's newsletter announcing collaborative mail art projects included a listing of "foreign contact centres" from northern and southern hemispheres mostly individuals and some artists groups who authored exchange projects. In the early seventies, W.O.R.K.S and Bill Vazan of Montreal were the two Canadian sites listed as "centres" by Groh.

I have long been comfortable in assuming that, with a collective ingestion of Filliou's network logic, Canadian artists organizations not "centred" in Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal chose to incorporate centre in their names because they wanted to signal an inversion of centre and periphery. While this happened after the formation of an association of artists centres in 1976, it appears that only the Parachute Center for Cultural Affairs through its lineage to W.O.R.K.S, makes explicit these particular naming connections. And so it spoke of "artist-run centres" inside and outside of its periodical *Centerfold*, which was renamed FUSE in 1980.

Neither the correspondence art network nor the Fluxus prototypes called for the construction of artist-run centres as special types of artist organizations, although such influential practices confirmed a discourse not just found in words but in models of being and living life as an artist. From the beginning, artist-run centres, in varying degrees and ways, saw themselves as sites of radical possibility, as sites of resistance — even if such resistance was limited to critiques of existing categories of arts funding or debate over which organizations should be run by artists. In 1990, bell hooks wrote a postscript to her influential book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Speaking to the experience of black Americans, hooks re-emphasizes the useful tensions between center and margins not in the abandonment of the latter but in the ability to "look from the outside in and inside out." Hooks writes, "I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the center, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it encourages one's capacity to resist." This, hooks insists, is not "a mythic notion of marginality. It comes from lived experience."<sup>9</sup>

My articulation of where these resistances may have cohabited in artist-run culture is not the same thing as claiming that postcolonial intentions or actualities shaped the priorities of the artist-run centre movement in the seventies or much of the eighties. What is important now is how to restate the past and current significance of the marginality of the artist-run centre movement, embraceable in itself as a local and international alternative to an orthodox artistic career. I recognize that many have seen and want to see artist-run culture differently: located near the bottom of a career ladder that still requires climbing. Valuing being at the centre and at the margins at the same time further complicates strategies for collective advocacy. Attention to issues that arise from lived contradictions or how representations are structured are worthy of engagement when mobilizing artists organizations.

There are domestic parallel centre histories that in a heterotopic sense have more importance in the ways they resituate the history and continuity of an artist-run centre network. The first Indian and Métis Friendship Centre was founded in Winnipeg in 1959. As Gerald McMaster writes, by the 1970s the federal government began:

supporting Indian centres emphasizing a new accord on multiculturalism through the setting up of the Indian Cultural Education Centres program. The cultural centres proved their worth to communities across the country. One shining example was on Manitoulin Island, where the First National Native Artists Symposium was held in 1978.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly it was not until 1990 (through the appearance of Maria Tippet's *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission*) and 1991 (with Michael Bell's introduction to the 1941 *Kingston Conference Proceedings* reprint) that the artist-run movement could connect the dots between itself and the Community Art Centre movement present in both Britain and Canada in the 1940s. In Canada this national network of community centres — each equipped with a theatre, movie projector, art gallery and library — was a massive project proposed to the federal government by a coalition of artists and art groups in 1944, with public and national media backing. Dot Tuer has written, "artists in the 1940s were as concerned with decentralizing culture as a system of community arts centres as they were with recommending the

establishment of a government body to supervise cultural activity that would become the Canada Council.<sup>11</sup>

The Parachute Center's name has one other story to tell about how "artist-run centres" came to be defined by their source of funding. We chose our name after a discussion with a Canada Council visual-arts officer about the funding for a possible centre. He informed us that the Council was unwilling to "parachute" sole support for such projects into communities.

By 1977, the network participants had transformed into an initial group, including approximately twenty multidisciplinary artist-run centres and parallel (artists co-op) galleries. This included an assortment of media production and specific cultural-building organizations like Montreal's Powerhouse Gallery, the first women's artist-run centre. Parachuting was an effect of rationalizing the need for new national programs, which required (and continues to require) locating and accessing potential funding clients in all regions of the country. The same holds true for region-wide programs of provincial arts councils. For the nascent artist-run centre program and film co-op program of the Canada Council in the mid-seventies, this nudging of individuals and collectives into more formal entities by funding agencies (as accommodations of various margins into the cultural funding centre of a

From the beginning, artist-run centres, in varying degrees and ways, saw themselves as sites of radical possibility, as sites of resistance — even if such resistance was limited to critiques of existing categories of arts funding or debate over which organizations should be run by artists.



nation state) constitutes a necessary chapter in the history of our artist-run culture. In the present, where provinces and cities are continuing to cut back services and programs, it is worth remembering previous and current processes of arts funding *disassembly*: projects or organizations that are shuffled into less-welcoming programs or are simply deemed ineligible by priority redefinitions. Questions of which artist organizations get funded (based upon what criteria and by whose selection of "peer assessors"?) are difficult for artist-run service organizations to face. An obvious question members raise is: Is there any common voice or is everyone on their own?

### Champagne and history for the birth of ARC<sup>3</sup>/C<sup>3</sup>A

At the end of the *InFest* conference, a new artist-run centre national/federal service organization came into being. The chosen name for this post-ANNPAC/RACA (1976–94) advocacy body is to be "Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference/Conference des centres et collectives d'artistes autogeres" (ARCCC/CCCAA). Intentionally or not, incorporating the word conference resonates with other organizational names within a history of domestic arts advocacy. This, in English Canada, includes the "oldest and largest" arts and cultural industries advocacy body, the Canadian Conference for the Arts (CCA) founded by artists in 1945, and the Kingston Conference, 1941, credited as "the first national meeting" of Canadian artists.

The minutes of the *InFest* meeting on models for a new national association of artist-run centres makes possible the following report and response. A group of forty-six centre, collective and caucus representatives present at *InFest* agreed to a governing council that initially consists of seven caucuses. This model was voted in by four existing regionally existing associations: PAARC (BC), RCAAQ (Quebec), ARCCO (Ontario), PARCA (Saskatchewan and Manitoba) as well as a Maritime caucus, an Alberta caucus, and an Aboriginal caucus. For the record, this voting "Group of Seven" were: Cindy Baker (AKA Gallery, PARCA), Anthea Black (Stride Gallery, Alberta caucus), Bastien Gilbert (RCAAQ), Anne Gambery (St. Michael's Printshop), Jewel Goodwyn (ARCCO), Steve Loft (Urban Shaman, Aboriginal caucus) and Jonathan Middleton (Western Front, PAARC). There was also discussion of a women's caucus and disciplinary caucuses.

It is useful to point to similarities and differences between the start-up of ANNPAC/RACA and the new ARCCC/CCCAA. The forming of ARCCC/CCCAA has included considerations of how to remedy ANNPAC/RACA's faults by those who were involved in the previous organization. This "lessons learned" exercise requires a broad knowledge of ANNPAC/RACA's actions as a "technology of governance." We should assess what resources and skills ANNPAC/RACA had (and didn't have) and how much it moved (and failed to move) new policy agendas. We should also consider the broad areas of artist self-determination it intervened in; how it could be both deeply conservative and radical in its policy actions; how it veered towards and away from union-management models. Also worth exploring is how it was split between the demands of counter-culture and the lobbying of professional arts administration. We might ask what, if anything, has replaced the function of *Parallelogramme* as a bilingual, regionally edited national publication of artist-run centre discourse?<sup>12</sup> And, finally, we need to rethink what it means for the short or long term to actively pursue the alternative and oppositional status of the movement or passively give in to the magnetism of rejoining the family compact of traditional art institutions.

This is not to suggest that ANNPAC/RACA did not require disassembling. Its restructuring and decentralization efforts in the early nineties — which is where the ARCCC/CCCAA engages with this project of representation — were irrelevant to the pressing demands for systemic cultural equity. They were also irrelevant to the RCAAQ who, with the legal opportunities presented by the Quebec Status of the Artist legislation in hand, required a more organized and tightly focused advocacy partner. ANNPAC/RACA's membership actions in Banff will never be forgiven by history for their resistance to sharing power, resources and speech with Aboriginal and artists-of-colour organizations. The refusal to accept a remaking of the organization that ANNPAC/RACA itself had invited and endorsed in Moncton effectively neglected critical discourses about art institutions and their trusteeship-based reluctance to reform. While the historically significant blow-up in Banff over cultural equity and institutional racism and the adroit challenges to ANNPAC/RACA by the RCAAQ in Quebec City more or less sealed the association's fate, there remains both internal and external challenges to complicate a desire for a clean and efficient new formalized coalition of mutual advocacy interests.

ANNPAC/RACA's first challenge at its inception was to establish the relevance of interdisciplinary centres (funded largely with visual arts funding) that could offer production and display resources for visual art exhibitions, video, performance, audio art and music, spoken word, new dance, archives, exchanges and residencies. Public objections came from within CARFAC who saw the new Parallel Galleries program as a threat to gains by visual artists they had formed to represent. ANNPAC was accused of being controlled by "non-visual artists...[who] should under no circumstances be allowed to pilfer [visual arts funding]."<sup>13</sup> In the climate of post-conceptual art politics, the visual arts section of the Canada Council was willing to provide interim funding of experimentation across disciplines and media that other arts sections within Council ignored. This complicated ANNPAC's representational purpose and function. Not only did ANNPAC advocate on behalf of artist-run centres within a vacuum that then existed, ANNPAC additionally took on some of the responsibilities of representing the advocacy of media artists rights. Among its first actions was to prepare a sample contract for the use of video within its member centres. A similar document was written for "documentary audio tape recording." Both sample contracts were published in ANNPAC's first *Parallelogramme Retrospective 1976–7*.

The question of who such an association represented became more complex in the first phase of professionalization in the 1980s. ANNPAC's management incorporated arts administrative models from ACE (Association of Cultural Executives) and elsewhere, circulating both a management and policy manual, *A Handbook For Cultural Trustees*, published by the Waterloo University Press. These introductions rarely took into account what was different about artist-run centres. There was a shift from concepts of artist-run and artist-controlled to the less assertively autonomous notion of artist-directed. At times ANNPAC simultaneously chose to develop resources and speak on behalf of individual artists from emerging fields of artistic practice, artist-run centres and employees of artist-run centres. The implication has continued significance for focused advocacy. Do artists who choose to work for artist-run centres see what they do as part of their integrated intellectual and social practice? Is it simply a job, or has it long become a training facility for artists, curators and critics? If it is the latter then perhaps in the simmering of further professionalization, such training should be formalized with official educational accreditation. If it is just a job

then perhaps artist-run centre employees should unionize (there was at least one instance of this happening). If the new body ARCCC/CCCAA revisits some of these matters, it might choose to update the detailed study, "Employment Survey on the Working Conditions in Artist-Run Centres in Canada," (1989), a joint project of CARO and ANNPAC/RACA.

ANNPAC/RACA and in its immediate aftermath, ARN (Artist-Run Network), both addressed the "politics of speech" assumptions of how ideas and cultural experience informs meetings, how decisions are best or fairly made. Through attempts at gender equality ANNPAC/RACA moved to a feminist consensus trust model and ARN reportedly used an Aboriginal talking circle.

### Similarities between ANNPAC/RACA and ARCCC/CCCAA

Both ANNPAC/RACA and the ARCCC/CCCAA came into being at meetings funded by the Canada Council. In both cases the founding members are defined by something they have in common: they represent organizations whose members are recipients of Canada Council funding. The executives or governing councils-to-be are small and the organizations are incubated in meetings in various regional cities.

As well, both ANNPAC/RACA and the ARCCC/CCCAA choose management configurations based upon ready-made political geographies including, in ARCCC/CCCAA's case, rationalizations of the Aboriginal caucus. A mixing of political and cultural geographies (which the Aboriginal caucus also provides) is clearly a better model. ANNPAC/RACA's problem with the centralization of bureaucratic power was not a result of its head office being in Toronto; it resulted from how the association was funded and grew primarily with Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council monies. The ARCCC/CCCAA obviously needs to find a different mixed-funding model, one that can overcome the limits of regional funding sources being used for national projects.

It is too early to project differences. Clearly in the absence of a national association, the regional associations and caucuses have developed their own strengths and some have sizeable budgets and carry out ambitious advocacy projects within their own jurisdictions. The difference perhaps between ANNPAC/RACA and



ARCCC/CCCAA is that the former needed to be both a national service organization and an advocacy body. ARCCC/CCCAA appears to have identified a more focused set of ambitions in choosing common matters of advocacy at the federal level. (The desire for annual/bi-annual national conferences could complicate this simplicity.)

A discussion and clarification of the Canadian artist-run movement's namings is important not only as a way of understanding historical developments within the movement itself, but also because organizational terms like parallel gallery, artist-run centre and artists collectives became regulated funding categories in Canada.

Such enunciations then allow and prohibit certain types of projects and practices within the fields of visual, media and inter-media/disciplinary art.

When it comes to national conferences like *InFest* there is a need to publish (in the many ways this can happen) presentation texts and transcripts of discussions. Audio and videotape recordings, while useful for immediate reviews have limited archival appeal. (Similar audio and video recordings from ANNPAC/RACA's meetings deposited at the National Archives a decade ago may still not have been processed for access.)

I certainly welcome and support new efforts of advocacy on behalf of artists and their organizations. Past attempts at changing history are worth knowing, if not following. In the early days of ANNPAC/RACA it was seen as rational (if not acceptable) for CANPAC (Canadian Association of Non Profit Artist Centres) to propose being responsible for an interdisciplinary program within the Canada Council. With new attention to policy matters my hope is

that new spaces can be opened up for the collaborative researching and writing of administrative and critical studies useful for public advocacy. We certainly can improve upon consultant's reports and commission studies that more often than not treat artists initiatives and artist-run culture as an afterthought.

#### Notes:

- 1 See Clive Robertson, "Custody Battles: Changing the rules at the Canada Council," *Fuse* (22:3, Sept 1999), 42.
- 2 Karen Henry, "Taking Our Bearings: The Strategies for Survival Conference," *Parallelogramme* (12:1, Fall 1986), 10.
- 3 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge 1992), 275.
- 4 Relatedly, the *e-flux* web site has a still-active 2002 project worth reading, Jens Hoffman's "The Next Documenta Should be Curated by an Artist." It includes invited contributions from twenty-three artists, including Martha Rosler, Dara Birnbaum, John Baldessari, Ricardo Basbaum, AA Bronson and Ken Lum. Some site project invitees offered curatorial proposals; many critiqued the proposition itself. There is also a chat section for further discussion. Ricardo Basbaum's contribution speaks to the artist-curator role as a questioning of the artist-artist role, presupposing that a curator-curator, an artist-curator and a curator-artist all work differently. His term for this questioning is the prefix "etc," as in an "etc-curator" or an "etc-artist."
- 5 Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981), 68–70.
- 6 Hall, 263.
- 7 Hall, 264.
- 8 "The Propositions and Principles of Robert Filliou, Part One," *Centerfold* (2:3, 1978), unpaginated.
- 9 bell hooks, "Marginality as Site of Resistance," Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cornel West, eds., *Out There, Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge, Mass: The New Museum and MIT Press, 1990), 341.
- 10 Gerald McMaster, "Beaded Radicals and Born-Again Pagans: Situating Native Artists within the Field of Art," ma Thesis (Dept of Anthropology/Sociology, Carleton University, 1994), 64–65.
- 11 Dot Tuer, "The Art of Nation-Building," *Parallelogramme* (17:4, 1992), 32.
- 12 Those contending that website communication has replaced the need for artist-run centre network print publications like *Parallelogramme* might want to consider how website conferences like the one described in note 3 above have similar cost-effective accessibility advantages over national face-to-face conferences. While the latter allows for the exhilarations of networking, there are no four- or five-day meeting structures that permit 300 people to publicly debate even a mere handful of topics.
- 13 Ray Woodworth, "CANPAC Report," *Only Paper Today* (3:5, 1976), unpaginated.

## Guarded Views: Robin Pacific's *Uniform*

Art Gallery of Ontario  
24 September 2003 – 18 January 2004  
review by Vid Ingelevics

Security at the Art Gallery of Ontario has received a lot of attention in recent months. On a busy Saturday afternoon in mid-January, five eighteenth-century ivory carvings worth \$1.5 million were stolen from a set of locked display cases. AGO officials maintained that security guards patrolled the area regularly and that this was the first security breach in two decades. However, a *Globe and Mail* article quoted an unnamed AGO employee who said that the cabinet locks were "rudimentary" and that "the security guards patrol a large area."

It is especially ironic to realize that on their way to their quarry the thieves had to pass through another exhibition that was meant to draw positive attention to the AGO's security guards (or Protection Services Officers — PSOs — as they are officially known). *Uniform* was conceived and developed by Toronto artist, writer and community activist Robin Pacific in collaboration with nineteen of the AGO's Protection Services staff. On view from September 24, 2003, the exhibition was extended more than a month beyond its advertised December 7 closing date "by popular demand" as one of the PSOs told me (some cynics, though, noted the coincidence of the exhibition's extension with the tense management-labour contract negotiations going on at the time, suggesting that the gallery was eager for a positive labour story as it geared up to fundraise for its expansion).

The AGO has made gestures towards institutional self-reflexivity in the past (with strategic curatorial initiatives such as hanging works to create commentary and perspective on other works or, more ambitiously, commissioning artists to engage with the historic Grange in the recent

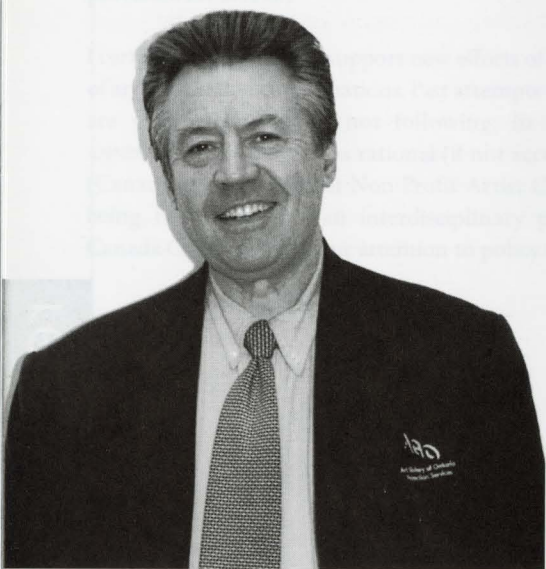
exhibition, *House Guests*). However, it is safe to say that no artists' or curators' "interventions" until *Uniform* have attempted to raise issues of class and the status of certain kinds of labour at the AGO itself in such a personal and specific way. Because of its unique collaborative nature and its situation within one of Canada's major art galleries, *Uniform* also begged questions as to how it was to be understood as "art" and what its effects might be.

I raised my camera to my eye to make a quick photograph of the row of nine life-size, full-length colour photographs of gallery guards. This shot was intended to refresh my memory later of what was a quite striking first view of *Uniform*. The warmly lit portraits, situated on the wall just past the glassed entrance to the galleries, were visible almost immediately upon entering the foyer of the AGO. They created the illusion for a moment that there was a line of actual, rather animated, guards standing there.

"Sorry, sir, you can't take any photographs here," Diane McCaveney said to me from her post at the entrance to the galleries. "You know, copyright issues," she added. The consummate professional, she wouldn't bend the AGO's overly stringent rules on photography, even though I tried to soften her up by pointing out that my subject was the exhibition that featured her and eighteen of her colleagues.

Our exchange, while probably not out of the ordinary for McCaveney, did cause me to reflect on one immediate effect the exhibition had. I noticed that, while it wasn't exactly a





Robin Pacific and AGO Protection Services Officers, *Uniform*, installation detail, 2004.  
Photo: Angus Muller, Courtesy: Robin Pacific.

feeling of intimacy that I experienced in speaking with her, neither did I have a sense that I had been admonished by a faceless and undifferentiated "voice of authority." The exhibition had accomplished what I presumed was one of its goals — to force us to go beyond our often one-dimensional perception of those individuals who do a job that, most of the time, means becoming virtually invisible. It brought to mind a somewhat related precedent: Fred Wilson's 1991 work *Guarded View*, which raised questions about museum guards and race in an American museological context. Only an hour earlier, I had seen a large colour photo and accompanying text up on the gallery's second floor that told me that McCaveney was a single mother with an eleven year-old daughter she had been bringing to the gallery "since she was two years old." McCaveney also worked at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in the past and had obviously developed a lively interest in contemporary art. I learned this in another part of the *Uniform* installation, a computer terminal situated beside the life-sized PSO portraits. Here one could select and listen to audio clips of PSOs discussing their favourite artwork at the AGO. In McCaveney's clip she speaks about Liz Magor's *Four Boys and a Girl* of 1985. I also learned the favourite AGO artworks of eleven other PSOs. Interestingly, three of them, Richard Guimond, Mike Rodden and Kathleen Trumbley, all chose Lawren Harris' 1920 painting *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. This is one of the few paintings from the historical Canadian collection that remains on view since the Canadian Wing was closed as the gallery attempted to put its financial house in order in anticipation of the upcoming Gehry renovation.

Beyond learning sometimes surprising details about the PSOs' personal lives (like Bill McIntyre's participation in the gay uniform scene, or that Roman Baran has a great collection of autographed celebrity photos), I noted that many were also involved in producing the works that comprise the exhibition. Angus Muller took the life-sized, full-length portraits mentioned above as well as all of the photographs used in the text/image panels about the PSOs scattered around the public spaces of the AGO. A gentle

and respectful video, "Le Chaim," a tribute to Mike Litnovetsky, who has served at the AGO for twenty-five years, was located directly to the left of the life-sized portraits at the gallery entrance. The video was directed by Pacific and shot by PSO James Newstead. Lyrics and music for the video were written by PSO Shawn Devin, with piano by PSO Kathleen Trumbley. The video also featured the reminiscences of Litnovetsky's son, Igor, who himself has been a PSO at the AGO for six years. PSO Patrick Grieve acted as project coordinator on behalf of his participating colleagues.

It is startling to be standing in the corridors of the AGO reading text panels where employees make public statements such as "The curators walk by, they don't notice us, because in terms of career we're of no value to them." (Bill McIntyre). Even the milder statements — "I'd like recognition that this is important work that we do. Sometimes it's as if we are second-class citizens." (Sharon Kiyoshk-Burritt) and "I'd like to see people look at Protection Services in a different way. We're not just security people walking around being bored in the gallery." (Paul McKeracher) — reveal a sense of frustration with how they are perceived by some gallery staff and, one senses, by the public, too. To be fair we, as visitors, do not have access to the complexities of the personal dynamics that are operative in this or any workplace that is not our own. As well, not all of the PSOs' statements contained remarks about their status. However, one does gain an unmistakable feeling that the nature of the PSOs' work has been somehow devalued and that *Uniform* is in part an attempt to address this.

This perception regarding job status is, in fact, consistent with the signal given by the low positioning of the job of museum guard within hierarchically structured museum labour forces in general. Historical evidence of this can be found by even a cursory scanning of the staff lists that have accompanied the AGO's annual reports off and on since approximately 1930 (a time when the position of "director" didn't exist yet at the then-Art Gallery of Toronto). For much of that time the guards hover at or near the bottom of the list.



Robin Pacific and AGO Protection Services Officers, *Uniform*, installation detail, 2004.  
Courtesy: Robin Pacific.

However, like today, wealth and power in 1930s Toronto are still given their due. The gallery's richest benefactors are listed with their various honorary titles at the top, followed by elected officials, representatives of City Council (which contributed funding), representatives of the leading art societies and the Ontario College of Art and, finally, the staff. The first staff member listed is the curator, Fred S. Haines. The list then literally descends through the secretary to the curator, treasurer, educational supervisor, assistant, lecturer from department of education, assistants in Saturday morning class, stenographer, membership secretary, superintendent of building and, finally, at the bottom, the guards, who were Percy Bilkey, J. C. Hardy, W. A. Lancaster, G. McMurdo and Walter White.

Ten years later, in 1940, the guards are still listed last on the regular staff list. This configuration is maintained over the following decade until the 1950s and early 1960s when the staff list disappears altogether from the AGO's annual report for a few years. It reappears in the late 1960s and the report for 1969–70 (featuring a full page photograph of Yoko Ono and John Lennon's visit to the gallery) reasserts the guards' position at the bottom of the list, naming only John McDonald as security supervisor. William J. Withrow, director, is at the top, while the guards now precede only the maintenance supervisor. By the end of the 1970s the annual report, along with the gallery, has grown enormously. In the 1977–78 report the guards inhabit the middle of the third page of three pages of staff listings as security under the larger heading, physical plant. No longer are only department heads mentioned. In a spirit of postmodern inclusiveness, every single employee of the AGO appears to be named (there are now twenty-six PSOs, including two supervisors). Another ten years pass and by 1988–89 security has its own larger-font, bolded heading on the first page of three pages of staff listings (still listing everyone) and now five cloakroom attendants are included amongst the forty-nine PSOs, including supervisory staff. By the end of the 1990s, perhaps reflecting several years of cuts to provincial cultural funding, the annual report has shrunk almost to the size of the early Art Gallery of Toronto publications of the 1920s. Also like the 1920s, the post-1999–2000 reports no longer contain a staff list at all. It must be noted that this "even-handedness" (of listing no one anymore) affects more adversely those who occupy lower profile jobs as they rarely receive public notice for what they do in the first place.

Given this history and a sense of some of the exhibition's representational strategies, we can return to the question asked in this review's opening paragraphs. How are we to understand this exhibition and its affects?

In conversation, Pacific has cited the important influence of Herbert Marcuse on her work, so a brief consideration of his thoughts on art may be helpful. Carol Becker, a former student of Marcuse, considers his ideas in a more contemporary context in her 1996 book, *Zones of Contention: Essays on art, institutions, gender and anxiety*. In the essay, "Herbert Marcuse and the Subversive Potential of Art," she discusses his last major work, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978), in which his thoughts on the potentially radical nature of aesthetic experimentation are expounded. Marcuse saw "difficult" and challenging art as a potential catalyst for radical social change because such work created form that had not previously been experienced. This provided an example of the workings of human imagination and, hence, a stimulus for envisioning "freedom." In Marcuse's frame of reference an artwork that too closely resembled the conditions of a viewer's everyday life would be ineffective as it did not challenge a viewer to imagine something other than conformity to the "reality principle" (i.e., the adaptations one makes in response to the constraints and conditions imposed on life by capitalism). On Marcuse's terms—as an advocate of "radical" aesthetics—the question would become: Does Pacific's project constitute a radical enough





Robin Pacific and AGO Protection Services Officers, *Uniform*, installation detail, 2004.  
Photo: Angus Muller, Courtesy: Robin Pacific.

as a staged space primarily concerned with foregrounding product over process. Background became foreground — for a time. However, while a major and laudable goal of the exhibition — the positive acknowledgment of the PSOs and their work — was accomplished, the bracketing off of the exhibition from the AGO's galleries did miss an opportunity to push even further by more provocatively framing the question of what art can be for gallery goers.

A troubling absence, which could limit *Uniform*'s longterm influence, is the lack of even a modest catalogue or anything more substantial than the three-fold handout available in the galleries. While there was an animated and informative panel talk featuring Pacific and several of the PSOs, this does not address the issue of how this project survives for posterity. A wider social, historical and philosophical context for site-specific Canadian work that highlights the relationship between labour and the institutional representation of culture would surely have been a welcome addition to the field of museological writing. It might also have been of immediate interest to the many AGO visitors who found *Uniform* engaging or puzzling.

Finally, *Uniform*'s presence within the AGO is symptomatic of the institution as, in Carol Becker's term, a "zone of contention." In this regard is important to note that the *Uniform* project was not commissioned by the AGO, but proposed to it by Pacific. It would not have existed at all if it had not been supported by individuals within the institution. In conversation Pacific acknowledges that there was certainly resistance to this project in some quarters. The fact that it was produced in the end reveals that the AGO is not monolithic, but contains within it conflicting views about relationships between the institution, the art audience, the nature of art and the role of the artist. It is hoped that *Uniform*'s presence has become part of institutional memory in a positive sense and will now serve as a precedent for further projects that hold the AGO to the words of the Marcuse-like slogan used on the cover of its 1999–2000 annual report, "art can change the way we understand the world." That is, as long as it isn't forgotten that the AGO is part of that world.

form for art to create social change? The actual components of the *Uniform* installation as a whole, while executed to high production standards, take fairly conventional forms — portrait photography, text/image panels, documentary video. It would seem that the radicality of the exhibition would have less to do with aesthetic innovation than with the fact of its very presence within the institution.

In considering that presence, one notes that none of the parts of *Uniform* are situated within the actual galleries amongst the already validated artworks (as some of the AGO curators' own past "interventions" have been). There is the curious sense that *Uniform* is situated in a parallel relationship to the art located in the galleries. In truth, *Uniform* does exist outside the value system, based on notions of connoisseurship and centred on the autonomous work of art, that has historically informed the gallery's functions and its definitions of art. *Uniform* is a process-based project whose goal is not to create new commodities for the art market nor to become part of an institutional collection but to collaboratively explore and expand upon ideas related to community, the social nature of art and the representation of labour. The exhibition's presence rubs against the customary seamlessness of the art museum

## Rob Kovitz's *Ice Fishing in Gimli*

*Winnipeg, where the moon is full every night.*  
Gallery OneOneOne  
26 February – 2 April 2004  
review by Jeanne Randolph



William Eakin and Rob Kovitz, *Ghost Month/Ice Fishing in Gimli (the Gothic Unconscious)*, 2004, installation photograph, Courtesy: Gallery OneOneOne.  
Photo: Larry Glawson.

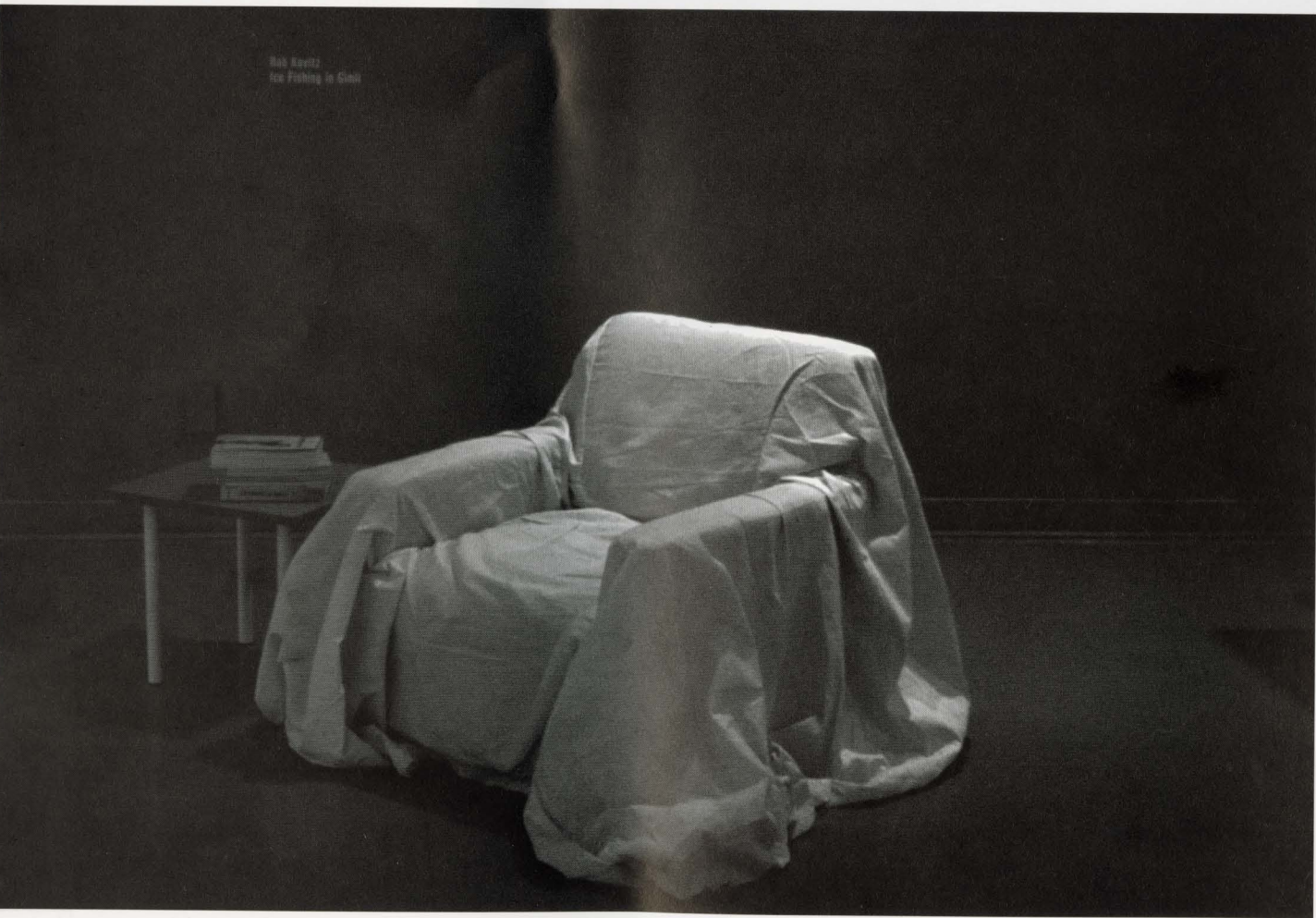
*The Gothic Unconscious* exhibition series was uncompromised curatorial speculation ("How are we to wrestle with restless ghosts and tragic histories in the context of twenty-first century culture?") manifest as installations of work by a hundred artists.

As materialized hypothesis, *The Gothic Unconscious* fluctuated melodramatically over the course of one hundred fifty-five days: the colour of walls shifted, the lighting moved, furniture changed, the windows were framed then clogged, then luminous, while dramatic arrivals and departures of art broke the silence of civic amnesia: all under the transfigurative spell of curator-in-residence Sigrid Dahle.

On the south wall of Gallery One One One the broken backbone of Winnipeg's social history was diagrammed in clean straight lines in blood red paint. The lines were punctuated by thirty-five cruel facts, such as:

**October 11, 1875.** After a month-long journey, a party of 285 Icelanders arrives in Winnipeg and heads for a settlement in Gimli. The Dominion government lends the colonists \$5000 to purchase supplies in Winnipeg; some local merchants see this as an "opportunity to dispose of quantities of old, unpalatable pemmican, flour of a similar quality, and weavilled beans.





William Eakin and Rob Kovitz, *Ghost Month/Ice Fishing in Gimli (the Gothic Unconscious)*, 2004, Courtesy: Gallery OneOneOne, Photos: Larry Glawson.

For those one hundred fifty-five days this mural lasted unchanged, looking like a transit map for hell, where the name of every stop would be prefixed by "Tragic- [genocide," police brutality," epidemics," political corruption," unjust laws," commercial ruthlessness," dispossession," floods," famine," class warfare"].

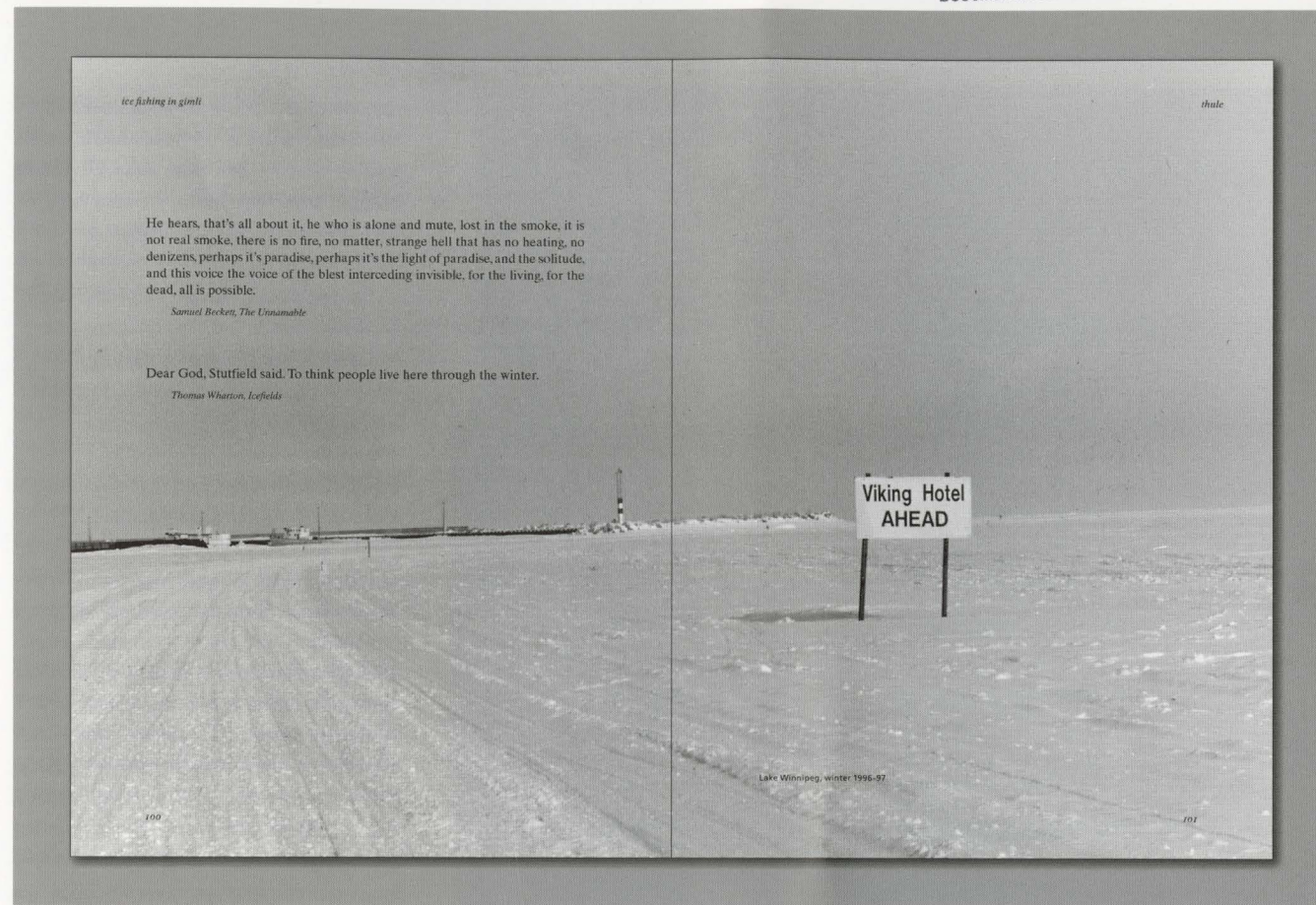
Unlike its Winnipeg moon, *The Gothic Unconscious* displayed itself in phases: the "Blind Spot" phase, the "Trauerspiel" phase, "Das Cabinet des Dr. Jeanne Randolph" phase, and in the end, the "Ghost Month/Ice Fishing in Gimli" phase. At the allusive centre of each of these phases artworks embodied traumatic causes and effects, effects that merge into causes, causes that dissolve into effects. Each painting, sculpture, photograph, performance, video, and film offered versions of Winnipeg's past in the

costume of an uncanny metaphorical present. The juxtaposition of the works of artists (who are always capable of composing forms of reparation for damage done to their body politic) suggested that trauma might generate, rather than annihilate meaning. Like Joseph Conrad's character Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, Sigrid's inimitable curatorial method demonstrated how "meaning was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze."

I prefer winter ... Something waits beneath it — the whole story doesn't show.

—Andrew Wyeth

During the final thirty-nine days of *The Gothic Unconscious* the gallery was cast as a nearly emptied room: looking in through the gallery



All page spreads from Rob Kovitz's *Ice Fishing in Gimli* (Winnipeg: Treyl Books), progress edition. Courtesy: Rob Kovitz. See [www.treyl.com](http://www.treyl.com)

windows one could see four armchairs draped in white sheets, a few little end tables in pools of light. Near each cloaked chair sat tall stacks of thick grey-white blocks and their off-cuts of 186-cubic-inch rectangular chunks (perhaps hewn from dirty glaciers? Or glass bricks heavy with grime?).

Once inside, a line of photographs (William Eakin's *Ghost Month*) would be visible crossing the pale corner between the two far walls. And the weighty white slabs? They were in fact made of paper, three-volume tomes of the massive *Ice Fishing in Gimli* project concocted and designed by Rob Kovitz.

*Ice Fishing in Gimli* is a unique hybrid fabrication impossible to describe except by triangulation:

**triangulation from point a:**

**"For one writes only half the book," [Joseph] Conrad insisted, "the other half is with the reader."**

Rob Kovitz's half of *Ice Fishing in Gimli* is more than 1500 pages long at present (volume four will likely be finished within the coming year), consisting entirely of appropriated texts and images.

Given our literate heritage, for any material object that appears to be a book our reflex is to identify the sequence of beginning, middle and end. Each of the present three volumes of *Ice Fishing in Gimli* enhances this reflex with a table of contents naming the seven books of which it is comprised: *house of squid*, *exodus*, *song of the sibyl*, *at the beach*, *far interior*, *lives of the saints*, *all the words you love*. And within each of the seven books are prevailing themes, four at the least, eight at the most.

I have not read *Ice Fishing in Gimli* word for word, but I have read every single image. This seemed to me to be the natural way to begin a relationship with a 186-cubic-inch unique hybrid invention. And I would claim it is no



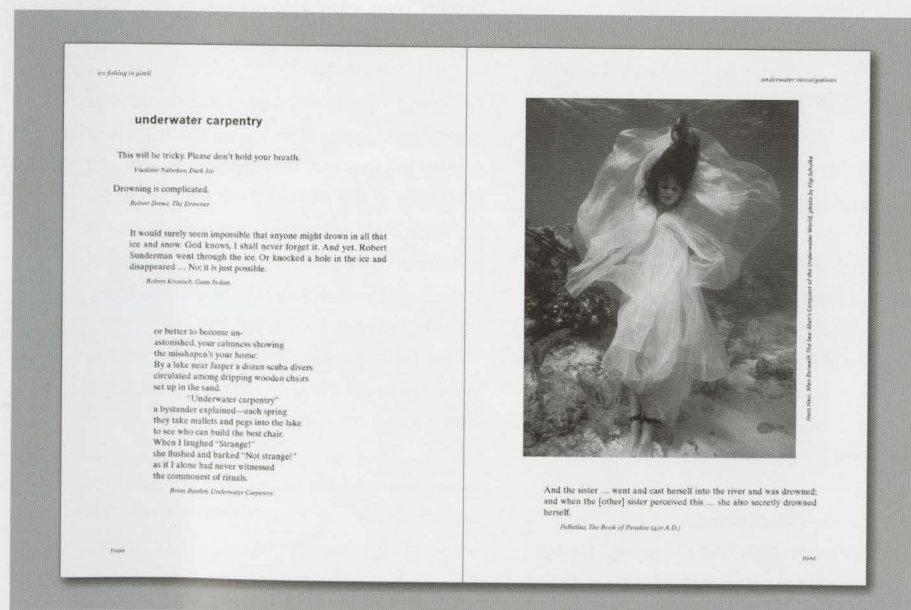


coincidence that one of the volumes provides a quotation mirroring my vacillation between reading words, skimming words, reading images, skimming words, reading images, reading words not always in that order:

(Schopenhauer, Borges remarks, had already written that life and dreams are leaves of the same book: reading them in order is living; skimming through them is dreaming.)

It is uncanny how *Ice Fishing in Gimli* lures a reader into Schopenhauer's metaphor.

Given our literate heritage we are alert as well to recognize the signs that some text and image combinations will free us from strict compliance with Time (first things first, then the middle, the end is last). In this literary project, composed entirely of clippings from other authors' gardens, the in-between spaces become exceedingly fertile ground. Visually, one in-between space looks as vacant as the next; imaginatively, its yield depends on how much concentration one expends upon the clippings at either end. This implicit and explicit design technique dramatizes the value of "the half that is with the reader."



triangulation from point b:

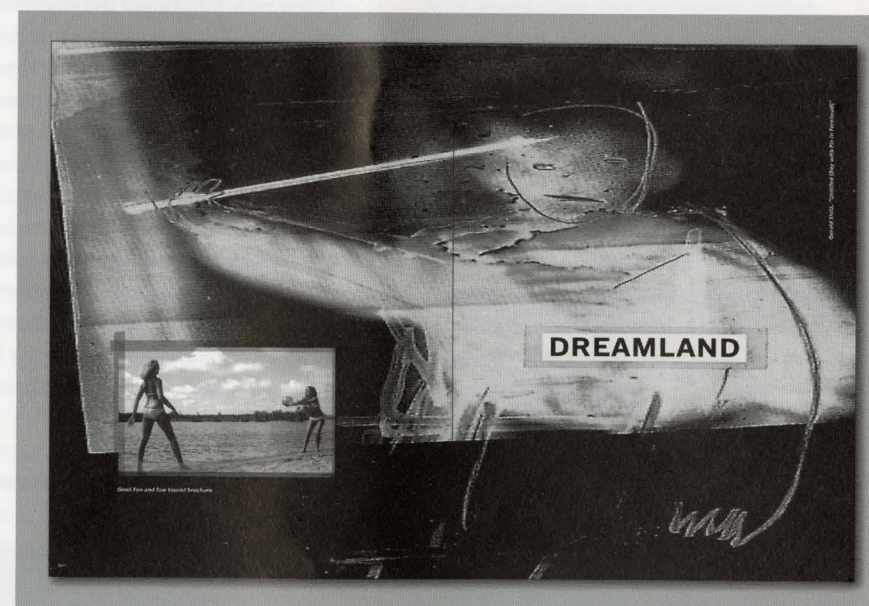
**The squiggle game:** The psychoanalyst would shut his eyes and scribble with a pencil on a piece of drawing paper. Then the child would take the pencil and turn the squiggle into something, saying what it had become.

If any of us were to draw a line, and then draw a circle touching the right end of the line, couldn't this be the primal form of a saga? The line could portend an implied movement; and the circle could designate the relation of that movement to a circumscribed space. Given European literate heritage, we would usually assume that the line led toward the circle rather than away from it.

The judgment call an author or an artist must make about this (or any) squiggle is how much to elaborate upon it. The line and the circle needn't remain nakedly abstract, nor would the author-artist be morally obligated to freeze this squiggle as a literal map with mileage (sic) and emblematic landmarks in proper scale.

The therapeutic value of the squiggle game is in the elaborations. The cultural value of the simplest story (for instance "They travelled to here.") is likewise revealed in the elaborations upon it.

With a marvelous methodology *Ice Fishing in Gimli* elaborates upon ice fishing in Gimli, Manitoba, sustaining a correspondence between the reader reading and Gimli's Icelandic descendants living. This correspondence is vivid because the specificity of ice fishing in Gimli is attached to hundreds of histories and hundreds of literary creations whose imagery it shares. The profusion of imagery is offered, it should be no surprise, as themes of the book: for instance *protasis (fish story)* page 44, *exodus* page 121, *road movie* page 176, *dreamland* page 386, *plans for everybody* page 442, *at the beach* page 563, *handbook of snow* page 608, *the transport* page 718, *society on ice* page 842, *alien architectures* page 910, *dead and cold* page 1250, *lives of the saints* page 1476, *et cetera*. And then, speaking of elaborations, these themes are embellished as well. For instance *volume 2, book four: at the beach*,





# The Revolution Will Be Televised: Stan Douglas' *Hors-champs*

Art Gallery of Ontario, 22 October 2003 – 11 January 2004 (as part of *Soundtracks: Re-play, a citywide, multi-media, multi-gallery exhibition*)  
review by Andrew James Paterson

*Hors-champs* loosely translates as “out of bounds,” “off-side,” or “off the playing field.” More colloquially, it can mean “outside,” “marginal” or “not in the picture.”

Stan Douglas' *Hors-champs* installation presents a performing jazz quartet documented by two video cameras. On one side of the screen, situated on a slight angle in the gallery's centre, is the edited “programme.” On the other side is an assemblage of the programme's outtakes. These documented moments involve the musicians laughing and socializing with each other. According to video scholar and curator Peggy Gale, they “reveal the intimacy of their collaboration, their participation and pleasure in each others music.”<sup>1</sup> Process, whether delightful, stressful or provocative, is routinely edited out of both entertainment and informational television programming.

According to Douglas' notes, *Hors-champs* is a recreation of, or an homage to, a particular mode of performance documentation and broadcasting typical of classic ORTF television (ORTF, or *Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française*, is the French national network). He further cites the production and shooting aesthetic of Jean-Christophe Averty, a prominent television director revered in France as a prolific artist working creatively for the national network.

*Hors-champs* combines Douglas' ongoing interest in jazz and his fascination with the mechanics and languages of various television formats. The quartet performs “free jazz” or “The New Thing,” a movement that was controversial and not necessarily popular in the late 1950s and 1960s. Free jazz was a general moniker or umbrella term loosely referring to

diverse musicians including Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane and Albert Ayler, among others. Free jazz never fit comfortably into what contemporary revisionist critics and scholars call “black classical music.” Rather, this movement occurred relatively off-side, and then either dispersed or became further off the map in the early nineteen seventies, a period musically characterized by jazz-rock fusion and electronically amplified instruments.

Free jazz can be simplistically described as involving committed improvisation outside of conventional harmonic constraints. It is also frequently characterized by sophisticated ensemble playing, sometimes harmonious and sometimes radically dissonant.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, free jazz can accommodate both individualism and collectivism.

Free jazz has been virtually ignored or trivialized by revisionist jazz historians and practitioners such as PBS documentarian Ken Burns and classical trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. This music has frequently been labeled angry, anti-social, militantly political (many of the musicians have never concealed their pan-African politics and values), self-indulgently religious (many musicians similarly made no secret of their faiths) and hyper-aggressively modernist. For many critics and historians, this music is also too closely associated with an essentialistic black nationalism of a specific time and zeitgeist — identity-based nationalisms considered hopelessly dated in this age of globalist capitalism. In

*society on ice* is a concatenation of quotations about rural life as a weather-beaten, violent, incestuous, social nexus of deluded souls holding their land and mores in a death grip. And interspersed with literary imagery, to vivify the symbolism even more, are wry, eloquent pictures and depictions from a plenitude of magazines, artworks, books, films, drawings and photographs.

## triangulation from point c: copyright

*Ice Fishing in Gimli* already belongs to what a romantic psychoanalyst, D.W. Winnicott, called “the common pool of humanity”:

...Every object is a ‘found’ object. Given the chance, we begin to live creatively, and to use actual objects to be creative into and with. If not given this chance then there is no area in which we may have play, or may have cultural experience; then it follows that there is no link with the cultural inheritance, and there will be no contribution to the cultural pool...In using the word culture I am thinking of the inherited tradition. I am thinking of something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, *and from which we may all draw* if we have somewhere [in our psyches] to put what we find.

*Ice Fishing in Gimli* will, however, when formally

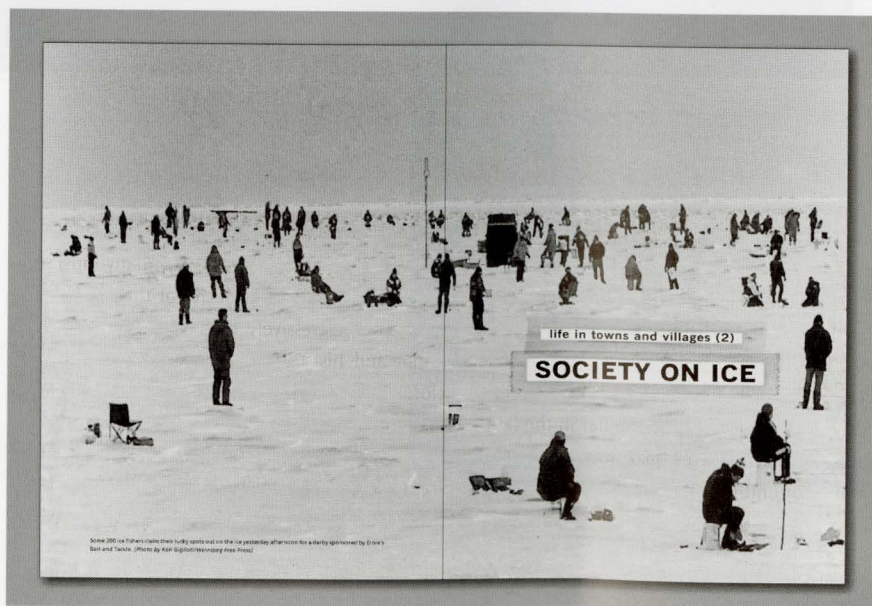
published, emerge from the warm common pool into the cold light of copyright law. This eventuality evokes the shade of ye olde Samuel Johnson, who wrote:

It is a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent of time or place.

Rob has contemplated Johnson's edict with extreme care. If justice is a virtue, then one would hope that it will be nourished by current (and future) copyright law. Among the hundreds of excerpts and images drawn from the cultural pool and prepared for delectation as *Ice Fishing in Gimli* is a “fair use notice.” The notice itself trumpets an ideal of present legalities, (detailed in Title 17 Section 107 us Copyright Law), an exemplar of which would be *Ice Fishing in Gimli* making:

...such [copyrighted] material available in the effort to advance understanding of political, human rights, economic, democracy, scientific, environmental and social justice issues, etc. We believe this constitutes “fair use” of copyrighted material.

I would guess there has never been a poetic work in Canada that has undertaken on such a profound scale the advancement of understanding of political, human rights, economic, democracy, and so on and so on and so on, without a single original sentence from the author.







Stan Douglas, *Hors-champs*, 1992, still from two-channel DVD installation with sound. Photo courtesy: the artist and David Zwirner Gallery, New York, © 2003 Stan Douglas.

the movement's heyday, it was observed by critics and musicians alike that free jazz's audience tended to be (predominantly white) academics and bohemians, and that the music didn't register with black youth.<sup>3</sup> Within the assumed boundaries of popular culture, free jazz is definitely *Hors-champs*, or on the fringe. Jam bands and noise-punkers routinely name-check Coltrane, Coleman, Sun Ra and even Albert Ayler, but the invocation of these musicians' names is here intended to signify a serious authenticity in opposition to pop superficiality. In this digital age, free jazz may seem an analogue anachronism, although astute observers have detected parallels between a jazz musician's synthesis of composition and improvisation and a creative turntablists' blending of rhythm, melody, traditions and futurism into a delirious present tense.<sup>4</sup>

Douglas seeks to counter simplistic dismissals of free jazz, as well as its ghettoization in a very specific historical timeframe and location. *Hors-champs*, shot at Paris' Centre Georges Pompidou in 1992, presents these seriously accomplished musicians as sociable, interactive and televisually friendly. He presents this difficult modernist music as being social, communal and entertaining. Before reading the notes accompanying this installation, I would have situated the performance within a 1960s timeframe and not only because of the drummer's tie-dyed shirt. At first I thought the saxophonist looked like Ornette Coleman, and next I thought that the "musicians" must be actors, miming to a vintage recording.

The musicians are George Lewis on trombone, Douglas Ewart on saxophone, Kent Carter on bass and Oliver Johnson on drums. They are

performing Albert Ayler's *Spirits Rejoice* (1965). It is a four-part composition consisting of a gospel-based melody, relatively brief saxophone and trombone solo-segments, a heraldic fanfare and then *La Marseillaise*, the military melody long deployed as the French national anthem. These four musicians are among the many jazz practitioners and artists working in other disciplines who have relocated, or been forced to relocate, from the United States to France. This particular path of exile has not been unusual among American artists, particularly those of African heritage. There is of course a clichéd truism that leftist French intellectuals have traditionally appreciated American cultural practices that American audiences and politicians just don't comprehend, but that doesn't negate the fact that considerable migration has occurred. It also doesn't negate the fact that *La Marseillaise* is a key movement of *Spirits Rejoice*.

Free jazz was, according to Douglas' notes, quite popular among the 1968 generation; the many radical French students and dissidents who revolted against the American war in Vietnam and who believed in alternate economic and social orders to capitalism. Indeed, the French Communist Party considered the ensemble

interplay of free jazz musicians to be an exemplary social model, as this music, so often denigrated as egocentric and soloist-oriented, is actually all about sophisticated listening and an ability to choose directions collectively.

The fascination with the language of television in *Hors-champs* is shared by several of Douglas' other gallery installations, as well as his public realm interventions. *Evening* (1994), for example, examines the composition and omissions of the six o'clock news. His much acclaimed television spots utilize the semantics of advertising to subvert comfortable viewer expectations — what appears to be just another harmless commercial articulates a biting politic. *Hors-champs* recalls the performative origins of the televisual medium, when it did not feel compelled to edit down or eradicate performance, when "real time" was not strictly confined to reality programming and prime-time talk shows.

*Hors-champs* reminds viewers that the verb associated with the modern invention patented as television is to *televize*, which is synonymous with broadcasting or dissemination. This box need not merely squawk or cater to simplistic assumptions of "the public" and

"public taste." The television — just like a radio with pictures — and in anticipation of other home and public exhibition formats, is an amplifier and transmitter, a conduit for presenting both select and general audiences with a performing art-form that can please both sensually and educationally.

ORTF is a national network, and national of course implies nationalist. The four musicians performing in *Hors-champs* are exiles from their home nation, and the final movement of Ayler's composition is the French national anthem, itself of military origins. Nationalism is an all too frequent cause of war, whether imperialist or revolutionary. But identity, or community-based nationalism is not necessarily synonymous with jingoism, xenophobia or separatism. Pride need not mean prejudice, let alone exclusion. However, national communications systems have been crucial to the building of nation-states and the maintenance of official or hypothetically unified national cultures. In *Hors-champs*, as a performed movement of Ayler's composition, expatriate African-American jazz musicians perform the French national anthem in a celebratory manner, but also in the process undermine the nation-state's pretensions to unity or sameness. Although the noted adoption of free jazz by the French Communist Party and leftist intellectuals might well seem problematic, within *Hors-champs* a transnational fluidity that defies notions of homogenous nation-states and absolute ethnicities is indeed at play. The quartet performing Ayler's original American composition have been at home in Paris for a couple of decades now, implying transcultural identifications. Twenty-seven years after Ayler's original recording, four racially integrated American artists are performing this seminal work from a musical canon, in a production conceived and directed by a black Canadian art star.

If, as Rinaldo Walcott has opined, in Douglas's work "jazz acts as a kind of covert and simultaneously modern 'blackening' of his art in works that appear to be far from the discourses of race,"<sup>5</sup> then *Hors-champs* is arguably as much about what is outside the frame as it is about the discernible contents inside. *Hors-champs*

went into rehearsal on 29 April 1992. Five days later, members of the South Central Los Angeles police force beat the crap out of detained African-American citizen Rodney King, provoking riots that spread well beyond Los Angeles. Thus, it is not only the televising of performing free-jazz musicians that could so easily be mistaken for an event taking place in, say 1967 (the Detroit riots) or 1968 (in many American cities after the assassination of Martin Luther King), or so many similar uprisings. Douglas dedicates *Hors-champs* to the people of South Central Los Angeles.

By effectively collapsing distinctions between present and past tenses, this justifiably renowned video-installation also focuses on immediate and long-term futures. *Hors-champs* might loosely translate as "out of the frame," which should not be confused with out-takes or extraneous footage. While the framed performance televises ecstatic creativity and spirituality, what's happening outside the frame is the same old song and dance.

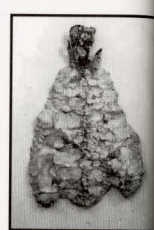
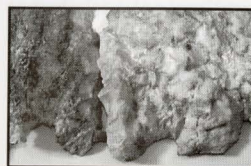
#### Notes:

1. Peggy Gale and Stan Douglas, "Evening and Others," *Video re/View*, eds. Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole and V/Tape, 1996), 363.
2. Ornette Coleman, widely considered to be one of the progenitors of free jazz, has defined the intentions behind his music and those of his contemporaries as "to encourage the improviser to be freer, and not obey" set ideas of "proper" harmony and tonality: "Let's try to play the music and not the background." Coleman quoted by Martin Williams in sleeve notes for *Free Jazz*, Atlantic SD 1364, Atlantic Recording Corporation, 1961.
3. Archie Shepp's album, *Mama Too Tight* (1968), addressed this dilemma by combining largely improvised saxophone soloing with James Brown-like funk rhythms. This recording predates both the early-seventies jazz-rock "fusion" recordings, as well as New York neo-free jazz, post-punk bands like The Contortions and The Lounge Lizards.
4. See tobias c. van Veen, "Fuck Art Let's Dance," *Fuse* (26:4, Nov. 2003), 12-21.
5. Rinaldo Walcott, "Blue Print for Resistance," *Money, Value, Art: State Funding, Free Markets, Big Pictures*, eds. Sally McKay and Andrew J. Paterson (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2001), 205.



# Lucille Robichaud: *Dermis: Repertoire of Skins*

24 October – 12 December 2003  
UNB Art Centre, Fredericton  
review by Roslyn Rosenfeld



There is a concept called the “skin ego,” first suggested by Freud but developed more completely by later analysts, especially Didier Anzieu of France.

Freud theorized that the infant begins to differentiate itself from its surroundings first by experiencing itself as an entity inside the skin. This fragile first ego may suffer trauma as it develops. Lucille Robichaud's work deals with the continuum of trauma — from neglect and abuse in infancy and childhood to political acts of violence and global indifference. Her vehicle, her metaphor, is skin.

Violence surfaces in two vivid memories that frame the artist's sixteen-year exploration of bodily covering. The first dates from 1987 when she was still a painter. Unable to erase memories of bull fights she had seen in Mexico, Robichaud pulled her acrylics beyond the paper support to create skins, stretched hides, that still carried the marks of their violent deaths. That first series was called *Skinned Alive*. When I sought the origins of her current series *The Geeks*, she recalled, as a child of three or four, watching horrified as her father chopped the heads off chickens, which then ran around headless, spouting blood.

*Dermis: Repertoire of Skins* offers three of Robichaud's ongoing investigations into the body's sensitive envelope: *The Geeks* (2002), *Annihabitus* (1999) and *Gadus Morhua* (1998). *The Geeks* was making its first appearance, the other two had been shown in Saint John in 2000, *Annihabitus* in Toronto in 2001. To see her work is an event, but *The Geeks* is undoubtedly her strongest series yet.

The Geeks are a curious lot: 33 headless, sack-like creatures, gangly on their skinny, tree branch legs and scaly chicken feet, with the branches extending above like arms. Their bodies are translucent, skin-like, but empty. Their emptiness may be mere vacuity. Hollow lives. Their scale is disarmingly human. Disposed along one wall, they might be a police line-up, all with their arms in the air, hapless. Or wallflowers, huddling along a wall. But their reflections on the polished floor suggest a kind of dance. What comes to mind is the Dance of Death from Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, and its antecedents in northern Renaissance art. Robichaud's creatures are at

once a bit silly and curiously affecting, even disturbing. The word itself has currency today (“computer geeks” — people with no social skills or without a life outside work) — but there is an older, very particular meaning within the carnival world where a geek was someone (usually high on drugs or alcohol) who bit the head off a live chicken in a freak show. The associations are all uncomfortable.

The nine pieces of *Gadus Morhua* hung on one wall in a row like the salt cod their name suggests. For Robichaud, raised in Acadie, this subject has strong cultural significance. Salt cod was a staple and embodied a way of life. If kept dry it could last for a hundred years. Robichaud's dried cod, unlike the original, will not last that long. Made from unstable natural media (salt, tissue, paint, rice cakes) it is as threatened as the cod stocks themselves. The pieces are studies in texture, with considerable appeal as aesthetic objects. Their grayish or taupe surfaces are granular (salty, I suppose) and beautifully crystalline.

The fifteen fabricated nests of *Annihabitus* were suspended at eye level in one corner of the gallery, and isolated in their own pool of light.

While not about skin as such, these nests function like skin, as enclosing, protective entities necessary to the naked hatchling. While their materials include latex, wax, string, natural fibres and grasses, they are built around a concealed armature of steel wool. These sheltering nests are cruelly abrasive. They look inviting at first, but threaten insidiously. Their dysfunctional nature is their content.

Robichaud's most recent series is her most effective. *The Geeks* uncannily suggests humour and horror, hand in hand. Her early works, *Skinned Alive* and *Altered Epidermis* (both scarred skins or hides) and *Penderies* from 1992 (three-dimensional carcasses, bound and hung from the ceiling) left you feeling bludgeoned. *Gadus Morhua* is serious, but much more detached — perhaps in reaction to the explicitness of the preceding violence. *Annihabitus* and *The Geeks* address her theme in a sophisticated and subversive and, in the end, much more effective way. *The Geeks*, in particular, stays with you.

(This review was originally slated to appear in *Arts Atlantic*. It was offered to *FUSE* when financial difficulties forced them to suspend operations. —eds.)



Facing Page: Lucille Robichaud, details of *Gadus Morhua*, 1998; *Annihabitus*, 1999; and *The Geeks*, 2002. Above: Lucille Robichaud, *The Geeks*, 2002. All images courtesy: Roslyn Rosenfeld.



# A Bad Review for Gary Michael Dault

by Richard William Hill

I remember talking about the issue of historical injustices in John Scott's class at the Ontario College of Art in the late 1980s. John wondered aloud why North Americans had never gone through the process of confronting their colonial history in the way Germans had confronted their Nazi past.

The answer seemed obvious to me. The Germans lost. In North America the bad guys won. They got to have their genocides and ethnocides and write the history to make themselves look like heroes. So we grew up on a steady diet of John Wayne and manifest destiny. Now, as Aboriginal peoples are finally in a position to rewrite these histories, some folks tell us we ought not to bother, because it's all old news and doesn't really matter anymore. How convenient.

Arguments distancing Aboriginal history from contemporary relevance are usually heard in the mouths of right-wing politicians who want to extinguish treaty rights and Aboriginal title, but lately *Globe and Mail* arts writer Gary Michael Dault got into the action. In a January 17 review, Dault blithely dismissed Arthur Renwick's exhibition *Delegates: Chiefs of the Earth and Sky*. According to Dault the work not only fails artistically, it fails to be interesting because it is about Aboriginal history. Really.

Renwick's show took up the question of land, landscape, language and power. It was com-

prised of eleven aluminum panels with photographs of the South Dakota landscape on the bottom and an exposed aluminum "sky" across the top. Each work's title is taken from the name of one of the Aboriginal signatories to the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. In the upper portion of each is a single punctuation mark that has been cut through the aluminum sheet to reveal copper below. The series is about how the us government used language to obscure and deceive rather than to communicate, suggesting that the reality of what occurred is best found in the pauses and silences between statements. These gaps also give us space to think about the land that these leaders knew so well and the many sorts of claims they might have had on it.

Dault perpetuates this tradition of willful misunderstanding, ridiculing the "laborious explanation" in Renwick's artist's statement. He quotes sections of Renwick's text on behalf of "any of you who may be a bit muzzy about what this treaty entails." Then, moving in for the kill, he tells us that the subject of the work is: "All very historically distressing, certainly, but scarcely a situation high on most of our lists of social and political evils to be now fretted over and redressed." Even leaving aside the condescending, smart-ass irony, the statement is remarkable. I've re-read it many times trying to come up with a more charitable interpretation, but in the absence of further explanation I can only take Dault to mean that Aboriginal history itself is uninteresting and an unfit subject for contemporary art. After all, if bad treaties don't matter then what bit of Aboriginal history might? And look at how he puts it: not on "our" list of things that matter? But I suppose Dault's "our" doesn't include us fretful Indians. What does it serve to create an "us" versus "them" dynamic between an Aboriginal artist and the writer's presumed audience in the first place? The critic is in a

position to bridge the gap of cultural difference between artist and audience — one might even say he has an ethical obligation to do so — but Dault prefers to widen it instead.

More to the point, the history of treaties and colonization, as Dault must know, has been an ongoing and serious concern for Aboriginal communities and artists. I'd provide a list of Aboriginal artists who have dealt with similar histories in their work, but I'd have to list virtually every artist I know. Why? Because these histories are still playing out in our lives. Every time there is a Wounded Knee, an Ipperwash or an Oka crisis, every time an Aboriginal kid dies on the street, we are seeing the outcome of the histories Dault would rather ignore. Of course these are white histories as much as they are Aboriginal and should matter to anyone living off the spoils of conquest in the Americas. Unfortunately, it is just this avenue of moral reflection that Dault's glib dismissal willfully avoids.

Aboriginal art in Canada is lodged in a critical purgatory, stuck between critics who can't say a bad thing about Aboriginal artists and those who are quite willing to blast away, but don't have a clue about the issues they address. Dault may be a worst-case example: not only ignorant, but smugly pleased to have the luxury to be so, holding up his ignorance and indifference as a model for his readers. He goes after Renwick's focus on punctuation and the deliberate gaps in language and communication with the same rhetorical strategy, eliciting audience complicity against the artist: "Now I don't know about you, but I think this is just about the silliest idea I've ever seen." Why? Unfortunately, beyond simply describing the work, Dault can't be bothered to make his case. Indeed, he offers flippant pronouncements in lieu of argument throughout the review. Our artists deserve better. And Arthur Renwick deserves an apology.

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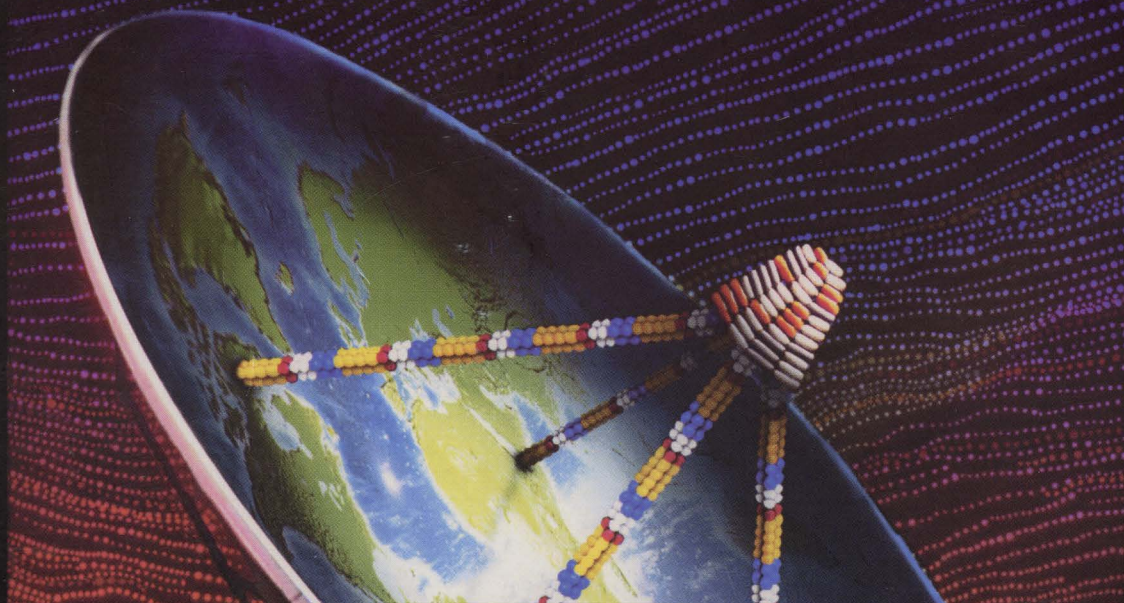
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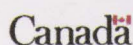
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