

FUSE

MAGAZINE

Queering colonialism:
David McIntosh on the work of
Kent Monkman

Space, citizenship and urban
planning in Montreal as
envisioned by the dAb collective

Florencia Berinstein on the
struggle for history in Argentina



dissenting opinions



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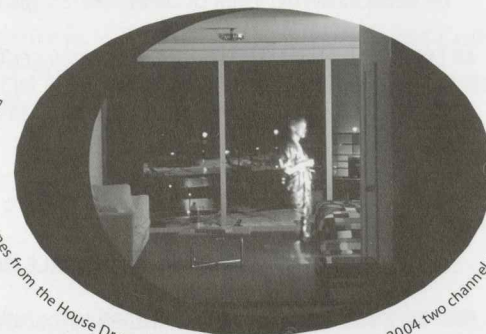
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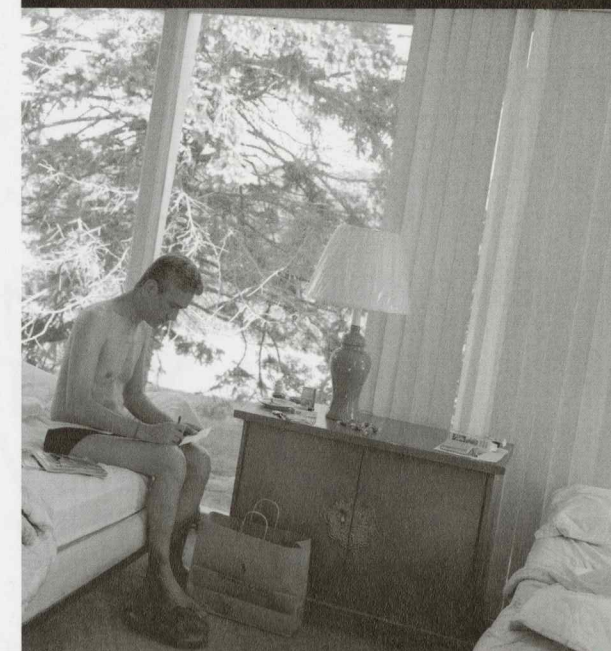
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Short Fuse Artist Project

Cover: Kent Monkman as Miss Chief Share Eagle Testicke.
Photo: Gisèle Gordon, courtesy the artist.

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MAGAZINE

Volume 29 Number 3 July 2006

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Dissenting Opinions: Racial Profiling, National History and Citizenship in Canada

This issue of FUSE continues a series of conversations we have been fostering in the magazine about the politics of identity. Particularly, how the identities of the “other” are created and disseminated in mainstream histories and media and the ways in which these same identities are reclaimed, subverted or resisted. The printing of this issue follows on the heels of a series of disturbing events in Toronto and surrounding area that have been making the national news headlines — the arrest of 17 Muslim men in one of the city’s suburbs on charges of terrorism, the month-long land claim standoff at 6 Nations, the massive crackdown on and arrest of nearly 100 Black individuals in St. Jamestown, the targeting of people who fit particular racial profiles by the enforcement branch of Citizenship and Immigration Canada in public places and the seizure of children in their schools as a tactic for entrapping and deporting their undocumented parents.

These events are not unique to Toronto: there are over 1500 land claims in Canada and reports of targeting from communities of colour, poverty activists, immigrant

and non-status groups across the country. They also cannot be treated as isolated from one another as they reflect on how identity politics play out in Canada — they demonstrate the realities of a white settler state, multiculturalism, immigration and settlement policies, wealth distribution and the tiers and entitlements of citizenship. In the shortFuse, members of the immigration activist group No One Is Illegal speak to the politics of using children to bait undocumented parents into detention centres.

The threads that run through the issue consider how identities are invented and produced by dominant historical and cultural narratives, how they relate to economic and political trajectories, and how these same identities are redefined and re-presented in new and subversive ways. David McIntosh takes up Kent Monkman’s postindian Diva Warrior, examining how colonial artists and writers enacted domination over native peoples through their historic misrepresentation and the manners in which Monkman’s painting, performance and film work re-images and re-enacts contact between white male

colonizers and aboriginal men in North America, transforming history by reading it through sexually explicit, queer terms.

Florencia Berinstein reflects on the transformation of history in “Memoria y Resistencia.” In her report back from last year’s People’s Summit, Berinstein discusses some of the recent activities of Argentina’s growing grassroots political and cultural movement. Documenting the results of the summit, which suggested that Argentina’s economy was slipping from the control of neo-liberalism, she describes the cultural struggles to preserve the stories and landmarks that will tell a people’s history of the dictatorship.

Politics of identity, as it relates to space and citizenship is further taken up as part

of our continuing series on gentrification across Canada. Here, we feature a project by the dAb collective, a response to the 2005 call by Montreal’s Partenariat du Quartier des Spectacles for proposals to provide an urban branding strategy for the city’s central precinct. dAb proposed a critique of branding, along with an urban design strategy that privileges sustainability, the neighbourhood and its inhabitants (many of whom object to the condo model for community planning), and useable public space.

The coming issues will continue to develop these critical discourses, focussing on ethical curatorial practices, art censorship, gentrification in Edmonton and Halifax and war — both at home and overseas.

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Memoria y Resistencia: Dispatch on Cultural Resistance and Reclamation in Argentina

by Florencia Berinstein



Photo: Florencia Berinstein.

In November 2005, the III Peoples' Summit of the Americas took place in Mar del Plata, Argentina, parallel to the Summit of the Americas. The Peoples' Summit, organized by a coalition of unions and community groups, was part of a larger mobilization to oppose and offer alternatives to the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) and encroaching US imperialism. Political posters were everywhere, linking the situation of Argentina to those across the globe. Produced by many social justice and left-wing organizations in the country, some posters were poignant reminders of the havoc that Bush's Iraq war has wreaked on the Iraqi people, while others communicated a simpler message to the summit's most determined proponent of economic liberalization: "W, go home."

Although I attended the summit as a Canadian Union of Public Employees delegate, my interest in Argentina is also deeply personal: it is my country of birth, a country I left with my family in 1982 at the tail end of the military dictatorship that was in power between 1976 – 1983. While I had returned to Argentina in the past, I had never seen such a powerful and organized effort to regain sovereignty, human rights, respect for diversity and universal access to healthcare, education and good working conditions. In Mar del Plata, this culminated in a rally at *Estadio Mundialista* soccer stadium, where president of Venezuela Hugo Chavez argued passionately against the FTAA's opening of Latin American economies up to even greater exploitation by US corporations and proposed the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean (ALBA) as an alternative. ALBA would integrate the economies of Latin America in order to provide a challenge to US economic and political hegemony on the continent.

Across the country, Argentines protested the FTAA with a one-day national general strike. Commerce came to a grinding halt as businesses and banks closed their doors for the day and hundreds of thousands of workers marched in the streets. The countrywide day of action culminated in the burial of the FTAA at the official Summit of the Americas, and, to paraphrase Chavez, we the people were the 'grave diggers.' The official Summit's final declaration mirrored the ALBA plan — calling on a social agenda to take precedence over a corporate one, that trade be utilized as a way to strengthen national economies and for the elimination of poverty and the creation of jobs.

While the results of the summit indicated that Argentina's economy was finally slipping out from under the thumb of neoliberalism, cultural struggles for the preservation of Argentinean history and memory have also been fought and won. Gaining control of the *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA), Argentina's second largest detention centre during the dictatorship, was another major victory for social justice and at the core of an agenda to return Argentina to its people.

From the armed resistance groups *Montenros* and *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* that opposed the dictatorship, to the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, a human rights group comprised of the mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared that formed during the dictatorship, social struggle has informed and continues to drive much of Argentinean life. It is against this backdrop of persistent activism and resistance that the reclamation of ESMA has taken on a central and symbolic role.

Over 5,000 people were murdered and countless children were born in detention



Photo: Florencia Berinstein.

or kidnapped during the years of ESMA's operation, while naval personnel carried out the administrative business of corruption, the production of propaganda and the falsification of documents to appropriate detainees' assets. Originally established in Buenos Aires in 1924 to function as a naval training school in mechanical trades, ESMA is comprised of 35 buildings on 17 hectares of land. Part of the *Casino de Oficiales*, where officers lived, was turned into the detention centre in 1976. Since the return of democracy, ESMA has continued to function as a naval school.

In July 2005, after years of agitation and activism by a broad coalition of human rights groups, cultural workers and artists, a court ruled that all 35 buildings and 17 hectares of land were to be turned over to the people. The navy was ordered to move out so the grounds could be converted and opened to the public as a living memorial to the victims of the dictatorship. Securing the site of ESMA for the people was a monumental achievement in the reclamation of history.

A historian working with the coalition of

human rights groups that reclaimed ESMA toured me around the site and told me of the atrocities that took place there. At the end of the tour she spoke of the strength of the people working towards exposing and telling the story of ESMA — many of whom have family members that disappeared, and a few survivors themselves — who have worked to ensure that the memory and stories of the disappeared will not be forgotten. The coalition of human rights groups that has been at the forefront of the struggle in Argentina has engaged in a process involving community and consultation to arrive at a consensus on every aspect of the site's transformation. This consensus-building process is a way to work across the varying interests and political differences the human rights groups bring to the table and functions to give people a meaningful stake in the transformation of ESMA. It is a way to build momentum and support for a project that is time consuming and arduous, but filled with unlimited potential.

The involvement of artists such as Marcelo Brodsky has been integral to the process from the beginning. (He has recently



Marcelo Brodsky, Buena memoria, 2000. Courtesy: Florencia Berinstein.

edited a book of essays and art works about the meaning of ESMA to Argentina, entitled *Memoria en construcción: el debate sobre la ESMA* (Memory Under Construction: The Debate Over ESMA.) Brodsky has been an active participant in ESMA's reclamation and makes work that examines and documents the effects of the dictatorship on Argentines. He is one of the many artists in Argentina who engages with Argentina's dictatorial past. Brodsky's body of work focuses primarily on the history of disappeared people and the dictatorship's impact on families. As the brother of a dis-

appeared person, these are issues he knows intimately. In *Buena memoria* (Good Memory), Brodsky commemorates the disappearances and assassinations during the dictatorship of his classmates from high school, the *Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires*, Argentina's oldest public high school. The installation consisted of class and individual photographs of those he was commemorating, as well as contemporary portraits of his classmates that are still living, accompanied by text. This work was mounted at the *Colegio Nacional* in order for current students to feel both present

and connected to what happened, making apparent the loss of a generation's hopes, dreams and futures. The installation also consisted of an action action in partnership with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo entitled *Peunte de la memoria* (Memory Bridge), where where the names of the students at the *Colegio Nacional* that had disappeared were read out loud. Brodsky's overall body of work grapples with keeping the memory of what happened in Argentina alive, and provoking debate about its relevance to Argentinean society today.

HIJOS, a human rights group comprised of the children of the disappeared, exiled, politically imprisoned and assassinated, in collaboration with *Grupo de Arte Callejero* (Street Art Group), are known for street actions that denounce ex-military personnel who worked in the detention centres. Many children of the disappeared were kidnapped and "adopted" by military families and other collaborators whom their very parents had fought against. This group stages happenings that involve drumming, street performance and speeches as well as graffiti on the roads and sidewalks, political posters, stenciling and the wide dissemination of information about the person they are denouncing. It is a high-visibility way to show that many of the personnel that gave orders for torture, kidnappings, interrogations and death are currently enjoying their freedom.

At ESMA, when the main buildings were vacated and handed over, paper cut-outs of people were made by artists and community members and affixed to the large iron fence enclosing the perimeter of the

grounds. Signs to alert the public of the buildings' renewed purpose were put up right away. These cut-outs represented the many victims of ESMA, as well as the many surviving relatives and friends who can attest to the significance of the disappeared. These paper figurines were part of a ceremony/rally that was held in the front of ESMA when the initial handover occurred. The cut-outs and accompanying banner naming the museum *Espacio para la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos* (Space for Memory and Human Rights) imbue the space with a sense of humanity that it has never had and in many ways alter the terror ESMA has symbolized for so many years. These are good indicators that secure footing is being put into place to continue the work of reclaiming and remembering the horrors of Argentina's recent past and its contemporary connections, drawing and building on what came before. Ultimately Argentina is in a very hopeful moment in its history as the work of activism, reclamation, progressive economics and cultural resistance intersect to empower people to regain control of their country.



Photo: Florencia Berinstein.

Florencia Berinstein is a visual artist based in Toronto. She is also currently the festival coordinator of the Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts and a member of CUPE Local 1281.



Photo: Florencia Berinstein.



Kent Monkman, Still from *Group of Seven Inches*, 2005.
Photo: Jody Shapiro, courtesy: the artist.

Kent Monkman's Postindian Diva Warrior: From Simulacral Historian to Embodied Liberator

by David McIntosh

The teller of stories is an artist who relumes the diverse memories of the visual past into the expressions and metaphors of the present.

Gerald Vizenor¹

Over the last few years, Kent Monkman, a Toronto-based artist of Cree ancestry, has undergone a series of personal and artistic transformations that have merged and emerged in an ever-expanding body of work that engages history, desire, identity and freedom. From his reworking of iconic Hudson School and Group of Seven landscape paintings, newly populated with porno-kitsch “cowboy-and-indian” couplings, to his incarnation as Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle, an extreme-rez makeover of the artist as pop diva Cher, Monkman surfs our collective cultural pasts, repeating, inverting, queering and reluming them. At first glance, Monkman might appear only as a highly accomplished mimic of bygone painterly and personal styles, as a fashionista of everything faux in the most vulgar sense of post-modern pastiche, parody and pun. And that he is. But mimicry is simply the fragile, familiar surface of Monkman's work. While he assumes the position of master in the colonial gaze, asserting his postindian diva warrior self as a determining presence, he exceeds simple role-reversal and simulation by constructing eloquently disjunctive palimpsests that break open to reveal new seams of meaning. Monkman's uncanny eruptions inevitably exceed themselves, releasing a

flood of postindian histories and becomings to pour out of the simulacral carcass, proliferating out like waves on a troubled pond.

Monkman's recent art works activate extended webs of meaning, each work standing as a vibrating intersection point that oscillates between illusion and reality, between the artificiality of virtual simulations and the actuality of embodied desires. Presenting a seductive surface, Monkman proceeds to reveal its underlying mechanics by reaching deep inside history to rearrange its genetic code and retroprojecting his postindian warrior self to alter the balance between actuality and virtuality in the past. Monkman operates as a historian of the simulacral, constructing a narrative of liberation that invokes past simulations of colonial dominance while exceeding historical factitiousness. As “androgynous, comic healer and liberator,”² Monkman's postindian diva warrior is a mutable, recombinant, distributed self, embodied in an expanding and constantly shifting network of artifacts — from pillows, puzzles, performances and paintings, to book works and films. This text is an associatively intertextual and transtemporal project that begins to trace the paths of Monkman's multiform

transformative and proliferative becomings, as well as the complex extended network of simulated histories, narratives and images that his work simultaneously mimes and mines.

Superior: The Rise of the Artist as Postindian Warrior

I set out with the determination of reaching, ultimately, every tribe of Indians on the Continent of North America, and of bringing home faithful portraits of their principal personages...Armed, equipped, and supplied, I started out and penetrated the vast and pathless wilds which are the great "Far West," to devote myself to describing the living manners, customs, and character of a people who were rapidly passing away from the face of the earth — a dying nation who had no historians or biographers of their own.

—George Catlin¹

The simulation of the *indian* is the absence of real natives — the contrivance of the other in the course of dominance. Truly, natives are the storiers

of an imagic presence, and *indians* are the actual absence — the simulations of the tragic primitive...The postindian absolves by irony the nominal simulations of the *indian*, waives centuries of translation and dominance, and resumes the ontic significance of native modernity. Postindians are the new storiers of conversions and survivance; the tricky observance of native stories in the associated context of postmodernity.

—Gerald Vizenor²

The evolutionary historicism of George Catlin's nineteenth-century colonial gaze, designed to dominate and exterminate through simulated textual and image misrepresentations served up as factual documentation, along with Gerald Vizenor's theorization of present-day postindian storiers of survivance, offer a conceptual frame for approaching Monkman's transformative personal and artistic trajectory. *Superior* (2001) is perhaps the most eloquent articulation of Monkman's nascent postindian warrior. A direct quotation of Lawren Harris' iconic and endlessly reproduced *North Shore, Lake Superior* (1926), this work displays

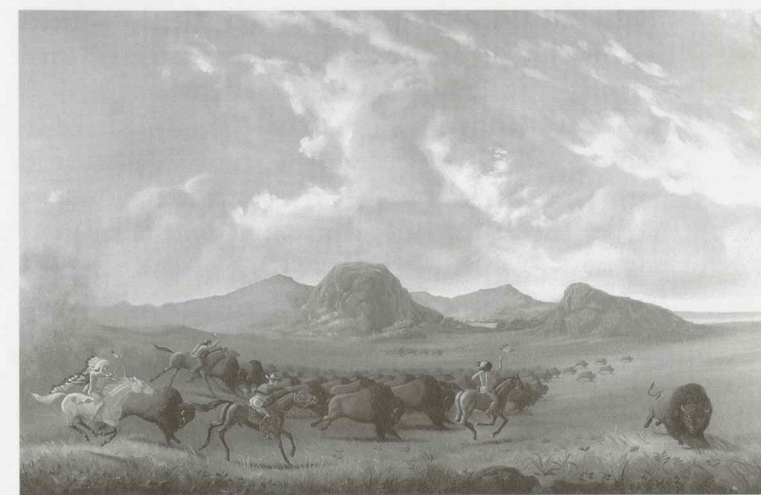


Kent Monkman, *Superior*, 2001. Courtesy: the artist.

Monkman's now-characteristic layering of simulated histories and mimetic image presences in uncannily disjunctive palimpsests. Harris's quoted image initially dominates Monkman's painting, demanding its due as a condensed cipher of both Canadian art and nature. A single dead and decaying tree trunk rises proudly above the rocky landscape, asserting the spirit of nature and the endless cycle of life, as a radiant sun strokes the phallic tree. But Harris' work cannot be brought into sharp focus — the crystal clarity of his original vitalist work is obscured by a scrim of text and the human figures that resolve into an image of two men fucking doggy-style at the base of the tree. Peering through the overlay of lettering, a copper-coloured man wearing nothing but a feathered headdress mounts a bluish-coloured man wearing nothing but a Stetson, hanging onto the enormous tree stump for support. As the shock of the collision between Harris and the "cowboy-and-indian" porn subsides, the lettered overlay begins to resolve into words — "swallowed," "tribal secret," "crotch hair" — and then into an entire text:

His dick moved freely throughout my wet mouth, pushing back as far as possible, then withdrawing. Licking its tip really turned me on. This was exciting. I liked this. I got erect. His prick suddenly became extra hard, his warm cum filling my mouth. I tongued it together and swallowed, receiving a feeling of fulfillment. I rose to my feet. We embraced again. The feathered headband was placed on my head. "You are now man tribal member and Indian blood brother. I name you coyote..." "I'll show my headband to everyone at school. And in the gym shower, display my crotch hair shaped to an arrowhead. My initiation will remain a tribal secret."

The painted letters of the porn text overlay are vaguely camouflaged as part of the landscape, but turn bright red over the warrior's body, then turn blue as they scroll over the cowboy's body. As the competing layers of the painting interact and coalesce into meaning, the work opens up into a realm beyond repetition. As



Kent Monkman, *Portrait of the Artist as Hunter*, 2002. Courtesy: the artist.

Zizek describes it: "What repetition repeats is not the way the past 'effectively was' but the virtuality inherent to the past and betrayed by its past actualization. In this precise sense, the emergence of the new changes the past itself..."³

The shimmering waves of histories and narratives that proliferate out around this queer postindian warrior work are provocative and entangled. The fact that Monkman has chosen Harris to quote and relume opens up an enormous network of people, events and imaginings that can only begin to be traced and unpacked here. Harris's obsession with Theosophy, an anti-materialist, esoteric and occultist evolutionary concept of the universe as "an immense sea of vibrations and insubstantial forces,"⁴ where mind mattered more than body and the North was a "source of Spiritual flow,"⁵ eventually lead him to abandon his renderings of uninhabited land as he "evolved" into painting pure abstractions and mathematical equations. This concern with purity was echoed in the work of his contemporary and colleague Duncan Campbell Scott, a Confederation poet and commissioner of the Department of Indian Affairs from the late 1880s through to his retirement in 1932. Widely regarded as a primary force behind racial purification through the

Treaty removal of First Nations from traditional lands and the brutal assimilation of Christian residential schools, Scott traveled extensively in the same lands as Harris, rendering in words what Harris rendered in paints. Scott's racist view is eminently visible in such poems as *The Half-Breed Girl* (1906) and *The Onondaga Madonna* (1898), the latter containing some of his most notorious rhymes:

She stands full-throated and with careless pose,
This woman of a weird and waning race,
The tragic savage lurking in her face,
Where all her pagan passion burns and glows;
Her blood is mingled with her ancient foes,
And thrills with war and wildness in her veins;
Her rebel lips are dabbled with the stains
Of feuds and forays and her father's woes.

And closer in the shawl about her breast,
The latest promise of her nation's doom,
Paler than she her baby clings and lies,
The primal warrior gleaming from his eyes;
He sulks, and burdened with his infant gloom,
He draws his heavy brows and will not rest.

Rounding out this group of simulators of the "tragic primitive"⁸ was Edmund Morris, a Toronto artist first contracted by the Ontario government to document D.C. Scott's Treaty signings by painting portraits of the First Nations leaders who took part. Drowned in the St. Lawrence River at Ile d'Orleans in 1913, Morris left the many First Nations artifacts he collected between 1907 and 1911 to the Royal Ontario Museum. Morris's "tragic archive"⁹ is now on display, embedded in a thick layer of institutional resimulations of the past in the recently opened First Peoples gallery at the ROM. Excerpts from his diary are also displayed as part of this collection, as the simulacral interpretive history of the collector that replays the simultaneous production and disappearance of the subjects of his portraits. Strangle Wolf, who Morris describes as "gorgeous in buckskin and beadwork," gave Morris his buckskins in exchange for being painted, but his portrait is nowhere to be seen

in the ROM exhibit, just his buckskins. Echoing George Catlin's racist and melancholy memorializing of the First Nations people he wrote and painted out of Manifest Destiny's history, Lawren Harris praised Morris, suggesting that, "in years to come, the western work of Morris will stand for much in our memories of the vanished red man."¹⁰

The emergence of the postindian warrior as queer in *Superior* provokes another tangle of history and narratives that resonate with centuries-old accounts of European conquest, where simulated generalizations of homosexual activity underpinned hatred for and repression of all aboriginal peoples. As Hernán Cortés reports in accounts of his exploits in Mexico in 1519: "In addition to children and men and women being killed and offered in sacrifice, we have learned and have been informed that they are doubtless all sodomites and engage in that abominable sin. Punishment might serve as a further occasion of warning and dread to those who still rebel, and thus dissuade them from such great evils as those which they work in the service of the devil."¹¹ In *Sex and Conquest*, a detailed unpacking of European accounts of sexualities and genders encountered in the 16th century in the Americas, historian Richard Trexler confirms that his work to recuperate sexual differences is entirely dependent on racist, exterminatory simulations of the *indian* that vary only slightly in vituperative detail according to the motivations of the source, from priest as saviour, to bureaucrat as collaborator.¹² The actuality of past sexualities that Trexler attempts to decode from biased accounts is mimetically restaged by Monkman and produced as new meaning that reshapes this past in *Superior*. The strategic hemispheric hatred and punishment of homosexuality that was implanted in the Americas in the 1500s flourished until the 1950s, when a range of liberatory practices began to undermine that deeply sedimented simulated history. This period of change offers yet another crucial layer of meaning just beneath the surface of *Superior*, Richard Amory's literary simulation of the *indian* in the wildly popular 1966 novel *The Song of the Loon*, which Monkman recalls mimetically in both

the image of the "cowboy-and-indian" fucking and the text overlay. A short quote from *The Song of the Loon* underscores this transhistorical resonance:

Singing Heron's vibrant, pulsating cock rose straight from his crotch, Ephraim stared in wonder at its dark strength, at the testicles hanging loosely between strong thighs. He leaned over and touched the head of the Indian's cock with his tongue; it glistened in the sunlight, smooth as a flower petal, soft on his lips. Singing Heron thrust gently upward; his belly hair touched Ephraim's lips... He burst with overpowering urgency, quivering tensely, in aching gasps. They lay embraced in the sun until the shadows of the Douglas Firs fell across their brown and white interlocking bodies.¹³

Amory, whose real name was Richard Love, wrote the first positive post-Stonewall gay pulp novel of explicit man-to-man love. A utopian tale of the sexual healing of the Brotherhood of the Loon set in the Pacific Northwest, *The Song of the Loon* announces itself as a self-aware simulation; as stated in the preface, Amory "wishes it clearly understood that he has, unfortunately, never known or heard of a single Indian even remotely resembling, for instance, Singing Heron or Bear-who-dreams. He has taken certain very European characters from the novels of Jorge De Montemayor and Gaspar Gil Polo, painted them a gay aesthetic red, and transplanted them to the American wilderness." Despite similarities between Amory and Monkman's mimetic processes and liberatory intents, the queer postindian warrior that emerges in *Superior* teases out the simulated absences in Amory's porn and recombines historical tropes and narrative patterns to assert a new actual presence that reconfigures pleasure, representation and power. In *Superior* and related works of the period, Monkman's artistic and personal transformation activated an emergent postindian queer warrior self who exists in the seams of temporal disruptions and imagic disjunctions, and who mimes the simulacral ruins of the past to create liberatory "pictomyths without closure"¹⁴ that reconfigure both past and present.

Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle: Becoming Postindian Diva Warrior

History amounts only to the set of preconditions that one leaves behind in order to "become," that is, to create something new.

—Gilles Deleuze¹⁵

The transformative, liberatory project of the queer postindian warrior that Monkman launched in 2001 in works like *Superior* developed in different directions in subsequent works where the artist stepped into the frame. Monkman embodied the warrior, and in so doing remade him. He clarified his vision of the queer postindian warrior in a series of paintings produced in 2001 and 2002, where the "cowboy-and-indian" couplings of earlier works were transposed, with minor variations, into carefully quoted works of nineteenth century painters George Catlin and Paul Kane. Works like *Heaven and Earth* (2001),¹⁶ *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (2001) and *Cree Master* (2001) repeat the motif of white cowboy buttocks spread for the queer postindian warrior to mount, this time under the roiling cloudy skies of Paul Kane's romantic landscapes. Once again inserting his own imagined evidence of the past into art works that falsely claimed factuality, Monkman reaches deeper into the palimpsest play of representational histories, into the dusty image core of the tropes of power. The queer postindian warrior project reached a peak with *Fort Edmonton* (2003), a quotation of the eponymous work by Paul Kane that reframes the original by stepping back to give it an extended foreground where Monkman's simulated ironic narrative of sexual domination is staged. *Fort Edmonton* is visible on the misty horizon, while the foreground is a magical, erection-inducing clearing in the woods. In the lower left foreground, a wild pinto stallion mounts a saddled and bridled stallion, pulling the reins of the bottom horse tight in its teeth. In the lower right foreground, the queer postindian warrior pulls tight on the ropes that hold a half naked and entirely erect white man's arms behind his back. In the centre foreground, rocks carved with petroglyphs of prehistoric homosexual fellatio complete



Kent Monkman as Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle, 2005. Photo: Tony Charnock, courtesy: the artist.

Monkman's simulated transtemporal narrative of queer postindian warrior domination.

In 2002, a dramatic shift in Monkman's transformative project appears as he begins to reshape the relationship between actual being and virtual becoming. He continues time-shifting, retroprojecting his contemporary image constructs into simulacral histories, but he also begins to shape-shift or, perhaps more accurately, gender-shift. His revisioning and retrofitting of history assumes subjective agency by invoking simulacral histories, then invading, inhabiting and embodying them fully. The signal of this dramatic personal and artistic transformation is the appearance of the artist in his paintings, and the presentation of self as Miss Chief

Share Eagle Testickle. Miss Chief is in many ways the queer postindian warrior's double, a repetition of the copper-coloured warrior in *Superior*, with the same square jaw, the same muscled chest and the same enormous genitalia. However, Miss Chief is not "gorgeous in buckskin and beadwork," but gorgeous in a Bob Mackie-inspired floor-length feathered headdress, 12 inch platform moccasins and a flowing diaphanous breechcloth. In *Portrait of the Artist as Hunter* (2002), Miss Chief rides a white stallion bareback in a buffalo hunt, bow poised to shoot an arrow into the naked buttocks of the cowboy on horseback just in front of her. A delicious repetition of Paul Kane's *Half-Breeds Running Buffalo*, *Portrait of the Artist as Hunter* cuts across simulated histories and the subject/object differences that construct the colonial gaze's

fetish facticity by displaying the artist — in this case, Miss Chief and Paul Kane — as subjective hunters that are always already constructed in the frame.

Miss Chief continues her denunciations of linear temporal succession and unitary subjectivity in *Artist and Model* (2003), where the simulacral stakes grew even higher. Quoting himself quoting Paul Kane, Monkman repeats the background landscape and foreground clearing of his version of *Fort Edmonton*, reversed from left to right.¹⁷ The simulacral visual narrative in *Artist and Model* appears simpler than that of *Fort Edmonton* at first, given there are only two figures in the foreground. But the two figures in *Artist and Model* are supercharged presences that constitute perhaps the most disjunctive and excessive repetition and retroprojection in Monkman's work to date. The artist is of course Monkman as Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle, posed in the lower right foreground with her back to the viewer. Standing in front of a tipi-style artist's easel, bow and arrow in one hand and brush in the other, she paints a glyph of her

model on a piece of birch bark. Her model is the cowboy, naked except for Stetson and boots, tied to a tree, pierced by arrows but erect in sublime pain. At the cowboy's feet, a view camera lies toppled on the ground, hacked into with a hatchet.

In addition to miming and inverting the fetish mechanics of the colonial gaze as metaphor for the hunt, this new "pictomyth" pulses explosively with the simulacral historical traces that transect and sustain it. Monkman's repetition of Paul Kane's romantic landscapes to the point of banality underscores Kane's continued domination of simulacral histories of the "tragic primitive" in Canada. Even the new First Peoples Gallery at the ROM has been organized around a central passage, painted a colorectal pink, that has been covered with Paul Kane paintings and pages from his diaries.¹⁸ Included in the ROM display is *Medicine Mask Dance* (1848–1856), one of Kane's most reproduced paintings, which is an acknowledged work of fantasy and a mimetic quotation of Catlin's *Dance to the Berdash*, which is in turn the



Kent Monkman, *Artist and Model*, 2003. Courtesy: the artist.



Kent Monkman, *Fort Edmonton*, 2003. Courtesy: the artist.

only image of sexual and gender difference produced by the colonial gaze that Kane then elided in his version. Kane's diaries are equally simulacral, having most likely been written by someone else. *Artist and Model* also reactivates a range of simulated histories of sexual and gender difference, perhaps most obviously, the martyrdom of the cowboy model cast as the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, the most notoriously kitsch icon of closeted, sadomasochistic, homoerotic ecstasy. Not surprisingly, the widely accepted representation of the lithe Christian convert Sebastian's death by arrows for refusing the advances of the lecherous pagan Emperor Diocletian is a simulation. Surviving the arrows and continuing to proselytize, Sebastian actually came to a much less elegant end; he was clubbed to death and his body dumped

in a Roman sewer. Monkman's incarnation as Miss Chief further invokes the 16th century Spanish conquest strategy of gendering male enemies as female, as well as the words of Bernardo de Sahagun, a key chronicler of the conquest: "He shows himself womanly and effeminate in everything, in walking or in talking. For all of this he deserves to be burned."¹⁹ That murderous sentiment was echoed in accounts of first Spanish contact with Native drag in 1513 when "in his trek across Panama, Balboa found the brother of the cacique of Quaraca and some of his men dressed as women and practicing sodomy. The conquistador quickly threw some forty of these transvestites to the dogs, the first record of Spanish punishment of sodomy on the American continent."²⁰

Artist and Model clearly belies Catlin's willfully erroneous claim that First Nations "had no historians or biographers of their own," (p. 89) but it also revisits Catlin's refusal to portray gender differences and his strategic deployment of the magic of representation to dominate. In his diaries, Catlin acknowledges having encountered a range of First Nations men who exceeded gender codes:

Indian beaux or dandies may be seen on every pleasant day, strutting and parading around the village in the most beautiful and unsoiled dresses... They are called "faint hearts" or "old women" by the whole tribe, and... acquire celebrity among the women and children for the beauty and elegance of their personal appearance, although they are looked upon as drones in society. These gay bucks may be seen astride of their pied or dappled ponies, with a fan in the right hand, made of a turkey's tail, with whip and a fly-brush attached to the wrist of the same hand... The fops stand about my door from day to day in their best dresses and best attitudes, as if in hopes I will select them as models. (p.159)

However, despite his stated commitment to "bringing home faithful portraits of their principal personages" (p.89) and despite his obvious fascination with these "gay bucks," Catlin never once selected them as his models. This fetish absence that Catlin constructs in his diaries is fully articulated and the fetish roles inverted in Monkman's *Artist and Model*. In staging the becoming of Monkman the artist as Miss Chief the artist as the invert of Catlin the artist, this painting asserts a mutable, recombinant, collective self that transcends simple doubled subject/object relations and assumes control of the representational magic that emerges from the oscillation between the artificiality of virtual simulations and the actuality of embodied power. Both Catlin and the people he was painting were well aware of this oscillatory representational magic, as evidenced once again in his diaries:

These people are astonished by the operations of my brush. The art of portrait-painting was a subject entirely new to them, and of course unthought of. My appearance here has commenced a new era in medicine or mystery... They pronounced me the greatest medicine-man in the world. They said I had made living beings. They said they could see their chiefs alive, in two places... The squaws generally agreed they had discovered life enough in my pictures to render my medicine too great for the Mandans. They said such an operation could not be performed without taking away from the original something of his existence... They commenced a mournful and doleful chant against me, crying and weeping bitterly through the village, proclaiming me a most dangerous man, one who could make living persons by looking at them, and at the same time could, as a matter of course, destroy life in the same way, if I chose. (p.157)

Given Catlin's preeminent role in extending and asserting colonial domination through his racist simulations of the tragic primitive, of a "simple race of beings... whose term of national existence is nearly expired," (p.89) the women, the gendered enemy, quite rightly perceived his destructive intent. Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle extends her multiform, networked self further into Catlin's web of representational magic, occupying and displacing him in her 2005 bookwork *The Moral Landscape: Hunting Scenes and Other Amusements of the Great Wild West*, where Monkman retro-projects his emergent postindian diva warrior self into the nineteenth century to undermine and reconfigure the simulacral history of dominance through representational sleight of hand:

On my return to North America from the continent of Europe, where I passed considerable time in studying the customs and manners of the European male in his native habitat, I determined to devote whatever talents and proficiency I possessed to the painting of a series of pictures illustrative of the North American White Male and scenery. The sub-

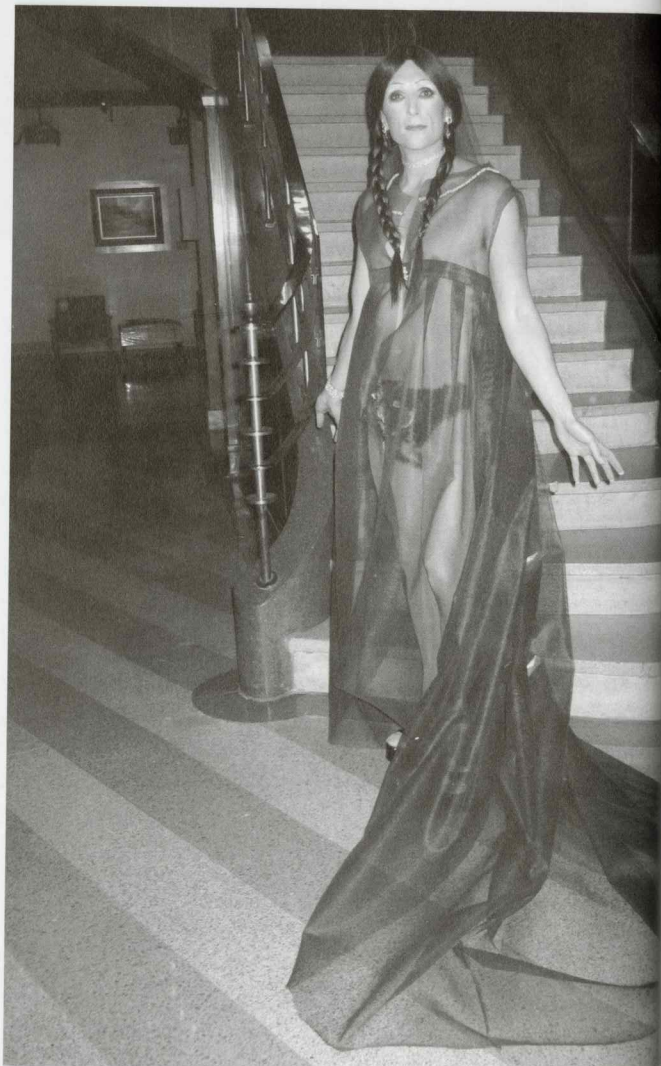
ject was one in which I felt a deep interest since boyhood, having become intimately familiar in my native land with the hundreds of trappers, coureurs du bois, priests and farmers who were representative of the noblest races of Europe. But alas, the face of the white man is changing, all traces of his former self is being altered through contact with the red man. It has become my undertaking to record all manner of his customs and practices as I trust these pictures will possess not only an interest for the curious, but also an intrinsic value to the historian. (preface)

Subtitled "Wanderings of a two-spirited Cree half-breed artist among the white men of North America, from the Kentucky Valley to the Western Plains and the Rocky Mountains," this bookwork deploys the mimetic power of doubled representation to assert the postindian diva warrior as alive and occupying multiple times, spaces and bodies simultaneously.

In April 2005, Monkman staged a performance at the Drake Hotel, curated by Robert Houle, in which he completed the virtual process of becoming to assume the paradoxically simulacral embodied reality of Miss Chief. Existing to that point as the artist's other, as a constructed cipher that stood in for the artist in his self-referential paintings, Miss Chief's Drake performance allowed her to exit pure representation to occupy the same space, time and body as Monkman. Billed as a series of *tableaux vivants* featuring Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle, the performance actually played out more like the current hit reality TV show *Project Runway*. From a carefully guarded dressing room on the second floor of the hotel, Miss Chief emerged with considerable fanfare, descending the staircase into the Drake's main dining room to model a series of simulacral fashion creations. Of the four outfits modeled by the artist, two merited special attention. The Warrior Princess gown, designed by Monkman, consisted of a floor-length sheath skirt in grey and black camouflage, slit to the hip and topped with a scarlet-sequined stretch tank emblazoned with the Mohawk Warrior

flag. The outfit was accessorized with heavy duty shit-kicking boots and mirrored aviator sunglasses. Monkman's Warrior Princess simultaneously recalls Xena, lesbian pop culture icon of the 1990s, and the 1990 Oka Crisis, when the people of Kanesatake fought the governments of Oka, Quebec and Canada to protect their traditional lands.

Miss Tippy Canoe, the other noteworthy simulacral fashion creation in the performance, also invoked a key battle between colonial powers and First Nations. Designed by artists Bonnie Devine and Paul Gardner, Miss Tippy Canoe's gown was in fact a wedding dress, constructed from dun-coloured bug screen embroidered with tiny wooden canoes, then mounded into poofy headdress and bustle. The allure of this gown was sealed by a fur jockstrap, fashioned from deceased Globe and Mail film and art critic Jay Scott's coonskin



Kent Monkman as Miss Tippy Canoe, performance at Drake Hotel, 2005. Photo: Lisa Klapstock, courtesy: the artist.

cap. Miss Tippy is a paradoxical embodied simulation that relumes the 1811 Battle of Tippecanoe, so-called as it took place at the confluence of the Wabash and Tippecanoe Rivers in present-day Indiana. In this battle, US General William Henry Harrison, charged with securing and governing the newly acquired Indiana territories, defeated Tecumseh, who was building a First Nations confederation on the basis of Joseph Brant's concept that the land was owned in common by all First Nations and ownership couldn't be transferred without agreement by all.²¹

Miss Chief and Monkman merged into one magically paradoxical virtual and actual self in the Drake fashion *tableaux*. As they continue to develop their distributed, recombinant self into an extended network of proliferating postindian diva warrior incarnations that shift time, space and body, their personal, artistic and liberatory transformations will undoubtedly continue and their genetic re-engineering of simulacral histories of dominance will surely extend out into exciting new fields. Already, the transformations in Monkman's postindian project over the past five years have been dramatic. The postindian warrior has shifted from queer to diva, from vaguely perceived to flamboyant, from pictomyth to performance, from a dualist vision of artist and model to a singular but paradoxical embodiment of the simulacral. In so doing, Monkman's postindian diva warrior has revealed herself as a crucial artist-storier of our time whose revisions of memory and re-embodiments of simulated absences transform both historical being and new becomings.

Notes

1. Gerald Vizenor. *The People Named the Chippewa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.113.
2. Vizenor. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) p.89.
3. George Catlin. *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians In Two Volumes* (London: Author, 1841) p.89.
4. *Manifest Manners*, p.2.
5. Slavoj Žižek. *Organs without Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.12.
6. Erik Davis. *Techgnosis* (New York: Three River Press, 1998), p. 50.

7. Roald Nasgaard. *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting in Northern Europe and North America 1890-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1984), p.167.
8. *Manifest Manners*, p. 1.
9. *ibid.*, p. 2.
10. Margaret McBurney. "Looking Back," *The Newsletter of The Arts and Letters Club of Toronto* 65:3 (March 2006), p. 3.
11. Hernán Cortés. *Cartas y documentos* (Mexico City: 1963), p.25.
12. Richard Trexler. *Sex and conquest: gendered violence, political order, and the European conquest of the Americas* (London: Polity Press, 1995), p. 3.
13. Richard Amory. *The Song of the Loon* (San Diego: Greenleaf Classics, 1966), p.14.
14. *Manifest Manners*, p.100.
15. Gilles Deleuze. *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p.170.
16. This Monkman work is a quotation of Paul Kane's *Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo* (c. 1851-1856), a work that in turn borrowed heavily from European romantic renderings of landscape and quoted the composition of an 1816 Italian engraving depicting two Romans hunting a bull.
17. Monkman also quotes himself quoting Kane in *Pilgrim's Progress* (2003), where the stallions are replaced by a dappled fawn, and the queer postindian warrior and the tied-up cowboy are replaced by a leering, erect queer postindian warrior pushing an arrow into the fleshy pink stomach of a half naked and erect altar boy.
18. Acclaimed Anishinaabe artist and curator Robert Houle's reaction to the Kane presence in the First Peoples Gallery was unequivocal and prominently quoted in Sarah Milroy's 21 January 2006 *Globe and Mail* review of the new gallery: "What's a dead white guy doing in the middle of our gallery?"
19. Bernardino de Sahagún. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva Espana* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1956), p.170.
20. Trexler, p.82.
21. Harrison's victory over Tecumseh became part of his successful 1840 presidential election campaign, in the form of the slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too," a phrase that is most commonly used to name pairs of house cats. The "Tyler" portion of the slogan referred to Harrison's younger, more handsome runningmate who became U.S. President when Harrison died in office in 1841 after serving for only thirty days.

This text is excerpted from an extended critical analysis of Monkman's body of work, including his recent film and video works. Many thanks to Kent Monkman, Miss Chief, Robert Houle, Paul Gardner, Dustin Peters and Noam Gonick for their generous assistance in the development of this article.

David McIntosh is Associate Professor of Media Studies at the Ontario College of Art and Design. His critical writing has been published in a range of Canadian and international books, magazines and journals. He has curated film, video and digital media exhibitions for galleries and museums in Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Cuba and France, and has been a programmer for the Hot Docs Documentary Festival for the past 6 years. He produced the award-winning documentary *Tina* in Mexico and co-wrote the dramatic feature film *Stryker* in 2004.



creation of an urban identity. Branding connects consumer culture to raging capitalism, a global economy that in North America leads to incoherent urbanism and banal architecture. How can the slow tempo of long duration, that of architecture and urbanism, influence the rapid cycles of advertising and capital accumulation?

While the neighbourhood undergoes extremes of spectacle, population flow, culture and temperature, its urbanism must connect permanent and temporary daily living. Neighbourhood residents include small shopkeepers, homeless youth, suburban teens, a symphony conductor, civic employees and musicians. For this reason, we must avoid sterile profiles and offer an intense diversity to correspond to this pivotal place.

The approach thus privileges recognizing the full range of occupants of the area, beautiful and ugly. The dAb collective proposes a three-pronged approach, adding the importance of an approach to urban form that is sensitive to urban acoustics, to the urgent themes of the environment and the questions of an urbanism that is sustainable from both a social and ecological perspective.

Call, Competition, Workshop, Follow-up
The Call for Submissions by the Quartier des Spectacles Partenariat

In early 2005, the Partenariat du Quartier des Spectacles (Theatre District Partnership) published a call for proposals to provide an urban branding strategy for Montreal's central precinct. The area is notable for its 28 performance venues with some 28,000 seats, including concert halls and theatres, as well as for its bars, discos and strip joints. It is also known for its distressed population of street people, homeless youth, drug users, addicts and prostitutes. Michel Tremblay's famous transvestite characters frequented the section of St. Laurent

between Ste. Catherine and René Lévesque, notorious as the red light district. The Partenariat, a consortium of quasi-public bodies that includes the Music Industry Association of Québec (ADISQ), which organizes yearly Félix awards for the best-selling pop music in Québec, aimed to raise the profile of the area and market its music halls with a new visual identity strategy. The Partnership sought out designers through the competition and showed remarkable initiative and flair for innovation in its call for proposals and the composition of its jury. The scenario and strategy were provocative: would the American Grammy organization ever call for urban design proposals for troubled downtown Detroit? The dAb collective was enthusiastic about the open call for proposals, and responded with a critique of the notion of urban branding as an approach to urban planning in such a vital part of town. With the Proposal Statement published at the beginning of this text, which explicitly criticized the graphic emphasis of the call for proposals, selection of the collective as one of the finalist teams was a surprise.

The Workshop

The finalists selected by the jury were: OrangeTango with Atelier in Situ, Photonic Dreams, Vlan Paysages; Bruce Mau Design, NOMADE-Lemieux+Pilon; Atelier Big City with Andrew Forster, Pastille Rose, Brière, Gilbert and Associates; Collectif dAb; and Intégral Concept with Jean Beaudoin and Ruedi Baur. Not all the finalists participated in the workshop and some jury members expressed disappointment that Toronto-based Bruce Mau Design declined the invitation. The workshop participants were Atelier Big City with Andrew Forster, Pastille Rose, Brière, Gilbert and Associates; Zurich-based graphic designers Intégral Ruedi Baur with Intégral Jean Beaudoin, OrangeTango with Atelier in Situ, Photonic Dreams, and Vlan Paysages, along with the



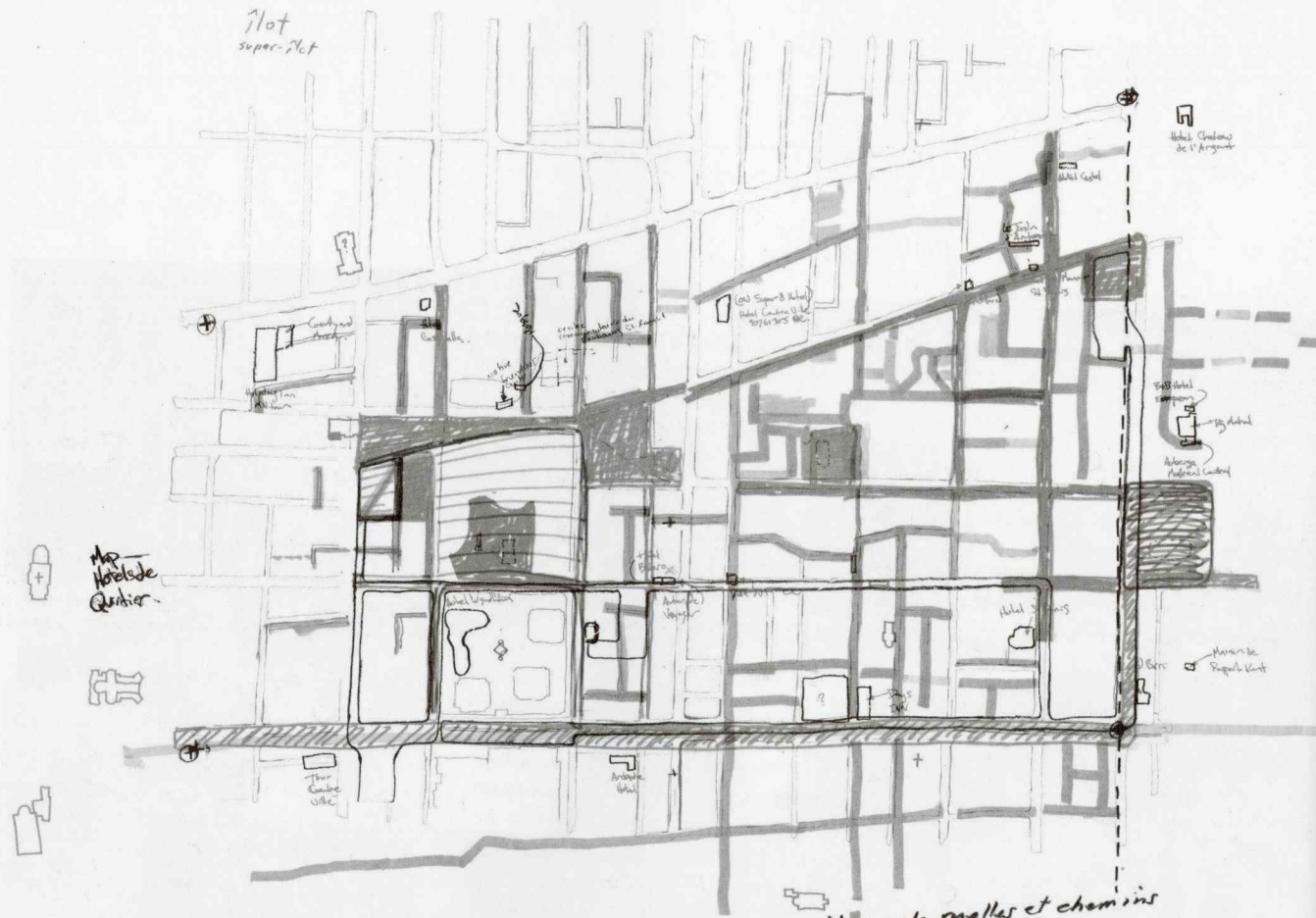
Left and above: Images of the urban context.

Previous page: Composite map with all layers of analysis and proposal maps superimposed.

dAb Collective. The process involved participating in a four-day workshop, from February 14 to 18, 2005, held at the Society des Arts Technologiques (SAT), a well regarded contemporary music venue. Participants worked at the SAT more or less continuously. At the end of an intense four days, each team presented their conclusions in digital slide format. The team of Jean Beaudoin and Zurich-based Ruedi Baur was selected for their graphic strategy for branding the area. The winning team unveiled a more developed strategy in a media event held in November 2005. This can be viewed at www.quartierdesspectacles.com. The quality and openness of the process was exemplary.

The dAb Collective Proposal

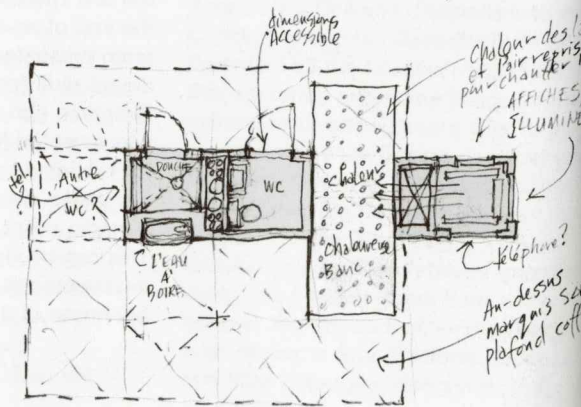
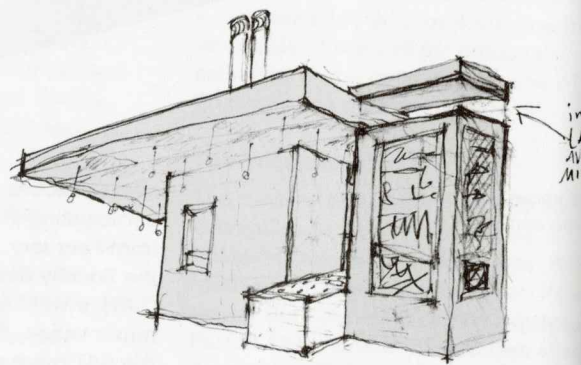
dAb collective developed a three-pronged strategy for approaching urban issues in the area. Abundant research material provided by the City of Montréal, a member of the Partnership and host to the competition, indicated that although there are many venues and seats available in the area, visitors to the city tend not to purchase tickets while in town, frequenting the free festival events they wander into instead. dAb hoped to link urban wandering to issues of sustainability, social activism, an urbanism sensitive to hearing and smell and to the network of venues in the district.



Sustainable Communities

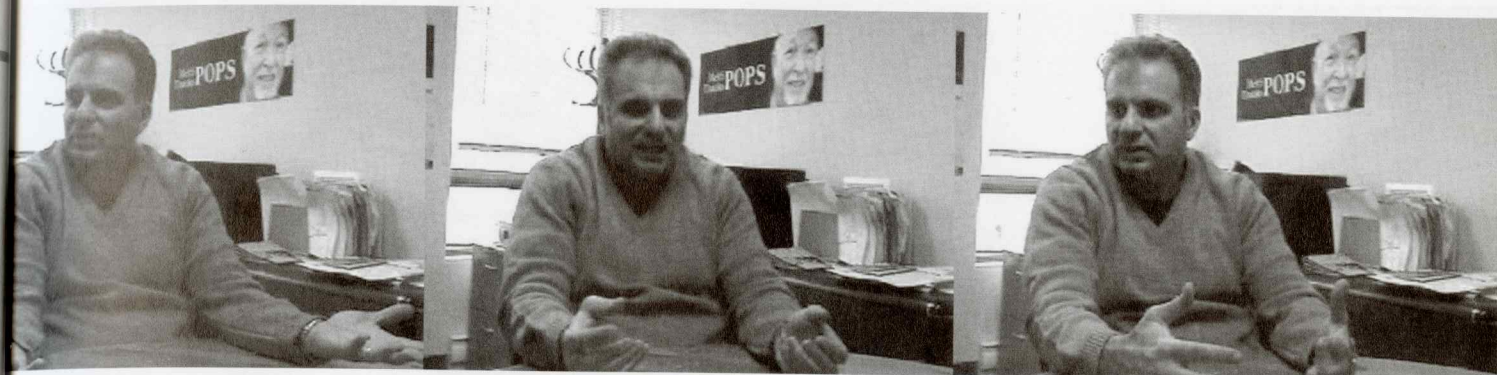
Recognizing the character of the neighbourhood as an urban home to a variety of street inhabitants was an important aspect of the urban design process. Collective members Lorraine Oades and Ana Rewakowicz interviewed social workers, recording a conversation with Aki Tchitacov of *le Bon Dieu dans la rue*, a local organization that works with street youth. He explained how any radical transformation of the neighborhood would further destabilize homeless youth, who are fundamentally in search of some stability, and suggested some successful initiatives including a roaming book-lending program. He made the following comments:

"There's a lot of people in our society who are not far from being on the street."



above: Map of laneways to connect to bicycle and pedestrian routes.

right: Urban Washroom Prototype by Cecilia Chen.



above: Interview with Aki Tchitacov of *le Bon Dieu dans la rue* conducted by Ana Rewakowicz and Lorraine Oades.

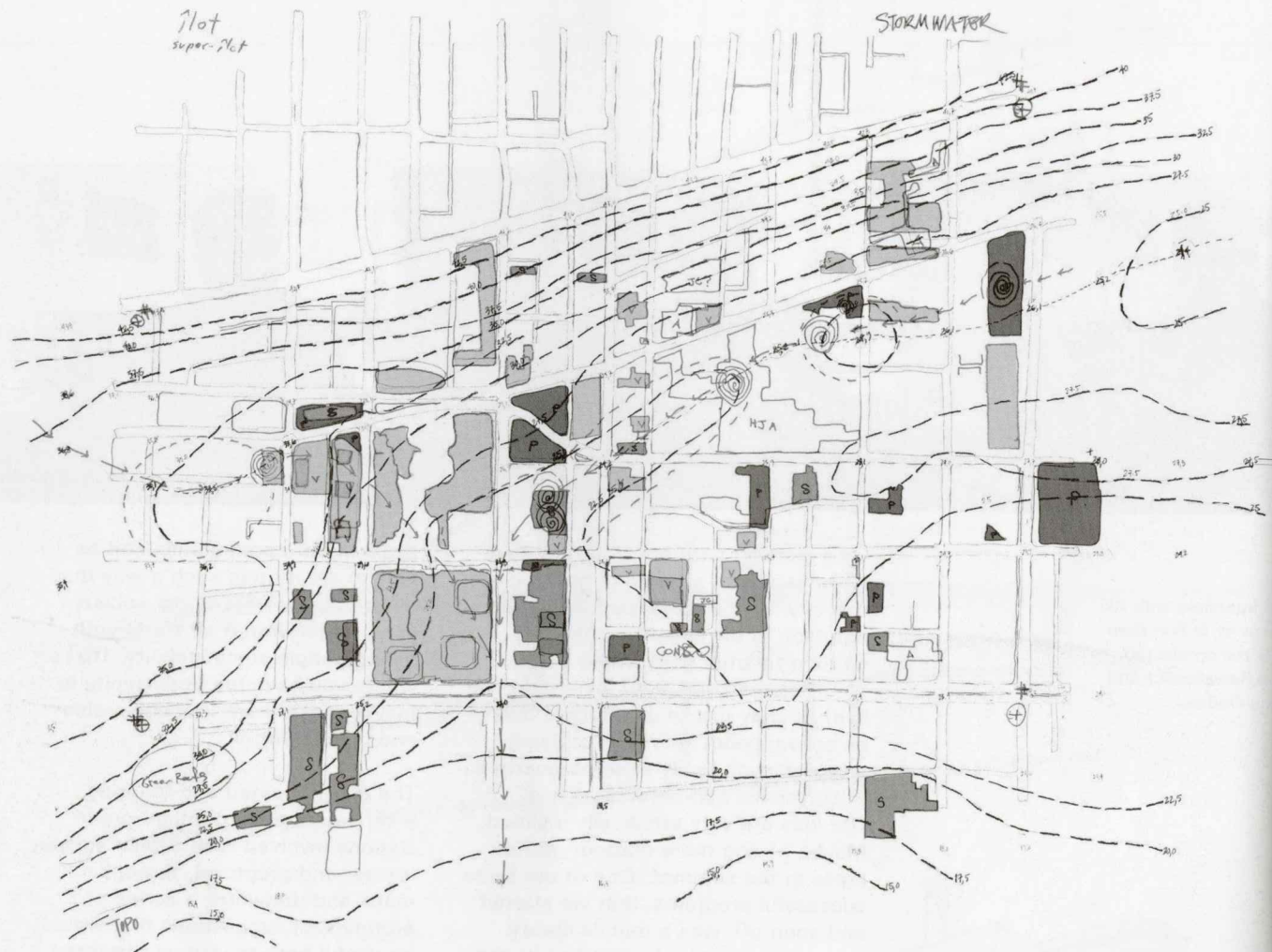
Let's start off with housing. We have a problem with affordable housing in this city. That's very basic. If you're a person in the street and there is nothing to latch onto where do you go? Where do you stay? Where do you live? Society has to understand that its conventional definition of living space doesn't apply in some quarters. Public space can have some use. Our kids are very artistically inclined. Maybe having more outdoor graffiti areas in the summer...One of our more successful programs, that we started and spun off, was a mobile library, but run by somebody who knows the street population. We could just go to the park and have the kids, have people come and pick up what they wanted and discuss everything from politics to the environment. But there has to be some kind of mechanism, some sort of synergy where these people will also have some sort of

place in our communities and be able to set it up in such a way that different segments of our society can coexist. And it all starts with giving people some stability. That's where you have the opportunity to maybe make them less vulnerable and dependent..."

The group located and mapped a series of neighbourhood organizations involved with similar social issues, and proposed, through maps and drawings, a series of prototypical suggestions that would be useful both to visitors attracted to the venues in the area and local inhabitants: for example, distinctive public toilets that could operate year round, or playgrounds that would make parks more multifaceted, for example, occupiable for longer periods of time by visitors accompanied by children. The group also considered more ephemeral projects, such as the Bookcrossing project, a practice of leaving a book in a public place to be picked up and read by others, who then do likewise. The Collective noted that new university facilities in the area had already demonstrated some insensitivity to existing social programs. In one case, a major new building was erected with an entrance that faced the main door of a church-organized meal program for street people that had been operating for some time.

below: Urban Playground Park proposal by Cecilia Chen, incorporating a sculptural image by Giuseppe Gabellone.





Ecological Urbanism

The group mapped topography in the precinct as a prelude to a series of proposals that would launch a more ecologically sensitive approach to urbanism. Low-lying areas could become sites of new stormwater retention basins, as part of a larger strategy of water infrastructure in cities attuned to the value of integrating landscape with the flow of rainwater, as opposed to more traditional and decorative approaches to landscaped parks. The study of topography also identified a natural amphitheatre next to the Place des Arts that could be intensified with a proposal for a new bicycle parking structure. This would serve as a sound-attenuating wall as

above: Topographic mapping for water management strategy.

top left: A green laneway

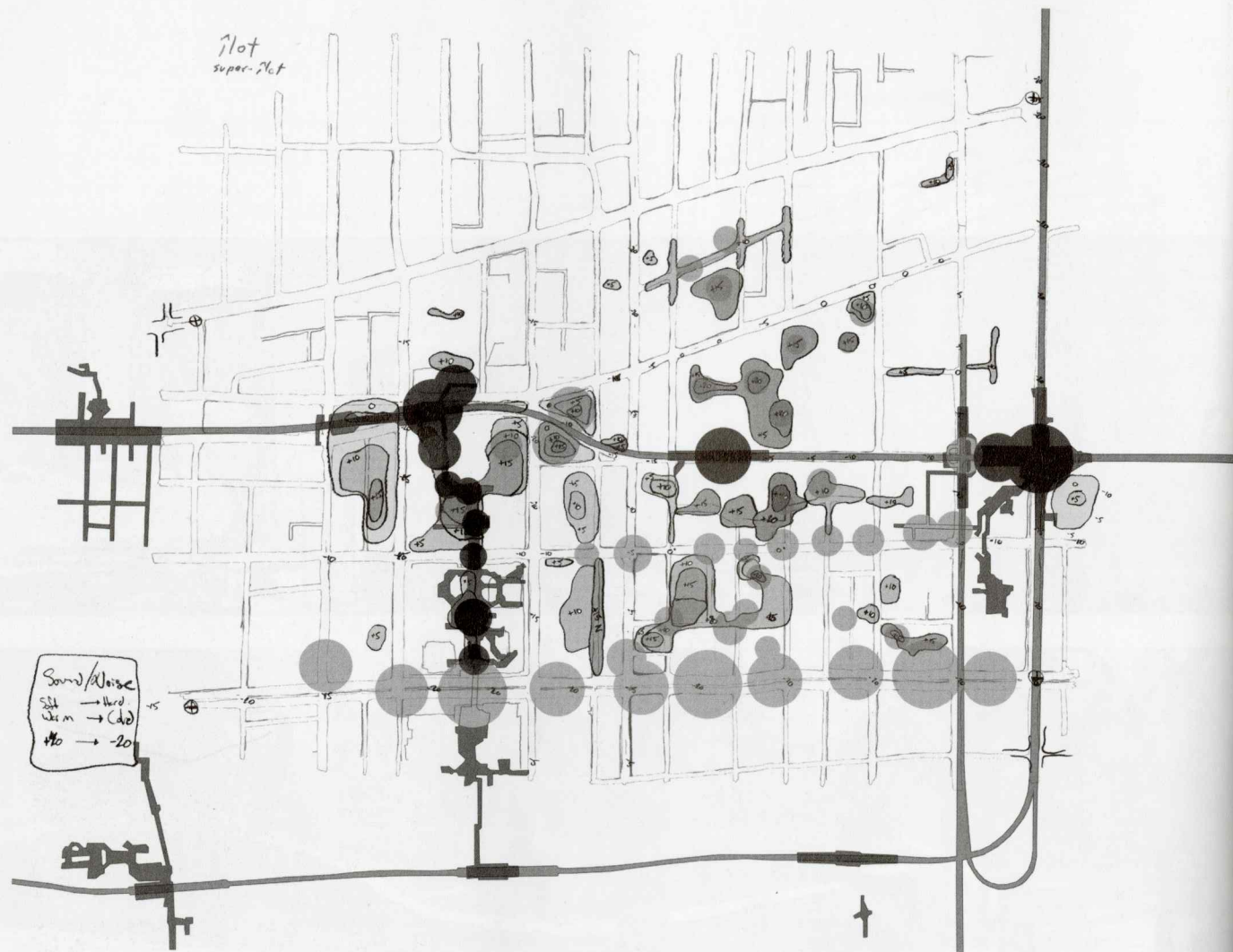
bottom left: Reflective surfaces augment an ecological lighting strategy.

top: Green roof strategies proposal by Marie-Paule Macdonald.

above: Urban storm water retention ponds and green bicycle path proposal by Andrea Kordos.

well as a listening and observation balcony for festival events. Attention to such amenities as bicycle parking structures, examples of which can be found in bicycle-oriented cities such as Amsterdam, connect to a larger infrastructure integrating bicycle laneways with a network of green laneways. The fine-grained network of existing lanes and lane fragments would become a tissue of paths that privilege all-season bicycle and pedestrian movement through the city. Another strategy is the greening of roofs for institutional buildings. As lighter plantings become more available, public buildings can realistically contribute to a comprehensive water management strategy by installing green roofs on

a wide range of buildings from the podium of the major arts centre, to offices for civil servants, to large commercial buildings — both private and public. Linked to the water strategy would be the use of more ecologically appropriate porous surfaces in the areas where festivals take place, as well as the use of conifer trees planted to create sonic screening. Another facet of the proposal was a lighting strategy inspired by the visual character of many distinctive existing marquees. The Collective favoured ecological lighting strategies, including directing lighting towards the ground or towards reflective materials, intensifying luminous effects, along with the use of phosphorescence.



top left: Cartography of Urban Sound

top right: Examples of subway street dancing in the Montréal Métro.

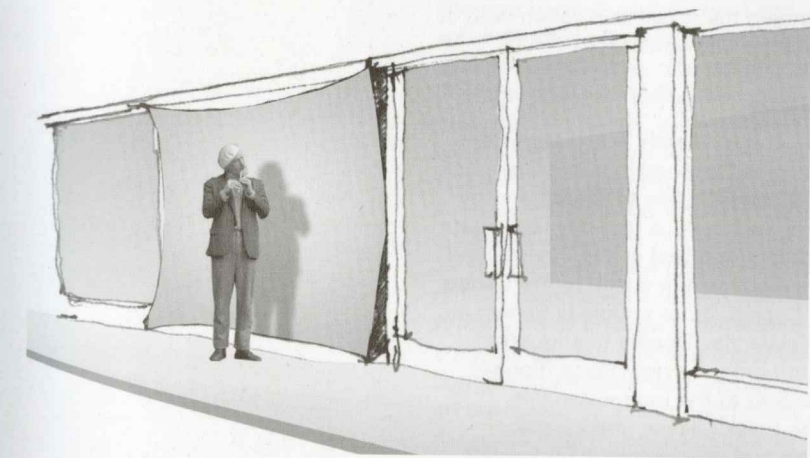
bottom right: Live video Link Proposal by Lorraine Oades, to connect subway riders with events going on at street level.

bottom left: Experimental Polymer Refuge Dome prototype scale model, Marie-Paule Macdonald.

bottom: Amplifying Wall for street performers by Tony Round.

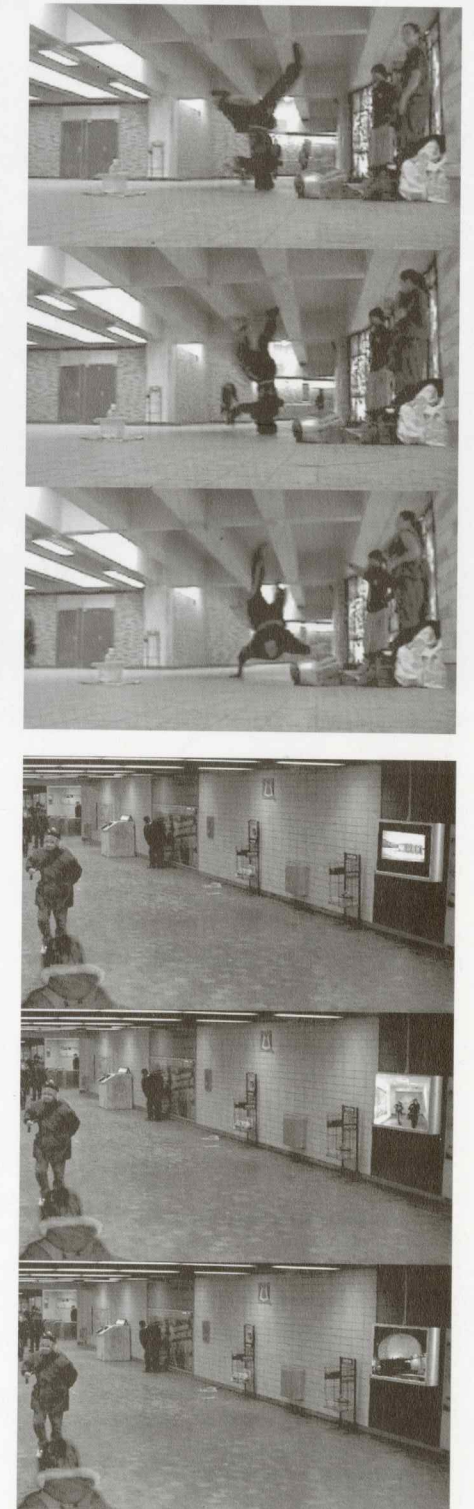
Acoustic Urbanism

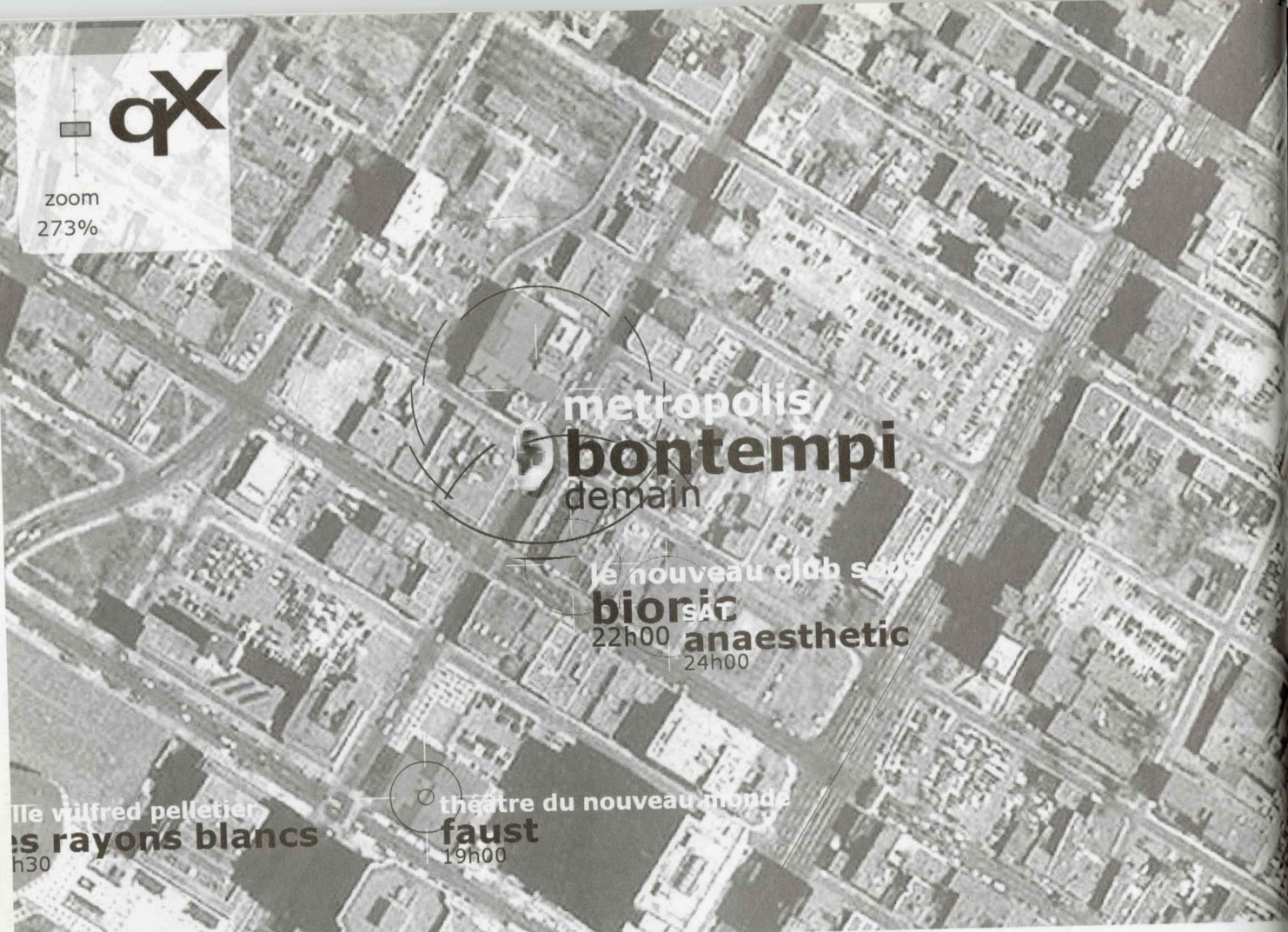
The collective experimented with mapping sound in the district, producing a test cartography of urban noise, recognizing the Canadian tradition of soundscape awareness. Tony Round and Steve Topping scouted for street performers and Round documented several striking performances in the subway: break dancers who spin on their heads, a flute player who plays two instruments at once. The aim was to link the creative performers who spontaneously entertain in the streets with the official performances in the local venues. In addition to the visual marquees of the neighbourhoods, a proposal for a range of street furniture that accommodates street performers



included sound marquees, discrete amplifying walls, and small acoustic shell installations for pocket parks and vacant lots. In a parallel vein, Lorraine Oades proposed a prototypical live video link between the underground subway and the sidewalk, so that transit users would be aware of street events happening above a station. These proposals were accompanied by mapping of festivals and demonstrations in the area. Tony Round adapted his proposal for an innovative acoustic web guide to the area, allowing potential audience members to sample the sounds of a performance as part of the process for choosing which performance, concert or sound event they would attend. The customized website used an ear icon instead of an arrow. Moving the ear over the location of a music hall prompted the sound of the performer scheduled to play at an upcoming date.

The dAb proposal included further analysis of the urban development processes of the area, advocating new, small-scale affordable housing and criticizing several of the demolition proposals where vernacular buildings accommodating small business were

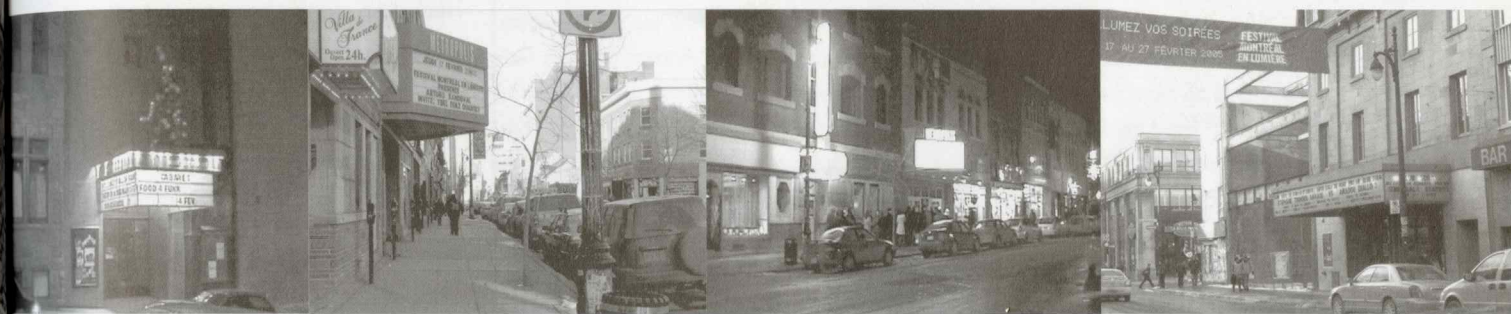




zoom, clic et draguez pour naviger et entendre

left: Quartier des Spectacles website proposal. The map locates music halls. Moving the mouse over a particular venue prompts a sample of the music performed on an upcoming date. Website concept and design by Tony Round.

below: Concert venues within the Quartier des Spectacles.



to be torn down to create empty, poorly conceived public squares, while voluminous, gargantuan, outsize-scaled development projects were proposed for adjacent sites. These inappropriate kinds of projects contradict the urban commercial patterns of the downtown. Suggestions for small-scale development that could still be relatively high-rise, in particular respecting the traditional small property lot patterns in the neighbourhood, were advocated, in contrast to the massive lot consolidation and bloated volumes characteristic of the built-form proposals in recent competitions. This central part of the city would be well served by smaller-scale precinct planning and development that recognizes the advice of perceptive urbanists, experts ranging from Françoise Choay to Jane Jacobs to Christian Devillers. From the perspective of the dAb Collective: the ideal of an

urbanism that integrates the concerns of ecology, the sounds and senses of the city and the social needs of the neighbourhood came together in a collective project and process that aimed to connect the urban population with its urban form and landscape.

Follow-up

At the end of March, the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership published a call for interested public to attend another kind of spectacle, a four-day real-estate fair called Montréal of the Future, held in the main atrium space of the Centre CDP Capital, more popularly known as the Caisse des Dépôts headquarters fronting onto the new Place Riopelle. According to the impression left by the press release, the central theatre and arts district is underbuilt: apparently there are a potential 1.3 million square feet of buildable area.

Their documentation put it this way, "The Quartier des Spectacles is an extraordinary opportunity for real estate decision makers to work together and invest in Montréal's creative heart." The proposals — architectural and urban models, posters, projections, audio-visual displays, drawings and photographs — including two modest proposals for artists' live-in studios, were largely projects for office and condominium use. The marketing strategy finally threw off its socially conscious disguise. The vacant lots used for festivals are to be prized as glowing red-hot commodities, up for grabs. A scenario of artificially stimulated, absurdly soaring rent and hyper-building appears to be underway, along with an unwanted destabilizing of many of the more fragile and vulnerable of the creative residents of this pivotal place.

The members of the dAb Collective included Cecilia Chen, Andrea Kordos, Marie-Paule Macdonald, Lorraine Oades, Ana Rewakowicz, Tony Round Frances Stober and Steve Topping. The urban proposals are posted at www.collectifdab.ca

On Gods, Grammar and Nonsense: Gary Kibbins' *Grammar and Not-Grammar: Selected Scripts and Essays*

edited by Andrew J. Paterson
(Toronto: YZBooks, 2005)
review by Earl Miller



GRAMMAR & NOT-GRAMMAR
Selected Scripts and Essays by Gary Kibbins

Edited by Andrew J. Paterson

An extensive but not complete collection of Gary Kibbins' essays, film and video scripts, *Grammar and Not-Grammar* covers a decade plus, from 1992 to 2005, including, as the heading of Andrew J. Paterson's foreword lists — four poems, eleven scripts, five essays, two lectures, one interview and one afterword.

It isn't hyperbolic to say *Grammar and Not Grammar* is a much-needed book. Needed, first of all, because Kibbins' insightful, radical and ambitious essays, having appeared in a variety of publications (including this one), bear common threads that remain unconnected given the disparate publishers. And needed because it's rare in Canada that an artist writes theory and criticism, especially with a political tone. Kibbins juxtaposes criticism and scripts, a pairing that refreshingly avoids the standard chronological order of retrospective tomes, meaning his book is best considered by looking at key themes — experimentation, nonsense, childhood, and grammar — interspersed throughout the book, themes forming intersection points between art, theory and often politics that defy any linear order.

I view *Grammar and Not-Grammar* as an extended metaphor for a laboratory, a site for experimentation, an approach outlined in the included essay, "Bear Assumptions: Notes on Experimentation" (2002). Here,

Kibbins volunteers — some might say masochistically — for the formidable task of discussing in its art context the term "experimental," a term he observes has remained "usefully vague" to avoid defining too narrow an art practice. This vagueness naturally makes defining experimental art tricky. Kibbins begins by arguing "assumptions are experimental in nature," citing the turn-of-the-twentieth-century phenomenologist, Alexius Meinong, author of the 1905 book, *On Assumptions*. He then contrasts assumptions with convictions, or judgments, which the assumer Kibbins says, has to "momentarily set aside" to arrive at new judgments. This accurate but not complex reading of the experimental process gains depth when he qualifies it, first of all, by ensuring that for current experimental art, arriving at the new, having lost its patina after Modernism, should be of secondary importance to the actual process of experimentation. Secondly, experimentation, or assumption, should trump interpretation (Kibbins cites this from Deleuze) so that artists, Kibbins continues, do not "solve problems" but instead "continually formulate new problems." Following this approach, *Grammar and Not-Grammar* does not tie up loose ends of theoretical assumptions, which is to say, don't look for answers here.

I find this reassuring. Artists and some critics express ongoing frustration at the hermetic packages critics too often present as their *oeuvre* for whatever zeitgeist they're championing (Hal Foster: is trauma — just one paradigm, I stress — truly the definitive motivator for the art of the mid-nineties?) In other words, pat answers and no provocative questions.

Kibbins' experimentation is typically convincing and clear. There's the odd weak

moment of missing elaboration; it would, for instance, have been helpful in his catalogue essay, "Flaming Creatures" (1997), if Kibbins had backed up his assessment of a trend in video art at that time toward "experimental propaganda" with references to work exhibiting the tendency. On the other hand, "Ass Bowl Comedy: Nonsense and Experimental Film," likely the strongest essay included, offers what may actually be a new way of approaching certain works of art. Kibbins attempts tackling the notoriously cryptic, consequently oft-analyzed, Hollis Frampton film, *Zorns Lemma* (1970) (as with his classifying of what is "experimental," taking on this task indicates the confidence underlying Kibbins' essays), by claiming it defies interpretation because it's nonsense. Kibbins begins by defining nonsense as what occurs when "customary forms of interpretative activity have been waived." However, unlike dreams, nonsense is rational. Nonsense intentionally "prizes concepts apart," a separation again differentiating it from the unconscious. To illustrate using Kibbins' example of Lewis Carroll, an avid practitioner both of logic and nonsense, note how Carroll deliberately separated a grin from a cat to make it the Cheshire Cat. In *Zorns Lemma*, apparent connections can be likewise viewed as nonsensically disparate. For instance, Frampton uses a 24-letter Roman alphabet in the film because the number 24 corresponds with the number of frames per second in film. This deliberate pairing of sets of numbers seemingly connects but ultimately emphasizes separateness by the very pointlessness of such a match. This unnecessary pairing, Kibbins argues, is nonsensical. Certainly nonsense is a useful way to look at art. If applied properly, it sidesteps interpretation, not when interpretation is necessary (in other words, when work is not

dismissed as nonsense in a way that is a cop-out avoiding further thought — a bourgeois revulsion to "difficult" art) but when grasping attempts at interpretation are in vain.

Kibbins plays further with nonsense in his included scripts. "If Horses Had Gods," for instance, the script for a two-channel video installation (the other channel shows exteriors of Spanish cathedrals), comprises nonsensical statements ("If gods had horses, they'd look like horses"); the dictums of the famous, from Beckett's ("The bastard! He doesn't exist") to Nietzsche's ("How can we hope to get rid of God, as long as we insist on believing in grammar?"); and lyrics from "Somewhere over the Rainbow." Kibbins then reorders, adds and removes words so that the original statements and quotes read nonsensically. Pairing nonsense with religion, Kibbins presents an argument crucial to his definition of nonsense: he sees nonsense as a rational choice because it involves a conscious avoidance of interpretation. On the other hand, he argues in an included interview with Steve Reinke (2005) that religion is irrational. I'm not convinced of Kibbins' following assertion, however, that by removing "religious thought" from the realm of the irrational by making it nonsense, its "creativity can be preserved in the domain of nonsense."

As well as nonsense, the realm of childhood, both its imaginative and sociological elements, offers fragmentary clues to approaching Kibbins' often complex, or in his words, "irreducible" art. Consider, first of all, the child's hobby horse crafted from a broom that's seen on the cover of this book (as an aside, recall that Dada, the moniker for that most nonsensical of

movements, translates to hobby horse). Kibbins views the child's relationship to the hobby horse as a relationship where the horse, while not real, is virtually real to the child because it can be ridden, the prime purpose of the horse for a child. Kibbins uses this relationship to show that actual objects do not need to exist to be true, an observation that can be neatly applied to Kibbins' videos, whose texts at times reference nonexistent objects (including horses). Indeed, Kibbins, referring to the visual as "terrifying" and "unreliable," appears more comfortable around imagined objects such as the "round square" he speaks of when questioning whether imaginary objects can be "real." Consider secondly Kibbins' assertion that artists should be experimenters who "have to resist becoming completely socialized" in order "to be able to invent their own categories and methods of research...the figure of the incompletely socialized child helps to enable this freedom." As well as experimentation, childhood naturally intersects with nonsense. As does grammar.

Grammatical structure, when juxtaposed, as Kibbins has, with unrelated thoughts or elements (non-grammar, presumably), effectively summarizes the notions of non-interpretable experiments and nonsense he raises. Grammar becomes directly related to nonsense in "If Horses had Gods," where syntactical rearrangements again forge the non-readable. Further, in the script, "Grammar Lesson" (2003), when an English instructor takes Judy Garland's version of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and breaks it down to nouns, prepositions, auxiliary verbs and so forth, the word forms' relationships with the actual songs are nonexistent, rendering the grammatical categorization nonsensical.

It is at such points where Kibbins' theory meets both video and film, flashpoints of insight that are never hermetically sealed prescriptions. Take, for instance, Kibbins' many political references, including references to the Vietnam War, in "April 1967" (2004), the Gulf War, in "Mead Lake" (1992), and US economic sanctions in Iraq prior to invasion, in "Grammar Lesson." Non-didactic, these allow viewers to complete the political reading of, say, George Bush Sr.'s boast that "The conviction and courage we see in the Persian Gulf today [the first Gulf War] is simply the American character in action," a quote presented without further commentary. Kibbins calls for a critical reading only by placing it in an artist's videotape, that is, by granting it a politically aware audience. In Kibbins' sundry presentation of grammar, nonsense, and childhood, such political signifiers provide further debate because of context (e.g., the nonsensical detachment of grammatical structure from the political in "Mead Lake," when a gratingly pompous academic couple identify literary devices such as alliteration in a *Globe and Mail* article praising the World Bank).

Indeed, *Grammar and Not-Grammar* reads with the openness of an experimental laboratory, an openness providing a springboard for much ensuing discussion from a Babel-like meeting of seemingly incompatible sources and interests (grammar and childhood; Nietzsche and God). Such provocativeness is, in fact, the main reason this book is needed and perhaps, I'm thinking, even required reading. However, I fear "required" may connote the very authoritative conviction this book defies, and I instead offer what may be the highest compliment an art writer can: I will probably end-note *Grammar and Not-Grammar* in the near future.

Earl Miller is a freelance art writer and curator residing in Toronto.

Crumbling on a Grander Scale: Sunil Gupta's *Homelands* (2001 – 2003)

Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa
25 November 2005 – 23 April 2006

review by Bill Leeming

Sunil Gupta's photographic series *Homelands* clearly marks a significant turning point in a twenty-year struggle to come to terms with the cultural landscape of the AIDS crisis. With *Homelands*, Gupta sets out to portray a landscape in which the HIV virus has been travelling. A section of an Indian mural of bodybuilders is paired with a snapshot of a Dairy Queen in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. Graphics of religious deities, Bollywood characters and other cultural icons from India are juxtaposed with urban scenes from London, Montreal and New York — cities the artist has called home. The forts, temples, and gardens of Rajasthan, Uttar

Pradesh and Delhi sit side by side with photographs of the artist at home, naked, in New York. The choice of image pairings appears at once whimsical, self-effacing and acquiescent. What keeps the visitor locked in place, looking, is not the literalism of landscapes but Gupta's statement: "As [an HIV] carrier my presence in the landscape is ambivalent."

The nineteenth century German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies¹ once described the idea of homeland as "the embodiment of dear memories, holds the heart of man, who parts from it with sorrow and looks back to it with homesickness and

longing from abroad." This corresponds to a feeling that each place Gupta has photographed, as Edward Relph² might say, has "endured and will persist as a distinctive entity even though the world around may change." But, although Gupta comes into contact with those who inhabit these places, he is not organically connected to them through established ties of kinship or locality. Gupta's travels better recall Tönnies' contemporary, Georg Simmel,³ and his essay on adventure as a feature of modern life. For Simmel the perfect adventure is one in which "we abandon ourselves to the world." At the same time, modernity provides us with a world ready



Sunil Gupta, Ajmer, Rajasthan/Great Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, 2001-2003. Courtesy: the artist.

to accommodate, a tamed and domesticated world in which, as Zygmunt Bauman⁴ would add, “shocks come in a package deal with safety.”

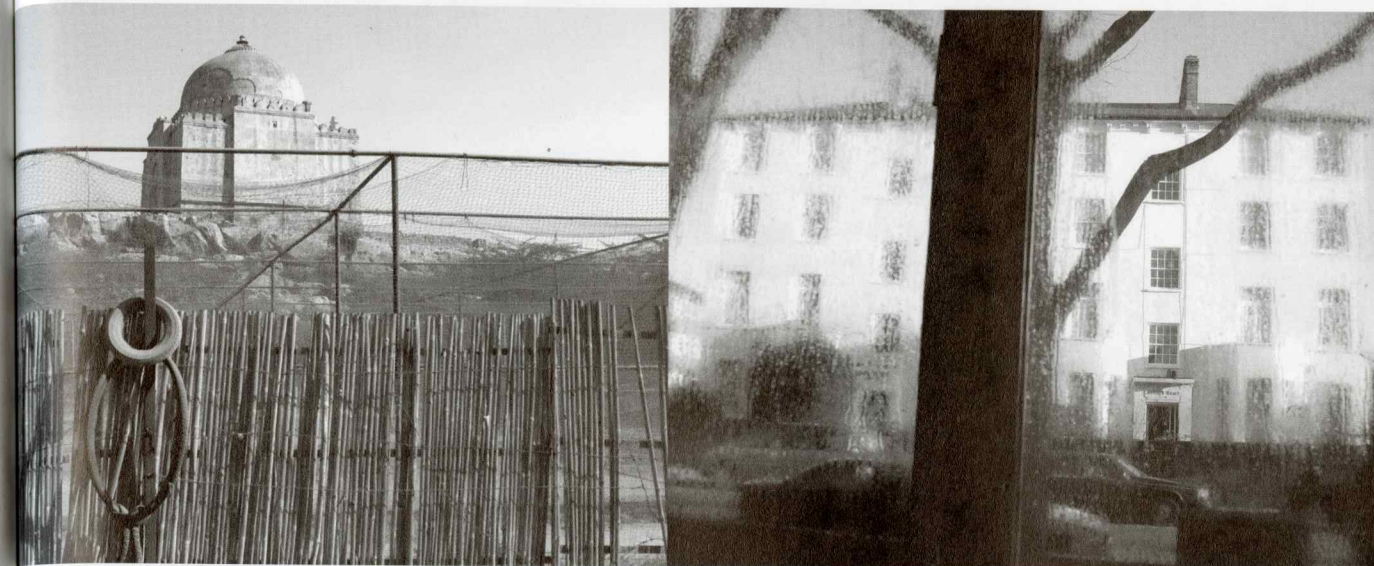
Gupta’s cultural landscape of the AIDS crisis is a landscape punctuated by a number of separate, more or less isolated “timeless” forms and spaces. The ravages of time do not exist here. Time does not ravage; time does nothing but pass. The spaces themselves appear empty of time, slowed down, lacking movement or speed of movement. The ongoing restorations and preservation of India Gate, Humayun’s Tomb and the Lucknow appear to promise to restore the world around us to something like of former glory. We might be inspired to build a new future on a monumental past. Ruins, in this context, provide the incentive for remembering and a return to origins *à la* Tönnies and Relph. The redemption of what has been neglected can be as joyous as the creation of something new. In the cultural landscape of the AIDS crisis we

know all too well when the golden age was, i.e., “before the war.” So it makes every bit of sense to juxtapose photographic images of famous ruins from the past with more contemporary ruins like, say, the *Mineshaft* in New York or Gupta’s Montreal “home.” We are living in an interval of neglect.

Gupta’s earliest photographs of the mid-1970s on Christopher Street in New York are, he says in retrospect, prophetic: “made just before the AIDS crisis they have taken on a new historical significance.” Noting that the Christopher Street of the period had “attained the mythical status by then of the birthplace of gay liberation,” the subjects of the photographs are somber and pensive. They seem to be looking — or waiting — for something. Admittedly, one could scarcely accuse the cityscape of New York of ever lacking movement. But the isolated, domineering sense of what surrounds the subjects in these pictures is heavy with time. There is a sense of leaving the routine and constancy of everyday life

and replacing it with something fugitive and ephemeral. In a similar way, there is a chary, unwelcoming quality to Gupta’s portraits of gay couples in the 1980s in their West London homes — a “social circle...to be hard hit by AIDS.” Amid the domesticity of the kitchens, living rooms and bedrooms they have created, these couples are on guard — *insistently* close to one another. The series has never been exhibited. Gupta speculates that curators have found the series “oppressive.” (The photographs and accompanying statements are available on Gupta’s website, <http://sunil-gupta.net/photography.html>).

This background explains much about the cultural landscape of AIDS *in the present*. The appearances of ruins become more handsome with time: these are ruins crumbling on a grander scale. The subject is inexhaustible, because the present interval of neglect provides boundaries and a threshold (*limen*) that detaches and separates it from the communality of the past. Gupta’s presence in the cultural land-



Sunil Gupta, *Aurobindo Marg, Delhi/Jeffreys Road, London*. Courtesy: the artist.

scape of AIDS recalls Simmel’s description of the *stranger*: “the man who comes today and stays tomorrow — the potential wanderer, so to speak, who, although he has gone no further, has not quite got over the freedom of coming and going.” As a *stranger* living with HIV in the landscape, he inspires a mixture of fear and compassion. But as an artist living with HIV he takes upon himself what Mircea Eliade⁵ described as “the function of temporal duration;” in other words, he takes on the role of time. The role of time avails itself of mechanisms like selection, narrativization, representation, displacement and denial. The role is essentially *performative*, i.e., as coming into existence at a given time and place through specific kinds of memorial and documentary activities. As such, in taking on this role, the artist provides us with a view of the cultural landscape of the AIDS crisis as not simply a repository of objects and images to be photographed and exhibited, but an opportunity for the selective reconstruction and appropriation of aspects of the

past that can be used to respond to the needs of the present.

That seminal essayist on the topic of the American vernacular landscape, John Brinckerhoff Jackson⁶, once observed that the most basic political element in any representation of landscape is the boundary. Politically speaking what matters here is delimiting the formation of a community of “responsible citizens, a well-defined territory.” But, as Jackson pointed out, the political boundary — as distinguished from social or topographical boundaries — is not a tight-fitting epidermis. It is rather a “loose-fitting envelope...a way of giving a visible, corporeal identity to a temple, a city, a state” — or a homeland in the case of Sunil Gupta’s photographs of the cultural landscape of the AIDS crisis. No doubt; instead of being a haphazard collection of private, temporary, changeable dwellings, a *homeland* is a permanent and visible element in the political landscape.

Bill Leeming is a Canadian visual artist and sociologist who teaches in the Faculty of Liberal Studies at the Ontario College of Art & Design.

Notes:

1. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).
2. Edward C. Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
3. Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).
4. Zygmunt Bauman, “From Pilgrim to Tourist,” *Moderna Tider* (September 1994)
5. Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).
6. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).



Sunil Gupta, *Mundia Pamar, Uttar Pradesh/Chesapeake Bay, Maryland*. Courtesy: the artist.

The Next Big Thing: *Supernovas*

curated by Shawna Dempsey and Lori Millan

Winnipeg Art Gallery

27 January – 14 May 2006

review by Amy Karlinsky

Supernovas includes the work of 29 young Winnipeg artists. It's a fun show for Winnipeggers and everyone seems to either be connected to it or have something to say about it. The guy at the gym confides, "they are not all good artists." A woman in my book club beams, "my niece is in it." A graduate student murmurs that an acquaintance's boyfriend is in it. So, all right! It's a sprawling, affirming show with no apologies in sight.

The electricity from the jam-packed opening and aggressive programming of artist's talks and curator's tours has the city abuzz. It's the buzz of skins shedding, paradigms shifting and vortices opening under the limestone façade. It's the vibrant and up-beat colour of the exhibition rooms, the rustle of work hanging from the ceiling, the hum of video, film and motorized parts and the shifting, mobile energy of contingency and possibility.

I have a Cyrus Smith called *art historian* in my office, another, labelled *emergency art kit*, in the kitchen. I have a Justin Ludwar in the living room, tamara rae biebrich's *nursette* in Anna's room. I have Ian August's writing books hanging around somewhere and I am down for a Paul Robles purchase. I have been on Mélanie Rocan's thesis committee, but too busy to be on Richard Hines'. I have included Jennie O's work in a Mentoring Artists for

Women's art (MAWA) journal, worked with Meera Margaret Singh and written about Liz Garlicki. I see Lisa Wood and Adam Brooks around town. I have shared an office with Heidi Phillips, but have never met Talia Potash. Let's face it, like many in this close-knit community I am both implicated and embedded. That's 14 artists mentioned. Only the editor can insert the other 15. As a writer, sometime sessional, inner city art teacher, MAWA Board member, former freelance curator with the WAG and mother of two teenagers I am embedded in multiple ways. Over 45, I am sandwiched by the last living modernists on one side and those for whom mass, folk and low are meaningless descriptors.

All media are represented. *Supernovas* is less about connoisseurship than it is about collectivity. After all, there are 29 artists and most are represented by the multiple or the work in series...as if...as if...there might be many more opportunities to get it right, to work it out. Renewal can be a tricky but imperative business. The show says process more than product; though there is rough and ready refinement here and, in spite of the hyperbolic title — a sense of pragmatics.

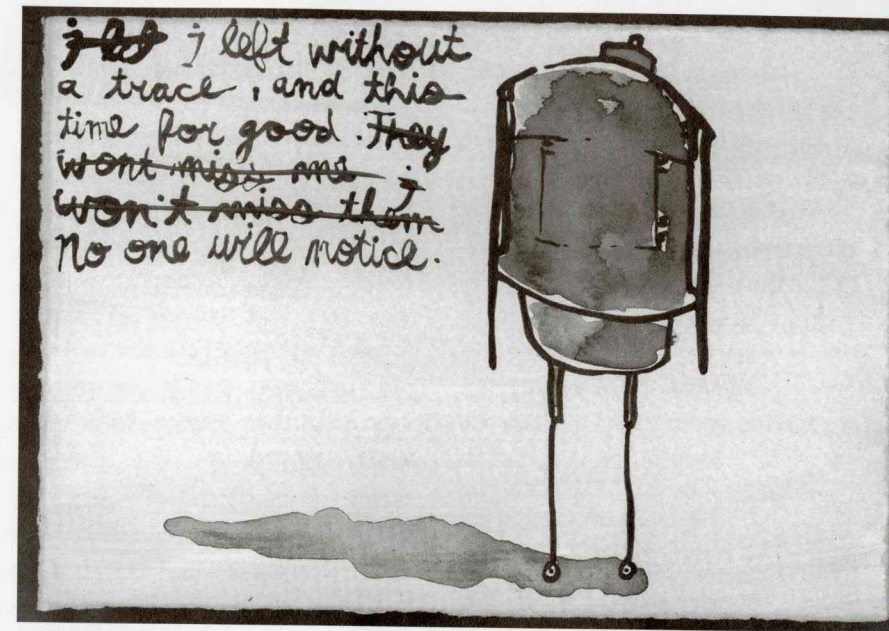
Big, young and restless shows are fun and uneven. The roster might well have included more supernovas if some installations had been more tightly edited.



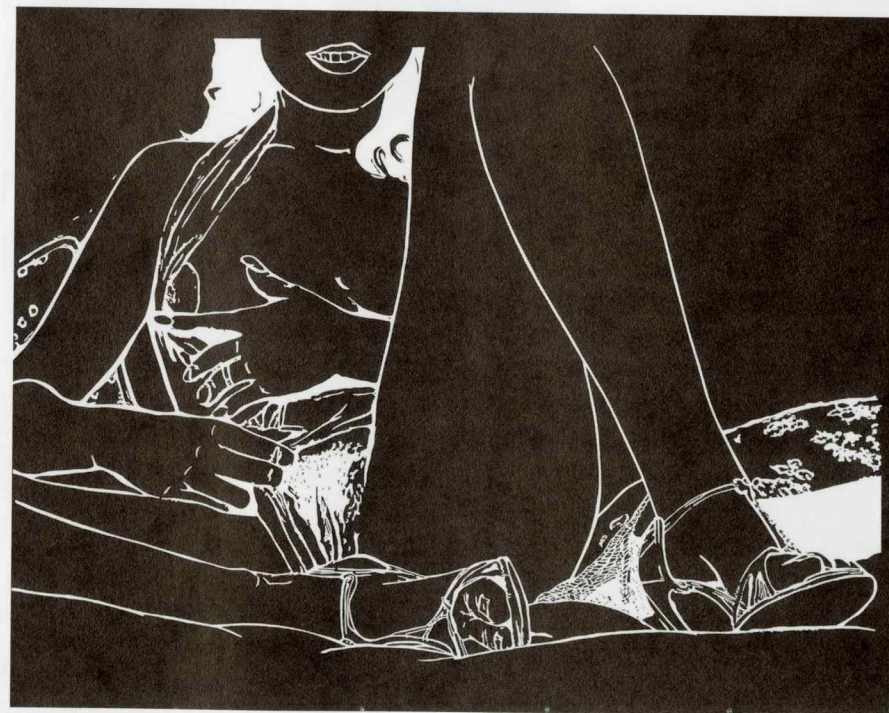
Paul Robles, *You Are The Everything* series (detail), 2003-2005. Photo: Ernest Mayer, courtesy: the artist.

Missing, perhaps, are a few notables, though it's hard to know what the criteria were at the practical level. Was there an age cut-off? Paul Robles is 36. Was a newly minted art degree one of the criteria? Though Shaun Morin just graduated, he can hardly be considered emerging. Likely, the criteria shifted as the curators juggled the formal coherencies and scope of the show. A little woven dictionary here, some stuffed and suspended super-heroine dolls there. The cheeky title, *Supernovas*, sends up the art world hype of making it big while acknowledging that a Winnipeg postal code is no barrier, as recognition of proper and missing nouns Marcel Dzama, Sarah Ann Johnson, Jennifer Stillwell, Erika Lincoln, Daniel Barrow, Paul Butler and KC Adams suggests, Winnipeg's margins feel like centers.

Many theories have been advanced to explain Winnipeg's vibrancy. Low rent. Distance from the centre: isolation, long winters and dark basements — both metaphorical and actual. The previous generation of artists was pivotal in their contributions to opening up art-making practices that were political, social and aesthetic. Today, art's engagement with the public sphere has some challenges. We have a residual hostility towards the visual arts within the mainstream press; more and higher paid, tenured male faculty at the School of Art than female faculty; a stream of exploited art sessionals who work for bus fare; a business class that rarely buys art; and contemporary dealers, some very inventive, trying hard to cultivate the local audience. Corporate collecting is sluggish. Acquisition budgets for new works in the contemporary field are slim. But this generation, unaccustomed to the funding largesses of the 1970s, hustles. They know nobody owes them a living.



Cyrus Smith, untitled, 2004-05. Photo: Ernest Mayer, courtesy: the artist.



Liz Garlicki, *brown & yellow*, 2005. Photo: Ernest Mayer, courtesy: the artist.

The Power of Light: aluCine 7th Toronto Latin@ Media Festival's *Uncontrolled Reflections*

Curated by Hugo Ares, Guillermina Buzio and Jorge Lozano

Shift Gallery

23 March – 23 April 2006

review by Richard Fung

There is an abundance in *Supernovas*, not quite a biennale, but perhaps the beginnings of a Made in Manitoba, biennial event. At the level of institutional art histories, the show is overdue, as the sheer weight of numbers and flesh pressing on opening night suggests. Between 1989 and 1998, the Winnipeg Art Gallery mounted the Manitoba Studio exhibitions as part of its program, providing local artists with solo shows. Sharon Alward, Diana Thorneycroft, William Eakin, Susan Chafe, Larry Glawson, Reva Stone, Bev Pike, Shirley Brown, Steve Gouthro, Myron Turner, Aliana Au and others had one-person exhibitions. The long-running series celebrated the contemporary and the local. Former WAG Curator of Contemporary Art Shirley Madill organized the Manitoba Studio shows and her swan song, *Sit(E)ings: Trajectory for a Future*, featuring Marcel Dzama, Blair Marten, Lori Rogers, Jean Klimack and

others. That was almost ten years ago. (A few years ago, Plug In ICA held its *Young Winnipeg Artists* show.)

It has been a long time since a WAG contemporary curator has stuck around long enough to develop relations deep and discerning enough, with enough institutional support and development time to develop a group show. But things are looking up. The WAG's *Bug City* mixed the international with the local, with three curators, including the WAG's Contemporary Curator Mary Reid, and thirty-six artists. The Winnipeg Art Council has a new public art policy and secure, for now, civic funding. MAWA and Urban Shaman, both recent award winners of the Manitoba Foundation for the Arts, are redressing long overdue balances.

I have written elsewhere about tamara rae biebrich's performance, Shawna McLeod's

drawings, Chris Cooper's bronze dog, Paul Robles' original origami, Adam Brooks' vivid paintings, Michael Stecky's fantasy film, Richard Hines' light-filled intelligence, Liz Garlicki's play on the private and public and Fred Thomas' haunting surfaces. I could say something about Cyrus Smith's cheeky pictures, Erica Eyre's frightening nipple girls. Everybody has their favourites from Lisa Woods' portraits, Adrian Williams' enamel monkeys to Joseph Reyes' delicate art and language hybrids. It could be that some artists have looked better elsewhere with different work. But the engagements are dearly felt and held — pornography, the multi-channel universe, print culture, commerce, identity, our deteriorating environment and more.

Each one of the artists demands to be taken seriously. There are lots of women, a poetic streak of fantasy watercolours, woven texts and elegies for printed words and books. There is a balance between the quirky eccentricities and fondness for obsolescence of the last decade and powerfully executed form-driven art. In this latter category are Hines, Richardson, Cooper, Robles, Garlicki and Eric Lesage. If I had more space, I might develop a thesis about this new formalism and its political implications — Lynn Richardson's columns entitled *Red State*, for example, are monumental and collapsible — or the penchant for the anachronistic, the new emotional intelligence, or the new engagement with the figure of woman.

From the centre of the margins, it's tidal change on the prairies.

Amy Karlinsky's last review for *FUSE 26:4* (Winter 2003) looked at the Plug In ICA/Belkin's *The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*.

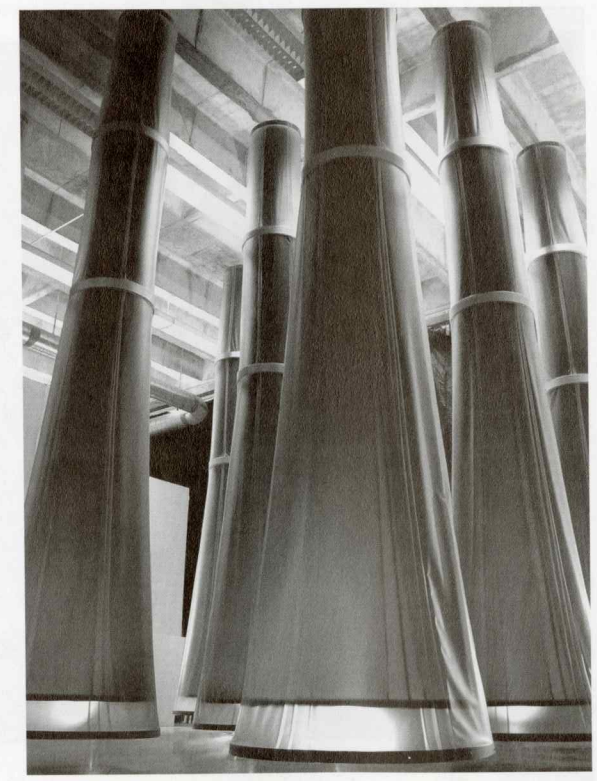
Apart from news of political turmoil and natural or manmade disasters, Canadians receive scant media coverage from south of the Rio Grande. The cultural competence of non-Latinos may stretch little beyond the now almost clichés of Frida Kahlo and Gabriel García Márquez — perhaps Shakira or *Amores Perros* for the hip. So *Uncontrolled Reflections*, the installation exhibition of aluCine 7th Toronto Latin@ Media Festival, is as much a window as a mirror, revealing a rare view into contemporary art practices from the Spanish-speaking Americas. This places a heavy burden on curators, viewers and critics alike. What does it mean to present art under the sign of Latino? How might the label of an identity enhance or narrow our framing and understanding of art? Does it over-determine interpretation?

Working mainly from a call for submissions, the curators have chosen eight installations by seven artists. These span a wide geographical breadth as well as a range of artistic histories and influences. The word "uncontrolled" in the title signals a strategic selection that foregrounds transnational migrations, not only of people but also of ideas. Between birth-place and current location, the artists map out an urban network that includes Buenos Aires and Montréal, Barcelona and Mexico City, each locale representing a specific *mestizaje*, a unique commingling

of cultures and circumstances. In a diasporic framework, the exhibition demonstrates that Toronto and Manhattan are indeed Latino cities.

Uncontrolled Reflections contains mainly video projections and single-monitor installations in the pared-down format that currently predominates in the global art world. But there are gestures towards a genealogy of Latino/Latin American art practices and their social and political contexts in several pieces. The various wars of independence fought against Spain in nineteenth century Latin America were fuelled by the resentment of local white elites against the Spanish-born ruling class. When a change in rulers arrived, the indigenous and African masses rarely benefited, and Europe

Tracy German and Marta Cela, *A Scaled Down Universe*, 2006. Courtesy: the artists.



Lynn Richardson, *Red State*, 2004-05. Courtesy: the artist.

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reviews



Above: Rubén Ortiz Torres, *Estudios para un Muralismo Virtual*, 2006. Courtesy: the artist.
Below: Claudia Bernal, *Chamanika Urbana*, 2006. Courtesy: the artist.

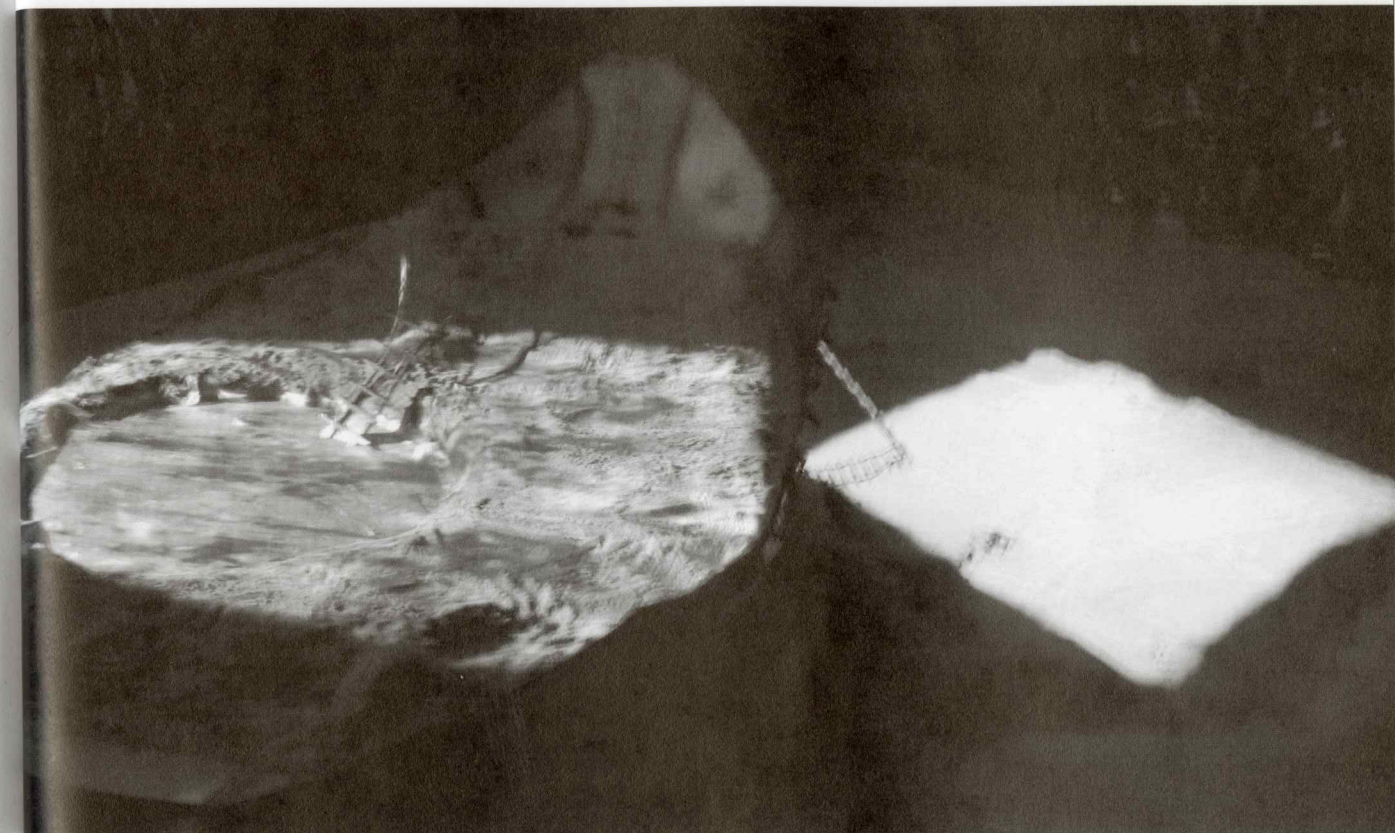
continued to provide the benchmark for art and culture. One of the legacies of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, however, was the affirmation of continuities to an indigenous Mesoamerica. In the 1920s, Mexican education minister José Vasconcelos hired artists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros to paint the now famous public murals lauding the history of oppression and the revolutionary spirit of the Mexican people.

This important moment in Mexican — and international — art serves as the starting point for two projections by Mexico City-born, San Diego-based Rubén Ortiz Torres. In *Estudios para un Muralismo Virtual*, the artist engages photographs from Siqueiros' own archive, now housed at the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros and made available online through An Image Bank for Everyday Revolutionary Life (<http://www.e-flux.com/siqueiros>). Image Bank commissioned Ortiz Torres among several international artists to respond to the archive. In Ortiz Torres' video study, a continuously morphing montage of posed nudes, gruesome corpses and snarling dogs, many familiar in their painted form, is projected into a corner of the gallery, echoing Siqueiros' celebrated manipulation of space. But the diminishment of scale, the transience of video projection as opposed to the permanence of wall painting, and the placement in a small private gallery instead of a large public institution domesticates and deconstructs Siqueiros' oeuvre, injecting a note of ambivalence. In this pastiche, Ortiz Torres enacts a post-modern strategy of foregrounding the chain of representation through the various relations of painting, photography and video, and thereby undermines notions of authenticity and

aura. The installation further prompts us to think about these media and their uses in engaging and mobilizing masses of people.

Extending the artist's exploration of the mural, available technologies, and a people's art, the witty *Manhattan Project* traces a genealogical line forward to graffiti, an art form with specific demographic associations. The video projection documents a moving van, its back fitted with a screen onto which a 3-D image of an elaborate graffiti signature, morphing and spinning, is rear-projected. The truck cruises the iconic streets of Manhattan tagging the city, as it were. In a further riff on the territorial imperatives of graffiti, Ortiz Torres projects his tags onto city walls already claimed by signatures. Positioned side by side, *Estudios* and *Manhattan Project* provoke interesting questions about appropriation, context and site-specificity.

By the 1970s and 80s, art inspired by the syncretic spiritual practices born of the collision of pre-Columbian, European and African religions became familiar in American galleries and museums — the altarpieces of Chicana artist Amalia Mesa-Bains, and the santería-inspired body work of Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta come to mind. The only work in *Uncontrolled Reflections* that links to this strand of Latino art is *Chamanika Urbana*, by Colombian-born, Montréal-based Claudia Bernal. A video of the eponymous urban shaman is projected onto a shawl of white feathers suspended above a ritualistic assemblage of stone, corn and gourds filled with what appear to be offerings in little cloth bags. The materials and layout suggest a pre-Christian ceremony, but the shaman is filmed on a busy



Tracy German and Marta Cela, *A Scaled Down Universe*, 2006. Courtesy: the artists.

Mexico City street where his smoke ritual, akin to a smudge, is presumably 'performed for money. *Chamanika Urbana* celebrates the endurance of indigenous identities and culture, but hints at the conditions of poverty that necessitate its petty commercialization.

Also replete with symbolic references is *A Scaled Down Universe*, a collaboration by Toronto filmmaker Tracy German and Argentina-born, Hamilton-based Marta Cela. The most elaborate in the show, the installation includes a large metal ship-

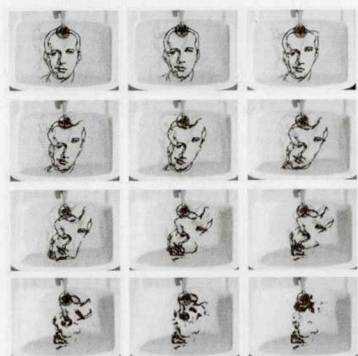
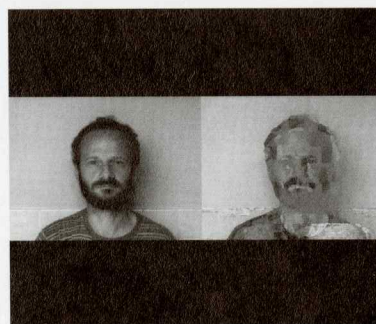
like structure covered in pictograms, a miniature pool on its deck and little metal ladders connecting it to an area of sand. Three 16mm film loops, flickers of colour and abstract patterns and a close shot of a woman's bare feet walking along rocks, are projected onto the sculpture. But where *Chamanika Urbana*'s ritualistic references ultimately bring us back to the social, *A Scaled Down Universe* depicts a strictly interior journey.

The remaining installations in "Uncontrolled Reflections" are all male

self-portraits. In *Chamber Piece*, Buenos Aires-born, Barcelona-based Gustavo Caprín gives us a black-and-white video in which the artist's body mimics gestures from a book of classical European painting. We may see in it a homage to the conceptualism of early video art or a paraphrase of Oscar Wilde's witticism about life copying art. But made by an Argentinean artist living in the former imperial centre (if Catalunya may be so positioned), the video tempts a postcolonial critique about the criteria and process by which art and artists are measured.



Above: Gustavo Caprin, *Chamber Piece*, 2005.
Courtesy: the artist.
Centre: Gustavo Daniel Kortsarz, *A los 40*, 2005.
Courtesy: the artist
Below: Oscar Muñoz, *Narciso*, 2005.
Courtesy: the artist.



Approaching 40, Gustavo Daniel Kortsarz decided to document the process of aging by taking daily pictures of himself. The photographs revealed little but when he was editing them, he became fascinated by the disintegration of the image. *A los 40* features a split screen image. On the left is a montage of close-ups of the Argentinean-born, French-based artist, clothed and unclothed, hair and beard slightly longer or shorter, tired-looking here, alert there. On the right is the same portrait but with the image breaking up and distorting.

In *Narciso*, by California-based Oscar Muñoz, a white sink fills the frame. On the surface of the water floats a portrait of the artist outlined in coal dust. The image is still at first, but as the sink slowly empties, first the shadow and the drawing that casts it begin to merge, then the likeness contorts until the lines of powder crumple into a scribble and is sucked into the drain. The reference to Narcissus falling into the pond enamoured of his own reflection is ingeniously invoked, but the piece is like a visual haiku, rich in signification.

Also by Oscar Muñoz, *Re/trato* is on its surface similarly a meditation on time and natural processes. But in the context of Colombia, it is hard not to read into it a darker premise. A small monitor mounted on a table features a grey field with a glass of water partially visible in the bottom left corner. A hand dips a brush into the water and proceeds to paint the portrait of a man, but the surface being stone or some other porous material, as fast as one section of the face is completed, the rest evaporates, forcing the painter to continuously and endlessly redraw the image. To apprehend the face being drawn, the viewer must combine the memory of the always just-vanishing brushstrokes with the ones being applied, leaving the features ever slightly shifting. In his artist's statement, Muñoz describes *Re/trato* as being about "the changes and needs of seeing oneself in the other." However, the hundreds of people who have been

kidnapped, killed or disappeared in Colombia's low-grade civil war inevitably haunt this piece.

Re/trato unwittingly provides us with a metaphor for the Latino presence in Canada: always in the process of construction, always changing through shifting patterns of immigration, always in negotiation with the dominant constructions of ethnicity and race, always in the process of recognizing and renaming itself. Since Latin American immigrants first started arriving in Canada in the 1960s, they and their descendents from countries with vastly different cultures, histories and economic and political circumstances come to suspend their former national identities, or at least hold them in tension with the diasporic pan-ethnicity of Latin American or Latino. A problem with pan-ethnicity, however, is that it can lead to a loss of specificity and encourage connotations and stereotypes. In the context of Canadian multiculturalism, it is easy for Latino to devolve into salsa dancing and ponchos. With their ambitious artistic agenda and their insistence on contemporary practice, aluCine is not only reflecting processes and dilemmas of identity and community formation, but also helping to shape them it.

Richard Fung is a Toronto-based video artist and writer. He teaches at the Ontario College of Art and Design.

Situating Pedagogy: Martha Rosler Library

e-flux project space, New York City
15 November 2005 – 15 April, 2006

review by M. L. Clinton



All images: Martha Rosler Library. Photos: Carlos Motta, courtesy: e-flux.

The e-flux corporation, run primarily by artists Anton Vidolke and Julieta Aranda, opened (most of) Martha Rosler's 7,000+ volume library to the public on 15 November 2005. By "opened," I mean they consolidated Rosler's libraries from both her office at Rutgers University in New Jersey and her home in Brooklyn and relocated a majority of the texts found there to the e-flux project space located in the city's Lower East Side.

All e-flux signage, save for an occasional logo sticker, has been removed from the ground floor glass front in which the adhesive signage reads *Martha Rosler Library*. From the street, passers-by glimpse tall bookcases, stacked with books, lining the remaining three walls and bisecting the centre of the narrow, rectangular space. A small reading desk has been built into the windowfront. The placement of this desk, facing the street, immediately positions the seated reader to demonstrate their use of the library. This display activates what might otherwise be mistaken for a sleepy, used bookstore, replete with local news broadcasts playing softly on an old radio near the entrance and aging ephemera hanging on the back wall.

Posted just to the right of the desk, small signs explain that this is a non-circulating library. A one-inch thick, velo-bound letter-sized guide lists, by genre, the con-

tents of Rosler's collection, which includes posters, maps, and other 'miscellaneous' items in addition to reference, theory, fiction and non-fiction. The contents of this guide, which can also be found on e-flux's website, provides the total number of shelves within Rosler's home and office.

This meticulous bibliography, a displaced research tool, bears no spatial relation to the library's current setting. Navigating the project space requires a visitor to ask gallery assistants about which bookcase in which to search for a specific topic. Ultimately the guide calls attention to the temporary nature of the site. Each artifact will eventually find its way home.

As is customary with most events at the project space, e-flux emailed a press

release to their online subscribers. The release defines the word library, relays a description of Donald Judd's eroding personal library in Marfa, Texas, and quotes art historian Alex Alberro's analysis of the interpretative potentials comprised by Robert Smithson's personal library. These three points tell us what the library is, what it risks resembling and what it intends. The release goes on to describe Rosler's artistic practice and achievements and states opening and closing dates. For five months, this constantly changing archive¹ of textual resources operates Tuesday through Saturday during "library hours" (*read* gallery hours), between noon and 6pm.

Although the space resembles a library, it is not clear whom this library is intended for.



Who has time to use the library during standard business hours? Perhaps students, people who work at night, or people who don't have to work — I guess the same folks that have time to linger in galleries — but when we call something a library, don't we want it to operate like a library?

New York public libraries located within Manhattan and throughout the surrounding boroughs also operate during limited hours, but main branch libraries remain open throughout the weekend and after business hours on certain weeknights. Given the practice and projects of the artist who is being represented in relief, it seems fitting that her library would be made available to working people. Wouldn't a true assimilation of the project space into a public resource require an assimilation of its operations — not just its appearance?

The problem here may result from a lack of resources, both in terms of limited

attendants and limited space. Visitors are invited to make up to 30 free photocopies per visit, but aside from a rocking chair in one corner, there is only one stool at the reading desk. In effect, very few people can actually use the library at any given time, which in turn, can inhibit the use of certain resources. One can imagine several shelves of fiction, too long to copy, yet too continuous to excerpt, sitting idly by. Surely several other texts will be reproduced and perused, but I pose these questions because, limitations notwithstanding, we still need to wonder about the utility of this undertaking and about what separates the library as a functioning resource (which is its earnest intent) from a voyeuristic portrait of the artist.

This is not to declare the project futile or align it with the bibliophilic tendencies elicited by Jorge Pardo's bookcase or Carol Bove's bookshelves. If I were to associate *Martha Rosler Library* with other recent collaborative archival and relational projects, I would loosely situate it somewhere between the *Definitively Provisional* reading room, a visual and textual archive of contributions by artists that was curated by Cecilia Canziani and Kristine Haugaard Nielsen for the Whitechapel Gallery Project Space in London in 2003 and *El Pepito Discotheque*, a lending musical and textual library, primarily built and attended by Vicente Razo and Bea Schlingelhof that was set within the centre of a public market in Mexico City during the same year. I mention these earlier examples not to make a case for originality but rather to recognize shared affinities amongst artists and cultural producers in different parts of the world. Many of these artists are reconsidering the sanctions around knowledge production, site-specificity, artistic training and audience are repositioning cultural

resources by creating spaces that test and propose new pedagogical limits.

In her work on Black Mountain College, art historian Eva Diaz explains that one of the central points of contention amongst the College faculty centred around the question of whether the College was a community or a school. While this question is still with us today, the case of e-flux corporation as business, as virtually networked community, as (sometimes) physical community and as practice repositions it in a new and viable way.²

The pedagogical and social aims of our past are now extended from a local setting into a global context. Thinking about e-flux's potential audience raises new questions. How can we start to think about an expanded arts community? If e-flux's pedagogical projects spur a movement, what are the movement's goals? Can these goals be met through the organization's current profit structure or does the prohibitive cost of advertising already skew the dialogue? How can an international arts organization operate outside of this profit structure?

What I'm suggesting here is that the resource in need of investigation isn't Martha Rosler's library so much as it is the e-flux corporation's press releases and the subsequent projects that have been supported by the art world's drive to advertise.

Most releases contain ample information about an exhibition, talk or project. The detail of the release then allows subscribers in disparate parts of the world access to the gist of a discussion or event they may not be able to attend, which may in turn prompt dialogical, albeit indirect, responses. In other instances, e-flux physically manifests a resource, like

Martha Rosler Library or the 2004 project by Vidolke and Aranda called *An Image Bank for Everyday Revolutionary Life*, which made film and video resources by 250 artists available for rental and screenings. But here again is where things get slippery. These physical manifestations of immaterial networks sound promising in a release but the fact that there is no functioning map of *Martha Rosler Library* to match the well-organized online index speaks volumes about the efficacy of this node. And while *An Image Bank for Everyday Revolutionary Life* may have spawned local programming that was informally advertised amongst friends, the outcome of the project remains unclear.³ This lack of clarity doesn't reflect a lack of merit, because as we know, pedagogical effects are never easy to quantify or measure. But I will return to this point later.

Clearly, many artists are seeking critical and educational alternatives to the professionalized tracks of high-profile Masters of Fine Arts programs that seem to hold out the promise of art star studio visits, single-person shows, glowing reviews, and connections to highly-coveted teaching positions yet can only guarantee (at least) \$40,000 of school loan debt. But can we go so far as to call conversations held in the back of a bar a school?

I am referring here to Mountain School

of Art's case for situating their school in the back of the Mountain Bar in Los Angeles. Vidolke sites MSA as an example of an alternative educational space in the Manifesta 6 publication, *Notes for an Art School*, that reconsiders the spectrum of artistic and cultural institutions. I understand the desire to extrapolate the collective exchanges that many MFA programs, through their competitive structuring, often render tangential, yet still I wonder if this new iteration of intellectual cafe culture will eventually develop into what Andrea Fraser has termed Institutions of Critique?⁴

In her article, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," Fraser argues that challenging and changing cultural institutions requires a dual effort. Critical art practices set within cultural institutions must work in conjunction with counter-hegemonic institutions of critique to provide sites for interrogating and determining the evolution of cultural institutions. Are we effectively restructuring pedagogy by resituating it? Which publics are being addressed and for what purpose? Which everyday and whose revolution? Perhaps this points to the limits of what can be reasonably expected of a press release. The onus remains on the artist and the cultural producer to make use of the information and resources available in generating their own networks and alliances.

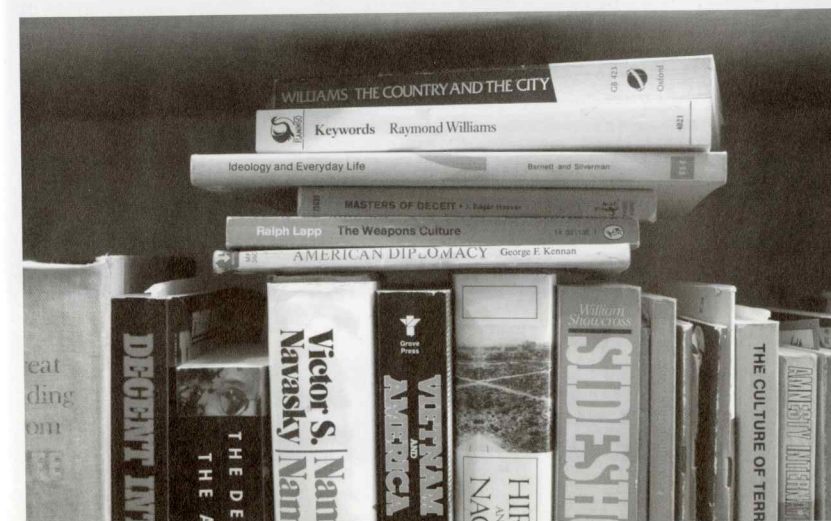
Originally published in 1979, Martha Rosler's essay, "Lookers, Buyers, Dealers and Makers: Thoughts on Audience,"⁵ comments on electronic and print media within the field of exhibition practices as presenting an alternative channel for reaching audiences. She states that they "can be quite expensive and are also now well along in the process of commodification; of course, their potential for doing something different isn't exhausted."

I work full-time, but in spite of the shyness that accompanies my sense of trespass each time I displace a clipping or misshelve a book, I anticipate spending more Saturdays at *Martha Rosler Library*. As I'm sure is the case with other visitors, I have already found needed resources that have been less easy to find in public libraries or bookstores. It will take me at least two visits to photocopy Roland Barthes' *Pleasure of the Text*, but I expect to return at least twice.

Notes:

1. Certain resources are unavailable due to their fragility or because they have been temporarily taken out of circulation so that the artist may use them.
2. There are of course several other commercial and non-commercial artistic and curatorial projects in the vicinity that deserve thorough review including, but not limited to, LTR, Arts & Leisure, CAMEL, Reena Spaulings Gallery, Orchard Gallery, Miguel Abreu Gallery and Participant Gallery.
3. If the image bank spawned new circumstances for sharing resources, we can't assume that organizers would credit e-flux for making the resources available.
4. See Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* (September 2005), p. 146-50.
5. Martha Rosler, "Lookers, Buyers, Dealers and Makers: Thoughts on Audience," in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings 1975-2001* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 9-52.

Margaret Liu Clinton is an arts writer and advocate who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She was a Helena Rubinstein Critical Studies Fellow at the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program and she will be continuing her studies at The Graduate Center, City University of New York.



A New Approach to Immigration Enforcement?

shortFuse by Krista Johnston, Faria Kamal and Farrah Miranda

Students in at least two Toronto-area high schools have been making art to express their feelings about Citizenship and Immigration Canada's increasing use of US-style immigration enforcement tactics. Dante Alighieri students made a colorful banner to communicate their concerns about Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) officials entering their school and removing two of their classmates, Gerald and Kimberly Lizano Sossa, to Toronto's immigration prison. At Parkdale Collegiate Institute, students made a beautiful Status for All! banner in solidarity with the Lizano Sossa family and the many others facing detention, deportation and increasing immigration policing. Members of both these school communities were present at Toronto's Status for All! National Day of Action events (held 27 May), proudly led by Kimberly, Gerald and their family.

While there are likely approximately 500,000 people living in Canada without full status, most enter the country legally and begin the process of building lives and families here while waiting for their cases to proceed through a beleaguered immigration and refugee determination system or hoping for a mechanism to regularize those shut out of these processes. Indeed, the cases of many non-status people reveal the limitations of an immigration system heavily weighted toward immigrants with high incomes. Although the federal government has been trying to depict recently targeted families as "queue jumpers," the reality is that there simply is no queue for

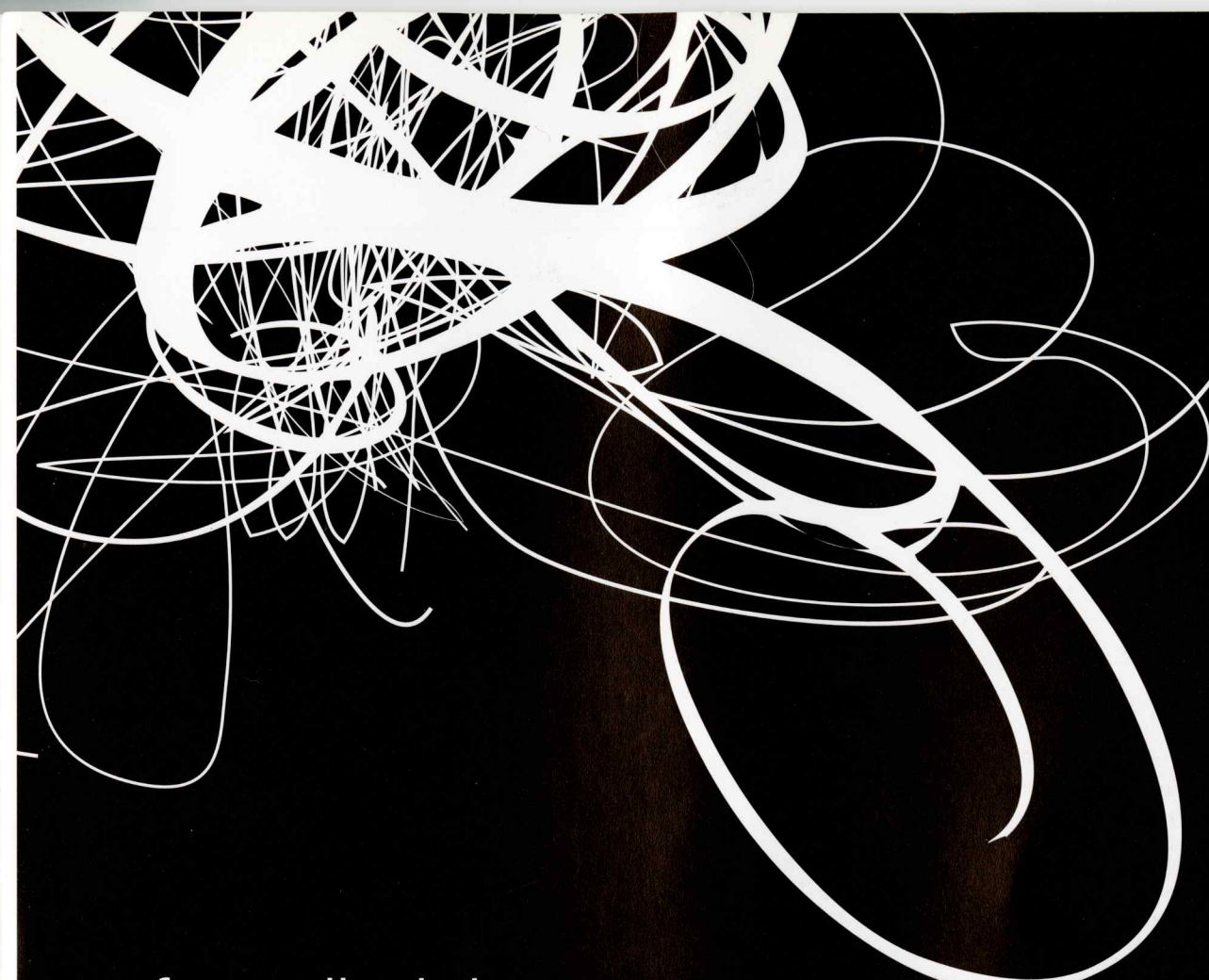
low-income families trying to gain legal permanent residency in Canada.

Many see the recent wave of attacks on non-status communities in Toronto as a signal that the Conservative government is adopting a heavy-handed approach to immigration enforcement. Over the past few months, CBSA officials have been conducting immigration identity checks in Toronto — demanding identification from people going about their daily activities. This has been happening in malls, at grocery stores, bus stops and workplaces in areas of the city known to be populated by non-status communities. The disturbing trend began with the targeted deportation of members of Toronto's Portuguese community, many of whom work in the construction industry. More recently, members of Caribbean and Latin American communities have also been targeted. Community organizations have reported that many of the people they serve are deeply unsettled, with some families deciding to keep their children home from school, while others consider changing jobs or addresses.

Despite overall alarming trends, the arrest of Kimberly and Gerald Lizano Sossa on 27 April sent an even greater chill through Toronto's non-status communities. That day, immigration officials entered Dante Alighieri Academy, a Toronto-area Catholic high school, and removed the two non-status students. The following day, as Kimberly and Gerald's classmates gathered

in a prayer vigil outside the immigration jail, immigration officials entered another Catholic school, and detained two young girls there. At St. Jude's school, the girls were called to the office and used as "bait" to lure their mother to the school. Due to swift mobilization by the school communities, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation District 12, Canadian Auto Workers, No One is Illegal and other supporters, both families have been released from detention. The Lizano Sossa family still faces deportation at the end of the school year.

Although non-status communities are confronting mounting fear and anxiety, they continue to mobilize for justice and dignity. Communities across Canada demand their right to walk in public places, do their grocery shopping, send their children to school and leave their homes to access vital medical care without fear of persecution. Despite attempts by immigration officials to silence people through fear, those most directly affected spoke out in their defense in Halifax, Fredericton, Ottawa, Montreal, Peterborough, Toronto and Vancouver through the recent Status for All! Actions. We are on the verge of unprecedented immigrant and refugee rights organizing. As the momentum of mobilizations in Canada and the United States continues to grow, articulate youth like Kimberly and Gerald Lizano Sossa move to the forefront to assert that No One is Illegal.



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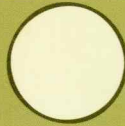
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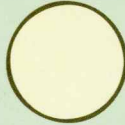


snap



Helen Gerritzen August 24 – October 7
Reception September 7

Lynne Allen October 12 – November 25 2006
Reception October 19



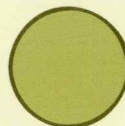
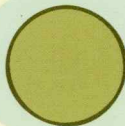
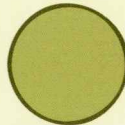
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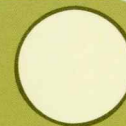
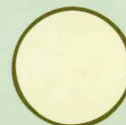
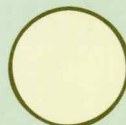
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Chantal Gervais: Without End
...in the Front Room, Jill Watamaniuk: Visitant
July 27 – August 26 2006
Opening July 27, 7 – 10 pm

Tim Rechner: Works created as Harcourt's
2005-06 Artist in Residence.
...in the Front Room, Nicole Galellis
September 7 – October 7 2006
Opening September 7, 7-10pm

Barbara Maywood
...in the Front Room, Judi Popham
October 12 – November 11 2006
Opening October 12, 7-10pm

Nov 18
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