Volume 23 Number 1 $5.50 A magazine about issues of art and culture

FUSE MAGAZINE

THE TERMS OF INCLUSION

BY ADRIENNE LAI

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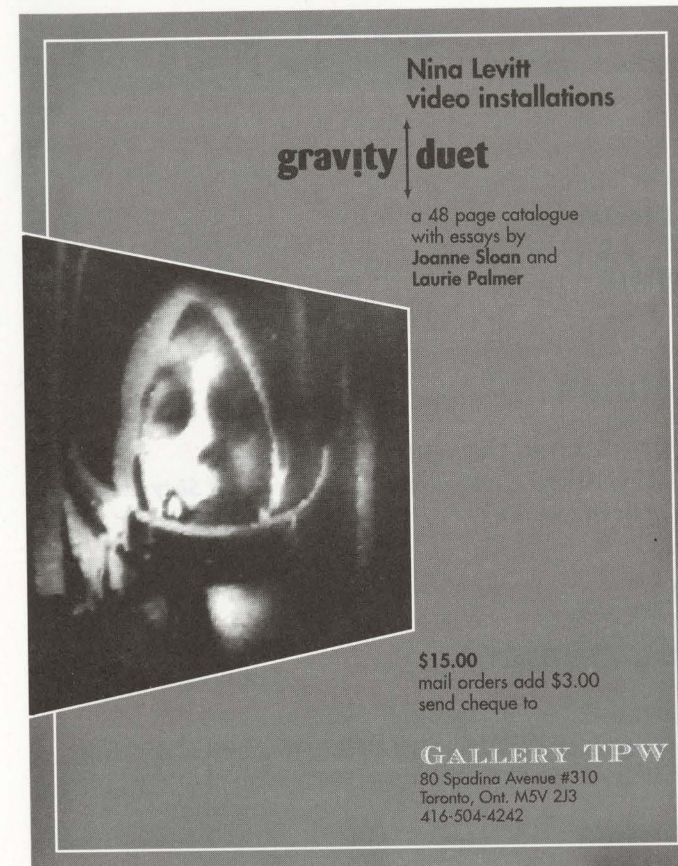

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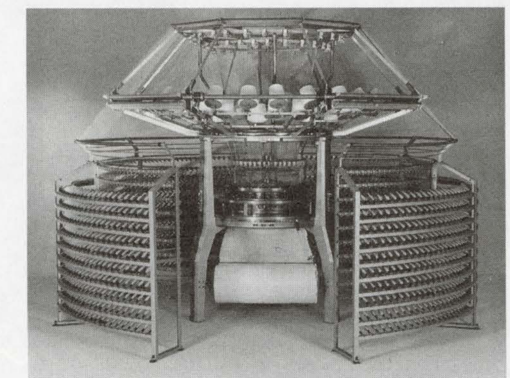

Industrial circular knitting machine, early twentieth century.
See review of *Material Matters*, p. 51.

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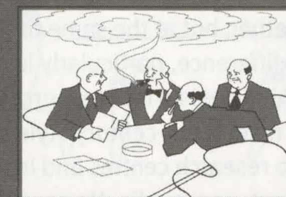

THE ORIGINAL INCENTIVE for this enterprise was a desire to appendix my normal professional routine – that of a studio artist submitting to the traditional methods of pictorial planning and forethought – with a more spontaneous, reportorial practice making drawings of daily modern life. I had held this idea for some time, although, thanks to years spent in the studio slowly working and reworking my compositions while cultivating a practical reluctance to associate my life with real life, it was obvious that I would never ...ily endeavor to produce onsite sketches in public places. (CONT'D ON PAGE VII)

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editorial

In this issue, most of the texts share concern, anxiety or frustration with the limits and borders of collective identity. Such contested terrain is the location of some of the most pressing concerns of this new decade, and is prime FUSE territory. As usual, our writers don't hesitate to ask hard questions, revealing not only vexing problems of identity, but provocative alternatives to conventional models.

Rinaldo Walcott gets things going with his concise interrogation of the "Is Gay Passé?" debate presented by THIS Magazine this past winter. He argues that collective action around issues of sexual liberation can be achieved without resorting to reductive identity claims. As Walcott sees it, the question posed by the debate arises out of a crisis resulting from the mainstreaming of white gay identity.

Adrienne Lai examines the reception of Jin-me Yoon's A Group of Sixty-Seven, arguing that the work challenges the mainstream inclusions and exclusions of Korean Canadians, while at the same time acknowledging the heterogeneity of the Korean Canadian community itself. Jesse Bochner's artist's project is a comic that touches on anxiety that many First Nations people might share about the official "status" of their identity in relationship to federal governments.

In "The Concrete Ceiling," Anna Camara contextualizes the often neglected or under-represented work made by artists of Portuguese heritage in Canada. She describes the uneasy feeling of cultural limbo experienced by those who, through their practices as contemporary artists, question the conservative values of the community establishment. At the same time artists do not want to sacrifice their experience as Portuguese Canadians in order to speak the language of contemporary art. Camara's article focuses on particular artist's struggles with this dilemma.

If you're pulling your hair out trying to negotiate the complexities of community identity in the traditional sense, two of our writers will take you into new realms of depilation by imagining the sometimes troubling but always fascinating possibilities and challenges posed by new media. In "From Dada to Data," Kathy Kennedy inquires into the status of performance on the web, asking whether webcasting technologies will develop or alienate communities. She suggests that they offer a new form of global public space for people of similar interests to get together, but at the same time potentially reduce the need for people to confront difference, particularly in their local environments. On another front, Oliver Hockenhull insists that resources for new digital media should not be directed toward nineteenth-century style museum (or zoo, as he puts it) warehousing, but to research centres and institutions that provide access to, and critical dialogue about, new media. He sees the possibility of addressing a broad public in ways that escape the confines of the institutional art world.

Borrowing Hockenhull's zoo metaphor, we might say that this issue is full of ideas that are not willing to stay politely in their cages.

—Editors

The Right Honorable Charles Marquis Cornwallis receiving the two sons of Tippoo Sultaun (detail), 1793.
See "Trespassers & Captives," p. 44.

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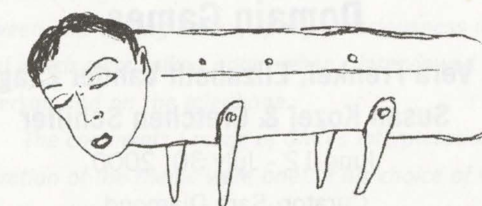

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FUSE:

I'd like to commend you on the super job you've done with FUSE. I recently subscribed to the magazine (having moved here from Montreal) and have been reading my first issue. I am delighted with its immediacy and topical articles, not to mention its fine writing.

I was especially absorbed by Catherine Osborne's contribution: "On the Feasibility of Becoming a Household Name," FUSE 22, no. 3, pp. 15-17. Artists-as-TV-stars is a bit of stretch for me, but what a gulf between Canada's and the UK's representation of artists. I thought it was the global norm for artists to be so undervalued by government and the public. Thanks for the new perspective.

Looking forward to the next issue.

—Xavier Nuez

FUSE:

As curator for "Tall Orders: On the Spiritual in Art," mounted a year ago last January at Toronto's Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts, I am of course pleased about the obvious attentiveness of your reviewer, Rozena Maart, and her detailed consideration of the works by each of the artists making up the exhibition. There are, however, some surprising and annoying moments in her review which need addressing and amending.

First, she has me speaking about "the exhibit" in a "panel discussion," at which time she has me holding forth while "the artists whose work was represented remained silent... as though performing a protocol of curatorial etiquette." Regardless of whatever "a protocol of curatorial etiquette" might be (and gawd knows how you would "perform" it), there was no panel discussion—something you'd imagine Maart (who was there) might well recall. She makes it sound as if these hapless artists, their spirits broken, were somehow cowed into silence while I held the floor. In fact, I was asked to give an informal chat about the works in the show and how I'd come to choose them. I stood up and talked (about each work, one after the other), while members of the Propeller collective sat around the gallery on the floor and listened—out of curiosity, not docility (there were, of course, questions and comments as the talk progressed).

Later in her review, she proudly thinks she has somehow caught me out in a contradiction (Oh, the thrill of it!). "Although curator Gary Michael Dault asserted adamantly that he chose pieces of work for this exhibit that did not make statements about religion," she writes, drumming her fingers excitedly, "all of the works here clearly use religious symbolism to depict notions of spirit." Well, *yeah*. Check out the title, for goodness sake! What I *said*—of course—was not that the works didn't make statements about religion but, rather, that none of them concerned themselves with the doctrinal minutiae of the *organized* religions. Geez.

—Gary Michael Dault

RESPONSE FROM ROZENA MAART:

Gary Michael Dault's comments seem to suggest:

1. That I make reference to a panel that did not take place. Yes, he is absolutely correct. My initial review was rather lengthy and whilst this earlier version noted that a panel discussion might have made all the difference here, that it might have facilitated a number of interpretations to the work, the final edited version unfortunately referred to GMD's talk as part of a panel, which it was clearly not.

2. That I cunningly sought to "catch" him and point to the inconsistencies in his statements on religion. Yes, I was present at his "talk" and noted his comments on religion, organized religion and spirit almost verbatim. Many artists did not have their work included and whilst GMD's comments focused on those included, the inconsistencies were overwhelming. In my review I chose to focus on the work of the artists, *not on GMD's conception of the relationship spirit has to religion, organized religion and consciousness, and the relationships between and among colour, spirit, consciousness and politics: all of which were talked about when I interviewed the artists in person and on the telephone.*

The comments I made of GMD's interpretation and consideration of the theme were brief. If his choice of words like "geez" and "gawd," which I observe as responses greatly showing his lack, are any indication of how my discussion (and disagreements) with him of the work might have turned out, then I recommend he listen to and engage with artists. He might learn, as I did, that artists have important contributions

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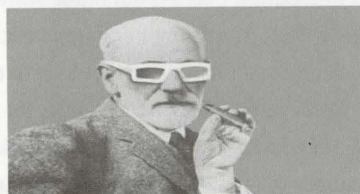

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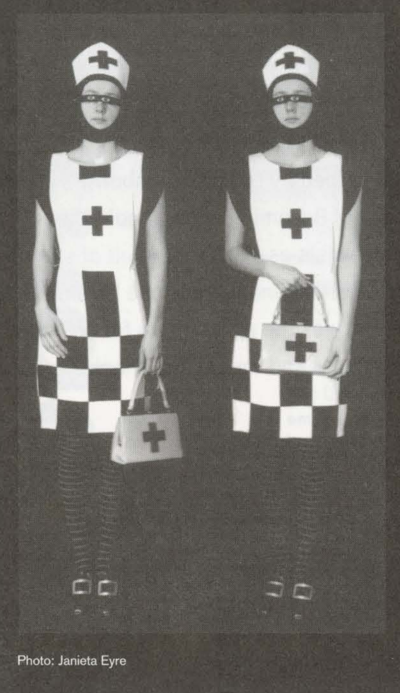

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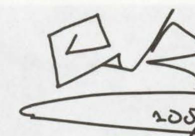

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to make to discussions of their work and the actual theme within which the work is situated.

GMD, quoting from my review, writes:

> *..."the artists whose work was represented remained silent... as though performing a protocol of curatorial etiquette." Regardless of whatever "a protocol of curatorial etiquette" might be (and gawd knows how you would "perform" it)...*

When I interviewed the artists, many of them referred to and spoke passionately of Derrida, deconstruction, Hegel, Husserl, Moses, Frederick Douglas, St. Agatha, and a host of influences and considerations, none of which was brought out during the evening of the talk. The videotaped version of his talk, which I might add really focuses on him "holding fort," has no evidence of the social and political thought of the artists and in no way notes the influences artists draw on as they create their work. If video recordings are used as resources documenting exhibits, as evidence of an event, then this event only records GMD's comments of each of the artists work. I found it rather shameful that the absence of such profound and provocative thinking was left unaccounted for.

If silence is not a performance, then what is? Silence was performed during Nazi-occupied Germany: this silence had devastating effects and consequences. John Cage (who studied art and architecture, and later music), on the other hand, utilized silence as a means of focusing on absence in his work 4'33" (Four Minutes and Thirty-Three Seconds). Cage talks about composing silence. Cage also observed silence as a response when engaging with the work of Rauschenberg; silence was forced from absence to presence by Cage. Silence can be both lack and observed as an ethical response, or as in the case of Cage, created to forge a ground for absence to be brought forth into presence. I did observe the silence of artists, and whether GMD agrees with me or not, I observed this silence as etiquette. That it is an etiquette of fear and in the case of many, an etiquette of intimidation, GMD would not recognize even if it (silence) recognized him.

erratum

In the review "When There Is No Limit to Spirit" by Rozena Maart (vol. 22, no. 4, p. 54), the photo should have been credited to Jonathan Philip Sheinbaum. FUSE apologizes for this omission.

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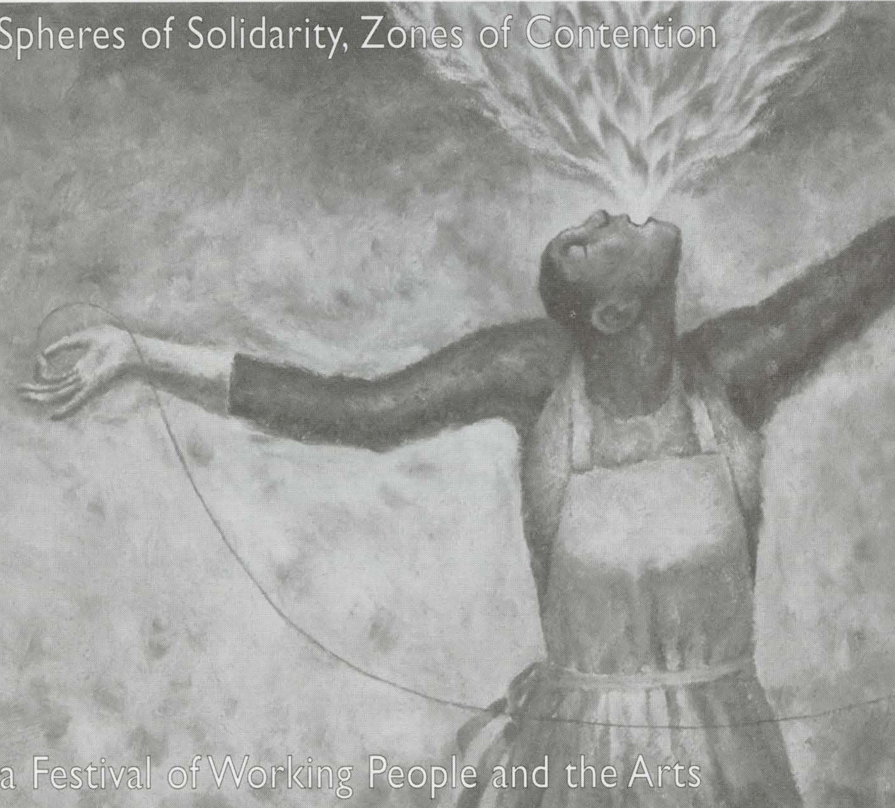

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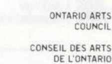

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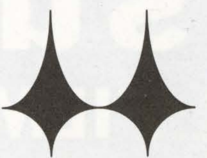

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RENEGOTIATING THE TERMS OF INCLUSION

Institutional space, (dis)location and *A Group of Sixty-Seven*

by Adrienne Lai

FROM THE 1970S TO THE MID-1990S, MUCH OF THE WORK BY ASIAN CANADIAN/ASIAN AMERICAN ARTISTS AND WRITERS CENTRED ON THE THEME OF INCLUSION—THE INCLUSION OF ASIANS IN DOMINANT "AMERICAN" OR "CANADIAN" MAINSTREAM CULTURE. ALTHOUGH MANY ARTISTS CONTINUE TO EXPLORE THIS THEME, OTHERS ARE BEGINNING TO FORGE BEYOND THAT BASIC DEMAND FOR INCLUSION TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF THIS INCLUSION. *WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO "BELONG"?...*

What does it mean to "belong"? Do I really want to "belong"? Jin-me Yoon's *A Group of Sixty-Seven* is a work that uses simple formal elements to elicit discussion around questions of identity, subjectivity and privileged spaces. A work that prefers questions to answers, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* is full of layered ambiguity and contradiction; however, Yoon's *Group* is not so mired in complexity that it fails to articulate a position. Like an individual trying to change the system from within, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* attempts to challenge the hegemonic nature of our culture while remaining cognizant of its own complicity.

A Group of Sixty-Seven was produced for *topographies: aspects of recent BC art*,[1] a survey show that took place at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1996 following the publicly acclaimed Group of Seven retrospective exhibition ("Art for a Nation," touring exhibition by the National Gallery of Canada, 1996). The piece was also shown in Taiwan, Japan and most recently in the *Crossings* show at the National Gallery in Ottawa. For the piece, Jin-me Yoon invited sixty-seven members of Vancouver's Korean Canadian community into the Vancouver Art Gallery to enjoy a dinner and to be photographed in front of two paintings. Against Lawren Harris' *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* (1924) the sitters gaze outward at the viewer; the same sitters turn away from the viewer to face Emily Carr's *Old Time Coast Village* (c. 1929–30). The sixty-seven sitters, varying in age, class and gender (and including Yoon herself), stare out stoically in the head-and-shoulders colour pictures that stylistically reference mug shots, passport photos and formal portraiture. The number sixty-seven refers not only to the Group of Seven—Canada's most renowned group of artists—but also to 1967, the centennial of Canada's confederation and also the year changes to the Immigration Act removed the quota system that previously restricted the immigration of Asian nationals (including Koreans) into Canada.[2] Specifically timed and produced, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* can be regarded as an intervention that raises questions about the institutional contexts in which it was/is shown.

At first glance, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* seems to be a simple critique of the impact left by the Group of Seven on the Canadian consciousness. As the title of the touring retrospective indicates, the Group's landscape paintings are, to many, "Art for a Nation." The Group's images of Canada—mostly of unpopulated, unprocessed northern wilderness—dominate the popular consciousness of what comprises true

Canadian-ness. These are not transcendent, apolitical images of nature. As writer Robert Stacey notes,

> Painting that seeks (as the foreword to the catalogue of the Group's first exhibition nakedly admits) to "interpret the spirit of a nation's growth" is painting with a set of agendas and premises more germane to those of political, immigration and tourism propaganda than to disinterested placement of pigment on canvas or lines on paper.[3]

The images made by a group of seven white men from eastern Canada[4] (and one white woman from western Canada who was profoundly influenced by this group) have had a lasting impact on our national identity. One need look no further than the commercials of Canadian beer companies, which proudly proclaim "I am Canadian" while displaying images of young beer-clutchers "partying" amongst lush forests, placid lakes and vast mountainscapes. By inserting these Korean sitters in front of these paintings, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* undermines this version of a national identity. In fracturing the integrity of the painting's illusionism, the photographed sitter emphasizes the flatness and artificiality of the painted landscape. Furthermore, Yoon's placement of a human—and a "non-white" human at that—into the empty landscape reminds us that Canada's national identity resides as much in its multicultural urban centers as in its wildernesses.

To date, the critical interpretations of *A Group of Sixty-Seven* have mostly focused on the issues I have mentioned above. Yoon's work has been described as "ironic,"[5] "mocking,"[6] and "deal[ing] severely"[7] with the Harris and Carr images. The reviewers seem to paint Yoon as someone who is oppositionally confronting the authority and legacy of Emily Carr, Lawren Harris, the rest of the Group of Seven and anyone else who supposes to pinpoint "true" Canadian identity. This dualistic construct is typical of the reaction to most artwork that appears to deconstruct dominant culture. As artist/historian Robert Linsley writes:

> Official neocolonial culture, nationalistic and patriotic of necessity, is haunted by the question of its own validity, even its own existence. The probing of such anxieties by official culture becomes one of its most important functions, but can only work to block the clear perception of an uncomfortable reality (namely, the paradoxical status of the nation itself) by freezing the fluidity of the real into polarized and bureaucratic categories.[8]

In this construct, since Yoon's *Group* seeks to question hegemonic perceptions of Canadian-ness, it sets up two oppositional poles: the Korean Canadian sitters (and by extension, other Canadians in visible minority groups) and the traditional Canadian (i.e. Anglo Canadian) identity. In this polarized relationship, based on essentialized versions of identity, the Korean Canadians seek inclusion in Canada's nationalistic identity, while the traditionalists seek to exclude them.

I find it difficult to believe that *A Group of Sixty-Seven* relies on these simplistic, black-and-white conceptions of essentialized identities. Even if we are meant to consider the Korean sitters and the background paintings as the paradigms of two separate identities, there is an ambiguity in how these two relate to one another. Is *A Group* trying to insert the Korean Canadians into the nationalistic Canadian landscape, in an act of "me, too" inclusiveness? Or does *A Group* emphasize the gulf between the two identities in the apparent disjunction between the visible minority sitters and the "Canadian" iconography? By facing into the Carr landscape, are the sitters accepting, examining, or confronting "Canadian-ness"? Or are they incorporating, ignoring or rejecting the Harris mountainscape by facing outward from it?

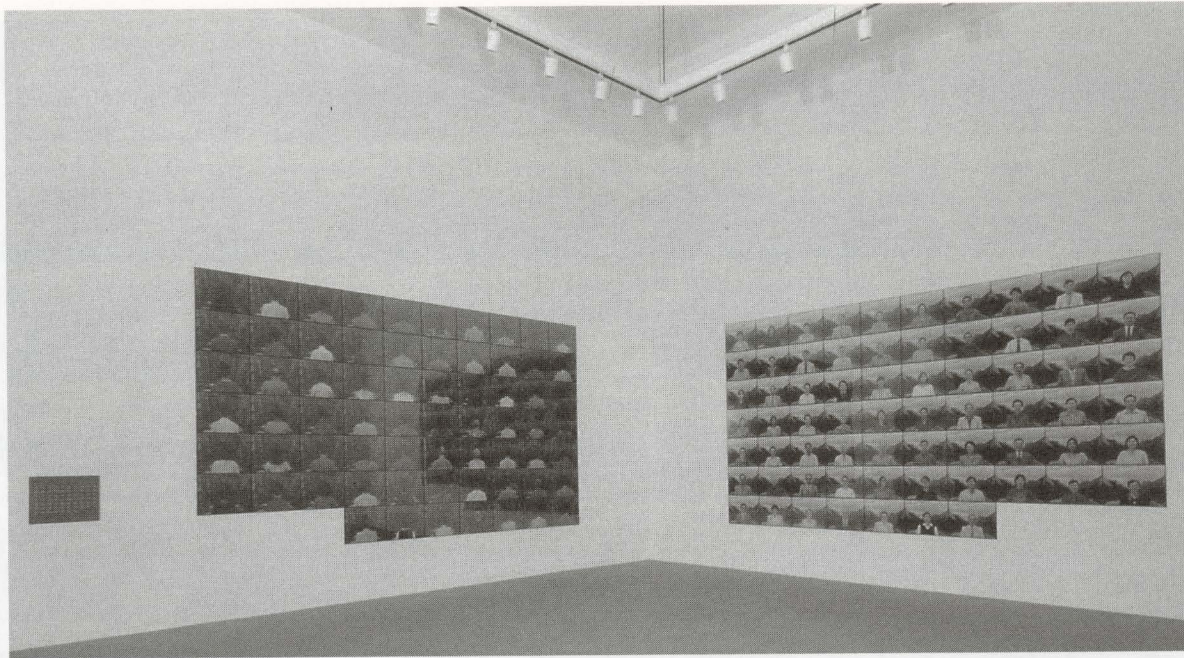
A Group of Sixty-Seven possesses a deceptive simplicity. The work's formal minimalism gives it the illusion of straightforwardness while simultaneously leaving it open to a wide variety of complex and contradictory interpretations.

Group of Sixty-Seven (detail), 1996, each print 47.6 x 60.3 cm. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

A Group of Sixty-Seven's presentation also complicates the possibility of essentialized relationships within the work. The identically cropped photographs are arranged in two rectangular grids: sixty-seven frontal views in one, sixty-seven rear views in the other. The visually rhythmic regularity of the grid format forces the viewer to consider the small asynchronous variations in each photograph. The grid's formal rigor thus serves to stress the heterogeneity of the Korean Canadian sitters (and by extension, the Korean Canadian identity) by emphasizing the differences in clothing, gender, age, and expression with each sitter. The diversity of the Korean Canadian sitters—from young men in t-shirts to older women in traditional Korean dress—points toward a multiplicity of associations to the background paintings (and, by extension, to Canada itself).

The corner installation of *A Group of Sixty-Seven* further indicates the complexity of the work's intra/interrelationships. If the *Group*'s grids were installed side by side on an expanse of wall, it would assume a confrontational position to the viewer. If the grids were placed on opposite walls, it would suggest an adversarial relationship between the two, with the viewer placed in the middle. *A Group of Sixty-Seven* avoids these pitfalls: the placement of the grids on the walls adjacent to a corner sets up a triangular relationship between the two grids and the viewer. The grids are simultaneously facing the viewer and one another, and the reflection of one set of images is apparent in the other. Instead of a dialogue between the images and the viewer, or a dialogue between the two grids in which the viewer is a mute observer, the installation creates a situation where conversation can flow between all three parties. Furthermore, the concave space of the corner invites filling by the viewer's readings and projections. I would argue that *A Group of Sixty-Seven*'s installation underscores a deliberate attempt to invite a multiplicity of responses from the viewer.

The question on my mind then, is this: If *A Group of Sixty-Seven* is engineered to elicit a diversity of interpretations, why have the critical responses been



Group of Sixty-Seven, installation view, 1996, two grids of 67 framed c-prints and 1 text, each print 47.6 x 60.3 cm.
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

so singular? I would suggest that this occurrence is not just a product of the work's visual cues, but also of the cultural, artistic and political climate. Artwork produced by artists from marginalized groups tends to be lumped into the category of "identity politics," which is perceived to be an area of postmodernism posited squarely against Western modernist status quo. As artist Yong Soon Min describes this perception, "Western culture is modern, dynamic and 'universal' whereas its non-Western counterpart is traditional, static, and too damn political!"[9] The underlying conception here is that a work of art's political position tends to belie its ability to address modernist issues of "transcendent" aesthetic form. This version of modernism, of art divorced from any exigent social, economic or political influences, ignores the diverse practices that flourished under this movement. In reality, many modernist works (e.g., Picasso's *Guernica*) combine the formal and the emotive with the political. There is no reason to believe, as curator Grant Arnold points out, that questions of identity or colonial history "somehow necessarily [involve] a turn away from the larger problems of modernity."[10]

In fact, Yoon's *Group* is quite heavily engaged with modernist issues and forms. While openly critiquing the ways in which the canon is constructed, Yoon herself is embedded in it in a number of ways. *A Group of Sixty-Seven*'s inclusion in large group shows at the Vancouver Art Gallery and the National Gallery, two of the most prominent public museums in Canada, speaks of Yoon's position in this country's art canon. As well, Yoon's commitment to image making, its optimistic attempts to affect social relations and its clean formal beauty recall certain modernist characteristics. The *Group*'s monumental scale and grid format refer to minimalist painting and sculpture, and, as Arnold notes, "The formal beauty of the work... overlaps with the visual pleasure offered up in the paintings of Harris and Carr, and even suggests an affinity for their work."[11] This observation contrasts with readings of the work discussed earlier, which seemed to posit Yoon against Harris and Carr. Yoon was schooled in Canada within an academic and photo-conceptualist background, and thus the aesthetic and historical legacy of modernism is a real and significant part of her cultural heritage.

Despite all the space writers have devoted to the discussion of *A Group of Sixty-Seven*'s (and Jin-me Yoon's) inclusion in Canadian culture and identity, I consider it a non-issue. There is a sense of solidity in each of the *Group*'s sitters, which for me quashes any question of whether they "belong" in a quintessentially Canadian landscape. I imagine the sitters' feet firmly planted on the shores of Lake Maligne and the West Coast respectively, facing "inland," the bodies of water behind them. Their stoic confidence indicates their arrival, and in this sense of arrival, they have started asking questions about the places they inhabit. Similarly, the reality of Yoon's inclusion into the institutional histories of the Vancouver Art Gallery and the National Gallery[12] has allowed her to examine the nature of the space she occupies. In both cases, there may be a certain sense of complicity. In one of the *Group*'s grids, the Korean Canadian sitters are blocking out Emily Carr's depiction of a Haida village. Does this indicate that the presence of the Korean Canadians somehow obstructs the presence of First Nations peoples? As immigrants, how do the Korean Canadians relate to the original habitants of this country? This placement raises issues around what Yoon calls the "terms of inclusion,"[13] or what it means to "belong" in a country with a colonial history.

Perhaps the confidence of the *Group*'s sitters is frequently mistaken for a unified identity, or perhaps it is the aggressive nature of the work that some mistake for an insecure demand for inclusion. Then again, perhaps it is also the basic desire to separate the world into neat categories, particularly in the hegemonic culture's way of understanding the Other, that necessitates the reading of Yoon's *A Group of Sixty-Seven* as an oppositional demand for inclusion. As cultural theorist Homi Bhabha notes, "A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid.'"[14] In *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, Jin-me Yoon has created a work that defies this grid in its hybridization of modernist and postmodernist elements; insider and outsider voices; the solidity and discomfort of inclusion.

The main criticism many have with *A Group of Sixty-Seven* is that it seems to tread some well-traveled territory. The problematic exclusions and political agendas inherent in the formation of a national Canadian identity seem obvious to today's jaded contemporary art audience. Some would argue that postcolonial and feminist movements have already shattered the idea of an objective History, and that it would be more interesting to approach more up-to-date subject matter. However, in the rush to keep up with the ever-ephemeral avant-garde, the art world must not forget that institutions (and society as a whole) are slow to change. Though we live in an era where postcolonial, feminist and Queer theory are becoming part of university curricula, it is also an era where the work of seven early twentieth-century white male painters is considered to be "art for a nation," and the work of forty-one contemporary artists of varying ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds is considered to be "aspects of recent BC art."

I believe the difficulty of *A Group of Sixty-Seven* is this: the work projects an unwavering aura of confidence and aggressiveness while simultaneously containing a mixture of disparate and contradictory elements. Yoon's work does not point to essentialized concepts of identity; rather, it speaks of the complexity of Canadian identity as it conflicts with, includes and reconsiders multiculturalism.

Unfortunately, however, *A Group of Sixty-Seven*'s refusal to let its complicated issues manifest themselves in an uncertain or ambivalent stance seems to cloud some people's ability to see the full richness of the work. The root of this problem can be found in the cultural and political climate as well as in the simplicity of the work's visual cues. Perhaps, however, this is not a problem but rather another institutional framework to whose inequities the work points. *A Group of Sixty-Seven* is about the space it inhabits, the frames that surround it, rather than its internal content. These frames include the critical and public perception of the piece as well as the museological and historical structures that envelop it. Until the dominant society acknowledges a "notion of a politics which is based on unequal, uneven, multiple and potentially antagonistic, political identities,"[15] *A Group of Sixty-Seven* can only be recognized for its political confrontation, not its political complexity.

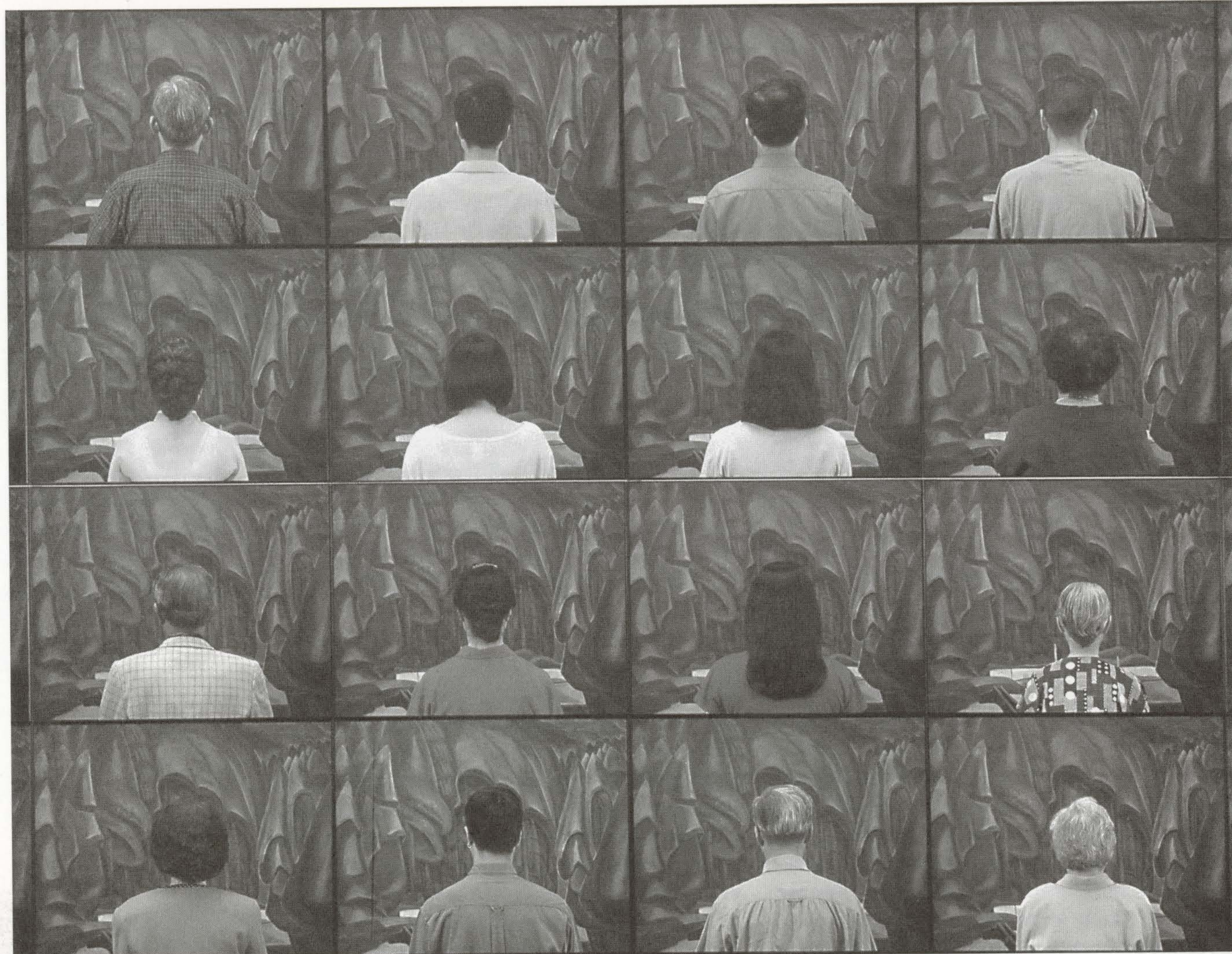
I would like to thank Jin-me Yoon, Baco Ohama and Sam Shem for their valuable input and support.

Adrienne Lai is a writer and photo-based artist. She is currently working toward her MFA at the University of California, Irvine.

Notes

1. I have taken this spelling of the exhibition title from the topographies catalogue, where it always appears in lower case.

2. While the introduction of the points-based system for selecting immigrants was designed to eliminate the discrimination of the quota system, it still remains problematic. By favouring applicants who have access to higher education and business/professional opportunities, systemic discrimination still occurs—this time on an economic basis.



Group of Sixty-Seven (detail), 1996. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

3. Robert Stacey, "The Myth—and Truth—of the True North," *The True North: Canadian Landscape Painting 1896–1939*, Michael Tooby, ed. (London: Lund Humphries/Barbican Art Gallery, 1991), p. 59.
4. By pointing out the ethnic origin, gender and geographical base of these painters, I do not wish to make any broad claims or reinforce conceptions of essentialized identity. Rather, I wish to note that these factors probably did have an impact on the Group's presence in the canon of Canadian culture.
5. Judith Mastai, "The Elevation of BC Art," *C Magazine* 52, February/April 1997, p. 27.
6. Letia Richardson, "Topographies: The Ethnic Contribution to BC Art Explored," *Artfocus*, winter 1996/97, p. 10.
7. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "topographies: aspects of recent BC art," *Canadian Art* 14, no. 1, spring 1997, p. 68.
8. Robert Linsley, "Painting and the Social History of British Columbia," *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, Stan Douglas, ed. (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), p. 228.
9. Yong Soon Min, "Territorial Waters: Mapping Asian American Cultural Identity," *Harbour Magazine of Art and Everyday Life* 1, no. 2, p. 34.
10. Grant Arnold, "Purism, Heterogeneity and *A Group of Sixty-Seven*," *Blackflash*, winter 1997/98, p. 23.
11. Ibid., p. 24.
12. Yoon has had work purchased by the galleries and has been shown in the galleries on a number of occasions.
13. From a telephone conversation with the artist, 8 April 1998.
14. Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha" from *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, Jonathan Rutherford, ed. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 208.
15. Ibid.

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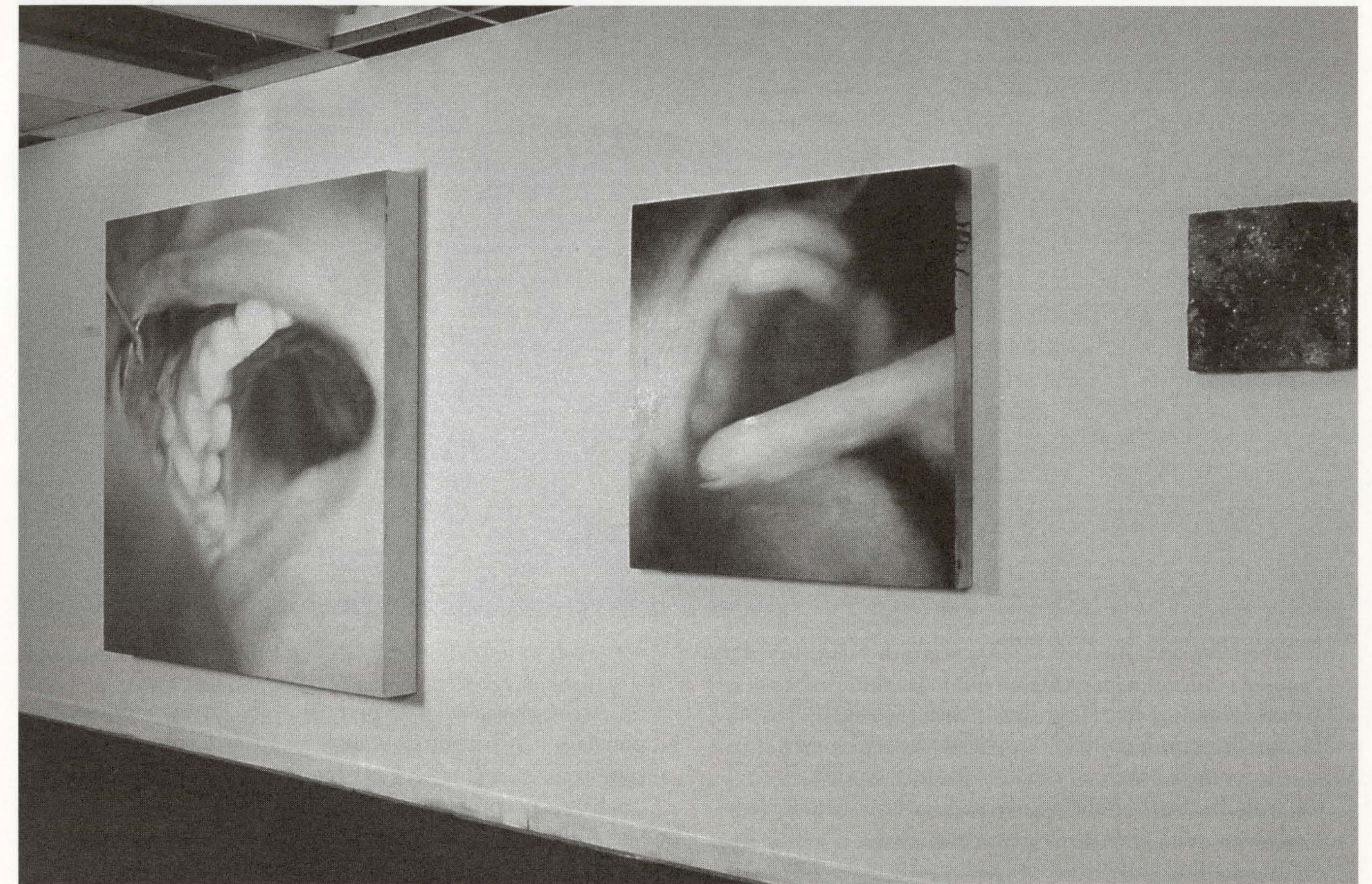
TWO stereotypes characterize the Portuguese in Toronto: the cleaning lady and the construction worker. The colourful religious parades that occur every summer in Toronto's downtown are conspicuous and widely covered—but what of political protests like the anti-Salazar rallies of the early '70s, labour disputes between office cleaners and their employers, feminist and political activism and the work of artists and thinkers in this community?

by Anna Camara



Painting Impersonates Television Talk-Show or *Decomposition*, Marie de Souza, 1999, oil on canvas, dimensions, left to right: 152 x 152 cm, 91 x 91 cm, 30.5 x 30.5 cm.

I am a Canadian citizen, born in 1956 on the island of São Miguel, Açores, Portugal. From my father's immigration to Canada a few weeks after my birth, to our reunion two years later, and between and now, my family has been on a tangential journey of adjustment, acculturation and integration. This basic narrative is shared by some 125,000 Torontonians and between 300,000 and 500,000 Portuguese immigrants across the country.[1]

Most sought to escape political and economic oppression in what was then the poorest nation in Europe. Many also avoided mandatory military conscription for themselves and their sons in fascist Portugal's disastrous colonial conflicts.

At the same time, the Canadian post-war construction and agricultural boom of the 1950s gave workers a boost up the class ladder. Veterans availed themselves of higher education or were promoted to managerial roles and it was necessary to import a working class to build the roads, till the fields and work the mines of the rapidly expanding economy. The Canadian government culled this labour force from a pool of white Europeans thought to be easy to teach and assimilate; able-bodied Italians and Portuguese with an international reputation for compliant hard work.

The first wave of 17,000 agricultural and railway construction workers arrived here from the Açores Islands in the 1950s, most from overpopulated São Miguel. Through sponsorship and family reunification their numbers swelled, by the early 1970s, to 80,000. Due partly to changes in Canadian law in 1973, and to improved political and economic conditions in Portugal, Portuguese immigrants have arrived since in dwindling numbers.[2]

According to the 1991 census, Portuguese is the most-reported non-official language spoken in Toronto, and ranks fourth after Italian, Chinese and German, among mother tongues spoken in Canada.[3]

Yet, as evinced by the paucity of statistical data, media and anecdotal material published in English, this population remains largely self-contained—disengaged from the political and cultural mainstream of its adopted country. The insularity that shelters and bolsters immigrants in Toronto may

São Miguel, Fernanda Faria, 1997, acrylic on wood panel, 122 x 45.7 cm.

also be an unwitting barrier to their progress. Self-sufficient ethnic satellites proliferate in every urban centre, where bases of economic refugees, sanctioned and supported by Canada's multicultural policies, live within the constraints of race, language and, perhaps most acutely, class.

With a limited knowledge of English, the first uneducated, poorly paid Portuguese workers had few ambitions beyond buying land or homes. They achieved this in unprecedented numbers after a decade or two in Canada. However, considerable sacrifice was made for the realization of this Canadian dream. In the still-patriarchal family, the workload shifted from fathers alone, to the second and third jobs (outside the home) of wives, mothers and teenaged children. The centrifugal pressure exerted by these closed socio-economic systems was felt most acutely by women.

Their predicament, which parallels that of poor working women around the world, generated its own backlash—high drop-out rates and poor academic performance among children in the public school systems; patterns of domestic violence and substance abuse—the toxic fallout of autocratic husbands and fathers. Effectively, a whole class of families banished themselves from the realms of higher education, political action and social interaction that might have propelled them to another echelon of Canadian society. A generation of exhausted immigrants clung to Roman Catholicism, language, a distrust of political systems, a stoic work ethic, and, above all, the sanctity of the beleaguered family. They were not equipped to meet the changing values of Canadian society on equal terms let alone to find voice within that society.

Açoreans make up 75 percent of the Portuguese speaking population in Toronto, but most of its leaders and well-to-do (political representatives, professionals, media workers and celebrities) come from the mainland. Conservative, upper-class Portuguese in Canada habitually impute social problems to islanders, and attribute drug and criminal activity to the more visible Brazilian, African and Asian immigrants, who make up a small fraction of Portuguese speakers in Toronto. This replicates, in miniature, a pattern that has survived six centuries.

The perceived inferiority of Açorean culture descends from conquest and settlement in the mid-1400s. Prince Henry the Navigator offered the newly subdued territories to farmers from Portugal's coastal regions of Alentejo and Algarve, and to his brother-in-law, Philip the Good of Burgundy and Flanders. Islanders and continentals are profoundly aware of their differences and have been at odds over various political issues ever since. Açorean separatist movements proliferated until the islands were given autonomous region status in 1976. In Toronto, the island–mainland rend is still palpable, but is probably on the mend as more educated, urbane Açoreans emerge to interpret and represent their culture, and as successive generations distance themselves from Portugal.

My parents' unusual willingness to embrace the modern life of 1960s Toronto placed me in a privileged position. I came of age in a household outside the Portuguese "ghetto," where old-world mores were acknowledged but not revered—where food, language, music, social manners and religious customs mingled with Canadian influences and values, themselves in flux at the time. I circumvented connections with Portuguese-speaking peers in Toronto. I did not discern a dilemma in my situation until my teens, when I began to analyze and experiment with art projects. Complete assimilation into the dominant culture essentially meant complete repression of my Portugueseness, beginning with the language, which I spoke only out of dire necessity.

Why does this large and dynamic community maintain a relatively low profile in the cultural life of the city? Who among the thousands of Portuguese in Toronto make art? In the slipstream between Portugal and Canada—each self-conscious, approval-seeking nations—how do artists navigate toward a cultural identity and with what support, given the apparent self-interest of most community leaders? Is there a new discourse between the continental Portuguese and their historically "inferior," less politically invested, offshore compatriots? Nearly fifty years on, do patriarchal, religious, gender and class constructs continue to muzzle cultural and political expression?

The Association

The Portuguese-Canadian Associação Democratica (The Association) was founded in 1957 as an offshoot of the larger and older (by one year) First Portuguese Canadian Club of Toronto. The Association's primary mandate was to aid dissidents and political prisoners during the Salazar/Caetano fascist regime. The much-noted divisiveness of the Portuguese community (Toronto is now home to over 100 clubs and associations) probably has its roots in this initial split—between the politically motivated minority Iberians and the politically disinterested majority Açoreans.

Salazar's successor was overthrown in April 1974 and the decolonization of Portuguese Africa and Asia wound down. The Association began to settle into its present role: that of a non-partisan, democratic (read: leftist) social and cultural organization. Its current membership are mostly first-generation immigrants in their fifties and sixties who, via long-standing affiliations with trade unions, organize for local NDP candidates and are active in political causes affecting the Portuguese abroad, most recently East Timor. Almost every Portuguese-language website I visited—Açorean, Brazilian, Canadian and Indonesian—is plastered with news flashes and "Free Timor" messages. The Association's forty-second anniversary celebration on October 8, 1999, was dedicated to the democratic struggle of the Timorese.

For the past eighteen years, The Association has been headed by Açorean-born Conceição Baptista, an energetic feminist who is the only woman to lead the only socialist Portuguese association in Canada. Baptista has represented The Association at international conferences, in particular those that focus on women's issues. She is on a mission to attract young people to the organization, no easy feat given the lack of concern in this community—economic, political and cultural—for its women and youth. She must also reflect the interests of the founding membership through charity efforts and activities geared at the preservation of native traditions and language. The headquarters, near the centre of Toronto's Little Portugal, is a small, clean community centre with free music lessons for a children's string orchestra; it regularly draws suburban members to downtown meetings. There is a new interest and focus on Açorean culture and issues.

The Scratch, Joe Lima, 1996, fresco on board, 23.5 x 23 cm.

teatrOVAL & VoxNova

Helder Ramos is a Toronto-born teacher, activist, writer and theatre director. Three years ago, he helped to found VoxNova, a loose association of young Portuguese speakers in search of a common voice. In 1999, he launched teatrOVAL.

Ramos' deepening involvement with the urban Portuguese community coincides with that of many artists I spoke to. He has funded teatrOVAL's projects with money from his teaching and media jobs. Ramos teaches at Lord Landsdowne Elementary School and is a social worker at a west end high school. Of the latter he quips, "Basically, I spend my days pulling teenaged boys out of local pool halls and dragging them back to the classroom." In June 1999, teatrOVAL staged *O Nosso Baile* (Our Dance), a multimedia chronicle of Portuguese immigration to Toronto. The image on the programme cover shows three young men, circa 1950s Toronto, ironing and mending their own clothing. The scene is a kind of double entendre that depicts the hardships of pioneering immigrants while eliciting empathy for traditional "woman's work." The play also addresses and criticizes a legacy of patriarchy and sexism, ignorance and fractiousness. It was reviewed positively and without irony in the Portuguese-language press but Ramos says that at key moments in the performance—those dealing with gender and domestic issues—some members of the audience became uncomfortable and a few were piqued enough to leave.

VoxNova now lives as a mailing list in cyberspace and as a youth page, in Portuguese and English, in the weekly publication *Sol Portugês*. Visit the website at http://www.solnet.com/juventud/home.htm, and you will encounter everything from party invitations to passionate dialogues on the history of slavery and media representations of Portuguese culture in North America.

Definitely Not Fado

I became aware of my own Açorean prejudices when I met experimental musician and DJ Manuel Lima for the first time. Since he was born in northern Portugal, I assumed, as I entered our meeting place, that I was looking for a fair-haired, possibly blue-eyed man. It took a minute to realize that the dark, mustachioed fellow swiveling toward me was Lima; he bore a startling resemblance to another Manuel, my late father, at Lima's age newly arrived in Canada.

When I asked Lima what his musical influences were, I received a paradoxical answer; not surprising, coming from someone with more than one alias. Lima's musical handle is Torque (recently updated to Torquelaris, after the star, Torclaris), and his nickname is Neu. Lima said that he had not looked at his work from an ethnic perspective until a Canadian listener commented after the release of Torque's electronica CD in 1996: "To me, your music sounds Portuguese." The remark sparked Lima to probe, for the first time, the conscious or subconscious function of ethnicity in the development of his social and cultural identity. We spoke about the often discomfiting experience of straddling two cultures and how each of us had found a way to explore, represent and take refuge in our creative lives.

On the surface, there is little in Quasi-Stellar Radio Source to betray Lima's ethnic origin. Apart from a few strains of sampled mandolin and a phrase or two of Portuguese spoken word, this debut defies roots music labels. Toronto weekly Now Magazine's Matt Galloway awarded Lima four Ns for his non-linear, basement-budget recording and said, "The density of Lima's earthy funk collages is surpassed only by the disc's breadth, skirting between trippy dub-pop, breakbeat junglism and disembodied end-of-the-dial radio thievery...begging repeated investigation."

In the northern Portuguese farm village where he was raised, the Lima family radio and television were reserved for news broadcasts only. History in written form was also strictly censored. Lima thinks his auditory awareness was triggered by persistent childhood ear infections. He had no music training and was only introduced to ska and bands like Pink Floyd by an older cousin in the early 1980s.

Lima arrived in the Toronto suburb of Pickering in 1983 at the age of fourteen, where he and his next oldest brother lived with a much older sister. He started high school there with kids of various backgrounds and, like many of his Asian and Balkan schoolmates, had no contact with his downtown "community" for several years. He says that he was always scientifically minded—liked to take electronic things apart and reassemble them. This bent found expression in computer-generated music.

At a 1997 youth conference organized by the Portuguese National Congress in Toronto, Lima met artists and activists, including members of VoxNova. Lima said that it did not occur to him until then that he might form connections with other Portuguese artists. Later, he heard that a troupe of Capoeira dancers held classes in Toronto and attended a performance of the exacting Brazilian dance/martial art. He approached the group with the idea of using his music instead of theirs. The experiment seemed to work and Lima later incorporated some Capoeira video footage into one of his performances.

Lima's 1998 return to his birthplace shattered his nostalgic impressions of rural Portugal and made him reflect on important sources of his music and cultural identity. "I did not hear the beautiful work chants of the women that used to reverberate across the land and off the surrounding mountains. I also did not see many young people.... But not everything had changed. The church bell, o sino," that marks the hour, religious holidays, births, deaths, "All these events had their own jingle, some beautiful, some eerie...the bell, the chants, my artist-brother's room...these experiences as a boy make up the foundation for my creative ideas."

The contradictory experience of discovering that one's identity both does and does not exist in a place of origin is universal. What is interesting is the use that individuals like Lima make of such information, and for whom.

Although Lima made it onto *Eye Magazine*'s list of the "coolest" Toronto musicians, he and his disc were completely overlooked by the Portuguese press. Portuguese artists do not make it onto the best-of lists of Toronto's popular press every day. Unless the community at large begins to accept and support young artists who make work outside of traditional bounds, it will continue to calcify into a backward-looking, approval-seeking, invisible minority.

Paint, Print & Patriarchy

Marie de Sousa is a sophisticated visual artist born in São Miguel in 1959. She emigrated to Toronto with her mother and two siblings in 1966. Her father, who had been here for a couple of years, was uneducated and strict. A village artisan and potter in his family business on the island, he was crushed by the menial labour he performed in order to provide for his family and suspicious of the liberalism he encountered in Canada. When Marie, his eldest daughter, reached adolescence, de Sousa virtually imprisoned her in their home, and punished her if she wavered from her narrow routines or showed the slightest sign of impudence.

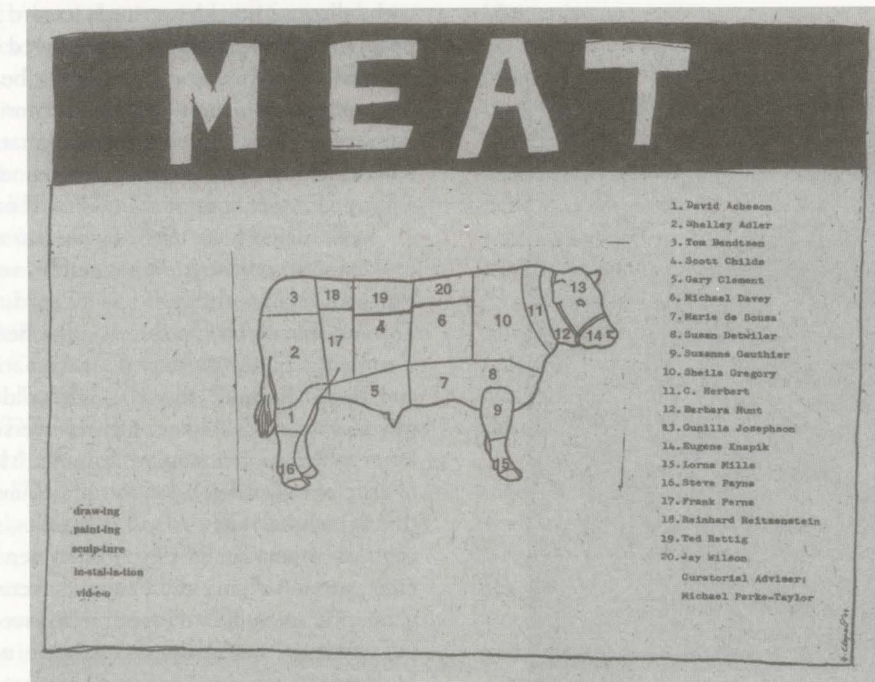
Out of shame, she lied to her friends at school: hid the violence, made up stories about where and how her working-class family lived and denied that she was Portuguese. At fifteen, she was doing badly in school and decided to drop out. She found a full-time job and ran away to live with friends not far from her family. After an exhaustive two-week search, her father found her in a neighbourhood café and brought her home. At seventeen she left home for good, working and taking courses at the Ontario College of Art (OCA). In her late twenties, she moved in with relatives in Montreal, studying at Concordia, then at the State University of New York.

Before her first solo exhibit at the Concordia Women's Centre in 1990, de Sousa began to "work through personal issues" and was deeply affected by the murder of fourteen young women which had taken place at the École Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6, 1989. Recognizing the cathartic impact that the event had on de Sousa and how it resonated in the content of the work, her curator suggested that the show commemorate the Montreal Massacre.

De Sousa then started an exchange between Toronto and Montreal artists, culminating, in February 1999, in a show with Joe Lima, a Montreal painter of Portuguese descent, at the Belgo Gallery in Montreal. Despite extensive promotion, including bilingual flyers distributed door-to-door, they received no interest and no visitors from Montreal's Portuguese neighbourhoods.

Now with the Red Head Gallery in Toronto, de Sousa says, "Even though I understand the lingo...French theorists and all that... I still feel like an outsider at openings." She also perceives a kind of "traditional elitism" among the Portuguese establishment. She is, however, able to produce in this cultural limbo and says that in her current work she is attempting to go beyond personal experience.

In October 1999, de Sousa and nineteen members of the visual arts collective Meat mounted an ambitious, eponymous show in a crazy-quilt office building in Toronto. Given her meticulously clean painting style, it was interesting to



Invitation for the exhibition "Meat," a group show featuring drawing, painting, sculpture, installation and video, Toronto, 6–27 November 1999.

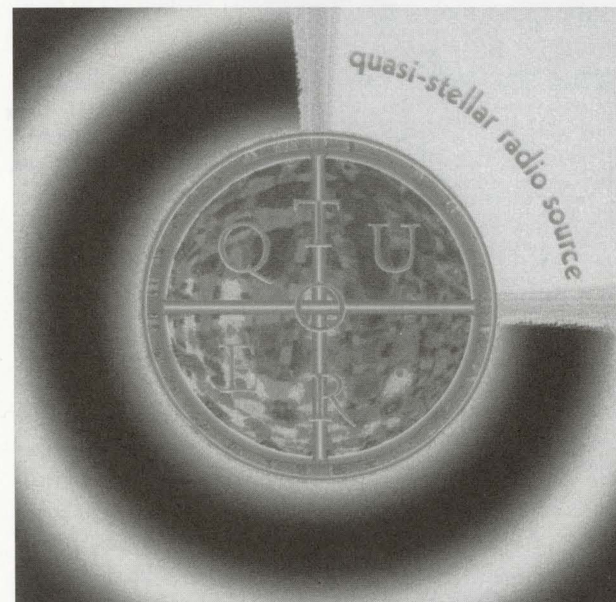
note how she had interpreted the ostensibly messy subject of meat. *Painting Impersonates Television Talk-Show* or *Decomposition*, is an arrangement of three oil canvasses in order of descending size. The first is a disquieting, hyper-realist close-up of a dental mirror lodged inside a gaping, vulnerable mouth. Hence the title's reference to sensationalism: what does it take for people to look at painting? The second painting is a smaller view of the first, in radically softer focus, the picture reduced to blocks of fleshtones. The final, tile sized image is made from the leftover paint (the by-products) of the other two works—clearly representing decomposition. The sequence, from realism to abstraction, can also be read as a metaphor for cultural and intellectual transformation.

Fernanda Faria is a painter who runs a framing business out of a small, cluttered storefront on Toronto's Queen Street West. From her axis point in the art district, close to the downtown Portuguese community, she is well-placed to both reflect on her background and to keep pace with the contemporary art scene.

Faria began her art training at Central Technical High School and, against her parents' wishes, went on to classes at OCA. As the youngest, unmarried daughter, she was expected to settle into a "pink collar" job and care for her elders. Instead, she worked at a retail framing shop, learned the trade and interacted with professional artists.

In her twenties, Faria made many trips to her birthplace on the island of São Miguel, which she calls the "most beautiful place on earth," after which she painted dozens of landscapes from photographs and memory. At one point, wanting to share her retreat with Canadian friends, she was set on building an art collective on a piece of land she owned on São Miguel, modeled on a Newfoundland art

Cover of "Quasi Stellar Radio Source," a music CD by Torque, 1996.



colony she had heard about. She became disillusioned when, in the 1980s, a rash of foreign investment brought tourists, congestion and diesel fumes to the formerly pristine island. She listed further reasons not to settle in the Açores: class inequities and social and religious attitudes would have made it difficult for a single woman, a lesbian artist, to function with any degree of privacy.

Faria returned to Toronto and set up her framing business, contributing to individual projects and to events like the Inside Out gay and lesbian film and video festival. In an odd way, Faria has succeeded in inhabiting a polarity of roles—she provides daily care for her aging mother and runs a business that gives concrete support to the visual arts in the city. Out of what once seemed to her a solid, onerous obstacle, she has quietly carved a full life in two parts.

Of the independent artists I spoke to for this piece, Almerinda Travassos alone has accessed arts council funding for her work. Travassos' humorous video collaborations with her partner, Margaret Moore, are well known among her colleagues and especially to gay and lesbian audiences. Yet, one artist friend of Travassos, having assumed she was of Greek heritage, was surprised to know that she was born in the Açores.

Although Travassos' mother encouraged her to complete her postsecondary studies, in her fourth year at York University she became disillusioned with the fine arts program and opted for independent studies at OCA, where she met and assisted experimental filmmaker Ross McLaren.

Travassos says that she has "no vocabulary to explain" her work to her family and that this is a distancing mechanism from the Portuguese community as a whole. She claims little or no influence from her background and derives her inspiration from seeing new work and dynamic interaction with fellow artists. Her attitude toward her birthplace is positive but unsentimental—she loved her only visit with her mother to the Açores, thought it beautiful, but could only summon pleasant "shadow memories" of the place. Rather than attack the presumed limitations of her ethnicity with a jackhammer, Travassos has found a window and made a formidable leap out of the edifice of patriarchy.

In April and May 1998, *Toronto Star* reporter Dalè Brazão broke a story on the front page of his newspaper that exposed the underbelly of Luso Canadian culture in Toronto. He picked up on a conflict between Father Antonio Cunha, the pastor at Santa Cruz Roman Catholic Church and Tania Monteiro, then a 22-year-old student of philosophy and women's studies at the University of Toronto. In a letter to the Archdiocese of Toronto, Monteiro cited a series of articles in *Familia Portuguesa*, a free newspaper distributed through church networks. The articles, written under the aegis of Father Cunha, describe women as irrational, indiscreet, prone to lying and having defective or suspect intelligence. "Women live to love and be loved," one article stated, but women's love "is superficial, fickle, unstable"; it urged husbands to "use a strong hand" to correct these supposed

Still from *Vale Abraão* (Abraham's Valley), Manoel de Oliveira, 1993, 35mm.

deficiencies. Manuela Marujo, a professor of Portuguese and Spanish language studies at the University of Toronto interpreted this last phrase as advocating that husbands use force to control their wives.

Monteiro wrote letters to *Familia Portuguesa*'s advertisers, urging them to withdraw from the paper until it formally apologized to Portuguese women and circulated a petition throughout the community. Cunha responded with open threats, going so far as to approach Monteiro's and her mother's bank employer to demand that they be fired. In subsequent Toronto Star articles, Monteiro called the *Familia Portuguesa* articles "hate literature" and "misogynistic." *Familia Portuguesa* responded immediately with insults about the moral and sexual corruption of women in general and attacks on Monteiro and her female allies in particular.

Eventually, the archdiocese distanced itself from *Familia Portuguesa*, investigated Cunha's suspect financial activities and launched a canonical trial resulting in Cunha's "retirement" from his parish. The Portuguese press was conspicuously mute throughout the four-month controversy. One small publication, *Nove Ilhas*, printed an interview with Cunha, but did not seek out the other side of the story. The publisher of *Sol Portugêse*, a friend of Cunha, demurred from publishing one of Monteiro's open letters. Frank Alveres, owner of CIRV Radio, was brave enough to hold a phone-in on the *Familia Portuguesa* issue. However, the sole question put to the program's listeners centred around whether Dale Brazão, the *Toronto Star* reporter, should have aired the problem at all. Two years later, Cunha is still "at large" in the community, using his clerical status to undertake new financial schemes as before, only now Monteiro says "he has no boss." Tania Monteiro has gone on to study law at Queen's University.

Forums for alternative community representations and political debate have floundered. The magazine *Silva*, for instance, was launched in the winter of 1996 and survived for all of three issues. An examination of the three covers of *Silva* reveals a brief devolution: on the first cover, the face of Bella Galhos, Toronto's only East Timorese in exile, beams optimistically; the second cover has an absurd illustration of a Native Canadian manger scene supporting the rubric, "Forging a New Identity"; and the coup de grace is a corporate, mainstream presentation that features the face of Canada's most popular Luso-descendant writer, Erika de Vasconcelos, paired with our most successful Luso-descendant banker, Humberto Santos.

Silva did not appear to lack advertising support or editorial direction but could not resist, in its appeal to subscribers, the suicidal pull of conservative mass culture.

In January 2000, at the screening of Miguel Rocha's first feature film, *Lost Heroes*, the house was packed with Toronto's Portuguese intelligencia. The film suffers from Rocha's decision to cram too many themes into his script, and from a distracting plot line that diffuses interesting tensions. Shot in

Toronto and rural Portugal, we follow the musings and longings of a young artist whose communist parents escaped with him to Canada before the April 25 revolution. On a return visit to Portugal, he tracks down a childhood girlfriend whose menacingly fascist father is set against their relationship. Predictably, the lovers meet a star-crossed fate. Curiously, Rocha cast two non-Portuguese in the leads, asserting that he had neither the time nor the contacts to find Portuguese-speaking actors. In accommodating English actors, the dialogue between the leads is stripped of political nuance and careens toward romantic sensibility. Rocha also says that he and his producer/partner were unable to obtain funding from either Portuguese or Canadian sources and the final closing credit proudly states that the project was made entirely without financial support from "outside our home."

Conclusion

Well over fifty media outlets—newspapers, periodicals, radio and television stations—have failed to address the heterogeneous Portuguese public, its youth or each other. At present, the Portuguese media in Toronto constitutes a hall of echoes, a cacophony of opinion and reportage that reverberates off its various factions. When you consider that the media establishment is, for the most part, composed of conservative, mainland Portuguese, it is no wonder that a coalition of ideas, identity or political power seems impossible to achieve. It is easier for the Portuguese electorate to support candidates of Italian descent than it is to coalesce behind their own leaders. Portuguese-speaking Blacks of African or Brazilian descent, women, Canadian artists and the young, with all of their stories and issues, are seldom consulted or represented.

The artists I spoke to who are not yet identified with any tribe or political position, seem resigned to their own obscurity or invisibility in the city as a whole. Clemente Alves goes so far as to sign his writing *O Estrangero* (The Stranger). And many still express surprise at the existence of, say, Açorean university professors, professional writers or politically active women video artists. The fact that so few have sought or received public funding for their work is due not to any native propensity for unhyphenated independence, but to the increasing poverty of arts institutions at this juncture. Arts grants have become less accessible to fewer people, let alone to first- or second-generation immigrants for whom language and the culture of state support may be uncrackable codes. That Portuguese ethnicity is elided in their artworks may reflect a conflicted response to the legacy of class barriers, patriarchal authority and the hide-bound traditionalists that still dominate Portuguese Canadian mainstream organizations.

On the other hand, international Portuguese culture has found its way into the gated consciousness of Anglo Canadians. In 1998, the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Portugal's Jose Saramago, a prolific poet, novelist and publisher with a broad, mostly European readership. In 1999, while doing the circuit of film festival interviews, British filmmaker Sam Mendes, director of *American Beauty*, revealed his half-Portuguese heritage. Cinematheque Ontario's poll of sixty international curators and historians voted Manoel de Oliveira's *Vale Abraão* (Abraham's Valley, 1993) one of the best films of the 1990s. On October 6, 1999, the world mourned the death of Amalia Rodrigues, the premier fado ("Portuguese blues") singer/songwriter who was, in her day, an international star on the order of Edith Piaf. That same week, Cape Verde's "barefoot diva," Cesaria Evora, played to sold-out houses in Toronto. Madradeus, Lisbon's hugely successful ensemble, and São, the Montreal singer, were interviewed and consulted on the history of fado and the importance of Amalia. There was news that k.d. lang was at work on a fado album and Toronto's airwaves, in particular CBC radio, have recently carried more Portuguese melodies and lyrics than I can ever remember hearing before.

Here on earth, Salt Studio, an artist-run photography/visual arts co-op, opened in Toronto's west end this winter. Paulo da Silva and his partner Laura Reynolds have financed Salt Studio out of their own pockets and are currently focused on women artists. João Paulo Medeiros, an artist, activist, social worker and co-founder of Abrigo (a women's shelter), operates a clinic geared at turning around abusive men. And in March 2000, Iria Viera, an influential social worker and immigrant from the Açores, won the prestigious Jane Jacobs award for her outstanding contributions to the life of the inner city. Both work out of St. Christopher House, a facility whose good works include the amelioration of the profound cultural and generational isolation of Portuguese elders.

The world is shrinking; immigrant families are aging. The moral and culture shock that once assaulted and silenced working-class Portuguese is wearing off. It is heartening to imagine that, with this recent exposure as a honing device and the desire to draw on their own traditions and engage critically in a formally innovative way, nascent Portuguese artists in Toronto are on the brink of a breakthrough. Perhaps, at last, they will be able to detonate their class barricades and allow some light to reach this rich but obscure culture.

The author would like to thank the many people who gave generously of their time for this project. Special thanks to Judith Doyle for her encouragement and fine editorial guidance.

Anna Camara is a Toronto writer and multimedia producer at work on a book of fiction, a website and a life.

Notes

1. Carlos Teixeira, *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 1079.
2. Ibid., p. 1076.
3. Ibid., p. 1079.

Stills from *Neonudism*, Neil Tenhaaf, 1997, Quicktime movies. Christine Martin as Gina, Gloria an Sue. Photo courtesy of the artist.

FROM DADA TO DATA

A brief survey of online perfomance

by Kathy Kennedy

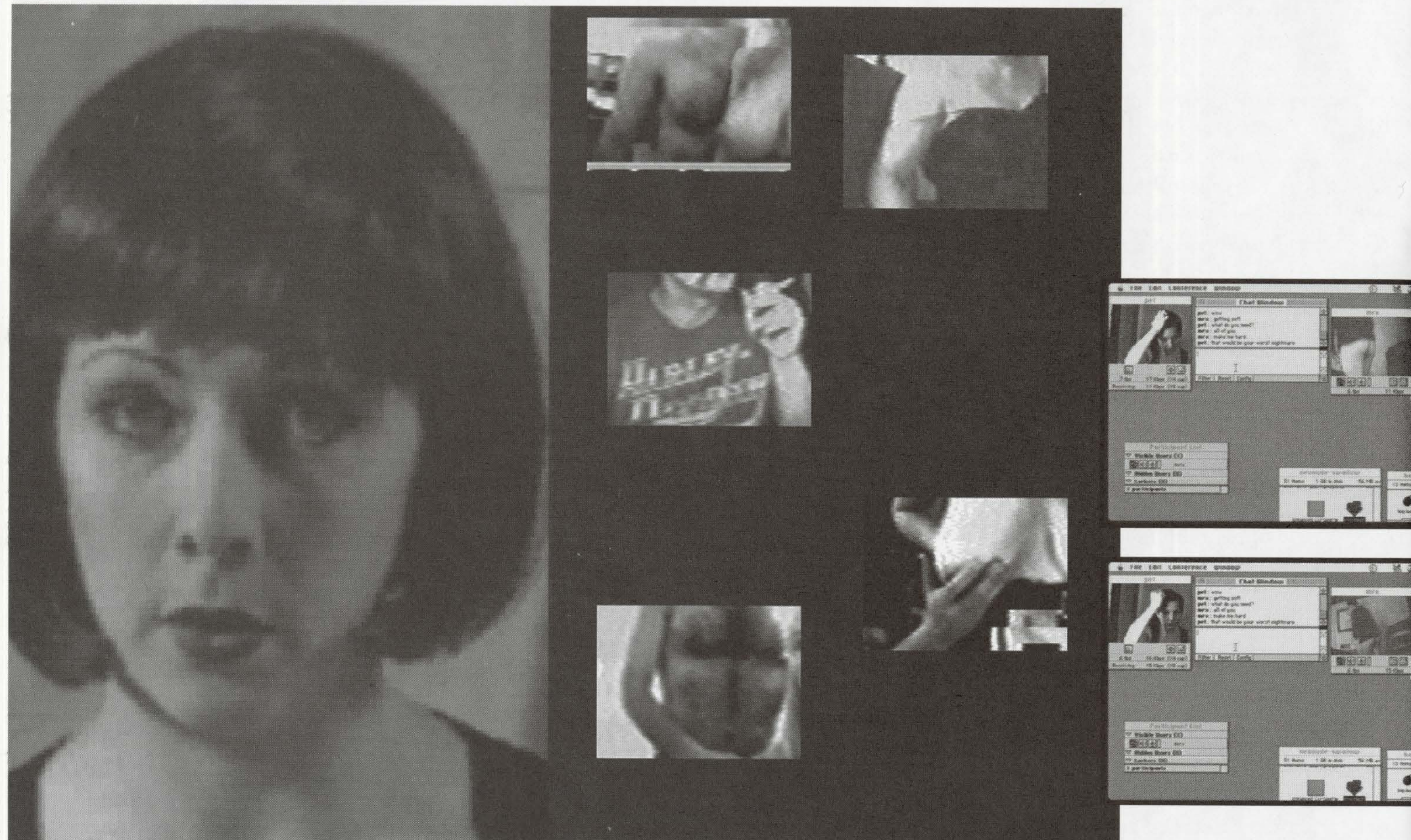
Virtual communities have evolved to the point of potentially undermining real geophysical or "placed" ones. In an effort to create intimacy and other "natural" experiences on the web, live transmission—the phenomenon of "webcasting"—has emerged as an essential cultural benchmark. While discussing webcasting[1] as a high-tech form of transmission with a member of Xerox's Palo Alto Research Centre in 1997, I was quickly reminded that it is now considered strictly low tech. "Thirteen-year-old kids are webcasting off their dads' servers out of their own garages these days" was the response. (Nowadays WebTV has become a reality and the Pope's holy mass in Israel is being webcast.)

The definitive feature of webcasting is that it's live. The viewers or listeners are invited to "be there" in real time, yet in the comfort of their homes. This live quality is authentic, since the data is being compressed and streamed, not stored in the senders' or recipients' computers. I question the performative advantages of this medium, whether possibilities exist for any serious implementation of performance within this technological barrage.

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.[2]

Other more widely used forms of "live" transmission on the Net also have performative possibilities. Online chat systems are becoming one of the most popular communications tools used by megapowers like America Online (AOL).

This article was written for the College Art Association conference of 1998, and recently updated.



Stills from *Neonudism*, Nell Tenhaaf, 1997, Quicktime movies. Right: from *Neonudism* performance at InterAccess, 1997, CU-SeeMe online video exchange with Mr. X. Photos courtesy of the artist.

"Channels" are given to various groups like teens and seniors, or groups based upon race, faith or hobby; each has a special guest moderator. Members interact within this context in a way not unlike the interactive model of talk radio. The software used is called a chat client, which users run to connect to remote servers (the computers on which the back-and-forth is actually taking place). A variety of these clients are available, and many are free. Recently, with the development of Java-based servers, browser plug-ins, and pure HTML-based chat, real-time online communications has moved to the Web's vast and colorful multimedia environment. Users may now receive limited audio and video streams, and can participate in chat rooms where others are having the same audio and video experiences. Courses are being taught in virtual classrooms, and transcontinental business meetings and slide presentations are becoming the global standard. Contrary to general opinion, there has been some critical questioning of live performance and interaction on the Net. An important early work is by artist John Hopkin, who created "Eight Dialogues" at the List Art Center Gallery at MIT in 1996. In this project, a series of eight two-hour dialogues using IRC (Internet-relay chat) with a variety of people were presented live as both form and content on projection screens to an audience. Hopkin is concerned with the loss of real experience that mediation incurs.

> Loss of the sensual Presence that informs a dialogue can diminish the energy flow inherent in this essential human activity. Mediated communication is easiest at the more practical level of provision of information. The more mediation, the greater the probability that information is the goal rather than substantial and genuine dialogue. By pressing technology into service of this activism, I would formally seek to explore the limitations and mediations that technology applies.[3]

Nell Tenhaaf's recent work *Neonudism* employs a poignant query of intimacy, voyeurism and public/private space issues on the Net. At InterAccess in Toronto in December 1997, she engaged in conversations with CU-SeeMe frequenters (who had been previously informed of the circumstances) who were displayed on a projection screen, bringing the audience into that nefarious world. Strangers meet and become greatly intimate through an exchange of words and pictures, the authenticity of which is never assumed. In the world of CU-SeeMe, there are specific social codes regarding anonymity informed by what Nicholas Negroponte calls the "knowledge age." Issues of nudity are less in contention than the ability to keep up with the latest developments and technological conventions.

So is the case with I-phones, another chat-based software that allows speech transfer through most personal computer microphones, simulating telephone calls to anywhere in the world for free. Sadly, there is little to report in terms of cultural performative interaction outside of the all-pervasive phone sex theme. I-phones function so far as a free, self-governed alternative to conventional sex-phone lines (or whatever they're called now).

Yet another incarnation of chat technology as "live" interaction is that of Multi-User Dungeons or Dimensions (MUDs), and MUDs that are object oriented (MOOs). This intense subculture is a haven for game lovers or those interested in playing with identity and interaction. Social groups have developed around this practice and a critical discourse has ensued in other online formats. Since the now legendary virtual rape incident at LambdaMoo (in which a member was "sexually assaulted" online, inciting a groundbreaking community outrage) in 1992, the utopian ideal of gender blurring has been defused, and some advancements have been made toward social policy on the Net. Through a genuinely democratic process between members of LambdaMoo, a decision was reached on how to treat the incident based on rigorous debate of censorship and the common good. Negroponte speaks of MUDs as a third, increasingly self-defining space[4] in contrast to work or home. Cliff Figallo, a general manager of the seminal digital community, the WELL, offers his thoughts on community and on conferencing, the earliest model of chat:

> Conferencing or message boards are "asynchronous" and don't require participants to be logged in at a specific time. The conversations remain available for reading and catching up with. They don't require a client or a Java Applet to run. Basically, they are online databases that allow you to enter new "records" as your responses. The best of them have good hosts leading conversations or are associated with content areas on the website which gives the discussions some context.
>
> I got to think of conferencing as "live" while working at the WELL. There was a core of committed users there who treated the WELL's community as seriously as they would have a live small town with all of its soap operas. When there was controversy over an interpersonal squabble of a policy decision or a technical problem, people stayed logged on and talked as if it were chat. We couldn't afford to leave the conversation ourselves, for as managers, we didn't want things to get too out of control. Our positions depended on maintaining trust. The "thrashes" as we called them, would sometimes carry on for days and we'd often have to log in late at night to try to calm things down.[5]

By defining Net space and immersing ourselves in it, we undoubtedly pull ourselves away from our geophysical worlds. We are encouraged to ignore the placed communities full of people unlike us with opposing points of view, and to seek those more similar to us online. In an evolving, organic community, "the public and private lives of...members are moving toward interdependency regardless of significant differences...."[6] In contrast to this technotropic ideal, Robert Bellah has coined the term "lifestyle enclaves," which are "segmental because they describe only parts of their members' lives—usually their behaviours of leisure and consumption—and celebrate the narcissism of similarity through the common lifestyle of their members."[7]

On one level, the information highway may bring us closer to our homes and families as an alarming proportion of the population is now encouraged to work from home as "telecommuters." But cultural theorists like Heather Menzies warn of the disempowerment and alienation of these workers, less likely to find solidarity or any other benefits.

Web photos from the Electronic Café International.

In Arthur Kroker and Michael Weinstein's theory of the "virtual class"[8] we are being led to become universally dependent on the Net for all levels of economic and social communication. Ensuing privatization will undermine the working class and any opportunities for real social advocacy. A more objective but still cautious view of the future is described by Stephen Doheny-Farina: "The Net can either enhance communities by enabling a new kind of public space or it can undermine communities by pulling people away from local enclaves and toward global, virtual ones."[9]

As for works of Net art in which the medium is fully incorporated into the process, only a few pioneers still grapple with issues of style and content as the technology seasonally reinvents itself. The Electronic Café Int'l in Santa Monica is the grandparent of the now ubiquitous Internet café, and was one of the first to use webcasting in a cultural event. Conceived of as "the café for the global village" by its founders, Kit Galloway and Sherri Rabinowitz, it includes a number of permanently installed multimedia teleconferencing facilities in real cafés, linked together to create an international "venue" for cultural exchange. Based on their 1984 prototype, the Electronic Café, which linked five cafés in various communities of Los Angeles for the Olympic Arts Festival, it acts as a meeting place offering food, beverages, and live interactive performances. Other cafés around the world are networked as "virtual spaces" where artists from different cities can appear to be on a single stage at the same time. In a performance at Toronto's InterAccess called the *Electric Skin*, viewers controlled two small robots from around the world using video conferencing and roamed through a maze of miniature artworks created by thirteen artists. Viewers saw through the video eye of the robot and bumped into other robots which activated a face to face conferencing feature with the two drivers.

The Café is designed as an ongoing "electronic commons" to support collaboration and co-creation between people in different cultures, countries and language groups. It functions not only as a venue but as an effective twenty-first century production and distribution mechanism for the digital and performing arts. The Café intends to have a "system [that] operates in a fluid manner where the satisfactory transmission of ideas and feelings takes precedent over the production of high end, time consuming, labour intensive computer graphics, though it can accommodate the creation, integration, storage and transmission of same."[10]

The concept of an Internet-based community centre has been widely adopted in a variety of ways. Local cafés with Internet connections exist in every major city today. Clients can surf the Net, read their e-mail from an account with any of dozens of free e-mail providers while frequenting a public space. Occasionally these centres host events, meetings and lectures. There was, until roughly 1998 in the San Francisco Bay area, a trend of uniting programmers, activists and digital artists together in regular gatherings. Cyborganic Gardens held regular Thursday evening "cyber-potlucks" and Joe's Digital Diner held a wide variety of digitally based events from storytelling to techno-shamanistic soirées.

More recently, however, the emphasis has been on keeping up with the economic frenzy around technologies such as webcasting and Net radio. Startups are appearing everywhere to align the delivery of a "live" performance with e-commerce potential, and the alternative art experiments of the mid-'90s are no longer new or interesting in comparison. A generation (in web terms less than ten years) of Net artists have matured into the relative mainstream of making projects using the broad bandwidth and technical support of institutional entities such as museums or corporate sponsors. Webcasting is now viewed as a likely accompaniment to any major performance around the world. Its most attractive feature is that it is easily viewable at any time, a direct antithesis to the concept of "live."

In Net art, the criteria of "liveness" must be reevaluated. The term "live" originated in broadcasting and has grown to be synonymous with authenticity and the trusted reality of seeing an event at its precise time of occurence.[11] Webcasting, as it becomes a mainstream cultural experience, undermines the authority of "liveness" over mediation and creates a new, hybrid space for performance.

Kathy Kennedy is a sound artist living in San Francisco, whose work involves the voice and the interface of technology. She is also co-founder of Studio XX, digital media centre for women in Montreal.

Notes

1. Webcasting is a "push" technology on the Internet; it sends information to viewers, rather than the more traditional "pull" version of placing files on websites, which viewers then copy and open on their PCs. A multicast is a single data stream intended only for stations that have joined the appropriate "multicast group" (as in clicking on a Real Video site, which automatically calls the data to be streamed from the Real Video server. The sender generates a single data stream. "Broadcasting" is presently a less viable option for sending data out from servers.
2. Peggy Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance: Representation Without Reproduction," in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Rutledge Press, 1993), p. 146.
3. http://www.usa.net/~hopkin
4. Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 182.
5. E-mail conversations with the author, January 1998.
6. Stephen Doheny-Farina, *The Wired Neighbourhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 50.
7. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swindler and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Roe, 1985), p. 72.
8. Arthur Kroker and Michael A. Weinstein, *Data Trash* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).
9. Stephen Doheny-Farina, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
10. http://main.ecafe.com/index2.html
11. http://www.diacenter.org/dillerscofidio/index.html

ZKM*

THE SMELL OF ELEPHANT SHIT / THE DIGITALLY CONTRIVED

by Oliver Hockenhull

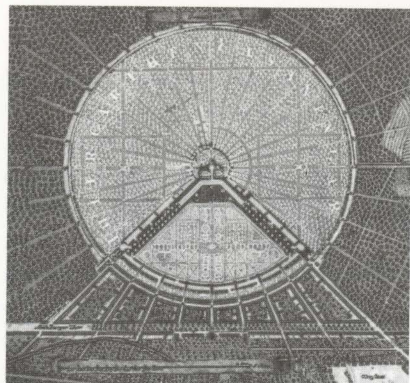
The world caged. Bounded in one place. Evolution frozen. The hippo squeezed into a petty enclave of 400 square feet eating severely light German chocolate—delicious—cake in Karlsruhe—that is Karlsruhe Zoo.

Karlsruhe is the new/old technological capital of German applied science/intent.

It is a city built under the watchful eye of the Margrave Karl Wilhelm of Baden-Durlach (1679–1738)—the founder of the city of Karlsruhe. The pamphlet at the tourist office describes the Margrave thus: "The Margrave had a pleasure-loving nature—except for his wife, whom he left behind in Durlach, he was very attentive to women."

"...In the electric age history no longer presents itself as a perspective of continuous visual space, but as an all-at-once and simultaneous presence of all facets of the past.... Awareness of all-at-once history or tradition goes with a correlative awareness of the present as modifying the entire past. ...It is the vision that is characteristic of the artistic perception which is necessarily concerned with making and change rather than with any point of view or any static position."
—Marshall McLuhan

***Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe, Germany**



At first the only building in the city was the Margrave's own residence and so in order to make life more pleasant, he decided to attract inhabitants to his town. The people who took up residence near his palace were granted many privileges: they were given land and wood for nothing, serfdom and statute labour were abolished, taxes were waived for twenty years, and they were guaranteed religious freedom. He made Karlsruhe his official residence in order to persuade the new citizens to move there. The first inhabitants were Prussians, Poles, Saxons, Bavarians, Swabians and people from Alsace, not forgetting of course people from the surrounding area. This population mixture gave rise to a new dialect—"Brigandendeutsch."

The city's design is based on the concentric embrace of absolutism. Radiating rays of sunlight originating from the munificence of the Margrave's palace and by extension, the Margrave himself.

In the town of Karlsruhe, the smell of elephant shit is sensate. An aged Imperial Zoo that boasts some of the world's best success in breeding contains more than one thousand animals of 150 different species. Zebras, giraffes, antelopes, polar bears, Persian ahus, elephants and lions and an oak tree honouring Otto Bismarck dedicated in 1896.

"Electronic man approaches the condition in which it is possible to deal with the entire environment as a work of art.... The new possibility demands total understanding of the artistic function in society."

—McLuhan

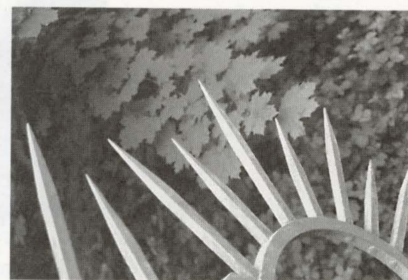
ZKM

From the promotional literature:

"ZKM, Museum for the New Millennium, Magnet for Visitors.... In 1997, the ZKM took up permanent residence in a listed industrial building impressive both for its striking architecture and vastness...its size—300 metres long and 52 metres wide."

The belief you can capture the evolving art of the digital without in actuality altering its reality is the simple conceit on which ZKM's premise is built. Museums predicate work/objects predicate canvas/frames/screens, the manufacturing and storing of aesthetic experience like so many exotic animals. An imperial gesture blind to the environmental consideration and properties of the medium.

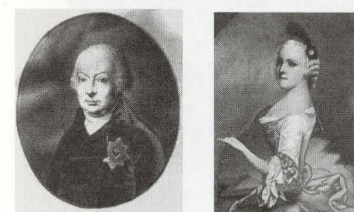
Yet, strictly, the digital is directly a transform—a transfiguration of the whatever through code into yet another whatever of code. Its formal properties demand conceiving the medium as the ground of rhetorical, philosophical and ideological contention. Counter to the spin of the conservative agenda, ideology did not vaporize into so much ancient history with the fall of the Berlin Wall.



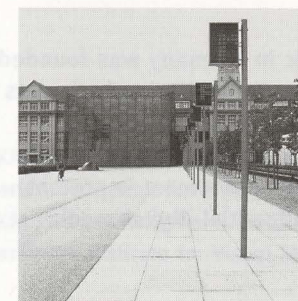
"Our typical response to a disturbing new environment is to re-create the old environment instead of heeding the new opportunities of the new environment. Failure to notice the new opportunities is also failure to understand the new powers.... This failure leaves us in the role of mere automata."

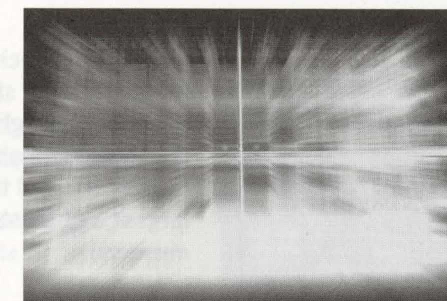
—McLuhan

It is through the reflections engendered by an immersion in the property of encoding, and of memory, that the structure of future developments rests.



The next Margrave Karl Friedrich was an example of an enlightened, absolute sovereign, who abolished torture in 1769 and serfdom in 1783. The reputation of Karlsruhe as a Court of Muse came about not least because of his wife's (Margravine Caroline Luise, 1723–1783) interest in arts and natural sciences. Prominent thinkers, poets and musicians such as Voltaire, Herder, Lavater, Goethe, Klopstock, Gluck and Wieland were among their guests.





THE ZKM MEDIATHEK

A state-of-the-art, slick, impressive and user-controlled auto-robot Mediathek is part of the ZKM Centre. Oddly the curatorial direction of the collection, presently at least, concentrates on the low-tech video/performance art of the '70s and early '80s and then jumps ahead to the polished video/computer art of the '90s. Experimental film, the substantive precursor to much of the high-tech digital video/computer works, is overlooked. Glaring, as it is in much of the structural, visual/technical, and grammatical/montage work of this "school," (from say Brakhage to Straub/Huillet to Trinh T. Minh-ha) that the antecedent of the rhetorically interesting works in hypermedia can be found.

KARLSRUHE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

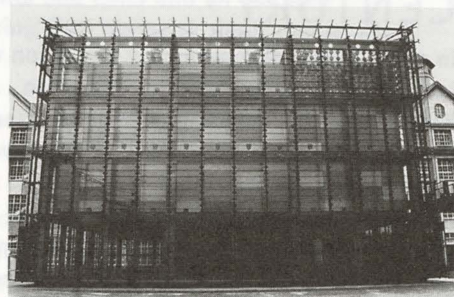
In 1803 universal compulsory education was introduced in Baden (and by extension Karlsruhe). This "reading revolution" created the basis for the politicization of the lower classes. In 1848 the French February Revolution lit the spark in Germany. The German uprising began in Baden, and ended here in 1849 with the bloody suppression by Prussian troops of the first, short-lived republic on German soil.

The first polytechnic in Germany was founded in Karlsruhe in 1825. Today Karlsruhe boasts a number of high-tech research centres including Germany's premiere lab in nano-technology and the world's most important, largest and most influential digital media museum.

Boundaries or frames intrinsically involve paradox. They are always of a different logical type from that which they bound or isolate.

The Media Museum ZKM is looked upon by many in the digital media community as an achievement that they would like their own communities/countries to emulate. A sad mistake. I believe that it is worthwhile to have research centres and retreat centres where artists can have access to equipment, dialogue, and additional knowledge and debate. However, the essential formal properties of the digital media demand a much greater, inclusive, and public engagement than a warehousing of "digital art."

Art that not only uses but understands and integrates the potential of the digital media is not object-oriented—it is process-oriented. That process is one that encompasses the global properties of the medium, its relationship to complexity, and its transfigurative social/political/cultural capacity.



Artists are not stupid, but neither are they particularly known for their integrity. They are more often than not self-serving. This results in the desire to see works situated in the venues that offer prestige and financial reward—thus the singular nature of the animal becomes engineered by the zoo masters.

All bureaucracies, educational, cultural, critical and institutional, prefer the imperialism of the object-oriented art work. It makes their life easier! They need not question (or be questioned about) their own use-value within the new processes and structures that are opened up by the new technologies.

"The potential of any technology is always dissipated by its users' involvement in its predecessor."

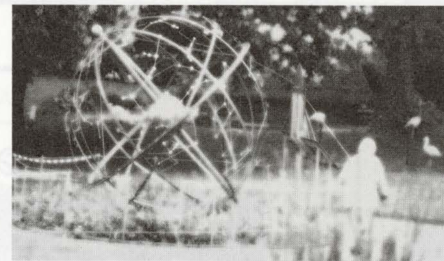
—McLuhan

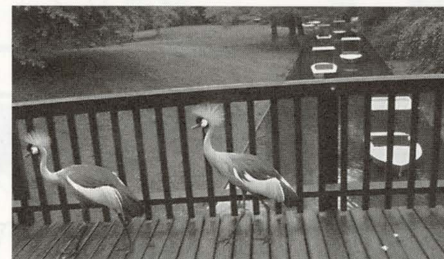
In this case it is the users' involvement with the deadening, zoo-like nature of the gallery circuit, the lion-taming acts of curators, managers, administrators, institutions and the power-hungry cultural tailors (who are putting a brake on the evolution of the medium: its subversive mutational potential) that go about claiming we need to find more space for "digital art" in the salons of the nation. It seems to me that what they are generally buying into is a bunch of expensive Rube Goldberg contraptions (that generally don't work) meant to impress through their (quite variable) technical sophistication, an audience that is unable to discern its RAM from its ROM.

It would have been fine to judiciously give the animal enough land to forage as it needed to feed, but to say that they have it and have locked it up?

It has already gotten fat with all that delicious cake, and with little exercise will surely have an early death.

According to administrator of ZKM Silke Sutter, the Centre will not be accepting applications for its Artists-in-Residence Program until the year 2001 as all its current resources are fully committed. According to critics I met in Graz, Austria in November 1999, the ZKM's heating budget is greater than the budget for its Artists-in-Residence Program.





ZKM | Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie
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ZKM | Center for Art and Media Technology
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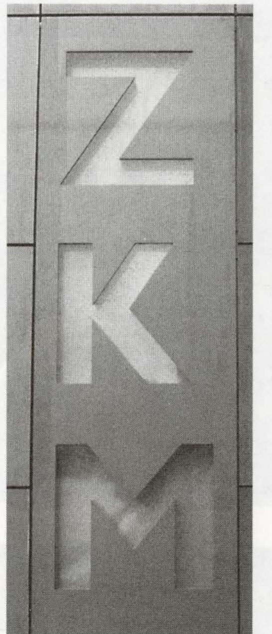
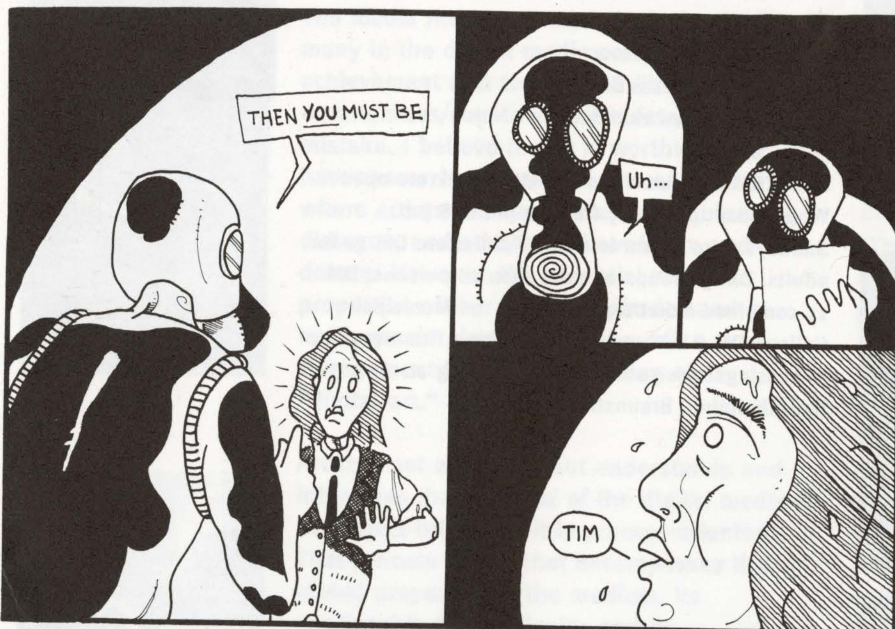
Both ZKM Museums and the Mediathek are open Wednesday to Sunday from 12 pm to 8 pm. Sundays from 10 am to 6 pm. Admission: DM 10 for adults, DM 5 groups of more than 10 persons, DM 12 combined ticket together with the Municipal Gallery, DM 8 with advanced booking. Tramway line 5, Lessingstrasse stop. Bus 55 starting at Hauptbahnhof, Braunstrasse stop.

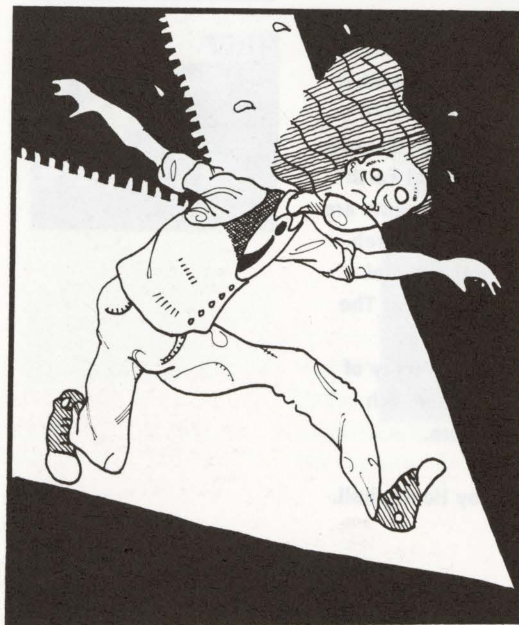


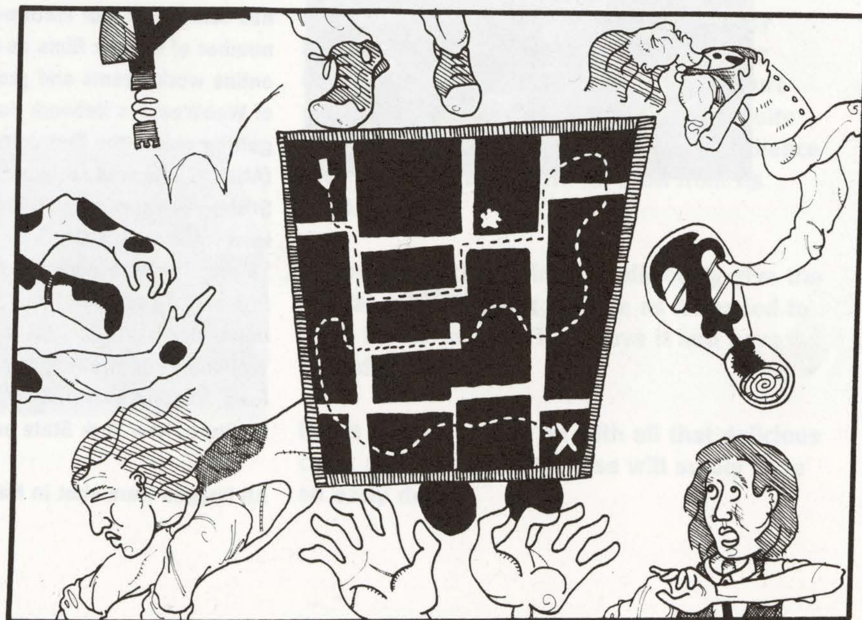
Oliver Hockenhull is a media artist and writer. He has completed four feature-length essay-films, a number of shorter films as well as a pile of digital online works, rants and prophecies. As a member of WebWeavers Network Society he contributed to getting online the first cultural web site in Canada (ANIMA). He was co-founder of the Digital Earth Society of Vancouver. His hypertext documents are integrated in TELECINE—the World Wide Web "Journal of New Media Authoring in the Digital Domain"—and have been used in courses at The University of Virginia Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, The University of Iowa, Victoria University (NZ), Rensselaer Tech. Institute, New York State and elsewhere.

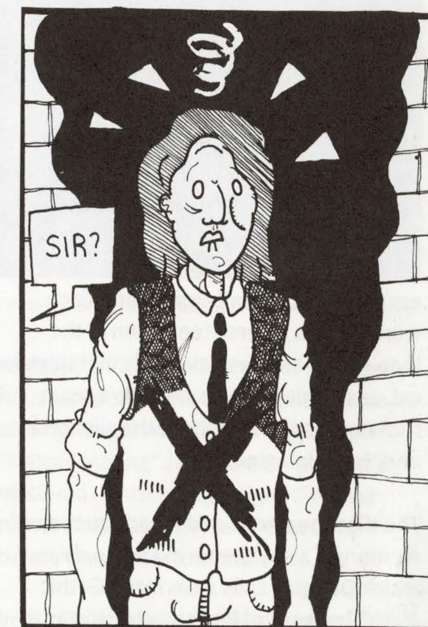
All images were shot in Karlsruhe by Hockenhull.

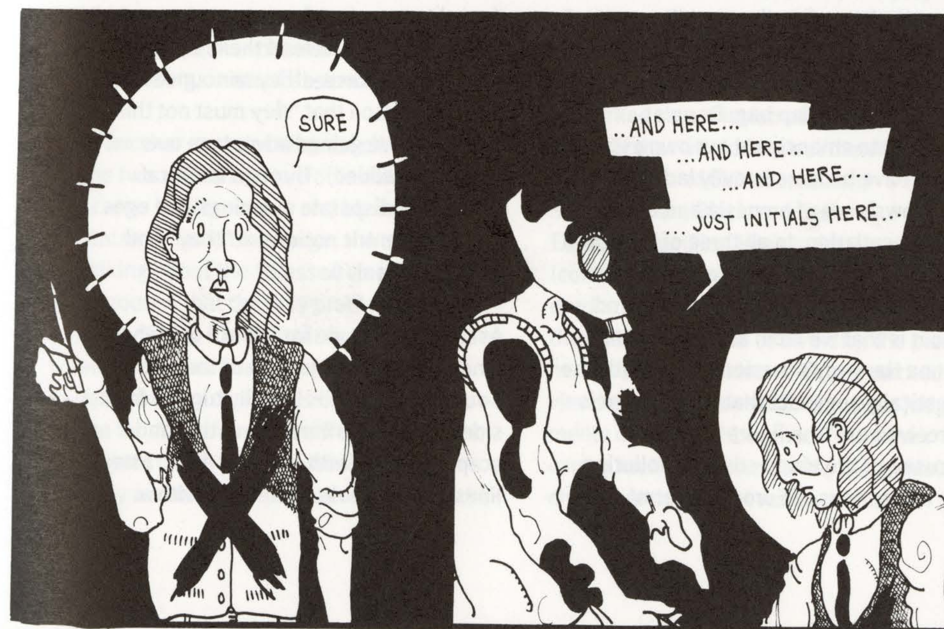


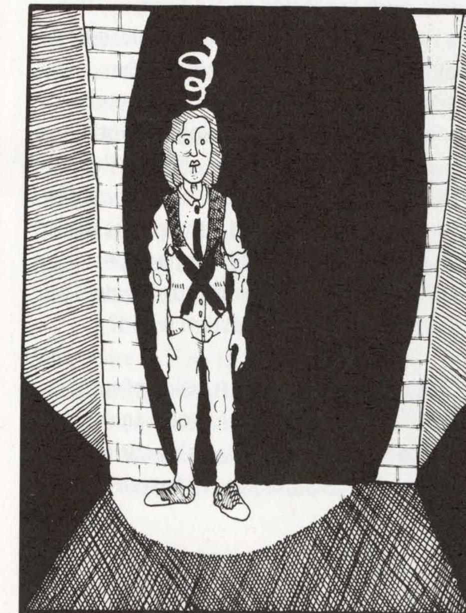
JESSE BOCHNER











A Persistent Seam in the Loop

Stan Douglas

NU•TKA• / DER SANDMANN / WIN, PLACE OR SHOW
THE POWER PLANT, SEPTEMBER 24–NOVEMBER 21, 1999

REVIEW BY RUTH KERKHAM

To be "in the loop" is to be ensconced in the all-too-palatable circle of power, where a "stance" has the flavour of seamless credence rather than conjecture. It is precisely this loop that Stan Douglas pervades, exposing concealed seams and creating subtle loopholes of social awareness. The three projection pieces exhibited at The Power Plant; *Der Sandmann* (1995), *Nu•tka•* (1996) and *Win, Place or Show* (1998) lead the viewer through a circuit of gradual comprehension, if she or he has the patience to peel back the layers of the perpetually irresolute. Each work reveals a persistent seam in the loop that is as physical as it is metaphorical, as mythical as it is factual; a seam that reveals the forgotten, the silenced and the unimagined.

The disappearance and reconstruction of memory is a key theme in *Der Sandmann*, which Douglas calls a German "Gothic Myth" because of its characteristic anxiety and xenophobia. The physical seam in this work separates an old Germany from a new Germany, as two temporally different scenes inhabit each side of the screen. Playing havoc on a traditional timeline, the two sides wipe each other away, creating a dizzying effect of the old, the new, the old, the new, until memories become dislodged and perceptions confused. How *was* the old Germany perceived? What *was* the attitude towards Communism in the Western world?

Woven into this deconstruction of sociopolitical memory is E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale of the Sandman who roguishly sprinkles sand into children's eyes to hasten their drowsiness. The narrative content, taken from Hoffmann's story, includes the characters Nathanael, his childhood friend Lothar, and his sister Klara as they read their letters to each other. Lothar and Klara are surprised to find that Nathanael's memories of the dreaded Sandman—Herr Coppelius—and the death of his father have lost their threads of connection. Layers of discrepancy occur as memories, perspectives and truths are evidently jumbled and yet there is naive astonishment in Klara's voice as she gasps: "And this you have forgotten?" Perhaps it is with similar naiveté that we forget that what we remember might not be how it was, and what we say might not be how it is. This indeterminacy is reiterated during Nathanael's monologue, for, as the physical seam in the projection moves across his mouth, his lips and the words that he utters subtly shift from being in sync with each other to being out of sync. What we hear is not always what is being said.

When Nathanael, Lothar and Klara were kids, they crept into the Sandman's garden to release the children's eyes that he hoarded in a burlap bag. Douglas attempts to emancipate our own eyes, which have become heavily laden with the drowsiness of amnesia and unsuspecting satiation. In all three of these installations he seems to ask what our own Gothic Myth is here and now, and who it is that we label as the vampire. In Donna Haraway's version of the myth she caustically suggests that the vampire is perceived as, "the figure of the Jew accused of the blood crime of polluting the wellsprings of European germ plasm... or it is the figure of the diseased prostitute, or the gender pervert, or the aliens and the travelers.... The vampires are the immigrants, the dislocated ones, accused of sucking the blood from the rightful possessors of the land and of raping the virgin who must embody the purity of race and culture."[1] Similarly it is with poignant relevance that Douglas asks in the exhibition catalogue: "What would contact and mingling with radically foreign cultures bring?"

The Gothic Myth continues in *Nu•tka•* where, again, words and their meanings shift surreptitiously. Quadraphonic sound allows us to eavesdrop on the monoramblings of the British and Spanish colonists who lay claim to the land around Nootka Sound, blatantly revealing their eighteenth-century imperial lust for power. Their voices are generally heard in random sequence, except for six occasions where the two captains unwittingly say exactly the same thing at the same time. At one point of apparent connection—when they defend their "obligations" to use force—they announce in childlike unison that "*they* must not think that *they* have gained advantage over *us*" (emphasis added). Through identical words, but disparate meanings, the ego- and Euro-centric notions of "they" and "us" are revealed.

As the captains vie for control over the land, the video projection of the Nootka Sound landscape is literally tugged from side to side. Two versions of the landscape (created with odd and even raster lines) move across each other with a ghostly presence that hints at the true guardians of the land: the absent and silenced voices of the First Nations. Even when the First Nations seem to be present in the photograph *Interior of the Church at Yuquot* (from the *Nootka Sound* series of photographs), the totem poles decorating the interior of the church are mere replicas, while the originals ordain a museum (for the benefit of whom?). In both the photographs and the video projection, Douglas speaks volumes through a resounding sense of absence.

In another moment of quasi-clarity when the two voices and two dreamlike landscapes briefly comply and blend into one statement and one image, the captains, talking about the "blessed cloak of sleep," announce that the only problem with sleep is that it is difficult to distinguish a sleeping man from a dead man. Even in apparent exactness it is discovered that the most fundamental difference between life and death is, to the observer, potentially a matter of perspective. Perhaps the Sandman knows this all too well as he lulls us to sleep, only to rob us of our eyes.

Photo of the set for *Win, Place or Show*, Stan Douglas, video installation, 1998.

True vision, however, demands more than sight, and it is a lack of vision and imagination that Douglas points to in *Win, Place or Show*, where a non-existent memory is constructed and then remembered. The dearth of insight is portrayed not by the characters themselves, but by the players of a history that fuels this narrative of failed modernity. In the 1950s the City of Vancouver Planning Department embarked on a mission of so-called urban renewal that would blot out the vibrant communities of Chinese, Italian, Scandinavian, Black and Eastern European families living in Strathcona (communities that were deemed substandard and as such, superfluous). Blinded to the cultural richness of diversity, the planners set out to validate their pre-packed views as they scrawled their insular judgments of the neighbourhood from their cars, a method known as the "windshield check." Architectural variety was to be replaced with the monotony of rooming houses, apartments and dormitories as an attempt to prevent the working class from "contaminating" those that supposedly mattered. Fortunately, neighbourhood protest frustrated these endeavours before they came to completion.

Ironically dramatizing this desire to disinfect and control space, Douglas constructs a set, representing the interior of a working class apartment that was never built. The characters placed within this sparse scene are two nondescript dock workers, Donny and Fred, whose mundane interludes would disappoint expectations for the theatrical. With a shrewd gesture Douglas splices the image with the use of a split-screen, simultaneously splicing fact and fiction, reality and appearance.

Win, Place or Show is partially based on the 1960s Canadian television program *The Client*, which is itself based on real-life conversations between probation officers and parolees. Perhaps, then, Donny and

Fred are more real than their set might suggest, and the prisons alluded to in *The Client* are more relevant than one might initially think. The intermingling of fact and fiction is further alluded to in Donny and Fred's conversation regarding the radio, which, played live, adds an element of randomness to the piece. Donny suggests that what we hear on the radio is nothing but stories, and that these stories are the same in every city. If radio, a medium that we often accept as a purveyor of fact, is merely a construction of stories, then on what level do we read the "story" of Donny and Fred?

The stories that the two characters relate to each other also play a significant role in this invented reality. While Donny fabricates stories of collusion, Fred continually disregards his ideas until tension peaks and they end up in a brawl. Every six minutes the projection loops, and after each fight Donny sits on the edge of the cot and picks up a newspaper. At first he seems to read from the paper, but it becomes evident that he is actually relating a joke, thus gently jibing at the media's claim to present trustworthy "facts."

It takes extensive viewing of *Win, Place or Show* to realize that the jokes in each loop differ, and that the only constant is the deadpan response that they elicit. As such, the work unremittingly evades exact repetition, urging perspectives to be constantly revisited, lest nuggets of value should be forgotten, silenced or unimagined. By imagining for us what Strathcona would be like if the city planners had completed their "renewal," this piece, and indeed the entire exhibition, chides our tendency to ignore the seams in the loop.

Ruth Kerkham is an independent critic and curator and is currently a research fellow in contemporary art at the National Gallery of Canada.

Note

1. Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness @Second_Millennium: FemaleMan_Meets_ OncoMouse* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 215.

TRESPASSERS & CAPTIVES

Jamelie Hassan

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROJECTS AT THE ELDON HOUSE
LONDON REGIONAL ART AND HISTORICAL MUSEUMS, LONDON, ONTARIO
JUNE 6–OCTOBER 30, 1999

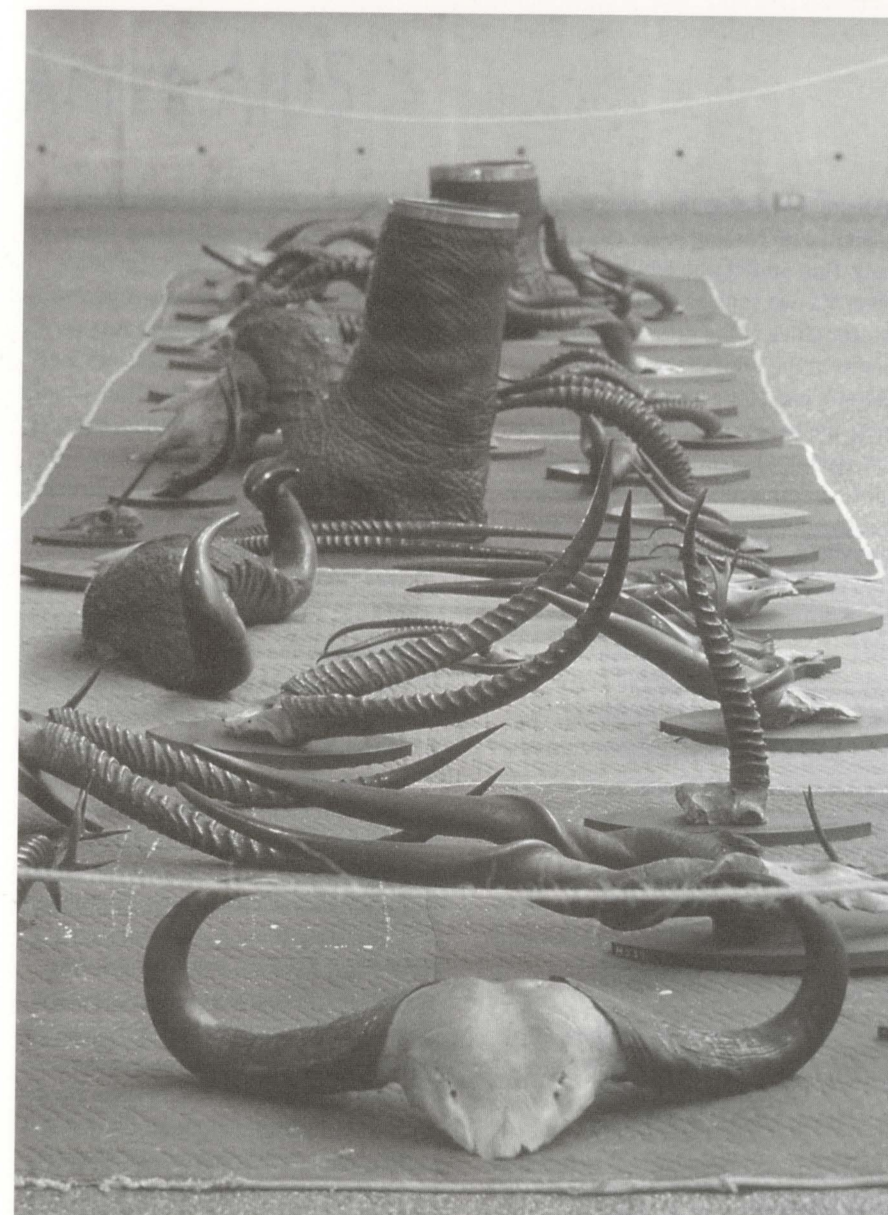
REVIEW BY DAVID MERRITT

to preserve is to burn,
for understanding means creating
—Trinh T. Minh-ha

Entering the high-ceiling entrance gallery of the London Regional Art and Historical Museums in the summer of 1999, a visitor would have abruptly encountered a disconcerting tableau: in the middle of the gallery floor, lying loose on packing blankets, the mounted skull plates and horns of a diverse collection of African wildlife. Standing in vigil over them, high on a modernist white wall, a palisade-like series of traditional African spears. Below these spears, at eye level, a didactic panel identifies the game trophies and spears as having been removed from the entrance hall of the Eldon House, a nearby Victorian-era estate whose once private buildings, furnishings and grounds now form part of the historical holdings of the museum. The panel attributes the installation to London-based artist Jamelie Hassan and identifies it as part of her five month artist-in-residence project at Eldon House entitled "Trespassers & Captives."[1] A guest book and pen rest beneath the panel. Written visitor responses to the public exorcism range from enthusiastic relief to anger. The question of who is trespasser and who is captive appears open.

Eldon House was the residence of an elite London family, the Harris', through four successive generations. From the founding of the house in 1834, the family was fiercely concerned with the material preservation of their history and social standing. The everyday activities of the household were recorded and perpetuated through regular diaries kept by a succession of the female heads of the household. The Victorian period chattels of the house, most imported from England or acquired through a series of international "Grand Tours," were guardedly preserved well into the middle of the twentieth century. When the house was finally abandoned as a residence in 1959, it was gifted to the city under condition that the remaining estate be publicly maintained. Like many estate homes of its kind, Eldon House was refashioned as a museum and the family's accumulated possessions were preserved and augmented as a sealed portrait of the period. But moving through its domestic spaces, peering over ropes and barriers into the long-exclusive living spaces frozen in funereal repose, it is not surprising that many among its public heirs might feel like uneasy house guests.

Viewed at the close of the twentieth century, the Harris' family history, as much as their conspicuous need to preserve and display it, is bound up with the territorial and class prerogatives of the British Empire at its fullest swagger. After James Clifford, the construction of "self" here is one derived through accumulated property, dutifully ordered, governed and



Installation detail, "Trespassers & Captives," Jamelie Hassan, 1999.

maintained; like a microcosm of the home-country and its dominions.[2] Prior to Hassan's residency however, the staid domestic tableaux of the Eldon House, as much as its colonial genealogies, rested relatively undisturbed. But accepting an invitation by Eldon House Education Coordinator Peter Smith, she took up the residency as an open-airing process. In response, she brought her personal experience, travels and cultural history immediately to bear upon the artifacts and narratives of the collection and archives. Through this process, both the personal and cultural acts of collecting, as much as the politics of interpretation, were quickly drawn into focus.

In developing the purview of the residency, Hassan extended invitations to an interdisciplinary group of researchers and artists to respond directly to aspects of the house's history and its representation. Her collaborators included archeologist Michael W. Spence, writers and performance artists Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick, musician George Sawa, cultural critic Salah D. Hassan, and social geographer Mireya Folch-Serra. What ensued served to reactivate and challenge both the history of Eldon House and the passive approach to its narration. Extending over the course of the summer and fall, "Trespassers & Captives" took the form of continually changing interventions and exhibitions, as well as public salon lectures, teas, musical performances and tableaux vivants. Multi-territorial and dispersed, evolving and often open-ended, the projects unfolded with a healthy unruliness and complexity resistant to comfortable containment as a whole. The first screen to drop along the way was that of a remote and objectively evident past (history as a space where, in the words of one museum attendant, "all you have to do is dust").

Practically, Hassan's "trespasses" in Eldon House involved a series of displacements, additions and repetitions within the collection. The removal of Ronald Harris' game trophies and spears from the entrance hall (in the artist's words "clearing the house of deadness") represented an initial condition of re-entering the house. The objects the artist subsequently brought into the exhibits were either recovered from museum storage or drawn from her own collections. Material from the artist's collection took the form of travel journals, diaries, artworks, personal objects and mementos. Placed alongside related materials or settings in the museum, Hassan's "collection" spoke across an intervening century to draw the everyday lives, travels and desires of its former residents into dialogue. It was particularly the women of Eldon House, the principle forces of its preservation and continuity, and like Hassan, active diarists and travellers, that reemerged here. In subtly breaking the museum's seal of temporal coherence, Hassan's project brought testimonies of living experience into open exchange with those of lived experience. As a result, the domestic spaces of Eldon House were both repopulated and localized on a historical world map—one overdrawn, though clearly not eclipsed, by the lived and living legacies of European expansionism.

In place of the African trophy horns and spears, Hassan paints a watercolour for the entrance of Eldon House. The watercolour depicts tropical blossoms and a porcelain figurine of a Japanese woman against a Japanese backdrop pattern identical to that of the hall's wallpaper. This wallpaper was originally acquired by the Harris' on a turn-of-the-century tour of Asia and the Middle East. Stripped of the trophies and drawn out by the watercolour, the decorative ancestry of the entranceway is allowed to reappear in the house in its fullness.

Turning to the adjoining library of Eldon House, Hassan places three more pieces. Two selected "titles" from the artist's ceramic book objects are displayed among the Harris' anglophile volumes. The first ceramic book lies on a hand-carved Indian table. Its glazed cover depicts the book *Djamila Boupacha* (1963) by Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi, a text that honours women active in the Algerian Liberation Movement. The second ceramic, resting on an animal pelt on the floor, depicts the book *The Life and Death of Anna Mae Aqwash* by Johanna Brand, a text that discusses the controversial and unsolved murder of a Micmac woman active in the American Indian Movement. Above these on the library's wall, Hassan hangs a framed reproduction of the image used in the artist's publicity for the project, an original 1793 British lithograph entitled *The Right Honourable Charles Marquis Cornwallis receiving the two sons of Tippoo Sultaun as hostages from the Yakeel*. Like a submerged and traumatic memory of the house itself, cropped fragments of this image resurface repeatedly throughout the more private spaces of the upper level.

The original 1793 British lithograph was long given a proud place in the Harris' home. It depicts the enactment of a controversial treaty exacted upon the Sultan of Mysore, a prominent Muslim leader of eighteenth-century Indian revolts against British rule. According to Article 3 of the Treaty, Tipu Sultan was required to deliver his two sons as hostages to the representative of the British government in India. In the print's tableau, the two children's hands are linked to form an arcing line between the bowed Sultan's ambassador, Ghulam Ali, and that of the imposing Cornwallis. Janus-like, the boys' faces turn in opposing directions, one toward the culture of their birth, the other warily toward that of a paternalistic colonizer. Founded upon cultural, generational, and territorial interstices, Hassan's project engages the Eldon House collection to reanimate this moment. Her response concerns not rescue or retribution, but a critically precarious re-emergence. This emergence is often identified in the artist's work with the life force of children. And to paraphrase Clifford, the emergent in a culture is what precisely is not valued in Western systems of collecting.

It is among the second floor spaces, the bedrooms, nursery/playroom, and servants' workroom that Hassan's interventions enter into most intimate contact with the collection. The *Tipoo Sultaun* image appears at the top of the stairs, identically framed but cropped tightly around the faces of the children. Two actual spears, similar to those of the ceremonial guard represented in the fuller image, are propped against the wall beside the print. In an adjacent bedroom the print appears again placed beside the bed, closely framing the children. Below, a bamboo sailing ship adorns the dresser. Outside a servant's bedroom, an ironing board decorated with the artist's glazed ceramic tiles leans brightly against the wall.

In the hall linking these rooms, a tall open cabinet contains artifacts relating to both Milly Harris' and Hassan's travels. "Collection of the Artist" labels here are aligned closely with "Collection of the Eldon House." At points the two appear indistinguishable. Small ceramic figurines representing a cast of Indian, Egyptian and Arabic figurines originally collected by Milly are placed alongside Hassan's materials: an open page of Hassan's journals and a watercolour sketch from Egypt; a photograph of a young woman, Milly, in full Victorian dress at the Great Pyramid at Giza; and an early painting of a young sleeping Tariq, the artist's son. Identities and origins here begin to vacillate, assumed historical and cultural positions blur. The displacement of issues of authenticity and provenance spills out across the house and its dispersed interventions to a point where the entire collection seems awakened to rereading.

Before leaving, one might notice on the back wall of the playroom the *Tippoo Sultaun* print again resurfaces. Here it is cropped to frame the two "captive" children in their entirety. Barely discernible on the floor below it, a tiny figurine of a dervish, skirts and arms spread, appears to spin the room free of time and space. Large blue ceramic beads, as if loosed from their string, scatter across the floor among the inert antique toys, dolls and stuffed animals that surround it. The nursery, for all its brittle historical encumbrances, seems caught in a vortex. Something in this history is being spun off, something is being regenerated. It is happening as we look.

David Merritt is a London-based artist and teacher at the University of Western Ontario.

Notes

1. The catalogue "Trespassers & Captives" has been recently published by the London Regional Art and Historical Museums.

2. James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, Russell Ferguson et al., eds. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), pp. 141-169.

After AIDS

Micheal Balser and Andy Fabo's "Stamina"

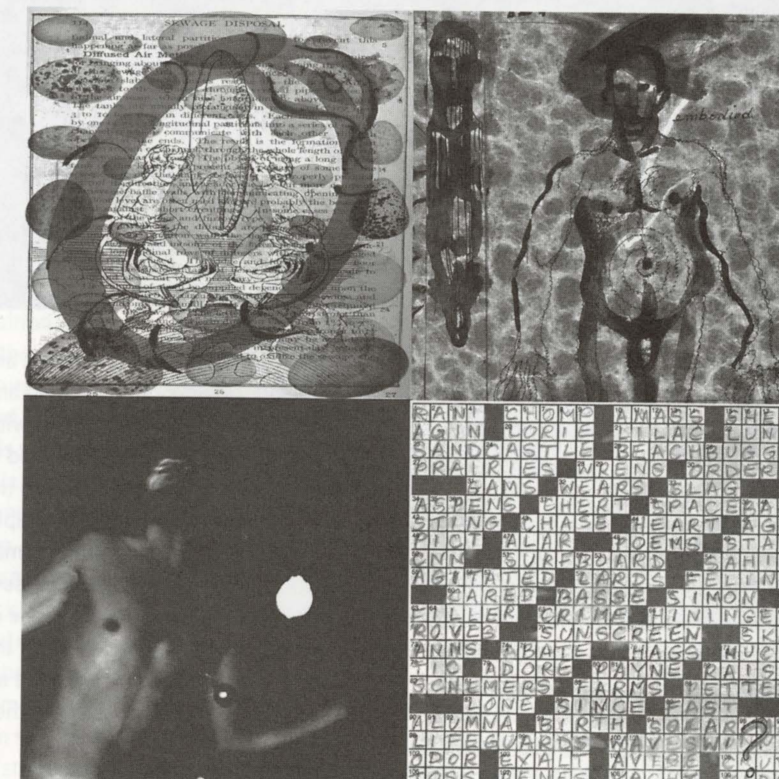
Michael Balser, Andy Fabo and Ian Fraser
The Red Head Gallery, Toronto, August 18–September 5, 1999

REVIEW BY DARIEN TAYLOR

Toronto artists in the late 1980s and early 1990s, like their peers worldwide, bore vivid witness to the AIDS crisis. Robert Flack's luminous chakras lit up Cold City in the weeks following his death in 1993. General Idea's viral mutation of LOVE into AIDS spread throughout the city while their shiny, gel cap placebos both promised and withheld remedy at the Sandy Simpson Gallery. Stephen Andrew's wax-etched photo/faxes based on obituaries in the local gay and lesbian newspaper faded slowly, like memories, on the walls of the Garnet Press.

Visual artist Andy Fabo and videomaker Michael Balser played important and expansive roles in the Toronto arts community during this time of medical/personal/representational crisis. The loss of friends and peers to AIDS, the traumatic reassertion of the body as subject, as well as their own health concerns—all this led by strange logic to a very productive period for these two men. AIDS became the primary focus of the work they produced, both together and separately.

In 1987, Fabo and Balser began a series of video collaborations concerned with the exploration and representation of cultural, scientific and personal issues central to the AIDS epidemic, including *Survival of the Delirious*, *Blood Risk* and *Beyond the Helms of the Sensors*. Fabo's gallery work on the AIDS issue culminated in the early 1990s in *Diagnosis*, a large scale drawing installation mounted in Regina, Calgary and Cardiff, Wales. A number of his installations at this time, such as *Aphasia* and *The Somniloquist*, took on issues of language, a theme that recurs in "Stamina."



Oroboros, Andy Fabo, Duraflex and silk screen printing, 1999. Photo courtesy of the artist.

In addition to these collaborative projects, Balser continued his own video projects, such as *Positive Men* (1995) and *Treatments* (1996). He also worked throughout this period with community groups in projects such as Second Decade and the Toronto Living With AIDS series to develop video literacy and media awareness. Both men were active as panellists, curators and writers, documenting and responding to the AIDS epidemic. Together and separately, they produced a remarkable and comprehensive body of work, creating art, creating communities, creating questions and responses about the impact of AIDS on their own lives, on the lives of gay men across North America and on others affected by this disease.

The Red Head Gallery's recent show, "Stamina," featured new works by Fabo and Balser, along with a wonderful series

From *everything i know is wrong*, Michael Balser, 1999. Photo courtesy of the artist.

of tiny, testosterone-frantic pictures by Ian Fraser. Many of the images, themes and techniques that have long characterized Fabo and Balser's work are in evidence in "Stamina." In Fabo's case, these include beefcake images from 1950s physical culture magazines, found and recycled images, and corresponding techniques of collage and montage. Balser's work continues his engagement with technology, his interest in "weird science," porn and autobiography. But a "decatastrophizing" has taken place and new sense of possibility, corresponding to the reprieve granted through AIDS treatments, has opened up in the work of these two artists.

"Stamina" is part of Fabo's recent exploration of what he calls "digitalia." These quadrated Duraflex and silk screen prints transform his long-standing interest in collage into an exploration of the layering capacities of the software program Photoshop. The contrast between scanned hand-made works and highly processed images is central to this work. But in spite of the relative novelty of the means of production, and in spite of the crisp formality of the quadrants and grids into which each print is divided and subdivided, this work is saturated with a luxurious sense of time passing and time past. The family photo album in the print entitled *Hoop*, archival photographs, portraits of the artist as a younger man, past works and the omnipresent crossword puzzles all convey a heavy sense of time, rooted in the small pleasures of the daily and the domestic pleasures and appreciations that were not possible in the midst of the AIDS crisis.

The five panels of Balser's print entitled *everything i know is wrong* restage some of his earlier works by floating them in front of a theatrical backdrop, a ready-made Photoshop filter that resembles a toffee-coloured stage curtain. The images in these panels bring together the questions, anxieties and preoccupations that have motivated Balser throughout the years. Sex (porn stills) and antiquated pseudo-science (strange medical apparatus, gas masks and deep sea diving suits) unite for a purpose that is ambiguous, possibly murderous, possibly protective, possibly liberating.

This, of course, has been the trajectory of AIDS over the past two decades—from certain death, through degrees of manageability, to the possibility of imagining a future. Those who have followed Balser's work know of his intense, ambivalent and personal engagement with the medical and scientific establishment. But here in "Stamina," his critique of medicine and science is less scathing than works of a couple of years ago, such as the video *Treatments* or the series of computer-generated images based on x-rays, cat scans and other medical imaging devices, of Balser's body as he underwent surgeries for AIDS-related lymphoma. Here science is amusing and playful, buffoonish even. We laugh at it. And there are intimations of liberation and regeneration in the images of the angel, the skeleton drifting in outer space or in the double-exposed mutant self-portrait, even while images of porn star Richard Locke, whom Balser featured in much of his work and who died of AIDS in 1996, add a memorial, elegiac tone.

While exhibitions related to AIDS in the past few years, such as Keith Haring at the AGO, have tended to recall its impact during the years of crisis, there are few artists who continue to tell this unfolding story as the years go by. Those, like Balser and Fabo, who continue this story speak about rediscovering one's place in space, time and history, and of recreating oneself through technologies, out of the "bones and wire" of which Balser has written. This is where "stamina" comes into it: in the sheer luck and the brutal hard work of being there to keep on telling the story after AIDS.

Darien Taylor is a member of the FUSE board. She worked with Michael Balser on the video Positive Women, *which grew out of her work on the international anthology* Positive Women: Voices of Women Living With AIDS, *published by Second Story Press, Toronto.*

The Invisible Empire

Odili Donald Odita

Gallery 101 Galerie, Ottawa, January 23–February 27, 1999

REVIEW BY SYLVIE FORTIN

Since the early '90s, Odili Donald Odita's work has consistently employed found, mundane materials and images culled from diverse sources including art, cinema, advertising and fashion, as well as print and electronic media. He relies on processes involving repetition, reuse, recontextualization and remixing to tackle Western stereotypes and myths as found, common ideas, images, and forms of social exchange that specifically shape notions of race and gender in America. Recently presented in Ottawa, "The Invisible Empire" enacted a powerful and elegant synthesis of these elements. Significantly, the works in this exhibition hover between single unrelated pieces and installation, refusing both yet operating between them through temporary and meaningful collusions. While they function as discrete projects, the combined works open up a performative space of inquiry into the mythic constructs of modernist painting and the Black body.

Most of the pieces in "The Invisible Empire" engage painting as idea, discipline, language or history. *Untitled (Paradise)* (1999) features a small, vertical rectangular dark, mixed-media painting set against a light floral wallpaper square. Its meaning surfaces through the tension provoked by the juxtaposition of a "high culture" framed work—the product of the gestural bravado of an expressionist stroke of male artistic genius—and a "low culture" piece of feminine, flowery, decorative, mass-produced wallpaper. But with further consideration, the framed component can be read as a critique of painting as it reduces the foundations of the notion of the sublime—namely nature and landscape—to materials and motifs.

On the adjoining wall, *Object* (1999) acts as a visual anchor for the exhibition, working with the gallery's architecture to define the axis of experience. This work consists of six framed black monochromes lit by bare, clear light bulbs suspended from black wire and presented on a rectangular background made from the repetition of a black and white film still. In this "lost in the jungle" image, a startled white woman beams her flashlight up to the buff bare chest of a Black male. She appears fully and properly dressed, diminutive and marginal, yet she is the one who, with eyes wide open, lights up the scene. In marked contrast, the unclothed Black male occupies half the image but his physical presence is mere matter moving to the rhythm of some obscure determination. Eyes closed, zombie-like, intentionality and signifiers of identity are denied him, he is an object. It is against this background that the six monochromes must be read. They replicate what is going on in the image—a black flesh-like surface is highlighted by a directed bare light source. *Object* thus articulates a relationship between the myth of Western painting and that of the Black body.

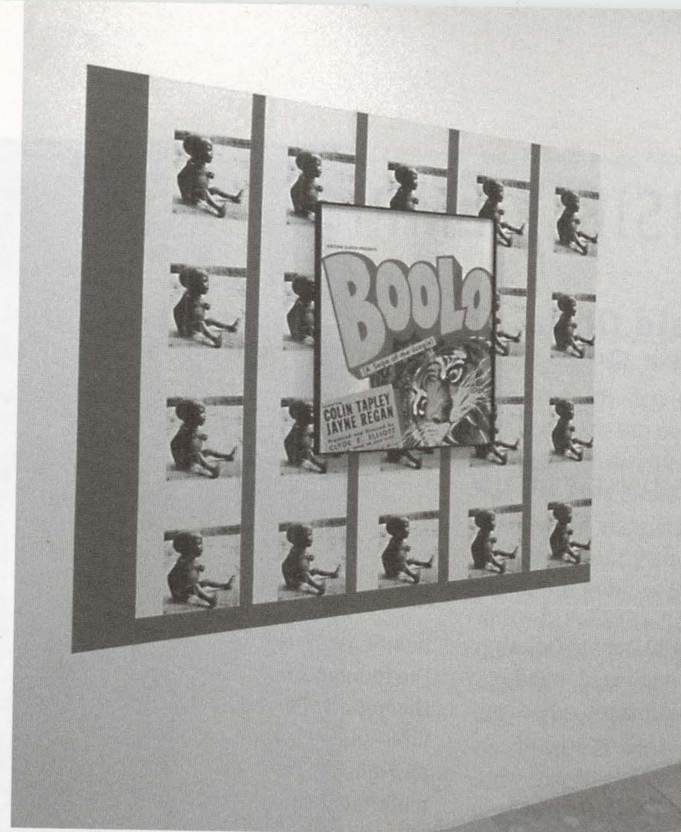
Object (detail), Odili Donald Odita, mixed media, 1999.

Directly across the room *Cutout* (1999) consists of a small black circular monochrome painted onto the gallery wall. Synecdochically related to the Black body of *Object*, it is the object defined by the trajectory of the pocket light's beam arrested on and by that Black body. While the image repeated in *Object* clearly foregrounds the stereotypical association of whiteness with light and vision, and Blackness with darkness and blindness, those tired yet still potent clichés are poetically undone by the power of the

small black circle. Isolated against the wall's vast expanse of whiteness, *Cutout* shows Western constructions of Blackness for what they are—abstracted, reductionist, commodifying projections of desire. It also reverses these readings by presenting the black circle as a porthole, an architectural feature that privileges vision and escape. Most important, it allows for a fully embodied Black subject to willfully emerge and move freely across the white cube of the gallery.

Birth of a Mythic Being (1999) also explores notions and conditions of emergence. In this mixed-media work, the image of a young African woman, culled from a second-hand, hardcover anthropology book and colour photocopied in brown on white sheets of paper, is pasted totem-like from floor to ceiling onto a greenish-light-brown vertical strip painted onto the gallery wall. Both in title and in spirit, it acknowledges Adrian Piper's *Mythic Being*, which is often only known through texts and reproductions. Discourse, reproduction and birth are thus literally and symbolically linked. This rhythmically repeated rectangle flattens and misquotes Donald Judd's minimalist sculptures, reducing them to the frames of a film strip. Furthermore, the stylized repeated brown image confronts the legacy of Warhol and his socialites. On the floor, a small mound of mulch—a synthetic brown earth synonymous with the North American suburb—acts as the "natural" birthplace of the announced mythic being. This piece thus debunks the foundation of the Black body's mythic status, which has been manufactured through the dissemination of specific and unfounded kinds of images, discourses and sciences, as Keith Piper has pointedly addressed in *The Fictions of Science* (1996).

Directly across the room *Couture (Me, Jane)* (1999), a digitally manipulated image, shows Kate Moss acting out the role of Jane—barely clad in jungle-wear, a wide-eyed, white woman with wild hair and sparse makeup. In the context of the exhibition, this small work reinforces the otherness of women and strengthens the association of women with nature and the primitive (a category shared with the Black body; remember Freud's definition of female sexuality as the dark continent). It also distances that otherness by showing it as a put-on. *Couture (Me, Jane)* thus provides a '90s equivalent of the scene enacted in *Object*. The wilderness set and the Black body are evacuated; luxury commodities of the exotic kind have taken their place on and around the white female body.



Erotic Invisible Empires, Odili Donald Odita, mixed media, 1999.

Erotic Invisible Empires (1999) is a very powerful piece that enlists an "emergency red" background with poetic precision. Against it, a framed fragment of a B-movie poster, salvaged from a flea market, appears before the repeated image of an abandoned, starving and crying African child—an image of Africa made all too familiar in the '60s and '70s in Biafra that is constantly reactivated by reports on AIDS, civil and ethnic war, dictatorship, drought, floods and famine, and deployed in a seemingly endless list of crisis zones. Across the room, a large hard-edge painting—acrylic latex wall paint applied to the gallery wall—clearly positions Odita's work in the broader context shaped by the practice of contemporary conceptual artists who use Modernist painting as a reservoir of available forms and motifs to be reinvested, as a repository of styles to be pillaged, misquoted, misused and subverted. Seeming to be an example of hard-edge abstraction, *Intermission* (1999) is displaced by its title which humorously positions it as an in-between, a retreat.

"The Invisible Empire" operates in mixed border zones of discourses and practices by complicating binary structures of otherness. The exhibition's greatest contribution is its original and productive conflation of myths. By enunciating successive leaps of faith by which painting was made to meet the sublime, which was linked to the unconscious and in turn conflated with the Other by primitivist fantasy, the artist succeeds in suggesting viable positions and strategies for Others to reclaim painting and redefine society.

Sylvie Fortin is Curator of Contemporary Art at the Ottawa Art Gallery (OAG), where she has organized numerous exhibitions since 1996. She has written essays and reviews for Canadian, American and European publications. She is a board member of Oboro Gallery, Montreal, and an advisory board member of the Arab Image Foundation (Beyrouth/New York).

MATERIAL MATTERS THE ART AND CULTURE OF CONTEMPORARY TEXTILES

Edited by Ingrid Bachmann and Ruth Scheuing

PUBLISHED BY YYZ BOOKS, TORONTO, 1998

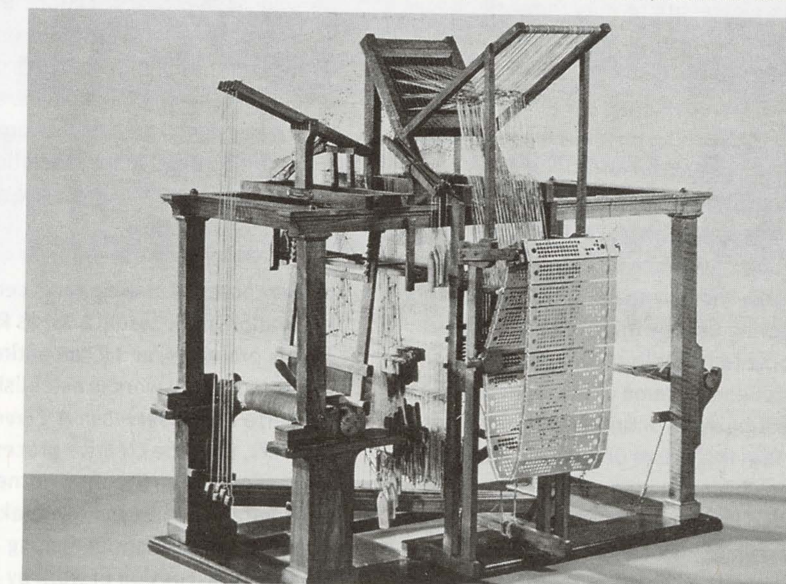
REVIEW BY JANICE ANDREAE

Material matters in this anthology of sixteen essays by contemporary art writers. Edited by Ingrid Bachmann and Ruth Scheuing, who are also contributors, this book is divided into four sections—Material and Process; Articulating Gender and Identity; Cloth, Colonialism and Resistance; and Reconsidering Tradition and History—that address diverse ways to explore material practices and the construction of contemporary culture. Each writer conducts an enthusiastic critique of forms of making, reminding me of Robert Morris' premise in his 1970 essay "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," which states "whatever else art is, at a very simple level it is a way of making" and that as "the making process increasingly becomes the substance of the work the effect is a direct engagement with the [social/symbolic] world in art making."[1]

Material Matters provides evidence that much of the current reconsideration of textile history and production is aligned with contemporary cultural theory and postmodernist preoccupation with rethinking the making of text. Mythologically and historically, the activity of weaving has long been linked with acts of resistance. Think, for example, as several of the writers in *Material Matters* do, of the significance of Penelope's behaviour in Homer's *Odyssey*—her nightly ritual of unravelling what she accomplishes daily weaving at her loom. Feminist literary scholars suggest that as she sustains through these efforts her household and her homeland until Odysseus' return, she performs an action more significant than Odysseus' own. The text shows that she accomplishes the task—that women can accomplish what men do—by a different means of *techne* or craftiness.

In "The Unravelling of History: Penelope and Other Stories," Ruth Scheuing explores the relationship between weaving and storytelling through the intersections between actual stories and the way in which history is told and retold. Scheuing discusses weaving as a language used to communicate in mythological tales, a language that is regulated by aesthetic forms and conventions supporting patriarchal structures in society. Yet, the practice of weaving can also lend itself to disruptive behaviour, as Anne West points out in "Weaving Out Loud," for "at any moment during the weaving process, only a partial sense of what the whole can become is visibly present." This enables greater flexibility and spontaneity in the development of work. Scheuing tells readers just how disruptive to the status quo Penelope's mythical peers, Philomela and Arachne, were. Arachne, the original spider woman, is punished and turned into a spider by Athena who challenged her to a tapestry-weaving contest. Athena's designs reflect the imagery of perfection, harmony and order that embody Greek ideals, but Arachne's are subversive as they represent numerous images of seductive deception and rapes of women by the Olympian gods. Here,

Nineteenth-century loom by Joseph-Marie Jacquard, which used punch-cards to code the pattern to be woven.



Arachne recovers what feminist Nancy Miller has described as "a critical positioning, which reads against the weave of indifferentiation, to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity; to recover within representation the emblem of its construction."[2] Anne West compares the generative behaviour in the process of making cloth with the process of constructing a written text, and Scheuing politicizes this behaviour as deconstructive and disruptive, noting its political import and ways that it encodes gendered subjectivity.

In "Arachne's Genre: Towards Inter-Cultural Studies in Textiles," Sarat Maharaj uses John Ruskin's take on the antithetical tale of Athena and Arachne (from Ruskin's Woolwich address of December 13, 1870) to launch his critique of the history of trade practices. He discusses connections with mythology and the rise to dominance of the British textile industry during the nineteenth century. Maharaj argues that such industrial dominance served the needs of British colonialism by depriving the people of India access to the means of producing their own textiles and developing their own industry. He deconstructs the contemporary nineteenth century romantic images of British imperialism and trade used to advertise the textile and shipping industries. The cover from the July 1918 issue of the textile industry journal *Textilia: An Argosy of Informative Textilian Commerce and Industry* makes direct reference to an ordered, patriarchal, mythological past where tradesmen are represented as heroic "homecomers" like Odysseus bearing the raw fruits of their journeys home to be civilized and given form through the frame of the loom. Then, bearing signs of Britishness, the ships return their store of cloth of "grand design" to the other culture of India which is typified by the "wild abandon" Ruskin associated with Arachne's woven cloth. Maharaj shows how liberating the textile industry and placing the means of production in the hands of the people of India enabled Gandhi to restore their independence from British rule. In this way, textiles and the making of textiles function as signifiers in what, Maharaj states, "shapes the social, political, institutional discourse in which textiles are imagined and made." Instead of thinking of culture as fixed, Maharaj proposes that culture, like Penelope's activity at the loom, is "an unceasing activity of unmaking and remaking."

Ingrid Bachmann's essay "Material and the Promise of the Immaterial" looks at the shaping force that weaving has had on new technology and the romance of the new frontier surrounding digital technology. Noting "how our visions of the future are predicated on the structures of the past," Bachmann counters traditional notions of textile practice as a "gentle art" with the significant role the textile industry has played in the Industrial Revolution, and currently in the digital revolution. She cites the forerunner of the first computing machine, Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine, which was based on the early nineteenth-century Jacquard loom, to initiate a discussion of weaving as "a process of information storage, a binary system of interlocking threads, mirroring the 0's and 1's of computer programming." She directs attention to the significant role the form of presentation plays in the mediation of information. In other words, she declares that material matters.

If the process of making art is central to innovation in the visual arts, as Robert Morris proposes, and if "an entire code is proposed as the work is established"[3] as Umberto Eco observes in *A Theory of Semiotics*, then the creative process can be semiotic. Both Stephen Horne and Janis Jefferies address how "making" practices are also about making meaning. In his discussion of work by Lani Maestro, Baco Ohama and Mindy Yan Miller, Horne considers David Michael Levin's view, from *The Body's Recollection of Being* (1985), that the activity of recollection is an active process, connected to present recognition to suggest that subjective processes of making, for example working with the hands, can produce work embedded with the maker's subjectivity. Jefferies analyses the significance of making a connection between the viewer and reader in her discussion of the signifying power of the "New Look" gabardine coat-dress worn by Carolyn Steedman's mother in her auto/biographical text *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (1986). The "New Look" dress, signifying Steedman's past experiences of and connections with her mother, recalled in the present experience of the text, links the "eye" of the reader with Steedman's own and that of another "I," through the multi-layered possibilities of meaning-making introduced by the sight/site of the dress. Jefferies probes the interwoven relations of language, text and textiles in the installation *We Knitted Braids for Her*, by Austrian sisters Christine, Irene and Heidi Hohenbuchler, to further explore the signifying possibilities of autobiographical and subjective references.

The dress is also a significant bearer of meaning for Renee Baert in her essay, "Three Dresses, Tailored to the Times." Here, she examines three art works—Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's *Arborite Housedress* (part of an ongoing series), Anne Ramsden's *Dress!* (1991), and Buseje Bailey's *The Viewing Room* (1996)—to look at "the dress" as a coded surface that carries cultural messages. Baert's observations about the ways that these works can have an affective charge by drawing on aspects of history, memory and popular iconography recall the disruptive power of Jana Sterbak's *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, exhibited at the National Gallery in 1987.

In 1970, Morris argued that innovative activities of making are "forms of behaviour aimed at testing the limits and possibilities involved in that particular interaction between [the maker's] actions and the materials of the environment."[4] While the artists and writers anthologized in *Material Matters* diverge one way or another from the strict frames of reference associated with the loom and the activity of weaving, three works stand out. Neil MacInnis' essay "Crimes Against Nature," Robin Metcalfe's "Queer Stigmata: The Embroidery Art of Robert Windrum" and "Mary Scott: in me more than me" by Nell Tenhaaf are the most political in the ways that they contest boundaries; the most pleasurable in their effusive dis/play of limits. As Tenhaaf says of Scott's typology, the text/iles these writers/artists make speak of "a different, more fluid ordering, a different way of knowing" that introduces disturbance and strangeness through representation. Tenhaaf maintains that such inquiry engages the viewer in a process of playing with the unknown that relies upon what is familiar, expected and highly subjective to construct something "new."

These writers suggest, as Robert Morris does through visual art, that the enterprise of making texts and textiles provides the ground for expanding the limits and possibilities of making work that highlights the significance and signifying power of process and the material means by which meaning-making occurs.

Cover of *Textilia*, by Audley Gunston, 1918.

Notes

1. Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum* 8, no. 8, 1970, p. 66.
2. Nancy Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing*, Nancy Miller, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 80.
3. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 244.
4. Robert Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

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<MISCOGNITIONS>

Or Why I Can't Seem to Get Along with White Boys

by Rinaldo Walcott

Recently *THIS Magazine* staged a "debate": "Is Gay Passé?" The debate was provoked by Bert Archer's *The End of Gay (And the Death of Heterosexuality)* and Sky Gilbert's essay "Everybody in Leather" published in *THIS* (vol. 33, no. 4, Jan.-Feb. 2000). Archer, Gilbert, TJ Bryan and myself were the panelists.

The tenor of Archer's book is a watering down of some aspects of Queer theory that argue for a proliferation of sexual practices and sexualities without the support of the walking stick of an identity claim. In general, for those of us who believe that what is at stake is a politics of sexual liberation it is difficult to disagree with the basic arguments of Archer. However, the central problem with Archer's argument is that it lacks any kind of collective political stance, and the book's subtle or not so subtle suggestion that any collective struggle for sexual liberation will inevitably result in some kind of identity movement is troubling. It is an assumption that one needs to continually question.

On the other hand Gilbert argues that until gay men feel free from a range of both personal and collective victimization, both physical and psychic, any claim of the end of gay is an irresponsible claim. In many ways Gilbert also has a point. But what is missing from his argument is that one does not have to proclaim an identity to make a claim for social, political and psychic justice. Justice is about ethics—or at least it should be—not identity claims.

The *THIS* debate did not allow for placing on the table the complexity of proclaiming ends. I want to suggest again, as I suggested that night, that the proclamation of ends is always a signal of crisis. In this case it is a crisis of identity for middle-class, gay white guys who must now renegotiate their firmer and more public inclusion into late capitalist practices. This has occasioned an identity panic because their marginality is no longer such an easy appeal. Instead, they are now one of the newly arrived marketing niches and surely with the pressures of advertising and its ability to give a fictional respectability to the once excluded, a crisis is bound to occur. Archer's book chronicles this crisis by way of looking at the "new" and more public ambivalences of marginal sexual representations in the popular media. But one should be cautious about proclaiming ends in relationship to being included into niche marketing and assertive modes of consumption through—and this is the continuing irony that Archer never addresses—an appeal to identity. It is the fictional "gay dollar" that is being called out.

Just to prove the point that gay is not over. Nik Sheehan, reporting for *Xtra!* on the event, wrote that he only found out after the debate that I was gay. If Sheehan was as intrigued as he claims to be about the end of gay, it would not matter what my sexual practices were or are, concerning my participation in the debate. But his comments reveal something even deeper: it revealed that in his mind a Black man, looking and speaking like myself, has nothing to contribute to the debate on whether gay is passé or at an end. This in and of itself continues to confirm for me that we are talking about a crisis for white boys. And if you still don't believe me take a short perusal of *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays and the Struggle for Equality*, edited by Eric Brandt. There are still many out there who think that Blackness and gayness—social constructions as they are—are incompatible.

P.S. Nik: I am not Jamaican. Racism reveals itself in all kinds of ways.

Rinaldo Walcott is a member of the FUSE Editorial Board.

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