

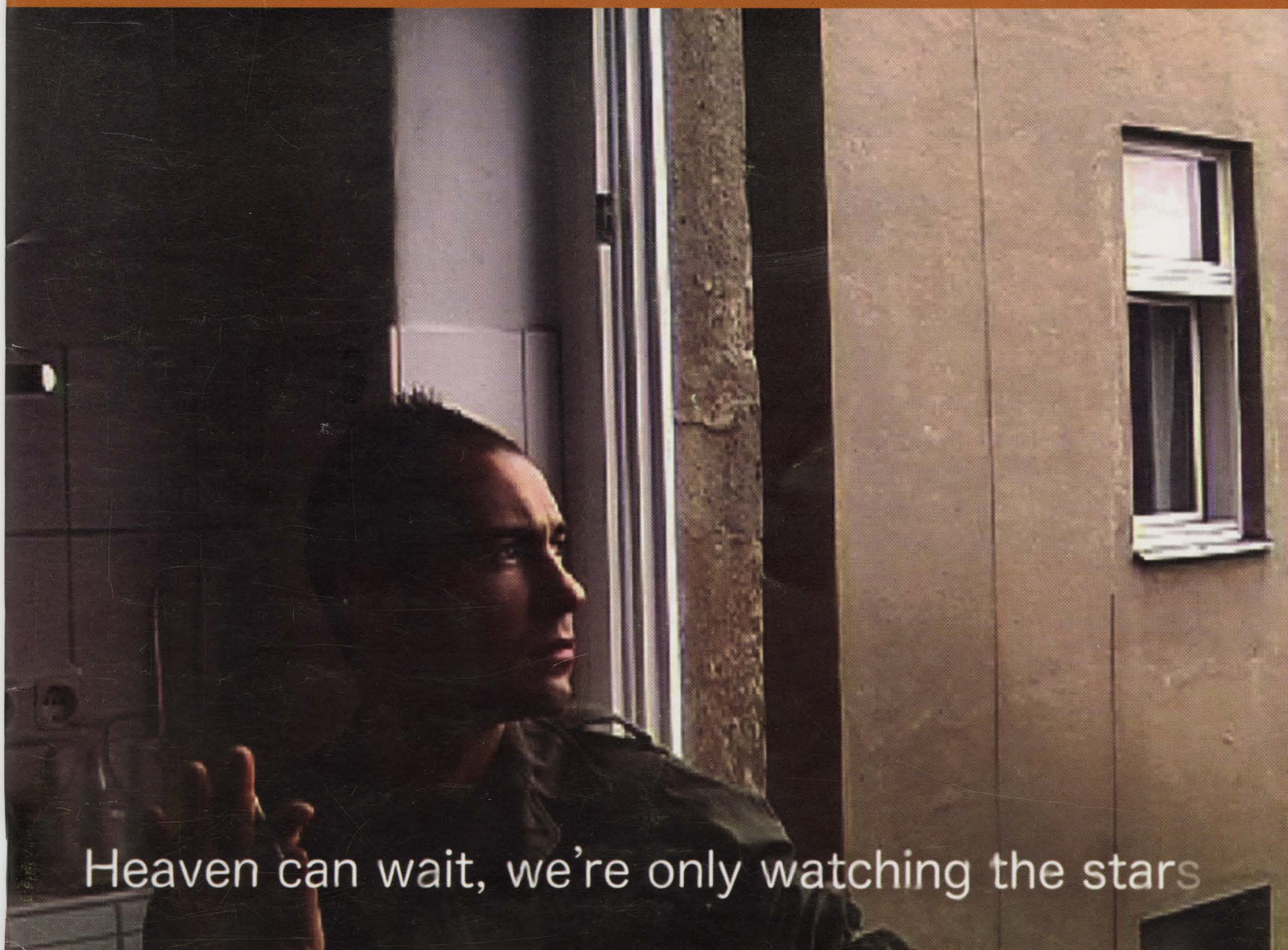
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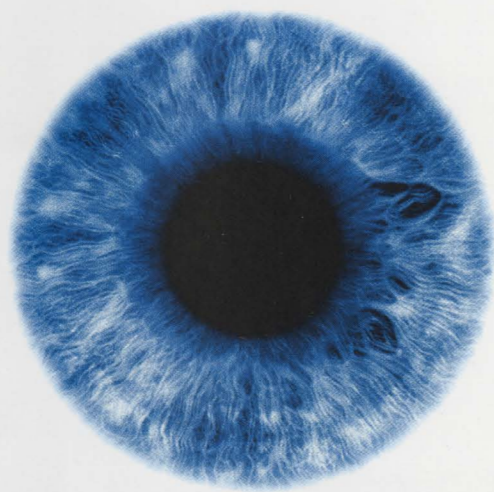
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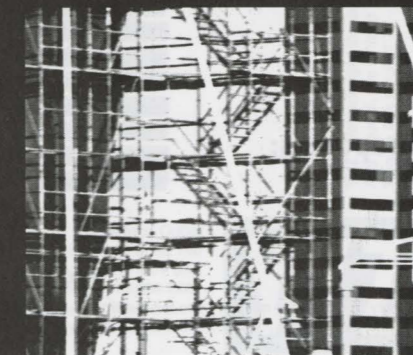
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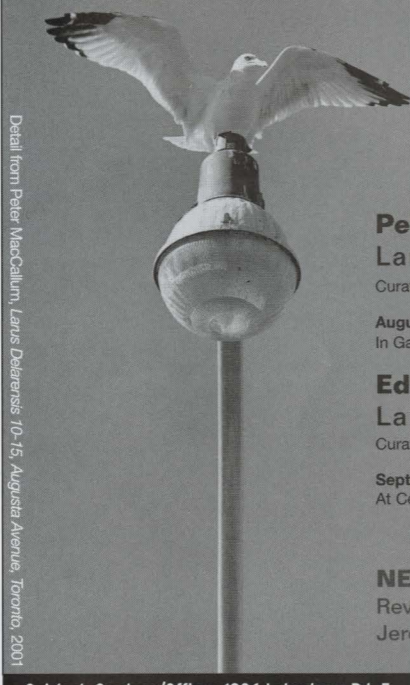
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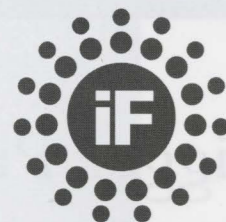


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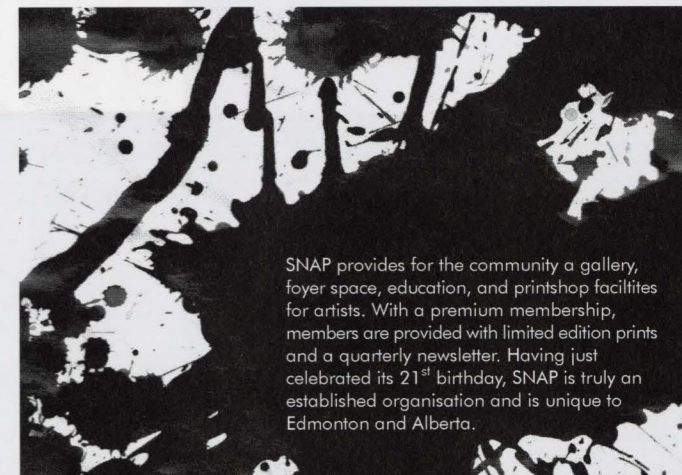
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FUSE is published four times a year by Artons Cultural Affairs Society and Publishing Inc., a non-profit artists' organization. Our offices are located at 454 - 401 Richmond Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 3A8. E-mail: [content@fusemagazine.org](mailto:content@fusemagazine.org), website: [www.fusemagazine.org](http://www.fusemagazine.org), tel: (416) 340-8026, fax: (416) 340-0494. All inquiries should be sent to this address. PAP Registration No. 8623. CPC publications mail agreement number 1396609.

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Subscription rates: \$20 per year; Institutions \$32 per year (in Canada only). Outside Canada \$24 U.S. per year; Institutions \$38 U.S. Decisions regarding who qualifies as an individual subscriber remain the right of the publisher. Printed in Canada on recycled, acid-free paper.

ISSN 0838-603X

FUSE is indexed in the Alternative Press Index and is distributed by, and a member of, the Canadian Magazine Publisher's Association, 130 Spadina Ave., suite 202, Toronto, Ontario M5V 2L4, tel: (416) 504-0274, fax: (416) 504-0437. FUSE is a member of the Independent Press Association, San Francisco. FUSE acknowledges financial assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Publications Assistance Program, in addition to the many hours of volunteer and partially paid labour that are provided by everyone listed on our masthead.

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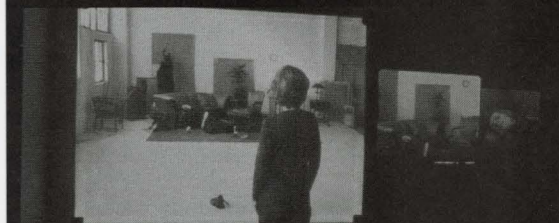
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## Short Fuse Artist Project

Cover: *Subtitled*, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, 2003. see *Artist's Project*, page 24



During a recent public panel in Toronto, discussion erupted around issues of audience engagement and cultural production. At one point an artist on the panel passionately stated that in moments of viewing art and exhibitions, if she felt she was supposed to learn something from the work, she immediately walked away. What constitutes learning or the pedagogical in the moment of engaging art? Perhaps the notion of pedagogy needs some elaboration if the term still conjures an image of unwelcome didacticism.

Arguably, walking away from the moment of learning is an empty gesture because, consciously or not, engaging culture — from the library to the gallery to the street — necessarily means participating in proposals for the production of meaning. We are always producing, receiving and performing culture and its messages. Perhaps walking away, toward that which we enjoy or relate to more readily, implies a preference for “lessons” we’ve already learned and accepted. Isn’t this how cultural canons are created?

Fuse is committed to thinking through the implicit pedagogies of all cultural acts. Didactic or not — whether it be art with an explicit issue to raise, a series of abstract paintings, urban planning and architectures that regulate the way our bodies move and perceive or the humorous narrative of a video work — culture asks viewers to see and engage in particular ways.

All forms of representation play within a politics of experience and meaning that, in turn, constructs knowledges, subjectivities and social relations. Engaging with any representational strategy as such constitutes an implied pedagogy as our perception takes us through a performance of learning, relearning and unlearning, implicated in the complex relationship between culture and power.



This last claim, that all culture is pedagogy, might be naively understood as analogous to suggestions that listening to heavy metal creates a violent impulse in listeners, or that engaging with cultural production necessarily creates the impulse to repeat what we have seen. However the idea of pedagogy does not involve a one-way transmission simply imparting skills or passing on information.

Pedagogy offers no such guaranteed understandings. Rather we might understand the pedagogical impulse, particularly within the sphere of cultural production, as what structures or creates conditions of possibility — the conditions for us to collectively work through the meaning of signs and negotiate what our role will be in a world where we struggle to understand each other.

This issue of Fuse has a number of voices speaking directly about possible pedagogies in the cultural sphere. Our feature roundtable presents a dialogue between Tracey Bowen, Ellen Flanders, Richard Fung, Roger Simon and Rinaldo Walcott, the organizers of Terms of Address: A Symposium on the Pedagogy and Politics of Film and Video Programming and Curating. In it they reflect upon and debate their impulses to stage a public conversation about practices of presenting film and video as pedagogy, while pushing at what it means for cultural workers to take seriously the pedagogical dimension of their work. Columns by Joseph Rosen and Amish Morrell offer insightful investigations into public commemorative practices and gesture toward the proposed ethical pedagogies of memorial projects. Our artist pages feature Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s invitation to revisit the lyrics of Alphaville’s ‘80s pop anthem “Forever Young,” an invitation that highlights the role of popular culture as both entertainment and a powerful influence in the formation of political attitudes and identities.

Reflecting on the contents of this issue, the context of thinking through pedagogy and the general mandate of Fuse to tease out the political dimensions of culture, one might ask if in fact we have been discussing pedagogy all along. What would be the implications of binding these terms together? Politics as pedagogy, pedagogy as politics. We invite you to both respond and stay tuned as future pages open up these questions.

—the Editorial Committee



Sarah Angelucci, *Stillness*, 2002.

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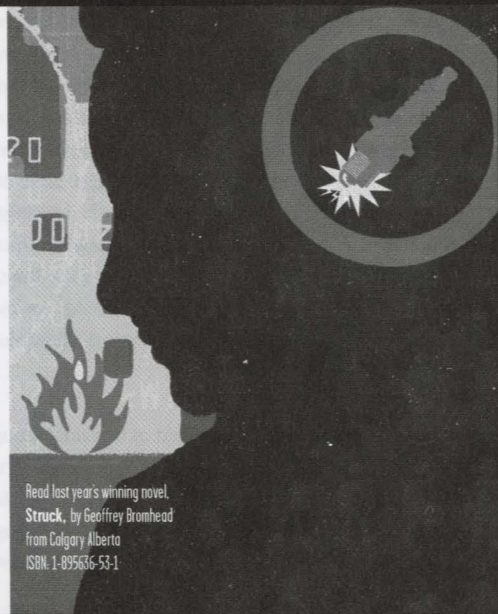
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# Self-

A missed  
populist politics

With its pending closure as a backdrop, the Danish Contemporary Art foundation (DCA) hosted a final international conference, titled "Populist Politics and Its Consequences for Cultural Production and Display" in Copenhagen on March 7 and 8, 2003. While the DCA did not make any direct assertions about the forthcoming structural changes in relation to its chosen theme, plans to centralize a number of independent cultural institutions passed unanimously by the parliament of Denmark's conservative government were a tangible presence. The question of how this centralization might effect the development of experimental and challenging work formerly supported by the DCA generated an urgency around discussions of the broad implications of populist politics. The conference was not, according to Dorothe Abildgaard from the DCA, "an attempt to negotiate with politicians." Local politicians were not invited to the proceedings. Rather, the curators at the DCA expressed their interest in "collecting experiences from plural perspectives on the issue of populism and its consequences for cultural production."

While the topics for discussion, their context and the list of speakers promised a timely interrogation of this issue, the few bright points of this two-day conference were not enough to stimulate and sustain a critical conversation amongst its participants.

The first panel indicated the need for renewed antagonism in politics and a critical art that might facilitate the growth of a "political public sphere." Political theorist Chantal Mouffe described populist politics as a consequence of "post political consensus." The adversarial struggle between left and right that defines the political has, for Mouffe, been replaced by "center left" and "center right." We now see politics conflated with morality, she commented; us versus them becomes right versus wrong. Questions raised by Mouffe included: Can critical art mobilize the passions of diverse publics, or help to organize a political public sphere? If so, would it reproduce or transform hegemonic structures? My own

desire for participants to discuss strategies for combating the uncritical tendencies of populist politics were unmet. Those "plural perspectives" presented on this panel and others were hardly diverse enough to address how and where such a critical art could function.

Throughout the conference we heard about the personal experiences of international artists and curators involved with major institutions. Robert Fleck (who sent a written statement), Isabel Carlos, Ami Barak, Sabine Brietwieser, Helena Demakova, Vasif Kortun and Zdenka Badovinac spoke of their individual experiences working as directors and curators in large European cultural institutions, ranging from the Generali Foundation in Vienna (Brietwieser) to the Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Art (Kortun), to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Ljubljana (Badovinac). Artists Thomas Hirschorn and Martha Rosler described past projects undertaken in conjunction with major institutions, but did not make any connection to how populist politics effects the production of artwork. Instead of leading us to points for discussion, each speaker outlined the limitations of his or her own position as curator or artist in an institutional art context. They did not address the phenomenon of populist politics as much as they illustrated the extent to which they were subjected to it. It is clear that state and corporate funding assert influences on the content of institutions and indeed a certain populist politics emerges in the production, brokering and display of art in institutions. Controversial content could mean the end of funding from public and private partners alike. Administrators must self-censor, compromise or move elsewhere. This obstacle is real. It was a surprise then, that while these speakers described how easily populist governments write them off as irrelevant to their constituents, these curators unquestioningly argued the opposite — that museum spaces provide something of public import. Does reliance on state and corporate funding bring about a certain complacency and feeling of entitlement that prevents administrators from asking critical questions about what they do and who it is for? There was frequent mention of how politicians either "don't like," "don't

# preservation?

encounter between  
and cultural practitioners

by Ava Bromberg

## If institutions are not interested in critically

understand" or "don't care" about contemporary art. Vasif Kortun even spoke of contemporary art's "irrelevance" as if it were a strength. The speakers seemed to be there to preserve their privilege, not account for its relevance or irrelevance to people beyond the entrenched borders of art discourse.

If institutions are not interested in critically challenging the preconceptions of contemporary art, they will be defenseless against the contentions of populist politicians. Rudi Laermans, who spoke after Mouffe in the opening panel, outlined the threat populist politics poses to the very possibility of "democracy." Discussing the foundational paradoxes of populist politics, Laermans went so far as to say we would see the end of democratic politics in the name of democratic politics. Populist politicians adopt a performative mode to speak and interpolate "the will of the people." They try to simulate a unity of the political majority and the popular majority and assert that, as rulers, they speak for the ruled, and know what "the people" want because they were democratically elected. Laermans called for "open war" between art and politics. What this "open war" might entail was never addressed. Since no non-institutional perspectives were given time to openly contest the scope and function of museum and galleries, this antagonism was not given a space to develop at the podium. Nor were the other consequences of populist politics — the chilling effect they have on the development of creative cultural forms, for example.

The opening panel on the second day provided some brief critical moments addressing larger themes and trends of consequence. Mark Rectanus called attention to the ways in which corporations are pairing promotional strategies

with social issues, involving themselves in cultural politics as a way of deflecting attention away from the products they sell. A clothing manufacturer, for example, may advertise its investment in diversity to obscure its use of sweatshop labor. As corporations proliferate a surface image and use "promotional aesthetics" to get people to consume a social issue, a "critical sense of the popular" never evolves. Rectanus also elucidated a certain populist politics to what now passes as "culture." We have seen advertising, trendy architecture and design brought into major art institutions. This kind of "culture for everyone" dulls the possibility of presenting a critical edge within the museum space. Major institutions receiving corporate sponsorship are increasingly making crowd-pleasing rather than challenging exhibitions. Image making has infiltrated "art spaces," but the quality of art as something more than advertising is not widely communicated. Must we hold onto the idea that art was once (more) political and still can be within the gallery? Can we not reach greater critical depths discussing art production and display in terms of the creation of a critical (political) public sphere, in its capacity for mobilizing the passions of citizens? Rectanus suggested that revealing the interests of curators and donors is a good starting point, as is the pursuit of alternative funding models. A discussion of these alternative funding models would have been appropriate here.

Artist-writer team Simon Ford and Anthony Davies presented their research in tandem, showing how private and public funding have a much more nebulous interrelationship than simple binaries allow. Urban regeneration schemes are one example of the interpenetration of the private and public sector, as profit is made primary and the "public interest" is justified in economic terms. Ford and Davies gave a

compelling presentation of the private/public partnerships driving the dominant arenas of cultural production, display and circulation. Ford described the "culturepreneur," an art-world operator who sells service and knowledge outside of the art system, to advertisers and property developers for instance, cashing in on contemporary art sensibilities that sell. Davies continued by outlining the uncritical nature of art criticism in Britain. Through a discussion of the way exhibited art is written about in British newspapers and art magazines, Davies revealed how an uncritical positioning of art perpetuates this private/public funding partnership, holding a status quo firmly in place.

The consequences of populist politics on art production and display do not stay within the confines of institutional thinking and the limitations of the museum space. It is quite possible that the work of consequence that addresses the dangers of populist politics may begin where state and corporate funding cannot manipulate content. Spaces where critical positions can be formulated and expressed without compromise should be central to continued debate and thoughtful action. It would have been exciting to see a discussion that carried through with non-institutional practices or funding models, so that the vital thread of the opening presentations was not lost. A discussion of possibilities provided by these alternative strategies may have been particularly productive for those facing the closure of DCA. Instead, a predictable kind of networking between international professionals was favored over critical conversation and debate.

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challenging the preconceptions of contemporary art, they will be defenseless against the contentions of populist politicians.

## INDIAN acts: highlights, or how art history spanked me straight

The "Indian Acts" conference held in Vancouver in November 2002 was different from the other conferences I have attended, and that difference merits consideration in a public forum.

by Donna Wawzonek

While "Indian Acts" was organized by Lori Blondeau of TRIBE and Dana Claxton, it made sense that the artist-run centre *grunt* was the catalyst for the project. *Grunt* has actively and consistently presented more Native art than perhaps any other non-Aboriginal artist-run centre in Canada. In fact, I was shocked at how little representation there was from other artist-run centres in Canada. I could name more curators and presenters of performance art that should have been there than actually were. This absence demonstrated and reinforced white-dominated centres' lack of commitment to presenting Native art.

I had seen Lori Blondeau's, Greg Hill's and Cheli Nighthtraveller's performances in Ottawa the year before and was looking forward to their contributions to this conference. Nighthtraveller's work was particularly compelling for me. For such a young artist, she has an exceptional talent for performance. In Ottawa, she bounced into Gallery 101 dressed like a sexy Easter bunny diva, tossing candy out to the audience, telling us a story of her childhood pet bunny that turned seamlessly from humorous to disturbing. She told us a story of deep love for her bunny, which took a violent turn as she tortured it just to get it to respond to her attentions. When the

performance was over the audience was not sure what to do with themselves. She had presented a penetrating metaphor of subjugation. This was the first time in a long time that performance had moved me so deeply.

There was meant to be an entire panel at "Indian Acts" dedicated to young artists like Nighthtraveller, Neil Eustache, Elwood Jimmy and Thirza Cuthand. Although it was a shame that this panel had to be cut from the schedule because of time constraints, the new generation of artists was most certainly vocal in the open discussions and contributed some of the most interesting concerns, challenges and inquiries to the forum.

The conference began with an afternoon session of general introductions and the presentation of a blanket to James Luna, a Luiseño who lives on the La Jolla Reservation. The gift commemorated his contributions to performance practice and the influence he has had on several generations of Native performance artists. Luna gave the keynote address, a performance/talk, which was a format that dominated this conference. He walked across the stage until he was swaying in a mock-drunken swagger. The gesture was simple, powerful and





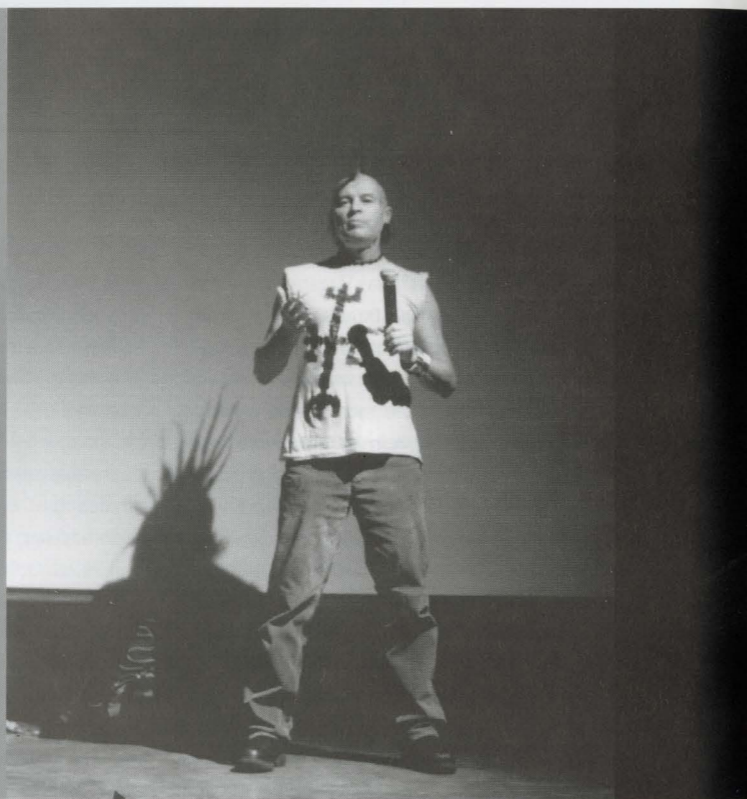
James Luna, keynote address.

moving, even unsettling. What Luna had to say set an important tone for the conference. To paraphrase, it is easy to shock, to be angry, to perform anger, but it is harder, and more poignant, to conjure compassion and complex ideas in a performance.

Luna's statement sums up what I consider to be the most powerful aspect of performance from the Native arts community. It comes from storytellers who address anger, violence and degradation with a sense of humour and thoughtfulness.

cally the peoples east of Ontario. Unfortunately his talk suffered greatly from the poor translation from French into English.

The respondents at "Indian Acts" consistently went beyond summarizing the panelists' presentations. They really got to the meat of the ideas presented and offered further thought on the topics. Without exception the contributions made by Warren Arcan were entertaining and thought-provoking. At first, his responses sounded like disjointed and abstract beat poetry, but this was an effective means of pen-



Guy Durand, performance/talk.

### Mapping the Movement

At this conference the participants repeatedly played with the traditional forms of public presentation and challenged its authority. Quebec artist Guy Sioui Durand, of Heron-Wendat descent, brought everyone from the auditorium up onto the stage (at least everyone who could fit). He presented himself as an ambassador for those Native artists written out of the history of performance art in Canada as well as those artists who were not at the conference, specifi-

etrating the core of each presentation without overstating the obvious. To the first panel, Mapping the Movement, he proposed that performance art is the act of putting bodies at risk (a strategy that was exemplified by the work of Lori Blondeau and Reona Brass later in the conference). He argued that performance can create a new time and a new history: a space of decolonization. He also noted that Aboriginals have always been postmodern as they must already confront themselves as constructed, in

their art or otherwise, and are therefore suited to navigate the territory of performance.

What followed this panel was a heated and complex discussion about the issues of cultural boundaries, sparked primarily by Durand's description of his brother Yves' performance that used imagery from a nation that was not his own. Although I was aware of the injustices associated with the misappropriation of cultural artifacts — colonists misappropriating objects and imagery from the colonized — I had not considered the implications of distinct groups within the Native community misappropriating stories, imagery or sacred rituals from their own or other tribes without permission in the context of performance art. It was clear that the use of sacred objects and imagery in performance was a long and highly debated topic that was not going to be resolved at this conference.

### Unregenerated: Action, Ritual, Offerings

This panel was described as a forum to discuss "how artists are arranging sacred practices through contemporary performance art [and] who defines the boundaries of interpretation and approval." Cree artist and musician Anthony McNab Favel extended the previous day's discussion of cultural property. He is a self-described practiced artist (as opposed to a practicing or academic artist) working for cultural protectionism. In his presentation he proposed notions of respect, the seeking of cultural permission from elders, and acknowledgement of the distinct cultural properties of each tribe. Offerings also became the idea of an artist making offerings to his/her audience.

For her contribution Lori Blondeau, performance artist and director of TRIBE in Saskatoon, chose to perform rather than speak, perhaps the most

profound act of the conference. She stepped to the stage, sat down at a table and pulled burgers out of a McDonald's bag and began to eat them one by one. A pile of waste and garbage grew on the table next to her as it became more and more difficult for her to choke the food down. She went on until it was clear that she could not take it anymore. This was a penetrating image of the suffocation of a culture and a voice through cultural and corporate colonization. With the preceding discussions dealing, for the most part, with cultural permission within and among Aboriginal cultures, this performance took us in a new direction: the violence of the erasure of one culture, not through misappropriation, but through monopoly.

### Performance of Trauma and Testimony

At the afternoon-session performance, video and installation artist Dana Claxton from Vancouver expanded on the issues raised at the morning session: "not many artists are cultural protectionists in the same way as Aboriginal artists. After all, who else needs permission from their culture to represent?" Synthesizing the comments of previous panels and respondents, Claxton proposed that it is necessary to make a safe place for an abused culture and to contend with the daily violence of bodies at risk through starvation, disease, death and the loss of language, history and culture. She also drew on Luna's initial comments — "how do we take the daily/institutional violence of our lives and turn it around in art" — to make the point that anger may be the impetus for performance but does not always need to be the result.

The panel then turned to address issues of memory and trauma, and the tendency to use performance as therapy. Blondeau spoke to the

issue of generational memory, emphasizing that is important for each generation to tell their own stories, not just those of their ancestors, to keep the oral tradition alive without gaps.

The moderator of this panel, Marcia Crosby, an instructor of First Nations Studies at Malaspina University in Nanaimo, BC, referred to Reona Brass and Rebecca Belmore as artists who make work that represents and gives voice to unspeakable acts. Crosby stated "I have never stopped crying about the things that happen to our people." After her own performance Brass responded to this by describing performance as a language that she could use to speak to her people. This was surprising for me, as performance art is so widely misunderstood in mainstream Anglo culture. Brass, a member of the Peepeekisis First Nation, explained that she could bring her grandmother to her performances and communicate something to her, where many Anglo performance artists struggle to be understood by fellow visual artists, let alone family members.

Perhaps more than anything else, what I took away from this day's sessions was that although art has been touted as a universal language time and again, in the case of Native performance art, it is able to speak in several ways: as a private conversation with the audience that has the cultural knowledge to understand the references to ritual and myth and as a conversation with those art audiences who want to listen.

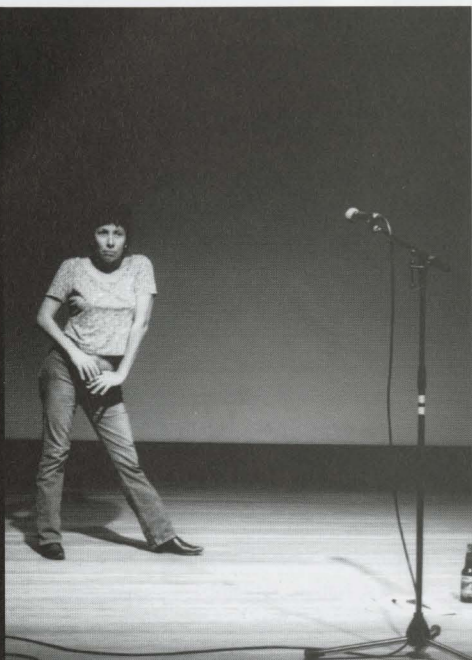
Only at this conference (or perhaps at *development of performance*) could one of the sanctioned after-hours events be a group trip to a fetish party. A rather tame event, I was able to get away with a tarted up version of my regular wardrobe: slutty little girl. To my surprise it didn't



Lori Blondeau, performance.



Bently Spang and Reona Brass, performance.



take long for Laurence Paul Yuxweluptun to become excited about the potential of a mild sm relationship with a little white girl. Before I knew it I had been turned over the knees of Vancouver artists Paul Wong and Yuxweluptun for a sweet little spanking. Everyone watching delighted in the idea of artists who challenge the canon of art history disciplining the art historian.

The next day I didn't have the sorest butt in the room (poor Mikiki did) but I did have a new perspective on the conference that I couldn't have hoped to obtain otherwise. After all the discussions of cultural property, injustice and anger I had come to realize that there is a place for corporal punishment in the art world. A little spank hits home faster than a lecture and gets to the point of performance art: bodies at risk. For me, this was a new performative ritual: spare the rod, spoil the art historian. I was willing to put



Left: Rebecca Belmore, performance. Right: Fetish After-party group photo.

myself at risk in the hands of artists whose practices are concerned with historical and contemporary injustices perpetrated by art historians, critics and curators such as myself.

#### Tussling and Public Spectacle

At this panel Greg Hill, a Mohawk artist and curator at the National Gallery of Canada, discussed several of his projects, all humorous and engaging, much to the delight of the audience. One project in particular exemplified the use of humour to explore issues of colonization. *Kanata* was a project Hill presented at the Indian Art Centre in Ottawa-Gatineau. Hill transformed the gallery space into a new country, Kanata, and engaged the audience by allowing them entry into the country through a customs

and immigration booth where visitors were required to apply for a passport and accept the law of Hill's country.

Lynne Bell, professor of Visual Culture at the University of Saskatchewan, gave an overview and commentary on the "High Tech Story Telling Festival" hosted by TRIBE in 2001. Of particular relevance to this conference was her discussion of the "anti-panel" where Betty Daybird, as Cosmosquaw, led a talk-show styled public discussion with James Luna, Rebecca Belmore and Lori Weidenhammer. At this anti-panel drinks and tv-dinners were served on tv trays as the hostess vamped it up for the audience. Bell concluded that performance forum successfully disrupted the colonial structure of the typical round table/conference/panel discussion that epitomizes the hierarchies of the academic milieu.

#### Differing Practices: Experimental Theatre and Performance Art

At most conferences I have found that there is at least one session, like this one, that I intuitively want to avoid. As it turned out, with the numerous schedule changes taking place over the course of the weekend this session was switched to the end of the day and I ended up attending even though I was planning on skipping it. Although the content of this panel discussion wasn't of particular interest to me it did provide some insights that I was not expecting. During a smoking break, Glenn Alteen explained to me that a great number of Native performance artists in Canada have studied at (or deliberately chosen not to study at) Spirit Song, an Aboriginal theatre school in Toronto. Thus, much as in Newfoundland, the visual and performance arts community has strong links to the theatre community that are not as present in other regions.

The panel was thoroughly entertaining. It began with a performance by Dolores Dallas, a Cowichan artist living in Duncan, BC, who is active in the visual arts, theatre, television and film communities. The panel switched to a talk-show format discussion (much like the anti-panel of the "High Tech Story Telling Festival") that quickly broke down into a more traditional discussion. I have to admit, what really thrilled



Conference group photo, Art Direction: Paul Wong, Photographer: Donna Hagerman/grunt gallery. 1) Steve Loft (director, Urban Shaman, artist) 2) Warren Arcan (performance artist, writer, Jawasin productions) 3) Greg Hill (performance) 4) Lynn Bell (professor of visual culture, University of Saskatchewan) 5) Reona Brass (performance coordinator, Sakewewak) 6) Dana Claxton (video, film performance artist, IMAG conference curator) 7) Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (artist) 8) Marcia Crosby (art historian, curator) 9) Bently Spang (artist, curator) 10) Guy Sioui Durand (art historian, curator) 11) Cheryl L'Hirondelle (filmmaker, musician) 12) Rebecca Belmore (performance) 13) Ahasiw Maskegon Iskeu (writer, digital media) 14) Bea Medicine (anthropologist, art historian) 15) Aiyana Maracle (performance artist, theatre director) 16) Edward Poitras (artist) 17) Shelley Niro (artist) 18) Lori Blondeau (performance artist, director at TRIBE, conference curator) 19) Anthony McNab Favel (artist, musician) 20) James Luna (performance artist)

me about this panel was the involvement of Floyd Favel, a theatre and dance artist perhaps best known for his character Jasper Friendlybear, on cbc radio's "Dead Dog Cafe". Favel discussed a McLuhanesque approach to theatre, where the body is the message of the performance, thus attributing strong connections between performance art and theatre. As well, I had never met Jasper Friendlybear. If only I could have been spanked by him too. Floyd? Can we meet sometime?

The conference ended with closing remarks by Bently Spang, a mixed-media artist, freelance curator and writer and member of the Northern Cheyenne Nation in Montana. He contextualized the weekend's events in terms of what was happening in the Native performance scene south of the border, thus reminding us of the unnatural boundaries that separate American and Canadian Aboriginal nations and artists. As we filed out of the auditorium, he personally said goodbye (and hello) to all of us, an act that reinforced the emotional tone of the conference and its importance as a meeting place.

As could be expected, the closing party was the party to end all conference parties. An open-

stage performance event took place at Western Front, mced by Aiyana Maracle. Wearing little else than nipple jewelry, this Mohawk *transformed-woman* warrior was able to successfully navigate the variety of performances and the sometimes-tense atmosphere of the room. Although I missed several of the performances, one piece in particular is worth noting here. Thirza Cuthand, a video artist currently living in Saskatoon, presented her new video *Anhedonia*, which dealt with issues of mental illness in relation to being Aboriginal and queer. The video combined the disturbingly higher rates of suicide among Aboriginal and queer communities with personal reflections on her own experiences with misconceptions of mental illness and depression. Maracle's comments on cultural differences in the acceptance of transgender individuals (specifically Mohawk acceptance of transgender individuals as a special class of people able to provide insight into both genders), combined with Cuthand's work, opened up a contemplative space in the cabaret venue, reversing its usual association with humour or extroverted performance.

The party eventually bled out to the bars and back to Yuxweluptun's apartment. Throughout

the evening many people discussed the need to have the events and discussions of this conference recorded in a public forum. I suddenly realized that I had been taking notes throughout the conference. I had never done this before at a conference, there never really having been much to write down. At the parties I was thinking about the issues of cultural permission that dominated the past three days and thought that I would like to co-write a piece with one of the conference participants. I thought that the conversation that could arise between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal voices would be interesting. When I raised this idea I was confronted with accusations of pandering to my own white guilt and told that I should just write it myself. I was shocked at first. I thought I was being democratic, inclusive. I suppose that the accusation was more importantly permission, cultural permission to give voice to my own perspectives. As a conference junkie, how could I turn that down?

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# CITIZEN SALLOUM

by Laura U. Marks

The question of how to be a citizen in the age of vanishing nation states demands that we ask, a citizen of *what*? Citizenship now, if it is to involve more than nationalism and more than going with the flow of global capitalism, means working across borders, building networks of responsibility and belonging. Citizenship in Canada might most optimistically be defined as *becoming-Canadian*, a flexible and continuous critique of our responsibilities as residents of this nation in relation to the world. Artists' success is often defined by an exclusive boundary marked by exhibitions and funding: the city, the region, the nation or, in what for some is the zenith of a successful career, membership in the international nowhere of the festival and biennial circuit. Jayce Salloum, a second-generation Lebanese-Canadian artist, redefines citizenship in general, and artistic citizenship in particular, across these boundaries. Salloum is an exemplar of the duties and benefits of citizenship in the age of global capitalism and international mega-exhibitions. He shows how an artist might weave a flexible web of micro-citizenships and trans-citizenships.

Canadian citizenship is being redefined, legally and culturally, as something less than the mosaic that two decades of multiculturalist policy attempted to establish. That policy had its problems, as readers of Fuse know well. But recent Canadian political practice seeks to establish a nationalism that is atavistic at best and slavish to global corporate interests at worst. Consider, for example, the funding criteria of Telefilm Canada. Transnationalism should be included as part of any definition of Canadian-ness, for one of the things this country does best is host the expression of immigrants who are Canadian *in that* they have other national loyalties as well. Yet a few years back, Telefilm redefined "Canadian cinema" according to a newly narrow prism of Canadianness: Canadian director, Canadian producer, Canadian actors, Canadian locations and Canadian content. One of the ridiculous outcomes of this policy was the questioning of whether Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, filmed in India by a Canadian director, could qualify as a Canadian film.

Meanwhile, like the country to the south, Canada has been closing its borders to immigrants. The restrictive immigration policy introduced in 2002 brusquely put an end to the relatively inclusive points system that made this country a popular destination for immigrants. The decision last year to evict thousands of Algerian refugee applicants reflected a cool calculation that Canadian corporate investment in Algeria was more valuable than the lives of a few who would return to the threat of imprisonment and torture. All this is to say that Canada's inclusive multicultural identity is becoming ever harder to defend. For many of us in the arts, the final blow came with the debacle at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC). You may remember what happened; Rawi Hage's mischievous recounting of the events (including Sheila Copps' memorable greeting "Salaam. Shalom." to the Arab-Canadians assembled at the vernissage) appeared in Fuse a little over a year ago. Aida Kaouk, the museum's curator responsible for the Middle East and



All images are from the videotape *untitled part 3b: (as if) beauty never ends...*, 11:22, Jayce Salloum, 2003. Courtesy: the artist

Southwest Asia, had spent five years researching and planning the exhibition "The Lands Within Me: Expressions by Arab-Canadian Artists." It was finally due to open on October 18, 2001. After the attack on the World Trade Center in September of that year, in a nod to anti-Arab sentiment, museum director Victor Rabinovitch decided to "postpone" the exhibition. Salloum, Hage and I were some of the actors who mobilized support for Dr. Kaouk and her landmark exhibition. We circulated a letter that traveled widely in art, activist and Arab communities, thanks especially to Salloum's prodigious mailing lists. International lovers of art, Arabs and free speech activists rallied in support of the exhibition. The Prime Minister himself called in Parliament for the show to go on. And it did but with a lingering bitter aftertaste.

The twist of the knife came a year later, in October 2002. After public attention had moved away from the fiasco at the museum, its directors fired Dr. Kaouk, declaring her position redundant. This time protests had less effect. The museum condescended to throw Dr. Kaouk a position of much smaller scope: a three-year contract to research Canadian women originating from the Horn of Africa. Though she still carries out work related to "The Lands Within Me," the Middle East and South-West Asia department has been eliminated. This implies that Arab-, Iranian- and Afghan-Canadians, among others, do not deserve representation at the national museum of the people. What must these citizens do to prove they are Canadians? And given that Dr. Kaouk is the museum's only female curator of non-European origin, what is the Museum of Civilization saying about who really counts as Canadian?

Back to 2001. We defended the exhibition in its entirety but one work was singled out for condemnation by lobbyists, Salloum's five-channel video installation *everything and nothing*. The exhibition as a whole was more suited to its location in the Museum of Civilization than it would have been across the river at the National Gallery of Canada. It was a survey of the many ways in which Arab-Canadians make art: many using such modest media as print-making, calligraphy and ceramics, as well as a few works in the international style, such as the installations by Salloum and by Jamelie Hassan. The showy form and overtly political content of Salloum's piece would be perfectly at home, say, representing Canada at the Venice Biennale—but it stood out among the other works in "The Lands Within Me." It was this work that was singled out for attention by the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) for its criticism of Israel: a series of reminiscences by 1948 Palestinians on one of its five screens and, more damningly, an interview with Lebanese activist Soha Bechara on another. Bechara had been detained for ten years in Khiam, a detention center in south Lebanon run for Israel by its proxy, the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA). She had attempted to assassinate the general of the SLA. On another screen, intellectuals from the former Yugoslavia discuss the impossibility of national belonging, in quite existential terms, after the Yugoslavian war.

In their press releases, the CJC became curious art critics, asking how an artwork that interviewed Lebanese, Palestinians and people from the former Yugoslavia could be considered Canadian. This accusation ignored a tradition of becoming-Canadian that remains our country's dearest hope for a meaningful identity in the

world. It's a gloomy situation when people feel they must ask why Canada should care about oppression and self-determination in other countries. While Canada's immigration and human rights policies seem ever more sensitive to the needs of global corporations, dissident art like Salloum's insists that Canadian-ness involves the responsibility to facilitate the global flow of humans, rather than that of capital.

*Everything and nothing* was attacked not only as not-Canadian, but also as not-art. This was mere reportage, the CJC suggested; it did not belong in a museum. But it would be a rare news item indeed where the interviewer allowed his poor French to be heard on the tape, offered his interviewee a bunch of red roses and listened to her reflect that roses should not be put in water, and used the subtle means of art to reveal the human love that kept Bechara alive and hopeful during six years of solitary confinement.

When everything about the Canadian Museum of Civilization debacle delineated Canadian officialdom's impulse to stifle democracy, Salloum's was one of the warmest and most insistent voices raised in defense of the democratic principles of free speech, reasoned debate and ethical struggle.

Indeed, Salloum's work challenges what counts as Canadian. Like Mehta, he takes advantage of Canadian citizenship to work freely in his country of heritage, producing art that he could never make if he were a citizen of that country. If he were a Lebanese national, he could not film in the Occupied Territories, as he does, for example, in the videotape with Elia Suleiman, *Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal* (*Introduction to*



the reason behind the tears,



- and then it asked me about

the end of an argument) *Speaking for oneself ...speaking for others* (1990). More fundamentally, he demonstrates that one of the great privileges of making art as a Canadian is having a locally rooted sense of global citizenship.

Salloum also forges an international pan-Arab citizenship at a time when pan-Arabism is suffering blow after blow in the Arab world itself. Benefiting from Canadian and North American funding, exhibition and distribution structures, he is able to speak more widely in the West than is possible for most Arab artists. He could have taken advantage of this exposure only to promote himself. But a kind of will to democracy urges him to share his fortune with others. It's interesting that this impulse to act on behalf of a collective (even to bring a collective into being) also characterizes the work of other Lebanese and diasporic artists and curators such as Walid Ra'ad, Akram Zaatari and Christine Tohme.

As an instigator of events, as well as an artist, Salloum forges a transnational citizenship with Lebanon and the Arab world. Believing in the ability of art to shape personal and collective becoming, Salloum is one of the people who helped bootstrap independent video production into existence in Lebanon. Shortly after the end of the civil war, he and Ra'ad returned to Beirut to facilitate a workshop on video to artists, intellectuals and activists who had plenty to say, but little infrastructure with which to say it. As a programmer, he brings Arab video to audiences that might otherwise never see it, in the traveling exhibition "In/tangible cartographies: new Arab video and film," and urges North American distributors to take up this

work. It's a separate problem that these ephemeral works are rarely seen in the Arab world itself: this is, of necessity, an audience constituted in diaspora as much if not more than at home. Like a one-person NGO he constitutes a virtual democracy in screening rooms from Brussels to Seattle where Arab voices reach the ears of their diasporic and other friends.

Salloum could easily settle into a place somewhere in the firmament of international art stardom. But his sense of civic responsibility begins locally, in the dual-class society of Vancouver. In his hometown, he organizes activist art projects, much like the intervention in Beirut ten years ago, with the goal of giving disenfranchised people a means for expression, empowerment and pleasure.

All this activity requires a certain ascetic determination. Indeed, everybody who knows Salloum remarks on his single-mindedness, and personally I'm astounded at his discipline in front of a few grams of bittersweet chocolate. But this is also a person who photographs sentimental window displays, who would rather talk about roses with Soha Bechara than press her for lurid details of her imprisonment, who cannot write a sentence without seasoning it with a pepper of ellipses. Some tenderness, some cherishing of the oblique and inexpressible animates his activism. Citizen Salloum knows that global citizenship starts at the local, and nothing is more local than the inexpressible reaches of the heart.

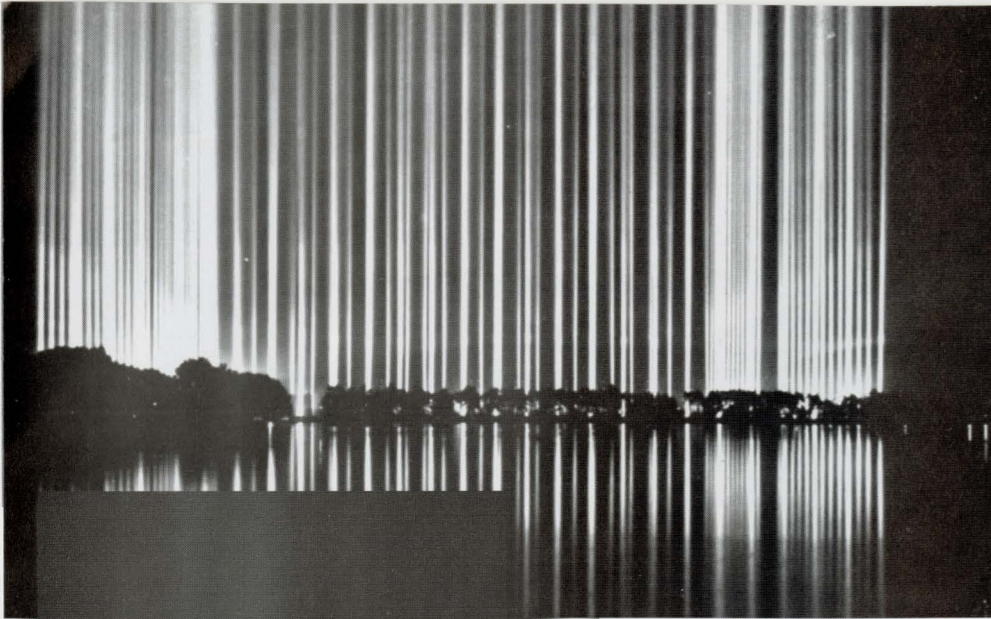
Laura U. Marks is a critic and curator of artists' media and the author of *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and The Senses and Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Just back from a year in Beirut, she is now Dena Wosk University Professor of Art and Culture Studies at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

# Light of Return

by Amish Morrell

For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.<sup>1</sup>

— Walter Benjamin



The photograph of Albert Speer's *Cathedral of Light* from the 1937 Nazi Party rally at Nuremberg carries an imprint of light, a trace of Speer's original sculpture across time, to where I encountered it in the pages of Susan Buck-Morss's *The Dialectics of Seeing*.<sup>2</sup> One evening a few weeks after seeing this, I was walking to an opening on the Lower East Side in Manhattan and saw what looked like Speer's sculpture in the New York skyline. Two vertical columns of light, each a fifty-foot square made up of forty-four searchlights — the same materials used by Speer — shone a mile into the night sky. This was a memorial to the victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, called *Tribute in Light*, installed where the towers once stood. The similarity was uncanny and disturbing, leaving me to wonder whether artists Julian LaVerdiere and Paul Myoda and architects John Bennett and Gustavo Bonevardi knew of Speer's sculpture over half a century earlier.<sup>3</sup>

Such a comparison may seem obscene. My intention is not to liken the events of September 11 to the systematic murder of European Jewry during the Holocaust, or the global empire-building ambitions of the United States to those of Germany under National Socialism. However, there seem to be provocative similarities. It is unlikely that supporters of National Socialism saw Speer's *Cathedral* as a symbol of Nazi genocide through which they recognized their complicity in a historical atrocity. We can speculate that people may have seen Speer's sculpture as one filled with utopian promise,

and that it could have served to mobilize collective consciousness around the possibilities of National Socialism. Similarly, New Yorkers may have seen *Tribute in Light* as a way of redeeming the lives of those who died in the twin towers. In the discourse around 9/11, remembrance has become practically inseparable from the war on terrorism. In death, the victims are re-animated, identified as part of a national identity and as objects of national mourning. The physical violence of their deaths was overtaken by a metaphysical violence that subsumed their lives within the political exigencies of the present. If there was ever a moment of silent reflection, it was quickly interrupted by the urgent demands of us foreign policy. But this is merely a tangent. I want to draw attention to the fact that both of these sculptures serve to structure collective consciousness around a set of historical events, and consider how the juxtaposition of these two images serves to shift how one reads the present.

Light is the most minimal of materials. Connoting both purity and divinity, light is a captivating and attractive force. Perhaps this is why it has come to symbolize the eternal, the idea that some things always remain. Events continue to have effect through their consequences, giving the past infinite, eventual possibilities for return. Although historical materialism ensures that the past has access to the present, the future is always unknown. In the face of this indeterminacy, the photographic fixing of light has a consolatory power by providing the trace that is contained in the photograph with access to the future. It is a technical transformation of light in which the visible image is burned onto film and becomes the template for its reproduction. In the dark-room it is miniaturized, contained and infinitely reproducible into contexts that are not known when the image is taken. Through this relation, the photograph provides a trace of the past access to the world of the present and to unknown future possibilities. However, the photograph of the sculpture and the sculpture itself each has a different structure of apprehension, and this profoundly shapes how each of them can be read.

Returning to the sculptural forms, there is, despite their different contexts, a structural similarity in both images, that reveals an associative power contained within the sculptures. They both allow for the unification of subjectivities in space and time. *Tribute* was installed from March 11 until April 11, 2002, from dusk until 11pm each night and could be seen, in ideal viewing conditions, for a mile above Manhattan and in a twenty-five mile radius. All of New York could see *Tribute*, all at the same time. At a time when the world was becoming increasingly divided, this work helped unify people and redeem a sense of innocence. *Tribute* beckoned the viewing subject into an ideal of nationalism, which foregrounded normative concepts of race and gender (among other identities) organized around principles of inclusion and exclusion that are upheld by the state and within civil society. (Think of how rigid border controls and immigration policies in the United States have become since 9/11.) The light of *Tribute* was pure and all-illuminating, apparently without contradiction or complexity. In its brightness, it blinded the viewer to difference and contingency, and instead served to reaffirm exclusive ideals of national and civic citizenship.

Rather than unifying a public within a specific place, photography allows for the formation of publics across space and time. Through its photographic trace, Speer's luminous *Cathedral* survives to be read in another context, as the image of *Tribute* also survives to be read within these very pages. But this does not mean that we are able to readily grasp the significance of either of these images. Like so many other images, we may view them without thinking about what they mean. Perhaps we are bored or distracted, feeling guilty about something we said, or wondering whether we turned off the stove. They each come to us as yet another image from a sea of images, traces of light refracted across time. We need barely look to know what they mean, to enter into the collective consciousness shaped by those events as they are inscribed in the images. To prevent the return of the same, it is necessary to introduce difference into our reading of the image. For it is often the bad dream that startles us

into wakefulness: the images of the airplanes hitting the towers, or the unfamiliar photograph in which the everyday suddenly turns macabre and unreal. For me, it is the image of *Tribute in Light* that becomes dream-like in its sudden unfamiliarity and shatters my sense of the present.

Placing these images together takes them out of the web of collective association that structures their respective taken-for-granted meanings. In seeing the installation in New York in relation to the image of Speer's sculpture, my sense of this monument as it was historically intended is ruptured. The image opens a relationship between Nuremberg and the present, between *Cathedral of Light* and *Tribute in Light* in which my point of aesthetic reference has shifted to a different register of meaning, to a different time and a different context. The result of this juxtaposition is a new association in which the image is extracted from the enclosure of the past and given entry to the present. This relation constitutes an awakening, but only an awakening into yet another dream, just as the events of 9/11 bring about a new vision of America's place in the world of the twenty-first century.

In Walter Benjamin's oft-quoted phrase from *Thesis on the Philosophy of History*, cited above, the disappearance to which he refers is not the image of the past, but the present, as it becomes past. The past itself never returns; that is what it means to be of the past. Yet through the image, light gives a sensation of the past's return. The past anticipates our arrival through the image, yet remains forever at a distance, like all images of the past. To place these two images together is to locate them in a new constellation of thought, to stage a conversation with an irretrievable past. It is to disrupt the enclosed dream of the present.

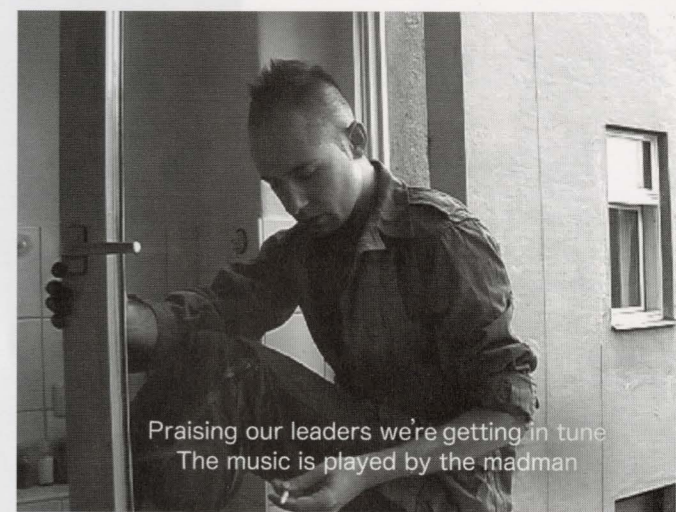
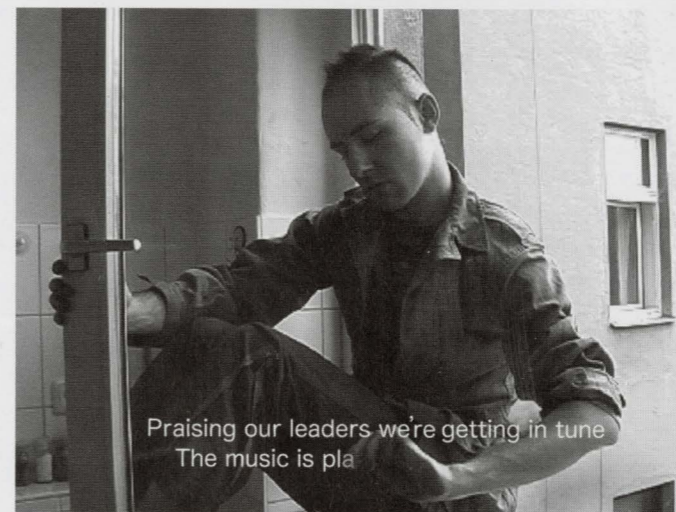
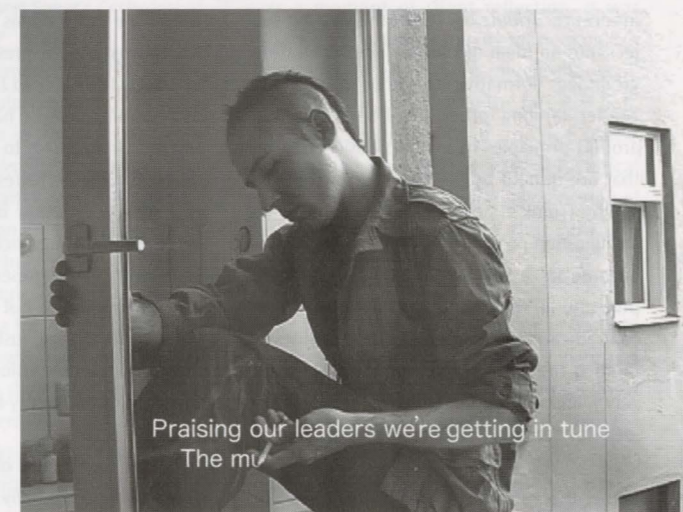
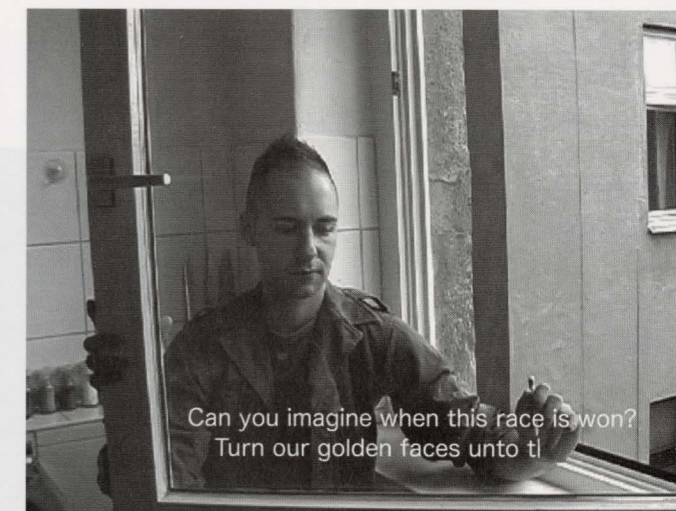
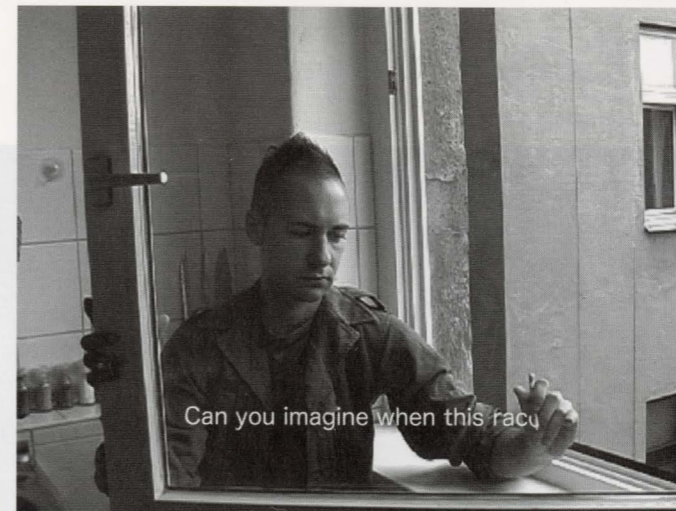
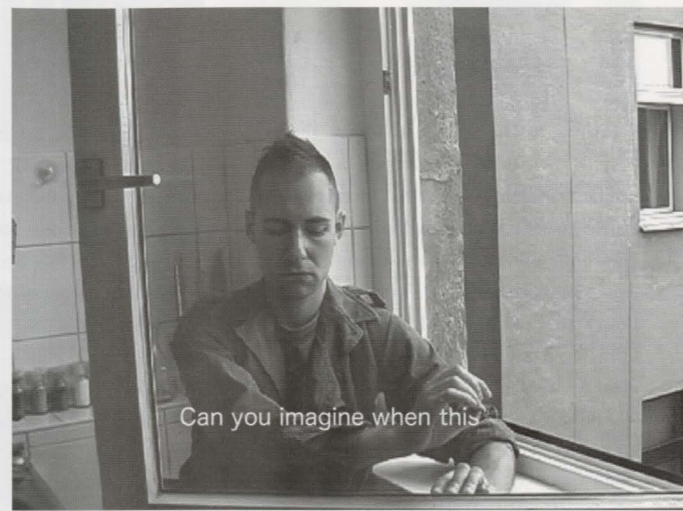
#### Notes

1. "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, ed. H.Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968)
2. Susan Buck-Morss. *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999)
3. <http://architecture.about.com/library/weekly/aaawtc-memorial.htm> (16 September 2002)

Amish Morrell is a PhD student at OISE/UT, where he is writing a thesis on contemporary photography and conceptions of historical consciousness. His recent essay, "Who's afraid of Ian Carr-Harris," can be found at <http://www.samplesize.ca/reviews.html>.

Top: The Party Rally at Nuremberg. Anti-aircraft searchlights project a 'Dome of Lights' into the sky.

Bottom: *Tribute in Light*. Photo: Ray Stubblebine. Courtesy: Reuters.



## Subtitled

by Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay

I'm thinking about our individual relationships to political conflict and the ways in which popular culture shapes our understandings of the scale and meaning of war. In our media-saturated times, pop songs and the lives of pop stars seem to have a larger impact on viewers than the video-game-style reportage of real live wars. I'm interested in the confusion caused by news reports that call the war on Iraq "America Strikes Back," featured back-to-back with music videos featuring Madonna wearing military fatigues singing about living out the American Dream.

I'm thinking about being in Paris at the time of the war proclamation and the rampant military chic ubiquitous in both street and couture fashion, despite France and Germany's notorious and much-criticized anti-war stance. I'm wondering why I can't get enough of army clothes living in a city still haunted by the atrocities of war.

I'm thinking about the lyrics from Alphaville's 1980s pop anthem "Forever Young," for their renewed relevance in the context of the American government's dismissal of the global outcry against war in Iraq, for individual and collective feelings of the futility of resistance to globalization and the war machine, and for the relationship that popular culture plays in shaping contemporary political attitudes and fantasies.

*Can you imagine when this race is won?*

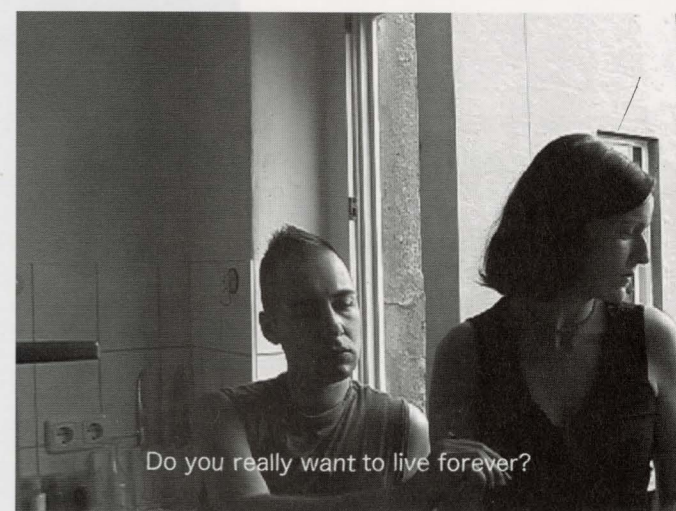
*Turn our golden faces to the sun.*

*Praising our leaders, we're getting in tune*

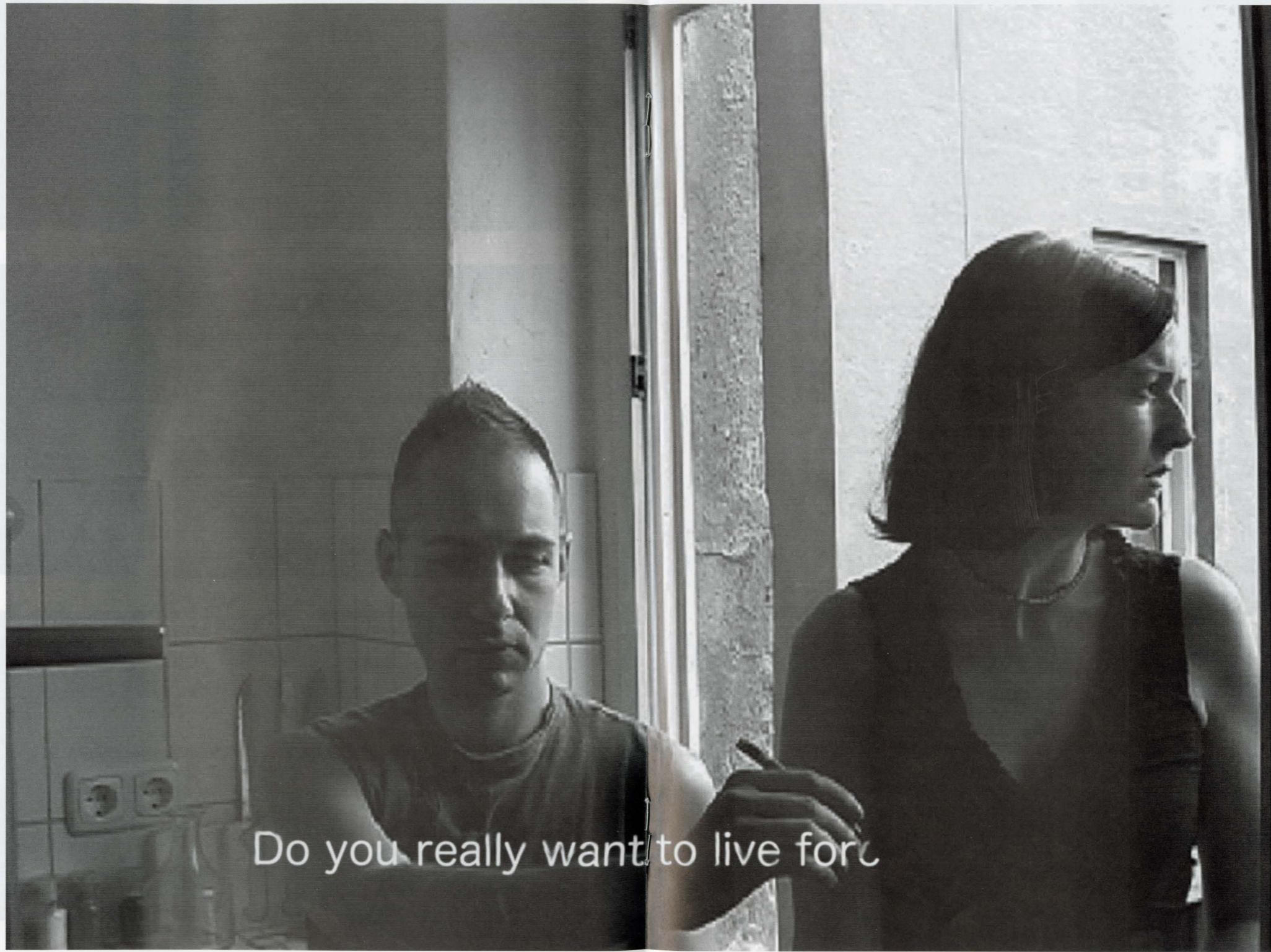
*the music's played by the mad man.*

*Forever young, I want to be forever young.*

*Do you really want to live forever?*



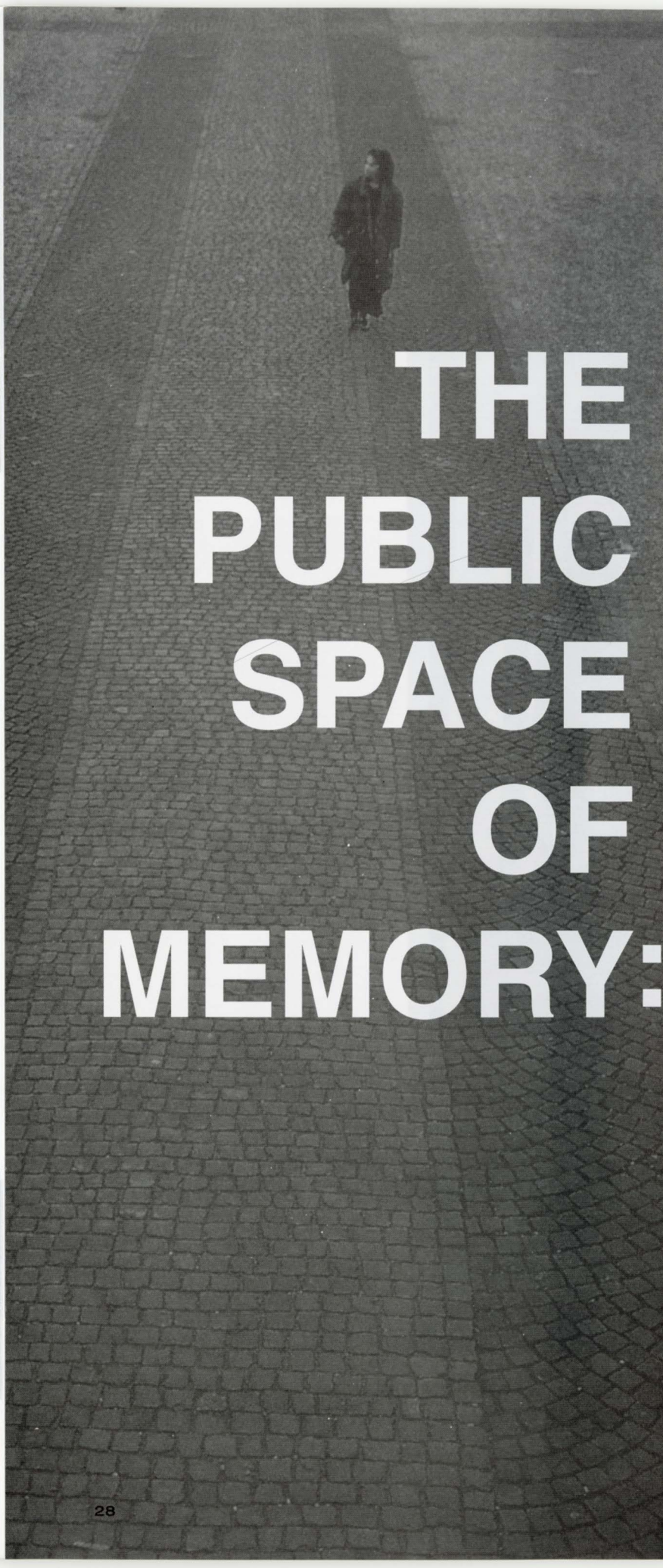
Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay is a Montréal-born visual and media artist based alternately in Berlin and Toronto. His work has shown in festivals and galleries across Canada and Europe. His 2002 video *I am a Boyband* is currently part of the Edmonton Art Gallery's touring exhibit "Soundtracks," which examines the role of music in the work of seventy Canadian artists over the past century.



Do you really want to live for

Can you imagine what the life is worth?  
And our golden days to be seen.  
Paying our taxes, we're getting in line,  
And we're waiting for the day to come,  
When we can all live in peace and love,  
And we can all be happy and free.

Benny Neomolinsky Ramay is a Montreal-born visual and media artist based primarily in Berlin and Toronto. His work has been exhibited in galleries and museums across Canada and Europe. His 2002 video *I am a Boyfriend* is currently part of the Edmonton Art Gallery's *Artists on the Edge* series, which examines the role of music in the work of seventy Canadian artists over the past century.



# THE PUBLIC SPACE OF MEMORY:

## Opening to the Future of Justice

by Joseph Rosen

“To articulate the past historically ... means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”

—Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

The political landscape of the present is saturated with memory. Material spaces are haunted by the blood of historical violence. Modern technologies of communication excavate more and more information about past and present violence, creating what Andreas Huyssen calls a “globalization of memory discourses.”<sup>2</sup> But memory discourses remain harnessed to an information economy and subjected to the logic of consumer culture. Information technologies threaten to empty memory of its historical content, turning the past into an object of consumption. Concurrently, there is a parallel proliferation of monuments: attempts to concretize and solidify the evanescence of memory. At present, the media is obsessed with immediate recall. Violence is remembered before it even has the chance to become past — as with the Twin Towers, whose “memorialization” occurred before the event had even faded from the daily news. What does it mean

to monumentalize the present? The monument, as institutionally sanctioned by the nation-state, threatens to turn memory into a foundation for national identity. As if, in response to an ephemeral flood of information, monuments might seize the past concretely and finish with history. And as if, once etched in stone, a monument could finally bury the dilemmas of historical justice. A politics of memory must negotiate between both electronic and memorial technologies that commodify historical violence. On one hand, a flood of information threatens to dissolve the past, collapsing it into the present. On the other hand, a monumental fetishization promises to finish with justice, consuming history in order to consolidate national memory. How can memory be brought into the present and made public, without reifying — and hence forgetting — the past? “For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.”<sup>3</sup> And how can the memory of past violence be brought into dialogue with continuing injustice in the present?

These dilemmas can be provocatively located in the context of certain Holocaust memorials and monuments in Germany. For, in the absence of a surviving Jewish community, the state itself — as

Place of the Invisible Memorial—2,146 Stones Against Racism, Jochen Gerz, Saarbrücken, 1997. Photo: the artist. All images from James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000)

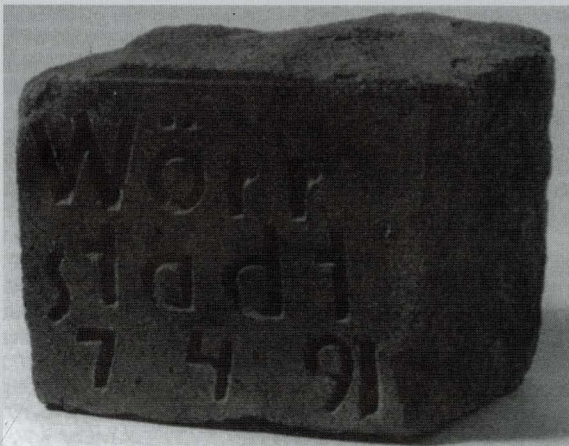


the very perpetrator of historical violence — is burdened with the task of memorializing the past. Yet, as James Young argues, monuments have historically been used to aggrandize nation-states, mobilizing memory in order to found national identities.

They suggest themselves as indigenous, even geological outcroppings in a national landscape; in time, such idealized memory grows as natural to the eye as the landscape in which it stands. Indeed, for memorials to do otherwise would be to undermine the very foundations of national legitimacy, of the state's seemingly natural right to exist.<sup>4</sup>

Monuments legitimize national identities by “naturalizing” memory. By ossifying memory, monuments paradoxically render history invisible, and consolidate identity in the nation-state. This “nation-building” capacity is an uncanny problem for Germany, as it attempts to self-critically memorialize its own atrocities.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the “monumental” aesthetic was readily incorporated into the fascist rhetoric and architecture of Nazi Germany. In the midst of these dilemmas, present-day Germany has produced certain monuments that self-critically confront the “fascist” and nation-building nature of the monument. The unique effect of this difficult process is that certain monuments manage to keep open questions of justice and public responsibility in the present.

One memorial explicitly addresses the way in which the past silently structures the landscape of the present. Jochen Gerz's “Place of the Invisible Memorial — 2146 Stones Against Racism” (Saarbrücken, 1997) is a “guerilla memorial action” that takes place at the Saarbrücker Schloss. Home of the Gestapo during Hitler's Reich, this is where Jews were brought during Kristallnacht in 1938; it is also the place from which all remaining Jews were deported on October 22, 1940. Students entered the square at night under the cover of a party: drinking beer and listening to music. They pried loose seventy cobblestones, took the stones back to Gerz's workshop and inscribed them with the names of missing Jewish cemeteries. The guerilla-artists subsequently replaced the cobblestones in the square, with the inscription facing down. The memory of missing cemeteries is invisibly inscribed on the bottom of the cobblestones. Rather than “speaking” to visitors, this memorial remains silent; rather than



Place of the Invisible Memorial—2,146 Stones Against Racism, detail of stone, Jochen Gerz. Photo: the artist.

mobilizing memory to make a statement, this memorial shows how the violence of the past is *unconsciously* buried in the ground. Memory is written in stone: the very stones across which the public walks. The “Invisible Memorial” does not claim to represent or consciously determine memory. Instead, the memorial disturbs the pedestrians of the present by invoking a memory that they cannot commandeer. This memorial prompts a strange proposition: public memory of the past takes unconscious form as the material space of the present. This concept is not metaphoric: Jewish graveyards were destroyed by the Nazis in order to pave streets — streets where drivers *unconsciously* traverse the graves of the dead. And this is precisely what Gerz's “Invisible Memorial” highlights: that a memory of past violence takes material form in public places.

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin proposes that “architecture ... belongs to the dream consciousness of the collective.”<sup>6</sup> Dream consciousness, or a “collective unconscious” does *not* take place in some ethereal psychic realm, but through the construction of physical space. “Construction plays the role of the unconscious.”<sup>7</sup> For Benjamin, the arcades of Paris, along with architecture, street names and advertising, are “structures in which we relive, as in a dream, the life of our parents and grandparents. ... Flanerie is the rhythmic of this slumber.”<sup>8</sup> Memory, as a dream of the past, is enacted as *flanerie*: movement through material space. We remember by walking through a past that has become buried in stone. Collective memory, conscious or not, only exists in its material, spatial manifestations: in public places. And one of the ways that memory is institutionalized is through the state-sanctioned memorial, which takes concrete form as the monument.

A collaborative work by artist Renata Stih and historian Frieder Schnock suggests a non-monumental route for the spatialization of memory. “Bus Stop — The Non-Monument,” was a proposal for the 1995 competition for Berlin's “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.”<sup>9</sup> Stih and Schnock proposed to turn the memorial site — from the Brandenburg Gate to Potsdamer Platz — into an open-air bus terminal. Buses would travel to concentration camps and other sites of destruction, including a courthouse where 200 (non-Jewish) political dissidents were sentenced to death. The proposal was not accepted, precisely because it was too dispersed. The artists then published a 128 page timetable

listing the departure times of all the actual bus routes needed to access these sites of destruction. Each destination was accompanied by a brief history of the atrocities committed at that site. If this proposal had been given the opportunity to take place, the active work of remembering would be inextricable from these physical routes. The intention of the artists was to decentralize the monumental fixation that would contain history in a single location. Traditional monuments localize the past, by fixing it in stone. History is institutionalized by economically reifying the instability of memory. But the centrifugal routes of the non-monument extended as far as Poland, the Netherlands and the Baltic States. The “Bus Stop” therefore activates an anti-monumental practice, whereby the task of moving through time necessarily corresponds to movement through space. Memory cannot be contained in one location: it spreads through the city, and beyond. To seek the past, one must travel through the present. The “Bus Stop,” through its mobilization of memory, reintegrates history into the lived space of the present. In this way, memory-work moves beyond the passive act of consumption, and becomes a mode of material communication: participants communicate — spatially — with present sites of historical violence. And it is a particular technology — public transportation — that creates this communication with the past. As newspapers and websites transfer information, bus routes transfer people. A technology of transportation brings people into communication with various destinations and, *en route*, with one another. By decentralizing the monument, the artists create a model for thinking about the way technology constructs a space of public interaction. For electronic technologies of communication also create a cultural-linguistic space of relation — or non-relation, as the case may be in the consumption of commodified information. Collective memory, in its public embodiment, must manifest materially, but it also takes place within technological routes of communication.

The stakes of communication technologies are explored in Walter Benjamin's “One-Way Street,” where he compares the “linguistic” book with the “material” technology of advertising:

Script — having found, in the book, a refuge in which it can lead an autonomous existence — is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertising. ... If centuries ago it began gradually

Collective memory, conscious or not, only exists in its material, spatial manifestations: in public places.

to lie down, passing from the upright inscription to the manuscript resting on sloping desks before finally taking itself to bed in the printed book, it now begins just as slowly to rise again from the ground.<sup>10</sup>

Through modern technologies, advertising drags communication out of the book and back onto the street. For Benjamin, script is a medium that takes place within the bourgeois consciousness of the critic. In advertising, however, communication takes a form that materially orients lived space. Technologically resurrected from the book — or magazine — advertising thrusts language up into the space of the city. The image of language, rising up from the ground, anticipates the reemergence of the monument. Benjamin highlights the technological advantage of advertising:

What, in the end, makes advertisements so superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon sign says — but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt.<sup>11</sup>

Like advertising, the monument creates a material space of communication beyond its ideational content. Unlike bourgeois criticism or modern information technologies, the monument creates a material place that orients public interaction. As a technology of communication, the monument speaks the language of the street: it is written in stone, asphalt. But this materiality cannot be fetishized: for this is precisely the means by which the monument can ossify the memory of violence and legitimize the nation-state. The critical distinction, for Benjamin, lies in the relation between the public masses and the 'fascist' use of communications:

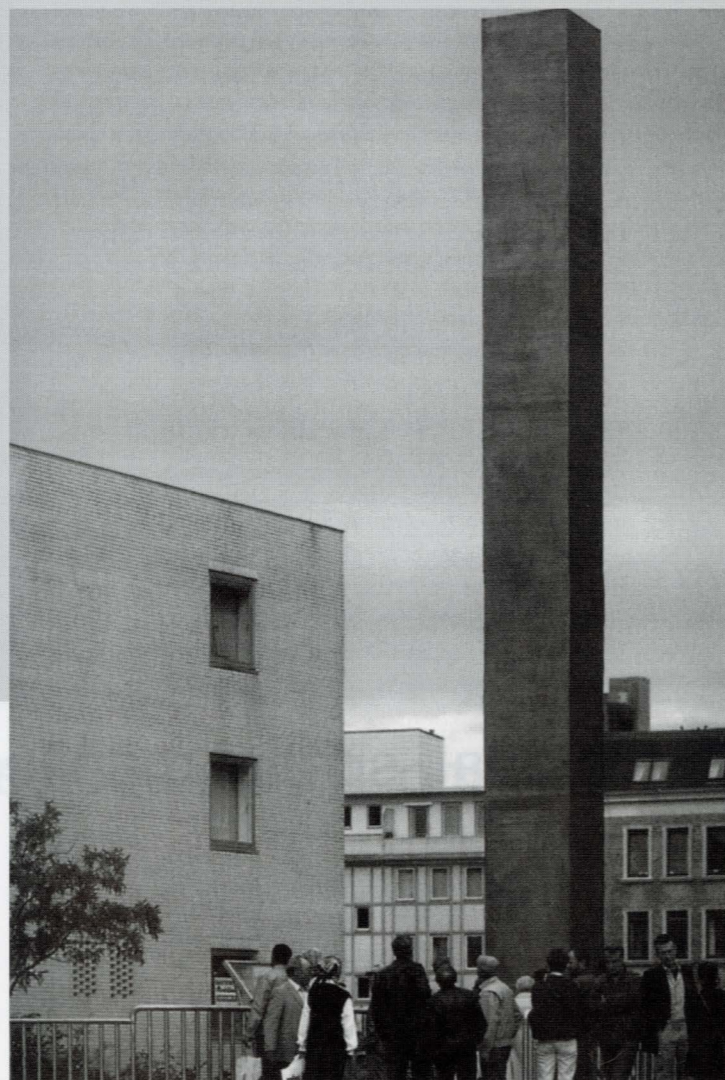
Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life.<sup>12</sup>

Expression, without changing material relations, becomes merely aesthetic, distanced from material content. Benjamin's prescient observation about fascism would apply, today, to memorial discourses that are merely expressive or informative. As Benjamin astutely forewarned, "Locust swarms of print, which already eclipse the sun of what city dwellers take for intellect, will grow

thicker with each succeeding year."<sup>13</sup> An anti-fascist monument is necessarily more than ideologically expressive. And it is not simply a matter of material versus linguistic technologies. The non-monument must engage not just with concrete, but with the material relations that structure communities in the present.

But what would this engagement look like? Another installation by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz provides a site in which to consider this question. The "Harburg Monument against War and Fascism and for Peace" (Harburg 1986–1993) demonstrates how memory, made public, creates a space of interactive relation. The monument consisted of a twelve-meter column, plated in lead and accompanied by a steel stylus with which to inscribe the soft lead. A plaque at the base of the monument stated in German, French, English, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic and Turkish:

We invite the citizens of Harburg, and visitors to the town, to add their names to ours. In doing so, we commit ourselves to remaining vigilant. As more and more names cover this 12 meter tall lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the



The Harburg Monument against War and Fascism and for Peace at its unveiling. Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, 1986. Photo: the artists.

ground. One day it will have disappeared completely, and the site of the Harburg monument against Fascism will be empty. In the end, it is only we ourselves who can rise against injustice.<sup>14</sup>

As it was covered with memorial graffiti, the monument was incrementally lowered into the ground in five foot sections. After seven years the monument entered the ground: nothing remains but a burial stone. The monument *disappears*: like the dead, memory and language descend into space.

But the inventiveness of this monument manifested as an accident. In addition to the officially sanctioned signatures, much more graffiti was scribbled on and around the monument: appreciative comments, stars of David, lover's names, swastikas and, moving into the politics of the present, the phrase "Auslander Raus" — meaning "foreigners get out." In response to the proliferation of racist graffiti, a local newspaper wrote:

This filth brings us closer to the truth than would any list of well-meaning signatures. The inscriptions, a conglomerate of approval, hatred, anger and stupidity, are like a fingerprint of our city applied to the column.<sup>15</sup>

The monument, as it testifies to past violence, also bears witness to the present community of Harburg. The monument creates an interactive public space in which supposedly past violence can be seen as it continues in the present. As Esther Shalev-Gertz comments:

Many people just say we want a monument with the names of the victims. We want to turn toward the past. But in no way do we want to be confronted with fascism as a reality in the present. They'd like to say that fascism is only in the past.<sup>16</sup>

As with the "Bus Stop," the disappearing monument remembers past violence precisely by locating it within the public space of present communities. By prompting public interaction, the memorial gives voice to the allegiances, tensions, solidarities and dissensions that continue to take place in the present community. The xenophobia of Nazi Germany is not displaced into a memorially redeemed past: instead, historical violence appears in the present, in a new form. The memory of anti-semitism thus opens



Top: Graffiti scrawl on Harburg's disappearing monument, 1989. Photo: James Young.

Bottom: The Harburg monument disappears, 10 November 1993. Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, 1993. Photo: the artists.



...memory, made public, creates a space of interactive relation.

onto both its continuation, and extension: a xenophobic fear of foreign immigration. These monuments do more than express distant memories. They bring the past into the present: not in order to ossify the past, but so as to remind the public of the violence that continues to structure material relations in the community.

Another installation by Stih and Schnock extends the present stakes of public memory into the terrain of law. The "Memorial to the Deported Jewish Citizens of the Bayerische Viertel" (Bayerische Platz, Berlin, 1993) remembers Nazi-era laws by resituating them in public places. Eighty signs were to be bolted to lamp posts in the Bayerische Platz, once a thriving Jewish neighbourhood inhabited by Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt. Each sign consisted of an image of an object and a short text (in German) from Nazi Germany's anti-Jewish laws of 1930–40.<sup>17</sup> A child-like drawing of a sidewalk hopscotch pattern was juxtaposed with the Nazi injunction: "Aryan and non-Aryan children are not allowed to play together." Beside an image of swim trunks, a law regulating public space: "Bath and swimming pools in Berlin are closed to Jews." And alongside a picture of a red bench, provocatively located just above an actual red bench in the park: "At the Bayerische Platz, Jews may only sit on the yellow benches." Another group of signs posted laws banning Jews from public transit; these signs incorporate the original graphic designs (such as a white "U" on a blue background)

that continue to be used in present-day subways and bus stops. Seventeen signs were put up earlier than officially proposed, and unannounced. This caused a public outcry: repeated calls to the police complained about 'neo-Nazis' and demanded removal of the signs. Installed unannounced, the memorial refused to distance the past from the present. Dates, subsequently added to the signs, were initially omitted. Additionally, the images were stylistically reminiscent of contemporary advertising. These factors precipitated a conflation of past and present, confusing the public by making the signs appear contemporary. Historical issues of communal exclusion and inequality were re-presented as dangers that remain in the space of the present. In the 1930s, these fascist laws were silently accepted. Retrospectively, these seemingly minor laws about public space lead to the extermination of the Jewish population. The installation activates the memory of this catastrophe by provoking the public to express vocal outrage and take action — in contrast to the silent accord that met these laws in the past. The medium of this project is, in a sense, the political vigilance of the community. Activating the public in this way is only possibly through a spatial installation that blurs past and present. Rather than displacing the memory of the past, this memorial incorporates legal violence into the political landscape of the present. Questions of political action and responsibility are not relegated to the past, but situated in the present so as to precipitate a crisis of justice.



Juden dürfen am  
Bayerischen Platz nur  
die gelb markierten  
Sitzbänke benutzen.

"At the Bayerische Platz, Jews may only sit on the yellow park benches." Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, Memorial Installation at Bayerische Platz, Berlin, 1993. Photo: the artists

Similar to the disappearing monument, the Bayerische memorial ignites a crisis in the present and galvanizes the public. The signature is an individual expression that bears witness to the past. Public law, on the other hand, can be viewed as a linguistic technology that structures material relations within a present community. Like a bus route that organizes spatial communication, law is a technology that linguistically orients movement and expresses communal relations. "Private Property: No Trespassing."<sup>18</sup> By remembering the violent laws of Nazi Germany spatially, Stih and Schnock express more than the burden of memory. Instead, their memorial communicates the imperative to remain politically vigilant against injustice in the present. In a sense, this memorial actualizes what the disappearing monument advocated: memory of the past eventually vanishes, and "In the end, it is only we ourselves who can rise against injustice."

In the end, a memorial politics requires a public spatialization of collective memory. For memory to be more than mere expression, it must address the material, technological and juridical practices that orient communities in the present. As Benjamin warns: "It is not spiritual renewal, as fascists proclaim, that is desirable: technical innovations are suggested."<sup>19</sup> These Holocaust memorials and monuments emphasize precisely this issue. Public memory takes place, through architecture, communication technologies and juridical institutions. Memories of past violence become concrete places, bus routes and laws: one-way streets opening onto the horizon of the future. And on the public streets of memory, communities confront their own relation to present injustice. Communications technologies are rapidly globalizing a new economy of memory. In the midst of this memorial flood, a question remains: how can we avoid repeating — unconsciously, or through the nation-state — the catastrophes of history? To begin the task of justice, the public sites of memory must be brought into communication with present violence: new sites of suffering that occur daily at the borders of twenty-first century globalization. Beyond the information economy that virtualizes the past, beyond the memorial fetish that ossifies memory, and beyond the self-legitimization of nation-states, memory must confront the politics of the present: the moment of danger in which we seize a memory. And, perhaps, memory will testify to past violence when it takes place — as a public vigilance against the material injustices that continue in the present.

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1. "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), p. 255.
2. See Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
3. Walter Benjamin "Theses on the Philosophy of History," p. 255.
4. James Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 2.
5. As Young points out, Germany is perhaps one of the only nation-states to engage in this task: "Where are the national monuments to the genocide of American Indians, to the millions of Africans enslaved and murdered, to the Russian kulaks and peasants starved to death by the millions?" *The Texture of Memory*, p. 21.
6. *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughling (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 393.
7. Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reflections*, ed. P. Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1978), p. 147.
8. *The Arcades Project*, p. 106.
9. See website at <http://wso.williams.edu/~mdeean/berlin/busstop.html>. See also James Young, *At Memory's Edge*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), pp. 117–119.
10. "One-Way Street" in *Selected Writings Volume 1*, ed. M. Bullock and M. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 456.
11. "One-Way Street," p. 476.
12. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, p. 241.
13. "One-Way Street," p. 456.
14. Cited in Young, *At Memory's Edge*, p. 130.
15. Cited in Young, *At Memory's Edge*, p. 139.
16. Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen, "The Monument Vanishes: A Conversation with Esther and Jochen Gerz," in *The Art of Memory*, ed. J. Young (New York: Prestel, 1994), p. 73.
17. For a more thorough history of these laws, see Caroline Wiedmer, "Designing Memories," *Alphabet City* No. 4+5: *Fascism and its Ghosts*, ed. R. Comay (Toronto: 1995) pp. 6–14.
18. A vital example, in the context of globalization, are the laws regulating (and often forbidding) the international movement of immigrants, exiles and refugees. How can the memory of past violence be located in the context of these juridical and material borders?
19. "The Author as Producer," in *Selected Writings Volume 2*, ed. M. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 774.

# After the

# Pedagogical Turn:

An Online Roundtable on  
Film and Video Programming  
and Curating

Tracey Bowen

Ellen Flanders

Richard Fung

Roger Simon

Rinaldo Walcott

Kim Simon

In March 2003, an excited group of approximately 100 curators, programmers, artists and university educators gathered in Toronto for Terms of Address: A Symposium on the Pedagogy and Politics of Film and Video Programming and Curating.<sup>1</sup> Through a series of presentation panels, curated programmes and lively discussions, the two-day event, organized by the Centre for Media and Culture in Education (CMCE) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT), provided a forum for investigating the pedagogies implicated within practices of presenting film and video.

In the weeks after the symposium, FUSE caught up with the organizers of Terms of Address to gain a little insight into the background of the event, get some critical hindsight and foster a continued discussion for our broader readership to engage. What follows is an edited email exchange between Tracey Bowen, Ellen Flanders, Richard Fung, Roger Simon, Rinaldo Walcott and FUSE editor Kim Simon.

**Kim Simon:** Richard, could you introduce the CMCE and how the organizers came together to develop this symposium?

**Richard Fung:** The Centre for Media and Culture in Education (CMCE) came out of the vision of a number of graduate students at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), and the leadership of its founding director, Kathleen Rockhill. When I was hired in 2000 as the first coordinator, part of my task was to further realize a mandate of building conversations among artists, academics and activists. To this end I set up a steering committee comprising members from these three stakeholder groups. Among those invited to sit on the committee was filmmaker Ellen Flanders. At one of our first meetings Ellen suggested holding a think-tank on film and video festival programming. She'd been frustrated by what she saw as the lack of critical thinking around presentation.

**Roger Simon:** My memory of how the conference came about is that it crystallized when a few of us, who were not involved in the formation of the Centre (then called CIVME: Centre for Independent Video and Media in Education), began struggling with the question of the purpose of such a centre at OISE/UT. As I understood it, CIVME was founded to support the development of educational interest in, and increased use of, independent film and video in classroom settings.

It seemed the dominant perception of the Centre by most people at OISE was that it was a place to come to find specific videos or films that could be used to illustrate specific issues teachers might be trying to convey in their classrooms. Within such a

limited framework, I thought the Centre would never be much more than a service organization with a reductive sense of what the pedagogical dimension of visual media might be — time-based image presentation organized into illustrative narratives subordinate to a textual representation of knowledge.

Thus a few of us started thinking about film programming and curating as practices that could explicitly render the pedagogical possibilities inherent to screening film and video. We began from the premise that presenting a program of films was a compositional act whereby the selection and sequence of time-based images might open new visions, questions and insights.

**RF:** As a video artist, I've long been interested in the conceptual underpinnings of film and video programming. I've been interested in spectatorship and in how the venue and curatorial context in which my work is shown, how it is written up and where it fits in a program inform a viewer's perception. The same tape can elicit quite different responses depending on these factors. I've also observed this as both spectator and programmer. In 1991, I programmed "Race to the Screen," a festival and conference, and I remember "Atlanta Film Festival" programmer Cheryl Chisholm describing how one year she started the week with a Tarzan movie and ended it with a Trinh T. Minh-ha film on Africa. In programming these juxtapositions she created a new space to appreciate what Trinh was trying to do. I also worked with Ellen Flanders at "Inside Out," the queer film and video festival in Toronto, and through that experience reflected on how that festival served to constitute queer communities. I had the opportunity to refine and articulate these ideas at a conference organized by film scholar Patricia White at the "New Festival" in New York in 1998. This, however, was one of the few forums for discussing the programming of film and video I know of. Another important conference was "Show the Right Thing," which Ruby Rich organized at NYU in 1989.

**Ellen Flanders:** It's important to locate the idea for this symposium both historically and institutionally.

The CMCE is a place where media, culture and their relation to pedagogy and critical thinking can be articulated. As an independent curator, festival programmer, filmmaker and executive director of Toronto's gay and lesbian film and video festival, I've recognized a dissonance between current ideas of curating and programming and how these practices were conceptualized in the years when I first started (identity-based) curating. Closer examination of this shift seemed critical as the way in which we produced and viewed media was changing and little to nothing was exploring this phenomenon. I brought the idea forward to the CMCE from both a frustration but also an anxiety at the nature of these unexamined shifts.

While queer festivals were noteworthy in this respect, it was clear that it was in no way an anomaly; how we were now programming, curating and viewing media was drastically different from ten years previously. As a result, how media was being produced had also changed. It struck me that what was fast becoming a contradiction between programming for festivals currently and what perhaps had taken place earlier, was the intentionality in the showcasing of cultural production. With queer festivals, I would argue that the original intention was the featuring of work made by artists who were gay. The connections were drawn between how they were approaching their work from this subject position and the resulting sensibility of the work. In time this changed: rather than the work initiating a position or curatorial statement, festivals became charged with the responsibility of seeking work about queer identity. As the movement towards identity became more pertinent, festivals shifted their focus to one of support, identity, affirmation and articulation of identity. This is not unique to queer festivals but to the larger realm of the articulation of the *other* in political discourse.

**KS:** What are the grounds for which film and video became the form of cultural production that made the most sense in relation to the CMCE and your ideas around pedagogy?

**RS:** I think we all understand that there is no one CMCE vision regarding how issues of pedagogy might be connected to film and video. Personally, I've had a longstanding interest in how learning takes places in various social sites and what synergies and contra-

ditions might exist across sites such as schools, museums, shopping malls and union halls, and centering on communicative forms such as expository text, literature, film, video, photography, material exhibition, radio, advertising, drama and so on. Learning through these sites becomes about the reformation of understanding and feeling, moments in which signification, emotion and desire are complexly interwoven.

Also central to my interest in working on Terms of Address is the productive character of montage and collage and exploring its importance to education; especially when this practice moves beyond its most reductive moments — illustrative of a theme or driving home a particular political characterization or judgment. Of more interest are circumstances when one presents a series of image-texts in which moments of learning are provoked by contrasts, contradictions and dialectical relations, and this learning is articulated as a part of a public discourse, reconfiguring the texture and substance of the terms of social life.

**Tracy Bowen:** As a photo-based visual artist accustomed to making and presenting static images, for me the symposium theme sparked questions around the differences between curating or composing presentations using moving images that speak to each other in different ways than static images in a gallery. How does the sequencing of film and video put forward a particular curatorial mandate differently than the curation of an exhibition of one or more artists? How do different themes resonate through movement versus the sustained image, and what are the pedagogical implications within such forms? The Centre and the idea of a symposium that would open up questions about curation through different media forms and the public location of those forms were both very attractive.

**RF:** Regarding Roger's and Tracey's comments on the specificity of time-based media and its exhibition in a screening context, there has now been a fair bit of attention paid to the place of moving images in the gallery or museum. In most of the material I've seen the questions have been around how to deal with or think about ephemeral images in the discourses and practices built up around art objects. In Terms of Address, we were interested in taking up the questions from the other end, from the perspective of cinema, broadly speaking.

In a traditional gallery or museum, viewers move through space from object to object at their own speed. The viewer's experience of the art is organized by architectural layout and by the arrangements of art objects and didactic texts within that space. However, the viewer can go back and forth among objects, they have some control. In a cinema or other single-channel screening, unless the viewer leaves the room, the flow of image and sound is fixed both within each work and by the order in which the programmer or curator has sequenced them. I supposed one might see this as a kind of infantilizing experience in which the spectator's visual sense is heightened but her or his physical mobility constrained.

**KS:** Can we talk a bit more about the context of education for Terms of Address and your extended notions of pedagogy? A number of people very involved in the video/art community skipped the conference dismissing it as simply about "teaching" with or about film and video. I'd like to try to get past the surface of this thinking.

**RF:** My sense of the Centre when I came on board is that for those involved encouraging the use of independent media in the classroom was a subsidiary interest. They were more focused in taking up the work of artists and independent makers — people like Isaac Julien, Ali Kazimi, Cheryl Dunye, Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan — as forms of intellectual practice, not just as supplements to "real" knowledge production: what do these works teach us, and not just in terms of content but through the (mostly experimental) forms in which they are embodied? The works they considered and presented dealt with questions of nation, history, memory, identity, power and difference. This jived with my interest as a maker of what I'd like to think of as variously theoretical, political and/or artistic interventions. So yes, when people hear the word pedagogy they think of a teacher in a classroom. However, Terms of Address had almost nothing to do with that context.

One of the ways in which the symposium and other activities of the CMCE show their roots in an institute of education, as opposed to a department of cinema studies, is that our interests are not so related to textual readings, or thinking of works in terms of genre, national cinemas and such, but lay more in questions of reception, consciousness and social transformation. This is not to say that

scholars of cinema aren't interested in these elements, and today there is a great deal of overlap and interdisciplinarity; it is a matter of emphasis.

**EF:** It struck me as fascinating when presenting this year at the Amsterdam History and Memory conference how the film and interdisciplinary scholars were actually stumped (or so it seemed to me) as to how to interpret notions of transmission, reception and consciousness when it came to film and video presentation. I think CMCE and the conference tackled issues rarely discussed in this particular manner. I think textual readings are still the dominant form of engaging with film/video in academia and while there is some crossover, it is usually by individuals within departments as opposed to the departments themselves.

**Rinaldo Walcott:** I am a little surprised that people would think that a conference on curating and programming film and video in the context of the university would be only interested in a narrow definition of teaching film and video. It seems to be that part of the struggle here is not only expansive notions of what constitutes pedagogy but also what is at stake in the pedagogical implications of film and video. The conference was premised not simply on reading off the surface of film and video in search of some narrative, hidden or not. Rather, the conference — by attempting to attend to questions of sequencing in festivals, double projection works, the politics of single channel works in museums and art galleries, continuing tensions between film as art and video as its other and the arrival of new media — recognized that pedagogy is a complicated and charged political concept. In this sense it appears important that an academic unit associated with attempts to grapple with these concerns and simultaneously serve communities beyond the unit staged this conversation. The conference itself represents one particular intervention of a more expansive notion of pedagogy.

**KS:** One question that seemed to stretch throughout the conference was the tension in defining the terms around practices of presentation. The discussion started with trying to get at "curation" versus "programming." At one level, the issue was somewhat dismissed as empty rhetoric. Philip Monk jokingly referred to curating as "hanging pictures of dogs on walls," perhaps pointing to the terms as mostly to do with an image of professionalization

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rather than the real work or impulse of practices of presentation, which for Monk seemed more about following a hunch and sharing a certain fascination. Participants proposed many metaphors and models of presentational practice, each highlighting a different aspect of what was most important to account for in the practice. I heard everything from likening the work of programming and curating to throwing a successful dinner party, to the notion of presentation as translation, and even "experience management." I wonder if you could respond to these metaphors proposed around the question of reception.

**RW:** As a committee we grappled with how the pedagogy of film festival programming might be quite different from that of museum and gallery curating. I have deliberately bifurcated the terms and placed them in relation to very specific practices because I think that such a bifurcation was part of our conception of a broad notion of pedagogy where tensions around narratives beyond and within the various texts being screened are given space and voice. The focus on pedagogy was about political implication in its broadest terms and more narrowly about the ways in which institutions might enable and disable our reading practice of various cinematic texts as each institution either programs or curates those texts. I think there is a substantive difference between the two practices which requires serious theorization. I did not expect the conference to resolve the tension. However, I think that pedagogical conceptions are deeply implicated in any answer that might involve resolution.

**RF:** Rinaldo raises an important point: that the presentation of film and video is not a single practice, but involves a number of practices and contexts. For example, while we didn't think we could settle once and for all the difference between programming and curating it was important for us to start the symposium by bringing to the fore the various meanings and implications people ascribe to those terms, and to try to understand what informs the choice of terminology. For me, this involves discussing the separate but interconnected histories and institutional infrastructures of the visual and media arts. When we talk of film and video programming and curating, we're actually dealing with a huge array of practices and situations. What is true for one context will not hold for another, and we have to keep this in mind while trying to see the connections.

**TB:** When I read Laura Mark's paper prior to the symposium, I was intrigued by her approach to distinguishing between the two practices through the metaphors of the carefully planned dinner party (curating) and the buffet (programming). She highlighted differences between the two practices by proposing that the dinner party was carefully planned to enable a viewer to taste the different offerings and appreciate their juxtapositions and how they have been served up for reception in a particular way. This was in contrast to the buffet approach where everything is laid out such that the viewer is able to taste a broad selection of offerings all at once. While this was an interesting way of defining curating and programming as different practices, it became clear that it is not that simple. The concept of presenting many texts together is a practice that seems mutable because of the many different political, pedagogical and aesthetic terrains it crosses.

**RS:** In regard to productive metaphors for the relation between pedagogy, presentation and reception, what I found very fruitful for discussion was Walid Raad's provocation that to the extent curating or programming puts forward a deliberate structure of presentation, the intention at work in such practices might be seen as a form of "experience management."

No doubt, there are pedagogical conceptions of presentation strategies that reduce the educative possibilities of video and film to such terms. This notion of what might be considered educative in the experience of video and film limits pedagogy to an attempted discursive containment of the range of possible meanings and feelings that viewers experience in the context of a specific presentation of work. On such terms, curators and programmers might be thought of as having a series of points they want to get across using a particular sequence of work to do so.

If this notion of pedagogy as experience management won't do, how can one respond to Raad's provocation, offering him a version of the educative possibilities in video and film programming and curating that doesn't ultimately reduce the significance of any given work to the interpretive perspective of a programmer or curator? To begin to lay out what this response might look like, I want to note Raad's important comments regarding his practice of sometimes "planting" questions in an audience to be asked during a question and answer session regarding his work. If I remember

correctly he said that through the experience of doing many Q and As, he knows there are a common set of questions that are repeated time and again whenever he presents his work, and that by planting different kinds of questions in an audience he has the opportunity to present perspectives on his work that otherwise would not get heard if he only had time to respond to the usual questions. We might reasonably ask, why is this not "experience management?" Is this staging of work unproblematic simply because the artist does it?

There are a couple of things that come to mind about such a practice that suggest possibilities other than experience management. In making the decision to partially stage a Q and A and hence structure the context of the reception of his work, Raad has made ambiguous the boundary as to what separates a work from its context. To grasp the importance of this ambiguity means underscoring that to screen any given work in a specific context and participate in its discussion is not so much to engage in a practice of representation, but rather, in a performative expression in which the possibilities for the way the work enters the world can be worked on. On pedagogical terms, this practice recognizes that viewing and responding to video and film is simultaneously social and personal, and as such responses are often imbricated with sedimented perspectives and psychic investments which provide the basis for the production of the interlinked pleasures and interpretations that are the substance of much aesthetic experience. This always-existent framing is what I think Raad is trying to take into account by his Q and A intervention; he is enacting a pedagogy that is primarily concerned with how his video work might be a moment in which (to draw on Homi Bhabha here) "newness" enters the world; that is, how something new might arrive through his work, offering a transformation of the possibilities of seeing, feeling and thinking. Further, I understand Raad's interest in doing this as consonant with his commitment to a social life that does more than circulate pre-formed visions, but seriously treasures that movement of expression in which a radical learning might take place, a learning in which one might imagine the world differently and ultimately act in the world differently.

**RF:** One doesn't want to determine readings, but neither does one want simplistic or reactionary (mis)readings laid on the work; there's a tension between control and letting go. This brings me to

an epiphany I had at a "Toronto International Film Festival" screening some years ago. Unlike many festivals, TIFF never programs Canadian shorts thematically, and the program notes go little beyond individual film and video descriptions. In most other cases, even if the gallery curator or festival programmer presents a seemingly open-ended show, the viewer's entry into the work is guided by a curatorial statement or essay, or by program notes that attempt to tie the pieces together. But despite this lack of thematic or formal coherence in the TIFF programs I realized that I found them among the most satisfying and enlightening I've experienced, and I'm referring not just to the strength of the individual works, but to the program as an entity.

**RS:** I still think we need to open up the question of what the multiple possibilities are for conceptualizing the pedagogical in video and film. Richard's response seems to stay with the pedagogical as a practice that enframes for an audience, the preferred meaning of a sequence of works. This is what I interpret Raad to mean by "experience management," something I see him working against without abandoning a pedagogical premise, one he is trying to develop on quite different terms.

**RW:** The conference was the second time that I encountered Raad's concept of experience management in relation to the failure and promise of reading his art and really by extension any art. What I find interesting about the experience management of staged Q and As is that even that process offers no guarantees. In Zurich when Raad did his presentation on the archives that he has invented<sup>2</sup> some people read it as "real." Such a reading places in jeopardy the intentionality of the art itself. If part of the intentionality is to point to what is missing in the archive by inventing what is presumed to be missing then what does it mean when people read the "fiction" as "real"? This is an important concern in the context of experience management. For me the experience of film and video in the gallery and in a festival is substantively different. I read the works differently, I respond to the works differently and experience my relation to the works differently. In the festival setting I often feel an obligation to sit through a piece of work — even if it is bad work. In the gallery I move away from works that don't immediately engage me. Raad's experience management concept works well when the artist is present but in the absence of the artist a whole other set of concerns is unleashed. Those con-

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cerns are especially important when the work worries the lines of fiction and the real.

**KS:** I believe that when thinking through what constitutes curating and programming, Raad's use of the phrase "experience management" was not necessarily what he was calling for but rather something he put forth for the purpose of inciting discussion. I read Raad's intention in playing with the form of a Q and A, not as a way to control the readings of his work but rather to take some responsibility for it. If I remember correctly, Raad's comments were in part about the question of managing a kind of "excess" of meaning in a work — and trying to understand this "openness" as both a possibility and a problem which cultural producers and critics should continually attempt to work with.

Perhaps this is really a dance around the subject of judging outcomes or the successes of how a work or a program is received. I did see Raad's various strategies of involvement in the interpretation of his work as mainly about making people conscious of what informs the positions or meanings they come to. Raad has also remarked that he tries to take responsibility for showing his work only in contexts that he feels audiences will have some history or experience with which they might engage a work.

This relates to an important comment Rinaldo made at the event. In a discussion about hoped for "outcomes" from presentations based on identity, there seemed a bit of tension around settling for the kind of affirmation and visibility that a festival or exhibition could bring to identity-based work. In Rinaldo's comment, he seemed to pose this "identity politics" sensibility as potential problematic affirmations that might foreclose the ability to critique a work or a text. It seems we're all hoping to find forms of curating or programming that invite dialogue, which includes debate, without being didactic.

**RF:** I wanted to come back to my experience of the short film programs at Perspective Canada for a moment since Chris Gehmen recently told me that this non-formula way of programming — intuitive, if you wish — is also how he curates for "Images." This struck me because the infrastructure of most programming venues doesn't generally allow for this methodology. You've normally got to sell the program to advertisers, media and/or audiences. The

non-formula approach relies on the reputation of the curator/programmer, and/or the reputation of the venue — and not many people/places have this ability. Nevertheless, what this method allows is the forging of different and surprising relationships, not just in terms of immediate juxtapositions and sequencing but in the program as a whole. It allows the program to put forward several ideas and experiences at the same time.

**RS:** I want to ask Richard to say more. I'm trying to open the question of how to think about pedagogy in the context of video and film presentation (no matter what we call this activity). I'm a little confused about the value of a dichotomous contrast between the formulaic and the intuitive. Isn't it possible to, as you say, "sell" a thematic program without resorting to formulaic strategies of selection and sequencing? Can't there still be different and surprising relationships forged in viewing experiences, when one has a conscious intention for a presentational selection and structure (in which several ideas are put forward at once)?

**RF:** I used the word formula instead of formulaic to signal a difference of intention. I'm interested in a wide range of programming and curatorial strategies, including ones that have very clear and focused pedagogical and political intentions: I loved the *Blah Blah Blah* collection of activist tapes made in response to the Quebec summit, for instance. I've seen great programs of short works in galleries, festivals and one-offs, all following the established methods of how programs are constructed. What intrigues me, though, is that once a program is "branded," i.e., given a title and program notes or curatorial essay, the viewer's attention is drawn toward certain relationships. In even the most abstract premises, I find myself drawn to experience or judge the program not simply in terms of the individual titles but according to expected coherences. This doesn't mean that viewers are locked into the curatorial premise and are unable to read against the grain of the program; neither does it diminish the insights that one gets from good curation. What interests me in the programs that are relatively unbranded, however, such as Perspective Canada's shorts programs or the annual new works exhibition hosted by Toronto's curatorial collective Pleasure Dome, is that the lack of framing allows both the programmers and the viewers to create and explore unexpected sets of relationships. Though the sequence is set, this approach asks spectators to chart their own map.

I'm not prescribing this method over the others. For one thing, there are few instances where infrastructures allow for this approach. Even when I have had the opportunity as a curator, I've chosen to develop a framing device.

**RW:** It seems to me that what you call it (programming or curating) has a lot to do with the experience of viewing and consequently the reading practice of viewing. It was that tension that I thought the conference would have productively dealt with. I approach a programmed session very much on some of the terms Richard last outlined. I look for its coherence; I try to find threads that bind the pieces together. When I encounter a curated session or something named as such I read quite differently. I experience curation as far more intentional, potentially more intellectual and challenging and I see it as a more sustained challenge to stay and engage a set of already prescribed ideas. So even though these distinctions don't hold totally for both practices what I am risking here, in my tentative definition, is a response to Roger to say it does matter to me what it is called. Because what it is called has a strong relationship to my reading practice and thus my experience of the work.

**TB:** I agree with Rinaldo's way of separating programming and curating through an understanding of how the viewer approaches the work as a whole and the ways in which they may be forming connections through a sequencing, theme or "branding." However, is it always that evident that a sequenced presentation of film and video works are either curated or programmed? Do you think the average viewer comes to the work aware of those distinctions as they are looking for connections and new relationships in what they are seeing?

**KS:** Were there any issues that didn't come up at the symposium that you see as an oversight, or was there something that got only surface attention that you hope to have future discussions on.

**EF:** I wished we had engaged more with the questions of economy than we did. This was quite an omission in terms of, in its crudest form, the influence of the market and its determination on the production and exhibition of work. If we look beyond the model of "identity festivals" to generic ones, it could be said that festivals have become laden with the responsibility of putting forward a

cultural agenda. As Liz Czach made clear at the symposium, Perspective Canada, the Canadian showcase at the "Toronto International Film Festival," has the burden of creating and continuing a Canadian national cinema. I would therefore suggest that both curating and programming have been grounded in recent years by institutions and their specific requirements (often resulting from their national and economic ties to larger sponsors, be they government or corporate) affecting the way in which we then select work, view it and what criticality we bring to it in this overdetermined and overburdened position.

**RF:** I don't have particular feelings of regret about the symposium; everyone did a great job. However, I do feel that this is a massive and little explored topic that needs sustained conversation. A symposium can barely scratch beneath the surface. There was a lot of talk among participants about the "next" meeting, and I hope that this can be realized somewhere and somehow, if not through CMCE. I would like to be able to include more people from across the country including more curators and programmers working outside the larger cities. I would like a larger international component, including folks from outside of North America and Europe.

**RS:** I want to register one concern. For a long time now I have been curious and somewhat frustrated by the inability of most gatherings of artists and educators to sustain a conversation about the pedagogical dimensions of cultural practices, more specifically practices understood as forms of artistic expression. Certainly one of the agendas of the Terms of Address conference was to convene a forum wherein such a conversation could productively take place. I don't think we were very successful in this regard.

I know there are multiple reasons for this. However, I do want to at least mention one problem that surely limits productive thought and discussion about arts and pedagogy. In my view, what is clearly missing in public discussion of cultural practice is a shared language for articulating how aesthetic experience may be considered as a form of learning, and in what sense one might understand an artist's practice as potentially pedagogical. Most commonly in art forums, when one mentions "pedagogy," one's immediate association is with the institution of schooling where often education is understood as a practice of helping students acquire a set of pre-specified knowledge and skills. When this idea

**In my view, what is clearly missing in public discussions of cultural practice is a shared language for articulating how aesthetic experience may be considered as a form of learning.**

is taken over into a discussion of the "cultural pedagogy of the arts," it leads to the perhaps reasonable suspicion that aesthetics will be eroded by ideologically driven "agenda art" whose value is reduced to a specific point to be made.

How might we begin to conceptualize a different form of discussion about art and learning?

**RF:** I think that Roger's comments are productive and true. I agree that there is a reductive understanding of what pedagogy entails, but I also feel that the intellectual and economic context of the art world produces an anxiety about thinking of art in a pedagogical framework. I believe to consider art in these terms threatens the dual notions of inspiration and connoisseurship that are still at the heart of the art world's (market) understanding of production and consumption respectively, despite the scholarship and the interventions to deconstruct these discourses. I think the conflation of pedagogy and didacticism may arise as much from willfulness as from ignorance. It's not that a pedagogical dimension hasn't been taken or considered, including at major sites of exhibition and criticism, but to pursue this approach carries risks, and for artists, critics and curators the stakes are high.

**RS:** In the simplest way, I want to claim the possibility of speaking of the pedagogical in multiple forms of art practice as something other than conveying a predetermined perspective or argument. This would mean attending to, for example, the ways in which visual form, narrative structure, relational juxtapositions, affective dispositions, the experience of pleasure and the communicative possibilities of people in relation to each other mediated through aesthetic engagement, open up possibilities of learning. We might discuss how the character of specific artwork makes it possible to attend to our resistances, experience surprise, see within new perspectives, and provoke the possibility of a transformative learning. It is this conversational agenda that I think can lead to the discussion about art and learning that is still yet to be had.

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*Rinaldo Walcott is associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, where he also holds the Canada Research Chair in Social Justice and Cultural Studies. He has published on music, film, queer theory, literature and theatre. His teaching and research largely focuses on postcolonial studies with an emphasis on black diaspora studies.*

*Tracey Bowen is a photo-based visual artist, freelance curator, and PhD candidate at OISE/UT. Her art work focuses on the technical manipulation of the "scale" on which images are viewed and how this manipulation can create a disconcerting ambiguity of reality. Her doctoral research examines the effects of navigating the world wide web on visual artists and their art making practices.*

*Richard Fung is a Trinidad-born, Toronto-based video artist and cultural critic. He is formerly the coordinator of the CMCE at OISE/UT and currently an associate professor of Integrated Media at the Ontario College of Art and Design. His videotapes draw on a range of documentary and experimental forms to engage ideas about identity, consciousness, sexuality, racism and the politics of the everyday. His critical writing, published in magazines and anthologies, also deals with issues of cultural policy and racial equity.*

*Ellen Flanders is a filmmaker and photographer based in Toronto and New York. She was the Executive Director of "Inside Out" and sits on the board of directors of the "Images Festival of Independent Film and Video." Ellen is an advisor to the CMCE at OISE/UT.*

1 Conference papers and abstracts are available for viewing at the Centre for Media and Culture in Education website: <http://cmce.oise.utoronto.ca>.

2 For a general overview of this project, Raad's archive documenting contemporary events in Lebanon, see Lee Smith's "Missing in Action: The Art of the Atlas Group/Walid Raad," *Artforum*, February 2003, pp.124-129.

## Tea and Gossip

Review by Andy Fabo

The same story is told three times. The gist of it is the same in all three versions but fault is found in the details. Who is to blame? Who is telling the truth? Did you notice his suspicious body language, her darting eyes, that slightly nervous tone of voice? Fictions of truth, conjecture and lies — the essential grist for the mills of gossip — make up a monstrous chimera that inhabits Linda Duvall's video installation *Tea and Gossip*.



*Tea and Gossip*, Linda Duvall, 2003, installation detail (Red Head Gallery). Courtesy: Linda Duvall

Duvall creates three viewing stations in the gallery; each monitor faces two matching armchairs with a shared side table suggesting a cozy yet banal domesticity. Two of the monitors are equipped with headphones while the third, closest to the entrance, becomes the sound track for the installation. As you move from station to station, you realize that the story is the same but that the casts delivering the fictive situation are markedly different. Duvall draws from her group of immediate family and friends to create a narrative that takes the form of a talking-head documentary in which the subjects seem to be responding to questions but the voice and actual questions of the interlocutor have been edited out. All the characters are given the bare bones of a story. With this narrative template in mind, they are allowed to improvise, creating their own background details and determining the nature and motivations of their character while not straying too far from the basics.

And the story? A girl and a boy begin a relationship that is becoming increasingly serious and passionate. The mother of the young girl is

faced with a dilemma. Unbeknownst to everyone else involved in the story, the two are half brother and sister. She had a fling with one man but ended up marrying another immediately afterward; when she realized she was pregnant, she did not reveal the true identity of the girl's father to her husband or her daughter. In the meantime the previous partner also met a new woman, they also immediately married and had a son. By a simple twist of fate, the son and daughter meet and are inexplicably attracted to one another. Driven by guilt and fear the mother eventually reveals the secret of this incestuous relationship and we, the audience, enter as the characters (including the mother) are dealing with their reactions to this unexpected revelation.

This is a situation salacious enough to be worthy of gossip. Easily the stuff of a rousing Greek tragedy, in contemporary terms it would be welcome fodder for Jerry Springer's show and has probably seen variations in numerous television soap operas.

Surprisingly, the actors are almost uniformly convincing in spite of the fact that they are all amateurs with limited experience. We really do believe them as they navigate a varied emotional terrain: anger at the mendacity of the mother, shock and repugnance at the possibility of incest, sympathy — sometimes unequivocal, sometimes grudging — for the various parties involved, sorrow for lost love and the shattering of youthful innocence and bewilderment in the face of a seemingly impossible circumstance. Where the delivery is a little stiff or awkward, it can be easily understood as the nervousness of a documentary subject with no previous experience on camera.



## Parolin Products for Busy People

Harcourt House Arts Center, Edmonton, Alberta  
January 9 – February 8, 2003

by Anne Whitelaw



All images from: *Parolin Products for Busy People*, Harcourt House Arts Center, Edmonton, Alberta, January 9 – February 8, 2003. Courtesy: the artist

expression rather than as a commodity with an identifiable market value. In its presentation of small work, beautifully packaged and presented, Maria-Anna Parolin's exhibition "Parolin Products for Busy People" underscores the desirability of the material object while questioning modernist ideas of individual creativity and aesthetic value used to deny the exchange value of art. Parolin does not present a trenchant critique of the commodification of the art object, but raises important questions about the relationship between art and the market, both in terms of the individual production and consumption of art objects and the strategies of their display and marketing.

"Parolin Products believes that interior design benefits immeasurably from the most appropriate wall hanging accents. To this end a series of limited edition finely crafted multiples have been commissioned to cater to the most discriminating palate. Handmade porcelain clasps seal each delicate paper portfolio exclusively designed and manufactured for Parolin Products. Available as a suite of four or individually, each of these remarkable creations looks magnificent and makes a most exciting addition to the most elegant of design interiors."

—Parolin Products Executive Series – Still Life

The relationship between making and marketing has a long and largely still hidden history within the art world. While the public at large remains incredulous at the high prices of "masterpieces" sold at auction, in the realm of contemporary art, the artist is still required to hide behind the veil of the creative impulse and to pretend that the art object hanging in the gallery is produced solely from a need for self-

The exhibition at Harcourt House in Edmonton was made up of a series of six works: *Parolin Products One a Day Series*, *Parolin Products Eaten Leaves Series*, *Parolin Products Corporate Gift Series*, *Parolin Products Coffee Break Dream Series*, *Parolin Products Executive Series – Still Life*, and *Parolin Products Benri (Convenience) Series*. The *One a Day Series* consists of a number of small boxes, inside of which a small drawing or mixed media object is visible through a clear window at the front. Arranged on a shelf just below eye level, the slick packaging of the boxes' identical exteriors belies the tiny, expressionistic and often naive objects inside. In the *Eaten Leaves Series*, woodblock prints of leaves found by Parolin while on an artist's residency in Newfoundland are encased in bags of hand-made paper. The packaging again is what is most noticeable about this series as the prints are entirely invisible and inaccessible unless the bag's seal is broken.

The *Corporate Gift Series*, *Executive Series – Still Life* and *Coffee Break Dreams Series* can be seen

However, if the acting is generally believable, Duvall has intentionally sabotaged her narrative through her casting. One set of subjects is plausible in age difference and familial resemblance, but in a second group the years between generations seem too slight to be possible. And in a third the credibility of the fictive circumstance is totally overturned as the daughter is portrayed by an Asian woman with nary an Asian parent within a narrative that precludes adoption as a possibility.

Plausibility is indeed an issue in both gossip and fiction. I first attended *Tea and Gossip* with a large group of students, all of whom took great delight in comparing not only the credibility of one circle of actors over the others but also the believability and congeniality of the various individuals within each set of subjects. An actor's appearance of trustworthiness was greatly undermined when a viewer found the character to be unlikable in any way.

The success of items of gossip involves community consensus and Duvall actively solicits opinions from her viewers. The walls of the gallery are lined with narrow shelves supporting small grey plastic rectangles that have, etched into the surface, audience opinions from the previous showing of the work. Over the duration of the exhibition Duvall invited viewers to join her in conjecture about the various characters and their motives over a pot of tea and all were invited to freely write their thoughts and reactions on small white cards and place them on the shelves next to the plastic ones. This increased the currency of gossip within the structure of *Tea and Gossip* while providing another stratum to the complex layers of narrative.

This exhibition illuminates the fine line between gossip, which is so often derided and spurned, and fiction, which is valued and rewarded. In fact, the viewer could easily conclude that gossip is the raw material for fiction.

As sales of Canadian books skyrocket abroad and nominations and awards to Canadians for prestigious international awards increase, it is clear that the world has come to recognize

Canadians as engaging storytellers, and we too have come to see ourselves in that light. What is less recognized at home and abroad is that many of our best visual artists are also consummate storytellers who radically deconstruct narrative forms to an extent seldom seen in Canadian literature. Using a variety of media and strategies, Jeff Wall, Vera Frenkel, Stan Douglas, Colin Campbell, Janet Cardiff, Paul Wong, Robert Morin, Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak have mounted probing inquiries into the nature of narrative while indulging in the captivating elements of a good tale.

Moreover, Canadian artists are often most prescient in seeing the productive possibilities of new media formats for storytelling. In the mid-seventies, when most of the art world was decidedly anti-narrative in its use of video, artists like Colin Campbell, Lisa Steele, Vera Frenkel and Paul Wong went against the tide and devised eccentric reinventions of the fictive in their work. Jeff Wall borrowed the photographic format of the Cibachrome lightbox that N.E. Thing Company (Ian and Ingrid Baxter) had previously used in a modest scale in the sixties, instantly understanding that an enlarged format would replicate the spell of the movie screen while concurrently referring to grand narrative painting. Janet Cardiff realized that the portable recorders used as tour guides in major museums could be used to create audio works that guided the user through a terrain mined with the explosive devices of narrative. Stan Douglas while using structuralist strategies that point to the innate properties of film and video has used technological alchemy to create narratives of social and historic import.

Duvall's particular commitment to narrative and prescience in seeing the artistic possibilities of new communications technologies perhaps links her work most strongly to the pioneering work of Vera Frenkel. In the early seventies Frenkel mounted a Toronto–Montreal performance, *String Game*, by using now defunct slow-scan technology. In those pre-digital electronic days, however, it was a revolutionary technology as it was the first to transmit images through a phone line. In the

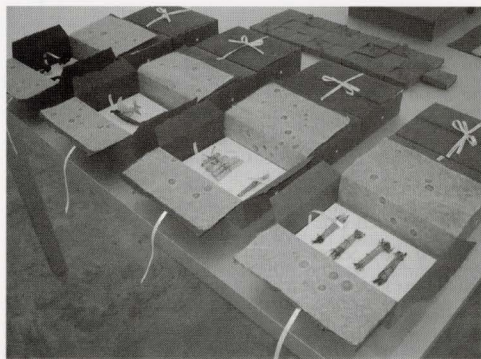
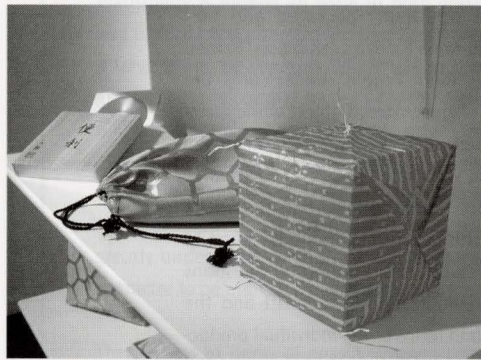
early nineties Frenkel created *Body Missing*, arguably the most extensive and thematically substantive artist's website of the time. Similarly Duvall saw the possibilities inherent in voicemail and created a work titled *933-Call*. She passed out cards in public places inviting members of the public to call the number. By using touchtone phone menus, the caller was able to select the way he or she wished to navigate through the narrative by deciding which characters to follow. Duvall was able to tease more menu choices from the system than the phone company had thought possible thereby creating a complex interactive tale — a digital narrative comparable to John Krizanc's notorious play *Tamara*, in which the audience follow the character of their choice through the physical space of a mansion.

Duvall's *Tea and Gossip* echoes aspects of Frenkel's *Transit Bar Lounge*, which was exhibited at Documenta in Kassel in 1996. Both create multi-monitor video installations that utilize the conventions of talking-head documentaries in the service of fiction. However Duvall sketches in the domestic environment where information is received with a bit of rented furniture while Frenkel goes to such great lengths as to recreate a real bar where a bartender serves real drinks to viewers who wish to imbibe as they watch the monitors. While the subjects on Frenkel's bar monitors are actors, they speak words that Frenkel transcribed and edited from interviews with refugees and exiles. By contrast, Duvall, in having three different groups deliver the same narrative information, is more baldly deconstructive in her strategies.

Linda Duvall has the grace to nod appreciatively to her predecessors while assuredly establishing her own voice and vision. With the installation *Tea and Gossip*, she has added to the rich legacy of contemporary Canadian narrative art, a genre in which the story is loved, nurtured and refined while it is simultaneously regarded with suspicion, interrogated and mutated.

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as more traditional in form, consisting of made or found objects tastefully presented in matte silver frames or in hand-made paper boxes. In the *Coffee Break Dreams Series* in particular, the contrast between the presentation and the work itself — drawings made with used coffee or tea grounds — is striking. This contrast is continued in the *Executive Series*, which presents similarly used objects (latex gloves, tea bags) in beautifully crafted paper boxes. Parolin's positioning of this work as appealing to the corporate executive dreaming of exotic places seamlessly blends the throwaway nature of western corporate life — the coffee grounds and tea bags that mark the passing of each workday — with signs of the status that accrues to those who have achieved positions of power within the corporate realm.



For Parolin, the juxtaposition of the aesthetic and the mundane is only one aspect of her exploration of the art object as commodity. Her shadow company Parolin Products was created three years ago to “explore the commercial nature of western society, the nature of the art market and the branding of the individual producer.” Under the company's aegis, Parolin has produced work that revels in its commodity status while maintaining many of the physical characteristics of the fine art object. A printmaker by training, Parolin is still obviously intrigued by the materiality of the media in which she works. The handmade paper, a particular obsession with many printmakers, figures largely in this show. While this interest could be dismissed as vestiges of a modernist interest in making visible the hand of the artist, in Parolin's work it appears more as an observation of the affective power of those attributes that remain entrenched as markers of the “real” art object. The perfect packaging of these eminently portable works — all, as the exhibition brochure reminds us, suitable for any interior décor — also offers a gentle poke at the (corporate) collector whose interest in art is often dominated by the need to find something to make office or boardroom distinctive.

The fetishization of the handmade and the singular is not unknown in the world of commerce. Interior design magazines are full of

unique objects made to grace home or office and to impart to the owner a developed sense of discrimination and taste. In the mechanized world of commerce where the logic of economies of scale and quality control necessitate the production of indistinguishable objects, the singularity of the art object — or the uniqueness that accompanies dominant perceptions of what constitutes the work of art — lends interest and status to the discerning consumer. The focus on the unique object also inheres to commercial spaces where high-end designer boutiques present single examples of clothing in splendid isolation, illuminated by gallery-style lighting to emphasize the object's value and desirability. In such a context, the aura that disappeared in Benjamin's account of the reproduced art object returns in the fetishization of the designer garment or object.

The imbrication of art and marketing was brought home for Parolin on an extended visit to Japan where she was struck by the great emphasis placed on the packaging of consumer goods. The *Parolin Products Benri (Convenience) Series* presents an origami balloon made of gampi silk tissue in a keepsake box of Paulownia wood, the whole inside a carrier bag of antique silk; a CD illustrates how to inflate the balloon. It is in this work that I think Parolin's commentary on the commodification of art is least successful. The aesthetic character of the packaging of this series — the wood box and the silk carrier bag — reinforces the preciousness of the hand-printed origami balloon. Whereas in the other series there is a pronounced contrast between the throwaway nature of the “content” and the beauty and uniqueness of the packaging, in the *Benri* series the aesthetic character of the whole is inescapable and even glorified through its artful presentation on the gallery's walls. Nevertheless, Parolin's work intrigues not only conceptually through its exploration of the intersections of art and commerce, but in its production of objects whose desirability is as evident to the collector as to the marketer.

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## Source: An Exhibition of Media Art Installations

Part of the 2003 Images Festival  
Review by Daniel Baird



*I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts*, Harun Farocki, 2000, video still. Courtesy: The Images Festival.

The first image in Berlin-based filmmaker Harun Farocki's brilliant two-channel video projection *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* (2000), on view at the Art Gallery of Ontario as part of “Source: An Exhibition of Media Art Installations,” displays an interactive computer model of a supermarket. On the opposite screen is a similar digital model, this time mapping the flow of human traffic through a prison with archaic computer-game graphics superimposed on footage of the prison's central corridor. Most of the projection is montaged out of crude surveillance footage of prisoners fighting, then being shot or blasted with a water cannon in the prison's grim, triangular cement yard, or quietly talking with wives or girlfriends in an equally desolate visitors' area. It would be natural to think *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* is about the disciplinary institutional gaze famously explored by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, but in fact Farocki is less interested in the gaze than in his sense of industrial images as deeply ambiguous fields of

information. His technique is, therefore, dialectical: counterposing images, voices and texts that are themselves embedded in a historical problematic. What is most uncanny about the cunningly titled piece is the eerie extent to which the prisoners, continuously viewed, tracked and even x-rayed, remain out of reach, unknown and in a sense uncontrolled.

Curated for the 2003 Images Festival by the media art exhibition curatorial team The Field Office, “Source” contains work by a diverse group of Canadian and international artists installed in venues across downtown Toronto, from the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Goethe Institute to YVZ, Mercer Union and Paul Petro Contemporary Art. The curatorial concept put forward by The Field Office, who also designed the 2002 Images Festival's “Flow,” is open-ended and inclusive. Its guiding metaphor, “if Source Then,” signals the binary linkage between source materials and the codes they eventually manifest and reveal. In the by now savage wake of September 11, 2001, and in the aftermath of the second Gulf War, events that screened like footage in a deadly marketing Expo for cutting-edge surveillance and weapons technologies, it is difficult to disassociate new media technologies from their use in policing state boundaries and asserting violent imperial power. In that light, this programme's emphasis on process and underlying code is prescient, and the work of Harun Farocki, three of whose feature-length films were screened at the Images Festival, provides an exemplary introduction.

Whereas Farocki traces the complex history of images, David Rokeby's recent work focuses on the ethics of automated vision. For *Sorting Daemon* (2003), Rokeby trained surveillance

cameras on King Street from the Goethe Institute's glassed-in front gallery. The cameras zoom in on and capture moving objects they recognize as human beings, remove the images from their surrounding environment, and then dissect and sort them by hue in an ongoing collective archive. The viewer can observe the unsettlingly mechanical and predatory targeting process on a monitor in the Institute's gallery and the aggregate result of the sorting process is projected as a bright, congested, patchwork abstraction on a screen in the theatre inside. Rokeby is not interested in surveillance as such but in whether an automated visual system can make substantial value judgments. However, the successes of *Sorting Daemon* are mixed. While the initial tracking, framing and selection phase is intriguing and troubling, the actual sorting feels arbitrary and surprisingly indifferent. Rokeby would clearly like to make a parallel between sorting by hue and a rudimentary form of racial profiling, but though his software's sorting procedure is unnuanced and mechanical, it does not directly raise the issue of machinic value judgments. Given that the projection of the results is not itself visually compelling — it resembles a pop color-coded cubist collage — *Sorting Daemon* ends anti-climactically.

While Farocki and Rokeby both address issues linking new media technologies to the possibili-

ties of state control and violence, Siebren Versteeg's hilarious *Network* (2002) operates at the level of the code, compressing discredited wartime broadcast news with teen internet culture. Projected onto a screen is an empty broadcast news set decorated with images from the war in Iraq, randomly generated by an algorithm linked to unfolding headlines on the AP, CNN, ABC, CBS and MSNBC websites. On a separate monitor, news anchors read their texts with the sound muted, while below the now chatty, now sordid texts of intimate teen e-journals scroll. *Network* simultaneously gives one the sense of broadcast news, even that of tragic events, as sensational, prurient and juvenile, and posits a sort of global network unconscious that renders images of the bombing of Baghdad and of a girl's tale of a debauched night equivalent. By contrast, Mexican artist Gustavo Artigas' *The Rules of the Game* (2002), a video of a performance in which two Mexican soccer teams and two US basketball teams play simultaneously on the same court, raises predictable issues about cultural difference and cooperation. *The Rules of the Game* is intended as an open experiment in the possibility or impossibility of incommensurable rules coexisting, but unfortunately the clever editing of the video tends to erase conflict and confrontation: the players never so much as stumble over each other, and at no point does the game degenerate into anarchy or grind to a confused halt, a fact that undermines the piece's credibility as a metaphor for cross-cultural engagement.

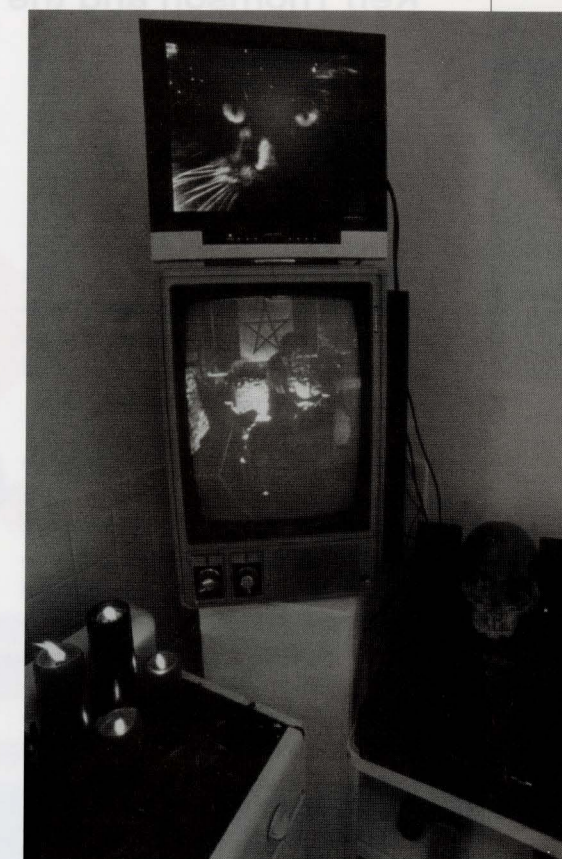
From its advent, media art and the theorizing that accompanies it has indulged in both apocalyptic and utopian futuristic fantasy. Dutch artist Debra Solomon's *Artist-Astronaut* (2000–present) at Interaccess Electronic Media Arts Centre consists of a blacklit room covered with warping lines of reflective tape, translucent bean bag chairs and a friendly deadpan voice-track guiding prospective artist-astronauts on a journey into outer space. *Artist-Astronaut* is self-consciously goofy, full of allusions to B-grade science fiction films, but the more one listens to the mission controller's smooth patronizing voice, the more one feels taken on a new age spiritual quest in zero gravity, with tired clichés about the freedom of artistic

expression and the conflict between science and the imagination coming hard and fast. The often cloying naiveté of Solomon's work is, however, more than compensated for by the weird brilliance of the Fastwurms' video and performance piece *Shagbat* (2003) at Paul Petro. One monitor loops a twenty-five-minute video, montaging apocalyptic footage of streaking comets, soaring spacecraft and massive blinking mainframe computers, pictures of a cat with burning green eyes and solarized images of the Fastwurms donning headsets and barking commands like "Fire! Fire! Fire!" On a separate monitor is a recording of a performance enacted on the day of the opening in the basement of Paul Petro. The basement was converted into a witches' lair, with a huge pentagram on the wall, candles burning everywhere and two witches with tall peaked hats reading tarot cards and carrying out an indecipherable ritual, while a slacker guy plays a lugubrious gritty solo on an electric guitar. The video is fast, explosive and psychedelic, yet one's attention is constantly drawn to the slow, absurd, incantatory performance in the basement, which for all its nuttiness is strangely melancholic. All that disastrous futuristic science is, one senses, driven by crude, messy, fragile magic and perhaps also by the cat's smolderingly erotic eyes.

"Source" also includes work that explores the boundaries between the media arts and the more classical genres. Curated by Katherine Harvey for Mercer Union, *Push Play* brings together four artists who juxtapose the two-dimensional pictorial stillness of painting with the temporal motion of video. Artist and surfer Melinda Morey's wall drawing and her mural of a woman streaking vertically down a wave are finally too static and formulaic to engage with her far more interesting, laboriously pared-down video projection of a shadow figure surfing nearly invisible, phosphorescent white waves. The more abstract of Mara Korkola's small oil paintings of skittering city lights seen from a highway at night are dense and eerie, but the videos she uses as source material are redundant and only serve to underscore the relatively narrow scope of her project as a whole. Michelle Forsyth is, on the other hand, more successful in bringing painting and video into

an active relationship with one another. On two hanging LCD screens a moiré of digital shapes overlays footage of the ebb and flow of water; the shapes seem to be trying to articulate the water's complex and centreless motion. These shapes are then used as a crude vocabulary in a series of thick abstract paintings on wood, whose overlapping shapes and pointillist color gradations attempt to mimic the fluid swelling motion of water and light. Unlike Mondrian's great early *Ocean Series* abstractions, however, Forsyth's shapes fail to take on an active, mobile life of their own. The thickness of the paint on wood, combined with her curiously sugary palette of pinks, oranges and purples, makes them read more as decorative patterning than as an analysis of the flow of water.

The art brought together in "Source: An Exhibition of Media Art Installations" is at its most potent when the images appear to rest on the surface of a complex and proliferating code, and when human subjectivity remains a haunting, isolated, almost unknowable presence. Think, for instance, of the voiceless convicts in the visitors' room in *I Thought I Saw Convicts*, or the unwitting pedestrians whose images are captured and processed by *Sorting Daemon*, or the disembodied journal entries in *Network*. Much of this work acknowledges that the crucial political issue in art today is not the power of the gaze or the image; rather it is the effect of increasingly complex and cryptic flows of information on human agency and interiority. Though concerned with neither media nor technology, Vancouver-based artist Judy Radul's devastating *And So Departed (Again)* (2002) at WZ Artists Outlet is about the limits of visibility, representation and knowledge and provides an unexpected counterpart to *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts*. Radul employed five directors who take turns directing the talented actress Nancy Palk in a death scene. The ensuing conversations, improvisations and rehearsals were shot from three stationary and increasingly narrow angles. The five directors approach the intractable problem of making the subjectivity of human death visible in different ways. In one scene, Palk sits down on the couch, reads a line in a book, then suddenly jerks back, her head lolling, her mouth



*Shagbat*, Fastwurms, 2003, Paul Petro. Courtesy: Interaccess Electronic Media Centre.

open; in another, she is curled up on the couch smoking a cigarette and lets out a long voluptuous death rattle. And in what may be the finest sequence in this emotionally grueling piece, the actress looks bewildered as her body gradually slips out of her control while she is pouring herself a cup of tea and writing a letter, until she is staggering in confused circles and collapses in violent seizures on the floor. Projected onto three screens, *And So Departed (Again)* has a stumbling, groping, searching quality. It is about the need to know death, to make it visible from the outside and the impossibility of that. It comes as almost a relief that neither the video camera nor theatrical artifice can penetrate death's irreducible privacy. Apparently death is outside the code.

Daniel Baird is a writer who divides his time between New York and Toronto. He is currently arts editor for The Brooklyn Rail.



*Artist-Astronaut*, Deborah Solomon, 2000–. Courtesy: Interaccess Electronic Media Centre.

## The Privatization of the AGO: Ken Thomson and the New Generosity

by Tony Rae

There is a saying: if you want to get out of a hole the first thing to do is stop digging. The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) is in a hole. Local billionaire Ken Thomson is going to help dig it 178 million dollars deeper.

Director Matthew Teitelbaum is betting the farm (and millions in public money) that a Frank Gehry designed expansion and a 300 million dollar gift of art from Thomson are the answer to the AGO's woes. But in the wake of the recent round of brutal lay-offs some healthy skepticism may be in order. Chronic under-funding has driven the AGO into the arms of a billionaire whose private interests are being pursued in a shroud of secrecy and at public expense.

According to the AGO website the project breaks down like this: Ken Thomson will donate his art collection and 50 million dollars to the expansion. The Province will kick in an additional 24 million and the Fed's will match it. There also appears to be a separate 20 million Thomson endowment, the income from which will be used to generate operating funds. The budget for the building project is projected at 178 million, which leaves the AGO with an 80 million shortfall to make up (if, by some miracle, the project comes in on budget). It must seem a daunting task for AGO fundraisers; you can imagine how enthusiastic local rich folk are to bankroll a project for which Thomson will get all the glory.

The expansion itself will virtually eradicate the previous expansion, which is only ten years old. The new building will be a cluster of towers with the Thomson Tower the tallest, centrally located on axis with the entrance. The Thomson collection will be housed on its own in the tower with various AGO collection galleries located around it

There are three deeply flawed myths on which the expansion is based:

**Myth 1: the expansion will save the AGO**

The AGO can't afford to run the space that it already has. Getting bigger will only make things worse. Twenty-nine staff positions have already been cut as management tries to get its financial house in order for the expansion. In some cases people who have worked there for almost thirty years have been heartlessly cast aside. Important education programs have been eliminated, including guided tours for school groups.

The cost of a Gehry building far outweighs whatever short term increase in attendance may result from the new towers. The AGO expansion of the early '90s was budgeted at around 38 million. It came in well over and the AGO went 15 million into debt completing it. Still, the previous expansion was a bargain compared to this project, which will cost more than three times as much (an increase that you will note is a tad higher than the rate of inflation). Call it the Gehry surcharge. For some institutions the Gehry surcharge has been fatal. The American Center in Paris is a timely example. Like the AGO, this venerable institution went into their Gehry designed building project hoping to make up their budget shortfall through donations. The donations never materialized and the Center was forced to dip into its endowment. The building was completed, but with no money left to operate the American Center promptly went bankrupt.

**Myth 2: Ken Thomson's generosity**

Thomson's gift has been touted as a great act of philanthropy, but anyone familiar with Canadian tax law knows otherwise. They say Ken Thomson is making a great gift to the public. The reality is that the public is making a great gift to Ken Thomson. Thomson could,

after all, build and endow a private foundation for his collection. This would be a terrible business decision. By giving his collection and his cash to the AGO he will likely receive a cultural property tax receipt for close to the full value, much of which can be taken dollar for dollar off of his tax bill over the next five years. His collection will have dramatically increased in value over the years but he'll pay no capital gains. Plus the government and other donors chip in to directly pay for the lion's share of the project. The government could have done the gallery enormous good by modestly boosting the operating budget. Instead they are giving hundreds of millions to Thomson in tax breaks.

**Myth 3: the AGO is still a public institution**

Close relationships between rich individuals and public institutions are no longer considered to be conflicts of interest: they are "exciting public private partnerships." The ongoing McMichael debacle should come to mind as a cautionary tale. But as the government withdraws direct funding, the AGO increasingly becomes merely a tax receipt factory and publicly subsidized country club for the rich. Wealthy patrons set priorities that have everything to do with self-aggrandizement and little or nothing to do with the public good. But the public still pays.

**Three Questions for the AGO:**

- 1) Will there be further lay-offs and program cuts to free up resources for the expansion?
- 2) Will the Memorandum of Understanding between Thomson and the AGO be made public (i.e. what strings are attached to the Thomson Gift)?
- 3) Will the 20 million dollar endowment for operating funds be protected if the project goes over budget?

The AGO has the potential to make an amazing contribution to the cultural life of the country. It deserves better funding and better management.

*Tony Rae is disgruntled but not disingenuous. Also, he is a culture consumer/maker/activist currently residing in Toronto.*

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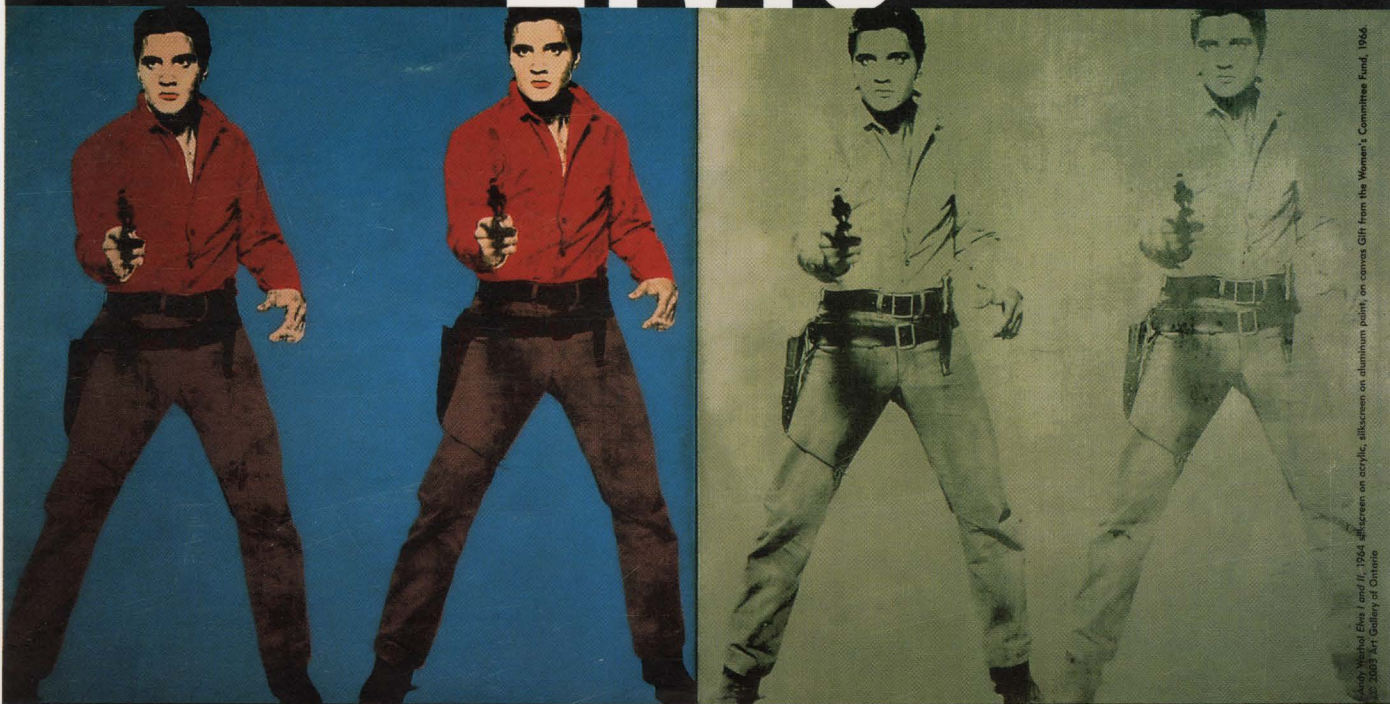
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# Elvis



Andy Warhol, *Elvis I and II*, 1964. Silkscreen on aluminum print, on canvas. Gift from the Women's Committee Fund, 1966. © 2003 Art Gallery of Ontario.

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