Volume 28 Number 1 $5.50

ART MEDIA POLITICS

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Jamelie Hassan on Rebuilding Art and Culture in Lebanon

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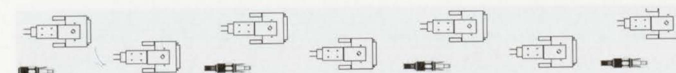

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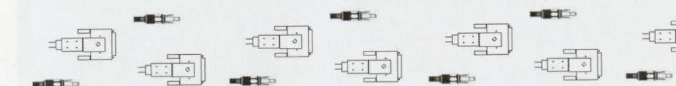

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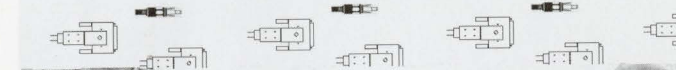

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Jem Cohen, "Chain"

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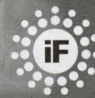

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On the Phone With Vincent Gallo.
Jillian McDonald. Video still. 2004.

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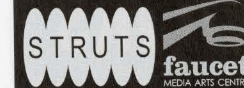

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Detail of "Untitled III" by Kadija de Paula

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The OCAD Student Gallery will be closed for the remainder of March and early April for repairs.

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April 20 to May 21, 2005
Vernissage: Thursday, April 21, 5 – 7 pm

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Dead Nature, La vie immobile

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Istvan Kantor, *Lebensraum/Lifespace – Spectacle of Noise*, 2004. Video still. Courtesy of the artist.

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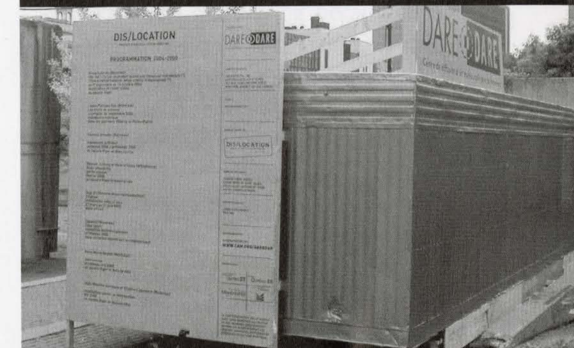

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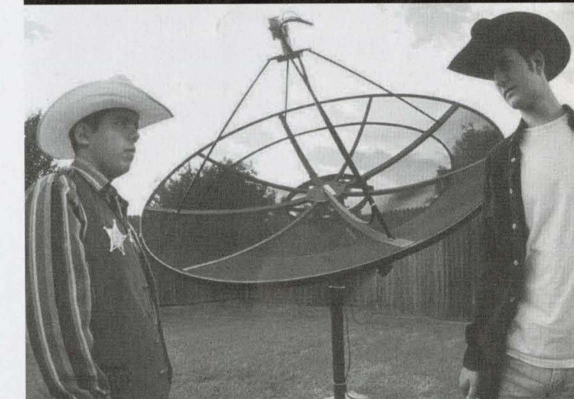

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editorial

Reframing

In his 2005 State of the Union address, George Bush turned his greedy, oil invested, monopolizing, privatizing, restructuring, war mongering government toward North Korea and Iran, stating the people of these countries, like the people of Afghanistan and Iraq, deserve freedom and democracy.

If we were to redefine democracy and freedom by the acts committed in their name in recent years, they would come to mean imposing the will of the American state through mass murder, privatization, media manipulation, destruction of social and institutional infrastructures, torture, humiliation, starvation — both at home and overseas. Democracy has become a banal euphemism for the expansion of unbridled capitalism while freedom has come to mean 'within the orbit of influence or under direct control of the US.' In reality, there was nothing democratic about making a unilateral decision to invade Iraq or forcing an election under occupation. And there is little that is emancipatory in an economic system that privileges the transnationality and lawlessness of corporations and a number of elite individuals over the human rights of the majority of people.

In Canada, linguistic battles waged by neoconservatives and coded social and economic policies have translated into increasingly discriminatory immigration policies, secret trials, fear mongering, racial profiling, repatriation of Canadian citizens and deportations as well as an unprecedented erosion of the social welfare state felt through a public policy environment geared toward the needs and culture of business.

George Lakoff — UC Berkeley professor and cofounder of the Rockridge Institute, a think tank geared toward helping left organization reorient the language and structure of political debate — argues that power lies not in engaging the dominant framework of political discourse but shifting it. To shift the frame is to alter the language and discourse, to reorient the discussion, take unconventional opportunities, expose hidden meanings and provide alternate histories and options for engagement.

Rebecca Belmore's work serves as an important example of the power of art to shift the frame— its potential to offer complexity, to imagine, invert, subvert and recontextualize given understandings. Lynne Bell and Lori Blondeau spoke with Belmore as she prepared *Temperance*, a work in which she returns to the freezing deaths of Aboriginal men in Saskatoon and the police practice of starlight tours. The discussion moves from socially engaged site specific work, story telling for social change and humour to the significance of history and place and the necessity of bearing witness.

In our second feature, Jamelie Hassan weaves together a narrative for cultural transition and creation in Lebanon. Using as markers the deaths of Edward Said and Yassar Arafat, the 1982 Israeli occupation of Lebanon, the present day Israeli occupation of Palestine and the US led war in Iraq, Hassan discusses how the knowledge held in these communities offers new possibilities. This issue's artist project, a collaboration of Babak Salari, Gita Hashemi and Daniel Ellis, covers similar terrain in examining resistance to the building of a colony in present day Iraq.

Despite the guarded optimism of these two features, things on the cultural-production front are not so rosy. Clive Robertson addresses the latest symptoms of cultural readjustment in his analysis of the exceedingly unpopular proposed funding changes at the Canada Council. The power of the new art market is drawn from the reorientation of artists from process to product, from creation to production, from community to commodity, from collectivity to individuality. Jim Miller's ShortFuse offers an insightful explanation of which of the dismal sciences is behind these shifts of priorities — and for once, it isn't economics or politics, but the until now unrecognised relationship between quantum physics and peer review!

letters

Dear Editors,

It is not normally my practice to respond to reviews or articles about my work, I figure that whatever I do has to survive, to a degree, on its own and be open to the interpretations of others. That said, I felt a need to respond to Ayesha Hameed's article "Nostalgic Landscapes — Andrew Hunter's Giddy Up! or a Darn Good Hat Act," (FUSE 27:4) particularly her suggestion that my work is mired in nostalgia and fails to engage the complex and troubling history of the Banff region.

"Giddy-Up!" is a partly fictional tale of two deeply flawed characters whose relationship is played out against the backdrop of what is clearly an equally flawed fantasy world. The project certainly uses nostalgia as a narrative hook, but to suggest that this tale of the pathetic failure of two individuals to live in the false, artificial world of the Hollywood cowboy imposed on the tourist culture of Banff, and projected back to the Ontario suburbs, is somehow about my nostalgia for some lost golden age is absurd.

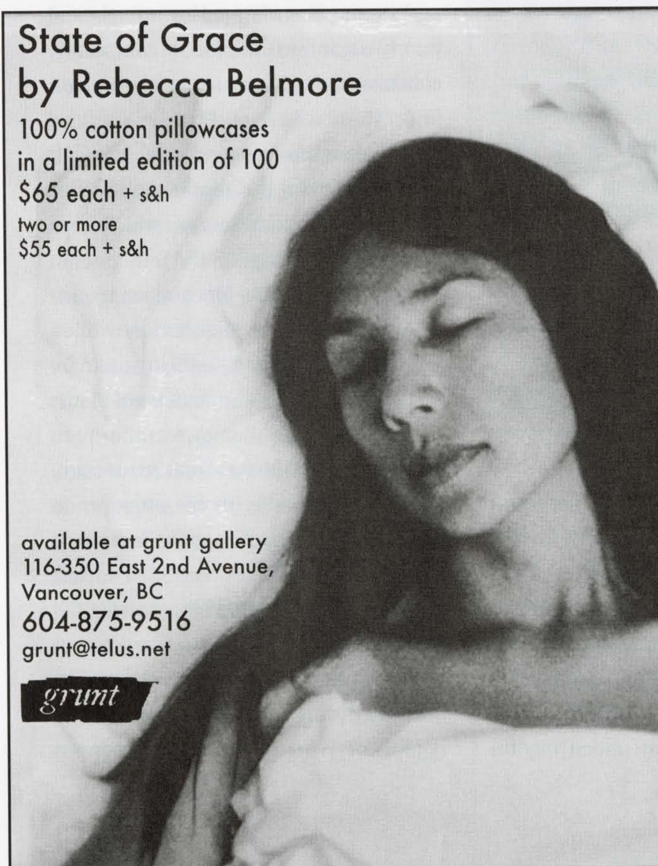
The artefacts collected and assembled in my project are all in states of decay; fading, cracked and broken. All of them used and discarded, that is with the exception of the clocks, which Hameed conveniently describes as "stopped" to further the argument of nostalgia, even though they do actually tick away. My use of period design elements is meant to set the scene not to express my desire for them. My characters might, but they are not me. William Eakin's series of photographs, echoing the entire installation and narrative, present faded, bloody, decaying fragments.

In "Giddy-Up!," as in many of my projects, I try to engage and undermine, through character driven narratives and the assembling of museum-like environments, the myths, fantasies and falsehoods we often project onto the world we live in. In the accompanying books I produce, I try to push these ideas further. Given that the entire second half of the Giddy-Up! book tells with detached pleasure of the bleak demise of the central cowboy character Gibby, I again cannot comprehend the label of nostalgia. With all due respect, it feels to me like my project was viewed from a distance, never really engaged and my book discarded half read.

Like many curators/artists/writers working away in this country, I appreciate the attention your magazine has devoted to my work. I'm not writing because the article was negative, I can certainly live with that, but because the article published misrepresents the work, omits significant elements and uses selected incorrect details to further a valid argument about the west and its history that is off target in the context of "Giddy-Up!"

I will end with this thought. I suggest that any writer who quotes (at length) the work of a nineteenth century writer (in this case Marx) without criticality should ask themselves about their own issues of nostalgia.

With respect,
Andrew Hunter



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Launching a new ARTSWORLD Trusted? Connected? Canadian?

by Clive Robertson

The 'career and international showcase development' discourse calling for fewer but better recognized artists, critics and curators has grown louder.

The visual arts section of the Canada Council has responded by revising the eligibility rules and purposes of its individual artists grants.

Tired of waiting to be paid for their production and living costs, artists have endorsed CARFAC's ambitious plan (backed by Status of the Artist legislation) to increase artist exhibition fees by 40 percent each year from the present until 2010.

Gallery and museum exhibition costs are certain to rise while the number of contemporary exhibitions by Canadian artists may drop.

The "international context" for Canadian art could become the replacement.

With more local artists not serviced by domestic museums and work made that is not aligned to a collector's market, the rationale for Canadian alternative production and diffusion infrastructures is further strengthened.

These possibilities (in some cases probabilities) spell further trouble for the Canada Council's visual arts section and its abilities to satisfy and be connected to the different needs and alliances of its clients.

It would be easy to blame particular internal and external actors for the mess the visual arts section of the Canada Council is in as a result of its exceedingly unpopular proposed revisions to the individual arts grant rules. But the "career development discourse" (in both its imported and local strains) underlying this initiative has largely gone unchallenged. Now that the new ArtsWorld is taking concrete form, there is an urgent necessity to give opposition to its assumptions.

Both the substance and consultation process for suggested funding 'improvements' from the Council are reminiscent of the program upheavals that followed the failed SSHRC/Canada Council merger in the nineties (see "Changing the Rules," *Fuse* 22:3). Mistrust of the Canada Council as an agency was then fanned by a hasty and poorly-organized "national community consultation" process in which changes under the new Strategic Plan were decided upon before they received wide debate or approval. One of the administration cuts was the Arts Awards Service, which from the seventies through to the mid-nineties had been responsible for conducting peer assessment juries in consultation with — but independent from — the disciplinary Sections. It was that dismantlement of Arts Awards in 1995–6 that gave authority to the current head of the visual arts section, François Lachapelle, in his attempts to push through new changes to individual visual arts grant rules. Included in last fall's announced reasons for revising the assistance program for visual artists was the claim that "the program was set up over forty years ago." In fact, the current regime of visual arts individual grants management is barely a decade old. That there are too many artists deemed "not qualified" or "up-to-scratch" applying for grants was among the more private reasons given for the proposed changes.

The additional visual arts section complaint that the processes of individual grant applications are taking up too much administrative time is ironic given the history of encouraging grant applications as proof of the relevance of a program, and that the separate component of the Council that dealt with the administration of individual arts awards was so recently deemed expendable. With unrestored administrative cuts and increases in the number of grant applicants, it has become common knowledge that peer juries have voiced their concerns about having to make decisions about too many files in too little time.

The issues of community trust in the existing jury process and of jury fatigue were raised in a study undertaken by the Canada Council in 1999 and released as *The Impact of Canada Council Individual Artists Grants on Artists Careers* (available on the Canada Council website). Two of the study's recommendations were that "the Canada Council should make a concerted, ongoing effort to rebuild confidence in the jury system ..." and that "[it] should re-examine its one jury per year policy wherever it exists, in view of increasing the numbers of juries per year where feasible."

Given the scale of opposition to the intentions and logics contained within the proposed rule changes, trust in the visual arts section itself is not furthered by reports that the objectives of the proposed program reorientation were outlined to community representatives in private meetings ahead of the two "phases" of community/client consultation.

Consultation: Phase One, 2003

Phase One included consultations with 250 artists in twelve cities across Canada as well as feedback through a web-based forum on "improving the situation for the visual artist." The facilitators' reports on Phase One and its provision of a "meet and greet" form of consultation is no substitution for studies that could more effectively analyze the problem. A critical study on how those Canadian artists deemed successful (those perceived as having 'national' and/or 'international' reputations) have and continue to survive would have been useful. Such a study would necessarily interview a full range of practitioners including those who have held tenured teaching jobs and been represented by a dealer and those with neither, who are now facing annual pensions of less than $3,000.

The misreading of the Canada Council as a policy instrument is one of the striking aspects of the community discussions in the facilitator reports. This again badly reflects on the Council's positioning of itself as a core advocate for the arts with ambitions it has neither the budget to undertake nor the mandate to achieve. This is not to say that the consultation process was intended as a 'fishing expedition,' but issues important to artists and art professionals such as audience development, advocacy and marketing raised in the consultations are better addressed elsewhere. The Canada Council cannot, for example, bargain with Apple or Microsoft to acquire free software or hardware; it cannot get more art review space in the *Globe and Mail* or *The National Post;* it has never (as far as I know) convinced the CBC or Radio Canada to make a documentary about its day-to-day and peer assessment operations; it cannot co-invest in a satellite TV station for the arts; and it cannot influence the state of art education in

Jayce Salloum
These changes are not what we recommended.

Don Gill
The proposed changes create a hierarchy of artistic validity and infringe on any idea of arms length funding.

Ed Pien
I have not heard any positive comments from my peers regarding the proposed changes. Please consult with artists before going ahead with any new plans.

schools. It does not even have the muscle to get its funded art texts into the Indigo-Chapters retail chain. Such matters are properly taken up with other departments of government by representative artists and cultural producer organizations that recognize the limits of agencies like the Canada Council.

In its explanation of the phase one consultation, the visual arts section is correct to point out that "Council support is limited" followed quickly by the assertion that "the current program [of funding to visual artists] has now reached the limits of its financial capacity." There is, however, no admission in its report that the different Council sections to which artists apply choose these limits differently. During the last decade, arts policy thinkers in academia and arts councils argued that the only way to hold onto or increase public support for arts funding is to switch priority from art making to art enjoyment. In the visual arts this has been used to justify allocating more dollars to larger display institutions and their claims to public audiences and correspondingly less money to the creation and production efforts of artists and their claims to community organization. The visual arts section already leads the way in this "new thinking," currently allocating 32 percent ($4.9 million) of its budget to grants for individuals and 68 percent ($10.6 million) on grants to organizations. The media arts section awards 47 percent ($4.1 million) to individuals and 53 percent ($4.7 million) to organizations. Confirming the sensitivity of these funding splits, the inter-arts section states that it awards 57 percent of its monies to individuals and 43 percent to organizations. Further down the funding report from inter-arts, however, we see that the larger percentage for individual grants includes creation and production monies made available via organizations. The real split therefore is 30 percent ($477,000) to individuals and 70 percent ($1.18 million) to organizations. (Direct comparisons are difficult as each disciplinary section's report on the Canada Council website is for a different year between 1999 and 2003.)

Little space has and can be given here to possible alternative "solutions" to the visual arts granting problems. While the Canada Council spends a lot of money and effort on its promotion of the happy-face side of art, internal re-allocations of its budget and a better focus of its core functions would be welcome. Many have wondered and asked if the visual arts section attempted to argue for a bigger slice of the pie and, if so, what the response was. A focus on career development and "deliverables" may be the reply that is now being heeded. As the Canada Council nears its fiftieth anniversary (in 2007), "50/50" might serve as an appropriate artist-friendly slogan: 50 percent for artists, 50 percent for organizations. Were it not for the expectation of "stronger partnerships between arts professionals in the community," a call for organisation support to be similarly split 50 percent to artist-run organizations and 50 percent for galleries, museums and dealers could have been useful. More seriously, when does "making a fair and informed assessment of the comparative merits of grant applications" kick in?

In 2001, the Art Gallery of Ontario received $250,000 from the Canada Council in the same year artist-run centre YYZ received the ceiling amount of $75,000. The AGO already receives $12 million in other government grants and $10 million in donations, bequests and memberships (2003 amounts). In consideration of both the AGO's annual $36 million budget and the visual arts section (with an annual budget of $15.6 million) crying poor, why, apart from political pressure from the Canadian Museums Association, keep the AGO on the books? Generous as artists are, I am not convinced that any panel of Toronto (or Ontario) artists would see the "comparative merits" in giving the AGO any visual arts money.

The "professionalization of the artist" (as opposed to the professionalization of a few artists) has been a slow business. Unlike qualified artists, qualified academics (who also expect tight definitions of what constitutes peer-assessment) receive a salary and research monies provided by their institution and/or by federal funding bodies like SSHRC. To give some idea of the different worlds, the success rate of applications for standard research grants at SSHRC was 43 percent in 2003 at an average of $31,000 per grant. The closest comparison in Canada Council reports on grants-to-individuals shows a higher-than-average success rate (all disciplines combined) of 27 percent in 1998–9. Fifty-six percent of these awards were for $5,000 or less.

Phase Two, 2004

In Phase Two of the consultation, the new rules were announced and more feedback was solicited. (see sidebar for the condensed differences between the old and proposed new rules according to the visual arts section)

The "old" model of visual arts awards has been revised many times in the last forty years. Each change of purpose or set of new restrictions tends to lessen the flexibility experienced in the past within the "A," "B" and project categories of funding. The new eligibility restrictions in the proposed "development" component include those who are employed full-time by an "arts institution or educational institution." While this is not a new restriction *per se*, it does further corrupt the general

Current model:
Guiding Principles: *Grants provide assistance to contemporary professional visual artists and are intended to encourage independent creative production. The program recognizes three categories of visual artists (emerging, mid-career and established) and offers two components: Creation/Production Grants and Travel Grants.* ***Components: Emerging artists: from $3,000 to $9,000; Mid-career artists: from $3,000 to $25,000; Established artists: from $3,000 to $34,000.***

Adjudication: *A peer assessment committee composed of three to five experienced professional artists, recognized as such by their peers and selected to ensure fair representation of artistic specialization, gender, the two official languages, Aboriginal peoples and the various regions and cultures of Canada.*

Restrictions: *This program does not provide assistance for commercial, educational or commissioned works; capital expenses or basic equipment purchases, promotional expenses, business maintenance or set-up, publication of catalogues or student projects.*

Proposed Model:
Guiding Principles: *In the new program, the Council continues to assist with costs related to creation and production, as well as expenses associated with career promotion and market development. The program components are not based exclusively on a given artist's number of years of practice (emerging, mid-career, established) but on the concept of "key moments." These new components support three of these periods: a) Production towards an important exhibition; b) First solo exhibition; c) Periods of significant professional development."*

1.Exhibition project $10,000 (75 grants per annum) *Purpose: To provide support for creation, production, networking and career development activities leading to a confirmed exhibition in a recognized professional venue. The activity should advance the long-term career development of the artist. Adjudication: On-line pre-selection by ten peers followed by a joint assessment committee (peers and other arts professionals) of five members held in Ottawa.*

2. First solo: $5000 (100 grants per annum) *Purpose: Provide support to young artists for a first confirmed solo exhibition in a recognized professional venue. Adjudication: By a peer-assessment committee of five members in Ottawa.*

3. Development: $50,000 for up to 3 years (15 per annum) *(renewed annually after assessment of progress report) Purpose: Provide support with long term impact to mature artists with outstanding track records at pivotal stages of their career. Adjudication: First year by peer assessment committee of five in Ottawa. For the second and third years: by the visual arts section in consultation, as required, with professionals from the art community.*

Craig Leonard
I reject the idea that a committed and critical art practice must be tied to "professionalism" that is defined by "market value" and institutional validation.

Jennifer Macklem
Restricting grant access to those with confirmed exhibitions shifts the emphasis from creative exploration to institutional conformity.

Gerald Beaulieu
These changes essentially gut the peer assessment process leaving dealers, curators and directors with the authority to determine who gets funded.

awards principle of "taking a leave of absence" or "buying time" and it continues to misrepresent a practice that typically cannot be supported indefinitely on the risks and deferments of continued secondary part-time employment. For all but a few, there simply is no career option box to check that reads: "full-time artmaking."

The detailed objections to these new components, coming from emerging to established artists, are too numerous to include here. Andy Patton's circulated response highlights a central concern that "the entire model shifts the determining site of designation of artistic excellence and valorization of innovation and exploration out of the peer arena into the arena of art institutions." The RCAAQ, reporting on a consultation meeting in Montreal, wrote that "Some people now wonder whether the Council intends to support exceptional careers rather than exceptional works of art, in disregard of its past positions." PARCA members, Glen Alteen, Lorna Brown, Keith Higgins and Jonathan Middleton further pointed out that "current changes proposed to the program threaten to shake the confidence that the artistic community holds for the Council. These changes are internally driven. They are not in response to any demonstrated need or demand from artists or other communities."

The visual arts section's apparent disconnectedness from common contemporary art practices that function well outside standard exhibition venues was another repeated criticism. Multiple arts-award winner Vera Frenkel tackled the issue of "key moments" in her detailed response to the rhetorical claims and "semi-clandestine process" of consultation. Frenkel has little patience for or faith in the task of assigning "key" or "pivotal" moments to an artist's career:

> "Key moments," whatever they are, especially the three periods described, are more diagnostic of soap opera plots than of an artist's development. The latter takes utterly different forms in the lives of different artists, and it is the artist who should be the main arbiter of what is 'key' in his or her own development, and why it should be seen as such.

On the matter of artists having to maintain close professional relationships "with presenter organizations and other professionals, such as curators, critics, art dealers and buyers" Frenkel responds:

> Not necessarily. There's enough evidence of collusion, self-serving conduct, misplaced ambition, questionable business practices, shallow programming and lack of courage in the 'official' art world that precludes holding this network up as definitive or exemplary.

(The complete text of Vera Frenkel's annotations is available on the FUSE website, along with other key documents.)

Given the historical specificity of Canadian arts funding and its obligation and structural ties to artists, the attempted ruse behind the proposed new visual arts grant rules is to keep writing cheques to artists but to change the purpose of the subsidy from creation-production to "career promotion" and "market development." The proposed shift in rules makes artist grants available that will help further subsidize "professional exhibition venues." It is some of these same "venues" who have said that artist's production and subsistence costs — the welfare of artists — are "none of their business." (According to CARFAC, the Canadian Museums Association officially refused to recognize artist's exhibition rights until last year.)

Since its recovery of government confidence in the 1990s, the Canada Council itself has received substantial increases in federal funding. Even within their own budgetary restrictions, the visual arts section could serve as an example by providing artist clients with more of what they deserve in terms of autonomy and awards, and organizational clients with more of what they can afford. "Better appreciation of the arts" can be funded by governments and the private sector at sites other than the Canada Council.

Phase Three, 2005

It is unlikely that the authors of the new funding regime will withdraw the proposed revisions to the artists grant program and cosmetic changes at this point are hardly acceptable. This means that, in all likelihood, artists' organizations will petition the Board of the Canada Council to reject the proposal outright. Should the Board decide at their March meeting to back the proposed changes, artists organizations will then decide whether or not to lobby the Heritage Minister and other elected politicians to intervene on their behalf. This is not a utopian scenario. When the Mulroney government was in the process of cutting costs by merging SSHRC with the Canada Council, Tory Senators voted against the merger legislation creating a tie. On the reported advice of his artist wife, the then Speaker cast the deciding vote which unexpectedly struck the legislation down.

The thinking that drives this proposed program-funding revision is a strange way to "keep the peace" or strengthen alliances between the various actors and institutions that ultimately make it possible to bring contemporary art into existence. Reinforcing traditional hierarchies and inequalities in visual arts funding is a very efficient way of calling the political sophistication of the visual arts section of the Canada Council into question. This is one government agency whose desire to be both a centre of attention and of continued usefulness to artists and artistic practices has to be matched by its intelligence and the fit of its consultative logics.

Clive Robertson is an artist, critic, and educator who lives in Kingston.

Thomas Elliott
To give greater value to confirmable, marketable end product and career-oriented development would be to give greater emphasis to the most inhibiting and petty aspects of artistic production.

Josée Fafard
Non à la marchandisation de la création et à la hiérarchisation des lieux de diffusion.

Janice Baldwin
Truly a disappointing affair, I thought the Canada Council had more integrity than this.

Elayne Greeley
The proposed changes in no way represent the feedback given to the CC by artists. Why consult with art professionals when you ignore the advice provided.

Patronage, Artistic License and Kissing the Rich Guy's Ass

by Marcus Miller

Last year DARE-DARE, a Montreal artist-run centre since 1985, issued a call for proposals that signaled a heroic, almost utopian commitment to the ideals of artistic self-determination and free curatorial initiative: the kind of chutzpah that exemplified the original artist-run movement. Its enterprise, experimentalism and sheer verve were heartening to anyone with doubts about artistic spunk today, and while the "call" may or may not have generated interesting responses, it was a radical experiment in nomadism and exposed some of the more insidious strings attached to arts patronage.

In an intellectually rigorous response to dire circumstances (DARE-DARE lost its Canada Council funding two years ago, and its rent increased 300 percent over its initial rate in the late 1990s), the centre let its lease expire, abandoned its physical address (a respectable one) and mutated into ether. "DARE-DARE is leaving its premises," the call for proposals dubbed Dis/location announced. "The centre's office will move to a temporary shelter in Montréal, located on a vacant space or in an area with potential for unusual occupancy. A Dis/location is taking place." Presumably, its entire artistic program would follow suit and hopefully also evolve *unusually*.

Doug Schole, *(This is) What Happens When a Thing is Maintained,* Courtesy: DARE DARE, Photo: Jean-Pierre Caissie

At least that was the plan for the following two years, which is how long the board was prepared to commit to the "adventure," as DARE-DARE's artistic coordinator Jean-Pierre Caissie puts it. It wasn't going to be easy, as any itinerant will confirm. And it's not just logistical difficulties such as storage security, or where to put the coffee machine (to say nothing of the staff); it's the loss of social, legal and institutional legitimacy that an address bestows. What would the neighbours, property owners, artists, critics, governments think and horror of horrors: what would the funding agencies think? "There were people at the centre who were trying to push the idea of going out," Caissie explains, "but there was always pressure to not lose the funding." This fear may have buttressed a widespread and retrograde tendency to reduce the definition of artist-run centre to gallery, and may very well have played a significant role in the evolution of many collectives and organizations. Expressing the prevalent attitude, he says, "we need a *place* to prove that, you know ..." Marie-Suzanne Desilets (DARE-DARE member) completes his thought, "we exist," putting a capitalist twist on the Rationalist premise: I own (or rent), therefore I am.

Doug Schole, *(This is) What Happens When a Thing is Maintained,* Courtesy: DARE DARE, Photo: Jean-Pierre Caissie

But the notion of an architecture-free artist-run centre has been around for a long time: a small office, a telephone or a web site, used for the coordination of disparate activities. Clive Robertson, a longstanding advocate and player in the artist-run movement, recently mused, "I've held to the idea that in-house production, residencies, publishing, incoming or outgoing community collaboration and not gallery displays were/are what defined artist-run centres." Or consider these recent comments from Andrew Forster, not quite as longstanding, but very much an advocate and a player. Here he contextualizes the debate surrounding a move by Articule, another Montreal artist-run centre, around 1990:

> My recollection is that there was some (at least conceptually) serious discussion of going roomless. Obviously it did not happen, the membership was thin and lacking motivation, and the administrator was pretty much against getting any more diffuse and alienated (read fear of funding loss). I certainly thought it might have been a good idea, perhaps just as a polemic against the formalization of the "space."

He goes on, and cites Articule's "special projects" program as the outcome of these discussions.

> Similar conversations did continue during the early 1990s, and this thinking is what gradually became special projects, with the idea of doing impromptu events in or out of the gallery. I would have been happy for special projects to ultimately take over the whole budget.

These recollections evoke old debates over nomenclature. While "parallel" implied correspondence and resemblance (presumably to conventional presentation venues), "artist-run" promised a deeper rethinking of artistic production and distribution. In her key text on the state of Canada's artist-run movement, Diana Nemiroff (now curator of modern art at the National Gallery in Ottawa) speculated that "parallel" was a conciliatory term intended to fit easily within Canada Council's conventional definitions of artistic outlets, and their corresponding funding categories for galleries and museums.[1] While "parallel" was usually linked, in the parlance of the day, to "gallery," the "artist-run" entity was conceived as a "center" — a more nebulous and open concept.

This article began as a piece of investigative journalism: a thesis considering whether DARE-DARE's move out of the gallery was linked to its loss of core Canada Council funding. In other words, if Canada Council was actively discouraging artist-run centres from abandoning galleries, then DARE-DARE was freed of its constraint as soon as the fateful letter with "results enclosed" was opened. Unfortunately no smoking gun has been uncovered: no indictable policies, memos or telephone messages. But still, there does seem to have been a widely held perception that funding would be put into jeopardy and that any long-term experiment sans-white-cube would be unprofessional or irresponsible. And like self-censorship, perhaps this kind of repression — this internalized bureaucratic conservatism, is an even deeper problem than an outright dim or meddlesome arts bureaucracy.

In fact, when we put ourselves on the world stage and compare notes with

peers from Holland, India, the United States, England, Australia or Korea, it must be admitted that we've got a pretty good thing going. The bureaucratic culture and structural mandate of our national arts funding has been, until recently, both relatively enlightened and arms-length. There is a sophisticated network and range of artist-run centres across Canada that is unmatched anywhere else.

"Just you wait," jeered some British arts administrators at last year's *Infest* conference on artist-run culture in Vancouver. "Sooner or later, Maggie Thatcher will happen to you, and when she does, what are you going to do?" What indeed. No doubt, we have much to learn from our impoverished peers. Just as "outreach" has become a regular feature of Canadian artist-run centre grant applications, words like "educational" and "accessibility" peppered their discourse. Now don't get me wrong, the creativity and ingenuity these arts administrators demonstrated in finagling spaces, materials and in-kind support was quite impressive. But after the smoke cleared, a fuller and more sedate picture of their projects emerged: a painting workshop for children in a new housing development, or a neighbourhood craft gallery.

What's wrong with that, you may ask? Nothing, but then what distinguishes an artist-run centre from a social-service organization? From the perspective of taxpayers getting the biggest, most measurable bang for their buck, these initiatives have clear, demonstrable value. The final reports for monies spent will look very good, and no one involved will have any trouble defending them. In a climate of direct accountability, a painting workshop seems like a coup. Well done, more paintings, more child-painters!

DARE DARE's trailer in Viger Square, Courtesy: DARE DARE, Photo: Jean-Pierre Caissie

The first job of an artist is to flatter the patron. While it's true that extreme wealth, sophistication and/or perversity can construe even the most damming critique as a badge of honour, most artists don't live in centres with the necessary density of wealth or cultural inbreeding to take advantage of such enlightened support. A dispersed and abstracted patron in the form of an arms-length state agency provides welcome relief in the absence of such (obscene) assets as can be found in only a few places on earth.[2]

Here's the rub: there are always strings and implications. There's always a hidden agenda to be considered, someone's ass to be kissed. Here in Canada, it's no different. We've got things worked out pretty well, but we may have let our collective guard down a bit. Waiting until Canada Council completely loses its nerve and retreats into a purely product-driven model, or simply pulls out, is ass-backward. The privilege enjoyed by artists funded by a "disinterested" state should be honoured and cherished by exploiting as fully as possible the license it endows them with. In other words, be sneaky and play it safe with the rich guy, but if you've got a grant — you owe it to the people to get radical.

Notes:

This article uses informal email correspondence with Andrew Forster and Clive Robertson, encounters with David LaRiviere in Vancouver, and a lovely chat in Little Italy with DARE-DARE's artistic coordinator (Jean-Pierre Caissee) and two key board members: Marie-Suzanne Désilets and Stéphane Gilot, who were generous enough to meet with me and talk about their crazy plan to close the door on their white cube and throw away the key.

1. "Par-al-lel," in *Sightlines*, Artextes editions, Montreal, 1994, first published in Parallelogramme, August 1983.

2. David LaRiviere makes an interesting case for the "disinterested" nature of state funding in an online letter to the editor at http://www.pipcom.com/~jackzine/june/lariviere.htm.

A graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Marcus Miller has studied music, architecture, 3-D computer modeling/animation, and holds an MA in the social history of art from Leeds University (England). An advocate of artistic self-determination for many years, Miller has worked with a host of artist-run centres in various capacities including exhibiting artist, curator, provacateur, director, and currently serves as president of articule (Montreal).

Neshat,
The Friendly Other

by Haleh Niazmand

In the mid-1990s, photographs produced by Iranian-born artist, Shirin Neshat, of militant Islamic women with Farsi text written and superimposed on their faces and body parts found a prominent position in Western art venues, heralded presumably as the voice of feminist Iranian art. Soon, Neshat's work moved to installations of her short films and videos that were reminiscent in style to Alfred Hitchcock's *Birds* and visually as striking as Calvin Klein ads.[1] These installations often featured mythical and oppositional female/male relationships locked in scenes that were shot in Neshat's "Iran of the mind, while actual locations range from Turkey to Morocco."[2] For those of us from Iran and other Islamic countries, it was and remains disturbing to watch how once again our cultures became the subject of Western art gaze through a lens that has historically cast us as "backward." *Women of Allah*, the exotic and highly sensational gun-loving women of Neshat's imagination, with their heavy black eye makeup (in reality not a fundamentalist tradition and practice) and their faces, hands and feet decorated with foreign script — primarily intended for titillating Western audiences who are seldom versed in Farsi and thus remain ignorant of the meaning of the text — placed us yet again as the target of the Orientalist perceptions, interpretations and actions whose insults and assaults we keep having to ward off and resist.

In her installations, Neshat capitalizes on the simplistic binary notions of victim/victimizer, liberated/oppressed and good/evil in a constructed world where women vs. men, modernity vs. tradition, spontaneity vs. structure find fixed meanings and destinies, an ideological tendency much in the same vein as what rules current US politics. Neshat's highly praised 1999 video installation, *Rapture*, typical of her literal and metaphoric black-and-white approach, sets up on two opposing screens a group of men in white shirts and a group of women in black *chador* (veil). In a linear dramatic course stylized and exoticized not only by the uniformity of costumes but also by locations, camera angles and the soundscapes, the men make their way to an old castle and watch from above the women drumming and dancing on the beach and finally setting a boat to the sea in which a few of them ride. The ideological notions that connect women to nature, spontaneity and freedom and men to structure, order and tradition are nothing but a shallow echo of classic feminist critique such as Susan Griffin's 1979 *Women and Nature*. In Neshat's work the analysis is simplified to mere sensational clichés, failing to display a genuine understanding of Western feminism and to provide any insight into the layered and multi-faceted relationship of Iranian women to the *chador*, to men or to sociocultural structures and systems.

After noticing in a studio visit a *New York Times* clipping of a photograph depicting twenty Jordanian brides veiled in white, Leslie Camhi writes:

> Her [Neshat's] work often starts from an observation that is as pointedly political as a newspaper editorial. Yet it moves on to explore the way differences — whether between men and women, traditional and modern societies, or Eastern and Western cultures — structure experience and the way we feel and think, on the deepest level.[3]

I find it hard to imagine any individual, let alone an artist whose work places her in politically contested domains, without a point of view or politics.

Allow me to intervene here: Though our encounters with "East/West" and "tradition/modernity" do structure our experience, to note the differences alone is the smallest step towards useful analysis. The West and the East do not exist as pure, separate and isolated entities. No place in the East has been immune to the influence of the West and its political, economic and technological pressures and interventions. On the other hand, not only is the foundation of Western civilization built on Mesopotamia, but even the current appropriation, cooptation and selling of the East in packaged forms as food, artefacts, tourist destinations and alternative philosophies have become an integral part of the Western market and culture. It is in the typical, fragmented and myopic worldview dominating the US and within the politics of public brainwash and indoctrination that "the West" and "the East" remain fundamentally different and forever locked in irreconcilable conflict (the worldview and politics that are necessary in order to justify current neo-colonial warmongering). And it is perhaps precisely due to such politics and public indoctrination that Neshat's art strikes so close to home in the eyes of elite art personalities and institutions.

As for Neshat's own intentions with these images, in a variety of interviews and articles she tries to wash her hands clean of any political agendas. Rather, she expresses an intrigue similar to the fascination felt by a tourist in a foreign land. She states, "People ask, 'Where are you coming from? What do you really think about Islam? What is your work trying to say?' I have been criticized for not taking a position, for not having a point of view."[4] While in some places she admits the presence of hot political topics in her work, she conveniently distances herself from any clear point of view: "I chose to concentrate on the meanings behind 'Martyrdom,' a concept that became the heart of the Islamic government's mission at the time … I felt I had exhausted the subject and needed to move on. I no longer wanted to make work that dealt so directly with issues of politics."[5]

I find it hard to imagine *any* individual, let alone an artist whose work places her in politically contested domains, without a point of view or politics. As social beings living in a politically turmoiled environment, we cannot help but form points of view. Surely the more diverse our range of experiences and the deeper our processing of them, the more aware of the multiplicities, complexities and paradoxes we become. But, Neshat claims such is not the case for her. This prolific artist insists she does not intend to really comment on Iran and that she stands outside politics. Yet she supplies the art world with politically charged representations of Iranian culture reduced to its Islamic character in the most simplistic and anti-analytical fashion, much along the Orientalist line of thought that has historically justified targeting of the country and its culture by Western imperialism. The claim of absence of viewpoint here at the very least exposes opportunist and exploitative positions that offer to her uncritical and unsuspecting audiences an "artistic" version of the same ideological stuff that they have been fed by mainstream media for decades. Additionally, Neshat's seeming lack of position leaves the door wide open to the kind of curatorial and scholarly practices the establishment love to indulge in. In other words, the gaps opened by Neshat's non-committal and uncritical attitude are filled by the "Iran of the mind" of those curators and scholars whose profession designates them to act as the interpreting agents where art fails to communicate on its own.

Absent from Shirin Neshat's "Iran of the mind" is the actual history and events relevant to her preoccupation with the *chador*. Documented history of the Iranian women's movement is more than 150 years old. The first recorded public act of protest against the Islamic veil dates back to 1848 when Fatemeh Baraghani (more commonly known as Tahereh Qurat al-Ein) — born in Neshat's hometown, Qazvin, the daughter of a prominent religious leader and herself a key orator, theorist and strategist in the mid-nineteenth-century Babi insurgence — tore down her veil in public.[6] Closer to Neshat's own time in Iran is women's widespread street protests in March 1979, barely a month after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, in response to a statement by Ayatollah Khomeini where he demanded the new government enforce an Islamic dress code in government buildings and on the streets. Khomeini's statement, issued on the eve of International Women's Day, sparked such outrage that in order to avoid public unrest, Ayatollah Taleghani, at the time Khomeini's right-hand man, issued a statement reinterpreting Khomeini's words as optional and only a suggestion. However, in spite of efforts to fog the issue, spontaneous protests broke out and continued for two days in many cities across Iran leading to street confrontations between women protestors and organized bands of fundamentalist men (*hezbollahis*). In Tehran alone, 200,000 women marched on the streets for several kilometers ending the day with a sit-in at the department of justice. Women's massive protests, supported by many male intellectuals and some leftist organizations, were entirely organized by word of mouth and guerrilla wheat-pasting campaigns in very hostile conditions.

These protests managed to force the Islamists to postpone the agenda of reveiling women for over a year and resort to clever legal strategies to slowly enforce the dress code between early 1980 and late 1981. The first targets of the fundamentalist regime were female government employees who were forced to cover their hair as a condition of their continued employment. Next schoolgirls were forced to choose between staying home or consenting to the mandatory dress code in schools. Soon, store owners were not allowed to sell to unveiled women or else their business would be shut down. With these strategies in place, it became easy for the regime to single out the remaining defiance and force everyone else with the threat of hired thugs who roamed the streets clubbing, stabbing and throwing acid on unveiled women's faces. Later, the Islamic government formalized street enforcement in the form of *Gasht-e Zahra*, legally armed groups of Islamist women who roamed the streets in military vehicles and had the authority to arrest not only unveiled women but women whose veiling was considered to be improperly done. These events were largely ignored by Western media, and what coverage there was simply regurgitated the highly hostile reports in Iranian mainstream press, which was in the hands of the Islamic fundamentalists.

Absent from Shirin Neshat's "Iran of the mind" is the actual history and events relevant to her preoccupation with the *chador*.

Neshat's work in general, and her photographs in particular, are presumably inspired by her trip to Iran in 1990. This was a time when Iranian women's resistance for over a decade had finally made the Islamic government incapable of fully enforcing its extremist codes. By this time, Iranian women had firmly established new forms of resistance that were visibly on display on the streets, especially in the middle- and upper-class urban areas and widely spread amongst the younger generation. Using their bodies as public vehicles for political statement, many women paraded their own creative, elegant and not infrequently "sexy" fashion takes, subverting the government-dictated dress code of head covering and long loose overcoat (*roosari* and *roopoosh*, the accepted alternative to *chador*). This suggests that Neshat's actual source of inspiration for the women's appearance in her work heavily relied on the early images of post-revolution Iran that were widely in circulation in US media during the 80s, not what she observed on the streets of Iran during her visit.

Having personally experienced the history

of Iranian women's troubled and contested relationship to mandatory veiling, you must forgive me if I take offence to the *New York Times* review that states: "When Ms. Neshat returned to Iran in 1990, she was initially appalled by the changed status of women, who were restricted to domestic sphere and compelled to cloak themselves in the *chador*."[7] Or to Neshat's own comments such as, "Iranian women for example, feel that men and women have their own distinct roles and places, they are not competitive"[8] and "When you are in the West, we take gender for granted; you are who you are. But when you are in the East the dichotomy between men and women is obvious."[9] I have lived in the USA for over 17 years and have never felt that gender politics in the West could so easily be overlooked. In fact, the Western body politics of size and attire, the sexual objectification of women's bodies in the media and the obsessive preoccupation with progressively younger women (look at the age of fashion models), is nothing short of patriarchal control of women's bodies that parallels the control brought by *chador.* To assume that women can be who they really are in the West points to a lack of comprehension of the global struggle of women and the solidarity in resistance that is the ultimate necessity for our liberation.

The Iran of my recollection, the one I left behind in 1985, the one that is inhabited by a people and not represented as the property of the Islamic Republic, is a place of heterogeneity and pluralism. This is the Iran of many faiths and philosophies that, in spite all its social follies, holds at its core a humanity that transcends religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic differences. It is a place where some of us discussed women and human-rights issues together as early as elementary school before we knew the term feminism. Granted, this is also a place where some go about their business without questioning conventions (and how is this different from what happens in the West?). In her article, *The Power of The Veil,* Susan Tenaglia states, "For twenty years, acclaimed visual artist Shirin Neshat has faithfully captured the plight of everyday women in her native Iran. It is a window that offers a troublesome view."[10] This "troublesome view" is surprisingly similar to the view presented by Western media of Afghani women's sufferings and struggles under the Taliban, which were ignored for well over a decade and then suddenly surfaced in 2001 to help justify United States' military aggression in Afghanistan. This is also similar to the policy of focusing on Saddam Hussein's brutalities shortly before the war on Iraqi people, while his atrocities during the war with Iran and against Iraqi Kurds were aided by the US government in the 80s when he was referred to as an ally.[11]

My contention comes from the fact that Neshat's version of Iran, which is the dominant and recurring depiction of a country occupied by Islamic female terrorists (*Women of Allah*) and oppressed but free-spirited and autonomous women (*Turbulent, Rapture* and *Fervor*), reveals an Orientalist gaze that never sees past the surface, the obvious and the cliché. As to why a position of art celebrity is awarded to her, it is important to note that establishment curators and critics have always followed the tradition of guarding their institutions from the infiltration of unruly and dangerous art that may actually challenge dominant views and current political trends. Under the pretence of democracy, silencing occurs either by omission or by burying contesting views under high volumes of sensational celebrity-making. Shirin Neshat's rise to celebrity status is therefore not a surprise. In fact, in comparison to Andy Warhol, who gained his reputation as genius not by displaying unflinching intellect but by being strange, evasive and vague, or to Neo-Pop artist Jeff Koons, whose biggest claim to fame came from his presentation of Wet/Dry vacuum cleaners and continued as a result of photographic records of the sex he had with his porn-star wife, Neshat's art is superior in both its formal beauty and its inventiveness, that, in spite of much critical writing on the issues of ethics and relevance, maintain their dominance over clarity and significance of content. Finally, with all the debate about multiculturalism in the late 80s and identity politics in the early 90s, Neshat's rise to fame kills two birds with one stone as she fills a tokenistic space as an Iranian who is also a woman.

Haleh Niazmand is an artist and the founder of Gallery Subversive, a space for exhibition of dissident art in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Notes:

Note: Because of the wide international representation of Shirin Neshat's art, I requested to not give her images further exposure with this column.

1. Reference to CK ads was an observation made by an audience member during a panel discussion on Neshat's art held at Mt. Mercy College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in November 2004.
2. James Trainor, "Shirin Neshat," *tema celeste*, Summer 2001.
3. Leslie Camhi, "Lifting of the Veil," *Artnews,* February 2000.
4. Bob Gumbert, "An Unveiling," *The Guardian Weekend,* 22 July 2000.
5. Arthur Danto, "Shirin Neshat," *Bomb,* Fall 2000, p. 63.
6. M Price, "A Brief History of Women's Movements in Iran 1850 – 2000," www.iranonline.com/History/women-history/4.html.
7. Pepe Karmel, "Shirin Neshat," *The New York Times,* 20 October 1995.
8. Arthur Danto, "Shirin Neshat," *Bomb,* Fall 2000, p. 65.
9. Marisa Solís, "Shirin Neshat's Cinematic Pilgrimage," *Juxtapoz Photo,* Winter Special 2003, p.32.
10. Susan Tenaglia, "The Power of the Veil: Shirin Neshat's Iran," *World & I Magazine,* December 2002.
11. Amy Goodman and David Goodman, *The Exception to the Rulers* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2004), pp. 28–29.

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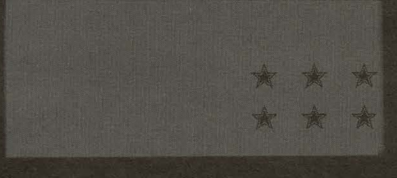

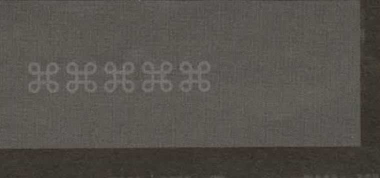

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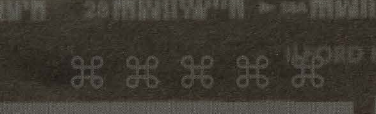
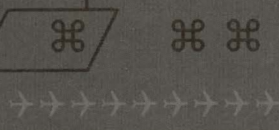
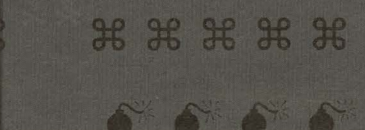
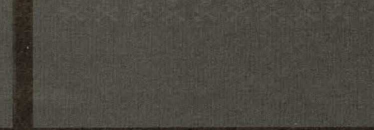
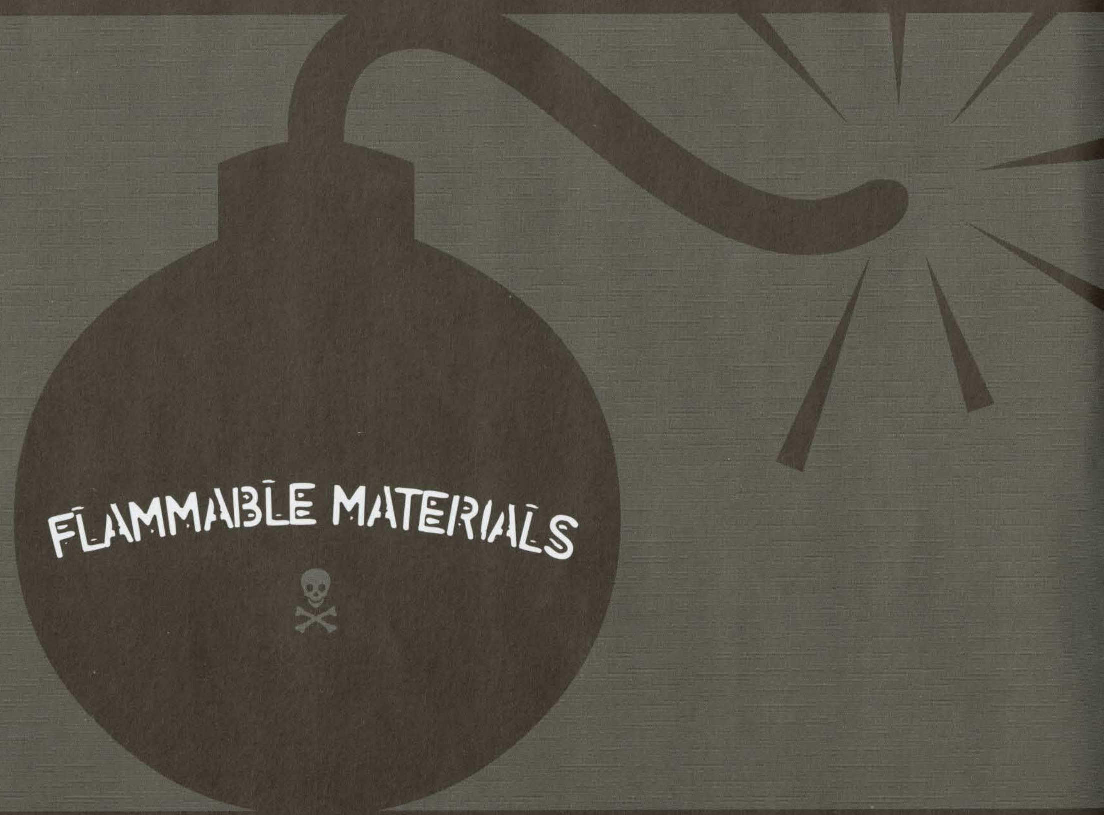
IN CONTACT IN IRAQ

COLONY IN PROGRESS/COLONY IN PROGRESS/COLONY IN PR







IN CONTACT IN IRAQ
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On the Fightin' Side of Me

Lori Blondeau and Lynne Bell in conversation with Rebecca Belmore about the significance of place and history, bearing witness and storytelling for social change.

When we turned on the tape recorder, Rebecca Belmore was in the middle of installing *Temperance* (2004) in the Snelgrove Gallery at the University of Saskatchewan. As we sat down to talk, the gallery contained only a mound of broken bottles, a projector on the floor and two panels of plexiglass suspended in front of one of the walls. After our conversation, with just two hours to go before the opening party, Belmore, with the skills of a magician, transformed these meagre ingredients into a compellingly beautiful, complex and deeply engaging installation.

Belmore is no stranger to Saskatchewan. In the last two decades she has completed six issue-based art projects in differing contexts, formats and venues in the province. In *Temperance*, Belmore returns to the "freezing deaths" of Aboriginal men in Saskatoon and the police practice of conducting "starlight tours," an issue she first addressed in the *Indian Factory*, a performance she did for the High Tech Storytellers conference held in Saskatoon in 2000.

LYNNE: Rebecca, in your noon-hour lecture yesterday, you said you had "big stories" to tell. Listening to you talk, I was struck by the fact that your performances and installations are clearly the result of a direct engagement with the places in which you find yourself. How much preparation do you do before arriving at a site? How much of your work is actually made on site?

REBECCA: My work is stronger if I wait until I get to a place, though I think a lot about a project before working on it. As I drive around, I can't help but make observations about a place. There are always clues that I can read. It's about reading places and trying to understand them in a very short period of time. I have been here before so it is easier. I walk around a lot. I go and look for things. I look for clues to understand a place. It is something you can do easily if you know how to look. And a lot of people don't notice anything, right? I make a practice of noticing as much as I can. As an artist I want to say something about the place in which I am working.

LYNNE: In the High Tech Storytellers festival in Saskatoon in 2000, you did a powerful site-specific performance/installation entitled the *Indian Factory* in which you bore witness to the freezing deaths of five Aboriginal men outside the Queen Elizabeth II power plant in Saskatoon and the issue of systemic racism in the local police force.

Rebecca Belmore, *Temperance*, installation view, 2004, Courtesy: Lynne Bell.

REBECCA: Yes. I was in Toronto when I heard about what was happening in Saskatoon — it made the national news. When I came here in May of that year, after the snow had gone, I wanted to address the freezing deaths of those Aboriginal men. I grew up in Northern Ontario and many of the problems First Nations peoples have to deal with in Saskatoon are similar to those in my hometown. So I was excited about being able to make a performance that dealt with the issue of racism head on. Saskatoon is a small art community and I knew there would be a lot of First Nations people in the audience. This allowed me to make a work that was highly emotional and political. There were all kinds of emotions — including anger — to work with. Maybe I was able to deal with this issue because I am an outsider.

LYNNE:. In your program notes for the *Indian Factory* you reflect on the need to make a site-specific work, saying, "Through the process of performing I'm attempting to address the power systems under which our communities must struggle to survive. I would like to acknowledge those men who lost their lives and the ones who were strong enough to speak out." How did you translate this thinking about storytelling for social change into the visual language of a live performance?

REBECCA: I decided to start with the title *Indian Factory*. I looked at newspaper photographs before I came to Saskatoon. Lori sent me the daily papers so I could read and think about it. I remember looking at this one photograph of a police car and a body in the snow in front of the Queen Elizabeth II power plant on the outskirts of Saskatoon. I noticed the power plant was very much like a factory. I am very comfortable living beside industry. In Northern Ontario there are many towns — smaller versions of Saskatoon — where there is a paper mill. And many Native people work in those mills. Because the bodies were found outside the power plant, I wanted the *Indian Factory* to become a work site like the power plant. In the process of making the performance I was also creating an installation. I was thinking of the artist as a worker.

LYNNE: In the five vignettes that make up the *Indian Factory* you open up a public space to ask difficult questions, a space to reveal issues that have been submerged and a space to say things that create discomfort. Can you walk us through these vignettes?

REBECCA: I started with the plaid work shirts — bathing them in plaster, hanging them up, lighting candles and unveiling an image of the Queen above them. I was making a direct connection between the freezing deaths of these men with the plaster stiffening on the shirts. The plaster is liquid, then it dries and the shirts become rigid. The candles, of course, are like a vigil. The picture of the Queen stands in for the power plant and the place. But it also goes beyond that.

The very idea of men freezing to death outside an industrial plant that is named Queen Elizabeth II draws my attention to the treaties and the relationship between First Nations people and the Crown. I think the photograph I just spoke about — of the power plant, the police car and the body in the snow — is such a powerful and poignant image. I was so moved by it. It speaks not just of now. It speaks of our long history and struggle as Indigenous peoples to deal with this relationship.

After the work shirts, I moved to the action with the big fan and the feather — dipping the feather into blood and letting it spray onto canvas. On one level, I was making a painting. At the same time, the feather blowing and dancing in the big wind is how I think of the prairies.

LORI: The large white canvas splattered with blood in this vignette came to resemble a painting by Jackson Pollock *and* a crime scene.

REBECCA: Yes. I like the fact that the canvas was white — it was like blood on snow. In some ways it was an abstract landscape painting. It could be many things. It was probably the most abstract action in the entire performance. I was trying to do different things within my *Indian Factory*. It was a factory producing art that addressed this political issue and this community.

The next vignette was the drunk dance. I used Merle Haggard's "On the Fightin' Side of Me." I think Native people are often attracted to country music, especially hurtin' songs, because we can co-opt them and make a new meaning for ourselves. I like the lyrics of Haggard's song a lot. I was just spinning and dancing. I was in some way mimicking powwow dancing. But then I got dizzy and disorientated. Then I was staggering. It was like a drunk dance– a mix of redneck music, traditional dance and drunkeness. It was also like the dance of the fool.

LORI: You were dancing around a column covered in red signs warning "danger."

REBECCA: Yes. The column also had a little tacky police light attached to it — the kind you get in a gag store at the mall. It was a very simple piece, an effective and easy way to bring up the drunkeness. And it is entertaining at the same time. It is funny and sad. People are not quite sure how to deal with it.

The next section is the hammering of nails into an image of the sacred stone at Wanuskewin. It is an old buffalo rubbing stone where the buffalo removed their winter hides. I had an image of this stone printed digitally onto a piece of plywood so that I was able to pound nails into it. I like the idea of something that is held sacred by First Nations people. And the idea of hammering nails into stone — which is impossible. It's all about impossibility. In pounding the nails, I started off with anger, but then I tired myself out. I exhausted myself with the effort and labour.

LORI: And you were already exhausted from the dancing.

REBECCA: I exhausted myself totally. In the end I was just muttering swear words. The last segment of the performance was the burial. Osvaldo, my assistant, had on blue coveralls with a red stripe — the stripe was very subtle. He was the policeman. He just buried me in a very sculptural manner. He works with clay a lot so he really did a beautiful job.

I situated my body in this burial segment in front of the five stiff shirts from the first action. If you looked at the installation from one direction, you saw the shirts, the Queen and the body lying on the floor. The placement of the burial segment was deliberate in terms of the composition of the whole space.

LORI: It was like a grave site.

REBECCA: That was the intent — the idea of burial, death and birth. I got into the foetal position and then at some point I had to come out.

Rebecca Belmore performing *Indian Factory*, 2000, Courtesy: Lynne Bell

Rebecca Belmore performing *Indian Factory*, 2000, Courtesy: Lynne Bell

LYNNE: I remember that Lori and others helped you out of your clay tomb in an unrehearsed action because they feared for your safety. It was an amazing moment to watch. It was one of those moments that tapped into the energy created between a performer and their audience.

LORI: The work was powerful. In a lot of ways I was shocked that I had intervened. But I felt this urgency to get you out! I couldn't stay in the space afterwards. I had to leave. I was overwhelmed.

REBECCA: It's good that you did what you thought you had to.

LYNNE: When I came to view the installation the next day I noticed you had made certain additions. You stencilled the names of the five Aboriginal men onto the wall: Stonechild, Dustyhorn, Naistus, Wegner, Ironchild. This was such a profound thing to do. The installation became at once a memorial to the dead men — refocusing attention on them as distinct human beings — and at the same time it drew attention to the political necessity of memory-work. What other additions did you make to the installation?

REBECCA: I cleaned up my washing station. That was one thing I forgot to mention about the performance. The action of washing my hands.

LORI: I read this washing ritual as both a ceremony and an everyday action.

REBECCA: Yes. This action of washing my hands has a ritualistic aspect to it. At the same time, it is a very common action. There is such a broad range of things you can do with simple actions. I like the possibility that they can be read in many different ways. Everyone can relate to the simple action of washing your hands. Simple actions allow the viewer to connect to me. I try to use actions like this because it's a way of getting people's attention. It's a trick. I shouldn't give away my tricks! [laughter]

LORI: You used simple actions in your performance at the Dunlop (*Five Sisters*) to tell the story of an Aboriginal woman who froze to death in Sioux Lookout.

REBECCA: You know what I did? I made a long bench and I ripped up a white sheet and made it into a long string. Then I pounded nails into the surface of the bench. I dipped the cloth into the wine and wound it around the nails and wrote: Don't fuck with me! [laughter] Then I took off my clothes and laid on a bed of ice.

LORI: You dipped some of the cloth in the red wine and placed it on your body. It looked as if you had haemorrhaged. When you told the story in your public lecture about the woman who froze to death in Sioux Lookout, then all the details of the *Five Sisters* performance came together for me.

REBECCA: Yes. She was a street person and she haemorrhaged and froze to death on the sidewalk. The performance dealt with the idea of freezing to death — and the image of blood on the snow.

LYNNE: In the installation *Temperance* (2004) at the Snelgrove Gallery, you once again take up the labour of remembrance, revisiting the story of the freezing deaths of the Aboriginal men that you told in the *Indian Factory*.

REBECCA: Yes, because the enquiry is ongoing and it shouldn't be set aside or forgotten. It is important to keep addressing things until they are somehow resolved. When the Oka crisis was happening in Quebec in 1990, I did this performance in Quebec City. I sang the national anthem in French and English, and I dedicated it to my grandmother, who spoke Anishinabe only. And I strangled myself while singing. I integrated this performance into a few other pieces in the early 1990s. But then I stopped because it was too dangerous. I had to stop doing that stupid thing. My point is, these actions are something I could do forever, because the same issues keep occurring.

Saskatoon is interesting for me. It is a tough place for First Nations people to live because of their relationship to the government, the police and other institutions. This new installation is the third work I have done that deals with the winter of 2000. I did a piece in Regina this summer (2003) for the artist's collective Sâkêwêwak. It was a very simple piece. It was silent. The performance took place in an ugly hotel room.

LORI: In an ugly ballroom with a rug carpet . . .

REBECCA: It was an awkward space to perform in. For a performer, this is the worst kind of space to work in — a hotel ballroom with ugly furniture, ugly carpet and bad lighting. So I decided to try to overcome the site. I used a bag of flour. I went to a toy store in Regina and found a replica of a Saskatchewan police car. And I used the long hair of Sharon Pelletier who worked at Sâkêwêwak.

I had someone with a camera hooked up to a projection, and I asked him to film my hands, to follow my hands in a detailed close-up, so that my activities would be projected onto a large screen. That was my way of overcoming the site. It was a simple action with a red lightbulb on a cord which I swirled around my head. Then I took the bag of flour, tossed it up into the air and it fell and busted open. Then I started to caress the carpet and make it white, like snow, and I called the woman by her name. Her hair was done up in a braid. She sat down and undid her braid and then lay down. I start to spread her hair out. There was about a metre of this beautiful, amazing hair lying on the white flour. Then I started to sprinkle and cover her hair with the excess flour.

LORI: It looked like she was aging.

REBECCA: It looked like snow too. That was my intention. I just tossed a magazine with the image of Queen Elizabeth onto the floor close to her body along with the miniature police car. I took the rest of the flour and buried the magazine and the police car until it looked like a snow bank. My body language tells you I am working with performance to create an installation. I pause to look at it — and I get into making it look beautiful.

When I arrived in Regina in June 2003 to do this performance, the big story in the news was that the police had come forward about an incident that had happened about twenty-five years ago involving an Aboriginal woman. She was driven out of town by police in

freezing temperatures. She never came forward to make a complaint. I was freaked out by the fact that twenty-five years ago this could have happened to a woman.

LYNNE: Is the work *Temperance* just an installation piece or will it include a live performance?

REBECCA: It is purely installation. It is a work in progress. Just a rough experimental piece at this stage. Basically it is a video projection of the stacks of the power plant at sunrise. It is a big projection through plexiglass. In front of the plexiglass there will be what I am calling a chandelier — made out of light bulbs and empty wine bottles in the shape of a cross. So there is reference to religion. And behind the plexiglass on the wall covered with the projection of the power plant will be a portrait of Queen Elizabeth — so people can connect the smoke stacks with the Queen Elizabeth II power plant. If you look at the video projection long enough you can figure out what it is, but you may not know where it is. There will be all these layers — different elements that are part of the story and part of the history. It is a very simple piece.

LYNNE: I am struck by the way in which you use beauty to illuminate all of these difficult-to-think-about topics. Just walking through your half-finished installation *Temperance* on my way to this interview, I was entranced by the footage you shot at the power plant at sunrise on a freezing cold day earlier this week.

REBECCA: I like beautiful things. I try to make things beautiful. But at the same time I don't think that beauty in any way inhibits the ability to address things that are extremely ugly. I like to work ugliness and beauty together.

This raises the question of whether it is ethical to aestheticize trauma, violence and tragedy. This is a great question that I ask myself. At a very young age I became politicized and I think that it is through art and through making things — wanting to make them attractive and aesthetically pleasing to the eye — that I have managed in some way to calm myself, to control my own emotions and to deal with issues that are deeply disturbing to me.

LYNNE: Can you talk about the significance of language in both testimony and the action of bearing witness in your work?

Rebecca Belmore, *Temperance*, installation view, 2004, Courtesy: Lynne Bell

REBECCA: I grew up outside of the language. I was kept on the periphery probably because my mother wanted us to excel in the white man's world. That was her strategy. And to some degree it has been successful. Of course, I feel I have lost something. But through my work I have been able to figure out how to partake in the language that I don't speak and to enter into community.

The megaphone (*Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*) that I made in 1991 after the Oka crisis, for example, is about First Nations' protest. During the Oka crisis, racism raised its ugly head and it was very uncomfortable to be a First Nations person. So I made the megaphone because I wanted to look at this need to speak up, to speak out and to speak your own truth.

I couldn't speak the language as a child but I spent time with my grandparents who spoke Anishinabe only. My grandfather spoke English, but my grandmother didn't. I spent a long time with my grandmother — I would hear the sound of her voice and understand what she wanted me to do. We could communicate with our bodies and gestures. So even though you can't clearly understand the language, you can still witness body language and listen in other ways. If I analyze my own personal history I think this is why I gravitated naturally towards making performances.

LYNNE: I was reading an interview last night by Edward Said. He was talking about the importance of building a counterpoint to official public memory through storytelling. Talking about the need to narrate experiences of oppression, shaping them into stories that can be shared and remembered, he says: "One has to keep telling the story in as many ways as possible, as insistently as possible, and in as compelling a way as possible, to keep attention on it."[1] This strategy of insistence is clearly an important strategy in your own work.

REBECCA: Yes. It is extremely important to fool people into looking at an issue again. [laughter] I have worked now for fifteen or sixteen years — things change slowly in our lives as First Nations people and the struggle is constant. The government is always trying to take away our land. It is really amazing how Aboriginal rights are continually being whittled away. I think that as an artist I have the time, the space and the opportunity to address these issues. I think I have to continually address them. I think artists have a responsibility and an opportunity to help their communities.

LYNNE: Could you talk about a performance you did in Saskatchewan in the early 1990s? It was a public intervention at the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon. The Mendel was unveiling a donation of paintings that included Indian portraits painted in the early 1900s by the Anglo settler artist James Henderson, among others.

REBECCA: It was a big opening and I was supposed to do a performance. But most of the people had probably come for the unveiling of the donation. It was also the inauguration of a new director. There were about 500 people there. I remember the chair of the board of directors was giving her speech in one of the smaller galleries. I arrived at the party dressed in a strait-jacket. I could move my arms slightly. I was wearing a long black wig and I think I had just jeans and a T-shirt on. I was probably bare foot. Attached to the strait jacket was a blue velvet painting I had painted. I had taken the image from a postcard — it was of a beautiful Indian maiden in a white frame.

LYNNE: You were physically trapped in a colonial stereotype ...

REBECCA: Yes. I had my strait-jacket with my stereotype on my back. And, at one point, the curator Bruce Grenville signalled to me — I was off in another gallery — and I let out a whoop and started acting really crazy and very loud. I started racing through the galleries and running in circles until I was exhausted. [laughter]

LYNNE: I remember people were shocked. You caused incredible chaos. The discomfort levels were high. People were clearly thinking: Should we call security? You could see it in their eyes. And while the speaker

was droning on at the podium you were like a wild banshee — racing and roaring through the house.

REBECCA: It was shocking. I was dangerous! But then I stopped and got out of my things. And I went downstairs to a small space in front of the auditorium where I did the second part of my piece. It was a slide projection of women speaking.

LYNNE: What were the women saying?

REBECCA: It was women from my community — Anishinabe women speaking about their lives. They were from different generations — an elder who works in a historical fort, a woman in her forties and a woman in her twenties. The projected slide images kept dissolving one into another. And the women were framed in frames like the ones used in the Indian portraits upstairs. I wrote on the floor: Fucking Squaw in big red letters — like graffiti. And while the women were speaking, I got on my hands and knees and washed it up. It was a very simple action.

LORI: People still talk about this performance.

REBECCA: The performance was a touring show and I did it in a number of cities. I did it in Sackville, New Brunswick. I was there in winter time and I decided to run around outside. It was dark early and there was no one on the street. All the houses were lit up and people were inside. So I ran around in my T-shirt and jeans and I probably had bare feet. I was quite crazy to do that. As I am running back, this one car was coming down the road. It's a young guy — probably a young father — in a big station wagon. He rolls down his window and says: "Are you okay?" I say, "Yeah, I am fine," and I kept running. He was the only one who witnessed the performance. For him it must have been a bizarre incident.

LORI: He probably still tells the story!

LYNNE: In your talk, you noted that when you took the megaphone on tour in 1992 one of your favourite stopovers was in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. What do you remember about this particular performance event?

REBECCA: I took the megaphone to ten different sites that summer. But Meadow Lake was my favourite site. We were at a political site — a political struggle for the land. The elders in this territory were blocking a logging road. They were protesting the clear-cutting of their land. A lot of them have trap lines and the logging was destroying their livelihoods. I was there about four days.

It was very interesting to see how the megaphone was embraced by differing communities. People often made fun of it, calling it a big ice-cream cone, but it worked because it is about speaking out. When someone speaks through the megaphone their voice is amplified. The shape of the object builds the sound and shoots it out into the distance. Your voice is separated from your body and comes back to you. Talking into the megaphone, people have said that they feel humble and connected as human beings to the earth. The megaphone is a clear assertion of oral history and of the need to listen to the land. All those things are implicated in that work.

At Meadow Lake, the megaphone was put on this hill. The people on the blockade were waiting for us when we arrived. They were very excited and couldn't wait to unwrap the megaphone. They wanted to put it up immediately. It was like a present. They were so friendly.

LORI: How many people were at the blockade?

REBECCA: It was a quiet time. There were probably about twenty people. They had set tents up by the side of the road. They had a teepee frame with a fire, a Virgin Mary altar and the megaphone set up on this little mound. These three elements were in the same place. It became their site. We stayed there a few days so we really got to know people, socializing with them and eating and laughing with them.

LORI: Did they use the megaphone to talk about the blockade?

REBECCA: Yes. They talked about why they were blockading the road. But the official elders of the camp were away. They had gone to raise money for the blockade. At the same time we were there, the TV news program W5 was there. They were trying to get a story and they wanted to speak to the elders of the camp. But no one would officially speak to them. So W5 went away and came back the next day. They were frustrated waiting for these old people to come back so that they could get their interview. They were trying to do a story about First Nations people working at the mill. In other words, the non-traditional versus the traditional. That was the story they were trying to get.

When the elders didn't come back, W5 got aggressive and started going into people's tents. They pointed the microphone at one old man in his tent, but he wouldn't give an interview. So one morning, it must have been the third day, we got up, and the people were speaking Cree to each other. I didn't understand what they were saying. They finished breakfast and grabbed their chairs — stackable chairs you find in any community centre — and walked up to the megaphone on the hill. They set their chairs down and started speaking Cree into the megaphone. W5 was video-taping it — they went mad with their cameras and booms, and then they came over to me and asked: "What are they saying?" And I said: "I don't know. Isn't it obvious? What do you think they are saying?"

Note.

1. David Barsamian and Edward W. Said, *Culture and Resistance: Conversations with Edward W. Said* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003)

Born in Upsala, Ontario, Rebecca Belmore has become one of Canada's most celebrated artists whose programme of art explores such themes as storytelling for social change, the work of mourning, and the contemporary legacies of colonialism in Canada. Belmore will be Canada's official representative at the Venice Biennale of Visual Art in June 2005.

Lynne Bell is Professor of Visual Culture at the University of Saskatchewan. She has published widely on art and activism and guest-curated a number of exhibitions, including "Urban Fictions." She is presently at work on a book on post/colonial testimony and visual culture.

Lori Blondeau is a performance artist and a co-founder and director of "Tribe: A Centre for Evolving Aboriginal Media, Visual and Performing Arts." Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at such venues as the Tozzar Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; La Fabricca del Vapore, Milan, Italy; and the Institute for American Indian Art in Sante Fe, New Mexico.

Rebecca Belmore, *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, 1992, Courtesy: Lynne Bell

Opposite Page: Rebecca Belmore, *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, 1992, Courtesy: Lynne Bell

Building an Inventory

by Jamelie Hassan

National Museum of Beirut, restoration, Lebanon, 1998, Photo: Jamelie Hassan

It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelists, chess players, political activists and intellectuals. Each of these occupations requires a minimal investment in objects and places a great premium on mobility and skill. The exile's new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction.[1]

This article began as a reflection on recent trips to Lebanon in October 2003 and June 2004 and includes the period during which we mourned the death of Edward Said. This writing continues as the world bears witness to the overwhelming brutality of nations in a state of permanent war — the disastrous geomilitarization of the entire Middle East, the slaughter and illegal US occupation of Iraq and Israel's flagrant colonial expansion and efforts to obliterate any Palestinian resistance. This state of permanent war "reinforces autocratic Arab regimes" while the US–Israeli alliance "serves the interests perfectly of the two partners."[2] Susan Watkin offers a long-view of the scene facing us and reveals the important status of Iraq to the United States. "The largest US embassy in the world will dominate Baghdad, with regional "hubs" planned in Mosul, Kirkuk and Basra."[3]

Looking back at the beginnings of this text, news reports that Yasser Arafat died in Paris on November 11 — after a strange prelude of conflicting announcements — evoked for me a scenario from another Nobel laureate. Columbian author, Gabriel García Marquez in his brilliant novel, *Autumn of the Patriarch,* reflects on the corruption of power. The Arab world has since, either mourned or in relief, said goodbye to the man who personified for many either the best or worst of leaders. Arafat was "temporarily" buried in a corner of the Mukataa, the devastated Ramallah compound that served as his headquarters, his shrouded body resting on a symbolic shovel load of soil from Jerusalem. Instead of watching the chaos of yet another spectacle of an emotional burial, I turn away and allow my thoughts to return to the example of the life and work of public intellectual, Edward Said, so much of his writing "tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history."[4]

Re-reading Said's introduction to *Orientalism,* I note his opening paragraph is a reference to "a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war ... "[5] and evidence of his lifelong attachment to Lebanon, the country where during the last days of October 2003 his family held memorial services, quietly burying his ashes under the branches of an olive tree in a Quaker cemetery in Broummana. On November 1, 2003, Said's family and friends presented "In Memoriam, Readings and Music" at Assembly Hall, American University of Beirut. Rather than being buried in the United States or in Occupied Palestine, Said chose to be buried in Broummana, a mountain village overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. His choice reflects the formative role Lebanon played in his life and work, that it was this country that could offer him a measure of refuge.

If one makes the journey to visit Said's grave, the road sign to the right indicates the direction to Beit Meri (The House of Wisdom), where fragments of once radiantly embellished mosaic pavings are still visible among the neglect of overgrown grasses and debris. Most of the mosaic pavings have been salvaged and relocated to the protection of Lebanon's restored museums, including the National Museum in Beirut and the large collection in Beit el Din. The ancient surfaces date from 392 AD, while the remains of stone shelters carry the graffiti of militias that had temporarily used the site as one of their bases during Lebanon's Civil Wars (1976–93). Hauntingly silent locations such as this one are easily forgotten in the immensity of the destruction of Beirut and the death of so many of its inhabitants during the

Mosaic, Beit Meri, Lebanon, 2004, Photo: Jamelie Hassan

seventeen years of war. Yet as I gazed at the fragments of Beit Meri's mosaics, I was reminded of Said's words, in the introduction to Samir Khalaf's *Beirut Reclaimed,*[6] "Gramsci somewhere speaks of history as leaving in us an infinity of traces, without also leaving an inventory. Therefore, he adds, we must go on to compile an inventory."

Said's reference here both evokes the discipline of archaeology to Khalaf's pursuit of reclaiming Beirut and ties the work of artists and intellectuals to the patient task of rebuilding. Said recognized in Khalaf's writing "that as a Lebanese intellectual he has not lost the power to make sense and to make order where in the past violence has unhinged the mind."

When *Orientalism* first appeared in bookstores in 1978, I, like many of my contemporaries, recognized its unique importance and felt the startling power of its text. My reading of *Orientalism* also coincided with my return to Canada in 1979 after a year doing research and working in the Middle East. I can vividly recall seeing the book in the typically meagre Middle East section on the bookshelf of Toronto's former SCM Bookstore. *Orientalism*'s book cover jumped out with its title and image of Gerome's snake charmer. It was a book "which talked of things I felt I had known all along but had never found the language to formulate with clarity."[7] Today, *Orientalism* is widely recognized as one of the most influential challenges to dominant narratives of colonialism and imperialism.

Beirutis and their guests often learn of important events by word of mouth and at short notice. Even something as significant as the tribute to Said held in Beirut — while open to the public — to my knowledge had no advance public notices. The informal networks of information exchange continue to be effective and are indicative of a heightened sense of responsibility among community members to be engaged and in contact with one another. On that memorable occasion, one observation circulated, in the form of a joke, that the Israelis could wipe off the map many of the Arab world's progressive intellectuals, artists, journalists, educators, booksellers, students and activists with a single bomb dropped on the university's Assembly Hall. This use of humour, rather than perpetuating a state of fear and anxiety, was deployed as a form of resistance since the risks of such a gathering are real.

In the June 2004 issue of Lebanon's *l'agenda culturel,* listed under the heading "Fabulous Festivals," was the Beit el Din Festival. Held over the summer in the Emir's former palace it included the photo exhibition "Mapping Sitting: On portraiture and photography," which was curated by artists Walid Ra'ad and Akram Zaatari and the Fondation Arab pour l'Image.[8] "Mapping Sitting covers early 20th century photographic practice in the Arab world. Looking at how it functioned as a commodity and a luxury item, the exhibit presents geographically and culturally specific photographic works that raise questions about portraiture, performance, photography and identity."[9]

The exhibition was presented in two gallery spaces under the rubric of four distinct groupings, "Surprise," "Group," "ID" and "Itinerant," practices that were common approaches to documenting people in Lebanon. In "Group," the photos were presented as a DVD continuous loop projected onto the gallery wall, consisting of a panorama of the nation through group photos documenting military men in uniforms, their hats varying from tarboush to military cap to beret.

During the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the palace of Beit El Din was looted of all its collection. Today, within its extraordinary architectural spaces and the formal beauty of the gardens, the museum houses one of the country's largest collections of mosaics, many relocated from Saida and Beit Meri sites. Within the palace's grand interiors of empty rooms with vaulted ceilings are spaces for occasional temporary exhibits. Before entering through to the palace courtyard the visitor is offered a political primer on Lebanon, at a museum dedicated to the life of Kamal Jumblatt, the charismatic Druze leader who was assassinated in 1978. This commemorative museum includes historical photos, official documents, personal papers and the philosopher/politician's library. The temporary exhibition "Mapping Sitting," with its photographic record of the anonymous citizen and soldier, provides a powerful companion to the Jumblatt Museum and the site's multiple histories.

During the war years, the National Museum of Beirut became a barrack for competing militias, occupying a space on the green line between west and east Beirut. Its collection was sealed into the basement to protect it from looters while many of the immovable parts were hidden by concrete encasements for protection. The collection and museum were in a state of destruction when restoration work began in 1995. The restoration project lasted until 1999 when the museum reopened its doors. Today, the museum houses over 1,300 archaeological artefacts, with a conservation laboratory in the basement, extremely urgent in light of the ongoing crisis of archaeological material in the country.

The file cards used for archiving information at the National Museum were at last report going through the tedious process of being computerized. Having personally seen the cardboard boxes overflowing with these damaged file cards, I wondered about the seemingly minor detail of their fate once the information they carried was copied and transferred to computer disc.

Aspects of New York-based Walid Ra'ad's work revolve around the constructed archive of what the artist calls "the imaginary foundation" of "The Atlas Group." His use of the file-card format suggests the activity of collecting facts, though the cards are presented as a fabrication, with the Atlas Group operating as a surrogate for the artist/author/researcher. Nevertheless documents in the Atlas Archives carry factual information as well as believable fictions: the photographers, historians, investigators, archivists, journalists, each is present in the evocation of the geopolitical cultural space that is the metropolis of Beirut. The file cards run across the walls of the entire gallery and are worth a close reading. If one randomly takes a name or two from the particulars inscribed on a card and does a search, it can be quite unnerving.

For instance, *Ibrahim Tawil, An-Nahar-Crimes Criminals 1987 Beirut* is inscribed in English on one of the cards. If you search Palestine's *Who's Who* you will find Ibrahim Tawil. According to the entry under his name: "Ibrahim Tawil was born in 1943. A pharmacist and mayor of Al-Bira.

back

The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, detail from *I was overcome by a momentary panic at the thought that they might be right*, 2004, Courtesy: AGYU

Narrowly avoided being maimed in May 1980 car bombs, instead being placed under house arrest from August, 1980. Dismissed and replaced with Israeli official on 13 May 1982. His fellow mayors, Karim Khala, mayor of Ramallah and Bassam Shakaa, mayor of Nablus also survived assassination attempts in the same bombing that Ibrahim was injured. Bassam Shakkaa lost both his legs in that car bombing." In another entry for Ibrahim Tawil there is the further tragic revelation that "His son, Wissam was shot dead by Palestinian Authority forces when protesting against the Wye deal in 1998. Ibrahim Tawil is also a photographer and coaches a swim team. His photographs are published in An-Nahar newspaper."

Beit Meri, Lebanon, 2004, Photo: Jamelie Hassan

The content in the familiar form of the file card as artefact compelled me to engage in further searches. I found another name among the anonymous photographers, Sami Ayad, which repeatedly appeared in Walid Ra'ad's file cards. My research revealed that Ayad is also a photographer from Lebanon's Arabic daily *An-Nahar*. An International Freedom of Expression Exchange alert reports that Sami Ayad was taking pictures of demonstrators who were roughed up by Information Services agents when unidentified persons demanded that he hand over his film. He refused and was beaten until he managed to take flight.

A question repeatedly asked is why an artist would choose to fabricate the very recent past in this way, when so many personas and stories are based in actual event. One response is that the sceptical position adopted by many artists is a way to pose questions about the multiplicity of truths. Wayson Choy writes of the paradox that exists specifically in the details of official histories, "the living truth of any place — the moral truth — exists between memory and fiction." The work of the generation of artists who were born in Lebanon in the late 1960s and early 1970s, just prior at the outset to the war, represents the challenge involved in finding ways to understand and reflect on the recent past. This work often exploits the concepts of historical and geographical space as a resource, but deftly avoids direct representations of the city as a site of conflict. Artists are marked by the events but impatient and dismissive of those who continue to do more literal "art about the war." They are also mobile and skilled, loosely associated with the international while resolutely enmeshed in local history and its relationship to global politics.

In 1967, the year of Walid Ra'ad's birth, I was a young art student, arriving in Beirut. Between fairly traditional art classes at Academie Libanese de Beaux Arts, I worked at the American University Hospital as a volunteer nurses' aid. Working in the hospital was my way of giving substance to studying art, which sometimes felt inconsequential and academic. By all accounts these were glory days for Beirut.

It was during the war in 1979 that I again returned to Lebanon and to a devastated and divided Beirut. A Scandinavian Airlines flight from Baghdad made a detour to drop myself and a fellow Arabic-language student off at Beirut airport, which was under siege. We were met by a member of a militia, and had to move the cache of weapons from the back seat of the jeep to sit down. I was an artist who had been invited to come to Beirut to witness the war. My code name was Al-Rassami. As I write this I know that it may read more fiction than fact.

Later in 1986, the Mukhabarat, Syria's secret police, kept my young son, my mother and I under surveillance the entire time we were in Syria. We were strongly advised by the Canadian Embassy in Damascus not to cross over the Lebanon/Syrian border because of the increased threat of car bombings and kidnappings.

Fact or fiction?

It was not until a few days after Sept. 11, 2001, that my son and I both managed to be in Beirut at the same time and to finally have the walk along the Corniche to watch the sunset that everyone, locals and visitors alike, feel they need to experience. Many remarked at the fact that we were in Beirut instead of being safe back at home in Canada. Were we unaware that the capitals of the Arab world were on alert again?

Beirut's rich legacy continues to conjure a vast array of contradictory impressions not only for persons familiar with the city, but also for those who have never visited. Another Arab capital, Baghdad, despite its overwhelming media presence and significance as an urban site, is either presented as an abstract space or a site of rubble. Its extraordinary former cultural significance to the Arab world is nullified and superseded by violence.

Beirut's Hamra Street, in contrast to the Beirut Downtown project under Solidere, is a vibrant and diverse cultural centre for the city and has seen modest improvements over this past summer. The Saroulla Cinema, under the new direction of Nidal al-Ashkar, will definitely give a boost to the Hamra cultural scene. Beirut Development and Cinema hosts Ayam Al Cinam'iya, the Arab film festival held in September. At the centre's location in Furn el Chebback, the restored house has space dedicated to editing facilities and is home to film archives and documents.

Producer and director Eliane Raheb has curated in-depth film programs in Europe, most recently in Zurich where Videoex 03 offered an Arab Cinema Week and included over fifty films from Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Algeria and by Canadians Jayce Salloum and Tahani Rached. Many of these filmmakers are showing their work internationally as demand for contemporary art and film from the Arab world has dramatically increased, particularly in Europe. One important indicator was last year's Frankfurt Book Fair, which featured writers from the Arab world who represented some of the cultural work being done in contemporary Arab literature. Other efforts to challenge mainstream media representations and "the manufactured clash of civilizations" are Montreal's *Parachute*, which devoted a special issue with launches in both Beirut and Montreal, and the emergence of ArteEast based in New York.

Ard En Nissaa/Women Beyond Borders, a film by Jean Chamoun that recently premiered in Canada, tells the story of Kifah Afifi, a Palestinian ex-prisoner from the notorious Khiam detention centre in south Lebanon. Together with partner Palestinian film maker Mai Masri, Chamoun formed Nour Production and has produced numerous films including *Frontiers of Dreams* (2001), the feature film *In the Shadow of the City* (2000), *Children of Shatila* (1998), *Hanan Ashrawi: A Woman of Her Time* (1995), *War Generation – Beirut* (1988) and *Under the Rubble* (1983). Both Masri and Chamoun are major participants in cultural forums in Lebanon and their works are included in international film festivals worldwide. Together they have received recognition and awards for their work in the area of human rights.

There is one scene in Chamoun's *Women Beyond Borders* where Kifah and Suha Bechara, also a former political prisoner held in Khiam prison, are reunited and talk about their imprisonment. This brief glimpse of these two women, their playful, flirtatious banter and the humorous anecdote about their smuggling of messages in bundles of fresh underwear appears at odds with the drama of their imprisonment, yet is indicative of the humour that often pervades the informal social dialogue between Lebanese and Palestinians. This use of humour as resistance has a transcendent quality that is also visible in the anti-colonial work of a number of Canada's First Nations artists, notably the performance work of Lori Blondeau, the photographs of Shelly Niro and the writing of Thomas King, which all undertake the similar task of using humour to create spaces of liberty. Anti-colonial narratives told in this way move us toward positions of social transformation.

The urgency of our time, as Said critically reminds us, asks us to find ways to relate and connect to the knowledge held within local communities and to dismantle rigid frames of mind. In the opening segment of the recent documentary film *Control Room*, Samir Khader, senior producer of Al Jazeera (Island) Satellite Channel, forcefully states that the mission of Al Jazeera is to reach out to the Arab peoples, to be involved in a free debate and to try to do this without taboos in order "to shake up these rigid societies — to awaken them — to tell them something is happening in the world — you are still sleeping — wake up!" To awaken the Arab world ... I agree — but would add that it is more than the people of the Arab world that need to hear these words. Wake up!

A preliminary version of this essay was first presented at the panel "Points of Convergence" September 30, 2004, with Tess Takahashi and Marie-Joille Zahar, organized by Aylson Addley in conjunction with the solo exhibition "The Atlas Group and Walid Ra'ad" at the Art Gallery of York University in Toronto. Special thanks to Ron Benner.

Jamelie Hassan is an artist and activist living in London, Ontario. She has exhibited internationally and has also created public art works including billboards and site-specific works. Her writings and artist projects have been published in several publications and anthologies, most recently "The Evasive Text" in Obsession, Compulsion, Collection *edited by Anthony Kiendl (Banff Centre Press, 2004).*

Notes:

1. Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile" in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures,* edited by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West. (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990).

2. Samir Amin, "US Imperalism, Europe and the Middle East," *Monthly Review* 56:6, (Nov. 2004).

3. Susan Watkin, "A Puppet For All Seasons," *Harpers Magazine* (Dec. 2004). Originally published in *New Left Review* (July/August 2004).

4 Edward Said, "A Window on the World," introduction to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Orientalism*, 2003.

5. Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

6. Samir Khalif, *Beirut Reclaimed: Reflections on Urban Design and the restoration of Civility,* (Beirut: Dar an-Nahar, 1993).

7. Partha Chatterjee, "Their Own Words? An Essay For Edward Said" in *Edward Said, A Critical Reader,* edited by Michael Sprinker, (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

8. See "Beyrouth_Beirut" *Parachute* 108, which includes numerous references to the work of the Fondation Arabe pour l'Image.

9. Quoted from *l'agenda culturel* in Cedar Wings, Middle Beirut, Lebanon, June 2004.

Somewhere Elsewhere: Diasporic Visions of Space and Subject

Worth Ryder Gallery (Berkeley CA), 19 October – 5 November 2004

review by Laura J. Kuo

Where should we go after the last frontiers,
Where should the birds fly after the last sky?

Mahmoud Darwish[1]

Organized by Bay Area curator, Saná Makhoul, the exhibit *Somewhere Elsewhere* foregrounded Arab and Iranian contemporary art post–9/11.

The artists—Rheim Alkadhi (Iraq), Khalil Bendib (Algeria), Doris Bittar (Palestine/Lebanon), Ali Dadgar (Iran), Abdelali Dahrouch (Morocco), Taraneh Hemami (Iran), Annemarie Jacir (Palestine) and Haleh Niazmand (Iran) — reside in the US and each represent the liminality, ambivalence and contradiction shaped by the politics of cultural displacement. Their works integrate critiques of Orientalism and imperialism in relation to the production of knowledge and its affiliation to life of the stereotype. Their work meaningfully charts alternative spaces of transnational subjectivity and resistance, where liminality yields contradiction and ambivalence that need not be reconciled.

Abdelali Dahrouch, *Yellow Citizen*, video installation, 2004, Courtesy: Sana Makhoul

Somewhere Elsewhere speaks to the legacy of transnational Arab/Iranian/Muslim cultural production, invoking the insurgent work of Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum, whose 1988 video, *Measures of Distance*, engages the simultaneous and paradoxical convergence of intimacy and alienation caused by war, terror and colonial occupation. In 1975 Beirut-born Hatoum arrived in London for a visit. When the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon prevented her from returning home, she was effectively exiled from her family there. *Measures of Distance* represents a love song to her mother, whose letters are narrated by Hatoum in a linguistic play that at once reflects the closeness between mother and daughter and the violent separation that bleeds into the fragmented existence of a nation and people. The textual, visual and linguistic palimpsest between Arabic and English underlies the family's enduring dislocations from Palestine to Lebanon to Britain.

For diasporic communities, transnationality is marked by fractured spaces where cultural identity is constantly negotiated while new affirmations of nation, family and community continually evolve.

Musings of home and foreign land together articulate different economies of subjectivity and national politics, while fostering an imagined community of transnational oppositional struggles. For Hatoum, displacement and separation engender agency and resistance, where mother and daughter — stateless — find home, nation and sanctum, in her video, in the liminal space between text and screen. Hatoum's art cultivates meditative spaces to engage the relentless dislocations wrought by mythologies of identity, culture and nation. Diverse experiences of exile are linked to processes of diasporic migrations — and the communities that are formed — becoming sites where artists use the visual arts sector to engender consciousness and develop alliances of solidarity.

Ambivalence and ambiguity converge in the identity of the postcolonial subject, whose life of contradiction represents the postcolonial condition. In her work *The Satellite Shooters,* Annemarie Jacir appropriates the genre of "the Western" to satirically frame the story of Tawfig, "a young Arab boy in Texas trying to find his place in America."[2] Jacir's single-channel installation, a 16-minute 16mm film, depicts Tawfig dressing and posturing as the Marlboro Man. She writes, "I wanted to tell the story of a character whose world has been shaped by racist images from popular American culture, in this case that of the Western film as well as that of Orientalist ethnic fantasies."[3] Depicting fantasy and resistance as complexly embedded, Jacir engages the contradictions that underlie subjective identification when "the other" desires to manifest "the self" within Western models of heroics and valor. The story plays on a silent screen as the viewer watches Tawfig assume the symbolic stance of the perpetrators of American manifest destiny. As the viewer studies Tawfig, s/he sees both the "cowboy" and the "Indian" (or the "native"), and is forced to contend with two conflicting identities converging in one character. Perhaps only then can s/he recognize the irreconcilable fantasy for young Arab boys identifying with tropes of masculinity constructed by a Western gaze.

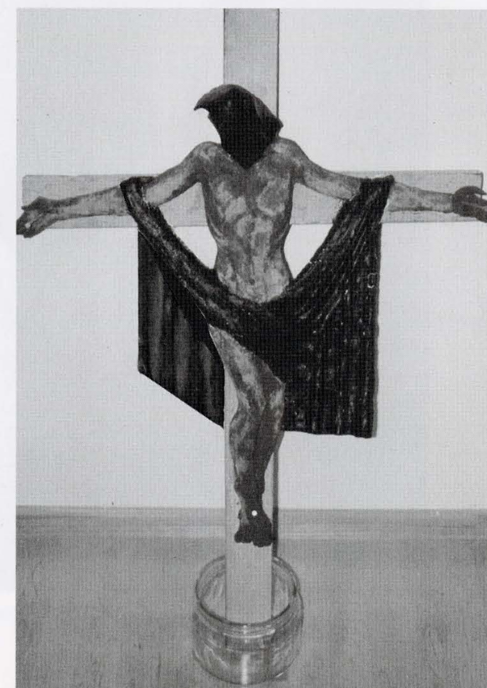
Jacir brings the idea of the American West into dialogue with Zionist manifest destiny in the creeping annexation of Palestine, as land is confiscated, and olive trees, orange groves and communities are gutted and settled by the homestead. While Zionist imperialism has forced millions of Palestinians into exile, these nomadic citizens manifest their destinies in a plurality of ways, embodying the necessary contradictions that mark their lives as refugees and prisoners. Jacir is an Arab and Christian Palestinian in a predominantly Muslim Middle East. She embodies the complexity of globalized subjects in an increasingly migratory world who negotiate ever-fleeting prescriptions of self and other, citizen and foreigner, insider and outsider. Jacir is caught between a "Palestinian colonial past and an American imperial space."[4] She addresses the plight of a people while creating a textual/visual countertext to engage and reframe hegemonic scripts. Their lives of exile mirror millions who also exist in between. They weave seemingly bifurcated narratives, refuting the formation of identity as static and monolithic.

Also engaging the discursiveness of "the hero," Ali Dadgar's triptych, Portrait of *Hero 1, Portrait of Hero 2* and *Self Portrait,* depicts three characters painted in lush vermilion and earth tones that are rich in intricate texturing and subtle symbolism. His palimpsest of iconographic imagery creates eclectic costumed characters composed by hybrid features such as beaks, long noses and mouse ears, each engaging inconsistent signifying systems within mainstream representations of "other." Each of Dadgar's characters is bound by the stereotype, and the contradiction and repetition inherent within that formation. Dadgar writes, "The word stereotype originally referred to the method of reproducing a printing plate by fixing an image. We could say that cultural stereotypes are fundamentally visual and that they become fixed in their repetition. Stereotypes, icons and relics of popular culture circulate in a transnational economy of images. They leave impressions, imposing patterns and associations that are recognized and repeated. They also come together in unpredictable ways and explode their contexts."[5] Layering mixed media elements of paint and silkscreen, Dadgar's engagement with hybridity can be found in the formalist dimensions of his work, which further elicit the political implications of cultural hybridity, and his personal narrative, that of living transnationally as an Iranian in the US. He reclaims the space of representation by making overt the overdetermined and absurd contradictions we find in the fabrication of knowledge as "absolute," and the impression of "other," as such.

Haleh Niazmand, in her four-part wall installation, *Dressing the Part: Exotic and Alien; Dressing the Part: Fit; Virgin;* and *Gotcha,* lures the viewer into the unsettling space of voyeurism established by the quest for the Orient. On one wall hangs a series of round sculptured frames of pristinely painted female body parts, bound by black material, (*Dressing the Part: Exotic and Alien* and *Virgin*). On the second wall, diagonal from the first, is a sculpture of a woman's head with a sheer black veil, revealing only her mouth in full laughter (*Dressing the Part: Fit*), and a woman's forearm in black clothing in the thumbs-up position (*Gotcha*). Both protrude from the wall. Niazmand captures the voyeur and coaxes him/her into what seems like private space, encouraging him/her to peer into these fetishistic keyholes created by the sculptured frames and to see something he/she should not. Niazmand's work emphasizes the notion of framing, creating an illicit window into a world of sexual fantasy and exoticism, not unlike Delacroix's much celebrated paintings of the Orient.

It is clear that the women of Niazmand's installation are not wallflowers; they are powerful, as if undeterred by the invasion and violation of their bodies by the lingering gaze. This resistance is particularly well captured by *Gotcha*. The position of the woman's hand is thumbs up, which signifies "good job" in America, while it means "fuck you" in Iran. *Virgin* is equally defiant and features an anatomically incorrect rendition of a young girl's vagina. Encapsulated in the fetishistic imaginary, *Virgin* shows the disconnection between fantasy and reality, and the manner in which the Orient can only be conjured through fantasy, because it is does not exist in reality. In this space of transnational feminist resistance, Niazmand draws upon the interrelatedness of gender, race and sexuality in relation to Islam and Western imperialism. Niazmand critiques the manner in which the West strategically stereotypes representations of veiled Muslim women as a means to demonize Islam. Here, Muslim women become emblematic of victimization and Islam's "other" who are in need of liberation by the West. These representations of "difference" create a system of apartheid that neglects the multiple ways in which Muslim women negotiate their own relationships to the veil, which are marked by both agency and resistance. Niazmand's frames are deliberately hermetic, offering no context or reference, they are void of history and its multiple articulations.

Khalil Bendib also engages opposing systems that ensnare the subject of other. *Gas Christ* features a sculpture of the crucifixion, with the head of Jesus suffocated by a black hood and the base of the cross resting in a glass jar filled with petroleum. Low across the arms of the figure hangs a black drape concealing the figure's pelvic region. Referencing the Abu Ghraib photo of the hooded Iraqi tortured by US troops, Bendib demonstrates the manner in which the dehumanized Iraqi is emblematic of the nativizing gaze of Western Orientalism vis-à-vis the "Middle East." Bendib situates "Operation Iraqi Freedom" in relation to the history of the Christian crusades, both of which have decimated land, nation, culture and humanity. He situates the feminization of "the Orient" in relation to the fantasy of colonial missionarism. These ideologies, which pervade nineteenth-century European and American art, position "the so-called 'Orient'... as a repository for Western male/missionary sexual fantasies about vast virgin lands replete with prodigiously sexualized yet passively acquiescent savages uninhibited by Christian/civilized norms."[6] Bendib reworks Andre Serrano's *Piss Christ,* replacing urine for oil, "the new object of Western desire," representing the ambivalence of the figure of Christ, who signifies both to legitimate the genocide wrought by Christian fundamentalism, and to identify Christ as the colonized native on the part of Arab Christians.



Khalil Bendib, *Gas Christ,* mixed media sculpture, 2004, Courtesy: Sana Makhoul

The colonized native is the subject of Rheim Alkadhi's installation, *Demonstration: strangulation of the linguistic impulse / performability of the resistant character.* Alluding to the case of a Palestinian worker who was fired for accidentally speaking Arabic in an Israeli McDonald's, Alkadhi references how hegemony, globalization and subjugation control the enforcement of language as a colonial imperative. Her installation comprises a soft sculpture of a dead chicken, with Arabic text sewn onto its stomach, strangulated by a yellow scarf carefully splayed in the shape of McDonald's "golden arches." Across the room rests the second component of Alkadhi's piece, a single-channel installation playing footage of the artist strangling herself. At the end of the video the artist cuts loose the yellow sash with scissors, emancipating herself from subjective colonization, calling upon her audience to question how language is interwoven into subjectivities of resistance, where articulation marks the basis of both

Taraneh Hemami, *Hall of Reflection: Remembrances of Iranian Immigrants*, mixed media installation, 2004, Courtesy: Sana Makhoul

restriction and suppression, and defiance and opposition.

This context of colonization is a discursive one, and it comprises historicity and its employment of hegemonic narratives. These frozen categories of representation decontextualize knowledge and memory. It is the resilience of hegemonic scripts and the narratives they obscure that Abdelali Dahrouch addresses in his video installation *Yellow Citizen.* The work features the interrelated histories of Japanese Americans during World War II and Arab Americans post-9/11. Archival footage of Japanese Americans being carted away on trains and buses to internment camps is interwoven with close-ups of Arab and Muslim men, women and children. These histories converge in relation to the systems of color-coding devised by Homeland Security in 2003 to mark those citizens who pose a threat to our national security creating, in effect, the new "Yellow Peril." On the projected surface is a band of yellow paint that sweeps across the faces of those in the video. This band recalls the devastating history of color-coding, reminiscent of Nazi Germany (when Jews, homosexuals, gypsies and the mentally ill were forced to don color-coded bands), and connects this "branding" with the post-9/11 climate of fear and terror. On the floor lies a 5'x15' rectangular configuration of loose yellow tempera powder, which echoes the yellow band on the wall. While the floor piece gives the illusion of being set a toe print of a shoe reveals its fragility. Much like the stereotype assumes fixity and authority through repetition, each particle of yellow paint connotes this function, and the spectre of terror only gains credence through being multiplied *ad infinitum* until it achieves the illusion of a threat, materializing into the yellow band. In the darkened installation space, the viewer is captured by the moving images that lull across the expanse of yellow. S/he reconciles the seemingly disparate communities of Arabs and Japanese as their faces, memories and histories fade in and out seamlessly. Dahrouch writes, "*Yellow Citizen* positions Japanese Americans and Arab Americans at the threshold of peace and devastation, representing solidarity in the struggle for recognition and restitution from a nation that consists of so much more complexity and diversity than conventional representation would otherwise presume. It hopes to remind us of lessons that should have been learned so that they will never be repeated again."[7]

While Dahrouch draws our attention to cultural memory in relation to historiography, the works of Doris Bittar and Taraneh Hemami engage the viewer with regards to subjective memory. Their works represent personalized accounts of cultural perception and encourage the viewer to rethink his/her own consciousness of past and present. Bittar's *Stripes & Stars* series were created in response to the events of 9/11. Her paintings feature fragments of the United States flag, onto which Islamic floral and calligraphic patterns are carefully etched. Bittar's work re-imagines the US in relation to vast communities of diasporic citizens whose lives, cultures and traditions comprise the heterogeneity of American cultural heritages. She shifts the common sense logic of the nation state—symbolized in the waving American flag, representative of the enduring monocultural ideologies of the nation state — toward a consciousness of transnational "diversity," reconstituting an American flag that reflects postmodern fragmentation and difference. Bittar describes the conflict experienced by Arab and Muslim Americans post-9/11 as follows, "I felt a sense of loyalty, protection and anger toward both cultures as their symbols and patterns layered in my mind seamlessly."[8] The politics of cultural citizenship Bittar critiques delimit fixed parameters of inclusion and exclusion, enfranchisement and otherness, belonging and displacement. These stringent notions of citizen/alien relegate people of colour to the other/outsider, as opposed to those who move fluidly between and among nation states, within and across hybrid landscapes of culture and psyche and beyond borders of culture, race, ethnicity and citizenry.

Taraneh Hemami's *Hall of Reflections: Remembrances of Iranian Immigrants* depicts a collection of family photographs from 1900 to the present, each rendering a portrayal of Iranian immigration on mirrored surfaces, which simultaneously engages the viewer to negotiate the multiple readings of insider/outsider, as well as the overwrought history of stereotypical images of Muslims in the US. Through the humanizing frames of Hemami's ancestors, the viewer finds similarities through identifying with shared familial bonds, rather than focusing on the mythologies of ineluctable difference often posed by the "other." Hemami writes, "The mirrors have the effect of calling you near for a closer inspection — yet one can never get close enough, as the images inside the mirrors are replaced by the image of the viewer when you get close. As you walk away, you can see them clearly — as if although on public display, the family albums always remain private and protected from the outsider's gaze."[9] Here Hemami describes the constant interplay between here and there, now and then, us and them, and the spaces of liminality where we find home.

The work of the artists of *Somewhere Elsewhere* demonstrates the manner in which exile has engendered new spaces of resistance, creating an imagined community of Arab/Iranian/Muslim/Americans who endeavor for social justice and progressive change through their art. Each artist explores alienation and difference in their work, in relation to living between worlds, and the simultaneous sensations of displacement and belonging these experiences engender. Their work converges in meaningful ways, even as the subject matter, vision and medium through which they convey these issues remain distinct. Together they represent an imagined community of Southwest Asian and North African oppositional struggles. This scenario is "imagined," Chandra Mohanty writes, "not because it is not 'real,' but because it suggests potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries, and "community," because in spite of internal hierarchies within third world contexts, it nevertheless suggests a significant, deep commitment to what Benedict Anderson, in referring to the idea of the nation, calls 'horizontal comradeship.'"[10]

The textual and visual contrapuntal work of the artists of *Somewhere Elsewhere* reestablishes borders and homelands, creating alternative realities in their collective struggle against legacies of colonization. The artists reframe national and cultural identity from the fluid and fractured spaces of "citizen," "refugee," "immigrant," "foreign national" and "expatriate." They erode fixed boundaries and categories of identification and engender a consciousness of difference, social justice, and equality, as well as the recognition of history and international law. The reductive homogenization and classification of "the Middle East," especially in relation to post-9/11 politics of preemption, the protracted war on Iraq and the Bush Administration's policy of unilateralism, have created the specter of the alien-subject, who exists elusively—but, nonetheless, definitively — in the US nation-state's collective imaginary.

Across and within vast geographical regions — that includes the US, France, and Britain — each artist represents communities composed of diverse populations, and together they re-imagine home, community and solidarity. Their art provides a context to realize another possibility, and a site to redefine the parameters of international relations as world citizens living interdependently in a realm confined by the disavowal of history and hegemony. Together they endeavor to map the broader implications of cultural and geographic identity — and the complexities that lie therein. Embodying the vital heterogeneity within US art practice, *Somewhere Elsewhere* looks to the visual art sector as a site for progressive change and reminds us of the multiple articulations of these spaces that continue to evolve in creative practice.

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Notes

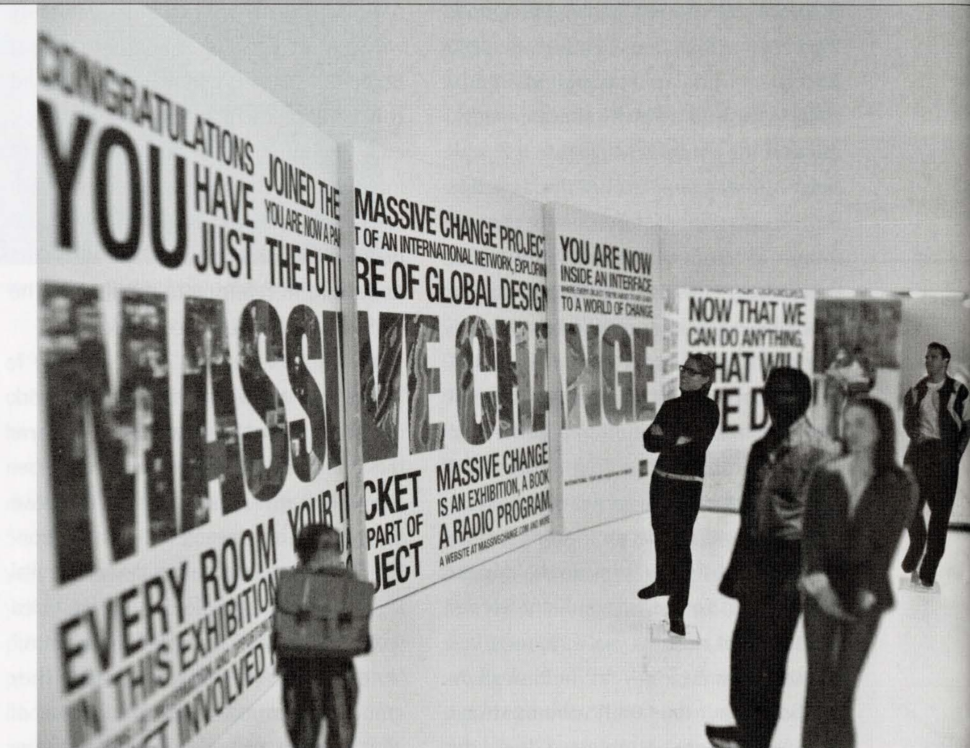
1. Mahmoud Darwish, quoted by Edward Said in *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 2.
2. Annemarie Jacir, *Artist Statement:* www.birwaz.org, 2004.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Bill Ashcroft, *Edward Said* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 6.
5. Ali Dadgar, *Artist Statement:* www.birwaz.org, 2004.
6. Khalil Bendib, *Artist Statement:* www.birwaz.org, 2004.
7. Abdelali Dahrouch, *Artist Statement:* www.birwaz.org, 2004
8. Doris Bittar, *Artist Statement:* www.birwaz.org, 2004.
9. Taraneh Hemami, *Artist Statement:* www.birwaz.org, 2004.
10. Chandra Mohanty, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 4.

Massive Change or More of the Same?

Massive Change: The Future of Global Design
Vancouver Art Gallery
2 October 2004 — 3 January 2005
review by Ian Wojtowicz

Bruce Mau's "Massive Change" exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery proposes an approach to design in the twenty-first century that rejects the pigeonholes of disciplinary tradition and offers design as a non-aesthetic activity of planning, creating and executing intentions for improving human welfare. Mau has taken-up a Haussmanesque attitude with his exhibit, carving boulevards through economies and connecting biotechnology, Third World development, transportation, sustainability and materials science. In the words of one of the exhibit's posters "it's not about the world of design, it's about the design of the world." The world that Mau proposes is decidedly capitalist, imperial and technological, fitting neatly into the void left behind by the dot-com bubble. That late-nineties techno-exuberance has found a home, and it calling for your attention.

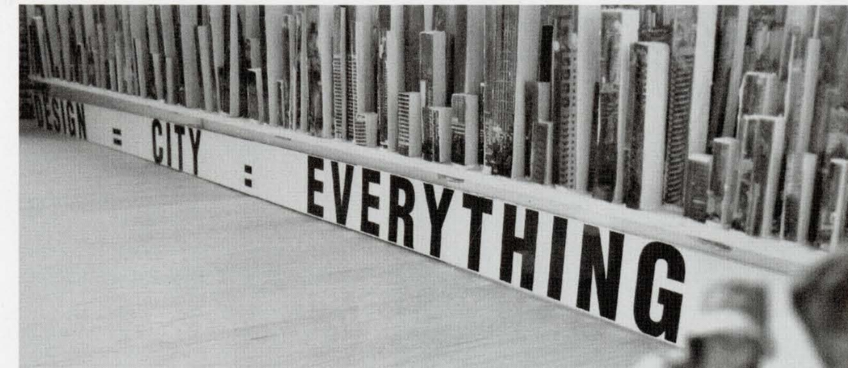
Walking into the exhibit, the viewer is immediately inundated with reams of wall-mounted text that introduce the exhibit's philosophy of unbridled optimism. One wall reads "The 20th century will be chiefly remembered by future generations not as an era of political conflict or technical innovation, but as an age in which human society dared to think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective." A noble statement that just barely manages to conceal its imperial



All images in review are installation views of *Massive Change*, Courtesy: Vancouver Art Gallery

undertones. Next, the wall reads that "Massive Change is a story about distributed problem solving, global cooperation, generosity, openness and connectedness, and the collective production and distribution of wealth on a scale the world has never seen." Again, this sounds pretty good but the use of so many buzzwords makes me uneasy.

"Now that we can do anything, what will we do?" Mau asks. His answer is to address issues of human development and sustainability through technological innovation instead of legal or cultural change. Most important, the show's subtitle "the future of global design" is purely posturing since all the innovations on display were actually authored in the West, many intended for use in the developing world. Mau's vision of globalization is an all too familiar pattern radiating outward from the developed world. Niki Dun's bicycle ambulance and the cheap, efficient Rocket wood cooking stoves displayed in the exhibit could no doubt help many people in developing nations, but there seemed to be no interest in learning from other cultures so that we



might change the way we live here. Mau's only approach to change is to commodify it so we can keep building wealth and buying our way to a better world. One of my favourite blogs (www.livejournal.com/users/apropos/) posted an insightfully succinct review of the show: "this is a bizarre, manipulative exhibit that seems to have taken its entire political modus operandi out of the pages of *The Economist* and painted it to look like *Adbusters*."

Each room in the exhibit is a distinctly designed environment. A wide video projection extols the virtues of urbanization as "humanity's greatest triumph." A room full of alternative-energy vehicles appeals to visitors' sense of techno-lust, along with a mini exhibit of Segways, which Steve Jobs once had the audacity to call "an improvement on walking." Another room is entirely wrapped in digital images — floor, walls and ceiling — ranging in scale from microscopic images to cosmic telescope images. Somewhere in the centre, buried and completely out of context, are images of missing women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Why the plight of these women is included here is beyond me since they are completely lost in the big picture. Another disturbing room is completely devoted to the civilian use of military technology. Humvees, Spam and remote-controlled toys all serve to remind us that we live in a society buffered from war elsewhere. Mau presents these technologies uncritically, matter-of-fact.

Close to the end of the exhibit is a series of voting booths that ask visitors to puzzle over complex ethical issues surrounding biotechnology. Because voting on each contentious issue occurs out in the open, the structure encourages interaction between people in the gallery space and elicits quite passionate responses from visitors. The discussion this section generates clearly helps people sort through the confusing mass of ethical concerns, though the exhibit clearly steers people in favour of biotechnology by setting it up as a natural extension of previous agricultural and medical techniques.

The exhibit's central thesis, that design has the power to change the world for the better, remains an open question in my mind, given the ability of designers to make bad judgments. A whole companion exhibit could be devoted to examples of bad design. Le Corbusier's design for the city of Chandigarh in northern India, for example, which more closely resembles a

sprawling Californian city designed for extensive car use than a functional, high-density Indian city, stands as historical testament to the arrogance of Western designers inclined to think they have a better sense of how the rest of the world should live.

One of the exhibit's numerous passages of wall-mounted text contains a telling quote, "The power of markets, brought to bear on the world's real problems, is the power to change the world." This attitude ignores the fact that in a free-market system, wealth has a natural tendency to concentrate with those who are already powerful. One of the exhibit's key thinkers is an economist by the name of Hernando de Soto, who advocates the privatization of land in developing countries so the poor can build wealth from equity. From what the world has witnessed of privatization over the past thirty years, it is agile capitalists and not the poor who stand to benefit.

It is nice to see that one section of the exhibit acknowledges that our society is too bound up in calculating wealth on the basis of GNP and the exchange of money. Other systems exist — ecological, spiritual, human — whose value is ignored by modern capitalism. The notion of alternative economics is a powerful one, and worth exploring more thoroughly. The open source movement, for example, is helping to keep a vast array of technological and conceptual developments in the public realm, outside the control of corporations. Massive Change rightfully nods to Lawerence Lessig's writings on this subject.

Another decontextualized quote that appears in the last room reveals a central objective of the Massive Change project: "We will eradicate poverty." For all the nice examples of water-purification systems and micro-loan projects, the notion of eliminating poverty butts up against another statistic in the show: "if all the world's population is raised to the American standard of living, the land use required to sustain agriculture, energy production and other demands would need the equivalent of four earths." It seems that poverty cannot be eradicated without fundamentally reducing the developed world's ecological footprint. Again, the exhibit offers us buzzwords and concepts without addressing the necessities of their realization. Sustainability can't simply be a convenient word thrown about to market designs, and here the West has much to learn.

Inclusivity is one of the strategies of the exhibit. The Massive Change book explains that "when we use the term 'we,' we mean 'we' as citizens collectively imagining our futures." For all the mention of the collective, the exhibit is prescriptive, with a feedback area tucked far to the back and an underused discussion forum hidden deep within their website.

In the end, the exhibit feels like an advertisement for Bruce Mau's design studio and school rather than an exhibition of an open, globally interconnected collaborative project. The exhibit was designed by ten students from Mau's postgraduate school, the Institute Without Boundaries, the sole curriculum of which revolves around Mau's vision for the world. My concern is that people encounter the exhibit without pushing back at it. It's easy to get caught up in high gloss and techno-fetishism without recognizing the realities and consequences of the ideas being presented.

Ian Wojtowicz is a writer and artist living in Vancouver.

Is Another World Possible?

Report on the European Social Forum, London 2004
review by Susan Kelly

From 15 to 17 October 2004, the third European Social Forum (ESF) was held at Alexandra Palace and at Bloomsbury, London. Following previous ESFS in Florence in 2002, Paris in 2003, and in accordance with the World Social Forum Charter of Principles drawn up in Porto Alegre in 2001, this ESF sought to support an open debate that would challenge existing processes of capitalist globalization and collectively affirm that another world is possible.

Babel translator booths, Alexandra Palace, 2004, Courtesy: Susan Kelly, Photo: Naomi Salaman

One could produce as many reports about the European Social Forum as there were delegates and speakers. And they would all be quite different. The sprawling, chaotic and noisy infiniteness of the programs, their sites and the issues discussed makes any attempt at summary impossible. For if the basis of the social forums is to bring together the many perspectives and approaches to social justice, resistance of corporate globalization and building alternatives, it is only right that no coherent party line emerges. This is the juggle and indeed the wager of the social forums. The question they ask is how to create a structure, a sense of momentum and a commonality that brings together without privileging some subjects, struggles and means over others.

What does emerge resolutely from the social forums is an intense cacophony of voices and ideas struggling to be heard. From the literally deafness-inducing space of Alexandra Palace, where the main hall held nine simultaneous seminars barely shielded from one another, to the flyers and posters that covered every conceivable surface, the force of address at the ESF was overwhelming. The sense of urgency to be heard was also witnessed at the end of every official seminar when the listed speakers were finished and the mike was taken by audience members working in related areas, often desperate to make connections and relate their issues to the assembled group.

For people and groups often working in isolation and through single languages, the ESF is a precious opportunity to connect, learn from each other's strategies and orchestrate actions and campaigns internationally. This was made feasible through free simultaneous translation into four or five European languages by the Babels, an international group of ad hoc translators.

Horizontals and Verticals

Throughout the three days insiders to the ESF process inhabiting the autonomous spaces watched like hawks for those who wore the red wristbands of the official ESF. From the outset of the organization of this year's events, an official and unofficial web-site and set of events emerged. Ranging from necessary critiques of the alleged undemocratic and opaque procedures of the official organizing committee(s) to more formulaic positions of

Nico Sgluglio from indymedia Malaga giving a talk on "Migration as a Social Movement," Alexandra Palace, Courtesy: Susan Kelly, Photo: Naomi Salaman

opposition to anything organized at all, a large and sustained group of theorists, activists and direct-action groups mobilized what they called the alternative ESF. This largely resulted from conflict between the so-called verticals (official organizations and political parties operating as representatives of larger constituencies)[1] and horizontals (autonomous or anarchist, self-organizing, non-membership-based networks working mostly through consensus decision-making procedures). As Isa Fremeaux has argued, the year of organizing prior to the ESF produced opposition between the horizontals' emphasis on process, and the verticals' desire to produce a mass event.[2] If one isn't to read these conflicts as a mere battle between two camps however, the concrete negotiations and arguments map a more crucial set of questions.

In an intriguing one-and-a-half day seminar entitled Life Despite Capitalism held at the London School of Economics, Nolasco Mamani spoke of how the Aymara people from the Andean Plateau had never been able to work with the principles of the traditional left in Bolivia: "The left presented itself as having all of the answers and all you had to do was join them."[3] In the 1980s the Aymara communities were accused of dividing the struggle, encouraged to wait for the revolution and figure out their histories and differences later. The speaker questioned this passive logic of signing up to preordained, largely Western, leftist principles and compared the problems the Aymara faced in the 1980s to what is presently happening in certain factions of the counter-globalization movement.

Mamani's words strongly echoed the criticisms of the vertical organizational structures of many central groups involved in the ESF. As Mamani pointed out, on an international level, these vertical structures also have a tendency to organize themselves along the lines of older forms of internationalist proletarian struggle, where the workers of the world unite to take power from the state. This tendency can be problematic as it often reads the legacy of the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s as merely fractious, politically correct identity politics that detract from the central aim of the movement. It seems that certain activists today have failed to notice that some of the most important moments that inspired the last eight years of global resistance began with peasant farmers in India protesting against patented seeds and land enclosures and the mobilizations of indigenous communities in Chiapas. In the name of unifying the movement, more traditional leftist parties with vertical organizational structures risk operating according to old Eurocentric, vanguardist principles that go against all that was supposed to be new about new politics. Viewing the conflict between the verticals and horizontals in London as strictly a fight for the autonomy of the social forum and against its cooptation by established politics is misleading. Rather, what is at stake is whether the social forums will ultimately support a triumphant return to a party-based international left, or construct a new space where participating networks, groups and individuals are strengthened across and beyond existing structures.

Building New Political Spaces

But of course, it is never that simple. A new international proletarianism is attractive to most and moreover, one needs to be careful not to pose false opposition between local, specific or informal struggles and the crucial articulation of new global structures that resist neo-liberalism and formulate alternative systems. It is possible to say, however, that the question of how to articulate these struggles is inextricably tied to the political spaces they take place in *and* construct. On day 2, in a workshop entitled Can You Change the World without Taking Power? John Holloway argued that efforts to create a better world have focused too much on the question of how to win State power.[4] He contends that creating a false opposition between the state and the market not only denies the historical imbrication of the state and capitalism, but leads to a situation where the actions of recently elected leftist parties, such as the PT in Brazil, always appear as betrayal. In saying this, Holloway linked what he saw as an unhealthy focus on the State and its structures of representation with what Nolasco Mamani (cited above) called a temporality of postponement, of *waiting* for the revolution or the next election. A particular concept of power and action is connected here to two forms of politics: a representational state politics that requires you wait to be given power *or* a politics that practices power by declaring "enough!" (*ya basta!*) and then builds new civic structures and collective forms. This attitude reflects the indebtedness of certain strands of new activism to the thought of the Italian Autonomia (and the more recent writings of Negri and Hardt), and to the struggles that are taking place in non-Western contexts.

It was not only from the perspective outlined above however, that the purpose of centring debates on what could be wrestled from the State was seriously questioned. One of the most exciting and radical strands within the ESF was the debate on migration, largely instigated by affiliates of the Frassanito Network.[5] In their articulation of migration as a social movement, Sandro Mezzadra (*Tavolo dei migranti*, Bologna), Isabel Saint-Saens (ACT-UP, Paris) and Nico Sgluglio (indymedia, Malaga), refused from the outset the rhetoric of victimhood that often frames discourses on refugees and migrancy.[6] Using concrete political demands for no borders and for freedom of movement, the Frassanito Network reconceptualized the nation-state's borders as selective inclusion and exclusion devices that produce cheap labour and illegal bodies. They provided a sustained critique of a European citizenship based on detention and transit-processing centres (or portals as they are called in Italy), located within Europe and increasingly in North Africa.[7] If this is the basis of citizenship and the function of borders they argue, looking to the state to protect minorities is no longer an option. Instead, the network, in the words of Nico Sgluglio, seeks to construct "political machines" and "post-national political spaces," to build new unions between migrants and precarious workers.

This Frassanito network's attempt to build new political spaces and unions, to me at least, represented one of most potentially powerful and constructive movements at the ESF. Already last year, Euro May Day was led in Milan and Barcelona not by trade unionists but by tens of thousands of "precarious workers" (immigrants, *sans papiers*, brainworkers, chainworkers, perma-temps, cultural workers and the unemployed). Through a network of social centres and campaigns spanning Andalucia and northern Morocco, indymedia Malaga and other groups built alliances between low-paid seasonal Spanish and immigrant workers on the basis of their shared experience of low-pay, precarious working conditions (mostly in strawberry production), and stratified and withheld citizenship, all of which optimize the conditions for labour exploitation. It is through such alliances and in the construction of these political spaces that Europe can be addressed as the global space it has always been. Rather than shoring up the remnants of the European welfare state, new alliances of precarious workers insist that we think of alternatives — for instance, a system of transnationally defined rights that apply to people wherever their place (not state) of residence might be. Utopian as it may sound, these are concrete attempts in a European context, for a timely and urgent rethinking of the 1970s call to address "here *and* elsewhere." And so one might ask, is this a vertical or a horizontal approach?

Alexandra Palace, Courtesy: Susan Kelly

It is clear that there is also a battle to be won inside the official social forums and that any sustained campaign must work across all terrains. What some of the movements seemed to propose however, is that while the nation state and established political structures are important sites of contestation, they mustn't define the imaginary or the horizon of this other possible world.

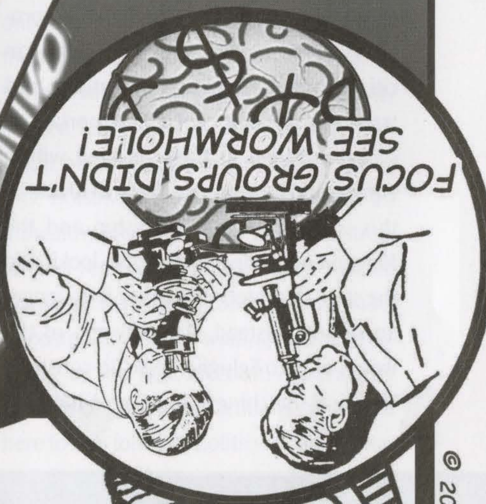
And where did culture fit into all this? In spite of an excellent series of screenings, theatrical productions and temporary exhibitions in Alexandra Palace, the majority of the art world stayed happily ensconced at the Frieze Art Fair in the city's West End that same weekend.

Notes

1. During this ESF, these groups included the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, certain factions from ATTAC and the local Mayor Ken Livingstone and his Greater London Authority (the GLA) whose involvement was controversial from the outset.
2. Isa Fremeaux, "The Big Hug: Getting on with the London ESF," *Mute* 28 (Summer 2004), p. 70.
3. Nolasco Mamani, unpublished plenary session "Life Despite Capitalism," 16 October 2004.
4. See also John Holloway's book *Change the World without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).
5. Frassanito is the name of the place in Southern Italy, where the last NoBorder camp was held in Summer 2003. For further information see www.noborder.org.
6. Isabel Saint-Saens pointed out that this discourse seemed to be alive and well in the London ESF. She noted that in Florence in 2002 migrant issues were everywhere but unnamed. In Paris in 2003, migrancy became an official theme but in London the issues were tellingly placed under an official banner of Racism and Discrimination.
7. The current Libyan government now runs portals for North African migrants caught trying to cross the Mediterranean into Europe and for those deported from detention centres in Southern Italy.

ARTS COUNCIL REVEALS WORMHOLE IN PEER ASSESSMENT

The BRAIN TRUST of the Canada Council's Visual Arts Section is poised to fundamentally alter the public arts-funding universe. By creating a semantic distortion of the term 'peer assessment' they have opened a gaping **wormhole** — a direct conduit to the universe known as the MARKET. In its wisdom the BRAIN TRUST will enlist art dealers and curators to be the Gatekeepers at the business end of this **wormhole**. They are to be hailed by artists as their 'parallel peers'.



With **PARADIGM** realignment artists seeking public funds must first gain the favour of an accredited **parallel peer**. Should this gatekeeper deign to provide an exhibition, the artist will get a **wormhole-pass** into the antechamber of Council support. There they must solve the riddle of the **pure peers** to un-lock the door to funding.

Regrettably, the BRAIN TRUST tells us, fewer artists will gain Council funds in this new system. Those lucky enough to succeed, however, should re-enter the MARKET universe with new **ZIP** — increased production power & the quantum career potential to soar into that rarefied MARKET zone of brand name individuals known as **STARS**! The hope is their twinkling light will improve the beleaguered status of ALL.

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LIFEWORLDS-ARTSCAPES

CONTEMPORARY IROQUOIS ART

FEBRUARY 20 - APRIL 24, 2005

WOODLAND CULTURAL CENTRE
184 MOHAWK ST. BRANTFORD
(519) 759 - 2650

Everyday Light

Family Photographs Selected by Contemporary First Nations Artists

Tobacco pickers, Delhi, Ontario, 1917, Collection of David Hannan

Guest Curated by Rebecca Baird

Organized for national tour by the Thunder Bay Art Gallery

Now available for travel to galleries and non-traditional spaces.

For further information - Glenn Allison, Curator, Thunder Bay Art Gallery
(807) 577-6427 • info@tbag.ca

THUNDER BAY ART GALLERY

The assistance of the Museums Assistance Program, Heritage Canada is gratefully acknowledged.

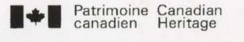

photo by: C.S. Earle

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a festival of contemporary photography

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ten venues in May in downtown North Bay
www.kennedygallery.org/camerafrontera

major sponsor

LATITUDE 53
CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE

Second Floor, 10248 106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 1H5

T: 780.423.5353
E: info@latitude53.org
W: www.latitude53.org

Submission Deadline: April 29th

March 4th to April 2nd
Tim Dallett - Flow Chart

April 8th to May 7th
the albertA wildlife show
Featuring new works by Tom Bagley, Penny Buckner, Paul James Coutts, Fish Griwkowsky, Dara Humniski, Colleen Langford, and Tandie McLeod

May 18th to 30th
Visualeyez... a festival of performance art
Curatorial Theme: Ceremony and Ritual

SNAP GALLERY
society of northern alberta print-artists

10309 97th Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 0M1

T: 780.423.1492
E: snap@snapartists.com
W: www.snapartists.com

Submission Deadline: September 1st

February 24th to March 19th
Kelly McCray - Gnawts

March 24th to April 30th
Tomoyo Ihaya - Searching for Agua

May 5th to June 11th
Patrick Mahon - Shopshifter

SNAPpy Saturday Children Program:
Teaching children about printmaking techniques through five-week studio programs.
Call for information on upcoming sessions.

harcourthouse

Harcourt House Arts Centre
Third Floor, 10215 112 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1M7

T: 780.426.4180
E: harcourt@telusplant.net
W: www.harcourthouse.ab.ca

Submission Deadlines:
Artist in Residence Program: May 31st
Main Gallery Submission: June 30th

March 17th to April 16th
Suzanne Caines - Chain Making
and in the front room...Kim Sala

April 21st to May 21st
Shelley Miller - Consumptuous
and in the front room...Ashley Andel

May 26th to June 18th
Lylian Klimek
and in the front room...Jennifer Rae

June 23 - July 16, 2005
The WORKS Visual Arts Festival Venue
Drawing in Stride Fundraising Event