

Volume 30 Number 1 \$5.50

ART MEDIA POLITICS

# FUSE

MAGAZINE

www.fusemagazine.org



Alessandra Renzi and Stephen Turpin on the state of our precarity ... Jen Budney on the possibilities of biennales ... Amber Dean and Kara Granzow on gentrification Edmonton-style



White Water Gallery & the W. K. P. Kennedy Gallery are pleased to present the digital archives project:

**A Retrospective of Artists in North Bay and Surrounding Areas**



coming Spring, 2007 to  
www.virtualmuseum.ca



**& TRIBE** present

**CORALLING ART**

Aboriginal Curatorial Practice on the Prairies and Beyond

The 2nd Annual Aboriginal Curatorial Conference

May 18 - 19 2007  
Delta Bessborough Hotel  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada

For more information on how to register please go to  
[www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org](http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org)  
or contact TRIBE at 306 244 4814 or [tribe.inc@sasktel.net](mailto:tribe.inc@sasktel.net)

**gallerygachet**

■ **EMILY CARR GOES EASTSIDE**

to January 28 • closing party Saturday, Jan 27, 7-11pm  
An exhibit of new visual art from 10 Downtown Eastside resident artists produced in collaboration with 10 students from Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design. Supported by the BC Arts Council.

■ **TWO WORLDS: TANIA WILLARD**  
February 2 to 25

Artist-in-residence Tania Willard wraps up her 6 months residency with an exhibition of new prints alongside Riel Manywounds, Marika Swan, Tyler Toews, Angela Sterritt, Taylor Omelak, Gabrielle L'Hirondelle, Tristan V. and Peter Morin. Supported by Canada Council for the Arts and the City of Vancouver.



■ **OUT OF THE RAIN**  
November 2006 to April 2007

Artists Jayce Salloum, Archer Pechawis, Tania Willard, and others mentor twenty DTES marginalized artists facing: homelessness, poverty, mental health and addiction. [www.outoftherain.org](http://www.outoftherain.org) Supported by BC Arts Council.

88 E Cordova, Vancouver, V6A1K2, 604.687.2468 [gallery@gachet.org](mailto:gallery@gachet.org)  
Gachet is a collectively-run artist-run centre for artists informed by mental health issues, exhibiting local+international contemporary+outsider artists.



[www.gachet.org](http://www.gachet.org) annual submissions deadline July 15.08

kamloops ART GALLERY



January 21 to March 18, 2007

**Cities of Canada  
The Seagram Collection**

Produced and travelled by the McCord Museum, Montréal, and made possible through the generosity of The Seagram Company Ltd. Presentation of this exhibition in Kamloops is made possible with assistance from the Museums Assistance Program Department of Canadian Heritage.

Werner Braun:  
The Heritage Kamloops Collection

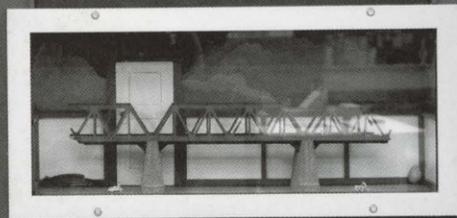
The Saskatchewan Trilogy  
by Brian Stockton

Sponsored by Simmons, Black and Emsland Insurance Services

[www.kag.bc.ca](http://www.kag.bc.ca) 250-377-2400  
465 Victoria Street, Kamloops, BC



ETERNAL



SPRING

**Don Holman  
The Eternal Spring Series**

February 2 to March 25, 2007

**TOM THOMSON MEMORIAL ART GALLERY**

840 First Avenue West, Owen Sound, Ontario N4K 4K4  
519 376-1932 [www.tomthomson.org](http://www.tomthomson.org)

WALTER PHILLIPS GALLERY

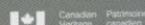
World Upside Down  
Until March 4, 2007  
Curator: Richard W. Hill

18:Beckett  
March 31 - May 27, 2007  
Curator: Séamus Kealy  
Organized by the Blackwood Gallery,  
University of Toronto at Mississauga

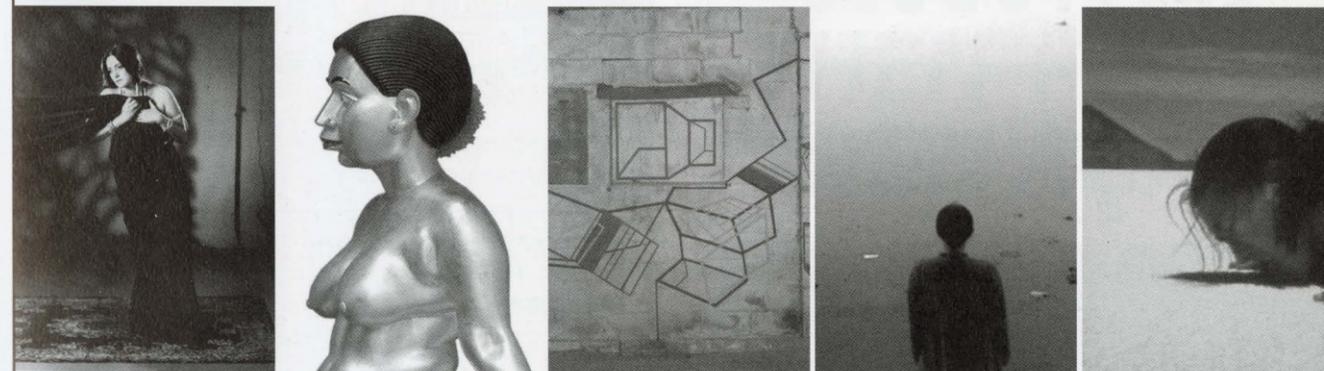
Simone Jones and Lance Winn, *Knock*  
January 18 to March 4, 2007  
Curator: Sylvie Gilbert

Recent publication  
*Bungalow Blitz:  
another history of Irish architecture*  
Co-produced with Middlesex University

[www.banffcentre.ca/wpg](http://www.banffcentre.ca/wpg)



**Post Object** January 18 - March 11, 2007



Work by **Michael Joo, Kimsooja, Samina Mansuri, Pushpamala N., and Ravinder Reddy**  
Curated by **Deepali Dewan**

**Opening** Thursday, January 18, 5 - 9 pm FREE SHUTTLE BUS TO DMG DEPARTS 401 RICHMOND ST. W. AT 6 PM

**Catalogue Launch** Sunday, February 11, 12 - 4 pm

For more information on *Post Object* programming and events, visit [www.utsc.utoronto.ca/dmg](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/dmg)

**DMG** DORIS MCCARTHY GALLERY University of Toronto Scarborough  
1265 Military Trail Toronto Ontario M1C 1A4 416.287.7007 [www.utsc.utoronto.ca/dmg](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/dmg)  
Tuesday to Friday 10AM - 4PM & Sunday Noon to 5PM



**torontodartsbouncil**  
An arm's length body of the City of Toronto

A SPACE GALLERY

February 16 to March 17, 2007



21

Cheryl l'Hirondelle  
Divya Mehra  
Jayce Salloum  
Camille Turner  
Gabriel Yahyahkeekoot  
Curated by Elwood Jimmy

March 23 to April 28, 2007



**Aberrations  
(ex situ)**

Manuela Lalic  
Boja Vasic  
Curated by Ingrid Mayrhofer  
Co-presented  
with the Images Festival

401 RICHMOND STREET WEST, SUITE 110  
TORONTO, ONTARIO, M5V 3A8, 416-979-9633  
INFO@ASPACEGALLERY.ORG WWW.ASPACEGALLERY.ORG

A Space Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of our members and project partners as well as the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council.



D

DUNLOP  
ART  
GALLERY

REGINA PUBLIC LIBRARY, 2311 12TH AVENUE  
REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN S4P 3Z5  
TEL 306 1 777 6040 FAX 306 1 949 7264  
WWW.DUNLOPARTGALLERY.ORG

**Dunlop Art Gallery**

CENTRAL GALLERY

**Lynn Richardson:  
Inter-Glacial Free Trade Agency**

Curator Dr. Elizabeth McLuhan  
Organized by Dunlop Art Gallery  
JANUARY 25 TO APRIL 1, 2007

**AutoBiographies**

Guest Curator Felipe Diaz  
Organized by Dunlop Art Gallery  
APRIL 20 TO JUNE 17, 2007

SHERWOOD VILLAGE GALLERY

**Familiar But Foreign**

Assistant Curator Elizabeth Matheson  
Organized by Dunlop Art Gallery  
JANUARY 21 TO MARCH 25, 2007

**AutoBiographies**

Guest Curator Felipe Diaz  
Organized by Dunlop Art Gallery  
APRIL 20 TO JUNE 3, 2007



David Altmejd, *The Lovers* (detail), 2004.



David Altmejd

Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens  
27 January to 25 March 2007  
Organized by Galerie de l'UQAM and curated by Louise Déry

**Re-Envisioning Habitat**

Oakville Galleries at Centennial Square  
27 January to 18 March 2007  
Selections from the permanent collection curated by Derek Knight

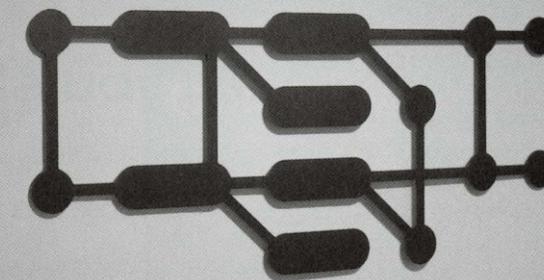
In Gairloch Gardens  
1306 Lakeshore Road East  
at Centennial Square  
100 Navy Street  
Oakville, Ontario  
tel 905.844.4402  
fax 905.844.7968  
<info@oakvillegalleries.com>  
www.oakvillegalleries.com



Oakville galleries

Adrian Göllner | Colwyn Griffith

Win-Win | Dollar Store



19 January–25 March 2007

oag GAO | The Ottawa Art Gallery  
La Galerie d'art d'Ottawa

2 Daly Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1N 6E2  
613-233-8699 · info@ottawaartgallery.ca  
www.ottawaartgallery.ca

ADRIAN GÖLLNER, WIN-WIN, STEEL SCULPTURE WITH FOUNDED COP PAINT, 2004

**LATITUDE 53**

CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE  
10248 - 106 Street Edmonton www.latitude53.org

**S.B. Edwards - I love the Shitty**

Stephen Fisher - No (such) Place  
12 Jan - 10 Feb



Photo courtesy of S.B. Edwards 2006

16 Feb - 17 Mar: TBA & Natalie Danchuk

24 Mar: 53 Ways to Leave Your Lover (fundraiser)



JANUARY 11 – FEBRUARY 24, 2007

**Benny Nemorofsky Ramsay**

*Radio Killed the Video Star*

**Jackson 2bears**

*The Stand-off*

MARCH 8 – APRIL 21, 2007

**Heather Goodchild**

*From Some Wilderness Place*

**Phyllis Grant**

*Contemporary Observations in Photos,  
Drawing, and Music and Inspired by Patterns,  
Forces, and Beats in Nature*



ART GALLERY OF  
SOUTHWESTERN MANITOBA

710 Rosser Ave, Unit 2 • Brandon, MB • R7A 0K9  
P 204.727.1036 • F 204.726.8139 • www.agsm.ca

THE ART GALLERY OF SOUTHWESTERN MANITOBA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT OF THE MANITOBA ARTS COUNCIL, THE CITY OF BRANDON AND THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS.

**STEAM WHISTLE**  
PILSNER



DO ONE THING REALLY, REALLY WELL.

CLIVE ROBERTSON

**THEN +  
THEN AGAIN**

PRACTICES WITHIN  
AN ARTIST-RUN CULTURE 1969-2005

SUNDAY 11 MARCH - SATURDAY 14 APRIL 2007

**nac**

Niagara Artists' Centre  
354 St. Paul Street  
St. Catharines, ON L2R 3N2  
905-641-0331  
artists@nac.org  
www.nac.org



Thinking of contributing to FUSE?

Well, you should.

Send your proposals to our editorial committee on anything that catches your fancy ... after checking our online contributor guidelines, of course. We'll get back to you.

[www.fusemagazine.org/write.html](http://www.fusemagazine.org/write.html)

# FUSE MAGAZINE

Volume 30 Number 1 January 2007

## Board of Directors

Adrian Blackwell, Robinder Sehdev,  
Syrus Marcus Ware, Roberta Buiani, Firoza Elavia,  
Swintak, Tony Hewer

## Editorial Committee

Jessica Wyman, Gita Hashemi, Adrian Blackwell,  
Sally McKay

## Staff

Izida Zorde (associate editor)  
Heather Saunders (associate publisher)  
Suzanne Noga (design)  
Liz Clayton (copy editor)

## Contributing Editors

Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Calgary), Robin Curtis  
(Berlin), Allan deSouza (Los Angeles),  
Cliff Eyland (Winnipeg), Andrea Fatona  
(Peterborough), Sylvie Fortin (Durham nc),  
Richard Fung (Toronto), Tere Badia (Barcelona),  
Ashok Mathur (Vancouver/Kamloops),  
Ian Rashid (London), Clive Robertson (Kingston),  
Nell Tenhaaf (Toronto), Reggie Woolery  
(New York), Sharon Rosenberg (Edmonton),  
Kirsten Forkert (New York), tobias c. van veen  
(Montreal), Joseph Rosen (Montreal), Trish Salah  
(Montreal) R William Hill (London UK), Dot Tuer  
(Toronto and Argentina), Randy Lee Cutler  
(Vancouver), Janna Graham (London UK),  
Michelle Jacques (Toronto)

FUSE is published four times a year by Artons Cultural Affairs Society and Publishing Inc., a non-profit artists' organization. All inquiries and return of undeliverables to the following address:

Artons Cultural Affairs  
454-401 Richmond St W  
Toronto ON M5V 3A8 (Canada)  
email: [subscriptions@fusemagazine.org](mailto:subscriptions@fusemagazine.org)  
tel: (416) 340-8026

Publications Mail agreement No. 1396609  
Registration No. 8623  
ISSN 0838-603X

Copyright © 2006 Artons Publishing Inc. All rights reserved under International Copyright Union. Any reproduction without permission is prohibited. Send permission requests to Access Copyright (1 800 893 5777). Artons Publishing purchases First North American Serial Rights and copyright reverts to the writer after publication. Artons Publishing assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Manuscripts will not be returned. A copy of our Writers' Guidelines is available on our website. Publication of an advertisement in FUSE does not include endorsement of the advertiser by the magazine. Opinions expressed outside of specifically marked editorials are not necessarily held by members of the Editorial Board.

Subscription rates: \$24 per year; Institutions \$36 per year (in Canada only). Outside Canada \$28 U.S. per year; \$36 International; Institutions \$48 U.S. Decisions regarding who qualifies as an individual subscriber remain the right of the publisher.

Printed in Canada by Sonic Print Management.

FUSE is indexed in the Alternative Press Index and ARTbibliographies Modern, and is distributed by, and a member of, Magazines Canada (416 504 0274). FUSE acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program and the Canada Magazine Fund toward our mailing, editorial, production, and project costs. We also acknowledge financial assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Finally, we are grateful for the many hours of volunteer and partially paid labour that are provided by everyone listed on our masthead, and some not so listed.



Canada



CENTRE DE DOCUMENTATION  
ARTEXTE  
DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

# contents

30.1

6 Editorial  
Art, institutions and the precarity of social life

7 Letters

8 "Politics in Aspic:" Reflections on the Biennale of Sydney  
and its local effects  
*by Jen Budney*

14 The Art of Technology (and the technology of art)  
*interview by Anna Feigenbaum*

25 Nothing Fails Like Prayer: Notes on the Cult of Saint  
Precario  
*by Alessandra Renzi and Stephen Turpin*

36 Gentrification — West!  
*by Amber Dean and Kara Granzow*

43 Supporting Creativity, but only for 12 hours?:  
Nuit Blanche  
*review by Leah Sandals*

46 Cracking Up the Nation: Afshin Matlabi's *Terrorism,*  
*Democracy, Leisure*  
*review by Leila Pourtavaf*

49 Hotly Engaged or Cold and Distant?: A "Pure" Encounter:  
Iris Haussler's *The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach*  
*review by Naomi Binder Wall*

52 shortFuse  
Personal pastimes, disappointed laughter and culture  
under a Conservative majority  
*by Clive Robertson*

21 Artist Project  
The Anatomy of Narrautonomy: Tools for Rebuilding  
Lafin's Histories  
*by Mélisandre Schofield*

## Columns



## Feature



## Reviews



## Short Fuse Artist Project

## Art, institutions and the precarity of social life

In our pre-New Year editorial meeting we had an animated conversation about the commitments that Fuse would make as we entered into our 30th anniversary year. Having taken our 20th anniversary as an opportunity to document our past, going to our roots in Arton's Publishing, through the Centerfold years and into what was then Fuse, "A magazine about Art and Culture," our 25th was dedicated to the future, "the great unknown of contested hopes and fears." On our 25th anniversary we asked contributors from far and wide to offer visions of utopias and possibilities, encouraging unhindered optimism (or at least a glimmer of hope). It is then fitting that with our 30th anniversary year, we assess the state of our present, those intersections that need address at this moment in history — indigeneity, occupation and settler states; "security," status, migration and war; politics of identity, institutional critique and social and economic precarity.

We begin the anniversary year with a focus on precarity in *Nothing Fails like Prayer: Notes on the Cult of San Precario* by Alessandra Renzi and Stephen Turpin, an article that examines the iconography, tactics and culture of San Precario along with the history of the precarious workers movement in Europe. Proposing possibilities for organizing under the concept of precarity in North America, the authors argue that "a key to posing the problem of precarity in a meaningful way is to understand precarity not as a simple reinvocation of dichotomies but a tendency towards the precarization of life that threatens every aspect of social existence."

Citing the myth of the American Dream and its attendant fantasies of limitless opportunity and personal enrichment, they unpack how in foreclosing on the connections between economic oppression and organized political resistance, dominant North American culture re-routes political questions back onto the isolated individual.

As we witnessed with the recent demise of *Parachute* magazine, precarity is a condition under which many small publications, including Fuse, struggle to exist. While many of us await the results of our Canada Council supplementary funding applications, we continue to agonize about the structural and institutional repercussions (both actual and projected) of a Federal Conservative Government (with its more dubious roots in Canada's Reform Party). Clive Robertson considers the implications of our precarious positions vis-à-vis a shifting funding regime in this issue's shortFuse, *Personal pastimes, disappointed laughter and culture under a Conservative majority*. Robertson argues that the non-profit engine that helps to drive the public sector and its contributions to civic life has needed and will continue to need investments from all levels of government — a fact that flies in the face of much conservative thinking.

We continue our focus on DIY political movements and the politics of identity in our two columns, a conversation with Montréal's *The Upgrade* by Anna Feigenbaum and "Politics in Aspice: Reflections on the Biennale of Sydney and

its local effects" by Jen Budney. Budney draws connections between Australia and Canada, exploring how, like many recent exhibitions that are titled and conceptualized to sound like they will speak to the forces of globalization (the biennale was titled *Zones of Contact*), the Sydney Biennale failed to do so. She writes "in moments of cynicism, it is easy to wonder whether the art world's ongoing fascination with the ways in which subjectivities and identities respond to the forces of globalization is not largely conceptualized around certain curators' jet-set lifestyles."

This issue of Fuse also continues our coverage of processes of gentrification across Canada. In "Gentrification — West!" Amber Dean and Kara Granzow examine the gentrification of Edmonton's East area, considering the transformation of this community as an extension of the colonial project of western expansionists as well as the conflation of culture with shopping in the city's approach to "regenerating" the neighbourhood.

Some of what you can expect in future issues includes a conclusion to our series on gentrification across Canada with analyses of the East and West coasts, an examination of the ethics of appropriation and the copyright debate, a discussion of the crisis in art criticism and Ashok Mathur and Rita Wong's report back on class, colonization and equity in Canada's art institutes. We look forward to receiving more of your thoughts and letters, and continue to offer Fuse as a forum for discussion and debate.

— Izida Zorde

Re: An Economy of Censorship

Dear FUSE,  
I just read your article about the so-called "censorship" of art in a Calgary pedway. If I understand it correctly, the work, which included a graphic image of a man ejaculating, was not taken down. Instead the management put a wall in the corridor, allowing passersby a choice of whether to look at the art or not. Considering the explicit nature of the work and the fact that the space is a transportation corridor, it sounds to me like the art was served very well.

The Epcor Centre requires that programming in their public space should be "family friendly." The author suggests that this is code for an oppressive corporate agenda. I'm not in favour of big business dictating to artists, but surely providing the option not to look at an image of a spurting male member in public does not amount to corporate whitewash. The author suggests that the artworks are intended to "critically engage the audience," and that the decision to put up a wall is an unfair recontextualization of the art. This would mean that the artists intended to force their images on the audience, whether they liked it or not.

I don't have a problem with transgressive art (some of my favourite artists are incorrigible troublemakers like Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Critical Art Ensemble).

But I do have a problem with artists and arts organizations who promote work that is intentionally transgressive, but then start whining and crying censorship at any form of negative public response. If the artist sets out to cross over the boundaries of what is generally considered socially acceptable, then sometimes they might succeed. Public art is just that: public.  
Alex Marshall, Saskatoon

Re: Organizing for Peace

Dear FUSE,  
Jamelie Hassan complains about Michael Ignatieff's comment that he wasn't losing sleep over civilian deaths in Lebanon, but seems to think his remark about Israel committing a "war crime" is not even noteworthy. Ignatieff is an irresponsible boob, but at least, unlike Fuse, he covers both sides of the conflict. Your most recent issue also contains a long feature on a Palestinian women's film collective. I found the article very moving and informative, but let's even things up a little. How about some pro-Israel art coverage for a change?  
Cameron Dubois, Montréal

Re: Interrogating Intertidal

Dear FUSE,  
I want to thank you for publishing Clint Burnham's carefully considered review of the Antwerp show of Canadian artists, *Intertidal*. Unlike some other Canadian publications I could name, Fuse makes good on its promise to publish genuine, in depth art criticism. I have been reading Fuse since 1995. I keep almost every copy I read, because the writing is consistently solid and the magazine is an excellent resource for teaching and research. Also, none of the other art magazines in Canada are dedicated to covering issues of race, colonialism, gender and queer identity. A little bird told me your 30th anniversary is coming up soon. Wow! Keep up the great work!  
Kate Lau, Toronto

Re: Identity Politics

Dear Fuse,  
In Issue 29:1, you published a shortFuse about a disappointing and problematic panel on identity politics held at the Rivoli, organized in conjunction with the Glenn Ligon show at the Power Plant, and moderated by Terence Dick, then head of public programs. Your article indicates that at the event, Dick asserted his neutrality as a "white man" and admitted that he didn't know much about identity politics. You offered the sage advice that moderators should limit themselves to issues that they both care about and feel qualified to speak to.

Well, it seems that Dick has struck again. At the risk of giving him even more of a platform for his misinformed notions, I feel obliged to raise some concerns about his recent Akimblog post about Annie Pootoogook's winning of the Sobey Award. Dick writes: "[The] buzz is in no small part due to her "exotic" origins (she didn't go to NSCAD, OCAD or Emily Carr) and, while I think it's fantastic that an Inuit artist is getting recognized beyond the ghetto of Inuit art, I can't help but suspect that she's just making visually curious (but conceptually slight) fake outsider art... wrapped in a cloak of identity politics that everyone is doing their best to pretend doesn't matter." When I read this post it was obvious to me that Dick still hadn't done much thinking about identity politics. Otherwise, he might have focused his criticism on Pootoogook's work, rather than her "exotic" origins and "faked outsider" status. It is curious to me that Dick doesn't see the problem of invoking an artist's race or cultural background only when an Inuit artist wins a prestigious award or when a black artist has a major show at the Power Plant.

Theo Sims, Winnipeg

## “Politics in Aspic:” Reflections on the Biennale of Sydney and its local effects

by Jen Budney



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Body Movies, Relational Architecture 6*, 2001, installation. Photo: Arie Kievit. Courtesy: the artist.

Traveling to Australia as a Canadian is like traveling to an alternate universe. It's just like here, with a few uncanny differences. We share the same language, same generic “multicultural,” late capitalist way of life, same queen on the coins and same colonial legacy of oppressed and marginalized indigenous populations. Yet, in Australia, cockatiels fly wild through cities lined with palm trees, traffic runs on the other side, cappuccinos don't come super-sized and all toilets have dual-flushes. Australia began emerging from the dark ages just slightly after Canada — for instance, rescinding its White Australia Policy (a collection of racist policies restricting non-white immigration) in 1973 — and then began submerging once again ten years before us, in 1995, when the people elected John Howard of the Liberal Party as Prime Minister. Since then, Australians have witnessed rapid economic liberalization, the further disempowerment of indigenous people through Howard's assimilationist and paternalistic policy of “practical reconciliation,” increases in racial tensions, reactionary policies on international affairs and immigration and other shifts that we are also coming know and anticipate under Stephen Harper's Conservative government.

Until the late 1990s, Australia was home to several outstanding art magazines, including *Art + Text*, *World Art* and *Art Asia & Pacific*. All of these were widely read internationally and did not shy away from the promotion of artists from the southern hemisphere while reaching out to European and American readers. Certain aspects of the art world still seem more sophisticated there — museums are bigger, many of them stunning, with collections unsurpassed by anything here in Canada, and the commercial galleries take more risks and make bigger sales: there is even a magazine devoted to collectors of



Calin Dan, *Emotional Architecture 2 - Sample city*, 2003, production photo. Courtesy: the artist.

contemporary art. Finally, the Biennale of Sydney, which was founded by an Italian immigrant in 1973 and began as a modest exhibition of 36 artists in the Sydney Opera house, now enjoys international prestige on par with Istanbul, Gwangju, and Havana. Notwithstanding the desultory attempts of the Biennale de Montreal, we have nothing of the sort in Canada.

In large part, the comparative dynamism of the Australian art scene during the 70s, 80s and 90s can be attributed to its profound isolation from most of the rest of the world, which necessitated an aggressive DIY attitude. This, however, began to change after Howard was elected. Like Harper, Howard started off more meekly

than expected, leaving the truly outrageous proposals to fringe party member Pauline Hanson, who, after ample air-time, was given the boot. Yet artists and progressives remained nervous, and the art scene prepared for the worst. True to form, in its eleven years of power, the Howard government has drastically limited funding to the arts and arts education has more or less stopped in schools. Around 1998, *World Art* folded and *Art + Text* moved to Los Angeles. *Art Asia & Pacific* relocated to New York a few years later and nothing has since emerged in Australia to replace these magazines. Many excellent artists packed their bags for Europe or the us; others resigned themselves to the circumstances and quit

or set about producing more commercially viable art. Alternative spaces like Gertrude Street in Melbourne and Artspace in Sydney continued to fight on, presenting emerging artists and politically and theoretically challenging programs and publications, but — according to many Australian artists and curators — this did not help prevent a sense of pessimism and renewed isolation from permeating the scene. Although many claim things are “picking up” again in the last couple of years — particularly in Melbourne — the Howard government and conservative media (almost all Australian media) are still anti-art and anti-artist.

Amidst all this, the Biennale of Sydney carries on. I was pleasantly surprised to read sometime last year that Charles Merewether had been appointed Artistic Director and Curator of the 2006 manifestation. Merewether has an impressive background as a scholar and writer on Asian and Latin American art, neo-colonialism, the concept of “primitive” and

other subjects. While his substantial work as a museum curator is not as widely known, he has been employed as an advisor to some interesting and high profile contemporary exhibitions, including Okwui Enwezor’s 1997 Johannesburg Biennale. I thought his selection boded well for Sydney. Shortly after he was appointed, it was announced he’d invited four Canadian artists: Rebecca Belmore, Jayce Salloum, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Brian Jungen.<sup>1</sup> It was at this point I decided to go see the show.

I must admit, I don’t envy biennale curators. I think conceiving, let alone managing, a show with over eighty artists is akin to wrestling a giant stingray: It is very difficult to win. Nonetheless, such curatorial positions are highly sought after and those who do one frequently develop signs of addiction. Hence, Enwezor, Hou Hanru, Francesco Bonami, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Hans Ulrich Obrist and their colleagues are now rarely seen directing exhibitions of fewer than thirty participants. While the exhibitions can

take on very distinct characters, the themes have tended not to range too widely. Since the mid-90s — perhaps since Peter Weibel’s “Inclusion/Exclusion” in Graz, Austria — it has been popular to frame large-scale contemporary exhibitions in terms of globalization, with titles and subtitles suggesting movement, migration, displacement and border crossing (e.g. “Cities on the Move,” “Trade Routes,” “Unmapping the Earth,” “Transborderline,” etc).

In moments of cynicism, it is easy to wonder whether the art world’s ongoing fascination with the ways in which subjectivities and identities respond to the forces of globalization is not largely conceptualized around certain curators’ jet-set lifestyles. Curatorial travel forms the bulk of the budgets for many shows and travel by western curators in search of the next great artist is extending to places further and further away. One frequently feels the poor cousin for not knowing the buzz in Uzbekistan. And because research travel is often conducted at a breakneck pace — Merewether, for instance, visited over ninety countries in the course of the year leading to his Biennale — one also wonders whether the research may be rather thin. While the theory-laden curatorial texts accompanying these shows invariably present the exhibitions as earnest attempts to de-Eurocentricize the western art world, one South African artist once lamented to me that the efforts of these curators resemble “the scramble for Africa all over again.”

Too much speculation on motivations can lead to the development of conspiracy theories, which are not particularly helpful on any level. For this reason, I have come to find it more interesting to reflect on affects. For instance, it is a given that inclusion in a biennale may advance an

artist’s international career or that a curator’s thesis may contribute to, even alter, the focus of international art discourse. The opening days in particular serve professionals in the art industry well, with networking opportunities and, at the best of times, moments of brilliant discovery. But even more interesting to me is how such large-scale exhibitions do or do not make connections with the local. What good is a biennale for the hosts — local artists and audiences? I once asked this question of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Johannesburg Biennale in an article entitled “Who’s It For?”<sup>2</sup> In that case, the brilliant content of the exhibition was not matched by practical strategies of outreach and inclusion for local audiences, particularly black audiences, in post-apartheid South Africa, so that the only locals to benefit were white elites. What I wanted to know in Sydney is how the biennale would contribute to artistic and political discourse in Australia, eleven years into the Howard government. My concern was not only for the Aussies; I was also thinking of what Canada might be like in 2016 and how such exhibitions here might function as agents of social change and opportunity.

There is a lot a biennale *could* do. Through its content alone, beyond enlightening audiences to “what is happening” in art elsewhere, it could provide or inspire new perspectives on social or political issues of concern to local audiences, put such issues into broader contexts and facilitate debate. It could pay attention to the history of a place through site-specific projects or by drawing parallels with places elsewhere. Or it could show local audiences something they’d never seen before, creating possibilities for interpreting the world and taking actions that were previously inconceivable. A biennale could also simply provide an opportunity for local audiences to evaluate the art of their own

Merewether made it clear that the exhibition aimed to be political, to challenge, engage and ultimately transform its visitors.

nation in a global perspective. On a more pragmatic level, a biennale can, through parties, conferences, studio visits and other means, offer local artists — including those who are not exhibiting — opportunities for encountering and exchanging ideas with artists, curators and writers from other places in the world. It is a chance for a local arts scene, particularly one suffering from isolation, to be made visible, to be validated and to make connections. By his choice of Canadian artists — particularly Belmore and Salloum, who excel at forging connections with local issues and audiences — I thought Merewether might do something out of the ordinary on this level.

The title of Merewether’s Biennale was *Zones of Contact*. With this title, he refers to a number of big ideas, including most of those contained in previous such exhibitions: “contradictions between cultures, the unstable, transient zone of inclusion and exclusion,” “cross-border flows of art,” “the movement of the transnational — its economies of trafficking and trade, of migration and deportation, of mobility and mixing,”<sup>3</sup> etc. The show contained an adventurous mix of 85 artists from over 40 countries, and was scattered throughout (and outside) a number of large and small venues across the city. In his catalogue essay and in press material, Merewether made it clear that the exhibition aimed to be political, to challenge, engage and ultimately transform its visitors. I spent four

days in Sydney and managed to see almost all of the Biennale; two of the smaller venues had such restricted opening hours that I could not find suitable times to visit. Unlike the Jo’burg Biennale, Sydney posed no problems for public access. Everywhere across the city, huge pink banners flew, announcing the presence of the exhibition, and entrance to all the public art galleries and museums where the Biennale took place was free of charge (as it always is in Australia, and should be here). And sure enough, when I was there, the venues were packed with visitors, tourists and locals alike.

Yet, by many accounts, this year’s Biennale of Sydney was a disappointment: “Why — despite my utmost respect and admiration toward this project and its apparent goals — do I feel so ambivalent towards *Zones of Contact*?”<sup>4</sup> asked Anthony Gardner in the best publication to come out of the Biennale, a critical reader produced in the week after the opening and edited by the folks at Artspace. I too felt ambivalent and have been struggling since to make sense of the exhibition’s failures.

For starters, not all of the art in *Zones of Contact* was very good. The Canadian artists produced excellent works: Salloum’s *untitled* video installation was expertly installed in a closed room, with comfy sofas and plenty of headphones, and in the three times I visited, was fully



Rebecca Belmore, *America*, 2006, installation. Courtesy: the artist.



Jayne Salloum, *everything and nothing and other works from the ongoing project, untitled*, 1988-2006, video still. Courtesy: the artist.

packed with viewers; Belmore created a beautiful, angry and elegiac new sculpture made of cut-up national flags from the Americas and a fan blowing long, black hair; and Lozano-Hemmer produced an interactive installation of lights and security monitors that tracked visitors through the lobby of the Art Gallery of New South Wales to great effect. But these are three mature and sophisticated artists. Many of the other artists in *Zones of Contact* were very young and their works demonstrated an art school sensibility — they were poorly made, or over-determined, or badly installed, or all three. Indeed, poor installation was a big feature of the Biennale, much of it clearly not the artists' fault. Sound from Anri Sala's video installation blasted throughout Pier 2/3, the wharf building in which Belmore's work was located, and it dominated other works to the extent that I was for the first half hour confused, believing the sound belonged to Cao Fei's video. The didactic panels and labels in several outdoor installations were faded and peeling away

from their backings. On repeated visits, I found several works "out of order," including Mona Hatoum's mechanical installation of moving household objects in the Museum of Contemporary Art. And, with a few exceptions, most of the dozens and dozens of time-based installations (mainly video projects) did not come with chairs or cushions for comfortable viewing. Those that did — such as Salloum's *untitled*, and the truly wonderful video works of Calin Dan (*Emotional Architecture*) and Olga Chernysheva (*March, Marmot*, and

Despite the rhetoric, the exhibition seemed designed precisely to avoid or evade the "contact" it advertised — it avoided dealing with the reality of the very place it was located.

*Russian Museum*) — found willing audiences, while the others saw visitors walking out mid-way, frustrated.

Some have attributed Merewether's lack of attention to the material presence of the show to inexperience. "He's not really a curator," many Australian artists told me. "This biennale is a triumph of discourse over the image," writes Gardner, "or, as one colleague quipped, of 'a handsome catalogue with an exhibition attached.'" He concludes, "*Zones of Contact* shows him (Merewether) to be an academic and decidedly *not* a curator; nor should he really be mistaken for one."<sup>5</sup> Yet, while it's clear the meaning of the show resides largely in the accompanying texts for Merewether, this is not the limit of the problem. In fact, despite the rhetoric, the exhibition seemed designed precisely to avoid or evade the "contact" it advertised — specifically, it avoided dealing with the reality of the very place it was located.

For starters, the Biennale was not designed to engage with local artists or politics. Only seven out of the 85 artists in the show were Australian, and just one of them was from Sydney, and no opportunities were created for visiting artists to meet with locals. The opening parties were invite-only and few Sydney artists were able to get in, although many had been involved as volunteers for the instal-

lation. This exclusion was felt acutely by local artists, who questioned the motives of not only Merewether but also the directors of the institutions that hosted the Biennale in their spaces. Sydney artist Lisa Kelly summed it up as "wasted potential."<sup>6</sup> Having spoken with Salloum and Belmore about their experiences in Sydney, I know the lack of contact with the local art scene bothered visiting international artists as well.

Although the premise of the exhibition is in a certain sense that artists today are homeless, many of the works in the exhibition were deep meditations or investigations of home. Yet Merewether presented these in a context emphasising fragmentation, making connections difficult for audiences to understand. Indeed, it seemed at times that the more a work dealt with the specifics of place, the further Merewether located it from the core of the exhibition, and I mean this quite literally. Pier 2/3, the old wharf located 20 minutes from the MCA, seemed quite peripheral to the heart of the show. Here is where Belmore's work was placed, and also the work of Djambawa Marawili, an Aboriginal artist from the Northern Territories. Marawili's installation of sand and painted wood was accompanied by a performance and very explicit text about land claims. Merewether placed this work in the farthest end of the



Olga Chernysheva, *Marmot*, 1999, video still. Courtesy: the artist and Stella Art Gallery, Moscow.



Cao Fei, *Cosplayers*, 2004, video still. Courtesy: the artist.

pier, "practically in the water," as one person described it, and literally disconnected from the land. Meanwhile, inside the MCA, the celebrated white Australian painter Imants Tillers occupied several enormous walls with his post-modern panel paintings that mourn the loss of Aboriginal languages and culture. So the white man is once again bestowed with institutional authority and with this authority assures us of the disappearance of Aboriginal people, which further refutes the reality of Marawili's claims. In a review of the Biennale on the website "Speech," Australian artist Geoff Lowe captured the viewing experience very well. "There's something about this biennale that's difficult to see," he writes. "There's so many works whirring away but somehow they all seem like they need time to access. It's a time in the world when politics at the daily level are more threatening and pertinent than ever... (but) this exhibition seems a bit like it's all under glass or aspic."<sup>7</sup> So much good stuff for so little effect. One can appreciate, then, the rather Martian title some Sydney artists gave to their protest

"anti-biennale" event during the opening days: *Cones of Zontact* neatly captures the gelatinous and alien mood of the exhibition that descended upon their city and did not include them.

#### Notes:

1. Brian Jungen later withdrew from the show.
2. "Who's it for?" (the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale), *Third Text* no. 42, Spring 1998, pp.88 - 94.
3. Charles Merewether, "Taking Place: Acts of Survival for a Time to Come," *Zones of Contact, 2006 Biennale of Sydney*, catalogue, pp.45-46.
4. Anthony Gardner, "The Atrocity Exhibition," *Zones of Contact, 2006 Biennale of Sydney, A Critical Reader*, p.13.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.14, 17.
6. Lisa Kelly, "Grasping the Thistle," *Zones of Contact, 2006 Biennale of Sydney, A Critical Reader*, p.76.
7. <http://speech2012.blogspot.com>

*Jen Budney is Curator of the Kamloops Art Gallery. She's previously worked as Artistic Director of Gallery 101 and News Editor of Flash Art magazine. Her essays have appeared in publications such as Third Text, Parkett, Art Asia & Pacific and catalogues to exhibitions including The American West (co-curated by Jimmie Durham and Richard Hill). With Roberto Pinto, she co-curated the Italian Pavilion at the first — and only — Melbourne International Biennale in 1999.*

# The Art of Technology (and the technology of art)

Interview by  
Anna Feigenbaum

There is no Upgrade  
without a Downgrade

— Upgrade Amsterdam

The Upgrade, an event organized in Montréal by tobias c. van Veen, Sophie Le-Phat Ho and Anik Fournier, is an autonomous, international and grassroots organization of monthly gatherings for digital culture and the technology arts ([theupgrade.net](http://theupgrade.net) or [upgrademtl.org](http://upgrademtl.org)). It began in New York City in 1999, organized by Yael Kanarek, with a regular gathering of new media artists and curators who were interested in discussing the technical, aesthetic and political dimensions of their emerging practices. In 2003, Vancouver became the first international node, with Montréal joining shortly after in 2004, followed by over a dozen more global nodes in 2005.

While the basic mandate of “an international, emerging network of autonomous nodes united by art, technology and a commitment to bridging cultural divides” is shared by nodes worldwide, each Upgrade takes on its own character, largely defined by the political and social contexts of their host cities. For example, the New York Upgrade is housed at Eyebeam, an atelier space in Chelsea funded in part by private endowment. This gives the New York node a greater sense of stability and resources for administration and technical equipment than many Upgrades. A very different political economic situation (and much warmer climate) in Salvador, Brazil gives way to their mainly public and open-air events. In the past, members of

Upgrade Salvador have set up Linux-based stations in the *favelas*, attempting to bridge the “digital divide” while teaching programming skills in open source software and offering Internet access. Likewise, the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem Upgrades are shaped by their proximity to the political conflicts in the region, addressing the occupation of Palestine and interrogating the ties between technology and warfare.

Over the past two years, Upgrade Montréal has organized diverse events that aim to bridge digital culture and the technology arts while providing a forum for feedback and discussion. Events such as an eclectic cabaret and art auction for Critical Art Ensemble (September 05) to a subzero, winter street celebration of Art’s Birthday (January 06) sought to connect various technology practitioners, artists and theorists across disciplines and divides.<sup>1</sup>

In 2006, Upgrade Montréal organized several major events including an International Women’s Day showcase “remixing” the voices of Aboriginal women that engaged technology as a point of access to address issues of violence against native women in Canada (March) and the first North American gathering of the net-criticism project [Nettime.org](http://Nettime.org) (June) under the umbrella of the MUTEK festival for digital culture.<sup>2</sup> This event connected theory, art, music and activism through panels and perform-

Phantom Technology,  
Upgrade, May 2006.  
Photo: Tanya Goehring.



Phantom Technology, Upgrade, May 2006.  
Photo: Tanya Goehring.



Andrew Brouse and crew, Upgrade, February 2006. Photo: tobias c. van Veen.

ances that interrogated strategies of engagement with media and technology. Smaller events have included a panel on tactical media practices (April) and a showcase of the digital techniques of contemporary choreographers (July). Upgrade events cross borders between disciplines and challenge the division between artistic practice and political activism that often segregates both organizers and audiences in Montréal.

I recently sat down to talk with the organizers of Upgrade Montréal about their efforts to present and critically engage the technology arts. Below I reweave our conversation to reveal the singularity, as well as the interdependency, of each issue.

#### thread one: techne

**techne/teck-nay/noun 1** The set of principles, or rational method, involved in the production of an object or the accomplishment of an end; the knowledge of such principles or method.

**ANNA FEIGENBAUM:** How do you define and conceptualize what digital culture and technology art are?

**TOBIAS C VAN VEEN:** The funny thing about “digital culture” is that it seems to be a term that is primarily Francophone. In English, “digital culture” seems to be opposed to analogue culture, whereas “technology arts” is the term I prefer and the one that is in our definition of the Upgrade. Both MUTEK and SAT will use the term “*culture numérique*.” I think it’s misleading because most art practices that incorporate technology in an explicit or even implicit way don’t necessarily focus upon digital means to do so. Turntablism and video art would be excluded in that definition. So the “digital culture” term is one of those buzzwords that seems to mean something like “new media” but is completely amorphous as it recycles itself.

**ANNA:** How specifically about technology are the events you organize?

**ANIK FOURNIER:** It’s something that we don’t talk explicitly about when we’re in

meetings. We are more interested in an artist’s ideas. What they are doing with the technology. For instance Freda Guttman doesn’t really do much with recent technologies.<sup>3</sup> When she presented at the Upgrade in November she did a slide presentation. But we are interested in the issues she is concerned with such as how she addresses technology through the technology of memory, and the way that she uses video technologies even if they’re not the most elaborate ones. I think it’s almost pointless to define technology art. Where do you draw the line? *Techné* can be things made with your hands: tools, objects. When does it become technology? When does it become new media? All of these terms are vague.

**TOBIAS:** New media always seems to constitute trends: what consumer technology can someone get their hands on and start playing with? A lot of that work can be extremely formalistic, sort of self-reflective upon the medium itself. Or it can be very political, like some net.art, when it reflects upon problematic access to the medium, or issues of control, such as military devel-

opment of the internet. Here one finds hackers in all the senses of the word. I look at it from a Heideggerian perspective, as Anik was saying, of technics and *techne*. So it might be that an artist addresses technology as that which their art is through their practice. Whether that is through “new media” or “net-art” is completely irrelevant to me.

#### thread two: audience

**audience/’awdi-?ns/ noun 1** a group of listeners or spectators. 2 the people targeted or reached.

**ANNA:** Do you feel that the Upgrade has a following?

**SOPHIE LE-PHAT HO:** The audience forms differently around each topic. We don’t really have a “core” base-audience but tap into specific and less specific networks every month. In a way, we have to start over every time – each Upgrade is a surprise...



Nettime Upgrade, May 2006, Gita Hashemi & M.I.L.F. Photo: Tanya Goehring.

**TOBIAS:** We’re new. We’re kind of foreign here. We have an English name. Our perceived Englishness is a barrier we must constantly seek to overcome. The language divide and the history between French and English culture still dominates many implicit associations in Québec, even in Montréal. Even when bringing into focus the art of Aboriginal women or Art Against the (Palestinian) Occupation or the plight of Steve Kurtz of Critical Art Ensemble we have to negotiate the differences between French and English perceptions of the same events. Each Upgrade interacts with its local environment differently, which is why we think of ourselves as a node in a network. But locally we have to figure out ways to situate ourselves and to bridge these fractures.

**ANIK:** I think in Montréal there are so many different communities, everyone is interested in their little thing, their practices, whether they are academic or artistic practices.

**TOBIAS:** Well that’s certainly the positive way of looking at it! But the negative way is that the communities are also sectarian and territorial. The Upgrade is working to be third party neutral to these divisions, but already being partnered with SAT camps us off.

**ANIK:** We have tried to target French artists and present ourselves as a bilingual organization. We try to communicate that we work with artists from all backgrounds and languages and I think that has helped us expand at least across the language divide a bit.

**TOBIAS:** And the Nettime gathering entitled “Critical Practice Resuscitation” attempted to do that on an international level. We are trying to engineer a collision between local Montréal new media artists and the activist crowd and then hook



Critical Practice Resuscitation Flyer, May 2006. Design: Kevin Yuen Kit Lo.

them up at the same time with an international sense of how it operates worldwide. The hacker aesthetic, in the broadest sense of questioning and exploring structures of power and technology, hasn't broadly resonated with Québécois practices.

### thread three: space

*space/spays/ noun 1 the three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction.*

**ANNA:** When I was at Hexagram<sup>4</sup> for the *Tactical Media Upgrade* with a friend of mine who works for Haiti Action Montréal we realized how much money has gone into the amazing equipment they have, but that it's a very closed-off space. And we were joking, "Wow what could one of our activist organizations do with, say, one of these computers?"

**SOPHIE:** It was apparently the first time that an external body came into that space. And we were lucky because the technician that was responsible, who's also an artist and into the stuff we are into, was like, "Yeah, come and use this fucking equipment!"<sup>5</sup>

**TOBIAS:** Hexagram is a very different space than SAT. With SAT, I can say all the equipment they have they use and then they duct tape it back together again. But SAT, like Hexagram, exhibits tendencies to close itself off in other ways. While it remains an admirable space where almost anyone can walk in, with all this chaotic energy in every direction it makes it difficult to coordinate an event. And raising political questions within the context of technology art sometimes catches institutions off-guard.

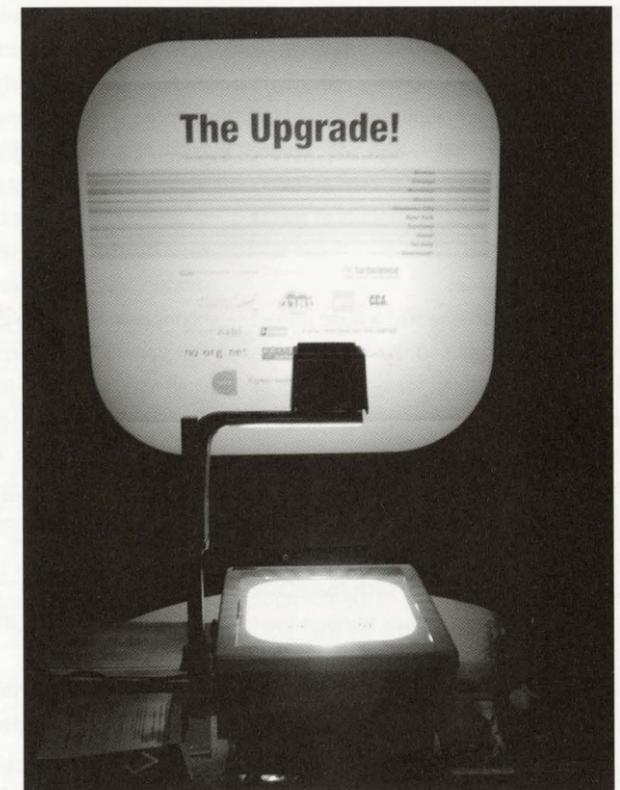
**ANNA:** It's amazing to be able to pull political art that in Montréal is normally screened on a white painted wall of a small café like Esperanza into a space like SAT. Instead of a small rickety projection in a back room, artists get to show their work on multiple screens with a professional soundsystem and have technicians on hand — like you had for the Derek Holzer and Sara Kolster event on microsound and open source software (2006 May). Yet, at the same time, the institutions that provide a hyper-technologized space often don't have the same politics as the group organizing the event. How does the Upgrade navigate that territory?

**SOPHIE:** One way to avoid confronting SAT over politics is to bring an audience. For the International Women's Day event everyone was happy because 300 people showed up. We were surprised, and our collaborators Quebec Native Women (QNW) and Studio xx too. It was amazing to have such a big audience, of which a large proportion was Aboriginal, to discuss difficult and taboo topics like violence against Aboriginal women. It is not by chance that so many new faces were introduced to SAT that evening. I don't think an event of that scale, involving a non-art organization like QNW had been produced there before — with free admission and no "guest list." This is significant: Upgrades *have* to be free, there's no choice; it's like an "Upgrade rule" — a rule that gives us more freedom to open up practices to diverse audiences and not have to be accountable to anyone else but the people we work with.

**ANIK:** We were somewhat anxious in anticipating SAT's reaction to the International Women's Day event, but in the end for SAT it was like "Oh! Look what we're doing, we had a big event here dedicated to Native art."

**ANNA:** tobias and I have talked of the parasitic nature of this kind of relationship. The unpaid labour of organizers reflects upon the host space, so for example, in the case of the International Women's Day event, SAT gets credited for being the host without doing the organizational work. This allows institutions to appear more radical, accessible or diverse than they often are.

**TOBIAS:** We truly thank SAT for giving us the space and technical support for free. Yet, there is a tension when such events are organized by a non-funded collective. And we think that institutions have a *responsibility* to be open to grassroots initiatives. Of course, our situation is hardly unique. We are volunteers and rather priv-



Upgrade International Exhibition, Eyebeam, NYC, 2005. Photo: tobias c. van Veen.

ileged ones at that. Yet, increasingly we are burnt-out and *precarious*. But we keep asking: what of these networks' potential for political activation?

**ANIK:** We have to depend on other people. So how do we create our space? We have zero budget and just to get access to technology we need to depend on someone who has it. Alongside the SAT, we also work with Studio xx, Oboro, Hexagram and La Centrale.<sup>6</sup> At the moment it's about creating our own space within these semi-institutional spaces. In the end I think working within the spaces of these institutions has not at all stopped us from doing what we want to do. Hopefully we can have some impact even if we're not going to change the institutions which we inhabit.

**SOPHIE:** The neat thing is that, although we are a group that can't afford to rent SAT — like so many others — we get to present work by other groups that couldn't afford it either. That is also why we are into collaborations, as a way of intervening in the normal economics of media arts dissemination.

**TOBIAS:** I think we've had a huge impact on the perception of SAT. Whether this has changed the nature of the organization or prompted a thinking of the political in their activities and structure remains to be seen. One hopes that the combination of outside expectations based on Upgrade events and the communication of parasitical techniques to inhabit such spaces will only lead such institutions to open their doors (and minds) more often — whether that door is sprung from the inside or deftly picked from the outside.

thread four: resources

**resource/ri'zaws/ noun 1 (usu in pl) an available means of help, support, or provision. 2 (usu. in pl) the ability to deal with a difficult situation; resourcefulness.**

**ANNA:** There are a limited number of ways in which one can come up with material resources. And something like the Upgrade is not a money-making body, it's not incorporated, so what do you do about applying for grants?

**TOBIAS:** Grassroots collectives don't easily fall into the current funding scheme. What we really need are funds to give to artists so they can come here and we can pay them! And what people need is cash to buy equipment. The technology required is not that much more expensive than what a painter requires for a canvas, yet the means to self-produce events is something the Canada Council is reluctant to give grants for. If we had portable equipment then we wouldn't need to depend upon institutions to give us *gratis* what we need to produce each event. There is a question here with Canada Council funding equipment in general and specifically with the media arts.

thread five: futurity

**futurity/fyooh'tyoo?riti/ 1 the future. 2 a future event or prospect.**

**ANNA:** What do you see in the Upgrade's future?

**TOBIAS:** We need to find ways to not become burnt out on the institutional problems. In the technology arts there is a lack, sometimes, of the critical edge. Much contemporary artistic investigation of technology is often closely entrapped in relations to corporate technologies, such as the field of locative media. Many artists further the goals of advertising *even when* considering the interventionist possibilities of this complex media. Critique obviously isn't enough: we need different kinds of institutions. The "net criticism" pioneered by writers, artists and activists associated with Nettime.org and the guerilla approaches of tactical media and hacktivism offer crafty viral tactics for the infiltration of institutions.

But today both the institution and its critique are caught in a precarious web of

complexity. We are operating in a globalized, network field of intercommunications, relying upon the balance of social networking (and rarely funding). We are of the "and...and...and..." generation: curators/artists/turntablists/graduate students/baristas/writers... Viva *San Precario!*<sup>7</sup>

We're running without a budget so it has to be fun both for us and the audience. Maybe instead of trying to produce a *spectacle*, an event, we should be throwing up guerrilla projections or having snowball fights coordinated through transistor radios. Something wild and silly. We have to learn from the periphery. One feels that the "core" can't innovate anymore, it has to come from elsewhere. I'd like to learn from Upgrade Salvador (Brazil) and others, where the grasp of technology marks a different context, timeframe and scale. I think for us to be attentive to the political dimension and our own place in this sphere will turn Upgrade Montréal from simply being this interesting grassroots exchange of technology artists into something *other* — imagine a viral node caught in the unstoppable swarming of the institutions.

*Anna Feigenbaum is a Ph.D. candidate in Communication Studies at McGill University in Montréal where she enjoys various modes of collective troublemaking. Recently she organized the "If I Can't Dance Anarchist Cabaret" which opened Montréal's 2006 Anarchist book fair.*

Notes:

1. From the 2006 "Upgrade Montréal" report on activities.
2. See <http://upgrademtl.org/cpr> and for MUTEK see <http://mutek.ca>
3. See <http://www.victoriaartsymposium.com/fredaguttman.php>
4. The intra-university multi-million dollar project Hexagram, the "Institution for Research/Creation in Media Arts and Technologies." See <http://hexagram.org>
5. Sophie writes: "Obviously he didn't say that exactly, but that is the spirit we understood it to be in."
6. Oboro, Centre dedicated to production and presentation of art, contemporary practices and new media <http://oboro.net>; La Centrale, La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse a pour but et comme politique générale de donner une voix à la diversité du travail en art actuel des femmes <http://lacentrale.org>
7. See Marcello Tari and Ilaria Vanni, "On the Life and Deeds of San Precario, Patron Saint of Precarious Workers and Lives," *Fibreculture 5*: [http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/vanni\\_tari.html](http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/vanni_tari.html)



Anik Fournier, Tobias C. van Veen, Sophie Le-Phat Ho, June 2006. Photo: the Monkeys.

## The Liberal Arts Fictional Institute of Narrative

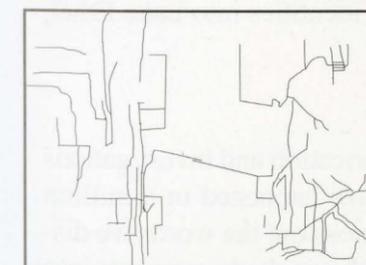
We held no residencies at Ethel's Lake that year.

ALL OF OUR QUESTIONS MERGE AROUND A SMALL BODY OF WATER, WHERE ONE LAFIN BOARD MEMBER DROWNED OUR ARCHIVES. STANDING IN A SMALL ROWBOAT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE LAKE, WE ALL STOOD BY, AGHAST—AS YEARS OF WORK PLUNGED DEEP AND SCATTERED ON THE SURFACE.

December 23rd, 2006

### Lafin programs

The Liberal Arts Fictional Institute of Narrative is an international collective of artists and academics. Lafin's programs are the individual initiatives of those who form the Lafin board of directors. From publishing, research development and education, to artistic production and presentation, departmental focuses are a reflection of our individual and collective narrative concerns. Our board of directors has come together over the years through a common interest in framing research and making use of narrative and structural tools to probe the objects of our cross-disciplinary investigations.



### Lafin's archives are *truly* lost?

The truth is that we never archived the work of our artists in residence. The works that were dropped into the lake were select documents that traced the history of our press and correspondences from 1893-2001. Documents that traced Lafin back to when no one called it Lafin, to the times where, separated by continents, we wrote further than it is possible to travel. The archives of each permutation of the Lafin residencies are scattered around the world and are only beginning to be gathered for the purposes of keeping an online account of the incredible work that has been and will be produced in the context of Lafin's programs.

Dear Fuse Magazine Reader,

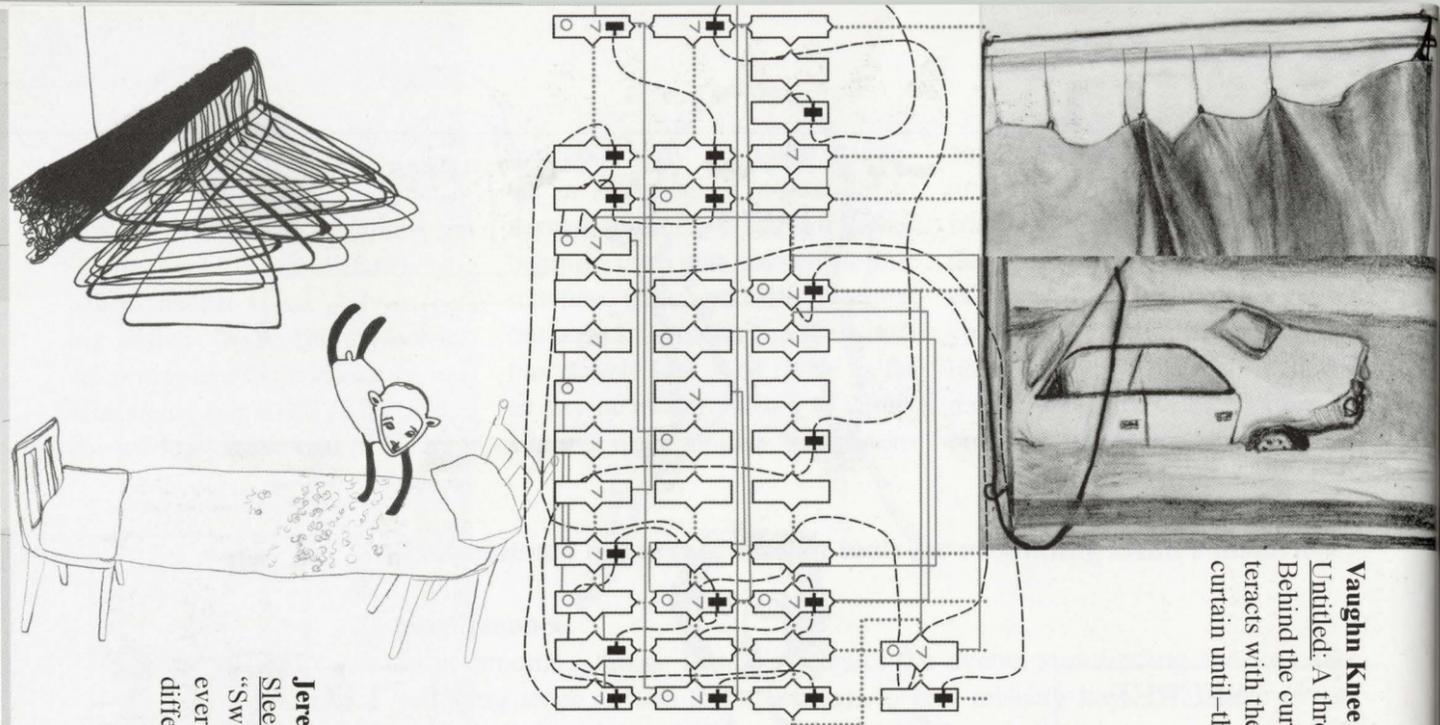
Due to events at the center of Lafin's activities, documentation of work produced in the context of our artist residency program as well as our other programs, has been lost. This loss has come as a strong blow to all of us at the Institute, as it has affected everything, emptying out our filing cabinets, desks and computers of all but a few traces left by a small selection of inspiring academics, artists, and thinkers. Lafin is in mourning at the inescapable horror of this loss.

This year our annual board meeting was held in Manhattan. Overall, approximately two months were spent working backwards/forwards through our memories. We gathered lists foggy with names and out of date contact information. In our desire to contact those who have contributed to our investigations and our passions, we have drafted this letter to urge those of you whom we have been unable to find to contact us, send us some news, help us fill the gaps in our memory with documentation of the work you have done with us over the years,

"Here's to the good times, the forgotten times",

Stacey Ruggenbaum,  
Lafin Treasurer





**Vaughn Knee**  
 Untitled: A three-curtain play  
 Behind the curtain, the draw-string hangs out of the window and interacts with the world outside. The audience stands around the closed curtain until—the show starts.

**Vincent AppleBee**  
 The Liberal Arts Fictional Institute of Narrative Closet  
 An experiment in the field of arts administration. Running a residency program in the closet of the while resident of the middle room residency.

**Jeremy Swimmer**  
 Sleeping with a Monster in the Closet: A short bed-time story  
 "Swimmer knew there was a monster. There was a monster in every story, and Swimmer knew his story was not any different."

San Precario official logo and stencil. Courtesy: the Chainworkers.



# Nothing Fails Like Prayer:

## Notes on the Cult of Saint Precario

by Alessandra Renzi and Stephen Turpin

### general call for submissions

In case you were wondering, our residencies happen in both the realm of the real and in the realm of fiction. If you are finding it difficult to make it up to our physical location due to time restraints, or financial constraints, you are always welcome to stay with us in a fictional capacity. Some artists chose to produce fictional work from a distance, or on location. Other artists chose to produce work far into the future or the past, at a time where they were or will be in a better situation to make their residency work.

Residency Program: middle room residency

The Lafin residency program is relatively new. Between 1988 and 1993 Roberta and Enrique Ruggenbaum hosted summertime water-bound residencies. These were open to one artist per summer, who accompanied Enrique and Roberta on their summer sailing expeditions around the Mediterranean. Between 1995 and 1999, Stacey Ruggenbaum and Frank Mayfield picked up the tradition by hosting residencies on their boat. They scattered the water-bound residency periods over the seasons, and offered their apartment in NYC for the times during which they were not on the water. Since 1999, Mélisandre Schofield has taken up the residency program in her more eccentric living arrangements.



"We are hireable on demand, available on call, exploitable at will, and fireable at whim. We are the precariat."

— Alex Foti<sup>1</sup>

"We are the precarious, the flexible, the temporary, the mobile. We're the people that live on a tightrope, in a precarious balance, we're the restructured and outsourced, those who lack a stable job, and those who are overexploited; those who pay a mortgage or a rent that strangles us. We're forced to buy and sell our ability to love and care. We're just like you: contortionists of flexibility."

— Manifiesto Convocatoria Barcelona EuroMayDay<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of May 2006, news sources reported that Americans were gathering with Christian leaders to pray for cheaper oil in cities from Los Angeles to Washington. During the summer months, groups of believers met throughout the US to petition God to lower the price of gasoline. Some more entrepreneurial churches, such as the Life Pointe Church of Homestead, even baited non-believers with gas coupons if they agreed to attend a mass. If this merger of materialism and spirituality signals an increasing religious fervour in America (*and it does*), it also calls attention to the struggle of Americans to survive within the brutal logic of capitalism. And, if praying for cheaper oil appears laughable to some, the insecurity of everyday life that has driven countless individuals toward fundamentalist positions as they attempt to give meaning to their oppression is precisely not funny. It is dangerous.

But, if American survival, both at individual and economic levels, is dependent on cheap foreign oil, (*and it is*) and we are seeing a planetary shift as political super-

powers fight for the last of this precious resource, perhaps prayer might not be the most effective method of addressing economic precarity. This article explores an alternative now gaining broader public support in many European countries; it is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive and is written with the hope that it will inspire some new creative lines, particularly in North America, where emergent fascist tendencies and their religious correlates signal an increasing need for new strategies to combat the imminent dangers threatening our social existence.

Precario Saint: from *preco*, unstable, faltering, without balance, XXI century AD In the legends, patron saint of the evicted, the poor, the underemployed, the exploited, the blackmailed, part-timers, unregulated workers and contract workers. Invoked against liberalism, ganging, uninsured accident on the workplace and sexual harassment. It is celebrated on 29 February.

(Life of Saint Precario)<sup>3</sup>

The hagiography of Saint Precario is told in a widely circulated text that appeared online around February 2004. A 25-year-old man, born to a rich family, obtains a degree in "creative finance" from an elite university and sets out to travel the world and find a job without any help from his parents. On his way back from a meeting with Silviodoro (Golden Silvio, an ironic reference to the Italian former Prime Minister Berlusconi), who, through "divine intervention" has founded three television channels, he bumps into a group of demonstrators. These workers are protesting the recent closure of their factory and explain that the only jobs available in the area are now temporary and without security. Believing that secure well-paying jobs are readily available, he sets out to prove them wrong by working in a fast food store and then a supermarket. After two years, refused both a mortgage and the financing of a TV set, Precario returns to apologize to the demonstrators and devotes his life to fighting the oppressions of precarity. Like all good saints, some miracles (like the continual renewal of a work contract for a young man in the south of Italy) have been attributed to him.

San Precario iconography extends from reproductions of the saint to spoofs of religious symbols that trouble and contest assumptions about contemporary labour conditions. The "traditional" iconography depicts him wearing fast food or supermarket uniforms, holding a contract in one hand. He has been portrayed changing jobs seven times in one day or frying potato chips. Associated images have many incarnations, ranging from a supermarket worker praying among symbols that reference housing, transportation, and health, to a woman with six arms, symbolizing forced multitasking. San Precario saint cards, distributed by demonstrators,

San Precario appeared in disguise at Milan fashion week to "protect" precarious workers in the fashion industry.

reproduce his prayer,<sup>4</sup> which calls for paid maternity leave, holidays and pensions, as well as for protection from sudden dismissal.<sup>5</sup> The prayers always end with a call for *Mayday!* in place of the more traditional *Amen*.

### From Icon to Action

San Precario first appeared in Milan, on 29 February 2004 — a leap year day symbolically chosen to signal intermittence. His statue was carried in a procession across the city, headed by a mock nun, priest and cardinal, who led the emergent cult to a supermarket chain store where devotees handed out saint cards and called for miraculous reductions in the cost of groceries. Subsequently, the saint has appeared in a range of locations, from supermarket chain stores to a gate-crashing intervention at the Venice Film Festival award ceremony that drew attention to precarious working conditions in the film industry.

In a more recent action, San Precario appeared in disguise at Milan fashion week to "protect" precarious workers in the fashion industry. The stunt centred around a fictitious Anglo-Japanese fashion designer: Serpica Naro (an anagram of San Precario), who activists registered with the Italian Fashion Chamber of Commerce, devising a profile, press releases and reviews, along with a fashion collection. After receiving approval for a show, they spread controversial information about their invented designer and threatened to disrupt her catwalk as they had been doing with others, gaining police protection for Serpica Naro and heightening media interest. To the puzzlement of police and media,



San Precario Saint Card. Courtesy: the Chainworkers.

the Naro fashion show was accompanied by a procession of Saint Precario devotees. Their slogan declared, "Precarity is in Fashion," while their models sported designs for the style-conscious precariat. These new fashions included: the "Mouse trap Mata Hari kick ass!" (which traps the boss' hand in instances of sexual harassment) and the "Husbands prefer blonde Romanians" dresses (for migrant women who need to get married to receive work permits); a "Call Donald / Mac Centre" uniform (for people working two jobs in a single day); and, finally, a pregnancy-concealing suit that helps women avoid "being made redundant." The Serpica Naro brand has since evolved into an open source brand that aims to support precarious designers.<sup>6</sup>

### Precarity 101 — Networks, histories and some definitions

While the Serpica Naro action is emblematic of the precarity movement's interventionist practices, precarity, as a concept for understanding labour practices and social existence, extends to a broader network of organizations that do not always coalesce around the figure of the saint.

Precarity describes the situation of temp or flex workers, ranging from workers in supermarkets and other big commercial chains to artists and employees of the service industry. Their working conditions are generally characterized by instability, often lacking contracts, health insurance and pension plans, which has important repercussions for everyday living. This group of workers is also characterized by a lack of political institutional organization and hence the bargaining power to influence state and industry regulations, let alone take action to alleviate the systemic barriers that keep them precarious. The EU labour market is characterised by 30 million part-timers, with Italy alone containing over seven million flex workers and three million working in the informal labour market.

In this context, precarity may be typologized according to three figures: the "chainworker," the "brainworker" and the migrant worker. The first group includes those

who are atypical workers in service, commercial and tertiary sectors and service industries. According to the labour activist group the Chainworkers, precarious workers are most often employed in shopping malls, fast food restaurants, supermarket chains and franchised businesses. These jobs tend to have a high staff turnover (on average three months), thus diminishing the possibilities for union organizing. "Brainworkers" are commonly characterized as those who use their knowledge to produce immaterial labour (computer programming, entertainment industries, advertising, etc.).<sup>7</sup> In the case of migrant workers, regardless of their role in the labour market, their lack of civil rights keeps them in an ongoing state of insecurity.

Although these classifications help determine the specificities of the emergent global precariat, they tend to melt into one another and ignore other forms of labour, like housework, care work and sex work, which are also characterized by precarity.<sup>8</sup> Recognizing the inadequacy of any identity-based typology for defining a social movement, perhaps the most important question to ask of the precarity movement is: *how does it work?* To begin to answer this question, we first need to understand how the cult of San Precario arches back on its own religious history and recuperates religious narratives, mutating their meaning.

It is no coincidence that the first two European countries to take up the idea of precarity through images of religion or detournment were Italy and Spain. These countries are very familiar with the sight of religious processions and carnival, yet this traditional cultural baggage is quickly displaced by the novelty of San Precario content, mutating the known image. What is important to recognize about the cult of saints within Catholic religion is that they have the function of protecting their devotees from very specific problems or dangers. In the case of precarity, the creation of a protective saint fulfils a twofold function: it gives a name to a condition of labour widely spread or spreading across the countries (i.e. it creates the concept of precarity as a contemporary condition); and, it summons a group, in

Like religion, the precarious worker's movement requires more than a charming icon to effectively constitute its people.

a form of autopoietic interpellation, that recognizes the need for protection from precarity. Call it a collective enunciation of precarious people.

Like religion, the precarious worker's movement requires more than a charming icon to effectively constitute its people. Precarity functions as a concept because it also relies on an autonomous network (*unlike most religions*) that forms the infrastructure of the struggle. Like every structure, it has a history: the precarity movement has its roots in the radical political thought and social analysis of the Italian *Autonomia* movement, and especially in the squatters movement.

The squats or *Centri Sociali Autogestiti* (CSOA) shifted from often-marginalized spaces in the 1980s to sites for organizing alternative socio-political practices in the 90s. Among these centres, networks developed to connect and coordinate experiments with alternative modes of sociability that would extend beyond national borders. The CSOA, functioning in Italy, Spain and France, became spaces where alternative forms of knowledge and social struggle were developed creatively, using new tools such as technology (Hacklabs) and communication (Medialabs). These networks have worked as a basis for organizing many alter-globalization protests, including the Social Forums and the Genoa G8 summit, and we can see the CSOA as the sites where the consciousness of the "precariat" begins to emerge. Therefore, behind the volatility of hit-and-run Saint Precario actions, his activists rely on the construction of a network that can aid precarious workers to

navigate the turbulent labour market. To this end, in recent years many Italian cities have witnessed the opening (often in CSOA) of San Precario offices (*Punti San Precario*), where the precariat can receive legal, union and contract advice, agit-prop support, picket and strike planning, counter-information, as well as precarious intelligence (which is a secret).<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the long-term infrastructure of CSOA, EuroMayDay is a European network linking media and labour activist struggles across Europe, from Spain to Croatia, and from Norway to Italy. It started in Italy, when the Milan-based group the Chainworkers decided to recuperate the long-forgotten political meaning of Mayday celebrations and began organizing peaceful protests, parades and carnivals in Italian cities. *Remember*: Mayday originates as a tribute to and celebration of the sacrifice made by the Chicago labour activists who fought and were murdered in 1886, following the general strikes for the 8-hour working day in the United States.

One year later the initiative spread to Spain and grew from 5,000 people in 2001 in Milan to 100,000 in 2004 in Barcelona and Milan combined.<sup>10</sup> MayDay 2007 is planned to be a globally coordinated phenomenon, hence the call for *MondoMayDay*.

### Tactics and Strategies

By embracing a wide range of communication tools and practices, the precarity movement enables workers less familiar with their political conditions, yet all too familiar with the exploitation they engender, to contextualize their exploitation within the broader logic of capitalism, and connect to a wide range of struggles within a meaningful system of reference. Since a large

percentage of precarious labourers are found in a younger, non-politicized stratum of society, much of the communication rhetoric and forms of struggle have been developed to capture their attention. Apart from the picketing and demonstrations that recuperate the traditional idea of workers' struggle, resistance is made more intelligible through games, carnival, parades with music and dance, video activism and marketing strategies.

At all levels, there is a reinvention of forms and strategies of resistance. The creativity of the precariat is used as a tool for resistance through various tactics, from re-appropriating urban public spaces in original ways to developing subversive videogames, board games such as Precariopoly or funky card games.<sup>11</sup> These tactics are important because they use the conditions of labour readily recognizable by those affected to construct a point of political reference within which struggle can become intelligible. In this context, the circulation of information through coalitions with media activist networks plays a considerable role in reaching a broader public. A case in point is the link between the EuroMayDay movement and Teletreet/Ngvision — a network of Italian pirate televisions. The Teletreet/Ngvision project provides a Web archive to store and distribute footage of actions. This means that the material is available online for those who want to watch it and that the same footage can be broadcast directly into Italian households, bypassing the filtering of the mainstream media.<sup>12</sup>

Research is another important aspect of the precarity network. Worth mentioning here are the Precarity Map project and the case studies carried out by the feminist group *Precarias a la deriva*, from a Spanish CSOA in Madrid.<sup>13</sup> The Precarity Map is a "WebRing for Communication and Militant Research on Precarity."<sup>14</sup> This Web project, involved in the mobilization of the EuroMayday actions, brings together different nodes of organizations working on precarity, including blogs and other websites. The website also coordinates research on the topic with an aim to "produce and share knowledge, experi-

ences and materials among labour conflicts and life struggles around precarity."<sup>15</sup> It connects those involved in the EuroMayDay initiatives, rendering more actions visible, intensifying the density of activist groups, creating a space for debate, "to construct common practices, concepts and notions for developing a militant co-research "with" (instead of "on") precarious subjects and their/our struggles."<sup>16</sup>

The work by *Precarias a la deriva* concentrates specifically on developing tools to conceptualize a movement that recognizes its singularities without having to rely on simplistic homogeneous identities and categories. This is done through ethnographic studies structured as a series of itinerant and first-hand encounters to map the territory of precarity in metropolitan areas. The *Precarias* stress the indissoluble link between life and work and their quest has yielded a more fluid definition of precarity: "We prefer to define it as a juncture of material and symbolic conditions which determine an uncertainty with respect to the sustained access to the resources essential to the full development of one's life. This definition permits us to overcome the dichotomies of public/private and production/reproduction and to



Precarity procession in Milan.  
Courtesy: the Chainworkers.



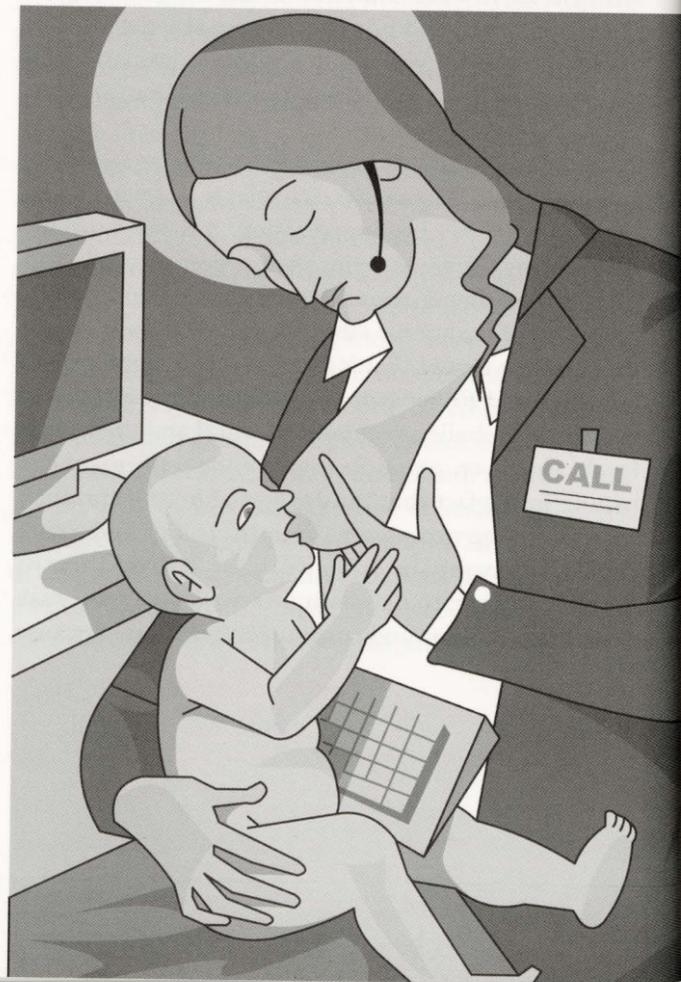
The precarization of social life is immediately evident in the exponential growth of the psycho-pharmaceutical industry in North America and its continual dispersal of antidepressant drugs.

and North American uses of political theory is, indeed, significant. These distinctions require that the problem of precarity, if it is to become useful in North America, be posed on its own terms and within its own historical and political context.

A key to posing this problem in a meaningful way is to understand precarity not as a simple reinvoication of dichotomies (precarity as opposed to guaranteed income/security), rather, following the *Precarias a la deriva*, it should be understood as a tendency towards the precarization of life that threatens every aspect of social existence. In this sense, precarity can be understood as a condition of social life, which is no less palpable in North America than in Europe. To cite Alex Foti once more, the precarization of social life is immediately evident in the exponential growth of the psycho-pharmaceutical industry in North America and its continual dispersal of antidepressant drugs.<sup>20</sup> The pharmaceutical industry is just one of many examples that signals how the anxiety engendered by precarity at the level of labour spills over into a plurality of related fields, including domestic stress, relationship conflict, isolation and depression, etc. This demonstrates the relevance of precarity, not only as a condition of labour, but perhaps more significantly, as the emergent condition of social existence within global capitalism.

The question then becomes how this precarization of social life, which no doubt affects the large majority of North Americans, can be made manifest as a concept

around which new struggles can begin to take form. Perhaps a key to this problem lies in another consequential distinction. The myth of the American dream and its attendant fantasies of limitless opportunity and personal enrichment plague the American imaginary, foreclosing connections between economic oppression and organized political resistance, and re-routing political questions back onto the isolated individual. The shame and guilt that the American media so willingly associate with poverty, precarity and the struggle for survival must be attacked as neo-liberal codings of political life. It is at this level where the struggle for a new labour politics must take place. Displacing these cultural myths and demonstrating that the processes of



Angelo Rindone / copyleft, 2004, Maternity Fresco for the San Precario Chapel.

capitalism are the same as those that lead to the precarization of all life, not just human existence, is therefore a key element in the construction of effective political resistance, especially in North America.

In this direction we can draw several lessons from the precarity movement in Europe: research, especially ethnographic studies, must connect with activist organizations to analyze the conditions in which the concept of precarity can take root and develop suitable strategies to adapt the forms of struggle developed elsewhere to new ground. Many of the strategies employed by the precarity movement in Europe to politicize younger generations are already widely developed in activist groups in North America, especially through "culture jamming" and video activism. In this context, we could say that some of the conditions for a potential precarity movement here already exist. What is missing is the space where various groups who recognize the advantages of the concept of precarity can come together and form a connective synthesis among organizations, while foregrounding their respective differences.

Since the beginning of the war on terror, many organizations have already formed surprising yet effective networks of solidarity, but whether or not the concept of precarity could further strengthen these connections cannot be determined in advance. We see it as a catalyst concept that could enrich activist and labour discourse, provide new points of contact between organizations, and embolden the North American imaginary. Maintaining difference remains a key point of the struggle and if the concept of precarity provides a point of unification and solidarity without compromising the distinct and unique experiences of those within the struggle, we definitely see it as worthy of adoption.

Organizations from Europe and Australia are already organising to make *MondoMayday 2007* a resounding statement against the logic of neo-liberalism, capitalist exploitation and the precarity they engender, while demonstrating alternative forms of social organization and solidarity. For those hoping to connect with these

Mayday actions, we suggest visiting [www.precarity-canada.org](http://www.precarity-canada.org) to begin the assemblage of a North American coalition that would build on existing networks and continue to operate as a point of connection for political action following the Mayday events. For everyone else, we suggest a more Pascalian wager: accept your precarity, seek salvation in your suffering, and get on your knees and pray — after all, if the sky is not yet falling on the precariat of North America, the price of oil certainly is.

*The authors would like to thank Greig de Peuter, Marcelo Expósito, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Alex Foti, Zoe and Jeff Monaghan for their help.*

*Alessandra Renzi is a researcher working on video activism and a member of CAMERA (The Committee on Alternative Media Experimentation, Research and Analysis).*

*Stephen Turpin is a researcher currently living and working in Toronto. His research interests include modernist architecture, conceptual art and contemporary French philosophy.*

#### Notes:

1. Alex Foti. "Mayday Mayday." [http://www.republicart.net/disc/precariat/foti01\\_en.pdf](http://www.republicart.net/disc/precariat/foti01_en.pdf)
2. Manifiesto convocatoria Barcelona EuroMayDay 2004. "Mayday, Mayday! Les precàries i precaris es rebel·len." [http://www.euromayday.org/barcelona/textos\\_ct.html](http://www.euromayday.org/barcelona/textos_ct.html)
3. Chainworkers. "LaVita di San Precario." <http://www.ecn.org/chainworkers/chainw/noi/azioni/29feb04.htm>
4. See <http://www.euromayday.org/prop/sprekario.mp3>
5. See <http://www2.autistici.org/hackeralbum/afreschi/>
6. The brand can be used under a share-alike license on the condition that the products are all licensed according to the same criteria. [http://serpicanaro.realityhacking.org/Licenza/?c=1\\_proclama](http://serpicanaro.realityhacking.org/Licenza/?c=1_proclama)
7. Maurizio Lazzarato. 'Immaterial Labour', trans. Paul Colilli & Ed Emory, in Paolo Virno & Michael Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp.132-146.
8. Precarias a la deriva. "Precarious Lexicon." <http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/precarias/lexicon.htm>
9. See <http://www.sanprecario.info/>
10. Alex Foti. "Mayday Mayday." [http://www.republicart.net/disc/precariat/foti01\\_en.pdf](http://www.republicart.net/disc/precariat/foti01_en.pdf)
11. For the Molleindustria games see: <http://www.molleindustria.it/> for the card game see: <http://www.insutv.it/mayday/index.php>
12. See <http://www.Telestreet.it> and <http://www.ngvision.org>
13. For the Precarity map see: <http://www.sindominio.net/idan/web/>. For the Precarias a la deriva see <http://sindominio.net/karakola/precarias.htm>
14. See <http://www.precarity-map.net/>
15. Ibid.
16. See [http://www.precarity-map.net/presentation\\_en.html](http://www.precarity-map.net/presentation_en.html)
17. Precarias a la deriva. "Adrift through the circuits of feminized precarious work." [http://www.republicart.net/disc/precariat/precarias01\\_en.pdf](http://www.republicart.net/disc/precariat/precarias01_en.pdf)
18. Greenpepper Magazine. Precarity and n/european Identity: an interview with Alex Foti (Chainworkers). [http://metabolik.hacklabs.org/alephandria/txt/Foti\\_Precarity.pdf](http://metabolik.hacklabs.org/alephandria/txt/Foti_Precarity.pdf)
19. Marcello Tari and Ilaria Vanni. "On the Life and Deeds of San Precario, Patron Saint of Precarious Workers and Lives *Fiberculture* issue 5. [http://journal.fiberculture.org/issue5/vanni\\_tari.html](http://journal.fiberculture.org/issue5/vanni_tari.html)
20. Ibid., Greenpepper Magazine.

"[G]entrification is a powerful if often camouflaged intent within urban regeneration strategies, and a critical challenge must be mounted against the ideological anodyne that sweeps the question of gentrification from sight even as the scale of the process becomes more threatening and the absorption of gentrification into a wider neo-liberal urbanism becomes more palpable."

Neil Smith and Jeff Derksen<sup>1</sup>

# West!

# Gentrification



A mural created by youth artists in the Downtown East neighborhood. Photo: Kara Granzow.

by Amber Dean  
and Kara Granzow

"I don't know of any place in the world where you have a city the magnitude of Edmonton with that much fallow ground lying next to downtown."

Don Stastny, Consultant, City of Edmonton Downtown East Revitalization Project<sup>2</sup>

The city of Edmonton has just finished a round of public consultations on plans to "revitalize" a neighbourhood that has been newly dubbed the Downtown East. This is an area where the unjust and uneven effects of urban poverty and neglect are deeply felt, and where some of Edmonton's most critical social services are provided. City-sponsored pamphlets advertising the redevelopment plans ask, "What would it take for YOU to live or invest in Edmonton's Downtown East area?" Frustratingly, the YOU the city is speaking to doesn't include many of the 2,425-plus people who already call the community home. Scratch beneath the surface and this "revitalization" looks much like a crass and deliberate attempt to rationalize a complete *gentrification* of this poor-and-working-class neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city's increasingly prosperous downtown core. Revitalization, here, is a watered-down, less threatening and hence less opposable name for the practice of gentrification.

### Gentrification Edmonton-style

An alarming (though not unusual) feature of this new city-sponsored project is the exclusion of many local residents from the "revitalization" of their neighbourhood. Those who live in the downtown east area are for the most part not being asked about the proposed changes to the place they call home. Instead, they are imagined away in the effort to gentrify part of what has for many years been known as the Boyle Street community. And this virtual erasure both legitimizes decades of neglect and portends what may well become an actual dispossession. For example, after decades of being overlooked by the city, rooming houses that have for years offered only substandard housing options to those with few alternatives are now conveniently receiving the inspections that deem them unfit for human occupancy. Had such inspections occurred earlier, prior to investor interest in what the city hopes will become prime real estate, the outcome might have involved repairs rather than condemnation and increased homelessness.

In February of this past year, at the first of three public meetings on the Downtown East project at City Hall, attendees were asked to answer the campaign's guiding question. City Hall is a daunting location for a community to gather for discussion. It is located outside the neighbourhood being considered, both by geography and by class. Standards of dress, etiquette, and styles of communication are exclusionary in practice regardless of whether the meeting is designated "public." Locating the meetings in Edmonton's civic centre, surrounded by the city law courts, police headquarters and the Edmonton Remand Centre, also makes a sense of surveillance inescapable — this is not exactly a comfortable or safe environment for those often already subject to heightened surveillance due to the poverty and over-criminalization common in inner-city neighbourhoods. So although city representatives have been self-congratulatory about the "openness" of their public consultation process, in actuality those attending the public meetings represented a largely homogenous cross-section of interested parties (e.g., developers and property owners), most of whom were not living in the neighbourhood in question. After all, for people who already live there, the question "what would it take for YOU to live in the Downtown East area?" is nonsensical.

Despite these subtle practices of exclusion, a number of voices at the first public meeting expressed concern for local residents of the Boyle Street neighbourhood and insisted that displacement of those already living and working in the area must not be the outcome of the proposed revitalization. At the second public meeting (in March 2006) city planners had a new strategy to curtail the expression of dissent to their all-encompassing gentrification strategy. In this meeting, participants were almost immediately broken into small facilitator-lead groups. To rationalize this new approach, project mastermind Don Stastny publicly dismissed the first meeting as a "bitch session" and insisted that attendees were about to embark on the real work of *creatively re-imagining* the 18 block area. At this particular "visioning,"

This process engaged us all in a mental bulldozing of the majority of the neighbourhood's buildings.

we were asked to focus solely on new park space, changes to traffic circulation and the creation of uninhibited views of the river valley (for those who will be able to afford them). There was *no* further discussion of the concerns raised at the first meeting and no opportunity to raise them again. Instead, we were handed packs of pink and yellow sticky notes and asked to use these little papers to indicate what city project manager Bob Caldwell described as our "gut reactions" to five imaginary new designs for the area. Varying only slightly from one another in terms of the location of green space, traffic flow and placement of prospective high-rises, each of the designs imagined away the neighbourhood's current people and places. This process engaged us all in a mental bulldozing of the majority of the neighborhood's buildings (13 are designated heritage sites by the city and therefore escape demolition). No mention was made of how any of the structures, historic or not, might actually be *used* after the proposed redevelopment. Nor was there any mention of how structures in the neighborhood are currently used. Many questions remain unanswered: Will there be decent, affordable housing that will accommodate local people? Will shelters and other services get to keep their doors open, or will they be removed to some other, more remote part of the city? What will happen to businesses, shops and restaurants that currently exist in the neighbourhood?

The third meeting and two subsequent open houses followed essentially the same format. Concern for local residents was handed off to a select group of social service providers who were tasked with developing a "community action plan" that would respond to the "problems" their clients pose for this revitalization of the Downtown East. Thus, the process of planning for existing residents was passed off to social service professionals to be decided behind closed doors instead of through public forums. While city officials had paid lip-service to an ongoing need for social services in the area and to their commitment to housing current residents locally, they have in the same breath been developing plans for removing "offensive activities" and relocating front-line services and individual residents.<sup>3</sup> Where services and people will be relocated *to* remains a mystery, as does the degree of decision-making power available to those affected. This September, a report entitled *Creating a Vision for Downtown East*, which offers an expansion of the "vision" for an entirely transformed neighbourhood, was ratified by city council. Further, troubling assumptions about class, creativity and culture have been mobilized in support of what essentially amounts to opportunities for private investment and development.

### Mobilizing "Class," "Culture" and "Creativity"

Since being elected Edmonton's mayor in 2004, Stephen Mandel has often proclaimed his admiration for American planning guru Richard Florida, author of the immensely popular book *The Rise of the Creative Class* and inventor of the "creativity index," a statistical method for assessing a city's potential for economic success.<sup>4</sup> Florida has been touted as the new champion of artists, bohemians, musicians and queers, as his research ties urban economic growth and development to both the presence of a Creative Class (vaguely defined as being composed of people who employ some form of creativity in their work life) and tolerance for diversity (measurable, according to Florida, by how well a city treats its gay population).

Basically, Florida's ideology of the Creative Economy predicts that if a city can attract and retain a strong Creative Class, its economic success is virtually guaranteed. The theory proposes that large companies, the high-tech industry and investors will be drawn to Creative People, rather than the oft-assumed other way around. So it is not surprising that Mayor Mandel, following Florida, has worked hard to promote the Edmonton arts scene since his election and has proclaimed "art" and "culture" as priorities for the revitalized downtown east area, including a new museum, small gallery spaces and artsy boutiques. Mandel has also publicly supported gay rights in a province where one can still safely assume such acts must cost political points.

So, what could be wrong with increasing funding and support for the arts or for the queer community? On the surface, nothing: the Edmonton arts community has benefited greatly from Mandel's drive to re-invest in arts and culture, just as the queer community benefits from his public endorsement of Pride Week and fundraising for local queer youth. But viewed in the context of attracting the Creative Class to the downtown east as a site for living or investing, this tactic might also be read as a form of "divide and conquer." In effect, artists and queers are being subtly pitted against the working class and urban poor who presently occupy the Boyle Street neighbourhood. While none of these identity categories are mutually exclusive or cohesive unto themselves, in this case priority is granted to those categories that are deemed potentially profitable in Florida's Creative Economy.

One of the many flaws in Florida's Creative Class theory is his assumption about what qualifies as "culture." For Florida and his followers, culture is remarkably white

and middle-class: it involves street-based cafés but excludes those who eat, drink or sit and socialize on the street outside sanctioned spaces; it involves gallery-based artistic expression but excludes graffiti/mural art or street-based vendors often noticeable in inner-city neighbourhoods; it involves access to the outdoors but only for those who can afford to participate in sanctioned activities (like going to festivals where consumers are welcome but "loiterers" are expelled). In Edmonton, one of the key proposals related to increasing access to outdoor activities in the neighbourhood recommends running exorbitantly costly (estimated at around \$15 million) funiculars (or outdoor escalators) from the river valley to the downtown east area, despite a dearth of decent, affordable housing in the city. Recently, an Edmontonian suggested in the local paper that perhaps the Mayor's office should run the funiculars from under the bridges since that's where too many of Edmonton's most marginalized citizens are (or will soon be) sleeping.<sup>5</sup> Insights like this point to the class-based assumptions that underpin Creative Class ideology about "culture," who creates it, and who should have access to it.

Not surprisingly, given this emphasis on culture as a driving motivation behind the revitalization, the campaign to transform the Downtown East appeals to aesthetics. The slogan, "Create a Vision," was the focus of the three city-sponsored public meetings (referred to by city staff as "visioning sessions"). This approach was a strategic step in gaining public support for the campaign in a number of ways: via an appeal to an aesthetic creativity, it 1) identifies/affirms who has the power to "create," 2) eliminates an architectural, social, historical responsibility to the people and places already present in the area, and 3) naturalizes a stance of non-opposition to the gentrification of the area, since "creativity" is

One of the many flaws in Florida's Creative Class theory is his assumption about what qualifies as "culture."



A large neighborhood cooperative garden used by many residents. Photo: Kara Granzow.

These two notions, “culture” and “shopping,” appear virtually interchangeable in many media and other descriptions of the city’s vision for the “revitalized” downtown east area.

assumed to be an automatic good and a universally-accessible form employed for the benefit of “humanity” as a whole. So this appeal to aesthetics invites participants without attachment to the current form and structure of the neighbourhood to a clean canvas, or more specifically, as the American architect hired to direct the “visioning process” professed, to “an open palette.”

This project to literally change the character(s) of a place is directed at those lumped into the Creative Class category and to classist affection for the aesthetic, the creative and the inspired. All of this should alarm those of us hailed willingly or unwillingly as constituents of Florida’s Creative Class. The Creative Class citizen presumed here sees the world as an expansive and open opportunity to appropriate. The imperative, “Create!” comes without conscience: it is a call to a supposedly empty, pure aesthetic. For while the Creative Economy transforms the middle-class into a Creative Class that is

positioned as culturally and economically valuable, it simultaneously transforms the working class into a Service Class. Florida is clear that the Service Class has little or no ability to act on the “Create!” imperative: it exists to cater to the Creative Class who “require a growing pool of low-end service workers to take care of them and do their chores.”<sup>6</sup> And the Creative Economy further transforms the unemployed urban poor into a class that is lamentably displaced entirely by “revitalization,” described as *an unfortunate but apparently unavoidable state of affairs*. For although Florida suggests the Creative Class has a moral responsibility to improve the fate of the other classes, he fails to make any case for how this might be possible given the Creative Class’ utter reliance on a Service Class for its very existence and for its ability to “Create!” Hence proponents of Creative Class ideology pay lipservice to the importance of social responsibility while at the same time being fully aware that without the labour of the Service Class and the existence of an “underclass” that is marked racially other and poor, the Creative Class would cease to exist — it is, in fact, *defined* by these very distinctions.<sup>7</sup>

What Creative Class ideology masks (and what Edmonton city council and planners have failed to notice in their rush to revitalize the Downtown East) is that there is *already* culture in this neighbourhood. It may not have the Creative Class cachet of galleries, boutiques and street-level cafés, but this certainly doesn’t mean that inner-city spaces are *devoid* of culture. Rather, they possess forms of culture that many of us would prefer to deny, avoid or eliminate, in part because to engage with them might point out the crass consumerism of what is often taken to be “Culture.” These two notions, “culture” and “shopping,” appear virtually interchangeable in many media and other descriptions of the city’s vision for the “revitalized” downtown east

area. Those envisioning a new location for acquiring hip goods will surely want to avoid the signs of poverty that might cause us to question our sense of entitlement to an ever-growing accumulation of stuff. Acknowledging the socially-situated nature of what is often assumed to represent “culture” might in fact encourage us to take a long, hard look at our own implication in the injustices evident in the Boyle Street neighbourhood. This type of self-reflection is exactly what can be conveniently avoided via assumptions that spaces like this one have no culture worth acknowledging.

Florida also acknowledges that his Creative Economy at best maintains, or possibly even deepens, racial divides, making evident the unstated equivocation of the Creative Class and whiteness. Yet he offers no potential solutions to this outcome. This troubling scenario further exposes the racialized and class-based assumptions embedded in Creative Class ideology about what qualifies as desirable “culture.” It is entirely predictable, then, that there is a strong visible presence of non-white folks in the area slotted for gentrification here in Edmonton. Given the noticeable over-representation of people who are indigenous in particular, there are hard questions to be faced here about the legacies of historical traumas like colonization, genocide, and residential schools and the perpetuation of these legacies through the ongoing over-criminalization and regulated poverty of indigenous communities. Such questions are sidelined by the City’s drive towards a simple “removal of offensive activities” from the neighbourhood through increased and targeted policing that addresses the “safety concerns” of those members of the Creative Class being invited to imagine the downtown east area as a place to live or invest in.

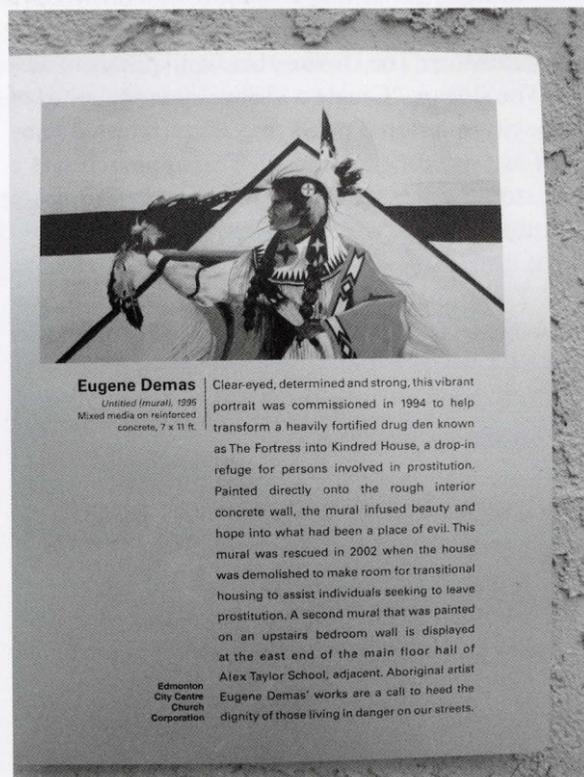
### Appropriation and Re-appropriation

This is not the first time that the land of the downtown east area has been reconstituted for the purposes of appropriation. Although late-nineteenth-century Europeans initially deemed the Canadian West unfit for civilized settlement due to its long winters and extreme geography, the expansionist movement revised the

West as a land of agricultural opportunity, a site of vast potential for European settlement and for the appropriation of natural resources. The first colonizers of this land assumed ownership despite the presence of indigenous peoples, eventually selling the vast western territory to the Canadian government. Treaty agreements then effectively usurped the land from First Nations bands and Métis families: by 1876, present-day Edmonton was bound by Treaty 6. Negotiations about ownership and entitlement to the land and its resources are ongoing.

With the introduction of government incentive programs, more and more people arrived to colonize Canada’s frontier in the image of their mostly European homelands. Since then, colonial government policy and practice has endeavored to assimilate (and/or eliminate) the indigenous peoples and their claim to the lands. Just as early government-sponsored representations of these inhabited lands portrayed them as spaces open and empty for settlement, today Edmonton’s Downtown East project renders the current residents of the Boyle Street area absent and the space itself uncharted terrain, “fallow ground” open for the taking. The frontier metaphors invoked by those spearheading the revitalization are staggering: as just one of many possible examples, a consultant to the project recently suggested that private developers don’t want to invest in the area as “pioneers” but would rather be part of the “wagon train”! So the violent appropriation of land through treaty arrangements that were subsequently mis-interpreted and dishonoured returns as this land is re-appropriated in the interest of increasing corporate investment and instilling commodity culture.

At the same time as it is repeatedly constituted as empty or “fallow” ground, the downtown east area is also rendered a *degenerate* space. These seemingly contradictory practices, of articulating the space as both empty and degenerate, work together to further legitimate the practices of colonization and gentrification. The City’s decision to re-name this portion of the Boyle Street Community the “Downtown East” area at the



**Eugene Demas** Clear-eyed, determined and strong, this vibrant portrait was commissioned in 1994 to help transform a heavily fortified drug den known as The Fortress into Kindred House, a drop-in refuge for persons involved in prostitution. Painted directly onto the rough interior concrete wall, the mural infused beauty and hope into what had been a place of evil. This mural was rescued in 2002 when the house was demolished to make room for transitional housing to assist individuals seeking to leave prostitution. A second mural that was painted on an upstairs bedroom wall is displayed at the east end of the main floor hall of Alex Taylor School, adjacent. Aboriginal artist Eugene Demas’ works are a call to heed the dignity of those living in danger on our streets.

A plaque commemorating the transformation of a local building into a drop-in centre for sex workers. Photo: Kara Granzow.

same time it began planning this revitalization seems hardly accidental. The local mainstream press, after all, has now taken to referring to the neighbourhood as "Edmonton's seedy downtown eastside," a neat rhetorical trick conjuring images of illicit drug use, widespread HIV infection, and missing and murdered women from the now-notorious neighbourhood of the same name in Vancouver. Once such images are conjured (as the phrasing, "seedy downtown eastside," is likely to do for almost anyone who has kept up with the national news these past few years), the city need do nothing more to make its case for the necessity of "cleaning up" this neighbourhood. The work is done for them through the act of convenient naming. So the neighbourhood begins to occupy the space in viewers' imaginations of a new frontier, one which needs taming and settlement to replace degeneracy with civility, modernity — in short, with progress.

Of course, Edmonton has its own story to tell about missing and murdered women. For years now women have been picked up in and around the area now called the Downtown East and disappeared from here, their bodies turning up in fields outside of the city. This violent removal of women who occupy the spaces slated for redevelopment should surely give us pause about any actions that might further perpetuate or exacerbate such violent displacements. Yet efforts to raise concerns about how changes to traffic flow stemming from the revitalization would affect the safety of women doing sex work in the area were met at public meetings with stony silence, dismissal, or outright scorn and derision. In this way the women who live and work in this neighbourhood are cast as less-than-human, their displacement an inevitable and irrelevant concern in the drive to generate "culture," to "create a vision" for a future wiped clean of its past. Displacing these members of the community to new and unfamiliar areas will likely heighten their vulnerability.

Over the course of this revisioning process, the assumptions and values of the City of Edmonton have been made exceedingly clear. Starting from the assumption

that the Boyle Street neighbourhood is empty, devoid of culture, or merely contains people and activities that are easily cast aside as "undesirable" or "offensive," it is little wonder that the "you" the city imagines revitalizing the neighbourhood for excludes many of the people who currently live out their lives in this community. Given this starting point, it is not surprising that artists, queers and other heretofore marginalized groups (whose marginalization, it should be noted, is also nuanced by race and class privilege) have been interpolated into the Creative Class (as the desirable subjects of culture and creativity) and pitted against those who already live in the neighbourhood. Unpacking the many assumptions underpinning the proposed revitalization in Edmonton's downtown east, and resisting and remaining critical of how we are each differently hailed (or not) by this YOU, allows us to begin addressing broader questions of social justice. Without such scrutiny, the unjust outcomes of gentrification and displacement do indeed appear inevitable.

*We'd like to thank the many dedicated activists and advocates for social justice whose work in and for the Boyle Street neighbourhood in Edmonton has inspired the critique contained in this paper.*

*Amber Dean is a Ph.D. student in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. She is currently guest editing a special issue of West Coast Line on representations of murdered and missing women (with Vancouver writer Anne Stone).*

*Kara Granzow is currently working on her Ph.D. in the Sociology Department at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.*

#### Notes:

1. Neil Smith and Jeff Derksen. "Urban Regeneration: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy." *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*. (Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery and Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002), p.88.
2. Cited in Gordon Kent. "Ideas Flow to Kickstart Eastside," *Edmonton Journal*, 3 February 2006, p.B.10.
3. The City of Edmonton's "Community Action Plan," part of the Downtown East Action Plan Overview, recommends the "removal of offensive activities" from the area.
4. Richard Florida. *The Rise of the Creative Class And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
5. Fabian Jennings. "Waterfront View" [Letter], *Edmonton Journal*, 10 July 2006, p.A.19.
6. Florida, *Ibid*, p.71.
7. Thanks to Sharon Rosenberg for helping us develop this argument, and for her many insightful suggestions on an earlier draft.

## Supporting Creativity: But only for 12 hours?

*Nuit Blanche, Toronto  
30 September 2006  
review by Leah Sandals*

This past fall, Toronto hosted its first-ever all-night art party. Well, it probably wasn't the first-ever all-night art party in town; but it *was* the first one to invite all city residents. From 7:01pm Saturday night to 7am Sunday morning, the west end of the city played host to Nuit Blanche, a "free all-night contemporary art thing" comprised of hundreds of art installations and events and, incredibly, hundreds of thousands of Torontonians as audience. Inspired by similar projects in Paris, Montréal and Rome, the night was a "signature event" in the city's Live with Culture campaign. Scotiabank, who has recently increased outreach to arts and culture, co-sponsoring the Sobey Award and similar events, was the main sponsor, and had its name appended to all festivities.

First impressions of both the art and crowds that came out to see it were of wonder and delight! At 10pm on Queen West, where I started my evening, sidewalks were choked with people looking for and at art. A huge crowd stood in the parking lot of the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art watching Paul Collins' film installation *24 Hour 3 Stooges*. Down the street, dozens of passersby snapped photos of an alleyway agglomeration of tennis shoes mysteriously installed by Maria Legault and Auriane Sokoloski (*Le Tour de Gretchen Burcelle*).

My engagement with the scene was inspired by the radical nature and unusual scale of some of the pieces presented. Particularly striking was Edgar Heap of Birds' installation *Presence and Resistance* — one part was a billboard reading, in huge red letters, "Imperial Canada Share Stolen Lands." It is rare to see a message like this writ so large, so directly, and so "officially" in the downtown of a major city. These works encapsulated the political potential of Nuit Blanche — to stage encounters between radical politics and the urban public, ferrying home issues and places that are often treated as far away.

Heap of Birds' work formed an elegiac, angry duet with Rebecca Belmore and Osvaldo Yero's *Freeze*, a memorial to Neil Stonechild that was located in a car wash across the street. *Freeze*, a sculpture of ice engraved with Stonechild's name stands as a testament to his freezing to death at the hands of Saskatoon police. Touching the icy monument made the cold of Stonechild's final prairie winter palpable. This ephemeral memorial, by its presence and materials also pointed to the almost complete absence of public memorials to and public art by First Nations people in Toronto.

There was a tension between the political nature of these pieces and the party atmosphere that prevailed in promoting



Above and middle: Rebecca Belmore and Osvaldo Yero, *Freeze*, 2006. Courtesy: City of Toronto, Special Events.  
Below: Edgar Heap of Birds, *Presence and Resistance*, 2006. Courtesy: City of Toronto, Special Events.

and consuming them. Though *Freeze* was a profound and heavy piece, the atmosphere around it was far from solemn. In the end, lament and festivity were awkwardly bound together into something not quite wake and not quite kegger.

Each of Nuit Blanche's curators dealt with this tension in a different way. Clara Hargittay, who curated the Queen West strip that included *Freeze* and *Presence and Resistance*, aimed to return the area to the people that once inhabited it. Consider the stage she gave to Belmore and Heap of Birds, as well as the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (Workman Arts' *Outstanding/Standing Out* broadcast selections from the Rendezvous with Madness Film Festival) and even the creek under Trinity Bellwoods Park (David Warne and Kevin Krivel's *Electronic Sky* installation recorded and broadcast the rushing sounds of the "lost" Garrison Creek now flowing along the bottom of the sewer). Kim Simon, who curated the adjoining area further east including Grange Park, Nathan Phillips Square and OCAD's

Butterfield Park, took a more playful tack, selecting works and artists that celebrated different forms of urban social interaction. This included a performance of tangoing "police officers" from Diane Borsato, *How to Respond in an Emergency*, two different dance parties from Darren O'Donnell and Samuel Roy-Bois (*Ballroom Dancing* and *Position Yourself in a Network of Possibilities*), games of marbles led by the Bantam AAA Art Team (*Marble Tournament*) and a public forum created and coordinated by architect Adrian Blackwell (*Model for a Public Space* (Speaker)). Finally, the curatorial team of Fern Bayer, Peggy Gale and Chrysanthe Stathacos focused on "pasts reframed" in their Yorkville area exhibition, matching artists' works with relevant sites: General Idea's *Pharma©opia*, sculptures of pills, were installed outside Cumberland Private Wealth Management; Fujiko Nakaya's *Fog in Toronto #71624*, a fog sculpture, was located along the former home of Taddle Creek; and Emily Pohl-Weary's *Bedtime Stories: Fables and Fantasies*, a series of author readings, were placed at the



General Idea, *Pharma©opia*, 2006. Courtesy: City of Toronto, Special Events.



Fujiko Nakaya, *Fog in Toronto #71624*, 2006. Courtesy: City of Toronto, Special Events.

Heliconian Club, a hub for Toronto's 1960s literary scene.

It is clear that the curators made great efforts to present a range of works that spoke to the specificities of geography and temporality. Some works were historically site-specific, while others, like Anthea Foyer's *Hidden Toronto*, generated invented histories of place. Some took the meaning of "public" to be outdoors, while others worked with often-neglected indoor public spaces like community centres and swimming pools. And while some works were hi-fi, like the video projections in the Drake Hotel's Sky Yard, some were decidedly "lo." In an appropriate contrast to the rich denizens of the Drake, artists housed in a burlap sack put on a nonsensical puppet show outside the hotel.

But was the reason 450,000 caffeinated spectators came curatorial curiosity? Likely far from it. The reason Nuit Blanche was so popularly successful was that it incorporated the operational aspects of any good art outreach project: it made art viewing/creating safe, interesting, relevant, fun, well-publicized, and best of all, free.

The key, now that the party is over, is for Toronto to extend this philosophy of cul-

tural outreach beyond the 12 hours of Nuit Blanche, making the arts more inclusive, accessible and sustainable. In many instances, the city and its corporations give to artists with one hand as they take away with the other. Nuit Blanche reaped \$1 million for local business and massive local publicity for the city. But how are artists actually being compensated for their role in making Toronto a "cultural destination?" The studios at 48 Abell Street are a good case study. Though they drove the revitalization of Queen Street West, they have been denied heritage designation by the city and are likely to be razed for condos.

There are, of course, built-in short-term economic incentives for keeping artists poor and on the move — for when their populations shift, they generally bring gentrification into low-income areas, eventually prompting development of profit-bearing condos, coffee chains and

upscale clothing stores. The geography of Nuit Blanche itself (perhaps unintentionally) reflected this, tracing patterns of art-driven gentrification from centre (Yorkville) to periphery (Queen West). So if the Queen West of today is the Yorkville of tomorrow, and if the Dundas West of today can be the Queen West of tomorrow, well, why should the City, funding-hungry as it is, be motivated to stanch the flow of market-driven, property-tax-harvestable "progress"?

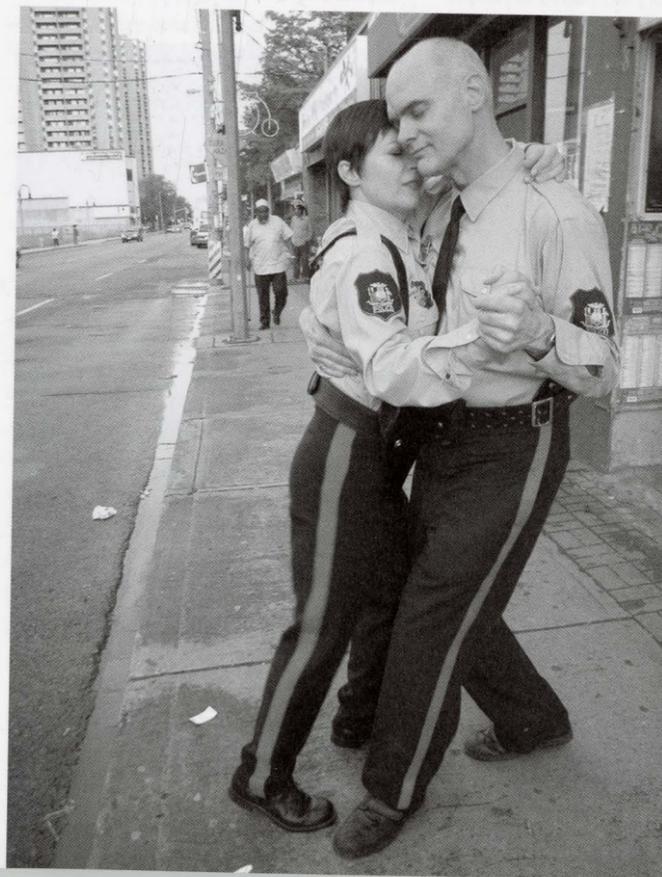
A recently issued report by the Creative Cities Leadership Team (*Imagine a Toronto — Strategies for a Creative City*) urges a more sustainable, long-term approach to the management of creative resources. This includes free admission to art institutions for people under the age of 20; reinstating arts education as a vital part of all school curricula; creating an arts advocacy organization whose purpose is to remove bottlenecks to arts funding; setting up an institution that provides startup supports

to creative enterprises; establishing a system for protecting and creating affordable space; creating a Mortgage Investment Fund for Creative Industries to ensure that artists, arts organizations and creative enterprises have the option of owning rather than leasing their premises; and installing public art in a wider variety of locales, including the extensive ravine parks of Toronto.

If it is any inspiration, the cities that Toronto modeled itself on for this Nuit Blanche have done as much for the rest of their cultural lives: under-18 admission to the Georges Pompidou and the Louvre in Paris is always free, while for \$7 a year, Montréal grants residents a special card that gets them 15 to 50 percent off admission to museums, galleries, festivals and cinemas. Brooklyn's Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Centre preserves low-rent spaces for artists in a gentrifying neighborhood. And the UK's Creative London provides a coherent voice to promote and advocate for the creative industries and forge connections between the many delivery agencies working across the city.

Nuit Blanche was a nightlong experiment in transforming public space. It remains to be seen whether those transformations can push not just beyond the bounds of sleep but into the everyday life of thousands of Toronto's citizens. Now that the city's government and commercial interests have had time for a good long rest, they are surely ready to start working with the cultural community in providing better levels of artistic access and compensation.

*Leah Sandals is Public Art Editor of Spacing Magazine.*



Diane Borsato, *How to Respond in an Emergency*, 2006. Courtesy: City of Toronto, Special Events.

# Cracking Up the Nation: Afshin Matlabi's *Terrorism, Democracy, Leisure*

7 September – 28 October 2006  
Montréal, Arts Interculturels (mai)  
review by Leila Pourtavaf

There have been a number of major exhibitions in recent years that speak to the post 9/11 cultural condition of a “clash of civilizations” between the East and West,<sup>1</sup> where diasporic Middle Eastern artists have been assigned the task of cultural mediation. Their work is often read through and fused to their cultural identity and they are placed within a binary system where Middle Easterners are either perceived as threats or victims, depending on which side of the political spectrum one is located on.

While it is always important to consider the social contexts of both works of art and the curatorial and institutional practices that allow them to be displayed, looking at art through the lens of a post 9/11 cultural paradigm that seeks to “understand” the mindset of the Muslim and Arab world, has dominated critical examinations of Middle Eastern artists, and has served to limit the complexity and diversity of their work. Artists such as Shirin Neshat, whose work can easily be read through a binary opposition, continue to receive a great deal of attention, while those whose work functions outside such a binary, have largely been ignored by Western art institutions. For those Middle Eastern and Islamic artists whose work has been receiving an increased amount of attention in light of the current political climate, the challenge of stepping

outside the discourse of “a clash of civilizations” can be a difficult and unrewarding task.

Montréal based Iranian-Canadian artist Afshin Matlabi's timely exhibit *Terrorism, Democracy, Leisure*, attempts to do just that. The exhibit features a series of video installations, animations, pencil crayon drawings and digital images that explore the contradictory struggle between personal identity and a global context rife with conflict. Employing elements of humour and irony, Matlabi's exhibit challenges viewers' perceptions of national identity as a legitimate category in relation to the cur-

rent global context marked by migration and cultural flows. While his work self-consciously acknowledges his cultural background, it simultaneously defies any coherent notion of culture that emerges from nationalism. As such, the show is as much about unpacking the relationship of individuals to nations as it is about casting aside the whole notion of nationhood.

In *National Anthems* (2006), Matlabi uses performance, digital imaging and animation to challenge the concept of nationalism. The video depicts the artist attempting to sing a series of national anthems in their original languages. The



Afshin Matlabi, *National Anthems*, 2006. Courtesy: the artist.



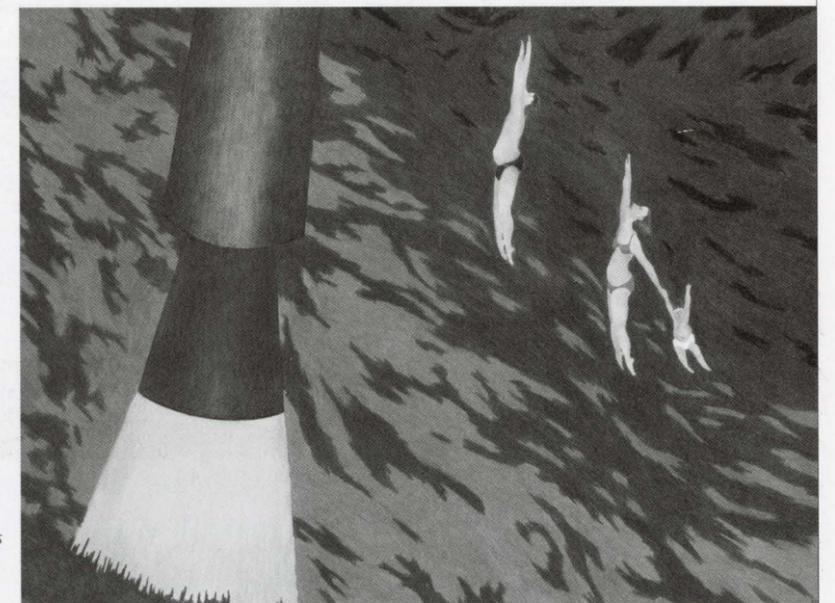
Afshin Matlabi, *I am so sorry that ...*, 2003. Courtesy: the artist.

slow motion footage augments the sound of a non-native person performing the most patriotic of acts. The work both references nationalism as a performative gesture, and reveals the emptiness of this gesture in a global age marked by dislocation. His patriotism towards nations that are clearly not his own functions to unsettle the viewer's perception of Matlabi's subjectivity. Rather than following a pre-given script about the orientalized subject, Matlabi places himself in the position of a perpetrator of cultural appropriation, at once resisting rigid cultural identification while claiming the right to be an infidel to any “authentic” origin. His work focuses on dislocation and the fluidity with which people cross boundaries — both figurative ones that define individual identities and material ones that designate national borders.

Matlabi's work eludes classification. While the influence of a variety of Iranian cultural images and artifacts is noticeable in many of the works (from references to Persian tapestry, miniatures and traditional music, to images of nuclear missiles), his work constantly undermines any receivable classification of imagery or context. Through unorthodox representations of, and experimentations with, traditional

Iranian imagery and media, Matlabi's playful negotiation of his own national identity is both sentimental and sarcastic. In *wmd (Weapons of Mass Destruction)* (2005), an animated missile dances through the sky to the beat of traditional Iranian music. There is an obvious reference in the piece to the current conflict over nuclear proliferation in Iran, which is humorously juxtaposed with digital animation and the iconic sounds of Iranian string instruments.

Perhaps the most striking piece in Matlabi's body of work is the mural size drawing *I am so sorry that...* (2003). With a vivid



Afshin Matlabi, *Ballistic Missile's Weekend Family Outing*, 2006. Courtesy: the artist.

colour palette and rhythmic structure of composition, it mimics the Persian tradition of miniatures and tapestries. However, unlike the traditions of these classical forms of Persian art that depict heroes and mythologized figures, Matlabi's drawing portrays an army of shirtless men with bloody hands rushing towards a fountain, in desperate pursuit of salvation. Human vulnerability and suffering is rendered with a satirical tone through the use of pencil crayons filling in the landscape with bright colours. While the scale of the large drawing and the use of pencil crayons serves to distance the image from traditional miniatures, which were rendered with expensive materials such as gold and silver leaf, the bright colour palette and attention to detail, as well as the presence of an element of narrative and fantasy, maintain a clear link to the traditional form. As such, Matlabi blurs the lines between authenticity and fabrication.

This same juxtaposition reappears more overtly in another large-scale drawing comprised of two panels entitled *Ballistic Missile's Weekend Family Outing* (2006). This work depicts two different scenes in

which a missile is flying through a sea of blue with a family of swimmers happily following close behind. Here, Matlabi again contrasts the element of tradition (the use of the different shades of blue and the repetition of patterns, both associated with Iranian miniatures) with the presence of a nuclear missile (the new cultural icon of Iran). Matlabi also embraces the binaries of terror and leisure, as well as East and West by placing the nuclear family, decked out in their revealing swimsuits, and the nuclear missile within the same sea of bright blue. The piece is the visual embodiment of a quotation that is prominently displayed at the entrance of the gallery. Matlabi states:

In the land of democracy nothing is hopeful and  
Everything is pending, so in the land of terrorism  
It is only leisure that keeps us alive.

For him, in the current global state of devastation, the only plausible response that is offered to those of us living in “the land of democracy” is distraction. The theme of tourism, the ultimate form of leisure and distraction, reappears throughout the exhibit.

In *Cuba* (2002) and *Four Cuban Impressions* (2004) Matlabi uses video and digital stills to represent Cuba from the perspective of a tourist. The images depict a serene beach landscape devoid of any local culture or context, a perspective offered to a privileged leisure class.



Afshin Matlabi.  
*Four Cuban Impressions*,  
2004. Courtesy:  
the artist.

Matlabi occupies this position, experiencing and representing Cuba as a site of escapist retreat. One can't help but juxtapose the Cuba in this work, with a Cuba that stands in as a popular symbol of resistance to Western Capitalism branded through the image of Che Guevara. For Matlabi, Cuba has become nothing more than another empty signifier, lacking cultural and political potency. It is an iconic space for two contradictory and opposing visions of utopia, both of which must turn a blind eye to the reality of those who actually live in Cuba. While Matlabi's representations of Cuba are perhaps the weakest works in this collection, in the context of the exhibit, their representation of leisure provides a counterpoint to images of violence and terror that appear in the form of missiles and bloodied hands in other pieces.

While his work is effective in deconstructing the current dichotomy of East and West, and his subjective position within, Matlabi's reliance on humor, parody and satire risks a reading that can easily move from social criticism to political ambivalence. One could argue that within this body of work, there is little room for an alternative paradigm and that taken to its logical conclusion, the exhibit is just another example of the kind of apathetic view of politics that has emerged in a younger generation of neoconservative cultural producers (from *Vice* magazine to *South Park*). Such a reading, however, would miss the most poignant element of this work.

Matlabi is primarily focused on revealing the absurdity of the post 9/11 neoconservative moment that relies on polarized binaries to legitimize itself. He points out that “terrorism” is constructed as the enemy of democratic nations, which themselves are a construction, through a spectacle of images and iconographies. These images are brought to us via media and culture and we consume them for leisure. At the end of the day, national anthems are for sporting events. Matlabi's work suggests that the current political climate has become so spectacular and diluted that our participation in it is equally trivial. We consume it as entertainment and our response is seldom anything more than indifference to the barrage of empty signifiers. But Matlabi also offers us a thoughtful consideration of post-colonial subjectivity and urges us to step outside the positions that we have so comfortably occupied and to engage with multiplicity, diversity and contradiction in tangible ways. His insistence on our inevitable movement within and beyond pre-set categories offers multiple possibilities for resisting the discourses around *Terror, Democracy and Leisure*.

#### Notes:

1. *The Without Boundaries: Seven Ways of Looking* exhibition at the MOMA earlier this year (26 February — 22 May 2006) and *Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East* at the British Museum (18 May — 10 September, 2006) are two examples of large institutions attempting to represent Middle Eastern artists. Both shows lump artists together based on their cultural origin rather than their work.

*Leila Pourtavaf is a Montréal-based writer, activist and community organizer. She holds an MA in Media Studies and is a founding member of the project MOBILIVRE-BOOKMOBILE project, an annual traveling exhibition of artist books, zines and independent publications.*

## Hotly Engaged or Cold and Distant?: A “Pure” Encounter Iris Haussler – *The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach*

Curated by Rhonda Corvese  
Off-site Installation: 105 Robinson Street, Toronto  
review by Naomi Binder Wall

*The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach* was Iris Haussler's most complex installation in a succession of fictitious off-site narratives over the last eighteen years. It is also her first major show in North America, a fabricated biography of an artist who filled his small, improbable house in Toronto's Queen West Neighbourhood with sculpture, working in secrecy and living as a recluse. Haussler and curator Rhonda Corvese, in their later framing of the exhibit, claimed that the installation fostered “an unhindered and unmediated opportunity” for an authentic encounter with Joseph Wagenbach.

Haussler and Corvese had originally hoped to secure a suitably large gallery space for the exhibition. According to Corvese, not being able to find one offered them the opportunity to “challenge how art is presented.” Rather than locate the story of Joseph Wagenbach in the cool setting of a gallery space, Haussler would build his world in a house she rented for the purpose. Keeping secret the fact that Wagenbach, his house and his sculpture were her creation, Haussler presented him to the public via a complex ruse, as an immigrant from Germany who had hidden himself away in his small bungalow. Her plan was to allow visitors to the house “to experience an unfiltered and unhindered discovery.” As Corvese put it, “To the people who visited the Legacy of

Joseph Wagenbach before it was revealed (as a fiction), I believe you had a very unique experience, full of wonder, suspension and shifts in perception, which I doubt you would have experienced had you known it was a contemporary art project.”<sup>1</sup>

The process of discovery was facilitated by the “municipal archivists” who took people through the house. According to the narrative they delivered, Wagenbach was born in Germany in 1929, and left his home in 1946, immigrating to Canada, via Paris, in 1962. He created his art in absolute privacy, transforming his living space into a gallery of sculpture. When neighbours noticed that the reclusive man had not been seen for weeks, they alerted the authorities, who, on entering the house, discovered that he had suffered a

stroke. In addition, they discovered his legacy of sculpture, which the “Municipal Archives” decided to assess in an open process (hence the tours).

Inside, the house is striking for its stale air and flying particles of dust. The light is dim. Sunlight creeps in through windows covered with old newsprint and grime, casting foreboding shadows over a barrage of sculpture — stacked on racks, rising from pedestals, crouching in corners, hanging from hooks, and covered in cement dust. They are organic, amorphous forms, layered with plaster, molten wax and string — earthen materials wrapped around doll fragments and the stuffed animals of childhood. There is an almost overwhelming claustrophobic atmosphere in the house. The small rooms unfold like a peeling onion as you



All images accompanying this review are of the off-site installation of *The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach*, 2006. Courtesy: Iris Haussler.



brush against shadowy figures that hang in impossibly narrow hallways. In one of these hallways there is a map of pre-war Germany pinned up on the wall. There is a marking of the Bergen Belsen concentration camp on the map, and an "x" marking the spot where Wagenbach apparently lived, not far from the camp. Finally, there is a room where he sculpted his muse, "Anna Neritti," who left him in 1974, but not before he rendered her likeness in cement, creating a giant reclining full female figure nearly stretching the length of the room.

While many reviewers waxed eloquent about the "intensely moving" experience of immersing themselves in Wagenbach's art and artifacts, welcoming the deception as their opportunity to "walk into something that is pure and genuine,"<sup>2</sup> others, including myself, were put off by Haussler's use of highly politicized signifiers without ever engaging their history or content. She had explicitly opened the door to the interpretation that Wagenbach's demons were rooted in his proximity as a child to the concentration camp. The guide who walked me through the house led me directly to the map on the wall and pointed out both

Wagenbach's childhood home and its proximity to Bergen Belsen. When I asked whether the research might uncover something of Wagenbach's experience as a German youth inside Nazi Germany, I was told that the map was all there is and that we will most likely never know what drove Joseph to despair.

Bergen Belsen is a powerful historical signifier. Its insertion into Wagenbach's narrative begs for recognition. Suggesting that it may or may not be significant is tantamount to its appropriation as mere background to Wagenbach's life. If the artist asks us to witness a biographical

account, whether real or fabricated, we can be encouraged to locate ourselves within the narrative's historical context and to seek an understanding of the life we are witness to in relation to that context. Certainly, Joseph Wagenbach offers an opportunity to deconstruct the experience of a German man, born in 1929, and ten years old at the time Germany occupied Poland. What were the pressures on a German boy at that time? What would be the impact of growing into young adulthood only miles away from Bergen Belsen? What did Wagenbach see? What did he know? The only reference to WWII and the Holocaust in Haussler's exhibit — the markings on the map of Germany — is given no more significance than the rusted cups in Wagenbach's kitchen or the slabs of concrete left lying in the corners of his house. The use of the Bergen Belsen marking carries the responsibility for an interrogation of the legacy of the Holocaust itself. Unfortunately, Joseph Wagenbach's creator is cool and distant, delivering form over content. Her frame — the "authenticity" and "purity" of the encounter with her creation — erases both social history and context.



#### Public Response: The Panel

On 20 September, by which time the fiction had been "outed," the Goethe-Institut, Toronto hosted an evening with Iris Haussler and Rhonda Corvese, philosopher Mark Kingwell, environmental phenomenologist Amy Lavender Harris and Art Brut photographer Marcus Schubert.

The discussion was framed in terms of the installation's offer of an "authentic" and "pure" experience. People who had been duped forgave the deception and thanked the artist for providing the opportunity for a genuine emotional interaction with Joseph Wagenbach. Marcus Schubert suggested that people who visited the installation were given an opportunity to be innocent once again, and to "engage hotly with the content of art." Amy Lavender-Harris made the claim that the installation offered a "pure encounter." She thanked Haussler for giving visitors the "gift of seeing Joseph Wagenbach...not just as art, but as life," and stated that the defining context of the Legacy was its *presentation*.

With *The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach*, Haussler reaches into the world of "Art Brut." Certainly, it is her own fascination with the genre that seems to drive the conceptualization of the Wagenbach installation. He is a marginalized artist, seemingly mad. He fits the historical stereotype of the artist-genius suffering through life with a diseased imagination. With Joseph, she has created the quintessential outsider. In so doing, she reinscribes the stereotypes associated with people living in poverty and traumatized by its impacts. Wagenbach is so marked by assumptions and conventional cultural expectations of the marginalized artist that he lacks meaningful substance and dimension and is himself a convention.

In her statement to the panel participants and audience, Lavender-Harris said, "We look at (eccentrics) with fascination before...looking away, as if there is a contagion associated with them." She acknowledged that we "construct unkind caricatures" of the homeless, or dangerous derelict, or the reclusive.<sup>3</sup> The hope is,

then, that Haussler's installation would complicate and interrogate these narratives. Instead, she reproduces the dominant discourse that pathologizes poverty and trauma, and erases impacting historical contexts. In the end, Wagenbach himself is a caricature.

Notions of authenticity, purity and innocence erase the (con)texture of experience. All of our experiences are mediated and located historically. None of us stands outside the social relations in which we participate. Notions of the unmediated, "pure" experience can open the door to an abandonment of the principles of social responsibility and the recognition that the ground we stand on is a shared space, where the power of some determines the powerlessness of others. While art can take us on flights of fancy or open doors to an enhanced experience, its significance must lie also in its reflection on issues of social justice. Haussler's installation fails to realize its potential for a critical reflection and engagement with Joseph Wagenbach.

*Many thanks to Kyo Maclear for our discussions and our journey through the Wagenbach legacy.*

*Naomi Binder Wall is a feminist anti-racism/anti-oppression educator, writer, and community worker and activist. She has published book, film, and art reviews, as well as numerous articles concerned with social and political issues impacting women. Naomi is a member of the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation and the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid.*

#### Notes:

1. From "The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach: Comment by Rhonda Corvese," statement for panel discussion, Goethe Institut, 20 September, 2006.
2. From "The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach: Comment by Marcus Schubert," statement for panel discussion, Goethe Institut, 20 September, 2006.
3. From "The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach: Comment by Amy Lavender-Harris," statement for panel discussion, Goethe Institut, 20 September, 2006.



## Personal pastimes, disappointed laughter and culture under a conservative majority

shortFuse by Clive Robertson

New York Times columnist Alessandra Stanley writes that this season's tv political ads "mark the Comedy Centralization of politics...[T]he new breed of humorous ads don't just mock the opponent, many of them wink at the absurdity of the campaign process." Feeding upon the gaffes and stumbles of parties in power or in opposition, *The Royal Canadian Air Farce*, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and *The Rick Mercer Report* provide domestic consumer-citizens with satisfying moments of sharp ridicule or bitter invective. In accepting her honorary doctorate from Memorial University in 2000, Mary Walsh — the warrior princess of anglo-Canadian political satire — referred to this relief from bad governance as "disappointed laughter."

In a Conservative Party "spoof ad" on the recent elimination of GST rebates for tourists visiting Canada, *The Rick Mercer Report* ends with the voiceover: "Your Conservative government: shutting the country down, one industry at a time."

Between announcements of a \$13.2 federal government revenue surplus and spending cuts of \$1 billion, the Canadian Conference of the Arts released a Bulletin (29/06) that raised the question: "How would culture fare under a majority Conservative government?" Thereafter followed a darker Bulletin (40/06) titled, "The First Cuts Are Not Always the Deepest" with the following warning, "This is not a test."

Aside from funding cuts, the broader danger to the arts and cultural sector has been the repurposing and/or collapse of federal cultural agencies without warning or consultation. The non-profit engine that

helps drive the public cultural sector and its contributions to civic life has needed and will continue to need investments from all levels of government. This flies in the face of much conservative thinking. As Reform Party Unity critic, Stephen Harper's forecast for federal cultural policy saw "provincial governments [becoming] the primary providers and guardians of cultural services and primary regulators of cultural industries." In the 2005 Fraser Institute series, *A Canada Strong and Free*, co-authors Mike Harris and Preston Manning's plan left the federal government with only a few assigned areas of responsibility — and culture was not one of them. Such proposals carry the strong odour of past Tory and Liberal provincial and federal government cost-cutting measures that resulted in an irresponsible and unworkable downloading of responsibilities.

As reported in *The Globe and Mail* in May, the reason the Conservatives finally gave small increases to the Canada Council — instead of honouring agreements to double its annual allocation — was because they were told they would otherwise lose support and votes from Québec. How other cultural agencies are going to fare remains a question of whether this government will keep its latent hostilities in check. I retrieved this quote from former Reform/Alliance/Conservative Vancouver MP, Ted White:

I cannot conceive of any way in which research in the fields of fine arts, classical studies, philosophy, anthropology, modern languages and literature, or medieval studies, which together accounted for over

\$5.3 million in grants from SSHRC in the last fiscal year, contributes to any 'understanding of Canadian society of the challenges we face as we enter the 21st century.' Research into such fields, as far as my constituents are concerned, constitutes a personal pastime, and has no benefit to Canadian taxpayers...

As telling an evaluation as this is, it pales beside a letter reportedly sent to SSHRC from then-opposition MP, Stephen Harper. This letter was passed around as a risible example of...well, rabid opposition to SSHRC's work. Summoning the force of a biblical ruling, Mr. Harper allegedly wrote: If I had my way I would knock your building down and salt the earth on which it stands. With Harper's promotions to party leader and then Prime Minister, this "funny" missive turned sour.

Conservatives are now freshly piqued that their rationales for spending cuts are being publicly unmasked. "We won't apologize for our capacity to say no to bad ideas," said Finance Minister Jim Flaherty. Receiving the support of a mere 19% of Canadians to form a minority government (36% of the 53% of eligible voters who voted), the Conservatives showed considerable gall in insisting that they received an unbridled "mandate to govern." The cultural sector can view the minority government project as the equivalent of producing a tv pilot. When the plot lacks credibility, when the acting is weak, and when the director disregards notes, we sensibly do what? We certainly don't go into "developmental hell." We simply commission a new project.

RETROSPECTIVE - Inaugural presentation of a national tour

### CLIVE ROBERTSON THEN + THEN AGAIN Practices within an artist-run culture 1969-2006

10 January - 17 February 2007

Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre, 21A Queen Street, Kingston Ontario, Canada  
A survey of Robertson's work as an artist, producer, writer, educator and curator. Includes video, audio, print, and performance documentation.

13 January - 6 February 2007

Union Gallery, Stauffer Library, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
Featuring selections from Robertson's audio recording archive.

13 January 2007

FORUM hosted by Union Gallery, Stauffer Library, Queen's University, 4 - 6pm  
Guest panel: Johanna Householder, Tobias c. van Veen, and Clive Robertson

RECEPTION hosted at the The Joy Supper Club, 178 Ontario Street, 8 - 10pm



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



With take home options!



Neena Bickham,  
*The Museum of the Horse*,  
2006

NEW from YYZBOOKS

### International Geographic

Edited by  
Tam-Ca Vo-Van and Stefan St-Laurent  
Essays on ethnographic representation,  
with artists' projects.  
Co-published with Galerie SAW Gallery  
ISBN 0-920397-42-5 \$21.95

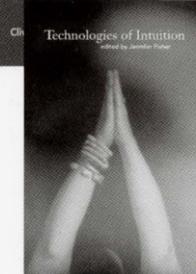
### Policy Matters

Administrations of art and culture

By Clive Robertson  
Collected essays on how we work with  
(but not for) government.  
ISBN 0-920397-36-0 \$24.95

### Technologies of Intuition

Edited by Jennifer Fisher  
On "coming to know" in aesthetic practice  
and experience.  
Co-published with Mentoring Artists for Women's  
Art (MAWA) and DisplayCult  
ISBN 0-920397-43-3 \$29.95



401 Richmond St. West, Suite 140  
Toronto, Ontario M5V 3A8  
tel 416.598.4546 fax 416.598.2282  
publish@yyzartistsoutlet.org

YYZBOOKS

### Momentum Mortem: Live Fast, Die Pretty

January 17 to February 10, 2007  
Reception: Thursday, January 18, 5 to 7 pm

Cultural preoccupations with consumerism, fetishism, and death are the premises behind this exhibit. Featuring installations and multiples by Danielle Davies, Rachel McRae, Adrianna Palazzolo, Laura Paolini, Courtney Thompson, and Alice Wang.

TBA

February 21 to March 10, 2007  
Reception: Thursday, February 22, 5 to 7 pm

Painting and photography works which explore a variety of poignant moments found within adolescence will be exhibited, some via personal experience, some projected. Featuring Alynne Lavigne, Cheryl Orr, and Megan Sinnett.

TBA

March 21 to April 14, 2007  
Reception: Thursday, March 22, 5 to 7 pm

The compulsion to collect is viewed by some as sociological phenomena. In this regard, a means of expression utilizing cultural icons from ponies to hockey. Featuring prodigious installations by Neena Bickram, Randy Gagne, Jonna Pedersen, Liz Pead, and Stacey Sproule.

ONTARIO  
COLLEGE  
OF ART &  
DESIGN

OCAD Student Gallery  
285 Dundas Street West, Toronto  
416.977.6000 x262/263 cswiderski@ocad.on.ca www.ocad.ca  
Wednesday to Saturday, 12 to 6 pm

Published with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts. YYZBOOKS is a program of the YYZ Artists' Outlet which is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, The Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council. YYZBOOKS is represented by the Literary Press Group and distributed by LIDISTCo.

JANUARY 19 — MARCH 25, 2007

MICHAEL HOSALUK *Containment (to March 4)*

JANE ASH POITRAS *Consecrated Medicine*

REBECCA BELMORE *Blood on the Snow*



**MendelArtGallery**

950 Spadina Crescent East, Saskatoon 306.975.7610

[www.mendel.ca](http://www.mendel.ca) | 9 to 9 daily | admission is free

{detail: Michael Hosaluk, *Containment*, installation, 2006