Volume 20 Number 3 $5.50 A magazine about issues of art and culture

FUSE MAGAZINE

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS, LEGAL WRANGLING, & THE MCMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION

Plus... a profile of Ingrid Bachmann, artists' pages by Buseje, Arthur Renwick and Stephen Andrews

Reviews of "Rencontre Performance," Lyle Ashton Harris, Kit, *The Fact of Blackness* and *Evictions*

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FUSE MAGAZINE

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The Watering Hole III, Lyle Ashton Harris, duraflex print, 102 x 76 cm, 1996. Courtesy Jack Tilton Gallery.
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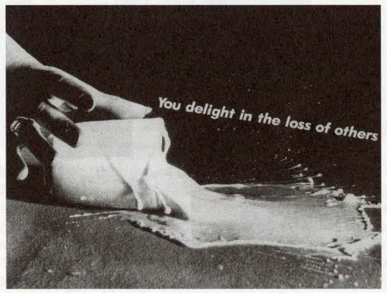

Untitled, Barbara Kruger, 1981-1983.
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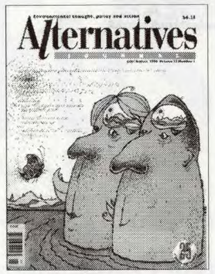

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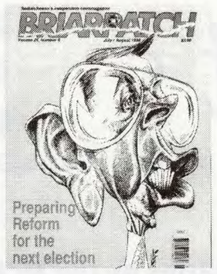

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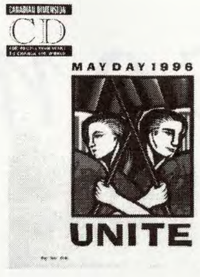

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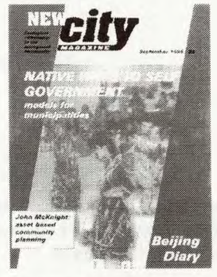

NEW CITY MAGAZINE believes in a distinct and sustainable Canadian urban culture and identity. Featuring articles, stories and histories about the city and its people, it is a critical forum on the modern city. *New City* strives to build a better understanding of urban maladies and the possibilities for change.

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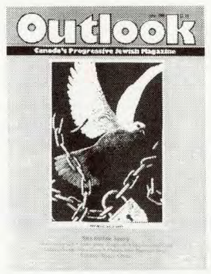

OUTLOOK provides a Jewish secular-humanist perspective on political and cultural issues. It features original articles, stories, and reviews by writers from Canada, the USA, Israel, France, Germany and Eastern Europe. Promoting peace in the Middle East and the world, *Outlook* supports multiculturalism and promotes self-determination of all peoples.

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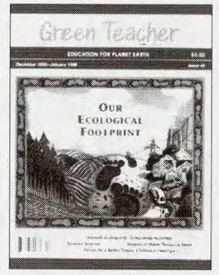
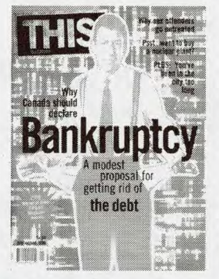


GREEN TEACHER is a forum for teachers and parents seeking to promote environmental and global awareness among young people from K to 12. It offers perspectives on the role of education in creating a sustainable future, practical cross-curricular activities, reviews of the latest teaching resources, and successful ideas from green educators.

NEW INTERNATIONALIST magazine turns the issues inside out and explains what's really going on. It's the best guide to the major issues from the arms trade to AIDS, from human rights to hunger. Each month, *NI* tackles one subject, and gives you the facts and the arguments. To influence what's happening to you, you need to know what's going on.

NEW MARITIMES is regional politics, environment, labour, culture and history, all from a refreshing perspective. Regular columns on Maritime books, political economy and Third World issues. This bimonthly is a unique adventure in radical regionalism that, into its second decade, still refuses to bow to the powers that be.

One of Canada's hottest independent literary quarterlies, ***SUB-TERRAIN*** features the work of writers, artists and photographers from Canada, the US and foreign locations. Each issue is a stimulating fusion of fiction, poetry, graphic art, commentary and book reviews. "Eschews geography in favour of a borderless world" - *Vancouver Mag.*



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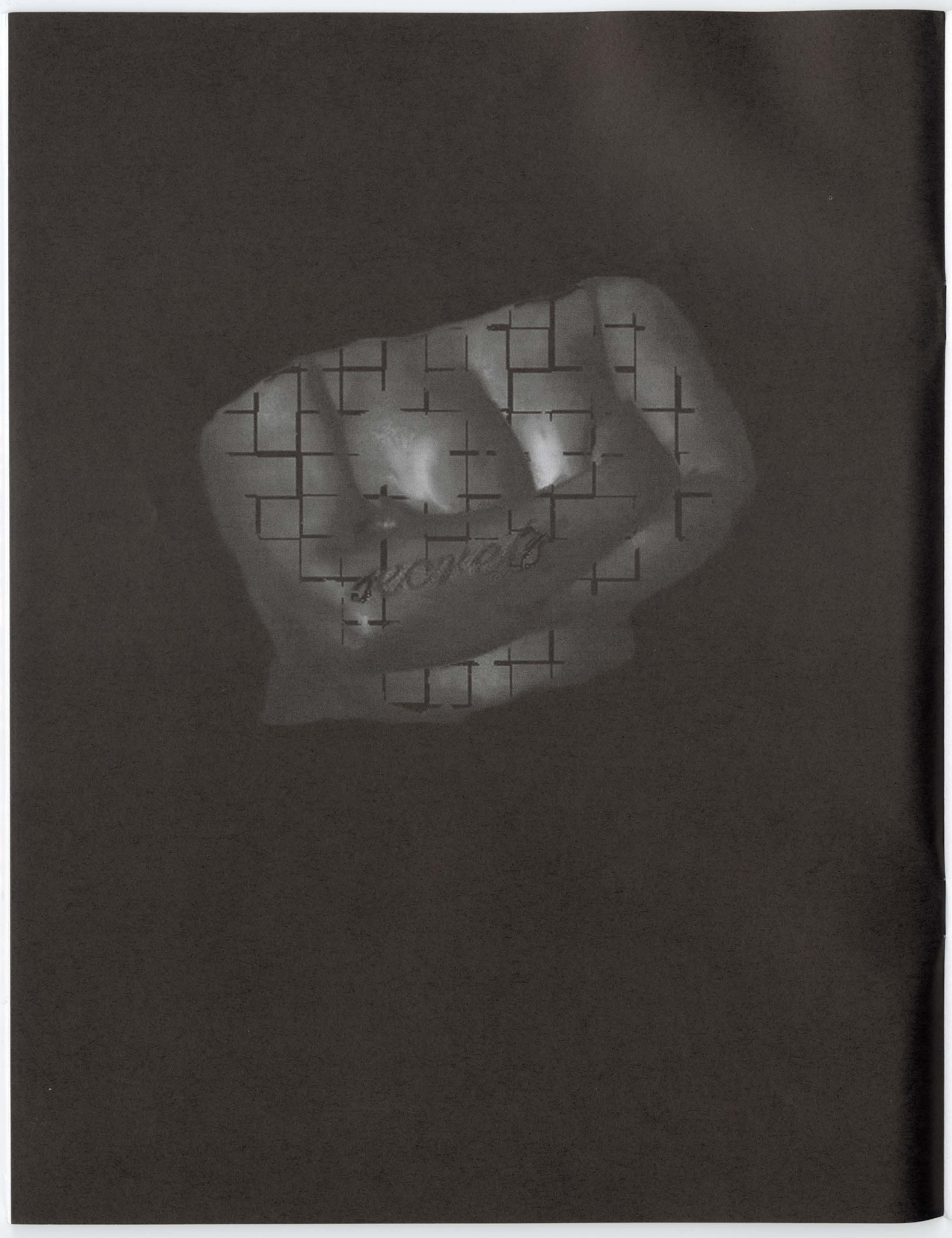

"THE GREAT HOPE OF CULTURE
IN THIS COUNTRY LIES
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THE MAGNITUDE OF THIS
OPPORTUNITY CONSISTS
IN THE VERY FACT
THAT WE HAVE SET
NO DEFINITE BOUNDARIES
WHERE CULTURE
IS CONCERNED?"

editorial

In this issue, we address topographies, geographies and social space, and advance our interrogation of nationalism and difference over current events. Again, FUSE takes issue with the packaged history of self-promotion by vested interests. Alongside this volume, look for our Twentieth Anniversary Retrospective issue. You will find it on the stands, in major bookstores nationally and in the mail to our subscribers. Inside is contentious writing culled from twenty stormy years of engagement, and an illuminating chronology of events, cultural projects and the changing shape of FUSE.

This long winter, landscape turned to media landslide when the stand-off between founding patrons of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection and its current administration escalated to the courts. Tax-advantaged "donors" used "strings attached" to their gifts to attempt to circumscribe contemporary art acquisitions at the McMichael and, more broadly, to erode the context of public funding for the arts. Controlling interests are at stake in this legal battle, with patrons demanding decision-making authority over the institutional presence of contemporary Canadian art.

In our feature, the position of landscape painting in official Canadian art history is questioned by contemporary artists. Traditional definitions are polemically and poignantly addressed by Lisa Steele, Shelley Niro, Gerald McMaster and Andy Fabo, in a humorous and pointed collection of texts that challenges constrained judicial pronouncements.

Surveillance as it pertains to geography and subjectivity are approached in two columns. Andrea Wollensak constructs a brief history of satellite technologies and Global Positioning Systems. This forms a counterpoint to Warren Arcand's account of relationships between a video producer, her subject and the restrictive legal system.

Lorraine Oades' feature-length profile of artist Ingrid Bachmann maps a geography of engagement between sites and viewers, mapping influences and interpretations of the work in the contexts of changing locations. The review section addresses issues of public art, performance, theory and representation. Three artists' projects augment the issue with images that articulate a diversity of perspectives and raise questions about what constitutes a Canadian landscape.

Stormy weather. The Red River flood threatened the St. Norbert's Centre for Contemporary Art near Winnipeg. Just as major renovations were complete and an ambitious season of programming was to begin, the centre was evacuated. To St. Norbert's and all in the area who are affected, we send our sympathy and best wishes for your recovery.

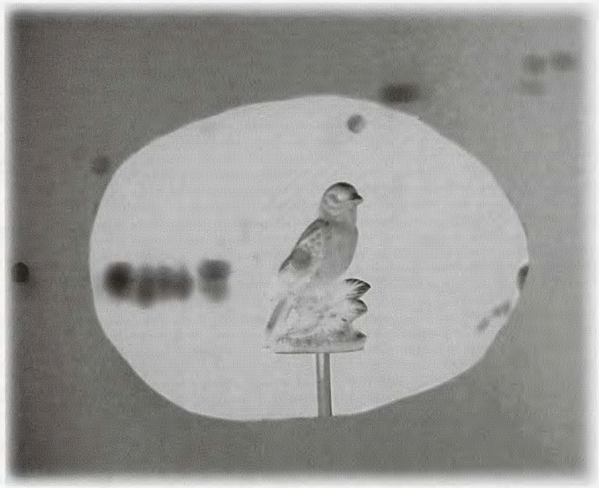


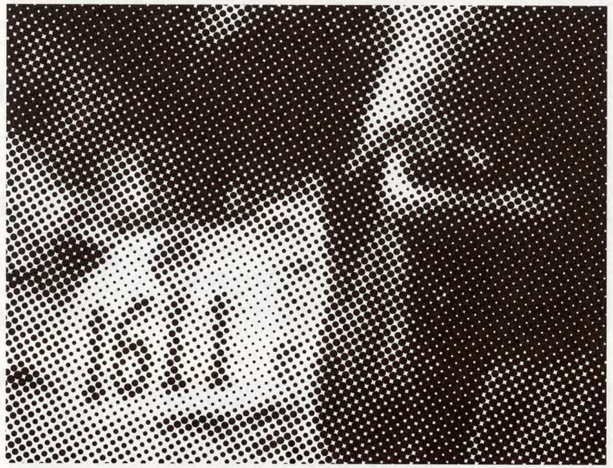
Image from a store window performance by Ed Johnson, October 1996.
See the "Rencontre Performance" review, p. 41

erratum

Judith Doyle's website version of "life and life support systems: zines, nets & outlets by artists—the late '70s and some now" (FUSE 19, no. 5, pp. 23-33) can be found at http://www.ocad.on.ca/dd/jul23-96/doyle

1611

by Warren Arcan



Jennifer Abbott is a Vancouver-based video artist. Her most recent work, *A Cow At My Table*, is now in post-production. It is an experimental documentary that examines the representation of farm animals and the cultural politics of factory farming and the production of meat. In this tape, Abbott confronts the social construction and normalization of meat-eating in this culture. She contacted over sixty meat-packing plants across Canada, asking for interviews with industry representatives and permission to tour their facilities with a camera. She anticipated being denied access and she was—the obstacle of the slaughterhouse wall is germane to the focus of the documentary.

During the summer of 1996, Abbott drove eastward, surreptitiously investigating agribusiness facilities and interviewing individuals with varying perspectives on the meat industry. Barred entry through the front door of the packing plants, she shot their exteriors.

On the afternoon of May 17, Abbott was outside Intercontinental Packers in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. She saw the body of a dead cow beside a pile of straw and manure. Too far away to get a good shot, she decided to go under the fence, onto Intercon property, for close-ups.

The footage is revealing. Abbott shoots as close as possible, attempting intimacy with the surface of the cow's body. She bends to bring the lens level with the cow's head where it lies on the ground. Inches from her subject, we see Abbott with her camera, reflected in the cow's glassy eye. We see a tag on the cow's ear inscribed with the number '1611.' Blood bubbles and seeps from her mouth and nostrils. Gas presses against her body, looking for escape, distending her anus. Her tongue, coated in blood, dirt and sawdust, sticks out as far, it seems, as it can go.

Abbott's strategy of questioning the processes of social construction that shape our concepts of "normal" and "ordinary" led her to shoot the cow so that she implicated herself. For her, the camera position in relation to her subject could not erase her own positioning: she tried to highlight and not obscure the ethics in aesthetics. She carried her camera across a legal limit (a private property line). The implications of this action were elaborated in the courts of Saskatoon. Her position, her artist's mark, was not erased, but raised and highlighted like a brand or a scar.

My objective in this article is to describe my understanding of my relationship to the image of Abbott breaching Intercon's property to videotape '1611.' It has to do with a play of relationships in that image, and the indeterminate power of "I" in the various narratives it contains. For me, in this text called *1611*, the key drama is how ethics and rights are established around various types of bodies. Keep an eye on the moving body: two things happen when an "I" enters/is entered into a relationship. First, "I" stare, focus, smell and touch—"I" am a body before another body, suspended in a moment where language hasn't yet arrived to negotiate the relationship, meaning "our" relationship is prior to language. Second, to an observing "I" these two bodies constitute one body—us—while the observing "I" is suspended elsewhere. More on this later.

When Abbott had been shooting for about ten minutes, she was spotted by Intercon security guards. Back at the car, she was intercepted and detained by a

guard. Three police officers and a police dog arrived soon after. They seized the camera and examined the videotape several times, asking how the camera worked and why there were no images of the dead cow. They didn't solve the mystery—the videotape with the incriminating footage was stashed in the glove compartment of Abbott's vehicle. The camera was confiscated and Abbott was arrested and kept in jail overnight, with a court appearance scheduled for the next day. She was charged with a criminal offense: mischief to interfere with private property.

Abbott spent a night in jail. Later, she described some of the people she met there: a woman caught shoplifting, two drunk women who had run-ins with the cops, one who was stabbed in the head, everybody contending with a night (or life?) of tough luck. In the morning, down at the court house, I observed the cases processed before Abbott came to the docks, and noted most of the accused were aboriginal. Cases were processed quickly and efficiently with only three complications: Abbott and two people with obvious psychiatric issues. The court had difficulty situating these unusual cases with ordinary procedures.

By law, so-called "farm animals" must be alive when they reach the kill floor of a slaughterhouse in order to be used for human consumption. If they die along the way, they become "deads," another sort of property, and are sold to pet food manufacturers, for example. If an animal is sick or injured in transport and can't walk to the kill floor, he or she is forcibly moved by truckers and packing plant workers with the aid of machines and equipment such as electric prods, chains and forklifts. '1611' was a "dead," waiting for transport elsewhere.

Before her arrest and with a great deal of perseverance, Abbott managed to arrange interviews with some of the appointed representatives of the industry—spokespeople of marketing boards and farm animal councils. Others, like producers and owners of packing plants, were less willing to go on videotape. The provincial farm animal councils are umbrella lobby groups that promote the image of agribusiness. Producers, packing plants and corporations like Canada Safeway are typical members and supporters.

News of Abbott's arrest spread fast in the small, insular communities that make up the meat industry. No less than seven industry newsletters and magazines in Canada and the U.S. published security alerts naming her and warning agribusinesses to be on the lookout.

Her actions at Intercon were seen as a breach of the tentative trust she had established with a few contacts in the industry. Post-arrest, all remaining interviews were cancelled. She had crossed the line.

Reduction. The problem with the legal system is people. It'd work fine otherwise.

Abbott, with her camera so near '1611,' was clearly in a perilous relationship. Not merely because of the legal and ostracizing consequences, but perilous because the footage implicates the artist in the very ethical questions that she is asking the meat industry. Despite her critical perspective, isn't there an exploitative aspect to her relationship to '1611,' vaguely reminiscent of the meat industry, since both require '1611's dead body to function?

Abbott recognizes this ethical double bind. Throughout her project, she has worked to foreground the individual identities of the so-called farm animals that star in her tape. For rights to be ascribed, there must be individuals and subjects, as opposed to objects and property. Only the subject—the "I"—can accrue such concepts as rights and autonomy. What happens to a human or nonhuman body when it is subjected to a system that, to function, must abrogate the body's rights, deny its autonomy, or otherwise reduce its fullness?

As food is to the body, the accused is to the legal system. Chewing is the first step in digestion. The mouth is the police. Mastication equals arrest and fingerprinting. Down the esophagus to the courtroom. In the stomach, food is reduced to baser components—protein, sugars, carbohydrates—and sent to other organs for further reduction. The criminal charge is mischief. From the finer organs, base materials are either incorporated into the body—guilty—or expelled as waste material—that is, free to go. Free, but subjected to and transformed by the process, and unassimilable.

'1611' had no rights, only value as property. Abbott was detained by police officers sworn to uphold property laws, her rights abrogated due to a perceived property offense. As an accused, her time and space as controlled by the legal system was analogous to the experience of '1611' within the meat industry. She was led down corridors, packed into a vehicle, fed and sheltered according to strict budgets and schedules designed to maximize efficiency. Abbott was kept in a cell, private functions visible to all. She slept with the lights on, had no privacy, and was surrounded on all sides by those, like her, whose rights were reduced.

Abbott's video strategy includes a clear marking of her subject position. She is seen reflected in '1611's' eye. Her "I" is visible. We might hear her say, "I crawled under this fence to tape you, '1611,'" or "I show you this tape of '1611'—see what is hidden." Or she could also say "What happened to you that you are dumped here?" or "How do you, the viewer, react to this footage of '1611'?" Ethics. Bodies. Where are we indeed? She opens up a rich space and interesting questions about our "ordinary" relationships. It's easy for me, Warren, or you the reader, to speak in quotation marks and say things as Abbott might say them. We "I's" can assume these or any subject positions whatsoever. We can narrate in order to orient ourselves to Abbott's footage with lines like, "Here I am, broken and bleeding—remember me."

Abbott works to highlight so-called "farm animal" identities in other ways; for example, she includes footage she took at a farm sanctuary where she stayed and shot for a month. Here, she portrays uncharacteristic representations of cows, pigs and other animals: extreme close-ups and unusual vantages of animals socializing with each other, feeding, sleeping, fighting, grooming and enjoying their freedom, living out their lives as naturally as possible, considering their histories and genetically altered bodies. Another strategy is direct address. The animals she taped regard her with her camera, and in this way regard the viewer as well, challenging us with their own gazes.

Back to '1611.' Can she, as an "I", assume a subject position ? Some, like Abbott herself, may say this statement negates the fact of '1611's' death, that '1611' can never, due to her subjugation, enjoy the subject position of, say, the reader of *1611*. At this point I risk something too. My article requires me to get near my subject, to find what I seek. I must reduce what I observe to make my text *1611* work, because the body I study is too full for my language to completely appropriate. I can't disguise my reductive manoeuvre, given the argument I am pursuing.

When a speaker reduces a body for the purposes of her system, there is a correlative effect. You are the criminal/I am the judge; you are the reader/I am the writer; you are nature/I have dominion. This mad pumping of the hierarchical see-saw of language makes culture. But when I highlight my reductive manoeuvre and say it's necessary because of my limited powers and vision—I make you small/I am not large enough—we only need compare it to "you are nature/I have

dominion" to illustrate two cultural perspectives. It is still a hierarchical relationship, a mere flip-flop, subject to all the power viruses that infect the body.

So, all this to point out some of the constructs built on the body of '1611,' that make up the body of *1611*. Let us list some by name: Abbott, Intercon, the legal system, *1611*. All orient themselves to '1611' in their peculiar way, and all regard rights and ethics. The parties make their constructions, but what of '1611'?

Whenever you come into relation with a body, there is the moment of suspension without language, a moment of vast potential. Hierarchical language is but one way of making sense of a relationship. "Any subject position for any subject whatsoever" marks one way to find the moment before language intervenes.

In order for Abbott to document '1611,' '1611' must lay dead by that pile of shit and straw. Abbott is outraged by the suggestion that '1611' could assume the reader's perspective. Her outrage depends on '1611's' place, and on what seems to her the overly-theorized and inaccurate freedom conferred on '1611' as "any subject whatsoever." Yet if '1611' is by the pile of straw because her rights have been stripped by an act of the imagination, then by a similar act of imagination, "excessive" rights might be returned.

In the moment before hierarchical language intervenes to hold sway over the relationship, two subjects are radically equal to each other (radical in the sense of 'root'). In this cellular foundation, both parties are irreversibly transformed, and continually transforming. These are reproductive systems. I have been transformed in my relationship with '1611,' through this text.

When we ask the question, "Is it right for us to slaughter and eat animals?" a chuckle might be heard in the gallery. This is the sound of discomfort prompted by associating ethics and animals. In contemporary society, the matter of ethics is popularly, if not unconsciously, rewritten to mean rights. You know, legal stuff. For instance, ethical questions regarding reproduction are cast as contests between the rights of the woman, the fetus, and increasingly, the family. That's what's so funny—animals don't have rights, and that's the point.

Ever since the horse and the cart, reduction has been part and parcel of figuring out how things work and constructing systems. In calculating the force necessary to drive a captive bolt through the skull of a mature bovine, we need not calculate the infinitesimal resistance offered by the air. While it is important to get some measure of the strength of the person wielding the gun, it is absurd, from a mechanical view, to factor in immeasurable matters like enthusiasm or abhorrence. A foundational precept of rational systems management is the removal of as many irrelevant factors as possible, to clarify the subject for study.

Reduction. The problem with the legal system is people. It'd work fine otherwise. Doctors can tell you about the infuriating inscrutability of the body. If it weren't for all that sloppy slippery tissue and viscera, the diseases we seek to understand would be plain as day. The thing about meat is that somebody's gotta die, and that, my friends, ain't good marketing.

For the legal system to work efficiently, alleged and accused criminals must have their rights stripped away. Ethical questions are forestalled in the meat industry because animals have no rights (how can property have rights?) The ethics Abbott displayed in crossing Intercon's fence began with the question: "What/who am I putting into my body?"

To understand the ethical problems that arise from the meat industry, and cultural politics in general, we have to look to see what's missing. Like sleuths, we dredge the river for evidence and reconstruct the scene of the crime. There, amongst the mud and crabs, are the rights of nonhuman animals, conveniently disposed of by Western society. There are many suspects, even a conspiracy brewing. Subpoena Aristotle, the authors of the Bible, or Descartes for a start, then their interpreters. . .

The history and system of factory farming gathered momentum in post-war culture; it appears with '1611' by the refuse pile. Its failures show up here. Intercon could not assimilate '1611.' In highlighting "ordinary" processes Intercon prefers to keep secret, '1611' and Abbott open up the industry to consumption, that is, '1611's body calls meat industry practices into question, subjecting them to criticism.

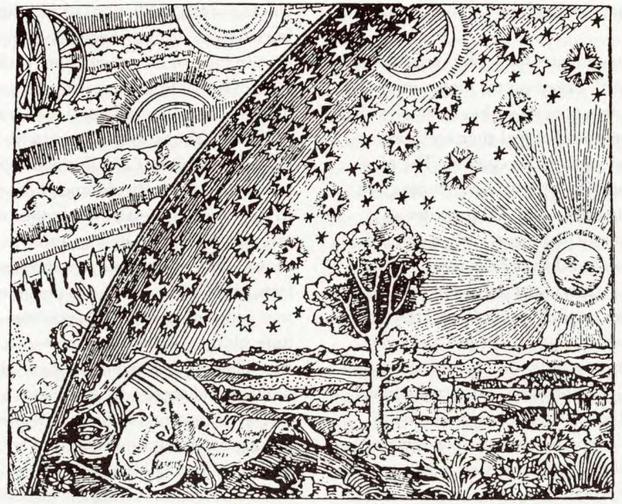
Abbott is in trouble because of '1611.' '1611' is trouble for Intercon. '1611' is what they mean to hide —the cruelty of their process. The text system *1611* is not in and of itself cruel, is it? But 'cruelty' is one of the things it communicates. A system that makes meat/metaphors is cruel in some fashion, or perhaps it is the fashion?

Warren Arcan is a Cree artist who works in performance art, writing, theatre and film. He has just completed writing and performing a four-part, one-person show in Vancouver titled Wet Space Performance Series *and is currently in post-production for a short 16mm narrative film. He has worked with many First Nations arts organizations, is the past Artistic Director for Toronto's Centre for Indigenous Theatre and has written for arts publications.*

New Cartographies, New Ways of Seeing

Mapping with Global Positioning Systems

by Andrea Wollensak



Nicolas deCusa (1401–1464) woodcut illustration.

The machinery of the heavens was envisioned by the Italian Renaissance artist Nicolas deCusa (1401–1464) in a woodcut depicting a mechanistic explanation of the universe, where a scholar, in a landscape abundant with works of nature and man, pierces the shell of the stars to observe the great wheels that move the heavenly bodies. One hundred years later, Copernicus revolutionized our way of seeing celestial mechanics by declaring that the earth rotates around the sun and that the planets revolve around the sun. In looking out to the sky we have defined and redefined our location on earth, using the stars as visual anchor points for positioning ourselves. *Where we are* has historically been defined by *what we see* around us.

Early navigation techniques for exploring unmapped, unfamiliar ocean territories were based on the triangulation of visible line-of-site observations to familiar objects in the sky. Angular measurements to celestial bodies were calculated with the sextant through the use of a graduated arc and a sighting mechanism between objects. The discovery of the invisible forces of magnetism and the subsequent development of the compass was another turning point in navigation, offering the traveller an orientation and a direction but not fixing a position. With the establishment of lines of longitude and latitude, location was redefined by invisible determinants with the abstract gridding of the earth through astronomical and mathematical means. More recently, with the invention of the radio in the early part of the twentieth century, navigators were able to determine their position coordinates in relation to in-range shore-based transmitters. With the launch of the first artificial satellites in the early 1960s, the stage was set for

Twenty-four GPS Navstar Satellites orbit the earth in 23 hours and 56 minutes.

the application of new technologies to navigation and location problems.

Satellite-based techniques for positioning ourselves on the face of the earth have become increasingly more exacting. We now operate within a complex digital infrastructure comprised of real-time computer communications and surveillance systems. The planet is now utterly mapped out within an enveloping and constantly moving invisible grid that provides an address, a pixel, that articulates every place on earth. Determining location has shifted from mechanical to digital means, and as such, visual sites or physical markers are no longer required as positional references. Our sense of location is being challenged and redefined yet again by the invisible structures of streams of pure information. Geography and cartography have been exhausted and superseded by technologies of surveillance. Globe-encompassing satellite constructions like the Global Positioning System present us with hyper-extreme articulations of space, time and location.

GLOBAL POSITIONING

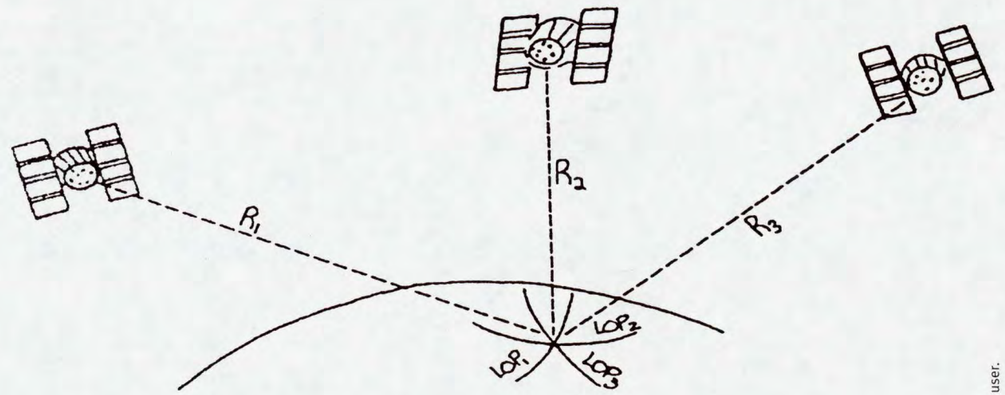
Over two decades ago the United States Department of Defense developed and launched the Global Positioning System (GPS) at the cost of ten billion dollars. Designed for military missile deployment, the U.S. government oversees, controls and allocates military and commercial applications of its communications signals. Orbiting eleven thousand kilometers above the earth, this constellation of twenty-four interlocked Navstar satellites relays a continuous, multi-sourced string of radio signals to radio receivers on earth that permit the pinpoint determination of location in four dimensions: longitude, latitude, altitude and atomic time.

The orbiting satellites each have an atomic clock that maintains them all in a synchronous state. These clocks use the oscillations of a particular atom as their "metronome" or "pendulum" to provide a stable and precise form of time regulation. Each satellite also has its own readable code or name-tag, called the Pseudo-Random code, that allows all GPS member satellites to operate on the same frequency without jamming each other. The flow of GPS information is based on triangulation, measuring the distance from the user's position to the various GPS satellites as they make their way through their orbit. By measuring distance through the vector of the travel time of radio signals relayed back from four GPS satellites, it is possible to establish the four coordinates of a user's position—latitude, longitude, altitude and atomic time—within a few centimetres. These signals contain data on the position, distance and speed of the satellites with respect to the receiver. Some non-military GPS applications include: navigation systems for boats and aircraft; sewing GPS receivers into clothing so people with Alzheimer's can be monitored; measuring the movement of fault lines to predict earthquakes; and tracking GPS video and audio receiver equipped trained rescue dogs on search missions.

MILITARY TOPOGRAPHIES

GPS was used during the Gulf War by the United States Department of Defense to track missiles and locate targets. During times of perceived threat to national security, the Pentagon can scramble the GPS signal through a manoeuvre called "selective availability," which entails the willful degradation of signal accuracy by clock dithering and the introduction of calculated errors into satellite trajectories. Paul Virilio describes this deceitful combination of self-sabotage and self-protection in *The Art of the Motor*:

> In the case of a declaration of war against the United States, the Pentagon automatically reserves the right to tamper with what amounts to a "Public Service" by falsifying indications of proximity in order to guarantee the operational superiority of its armed forces![1]



R = actual range from each sattelite to user.

The U.S. government also controls the "drift" of all the satellites. For surveillance purposes, the satellites can be instructed from the main control station to cluster over a site to gather information and fix on a target. Both "drifting" and "selective availability" can be controlled by Differential GPS, a technique for improving the accuracy of a satellite-based radio navigation system by measuring and transmitting the error between the known position and the measured position to users of the same radio navigation system (aircraft for example) in the area. DGPS can articulate points to the centimetre by calculating the difference between a stationary receiver and the moving receiver. Accuracy in determining location is a primary concern for GPS users, and real-time DGPS promises to fulfill the most exacting requirements for surveillance and determining location well into the next century.

Long-range satellite technologies and the introduction of GPS challenges traditional definitions of navigation, specifically with regard to location, timing and tracking. Like a huge invisible interactive map of networked information that blankets the entire globe, the Navstar satellites create a topographic envelope that choreographs points, lines and planes in real time. Now the representation of topography is defined by a moving, shifting ground visualized with numerical data rather than image information. Cartography has evolved from a two-dimensional system of representation of the visible for documenting the physical landscape to a four-dimensional invisible feedback system for surveilling an exhausted physical topography.

NEW DIRECTIONS

GPS locating and positioning information is currently being applied to the construction of computer generated landscapes and virtual environments. A virtual environment is a space without gravity, where all logic and reason based on an understanding of the physical world no longer apply. Virtual space is a place of pure disorientation where traditional codes and systems of knowledge and experience fail. Drifting 11,000 kilometers above the earth, GPS not only supplies digital data for conjuring virtual environments, it offers valuable insights into the processes of mapping and inhabiting virtual space. In this new cartography of invisible information, the user is able to track a path in a space that is constantly shifting and constantly moving.

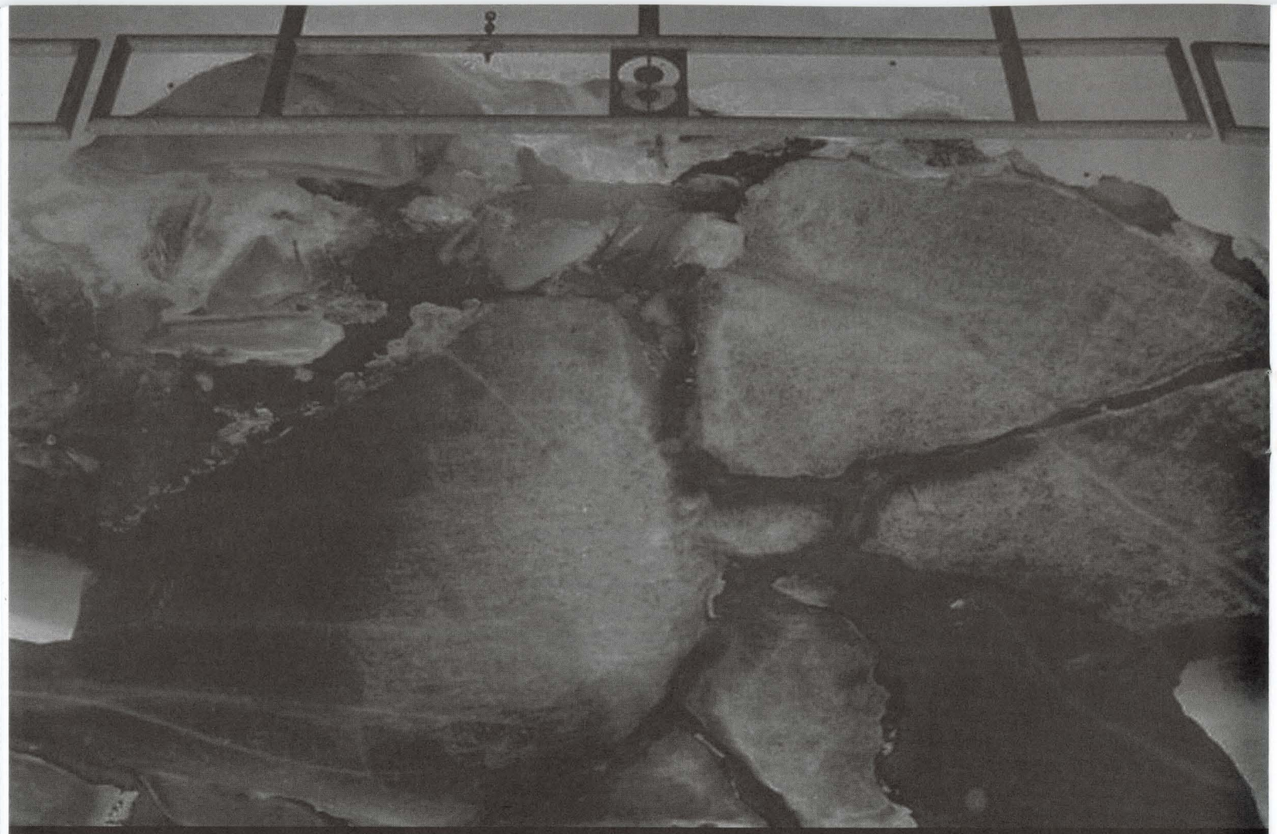
GPS-based cartography feeds a virtual system that is no longer a static, transparent information surface of measurement for representing physical spaces, lying on top of the landscape as a cartographic simulation; it is a map of abstract data. GPS provides a new system enabling one to track and draw new maps with satellites, to redefine one's location and to bridge the gap between real places and imagined spaces of representation. An important shift has been made from the historical means of locating oneself geographically through triangulation through visible reference points to an invisible network of satellites producing a constant stream of digital feeds.

Nicolas DeCusa's great mechanical wheels orchestrating the movements of the heavens have been replaced by the wheels of artificial satellites reflecting digital maps of our own position from the heavens. We are looking out to the sky to look back at ourselves.

Note

1. Paul Virilio, *The Art of the Motor*, University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p. 156.

Andrea Wollensak is an artist working in new media. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Art and a Fellow at the Center for Arts and Technology at Connecticut College.



CANADIANALUMINUMINDUSTRYELECTRICDELIRIUMDECREASEJAMESBAYANCESTRY

La Grande spillway: eight satellite views overlooking the James Bay horizon

I am standing on a bridge overlooking the crackled surface of a frozen reservoir in the James Bay Cree territory. It is close to the end of winter, spring thaw is approaching, and the wind still bites as it pushes against the surface of my face. Next to me is Robert Ottereyes, a Cree from James Bay, and we are looking towards the horizon as he describes some history of the area. He mentions that at one time there were several communities, summer camps, traplines and burial grounds situated along the banks of a once raging river named Chisasibi (Big River), also known as La Grande Riviere. These places still exist for him, but they are situated at the bottom of a vast container of water which is now labeled "LG-2/HQ" (La Grande-2/Hydro Quebec). I have a hard time accepting this fact as his words hang frozen in the air.

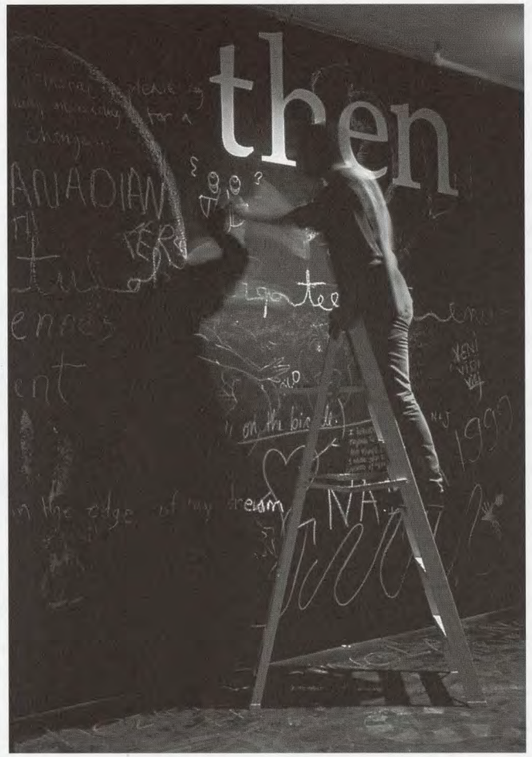
Situated behind us is a spillway which is a release valve for the dam that holds the water of this seemingly bottomless reservoir. On an information panel next to us is a diagram that illustrates a comparison of this hydroelectric dam to the largest Egyptian pyramid, and from a distance the spillway seems to resemble the Greek Parthenon. These comparative analogies become ironic references to architectural structures that symbolize the waning of one civilization succumbing to another. "LG-2/HQ" transcends itself, in my mind, to becoming a signifier for a technological tomb of monumental size.

Upon my return to Montreal, when I started printing these photos of James Bay, I couldn't help but implicate myself into the "larger scheme of things." The blind source of electricity that was imperative to making the photographic prints had been so easily taken for granted. I think of the electrical power and technology that it takes to make a single photograph, to make a camera, aluminum, plastic, or to simply shine a light so that we are able to see in the dark. The immense personal power that it would take to unlearn the dependancy that we have instilled in ourselves in order to keep ourselves "happy." Every print I make now has incredible connotations, and I cannot escape their impact. The weight of it all (like the reservoir) is overwhelming, and it follows me wherever I go.

When I think back to the stories that Ottereyes was sharing, I get a sense that they were not to evoke a nostalgic longing for an unattainable past, but were more of a distress signal to raise concern for the reality of today.

Ingrid Bachmann A Portrait in Three Parts

by Lorraine Oades



Participant in *Talking Walls*, Ingrid Bachmann, 1996.

Ingrid Bachmann was born in a trailer park outside of Alymer, in Southern Ontario. Raised on a diet of TV dinners, Alphagetti and Oprah, her parents have the dubious distinction of being voted for two consecutive years "King and Queen of the Wheels" by Trailer Life Magazine. Ingrid attributes her organizational skill, delusions of grandeur, and aversion to lime green polyester double knit to this upbringing.[1]

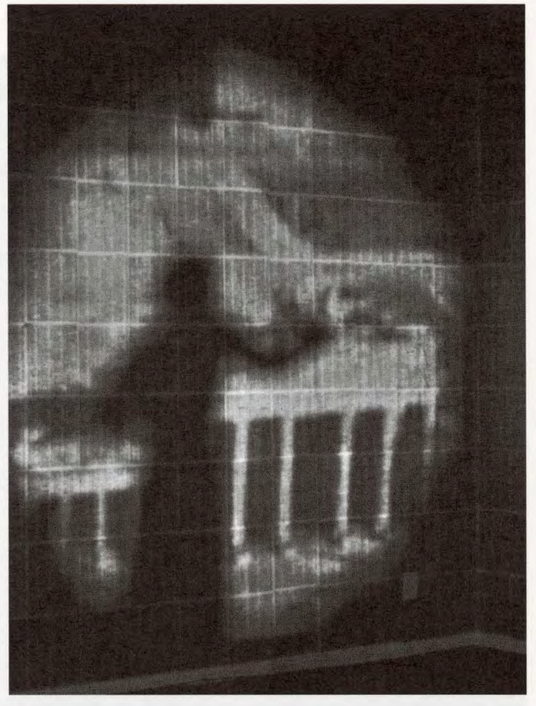
This humorous synopsis is taken from a list of five short biographies written by Ingrid Bachmann. In these biographies Bachmann is simultaneously a freaky giant, born in Herzegovina, kidnapped at birth, named after a famous Swedish film actress and believed to be Julie Andrews in another lifetime. At the bottom of the list the reader is asked to take their pick.

Bachmann effectively uses humour to subvert the institutional function of an artist's biography and frustrate a typical art historical reading where mythologies of artistic genius are often conflated with conceptions of an artist's life in relation to her or his art production. These biographies put into question larger issues relating to social behaviour and expand upon complex notions of identity formation.

The fictive/performative style employed in these biographies parallel similar strategies utilized within her installation practice. Bachmann's installations provide the viewer with an opportunity to publicly try on roles otherwise not available to them. Although her work embraces conventional notions of performance in relation to theatre and performance art, the real performativity lies in its ability to displace systems of authority by opening up spaces whereby viewers are invited to engage actively with the work, effectively altering its meaning.

The carnivalesque nature of Bachmann's biographies disrupt notions of normality, while the self-reflexive directive "Take your pick" further implicates the viewer. As viewers, we are prompted to extend the parameters of our own identity in ways that could fall outside socially sanctioned conventions. The performative question truly being asked is not so much "Are these biographies true?" but rather "Why do they seem unusual in the first place?" It is interesting to note that while these biographies relay a series of unusual and conflicting life stories, they are effective because they are grounded in events not completely fictional.

Part I Berlin (berlin stories)

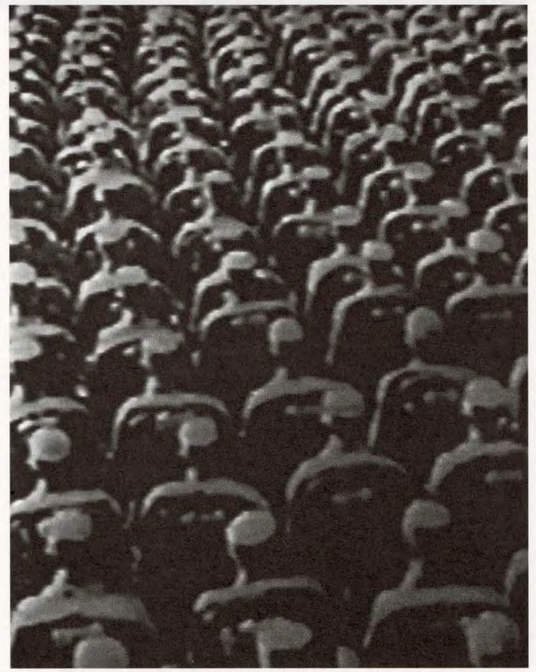


All of us quickly hid behind trees, pressing our bodies closely to the trunks, trying to contain any loose, recalcitrant piece of clothing that might give away our presence, trying not to breathe, as if our breath were audible to the soldiers in the trucks.[2]

A circular slide of the Brandenberg Gate (circa 1962) is projected against a gallery wall. The slide is inverted. Four audio tracks of a woman's voice quietly fill the room. Two small monitors are embedded in another wall. On one of the monitors is an extreme close-up of a soldier's mouth forcefully uttering words we cannot hear. On the other, a mass of soldiers blend into one another to form an enormous pulsating wave. Further down in the gallery a small figurine turns continuously on a rotating platform. Her moving shadow graces the inverted projection of the Brandenberg Gate. She is implicated by the shadow she casts, as is the viewer who may mistake this shadow for her own.

Silence is a recurring motif in *berlin stories*(1993). Recorded fragments reveal details of an unknown woman's struggle to survive while attempting to flee Berlin during World War II. In order to hear the recordings we must go up to each speaker individually. An intimacy is evoked by this proximity. The flipped image of the Brandenberg Gate is a subtle but important detail. This mirror-like reversal symbolically positions us outside events, emphasizing a reflective subject positioning. The media-based technologies reinforce a sense of transitoriness or slippage in time. The implications of this story are more difficult to grasp than we may initially realize.

While *berlin stories* constructs a picture of one woman's struggle to survive during the holocaust, it does so in an effort to understand the significance of these events from the viewpoint of a first-generation Canadian, of German descent, after the war. Another type of silence has occurred here; the silence of a young girl growing up in Canada attempting to deal with the implications of her nationality. This kind of silence has been shared by many minority groups living in Canada during the '60s. One of the questions Bachmann posits, however quietly, is a question that affects all of us: how do we come to terms with events we are connected to by circumstances over which we have had no control? Who is responsible?



Part II
Montréal
(Talking Walls)

When I arrive at the gallery it is shortly after 5:00 PM. Although the opening began just one hour ago, the gallery is already crowded as is the adjoining office area, which doubles as bar and milling ground during the *vernissages*. The feeling is energetic. It is the first opening of the New Year and many people have just returned from various forms of holiday celebrations. The room is buzzing with conversation as groups of people form and reform, friends and acquaintances happy to see one another again now that the pressure of the holiday season has subsided.

After surveying the opening scene I go to the gallery to look at the exhibition. Entering this large area, painted almost completely black for the installation, I am struck by the transformation that has taken place in such a short time. The room has gone from a subdued, reflective environment to a chaotic mass of marks and lines. My gaze moves across the space to regard the normally well-mannered gallery-goer energetically marking the surface of the room with white and yellow chalk. Fascinated, I watch this scene. The people engaged in this activity are completely absorbed in what they are doing. Their interventions feel singular in nature, removed from the larger dialogue originally constructed by Bachmann, and from one another. The variety of marks which adorn the walls instantly remind me of graffiti. Much of the drawing is crudely done and feels aggressive. The writing seems superficial and even cliché.

A curious self-confidence is shown by these mark-makers. It reminds me of young children drawing in colouring books, enthusiastically scribbling on the page without inhibition or concern for boundaries. I think of the authoritarian stance a gallery structure can impose and the mystique that often shrouds the art object. I think of my own shyness, my inability to perform spontaneously within this public sphere. I think of the philosopher Heraclitus and the implications of his cynical remark:

> The opinions of most people are like the playthings of infants.[3]

I decide to withhold judgment.

Demos

In *Talking Walls Dialogue: Ingrid and Plato*, Ingrid Bachmann transforms the gallery site into a giant walk-in blackboard and invites the viewer to participate. In this "tongue in cheek discussion" Bachmann addresses Plato as she would a peer, simultaneously disrupting temporal, hierarchical and gender boundaries. Bachmann duplicates the conversational manner of the Socratic dialogues by giving Plato the floor, mirroring his(toric) premises through the exhibition context and the discursive elements she uses.

Bachmann "rethinks the gallery site as a forum for ideas."[4] The performative nature of this exhibition subverts traditional notions of the art object as a tangible, collectable item which appreciates in time. Objects that do appear are minimal. Three white ladders distributed throughout the space provide access to the upper regions of the gallery walls. Giant chalk cast in plaster are placed about the room, as is regular chalk, which suspends from lines that hang from the ceiling. A white bicycle rests against a gallery wall. The viewer is invited to cycle through the gallery. Along with fulfilling an immediate utilitarian function, these objects act as metaphors for transcendence and restriction.

While Bachmann opens up a space that extends the agency of the gallery viewer, she also imposes and alludes to restrictions in a number of ways. Key texts (which, incidentally, are the only writings produced in a permanent material) are painted onto the gallery ceiling, floor and walls. *Polis–Demos–If–Then* and *Therefore*—succinctly sum up foundational principles of Western philosophy and science. These texts, written in large computer-generated fonts, contrast sharply with the transitory nature of the smaller handwritten elements that fill the space. *We live on writing and erasure*, also inscribed in large computer-generated fonts on the gallery ceiling, is perhaps a subjective response to these axioms that define and regulate culture.

The most recent addition to this installation work, previously exhibited at The New Gallery in Calgary, Eastern Edge in Newfoundland, and Art in General in New York, further personifies this dialectic of transcendence and restriction. A large drawing machine powered by the human body is installed at the back of the gallery. This machine, made at The Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia, consists of two wing-like arm extensions designed to fit into the area where it is installed. The extensions have chalk fastened at each end and a series of pulleys attached along the length of both arms. As the viewer climbs into the machine and moves their arms in the backward and forward motion restricted by it, semi-circular tracings of white chalk mark the two adjacent gallery walls while trails of white dust line the front wall at regular intervals.

Like a cardiograph following the rhythm of the heart these chalky traces transcribe the gesture of the machine. The wing-like quality of this apparatus references ascendance and scientific innovation and alludes to restrictions imposed by technological intervention. Although the arm extensions give us access to a

form of mark-making that extends the capacity of the human body, it distances us from a direct sensory experience and reduces our efficacy to that of simply propelling the machine.

We live on writing and erasure.

The day after the *vernissage* I talk with Ingrid on the telephone. She tells me that she found the opening difficult and has spent much of the day with gallery staff erasing many of the marks. She is uncertain of the repercussions of this act. After opening up the gallery space in an act of inclusiveness, what does it mean to now erase these voices? We talk about censorship. We talk about the nature of a dialogue and the responsibility of a speaker within an exchange. I suggest that this erasure is an extension of the dialogue and opens up a space that allows it to continue.

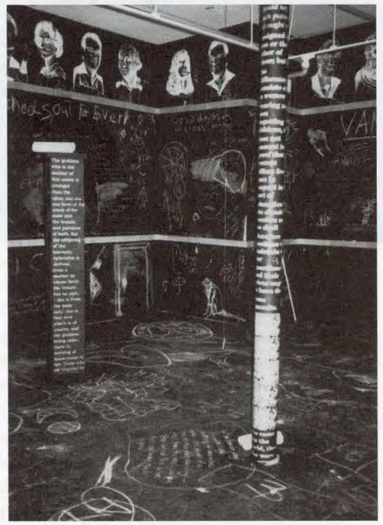
Our conversation takes an interesting turn. Ingrid tells me of her day with Sue Schnee and Doina Adam and the sense of relief they share in erasing much of the marks and writings. Both tell Ingrid of interventions that upset them during the opening and how they were unable to address the person making them. They speak of their inability to act and how it is reflected in situations outside the gallery. They make a pact with one another that they will do so in the future.

Polis

> For most people in the west, the chalkboard or blackboard has associations to authority and socially sanctioned or conditioned knowledge. But interestingly, it also provides a surface which can continually be written, erased, and re-written, much in the same manner as our public histories as well as our personal histories are constantly being rewritten.
>
> *Ingrid Bachmann,*
> *Talking Walls Dialogue: Ingrid and Plato*[5]

The two most prominent characteristics of a blackboard are its associations with pedagogy and its imminent erasability. Information inscribed on a blackboard is always transitory. This fluidity offers the prospect of continual evolution and renewal.

In this exhibition, Bachmann makes connections between the technology of the blackboard and the information highway. The Internet parallels a blackboard as a support system which carries and relays information. One can imagine the void of cyberspace being reflected in the blackness of the board. Information on the net piles up: an intangible accumulation, disembodied from our physical selves. Encoded electronic impulses translate through the machine, rebounding off our bodies as we sort through this seemingly infinite access to information.



The Internet, like the blackboard, provides a continuously changing surface that lives in the perpetual present. Bachmann's three-dimensional blackened space, almost completely devoid of colour and materiality, could be thought of as a late twentieth century mirror to Plato's imaginary cave: a shadowy world of ideas disembodied from the physical realm.

A week and a half later I return to the gallery. I wonder how the space will feel now that much has been erased. I remember the party-like atmosphere of the *vernissage* and am certain now the gallery is quiet the contributions will be more reflective.

The smell of chalk dust fills my lungs as I enter the gallery. Alone in the room, I am struck by the peaceful contrast to the opening day's activities. There is a ghostly feeling here. I am surprised to find the gallery walls already quite full. How many people have been here over the last week and a half? After taking in the general feeling of the room I look for Ingrid's original drawings. The large line drawing, following a Muybridge photographic study of a male nude somersaulting through space, is barely discernible. The series of hands gesturing, modeled after Renaissance paintings and a sign language system, remain quite prominent and have been added to in humorous and slightly predictable ways. A sea creature, resembling a human brain, floats amidst a sea of graffiti. A monkey, sitting discreetly under the outside periphery of a large chalkboard frame (a chalkboard within a chalkboard), rests relatively undisturbed. She looks out at us, quiet and innocuous in a funny way. Of all the drawings Ingrid originally made, this is the one I find to be the most enigmatic. It subtly disrupts the intentions of the other elements that refer to science and the rational.

allegory of the cave

Plato believed reality was divided into two distinct regions: the world of the senses and the world of ideas. He likened the sensory world to living in a cave. Being bound by chains we see only into the back of the cave. Sunlight enters through the mouth of the cave and projects shadows onto its walls. Since we have no knowledge of the world beyond the limits of our sensory perception, we mistakenly believe the shadows to be the real world we cannot see.

In this allegory Plato separates the realm of the body from intellect and reason. For Plato, it is only through the light of reason that we can free ourselves from the bondage of ignorance personified by sensory experience.

I return to the gallery for a third and final time with pen and paper in hand. By now the gallery floor is completely covered in white dust. Once again I look for Ingrid's drawings. Although they are still intact they are difficult to distinguish from the rest of the exhibition. The monkey continues to quietly look out into the gallery space. The series of hands gesturing remain relatively unchanged. I walk to the back of the gallery where the drawing machine is installed. A drawing of a teapot pouring tea into a cup has been here since the opening. I wonder who made this drawing. I admire their facility. This drawing so modestly sums up many of the ideas in this exhibition. It makes me think of people drinking tea together and talking, the subtleties of the act of sharing, the transference of knowledge from one body to another.

Walking around the gallery, I notice most of the contributions are text. Most people in the West seem to have much more facility writing than drawing. Overwhelmed by the quantity of marks and writings I am not sure where to begin. After a few moments one of the texts catches my eye: *"Wolfgang Krol, Lorraine Oades, Vita Plume and Naomi London students' were here."* I am touched to read my name and wonder which of my students wrote it. Again I am reminded of graffiti, but this time of its power to claim territory. I begin to read more of the texts: *"A candle loses none of its light by lighting another candle," "ligne de vie ligne de folie," "a cow, not understanding traffic will cross an intersection as soon as it gets to it," "If reality and appearance were the same we would not need science. Plato."* The philosophical underpinning of these texts becomes clearer.

> Information, like humanity, cannot exist apart from the embodiment that brings it into being as a material entity in the world; and embodiment is always instantiated, local, and specific. Embodiment can be destroyed but it cannot be replicated. Once the specific form constituting it is gone, no amount of massaging data will bring it back. This observation is as true of the planet as it is of an individual life-form.
>
> *N. Katherine Hayles*
> *"Virtual Bodies, Flickering Signifiers"*[6]

It's 2:15 PM. Although Ingrid's opening doesn't begin until 4:00 PM, I arrive early to bring her flowers. Already there is an energetic feeling in the gallery. Oboro is locally famous for its generous spreads at openings and Ingrid's is no exception. Caterers are busily chopping and laying out food in the large office area where people will congregate throughout the evening. Ingrid and Nicki Forest, who has been helping install the exhibition, are in the main gallery. Nicki is videotaping the installation. The room is serene. The care with which Ingrid has constructed this work is immediately apparent. The blackness of the room is inviting. The placement of the chalk drawings is spatially well-considered. Walking around the room I make a mental inventory of the elements drawn on the walls and floor and begin to make sense of them. There are a number of direct references to science: a quantum equation is written on the back wall; a large study of a brain copied from a drawing by Leonardo DaVinci is drawn on the floor; the words IF and THEN are written in three-foot letters on two of the gallery walls; the symbol for THEREFORE is placed on the floor. On the walls next to the entrance are two texts handwritten by Ingrid. One is her artist statement, the other is an address to Plato:

> When I speak the muscles in my mouth and throat have a memory of the words spoken.
>
> My ears retain an aural memory of the words heard.
>
> When I reach for the mouse at my computer my hand remembers the gesture.

Ingrid and I talk for a while about the exhibition. There is a curious combination of constraint and invitation at play in the work. I notice the chalk lines that hang from the gallery ceiling. One by one I take hold of a line and walk to the closest wall. Each time I am amazed by the minimal amount of room this device allows for the viewer to participate. It is approximately 10 inches square. I think about my own shyness in public spaces. I wonder if anyone will intervene.

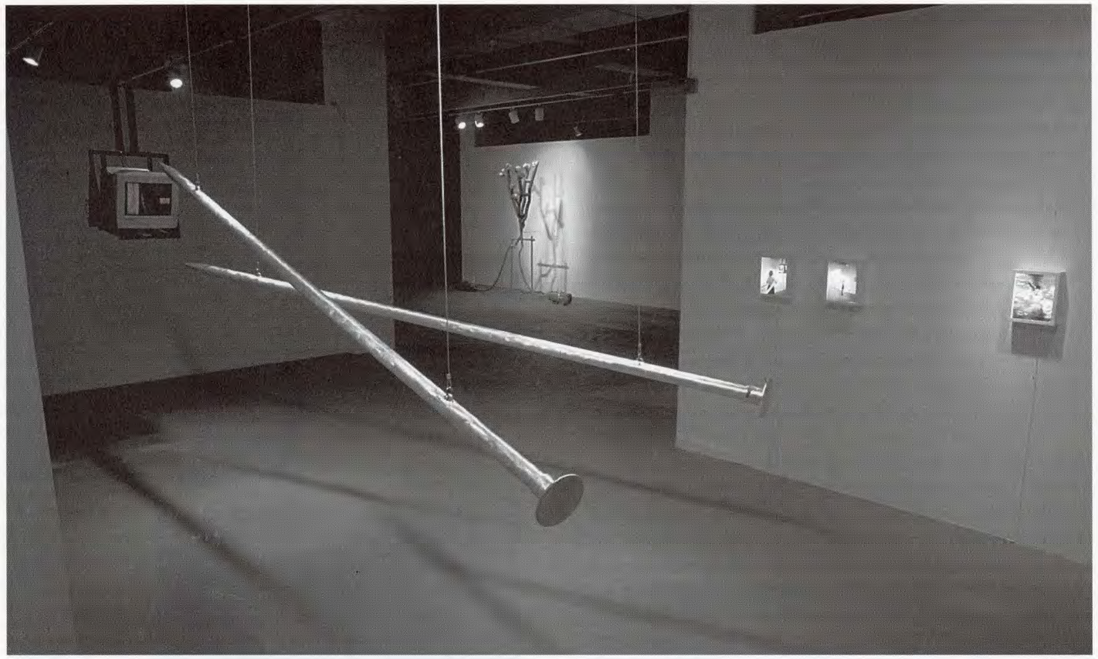
Part III
Chicago (Knit One, Swim 2)

> Engaging the viewer in an overwhelming bodily encounter with a gigantic pair of knitting needles, the action invoked is translated into many tangential responses. . . .
>
> *Joan Livingstone, Anne Wilson,* The Presence of Touch[7]

In poststructuralism, language is no longer seen as a system of signs which simply reflect inward experience, but rather as a complicated symbiotic web through which individuals are shaped. Two dimensions of language located by Saussure in structural linguistics are concretely articulated in his analysis of "langue" in monetary systems. "A given coin must be exchangeable against a real good of some value, while on the other hand it must be possible to relate it to all the other terms in the monetary system."[8] While these distinctly autonomous yet interlinking dimensions are both seen as having an important value function, the interrelated terms belonging to the larger structural system come to dominate the immediate value function implied by the individual elements.

The principals of "langue" allocated by Saussure to systems of monetary exchange are equally applicable to technology. Unlike the "langue" of monetary exchange, the terms or systems internal to technology have no direct relational correspondence, but function in ways that are analogous to one another. Nonetheless, the same formula occurs. The value allocated to the initial functional dimension, where a particular tool can be seen to perform a given task, becomes absorbed into the larger structural apparatus to which it remains attached, but whose function is ultimately different.

Knit One, Swim 2 is a recent interactive work included in "The Presence of Touch," an exhibition of eight European and Canadian artists curated by Joan Livingstone and Anne Wilson at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In this installation Bachmann continues to explore the relationship between the body and technology, expanding upon the simple mechanical system she developed earlier in the drawing machine exhibited in "Talking Walls." In this work two fourteen-foot aluminum knitting needles are connected through a series of pulleys, guide wires, and potentiometers to a computer animation program. When the needles are manipulated an animation sequence of a swimmer appears on a computer screen situated directly in front of them. The speed and duration of the sequence is controlled



by the viewer through their interaction with the needles. Outside the gallery four large cylinders of water move up and down in a section of the window. These cylinders play an important role in completing a circuit connecting the viewer and the installation elements.

Connotations indicative of knitting are abruptly altered in this work. Normally associated with a quiet and productive domestic activity, these needles take on sinister characteristics. The awkward action required to move them emphasizes a lack of dexterity or control by the viewer. Their sharp points suspend menacingly close to the computer screen. The giant knitting needles subsume the viewer the way language is seen to subsume the individual in poststructural theory. Transformed into powerful instruments, their agency is amplified well beyond their initial use value. Disassociated from their original purpose, their ultimate function remains uncertain.

While this work continues previous investigations relating women's craft, technology and the body, such as *Fault Lines*, a collaborative work produced with Montreal artist Barbara Layne, it evokes a number of unexpected associations. The giant knitting needles, the swimmer and the cylinders function in an incongruent manner reminiscent of a dream sequence. All of these elements can be seen as archetypal dream images, particularly the swimmer which is literally the focus of this work.

In an essay entitled "Traumatic Awakenings,"[9] Cathy Caruth describes dreaming as a process that allows the dreamer to reconstruct traumatic events they were incapable of fully perceiving as they occurred. For Caruth these events are grasped intermittently through a series of flashbacks, nightmares and dreams. While Bachmann's installation is not specifically related to trauma, it pivots on a disjunction of cause and effect related to the viewer through a form of belatedness.

The exhibition space at the Art Institute has two large window areas where Bachmann's work is installed. Bachmann utilizes these windows to frame her work, emphasizing its theatricality and underlining concerns related to spectatorship. The spectator can look in and, to a certain extent, observe the goings-on of the gallery from a safe distance. What this viewer sees are four large cylinders filled with blue water that mysteriously move up and down in the window area. The viewer inside the gallery is unaware of this movement and the direct effect they may be having on the cylinders, which move in tandem with the image of the swimmer when the large knitting needles are manipulated.

In *Performativity and Performance* Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick speak of the effectiveness of a performative utterance being reliant upon a "third person plural, a 'they' of witness—whether or not literally present."[10] Throughout Bachmann's artistic practice the recurring notion of witness is invoked by the viewer of the viewer. The first viewer is collaboratively engaged in the construction of the installation, while the second, "whether or not literally present," watches. Both positions are fluid and can be fulfilled by the same person at different times. Having independent yet crucial roles in constructing the meaning of the work, each plays a performative role that is received by a fourth and final position, the viewer who watches the viewer view (an overview). The final position, which is not the most necessary, might be the most important. The type of viewer fragmentation that recurs in Bachmann's work is synonymous with dream sequences, where aspects of the psyche are allocated to multiple characters in the dream; and is central to poststructural theory, where the individual is seen as socially constructed, relational and non-unified.

The relationship between knitting needles, the swimmer and the large cylinders of water may at first confound the viewer. The sequential series of events set into motion by them is in fact nonsensical. Some of the immediate associations implied by the elements may at first surprise us. The image of the computerized swimmer is alluring and personal, while the knitting needles are imposing and difficult to control. It is interesting to note that it is the computer image, and not the knitting needles, that seems to allow the greatest potential for human interaction and agency. The computerized image of the swimmer encourages an associative reading of the installation. Cognitive association, common to dream processes, might provide us with a clue for interacting with systems of technology in ways that, at least temporarily, deflect the totalizing effects intrinsic to them.

Bachmann interrupts highly stratified art structures by challenging the viewer to consciously participate in the production of an artwork. Her practice shares the belief that anyone can be an artist in the tradition of another artist of German descent, Joseph Beuys. This belief extends beyond the realm of cultural production and is indicative of an attitude that is genuinely inclusive. Generosity and intelligence are the mainstays of Bachmann's art practice.

The disjunction of cause and effect set up in *Knit One, Swim* 2 is apparent throughout Bachmann's work and corresponds directly to structural laws that govern technology and human interaction. This fracture suggests a systemic inability to perceive our actions as they occur. The rift is further intensified by traumatic events. *berlin stories* signals a catastrophic outcome. In *Knit One, Swim* 2 a series of incongruent signs are brought together through a simple mechanical system, to which all the individual elements are physically attached. We can begin to make sense of these elements, the knitting needles, the water, the swimmer, if we connect them associatively and if we pay attention to the complex systems to which they are attached.

> I is a freaky giant! I is a nice and jumbly giant. I is the only nice and jumbly giant in giant country. I eat rotsome snozzcumbers and drink delumptious fizzy frobscottle and is make whizpopers only sometimes.
>
> Words is oh such a twitch-tickling problem to me all my life. So you must simply try to be patient and stop squibbling. As I am telling you before, I know exactly what words I am wanting to say, but somehow or other they is always getting sqyiff-squiddled around. I is all a stutter.[11]

Notes

1. Ingrid Bachmann, first of five biographical entries.
2. Text from *berlin stories*.
3. Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, (New York: Berkley Books, 1996), p. 35.
4. Ingrid Bachmann, artist statement.
5. Ingrid Bachmann, artist statement.
6. N. Katherine Hayles, Virtual Bodies, Flickering Signifiers, *October Magazine* 66, fall 1993, p. 91.
7. Joan Livingstone and Anne Wilson, *The Presence of Touch*, (Chicago: The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1996), p. 4.
8. Jean Baudrillard, *The End of Production, Symbolic Exchange and Death*, (Sage Publications, 1993), p. 6.
9. Cathy Caruth, *Traumatic Awakenings, Performativity and Performance*, (New York: Routledge, 1995).
10. Andrew Parker, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Introduction, *Performativity and Performance*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 8.
11. Ingrid Bachmann, last biographical entry. The phrase "I is a freaky giant" originally comes from Roald Dahl's children's book entitled *BFG*.

Special thanks to Joel Frohman, Cheryl Simon, Terry Tremayne, Cathy Busby, Lorraine Simms, Bianca Hook and Millie Chen.

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BABYLON

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection has become the subject of controversy in a recent battle between the original founders of the gallery and the current administration of the collection. In 1965, Robert and Signe McMichael donated their collection of almost 200 works of art by the Group of Seven and their contemporaries to the Ontario government with intentions of creating an institution dedicated to collecting and exhibiting Canadian art. Since then, up to $30 million from the provincial goverment plus millions more from the federal goverment and private sector has been invested into the development of the facility and its collection, establishing the largest and most popular showcase of Canadian art.

Robert McMichael has remained involved in the Art Collection, as a paid director until 1981, and since then, he and Signe have continued as voting members on the board of trustees. His recent decision to sue the Ontario government for breach of his 1965 mandate was initiated by his sentiments around several works in the contemporary collection—works that he believed "mocked the values that gave rise to the collection." In particular, he found the outdoor installation called *BABYLON* by John McEwen and several works by contemporary First Nations artists to be offensive. His legal action resulted in a court case, and on November 15, 1996, Mr. Justice Peter Grossi of the Ontario Court's General Division rendered a decision in his favour.

Great debate around this case was played out in the media, and many questions have been raised with regard to the far-reaching impact, not only on the McMichael Collection, which may have to de-accession some 3000 works of art, but on contemporary art and art institutions across the country. Efforts are being made to overturn the judge's ruling since the Ontario government is appealing the case.

The following texts were solicited by FUSE as responses from some artists affected by this debate. Gerald McMaster and John McEwen both have artworks in the McMichael Collection that were represented in the media as the straws that broke the camel's back. Shelley Niro also has work in the collection, and both Andy Fabo and Stephen Andrews were residents at the McMichael Gallery for *Day Without Art*, a part of progressive programming that is now jeopardized by the court decision. Lisa Steele's text is excerpted from her contribution to a press conference organized by the Toronto art community immediately following the judge's decision.

***BABYLON and the Tower of Babel* was commissioned by the McMichael as a site-specific temporary work in the fall of 1991 and was donated to the collection in 1993.**
I chose the word BABYLON because of the impact the following had on me in 1974. At that point I had been living exclusively in the country for two years.

BABYLON—from the "rivers of Babylon" by the Melodians

BABYLON—from the film *Harder they Come*

BABYLON—from Psalm 137

BABYLON—a seminal example of the cultural jet stream

BABYLON* is an intersection of cultural experience. It is about language and language represents our presence in the landscape. The art work is also about animals and nature and a pause from language. It is this duality that became the McMichael's dilemma. The addition of a small bronze cast satellite dish to the single standing wolf, as planned, became their last straw.** ***—John McEwen

Above: *Babylon and The Tower of Babel*, John McEwen, 1991, sculpture. Collection of McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg. Photos courtesy of the artist.

A Rambling Fireside Commentary on the Seven Dukes of Kleinberg

by Andy Fabo

Hurled into the white vortex of a Canadian snow squall on the way to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, huge three-dimensional letters of rusted steel appeared to us in rapid succession as we drove down the road toward the gallery. A metal silhouette of a wolf stood alongside one letter and a giant iron jug was overturned on the top of the last letter. These letters, emerging from the storm, spelled out the word B-A-B-Y-L-O-N.

Whatever could that mean? Why would the name of an ancient Mesopotamian capital be enshrined at the gates of the gallery that supposedly contains the quintessential collection of Canadian art? It was this sculptural installation that spurred the original philanthropists, the McMichaels, to take legal action against the gallery, feeling that John McEwen's work was critical of their life project. The apparent aim of their collection was to identify the work of the Group of Seven as so central to Canadian modernism that it would cast a heavy shadow over all Canadian art to follow.

The attempts of the board of trustees of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection to turn the gallery into something it was never meant to be is both shameful and demeaning.... What we are seeing on the forested banks of the Humber River is an example of curatorial empire-building....
—Pierre Berton,* The Globe and Mail, *Letter to the Editor, December 12, 1996.

The Babylonian empire has had an undeserving bad rap in Judeo-Christian culture. As one of the first urbanized societies, it developed a sophisticated system of law and government, reflected by the Hammurabi code. However, in the constantly shifting geo-political sands of the antique Middle Eastern world, the Old Testament Jews came to be conquered by the Babylonians. Fearing their eventual assimilation with their conquerors, the leaders of the Israelites mounted a campaign of vilification against Babylonia, portraying it as a supremely evil empire, morally corrupt to the core. This demonization continues even in today's popular culture, with Babylon frequently denigrated as the embodiment of evil as in Rastafarian-inspired reggae music.

Admittedly, McEwen's sculptural installation can not clarify this tangled history of meanings. The obvious interpretation is an ecological one that implies urbanized society is an evil force destroying nature. But, since Babylon has come to symbolize immortality (particularly sins of a sexual nature), the sculpture leaves room for misinterpretation, however it is a handsome installation that cleverly tackles the formal problems of the driveway entrance to the McMichael Collection. I prefer to enjoy it on a visual level and take my own humbling message from the reference to Babylon: Empires rise and fall, just as individuals come and go.

* * *

Coming from western Canada, I was never effectively indoctrinated into the cult of the Group of Seven. It was the social satire of the cosmopolitan Calgarian painter Maxwell Bates that held me in sway. Trained as an architect, Bates spent a decade in Europe until World War II broke out. He enlisted in England and returned to his hometown after the war, taking a brief hiatus from the West in 1950 to study with Max Beckman at the Brooklyn Museum. Back in Calgary he poked fun at the local culturati in a series of saucy expressionist paintings of cocktail parties. As for landscapes, I looked to Emily Carr, Bud Kerr or the woodcuts of Walter Phillips for inspiration. High school art history had given me a sense of the pre-eminence of the Dukes of Kleinberg in Ontario but it wasn't until I moved to Toronto that I realized how fetishized the Group was in Upper Canada.

In the late '70s, I worked at the Loranger Gallery on Bloor Street with George Loranger who lived up to the cliché of the apparent misanthrope with the heart of gold beneath his blustery façade. He had the most hilariously wicked tongue and could easily out-Frank today's *Frank* magazine in his vicious quips about his many rich and powerful clients. At the time I worked for him, George had already been in the business for a decade and a half, and he seemed to know absolutely everyone of any importance in the establishment art world. So, he was able to survive the merciless market of the '70s by working his back room. George knew how to hook up Lord Thompson with a Krieghoff, or one of the Bronfmans with a Bacon.

The reason I bring George up is because I witnessed an event in his gallery that brought home to me the power of the Kleinberg Seven. One was an exhibition by the son of one member of the group. He had adopted his mother's maiden name and protested that he would never ever use his father's name to further his own career. Of course, the father's name was slipped into every press release, as well as his conversations with collectors and curators. Astute as George was about the Canadian art scene, he felt he could use the artistic lineage to sell some of this artist's tame northern landscapes. However George was in a panic when the artist-in-question delivered an exhibition that little resembled the cool Arctic landscapes that he had anticipated. The Son-of-Seven had changed styles and the new works looked gaudy and mass-produced. George was despondent that an exhibition of such kitsch might ruin his reputation. However, the Emperor's New Clothing prevailed and a respectable number of the paintings sold. I overheard no catty comments at the opening, and there were no negative reviews. The power of the Group of Seven gave credibility to a hideous suite of paintings.

Recently I witnessed another incident that reminded me of the stranglehold of the Dukes of Kleinberg. I was in a digital printing shop on Queen Street having some computer works printed out when a man came in to have a postcard by Carmichael scanned and printed as a large ink jet image to hang over his couch. It wasn't the obvious copyright infractions that irked me in this scenario. Rather, it bothered me that there we were in the neighbourhood that is home to many of the best galleries of contemporary art in Canada and he was getting a cheesy reproduction of art that was spawned by a generation long gone. He was young, hip and educated and his desire for this image seemed to be a pathetic example of the failure of schools and media in Canada to nurture a sophisticated understanding of visual art.

* * *

I was rather shocked by two high-profile Canadian writers, Pierre Berton and John Colombo, speaking against the contemporary art programme at the McMichael in their letters to the editor of *The Globe and Mail*. Visual art is the poor stepsister to Canadian literature, cinema and theatre. Every economic survey shows them at the bottom of the cultural heap, and the smallest slice of the pie goes to their support. And yet visual artists are supportive of others in the cultural sphere. I seem to remember many visual artists turning up for the

In my view, the meaning of "Canadian art" is defined in the context of the Group of Seven and their contemporaries and the indigenous peoples of Canada, in particular the colours, relationship to nature, to energy and to uncontrollable forces to reflect the expansiveness of their wide horizons.

—Mr. Justice Peter Grossi

protests that Berton, Colombo and other writers mounted against Cole's Bookstores when remaindered U.S. books by Canadian authors were being dumped on the Canadian market. Visual artists have been generous in donating works to auctions for theatres such as Theatre Passe Muraille and Buddies in Bad Times, as well as to various medical causes, hostels and emergency lines. This generosity and solidarity has too often been reciprocated with a savage philistinism directed at them from the other arts.

It is not contemporary art that is encroaching on Berton's home in Kleinberg, but suburban sprawl. And contrary to his and Colombo's assertions, empire building is not the motivation for expanding the contemporary programme at the McMichael. Having met the curatorial team and the director during a residency last year, I am assured that this is a very earnest, dedicated group with only the interests of Canadian art in mind. They work hard at contextualizing the contemporary exhibitions within the framework of their larger historical collection, but they also know that the shows must be challenging in order to draw in an art-educated audience. The Group of Seven's legacy is surely strong enough to survive whatever obscure critique viewers of BABYLON might wrench from McEwen's installation.

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection is an important place for a vital program of up-to-the minute Canadian art. Writers in Canada would never tolerate a situation where E. Pauline Johnson and Stephen Leacock were the be all and end all in Canadian literature. Similarly, visual art professionals should not tolerate a situation where the Group of Seven eclipses all subsequent activity (more than fifty years of it!) in the public mind. The McMichael is the perfect institution from which to challenge the preconceptions of a complacent art-viewing public.

* * *

I have one final anecdote to round off my arguments. After the disappointing court judgment, the board and administration of the McMichael did not retreat into an elite fortress to volley their arguments by way of the media. Instead they went the populist route and held an open house, inviting the public to air their views at an extended Town Hall meeting that was certainly not a strategy of empire builders.

After hearing articulate voices for and against the court judgment, including one young woman, sympathetic to current art, who was worried about the environmental impact if the gallery expanded to accommodate a growing contemporary programme, I stood up to explain how much art had changed since the McMichaels started their gallery. I told a tale of two Zacs: Zachery Longboy and Zacharias Kunuk, both video artists, both aboriginal; one Chipewyan and one Inuit; both working with their cultural heritage and the landscape; two very different artists, conceptually and formally. In the beginning, the McMichaels had an intuitive sense that aboriginal art dovetailed with their ideas about the Group of Seven. At the time aboriginal art was predominantly soapstone sculptures and Inuit prints, artifacts like masks and totem poles, and the new style of Woodland paintings spawned by Norval Morrisseau. Video had not really entered Canadian museums, and the notion of First Nations video artists probably seemed like science fiction to most gallery goers of the '60s. But, now some of the most challenging contemporary work is made by First Nations video artists, and their tapes and installations have represented Canada in many international film and video programmes, festivals and biennials. Both Kunuk and Longboy are engaged with the Canadian landscape in an intimate way rarely seen amongst contemporary Canadian painters. Rhetorically, I asked if it seemed right that a court judgment exclude them from this gallery when their work would be so illuminating shown next to the Group of Seven?

As I sat down, I heard a couple of stalwart defenders of the old ways at the McMichael whisper to each other, "Indian landscape videotapes? I never heard of such a thing! I guess that could be art!" ◀

On the Subject of Justice, Natural or Otherwise

When I returned to the country from an international video festival in France in December, I was greeted with the news that many of the thorniest questions facing contemporary artists, teachers in art schools and curatorial staff across the country had been miraculously answered, cleared-up, dispensed with, "shelved" as it were, in one brilliant legal opinion. The source of this opinion, one Mr. Justice Peter Grossi, must surely be granted the status of A Living Cultural Icon, conferred on so few each year, as recognition of his contribution to cultural life in Canada.

There are a couple of points that I just can't resolve in this succinct and breathtakingly simple definition of Canadian art. I get the colour part, but I do wonder about all those Canadian photographers who insist on printing in black and white, those who have been collected and exhibited in such an apparently misguided fashion by errant Canadian curators throughout the land. And what about the "uncontrollable forces"? Whose art is that about?

The reference to the indigenous peoples of Canada being integral to the McMichael collection is clear—and absolutely essential—until you start to think about *actual* aboriginal artists, many of whom don't paint landscapes, like Greg Staats and his black and white portraits, or Robert Houle and his rather distant relationship to nature, or Rebecca Belmore, who definitely qualifies as an "uncontrollable force" but may destabilize the landscape with her cultural critiques so drastically that the status quo tilts on its axis.

But today's history was yesterday's current event. The Art of Memory (a title from artist Woody Vasulkis) enables us to recall and relive through memory, that which has been. But not content with history as a living membrane that allows current, living experience to co-exist with the past, Mr. Justice Grossi has instead nailed the crate shut, and there it will lie, entombed and inert, never to be re-interpreted, re-imagined or breathed upon by the life of artists working today, or tomorrow's today if his definition is not over-ruled.

It is important to remember that the McMichael Gallery is not a private club. It is a publicly funded institution. The work of living artists needs to be a part of the McMichael Gallery's collection into perpetuity. Only in this manner will the "contemporary" nature of the Group of Seven et al. continue to live and breathe for audiences today and tomorrow.

—Lisa Steele, December 1996

A Parable

by Shelley Niro

I am a painter and a mother. As a young artist I learned how to incorporate my need to make marks and my need to survive. During this early period of my work I learned basic ceramic skills. With these skills I painted on items for everyday use—cups, ashtrays, teapots and bowls. I was a beadworker for many years as well. I started putting designs on my objects and went to pow wows and fairs and other places where Indians go. Most often I was successful in selling this work to people who understood these designs, and used them as gifts and personal wares.

Not all of the design work I used was Iroquois-based. Sometimes I looked to different reserves, predominantly Ojibway. At the time, I felt it was important to put these symbols onto items that one would use in everyday situations. I felt this to be artistically correct. Culturally, I was contributing to the presence of our designs in daily life. As I moved from one Indian culture to another, I made shifts in my approach to design. From Woodland floral to animal clan symbols; from lacrosse sticks to figurative images; the more northern, the more photo-realist. I started to realize the target markets, and I could predict what would sell where, not always accurately, but I developed a good sense of the demographics of retail.

At one pow wow, I remember, I had been part of a circle of vendors. It was a small gathering, and this particular pow wow was always friendly and close to home. The weather was always warm and being close to the end of summer, it carried a sentimental air. I sat with my goods on the table. Out of the corner of my eye I saw an extraordinary man. He could have stepped out of a movie—a western. He was a handsome Indian cowboy, but with no bucking bronco. His blue jeans were tight but not too tight, just the right tight. He had on a white T-shirt, carefully tucked in, pack of cigarettes rolled up in his sleeve, resting on a bicep. His not-too-short but short wavy hair was greased back. And on his nose sat a pair of mirrored sunglasses. To complete this picture, he was wearing a pair of snakeskin cowboy boots. His presence made such a strong impression on me and I felt he must have valuable opinions. He stood at a distance and looked at my table of objects for a long time. I pretended not to notice him. I waited apprehensively and wished he would go away.

He started to make his way toward me in what seemed like slow motion. I wondered what he would say. Was he thinking that I was selling out my culture by putting traditional designs on items for sale? Maybe he thought I was ripping off my people by taking their money for spiritual symbols that had been handed down through generations. These kinds of questions flooded my mind as this curious individual approached me.

He didn't come right up to my table, but stayed separate, leaving a space between himself and the objects. He stood there longer, looking harder than most. I got up from my chair, at last ready for his questions. I went to the front of the table, wanting to leave no space between him and me. Almost defiantly I asked it there was anything I could help him with. I was surprised by his friendliness. His confidence was still present, but not the aggression that I had imagined. He seemed happy looking at the designs and asked how long I had been doing this, and other general introductory questions. I was relieved.

Then he asked, "Do you have any gnomes?"

CATALOGUE OF COLLECTION IN TOTAL

The Subject of Displacement:

A response to the judicial decision regarding what constitutes a work of art that is neither Canadian nor Indian enough to be part of the said collection

by Gerald McMaster

In the late nineteenth century the American entertainer William F. Cody, alias "Buffalo Bill," brought together several aboriginal people, whom he called "his Indians," as part of his Wild West Show. These aboriginal people willingly participated, no doubt realizing their particular historical circumstances. It was also a chance for them to travel with other people to unknown places, to play "Indian." They knew what their benefactor wanted and henceforth endured his fifteen years of fame. Though no account exists regarding their perspectives on this matter, it is sufficient to say that if they had occasion to, this may be what one would have said to a friendly journalist.

Journalist: We are here in the city of London, where the famed Wild West Show is being performed. With me now is one of the actors in the show, an Indian from across the United States Border in an area known as Rupert's Land. His name is May...tay., Maytay pooh? I'm sorry how do you pronounce it.

The Indian: Matapoo!

Journalist: Ma...ta...poo. Is that right? What does that mean?

The Indian: Close! It means "Side by Side"

Journalist: Interesting. Can I call you Mr. Side?

Mr. Side: Whatever!

Journalist: What's it like being part of this show?

Mr. Side: The food is different. When we thought they were serving us buffalo, we didn't realize they meant water buffalo. That kind of threw us a bit. The pay is okay, but the hours are long. We occasionally get out and see the sights. All the young women like to meet us after the show. They like to touch our hair. They're strange that way. Their men don't like it so much that they hang around us. Also, we are hurt a lot because of the tricks we're asked to do. For some of us, it's been a few years since we attacked stage coaches. We're a bit rusty. And, generally, the arenas are too small, which causes some problems when you're riding at full speed. But, if I had to do it over again, facing real bullets, well... Get the point?

Journalist: Yes, I do. Tell me Mr. Side, how did you come to know Buffalo Bill and agree to be part of his show?

Mr. Side: It was by accident. I was visiting a friend in North Dakota and this white man came to the camp and asked if anyone was interested in making some money. He said that we could just be ourselves. My friend and I looked at each other and chuckled. "What's the catch?" I asked. He said that a big white man named Cody wanted to put an end to chasing and shooting at us, Indians. Instead, he wanted to put us in an exhibition. "What's an exhibition?" asked my friend. The man replied: "Oh, it's like what we've been doing to each other all these years; you know, chasing and shooting each other. Only this time, it is strictly for fun. All you have to do is dress up in your old buckskins, ride horses and pretend to shoot the white man. You get paid for it. What do you think?"

Shoot a white man and be paid for it! Somehow the idea seemed too good to be true, yet at the same time it was odd. I thought to myself: "We are used to playing war-games amongst ourselves. No one gets hurt, perhaps only someone's feelings and pride, but at least we live to return the act and brag about it. We all did this to each other; that was however,

before the white man came and spoiled it all by using real bullets. Many of our people died after that. They kind of spoiled the fun."

Journalist: So you agreed to join?

Mr. Side: Yes, we both agreed as did some of the other boys. He said that we'd be joined by Indians from other tribes. He thought that maybe there would be about a hundred of us. We realize his exhibition would not be so successful without us in it. In fact, we are the reason so many curious people came to see the show. Buffalo Bill usually keeps to himself. We call him "Mostoos-senow" (translation: "the buffalo guy"). He doesn't much care to hang around with us. In front of famous white people he is very different, calling us "his Indians." There's no reason for us to complain since we are treated fairly well. However, we miss everybody back home. I'm sure they all think that what we are doing is unusual. They didn't bother to say anything, as long as we don't come home speaking or acting funny.

Journalist: You said that Buffalo Bill doesn't hang around with you guys a lot, why do you think that's so?

Mr. Side: First, he doesn't speak any of our languages. We all have to speak English. He really isn't interested in who we are. He's much older than all of us anyhow. We have our fun with him, though he doesn't know it. Every time he comes by us, he hears us chuckling. He's very serious and businesslike. It's important for him that we don't say anything bad about him because it will spoil the show. We respect him enough for that. He can be pushy. No doubt, it's because this is his show and we should be glad we're in it, instead of being back home and doing nothing. At least here he thinks we're doing something and keeping out of trouble.

Journalist: You're not the only people in the show. I hear there are performers from other places?

Mr. Side: That's right. There are white war-soldiers from all over; cowboys; people called Mexican, Syrian and Arabian who are very good horse riders. There are men called Cossacks, too. Oh yes, there are some white men that play very strange music. One guy plays with a drum and the others play with funny looking things that make sounds like a flute. They all play at once. No one sings. For us Indians, we would rather sing. That is our instrument. All the performers get along though. Sometimes we go out together, but usually we stick to our own people.

Journalist: I hear that Buffalo Bill has been collecting all sorts of things. What do you think he's going to do with all that stuff?

Mr. Side: Yes, I heard Mostoos-senow likes to collect things. Us Indians, we don't

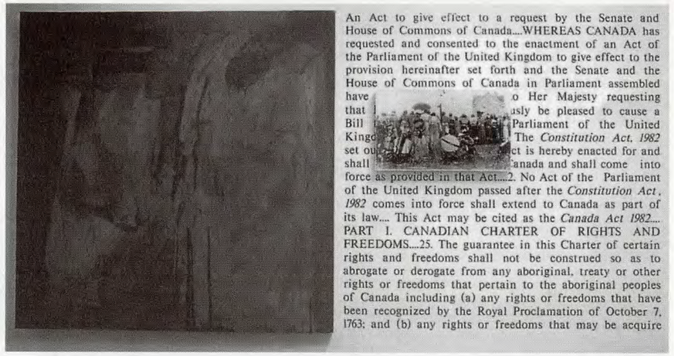
Above: *Speaking to their Mother*, Rebecca Belmore, 1991-92, Standing Buffalo, Saskatchewan. Courtesy of the artist.

Opposite: Publicity poster for Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and Congress of Rough Riders of the World, from the time of a tour of Europe (c. 1903). Also a photo of a portion of the Buffalo Bill company taken in London, England.

Previous two pages: artist pages by Stephen Andrews.

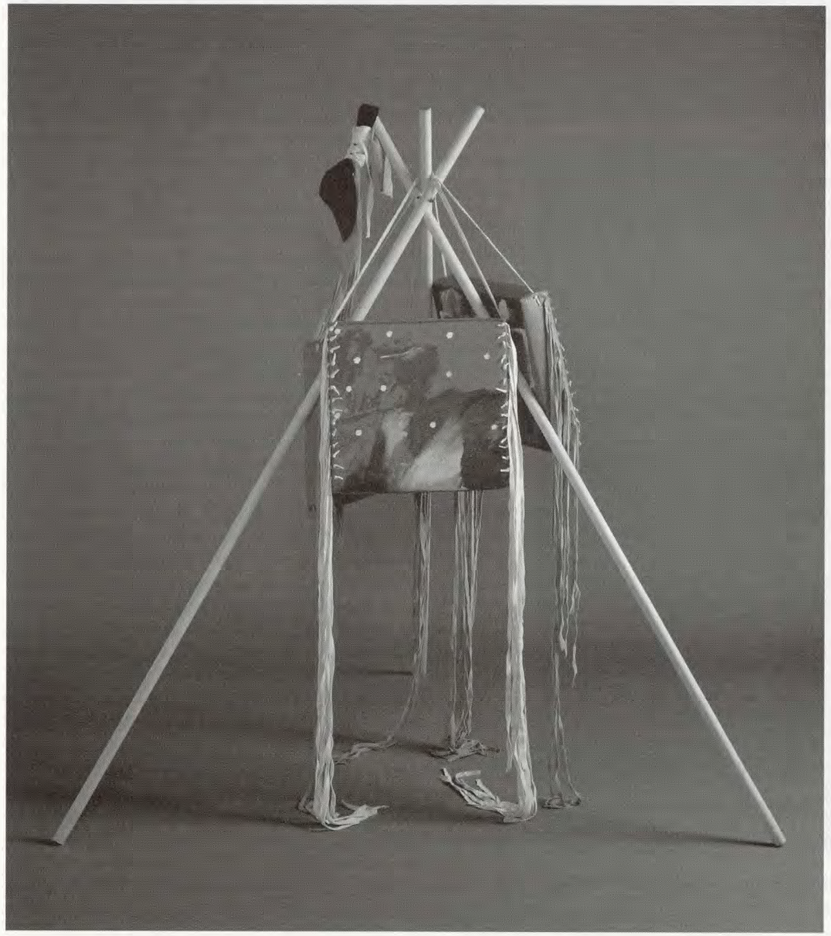
know what's the point. He must have a big house. We're told he likes paintings done by white men who come out to where we live. They make pictures about us and our territory. My people don't like being looked at. Sometimes, these pictures show battles between the white man and us. Usually, we're losing the battles, which isn't always true. We do pictures like that too, only we're winning, but he's not interested in them. What he likes is our worn-out clothes, which we sometimes give to him because we don't need them anymore. That makes him very happy. In fact, there are a lot of white men who come to our homes looking to buy old stuff. Our people think it's odd to save this stuff and not use it. What a concept! We don't think much about it. Most of our people are happy just to get some money for them.

Journalist: I want to thank you Mr. Side for this opportunity to talk. I hope we will see each other again. One final question before you go. I want to ask: "Why are you named Matapoo?



Above: *Premises for Self Rule: The Constitution Act*, Robert Houle, 1994, oil on canvas, photo emulsion on canvas, laser cut vinyl, 152.4 x 304.8 cm. Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank. Courtesy Garnet Press, Toronto.

Below: *Bases Stolen from the Cleveland Indians and a Captured Yankee*, Gerald McMaster, 1989, mixed media, 159.5 cm high. Courtesy McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.



Mr. Side: You don't give up do you? But if it will help, this is why. First it's not my only name, but I won't explain that part. It's what you call a nickname given to me by others. One time Mostoos-senow got very upset because all the performers weren't listening to him. You see he likes to command attention. He kind of forgets that we all don't speak the same language as he does. So, this one time I went and stood beside him and started to interpret to all the Indians, using my hands, like this. You call it "sign language." We use it all the time because where I'm from we all speak different languages, and it's the only way we can understand each other. Anyhow, this got him upset, because he didn't know what I was doing. He thought I was making fun of him, when really I was trying to make sense of him for everyone else. The more upset he got, the more everyone laughed. He soon realized that we weren't making fun of him. I don't think he ever understood us. Anyhow, the others gave me that name because I stood beside him. I think he eventually respected us for that.

Gerald McMaster is a visual artist and curator of contemporary Indian art at the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

The Watering Hole

Lyle Ashton Harris

Jack Tilton Gallery, New York City, Septemberb 7–October 5, 1996

REVIEW BY REGGIE WOOLERY

Lyle Ashton Harris' most recent exhibition of photographs, "The Watering Hole," is a deliberately macabre series of works. These center on the interrelatedness of Jeffrey Dahmer's serial dating and subsequent murdering primarily of Black men and the artist's own psychic fascination, identification and repulsion with such dark desires. The exhibition is an eerie world of racial/homosexual, self/other deception and hate. While clues provide direction, the viewer is in the intriguing yet uncomfortable navigational position of both deconstructing a crime scene and premeditating a murder.

In contrast to Ashton Harris' previous portrait work, such as "Constructs" (1989), where the artist's Black, blonde-wigged, nude body is central, here there is a displacement of the "real" body as the site where representations of power, interracial desire and sexual betrayal occur. It has been Ashton Harris' seemingly easy, almost carnivalesque location of the "I" at the center of this theatre of identity plays that has brought him and a generation of "othered" cultural artists and activists both recognition for being daring and provocative, and dismissal for narcissism.

In "The Watering Hole," alluring qualities are still present yet dispersed. Previously modernist constructions fragment into an array of recycled writings, phrases, pictures and postings from magazines, films and personal (re)collections. Collages are assembled and re-photographed against cheap basement wall paneling under a dull reddish light. Are we in the den of an obsessed hobbyist or a small town gay lounge? Images center on members of a mythical gay male "Black popular culture" pantheon: Michael Jordan, Donna Summer, Joe Louis, Lawrence Taylor, athletes, entertainers, models. Champion boxer and convicted rapist Mike Tyson's face appears, standing in most likely as an African-American equivalent to the seductive fascist body, developed by SM practitioners primarily in Euro-gay communities.[1]

Gold leaf splashes or ejaculations suggest elegiac trajectories of pain and pleasure. These drip across pop pin-ups and intimate snapshots by the artist. There are images of jars filled with bodily fluids, suggesting self-policing and maintenance. We are reminded of "The Good Life," Ashton Harris' last show at Jack Tilton Gallery, where the somber nature of the artist's HIV-positive status was held at bay by a playful, yet elegant collection of portraits of friends and family. If "The Good Life" sought a transparence or spiritual ascendence of human relations, "The Watering Hole" is much more skeptical of where we seek our sustenance and ancestry.

As one of Ashton Harris' more coherent scrawls notes, we must be cautious of "the danger [in] going back to the body and asking it to speak." Caution might be seen as the balance between our need for bodily wisdoms—a retreat from the overdetermining constraints of the mind—and an awareness that the body often speaks back whatever we ask of it. Body-speak can validate self-righteous indignation, pornography, or objective reporting. Dahmer's essentializing desires are echoed by the obsessive method in which the befuddled Milwaukee police amassed their huge pictorial autopsy of Queer Black and Asian bodies.

Then there are Ashton Harris' own ambivalences. This time these are aimed more toward others' "passing" than his own.[2] He makes reference to patriarchs such as Quentin Tarantino and Robert Mapplethorpe. The maverick filmmaker seems reviled by some for bringing the crude phrase "cold nigger storage" to the screen in his interracial buddy parody "Pulp Fiction." The ground-breaking photographer is best known for exposing "big black dick" to the arts marketplace. There is an interesting correlation set up here between Queens Dahmer, Tarantino, and Mapplethorpe as the ultimate hip white Negroes. They all mine bi-racial cultural fields where sex and violence are appropriated in equal admixture. Dahmer's carnal story rings close to a particularly "American epic."[3]

Kobena Mercer (1991) suggests:

> an approach to ambivalence not as something that occurs "inside" the text (as if cultural texts were hermetically sealed or self-sufficient), but as something that is experienced across the relations between authors, texts, and readers, relations that are always contingent, context-bound, and historically specific. Posing the problem of ambivalence and undecidability in this way not

only underlines the role of the reader, but also draws attention to the important, and equally undecidable role of context in determining the range of different readings that can be produced from the same text.[4]

Indeed, the primary axis of "Watering" extends toward this labyrinth of audience view, away from Ashton Harris' prior preoccupation with textual subversion and shock. Where and why do we place ourselves? This is activated by a semi-autobiographical ethnography of desire that is both lush and memorializing, incomplete and contradictory.

* * *

There are clues that "The Watering Hole," made primarily of more somber projections, cannot contain such a level of moralizing. There are leakages and ruptures in continuity. This is suggested by two peripheral works located in the front and back end of the gallery. In the rear, a sole light-box features a life-size, colourfully brilliant, Black male figure in frenetic motion, possibly ejaculating in a flattering mirror. In complete darkness, this work demands attention, carrying through all of the fragmented pleasure and pain of the overly deliberate collages nearby.

At the gallery's entrance, another work depicts a surreal image of Ashton Harris' protruding rear end at the quarry of a stream. It is an easily overlooked serial work as it resembles floor to ceiling wallpaper. Is this a metaphor for a fawn at rest or are we the butt of a joke here? From a distance, the wallpaper canyon diffuses into so many cosmic suns. Up close, the point of entry is clearly Ashton Harris' anus, with all that that entails. Might there be psychic connections to Jean Genet's ruminations on cruising, anal sex, death and betrayal in "Funeral Rites," a palatable closeness of blood and pleasure?[5] We are sure and are left wanting. These are visual devices that one hopes Ashton Harris would pursue further.

The Watering Hole VIII, duraflex print, 102 x 76 cm, 1996.
Courtesy Jack Tilton Gallery.

"The Watering Hole" in the animal kingdom as in the human (consider the brutal deaths of Dahmer's victims, Vincent Chin's death to anti-Japanese violence, and other such brawls at nightspots around the country) is a place of both regeneration and vulnerability to more aggressive elements of the food chain. In this show, the "I" takes up a position across the way, a spectator primarily in view of the predatorial other, yet, with the reflecting pool between them, still within eye view of the equally predatorial self. Thus, rather than being on hand for one of Lyle's flamboyant visual displays, we bear witness to the contradictions and complexities at play within gay male desire of the Black body, a hallmark figure of Ashton Harris' previous work.

This seeming turn of events deserves a look, as one debilitating aspect of leftist identity politics has been the easy reduction of the "I" into "innocent" and "the other" into ultimate nemesis. Even those artists who theorize Stuart Hall's "difference within similarity" mantra s/cite too many external demons. In art, as in politics, taking important conceptual risks involves treading beyond where one calls home, and looking back. Lyle Ashton Harris' most recent show, "The Watering Hole," begins this needed process for us the viewer and, as importantly, for the artist himself.

Notes

1. Kobena Mercer and Issac Julien, "True Confessions," *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, ed. Thelma Golden, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994).

2. Lyle Ashton Harris, "The Secret of a Snow Queen," excerpted as part of *Face*, a window installation at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City, 15 January 1993.

"Passing" is a term popular in the U.S. during the 1950s referring to the practice of fair-skinned Blacks taking on the identity of whites. Rarely is the reverse possible. The "one-drop rule" held that any person with one drop of "Black blood" lineage was considered a Black person.

3. Collage posting by Ashton Harris within the exhibition.

4. Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference & the Homoerotic Imaginary," ed. Bad Object-Choices, *How Do I Look: Queer Film & Video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), p. 169.

5. Leo Bersani, "The Gay Outlaw," *Diacritics*, Summer–Fall 1994.

Reginald Woolery is an artist and writer living in New York City. His multimedia work World Wide Web, Million Man March *will be on view this spring in "Translocations," an exhibition at The Photographer's Gallery, London.*

PSI Kit

Passport Sized Interference

MANCHESTER MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY, MANCHESTER, UK
AND OTTAWA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, OTTAWA
PRESENTED BY GALLERY 101
OCTOBER 1–31, 1996

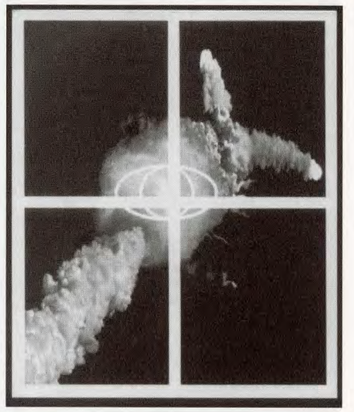
REVIEW BY KANDIS WEINER

Passport Sized Interference is the latest project by the collaboration Kit, a variable team of cybernauts who have been working since 1990 with media such as bookworks, CD ROMS, site-specific interventions and multi-media installations. My imagination was inspired by *PSI*, which ran from October 1 to 31, 1996, causing Star Trek fantasies to permeate my mind on my painfully slow voyage home to Montreal from the Ottawa installation. In the future, according to *Star Trek*, it is the penultimate achievement of velocity, the invention of the warp drive, that facilitates the human imperative to evolve. Speed enables travel and exploration that expands the human consciousness beyond the bounds proscribed by selfish and destructive desires to just accumulate capital. Ultimately, technology is portrayed as the new superhero that will propel humanity through present trials into a kinder future. *PSI* challenges these utopian notions, analyzing the nature of human relationships mediated by technology within the context of a voyage where distance and time provide the backdrop for dialogue around technology.

In *PSI*, two identical installations, located in the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, UK, and the Ottawa International Airport, Canada, (curated by Gallery 101), are linked by live video, in real time, via the Internet. *PSI* is a humorous attempt at grounding the idealistic rhetoric about cyberspace by demarcating its boundaries. The piece depends on its audience to string together elements of a narrative to formulate a story that is different every time someone steps up to the installation. At every level of interaction, identities collide and the audience must decide what path to pursue next. The campy sci-fi atmosphere that pervades *PSI* is set by a time machine that also serves as the vehicle for thematic exploration. The humour inherent in the installation discourages morose predictions while still raising fundamental questions about the role technology will continue to play in the future.

PSI is grounded in a structure reminiscent of a photo booth, yet it is covered in black soil and roofed with Astroturf resembling something forced up through the earth's surface by "ground-breaking technology." It is also suggestive of a military bunker; a stoic fortification, entrenched in earth, that demarcates the borders of space and refuses to be streamlined into slick virtual dimensions. Once inside, viewers sit in front of a screen that displays an image of themselves as well as an image of whoever is in the corresponding booth. The insertion of surveillance into the narcissistic photo booth suggests the oscillation of the viewer between object and observer while the elastic temperament of the photo booth/bunker/time machine also corresponds to the variable identity of the audience as each new participant contributes a new identity to the data transmitted across the ocean via cyberspace.

PSI invites people to participate within the limits that Kit has established. Interactive to a point, it magnifies the



nature of communication between people through machines. Despite the sophistication of the Internet and the program CUSeeMe, participants must resort to primitive forms of communication like gesturing symbols and signals, to express their ideas to the partners in the corresponding booth. *PSI* "dumbs" communication by intentionally prohibiting speech as a viable mode of exchange. The installation lampoons advanced communication technologies and exposes the limits imposed on interaction by the tools and structures that can both facilitate and limit communication. At the same time, the form of the photo booth poses the question of what happens to relationships and identities when mediated by technology.

Unlike most push-button, mouse-obsessed interactive art, *PSI* makes the audience the content of the interaction.

The audience plays the central role of manipulating linear concepts of time to animate the fictional narrative of time

travel. Once viewers step through the portal, they, or at least their images, are transported five time zones ahead or behind to the other booth. Only a few hours overlap when both the museum and the airport can be simultaneously linked. This separation in time between the two exhibits interferes with the intention of a seamless running installation. But, these time lapses effectively interject silence into an otherwise continuous flow of chatter and data assumed by communications technology.

The sites of the airport and the museum are well juxtaposed, making analogies between different versions of time travel, and the conventions associated with each context. *PSI* soils the aseptic environment of the airport and the museum with its alien presence and humorous parody of the austere surroundings. Each site serves as a launching pad for discussion about shifting identities in relation to the reflection and projection of time. The museum is traditionally an antiquated version of time travel, specializing in preserving memory of the past with collections of artifacts. As we step through museum doors, we are compelled to make comparisons between the past and the present, and gain a greater understanding of our place in time. Museums represent one way of configuring identity by linking the present to the past while the airport projects ideals of destinations and a promise of arriving safely in the future.

While Lyotard asserts that "the self…is always located at nodal points of specific communication circuits," Kit examines the fracturing of subjectivity produced by transience between locations. Advances in travel technology have changed self-awareness. Air travel, for example, has changed the perceived size of the planet by allowing great distances to be covered in short periods of time. As a result, we have gained greater access to the world, and are able to travel to places, see people, and experience cultures that were once inaccessible. Our subjectivity shifts as we move from place to place and self-awareness changes as the scope of human diversity is realized and felt. This is mirrored in *PSI* through the program CUSeeMe, which pixilates the image of the participants when movement occurs in front of the cameras situated above the screens. A coherent portrait is pictured when the viewer remains still, but their movement will fracture the image.

Airplanes are now being outdated by technologies that allow even greater leaps in time and space as well as enabling greater access to people and information. However, only those who can afford the high cost of this travel have the privilege of enjoying the riches it offers. The Internet has often been praised as the great democratizer, as if everyone has equal access and similar experiences. But *PSI* and the situation of the two booths in major Western cities highlight the privilege of access to travel, both actual and virtual.

Sci-fi themes pervade our cultural environment, and it seems that in our imaginations, we are already travelling to the future. *PSI* grounds the high-flying discourse about new communication technologies and interjects more practical considerations into the digital dialogue. Its comical sci-fi tone encourages playful interaction, and invites us to make ourselves a part of developing technologies. A multi-layered critique emerges from the fragments, and firmly locates itself in the present by voyaging to the past to reflect, and to the future to comically mimic grandiose predictions.

Kandis is a Montreal writer whose techno-fantasies have inspired many adventurous career decisions.

RENCONTRE PERFORMANCE

INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL
PRESENTED BY LE LIEU
CINECYCLE, TORONTO, OCTOBER 29, 30 AND 31, 1996

REVIEW BY JOHANNA HOUSEHOLDER

DAY ONE: *RICHARD MARTEL, QUEBEC; JULIE ANDRÉE T, QUEBEC; IRMA OPTIMIST, FINLAND; ISTVAN KANTOR, TORONTO; LOUISE LILLIEFELDT, TORONTO.*

DAY TWO: *RODDY HUNTER, ENGLAND; TARI ITO, JAPAN; DZUIGAS KATINAS, LITHUANIA; PAUL COUILLARD, TORONTO; GUSTAV UTO AND RÉKA KÓNYA, ROMANIA; ED JOHNSON, TORONTO.*

DAY THREE: *HORTENSIA RAMIREZ, MEXICO; HONG O BONG, KOREA; BMZ, HUNGARY; ANDRE STITT, NORTHERN IRELAND.*

After the Orgy, Irma Optimist, October 30, 1996. Photo: David Smiley.

For over a dozen years a shifting collective of artists that always includes Richard Martel has produced a festival of international performance art centered at the artist-run centre, Le Lieu, in Quebec City.

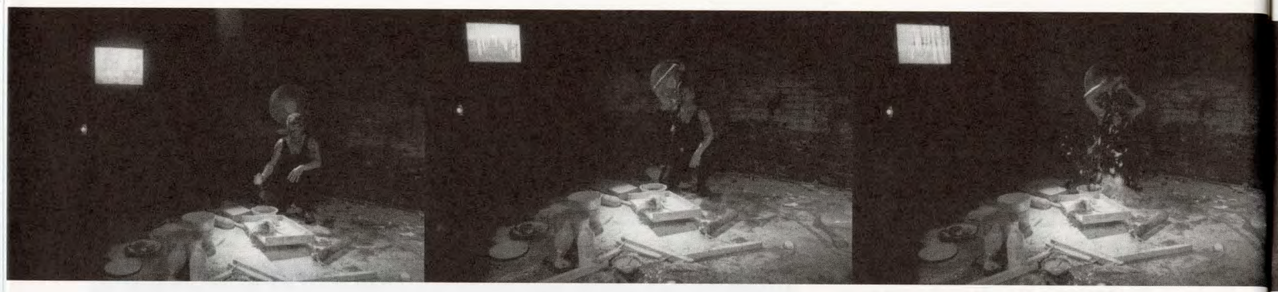
Now held biannually, the festival forms part of an international circuit of performance events. Although a few Anglo-Canadian artists have made the journey to Quebec, the participants, who are more likely to be from Europe or Asia than North America, only rarely come to Toronto. Indeed Martel, who has performed in thirty countries and who recently received an award for cultural excellence from the city of Quebec, has never before performed in Toronto—until "Rencontre Performance."

This past fall, performance artists Sandy MacFadden, Istvan Kantor and Paul Couillard invited a dozen artists from the 1996 festival to Toronto. For three nights performers from Hungary, England, Japan, Lithuania, Quebec, Korea, Finland, Mexico, Northern Ireland and Romania presented work at the virulently marginal CineCycle. The evenings were augmented by Toronto performers who made *tableaux vivants* in the window at Pages bookstore and along Queen Street.

These are performers whose work lives in the international festival context. Some host performance festivals in their own countries, and others, notably Tari Ito (Japan) and Hong O Bong (Korea), perform here to garner international support for work that is severely circumscribed in their home countries. This continual itinerant group show results in pieces that stand as cultural cross-section, while being portable, metalingual, physically adaptable and self-contained.

The qualities of nomadism apply equally to the audience, which includes a significant number of fellow performers. This is not simply a cognoscenti, however, but a participant audience engaged synergistically in the development of the work at hand, what performance anthropologist Richard Schechner refers to as an "integral audience." Speaking as a member of this coherent audience I'd like to focus on four of these nomad works that map out the range presented at "Rencontre Performance."

While many of those assembled have been watching as well as performing for close to twenty years, our connoisseurship is tempered by a recognition of performance art's suspect position within the art world. So when Martel, in his *Portrait of the Artist as…* (the "as" being one of a list Martel consults in performance: a dog, musical instrument, convex aesthetic, bureaucrat, a hand [dedicated to Eric Anderson], the audience, etc.) does



Portrait of the Artist as a Performance Artist, he throws a piece of metal ductwork on the floor, spits on it repeatedly, covers it with flour and brushes off the flour with a long-stemmed rose; the audience responds with self-reflexive glee.

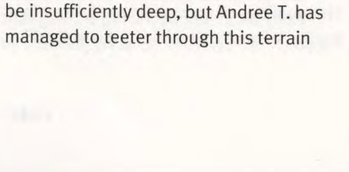
The next night, Latvian enigma Dzuigas Katinas does an almost identical action with absolutely no sense of irony and this is very depressing for all.

* * *

There comes a point in each performance when we gauge how serious things are and how serious they are likely to become. We begin to understand how far the performer is willing to go and we assess whether we are willing to go with them. Sometimes this going takes the form of physical risk and in some cases the audience agrees to take risk upon themselves. These are instances when the audience as co-producers of meaning, consider the ultimate direction of the work and endorse it.

Julie Andrée T. a slight young woman in a black slip and workboots, cuts pieces of string from a large spool and offers them to audience members. Sitting in a child's chair, she then patiently, wordlessly teaches us some cat's cradle string figures. She invites an audience member to pour a gallon of white vinegar into a large bowl. She drinks from the bowl. Then she knots the string around her head and through her mouth like the bit of a bridle or a gag, wrapping and wrapping it around her head so that her face distorts, the string cutting into her cheeks. She takes the bowl and sitting, mouth bound with string, she drinks. She coughs. Gags. Drinks more.

She will die. She will vomit and it will be trapped in her throat because of the string. It is not possible to cut the string without cutting into her face.



Self Portrait 1996, Tari Ito.

A large red velveteen curtain is spread out on the floor, a chair sitting on it. She moves to that chair and drinks more vinegar, pours the remainder over her head, then jolts the chair repeatedly on the concrete floor. Still tethered to the spool of thread, she stands on the chair, completely enveloped in the dirty wet red curtain. Launching herself into the air she lands with a sickening thud on the floor.

She gets up and says thank you in response to the applause.

This is a scenario somewhere between Francis Bacon and David Lynch. Reproducing the extremities of human experience is the horror and the valour of performance, and it is a risky business. One can bare one's psyche and be spurned if the soul in question is seen to be insufficiently deep, but Andree T. has managed to teeter through this terrain extracting courage from her viewers.

Irma Optimist is a doctoral candidate at the University of Vaasa, Finland. Her thesis work is on chaos theory as applied to marketing. "After the Orgy" is a lecture/demonstration on/of applied mathematical theory and a polysensual critique of scientific method. It is also a loopy parody of the serving up of theory in the place of art.

In platform shoes, black vinyl pants and vest, Irma places a picture of a "Dynamical System" (an overdeveloped muscleman) on the overhead projector. Using a collapsible fishing rod she points out the thousands of variables contained in this "system," including "some secondary parts" and the fact that "mostly it is 80% water." The theoretical question is then posed: "Now he is standing here (makes dot on screen) and he wants to take one step to here... what is exactly this motion?" She charmingly demands that we wrack our brains.

> It is downwards parabola.
> You remember it.
>
> And what is the function behind downwards parabola?... $y = a.x^2 + b.x + c$
> —but because it is a downwards parabola, 'a' must be negative.
>
> And now he wants to take that step,
> how can he solve the problem?

How indeed? How can science account for problems of one's own making?

Later, while jumping rope, Irma becomes overheated, unzips her vest and peels off her vinyl pants. Attired more coolly in black satin bustier, panties, garters and stockings, she continues to skip rope. We are very impressed. Here's someone who works with both sides of her brain all the time.

Irma's hilariously deadpan science lesson concludes with the charting of a Smooth Political Curve (is it a sine curve or a cosine curve?) from good conditions to bad. If this information falls into the

Hortensia Ramirez, October 31, 1996.

hands of Al Leach's hands it could be dangerous. Meanwhile, we are thrilled that algebra might finally be useful in the struggle. One thing is absolutely clear: we are on the "quasi periodic" road to chaos.

* * *

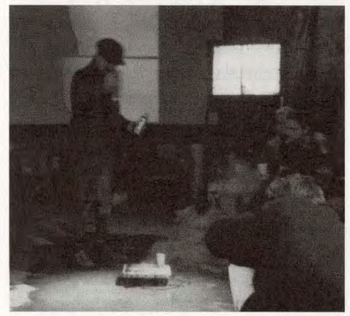
Andre Stitt, dressed in paramilitary gear, a hatchet in his belt, bandaged hands, puts on dogtags. A video of slow panning over the rubble of what might be a bombed out pub accompanied by an intensely dreamy audio collage form a kind of prologue.

Stitt blows rhythmically on a smudge stick until, the room filled with smoke, his face covered with soot and spit he embarks on an emotional journey piece in which physical action is at once executed and withheld. This is referred to in dance terminology as "bound flow," a parody of masculine effort in which the slightest action is accompanied by strangled grunting, bulging neck muscles and martial arts-like movements. He anoints himself with oil and ketchup, binds a beaver skull and some corn to his forearm, laces his arm to a small table which has a loaf of bread nailed to it. He fills plates with an indescribably yellow liquid, and smashes them against the back wall. And so on. Taped to the underside of the table are photographs of children, victims or perpetrators we don't know. They are, however, implicated in the nexus of violence that extends from the dinner table to the bombed out public house and back. He breaks into sobbing, holds his hand against the heart of someone in the audience, cleanses the table with oil, ketchup, salt and ash. Through incessant action and forced breathing he achieves the kind of cathartic plateau reached after a violent fuck or a bout of hysteria.

Cease Fire: Make Sure There's Bread on the Table, Andre Stitt, October 31, 1996. All photos courtesy David Smiley.

Stitt began his performance career enacting scenarios of abuse and degradation. Performances in which his abjection became an object of mirth and derision for a post-punk London underground. The feeling was mutual. The sources of his own self-loathing remained hidden to him until he imploded in the early '90s. He has since reconstructed himself as a one-man catharsis machine.

In his youth, Stitt says, he was a member of a Belfast gang that kidnapped, tortured and mutilated random victims. In light of this history, this performance becomes an expiation of the sins of any (Northern Irish/English) man implicated in the consequences of passing off hideous brutality as political action or domestic control.



Istvan Kantor, October 29, 1996.

This possibility, that an act of performance might be an act of redemption, is a compelling thought. It forces us to consider what we might mean by redemption, politically. Not safety from damnation—nothing will ensure that—but the recovery by expenditure of effort of that which has been hidden, unspoken, suppressed. The audience is engaged in this process of confession, testimony and acknowledgment as witness.

Performance is the intensification of the (artistic) statement. At its best, it ups the ante between the idea and its execution. So if its function is one of treading back and forth across the border between conceptual idea and lived experience, who better to do this than a nomad.

Johanna Householder has been a performance artist and a curator of performance art for twenty years.

Ignoring the Role of Violence in Fanon

Playing with the Bones of an Exhumed Hero

Review of The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation
Edited by Alan Read
Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
Seattle: Bay Press, 1996

REVIEW BY JULIAN J. SAMUEL

Contributors to the book: Homi K Bhabha, bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Lola Young, Kobena Mercer, Françoise Vergès, Renée Green, Isaac Julien, Raoul Peck, Marc Latamie, Lyle Ashton Harris, Ntozake Shange, Mark Nash, Martine Attille and Steve McQueen.

Frantz Fanon was born in Martinique in 1925, studied psychiatry in France, went to Algeria to head a hospital at Blida where he joined the struggle for Algerian liberation. He wrote about colonialism and the struggle against it from a point of view that tried to understand violence and its role in de-colonialization. Fanon died in 1961 at the age of thirty-six. Many Third World political and intellectual leaders have studied "The Wretched of the Earth," which has been translated into many languages including Urdu, (now a native language of England); and, into Farsi, by Dr. Ali Shari'ati, a major influence on the Iranian revolution of 1979.

> To wreck the colonial world is henceforth a mental picture of action which is very clear, very easy to understand and which may be assumed by each one of the individuals which constitute the colonized people.
> *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Grove Press Edition, 1963) pp. 40-41

> ...colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.
> *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 61

Algeria's resistance to external and internal imperialism persists decade after decade. When did it all start? Did it start with the surrender of Abd-el-Kadar in 1847? Or with French-orchestrated massacre at Setif in 1945, when according to President Bourguiba of Tunisia, upwards of 45,000 people were killed? Or does it start with the war of liberation itself (1954–62), in which one million Algerians were killed, and an additional 3000 politically related deaths ensued in metropolitan France?

Fanon's acts are inseparable from the Algerian war against the French. So, does a possible '90s interpretation of Fanon's thinking start with Alan Read's book? No. Why? Because most of its contributors put profound emphasis on dull '80s style sexual politics seen through Fanon's thrilling and naïve "Black Skin White Masks," (1952).

The professors and artists in this book are benightedly disconnected from the many guerrilla movements transpiring throughout the world. Read's contributors do not discuss the tactical violence that the *Front de Libération Nationale* (F.L.N.) offered French civility. Alan Read keeps the issue of armed struggle out of a study of Fanon. It is impossible to discuss Fanon without discussing the many violence-laden Algerias today, and to read Fanon in terms of the mere sexual-political trend is futile.

The Fact of Blackness records a dialogue that took place at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London via an exhibition: "Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire"—preceded by a conference: Working with Fanon: Contemporary Politics and Cultural Reflection (1995). The conference was sponsored by Toshiba.

Read's effort consists of the work of university professors, some visual artists and filmmakers who have made career improvements by injecting their work with the glorious auras of political activism via a "re-thinking" of the earlier Fanon. When reading the book I wonder whether these anti-colonialists are doing nothing but maintaining the status quo. Do they offer anything on the many imperialist machines ravaging the Third World? No. Do they show any interest in front-line struggles within the West (IRA) or, for example, in Latin America (MRTA)? No, not at all. Instead, I hear them whispering: I am stuck in a dreamy utopian class-struggle-oriented Marxism without the requisite gay and lesbian "activism." They just offer uglily written "Theory."

A short note on the current state of cultural studies is appropriate. The emptying of the activist politics from Fanon's works means, of course, that there will be plenty of "committed" yet sloppy thinking. Much of cultural studies is complacent, and careless, these days. Read's work reminds me of the recent Sokal affair. A physics professor at NYU submitted a bogus cultural studies style essay to *Social Text*, a leading journal in that field. Sokal was trying to prove that cultural studies professors haven't any rigour. Andrew Ross and the editors of the journal rushed to publish the essay: they were now going to have a physicist "doing" cultural studies in their pages. This would make them look cutting-edge. As soon as his paper was published, Professor Sokal publicly exposed the whole set-up. (For an exhilarating discussion of the inherent and utter falsity of cultural studies postmodernists, please see Paul Boghossian's comment in the December 13, 1996 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*).

Fortunately, this swishy stylistic complexity is far outdone by Homi Bhabha, who

sometimes does do good work, I think. However, in Read's book, Bhabha constructs sentences that are so magnificent that one has to appreciate them as ink marks on the page, as a kind of finger painting in minutiae. Listen to this unadulterated Gayatri-Chakravorty-Spivakese:

> Fanonian "continuance" is the temporality of the practice of action: its performativity or agency is constituted by its emphasis on the singularity of the "local": an iterative structuring of the historical event and political pedagogy and an ethical sense constructed from truths that are partial, limited, unstable. Fanon's dialectic of the everyday is, most significantly, the emergency of a new historical and theoretical temporality generated by the process of revolutionary transience and transformation. (p. 190)

Bhabha implies that complex-sounding prose is needed to interpret and understand Fanon. Clarity, brevity and historical analysis are not needed.

This book is born of a massive pre-Oedipal-post-Foucaultian-pre-Hegelian-Electra-inferiority-complex in the contributor's attempts to outdo the colonial masters at the game of words, and not at the game of gaining political ground. Western "radicals," argues Michael Neumann in *What's Left: Radical Politics and the Radical Psyche* (1988) are addicted to "Theory" and not to political success. To actually engage in projects that make political gains is a fate worse than death.

Read's contributors offer attacks on Fanon's correctable homophobia, misogyny and sexism. Moreover, these charges are made without fair reference to historical context, and are amplified to drown out Fanon's understanding of violence. Violence is the only thing the masters listen to. Nothing else. But political violence may not be a good companion to cultural and sexual politics; indeed, it may be bad to support it when trying to become a tenured high priest of cultural studies.

Here is the thinking of the completely delirious American bell hooks—another super-salaried anti-colonialist:

> In love. I was thinking a lot about the place of empathy in any kind of ethic of care and the notion that part of how one embraces that larger you—that you that Fanon uses—is through the capacity to embrace the other in some way. What does it mean if Fanon is unable to embrace the black female—what part of himself remains unembraced? How does the possibility of love or an ethic of care chart the path to this humanism that he poses as redemptive? (p. 106)

Are these consequential and serious psychological insights? Is there anything at all to be gained from "thinking" about bell hooks' words? No. (This passage reminds me of the smell of an epoch when people used to smear on patchouli oil). Need one really embrace questions of academic freedom of speech and tenure? These passages offer sufficient proof that activists who have anything contestory to say are not permitted anywhere near the university or art institutions. Tenure protects complacent luminaries.

Read's book is a quintessential dead end. There is no human liberation here. It begins where Fanon began, not where Fanon left off. It is boring to see sloppy professors and artists toying with Fanon's bones in the old-fashioned world of sexual politics, and in the wordy flatulence of "Theory" devoted to more "Theory" and to more "Theory."

Julian J. Samuel has published Passage to Lahore *(1995), and has made a documentary,* The Raft of the Medusa: Five voices on colonies, nations and histories *(1993-95).*

Public Art and Homelessness

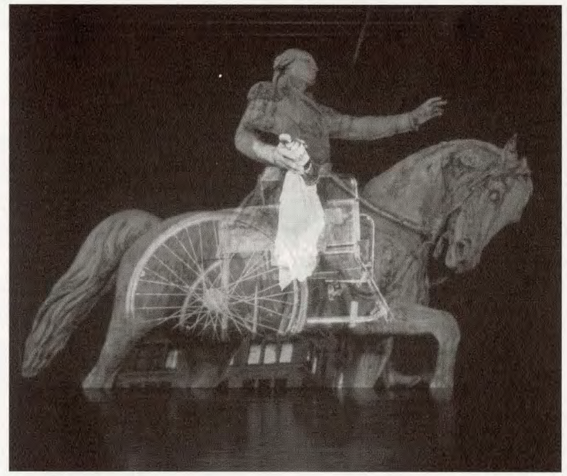
Behind the Space Industry

Review of Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics
by Rosalyn Deutsche
Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996

REVIEW BY GORDON BRENT INGRAM

There is a booming "space industry" at the junctures of cultural and gender studies, geography and "new genre" public art that is increasingly active in redesigning the places in which we live.[1] Unfortunately, too much public art is being used as window dressing to obscure the effective privatization of public places, especially with the increasing globalization of real estate markets. *Evictions* is a jarring meditation on how too much of contemporary art, even socially oriented public art, functions to privatize and to make spaces less democratic. Rosalyn Deutsche outlines a renewed radicalism and brilliantly relates "evictions" to both the art world, gentrification and mass homelessness in the 1980s. She highlights the persistence of old left conceptions of "the public" and "the private" to remain complacent to the "eviction of feminist critiques from the artistic public sphere." (p. 24) A decade ago, arguing that the increasing number of redeveloped spaces is directly related to a rise in homelessness in New York might have been considered paranoid. But, today these arguments may well be the last word in the art and gentrification debates of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Deutsche sees the scapegoating of homeless people as symptomatic of the pathologies of today's city living.

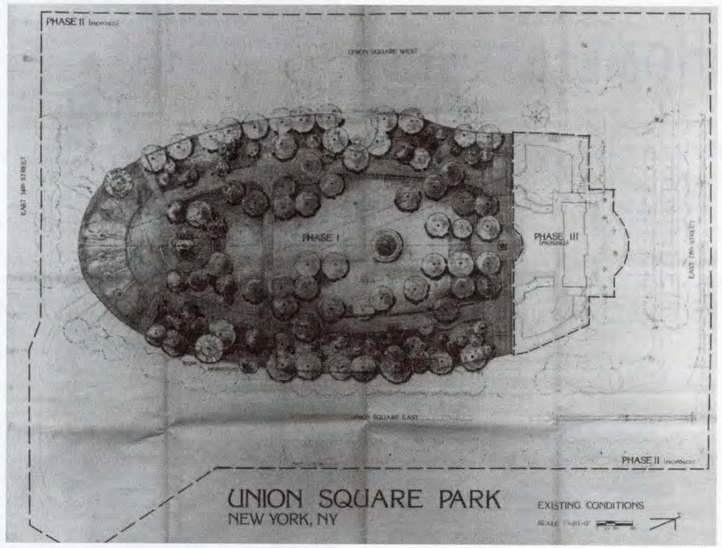
Evictions is a scathing critique that shifts recent arguments about the effective removal of large portions of "the public" from public art to a kind of manifesto for renewed activism. Few people involved in municipally sanctioned and corporate public projects are spared, especially the liberal art world and smug leftish cultural theorists. The book is largely a defense of "the democratic potential of site-specificity" (p. 16)—especially of site-specific and public art against its defusion and depoliticization as it has become institutionalized in city governments.



"George Washinton" from *The Homeless Projection: a Proposal for Union Square*, Krzysztof Wodiczko, 1986. Courtesy 49th Parallel, New York.

Deutsche argues that even public art projects with the most radical potential in recent years have tended to be neutralized. Rather than merely focusing on corporate biases, Deutsche plays hardball against the heavies; "the boys" of early, supposedly radical postmodernism, including Frederic Jameson, David Harvey, Edward Soja and T.J. Clark. Deutsche argues in her essays "Men in Space" and "Boys Town" that the radical and democratizing potentials of a decade of postmodern theory have been constrained by "rejection of issues of sexuality and gender and their marginalization of feminist social analysis." (p. 19) Part of the problem that Deutsche identifies is that older left analyses have equated public space with political space, continuing to push many issues such as sexuality into the darkness of the private. Deutsche argues that older leftist art criticism has driven a lot of art-making, such as that dealing with sex, from the public realm into the private—a line in the sand that can then be re-enforced by the right.

Deutsche's essays begin with a review of Polish Canadian conceptual artist Krzysztof Wodiczko's 1986 *Homeless*



Union Square Park, architectural drawings for proposed modifications, 1983.

Projection: A proposal for the City of New York, which used projections to visually alter public monuments at night to highlight issues of disability and poverty. It is with Wodiczko in Manhattan that Deutsche begins her attack on municipal collusion in gentrification. From the use and abuse of public art in lower Manhattan, Deutsche moves on to the marketing of German expressionism as a foil in the gentrification of post-unification Berlin. She documents how the "need" for a pre-World War II aesthetic movement acts as a reminder of the previously unified city. She shows how West and East Berlin had and have a considerable amount of contemporary art that was dismissed for being too radical and too critical of the cultural processes associated with gentrification.

Deutsche's most theoretically powerful essay is a takeoff on *Chinatown*, the 1974 Roman Polanski film about gangsterism and water politics in early Los Angeles, with references to subsequent essays by writers including Mike Davis and other academics. Deutsche is hardest on the first wave of (male) postmodern theorists and their preoccupation with the "economic foundation of spatial violence" (p. 253), rather than confronting the continued omission of some groups—such as women. Deutsche moves on to take a sceptical look at the significant controversy around the 1989 removal, the effective "eviction," of Richard Serra's public sculpture *Tilted Arc* from Federal Plaza in New York City and the bureaucratic uses and misuses of shifting notions of publicness. She is critical of the notions of the "public" in public art used by Richard Serra and his leftist allies, as well as those used by the U.S. government officials that eventually "evicted" the art.

The final essay, "Agoraphobia," outlines a vision of democratic culture where publicness in art is related to both the freedom to assert diverse experiences and contentiousness. She argues that, "How we define public space is intimately connected with ideas about what it means to be human, the nature of society, and the kind of political community we want" (p. 269). Deutsche goes deeper in her critique and looks at the problem of putting the words "public" and "art" together. She argues that the function of art to smooth over deeper social conflicts will never work, that publicness and art is about expressing activism and social contestation. *Evictions* ends with the beginning of a blueprint to stop evictions—of art, artists, the poor and marginalized.

As for Canadian cities, the "evictions" that Deutsche describes are on the increase. The increase of homeless people in affluent cities, such as Vancouver, continues largely unabated and is fuelled by real estate developers who increasingly use art and artists to market risky projects. In cities like Vancouver, art and artists become especially useful when housing markets are "soft," such as today, and projects are built in dangerous neighbourhoods—such as Gastown with its high levels of heroin addiction and violent crime. More decorative public art and bureaucratic frameworks, that have been entrenched in large cities, often effectively "privatize" space.

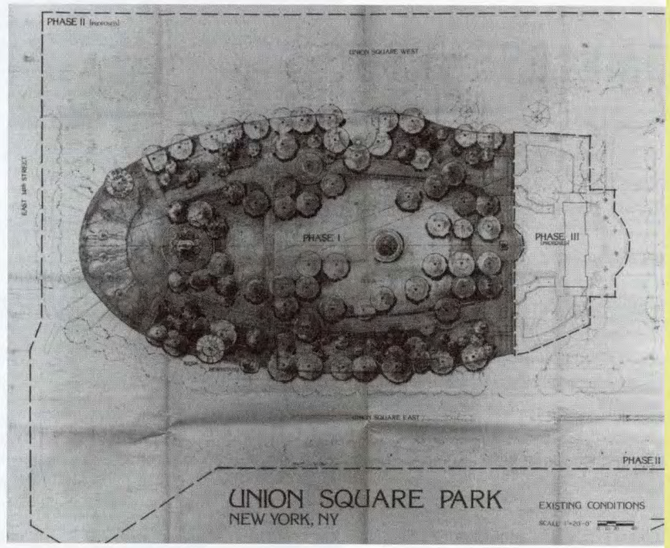
Evictions hurts to read but it makes sense. This book produces an uneasy clarity in its confirmation that a lot of so-called public art, that is increasingly installed around us, is not what it purports to be. Feeling concerned about the connections of art, gentrification, and homelessness? After *Evictions*, the links are undeniable.

Note:

1. Several major books have contributed to debates on these issues. On gender, sexuality and space, notable texts include Beatrix Colomina's 1992 anthology, *Sexuality & Space* (New York: Princeton University Press); Elizabeth Grosz' 1995 *Space, Time, and Perversion* (New York: Routledge) and Joel Sanders' 1996 anthology, *STUD: Architectures of Masculinity* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press).

   Also, see Suzanne Lacy's 1995 anthology, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press) for a thorough look at pubic art practice, and Mike Davis' 1990 essay, "Fortress L.A." in *City of Quartz* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) for its examination of the complacency of public art within the privatization of public space.

Brent Ingram is one of the editors of the 1997 Bay Press anthology Queers in Space: Communities | Public Places | Sites of Resistance.



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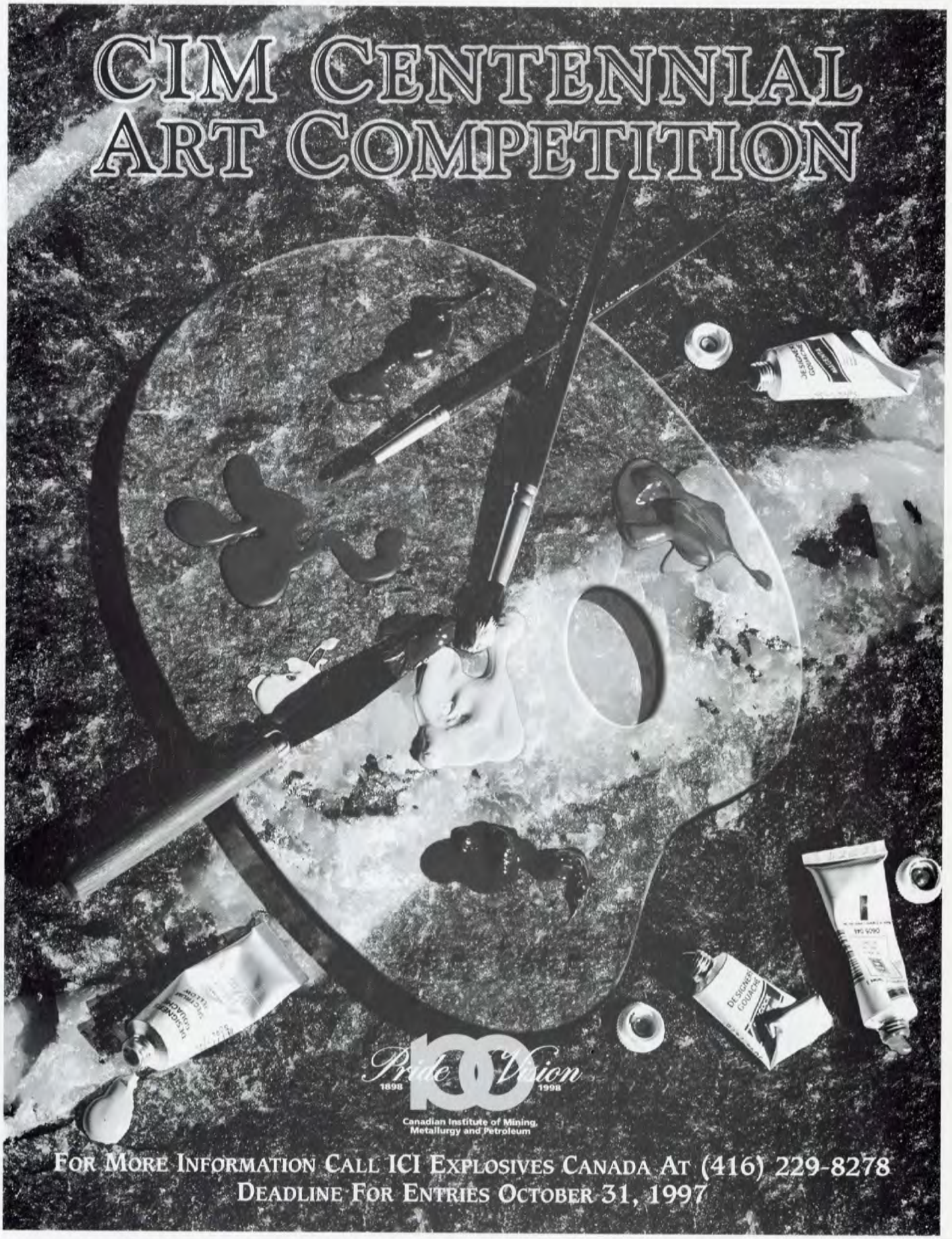
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