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EDITORIAL

# FORMS OF THE STRUG- GLE

Occupation is a form of life that sits at the heart of our ongoing series, *States of Postcolonality*. This current issue, which is neither part of the series nor entirely separate, has developed out of a formative engagement with the condition of occupation. The politics of occupations are mixed-up, historically and geographically uneven. The occupations that concern us here are a form of anticapitalist struggle conjured well by the Catalan phrase “em planto,” which carries a double meaning of “I plant,” and “I have had enough.” [1] These occupations, if we allow ourselves to be optimistic, move from a systemic critique of capitalism and its divisive devices of exploitation towards a prefigurative politics shaped by mutual aid, solidarity and radical inclusivity.

[1] I am entirely indebted to Hilary Wainwright, socialist feminist and long-term editor of *Red Pepper* magazine, for this linguistic insight. H. Wainwright, “Indignados movement takes root in Barcelona,” *Transnational Institute* (October 2011).

[2] D, “Occupation: Antagonism and Potentiality,” Vancouver Media Co-op (20 October 2011).

Since the 17 September 2011 occupation of Manhattan’s Liberty Square, near Wall Street, occupations of public parks and plazas have proliferated, grown and been forcibly evicted, prompting some to dub this season

the American Fall. In describing these singular and sited instances of resistance as the Occupy Movement, we do not seek to flatten the unique form and process of each. As FUSE contributor Harsha Walia stated when she spoke at Occupy Toronto in early November, each site has its own dynamics, strengths and challenges. Speaking of Occupy Vancouver, rebel-blogger D has remarked that it is an engagement with the complexity of contradictions between issues, ideologies and approaches that makes the occupation a “real event of thinking and acting.” [2] Nonetheless, particularly in contrast to the transient summit-hops of the anti-globalization movement, there are significant tactical, or formal, differences to this new wave of protest. These formal manifestations consist of a type of connective tissue linking many singular occupations, with their disparate issues and geographies, into something that can properly be recognized as a global movement.

In and of itself, occupation as a form of resistance is not new. Examples abound in recent memory alone: squatting as a means of defending homes against foreclosure by US organizations such as Take Back the Land and City Life/Vida Urbana (beginning in 2008); the student occupations of university buildings in Berkeley and New York (2008–10); the occupation of Tahrir Square and public squares across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region during what has come to be known as the Arab Spring; overnight camp-outs in the state Capitol in Madison, Wisconsin (2011) and even the all-night people’s filibuster at Toronto’s Budget Committee meeting on 28 July 2011.

As Silvia Federici argues in a recent interview with FUSE contributor Max Haiven, the occupations of this

[3] Max Haiven, "Feminism, Finance and the Future of #Occupy - An Interview with Silvia Federici," *znet* (25 November 2011).

[4] Ibid.

[5] Peter Morin, personal correspondence, 6 September 2011.

year emerge "from the confluence between the feminist movement and the movement for the commons" [3] This movement, which "places its own reproduction at the centre of its organizing" – through its creation of kitchens, libraries and free-schools, for instance – is indebted to legacies of feminism: "Consensus-based decision-making, the distrust of leaders (formal or charismatic) and the idea that you need to prefigure the world you want to create through your actions and organization, these were all developed by radical feminist movements." [4] After five hundred years of resistance to colonialism, it is safe to say that Indigenous populations across the Americas also have significant expertise and insight that should be highly respected and valued by any new movement.

In this issue of FUSE, we can see how the forms of occupation might be read as a kind of permutation and condensation of longer-term approaches to social and environmental justice. Etienne Turpin's *Reflections on Stainlessness* develops a materialist history of the Anthropocene through resource extraction and organized labour, reminding us that before 15 September 2011, there was 1 May 1886. Kevin Smith and Clayton Thomas-Muller's *Social Licence* is a description of solidarity work between UK-based arts-activism groups and First Nations activists that critically intervenes into the interdependence

of the oil industry and cultural institutions. Peter Morin's *Portraits of the Tahltan Land Story* is an exquisite visual expression of Tahltan Nation (northern BC) knowledge, a material projection of a "language that comes from the land." [5]

Writing from the Netherlands, Haseeb Ahmed calls for the formal alliance of artists and arts organizations with other sectors facing funding cuts under an umbrella of radical, organized Left resistance to ultraconservative so-called austerity measures. Chase Joynt and Alexis Mitchell offer us an example of gender justice at the intersection of media activism and public education through an iteration of the massively popular poster campaign they initiated this September. Nasrin Himada and Red Channels skirt around the contours of an open collectivity, a type of social organization that allows for hyper-production without feeding into the banalities of (creative) capitalist accumulation. As the occupations of the American Fall move into foreclosed residential and commercial buildings for the winter and increasingly develop alliances with ongoing local struggles, the continued vitality of the movement will depend on its ability to build on the forms and tactics of long-standing anticapitalist efforts.

Gina Badger  
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## OCCUPY

# LETTER TO THE OCCUPY TOGETHER MOVEMENT

Harsha Walia

The words of Grace Lee Boggs are on my mind as I write today: "The coming struggle is a political struggle to take political power out of the hands of the few and put it into the hands of the many. But in order to get this power into the hands of the many, it will be necessary for the many not only to fight the powerful few but to fight and clash among themselves as well." [1] This may sound counter-productive, but I find it a poignant reminder that, in our state of elation, we cannot under-estimate the difficult terrain ahead. I am inspired that the dynamic of the Occupy movement thus far has been organic, so that all those who choose to participate are collectively responsible for its evolution. I look forward to the processes that will further these conversations.

There has been much debate at Occupy Vancouver about including an acknowledgement of unceded Coast Salish territories in the statement of unity. I would argue that acknowledging Indigenous

lands is a necessary and critical starting point for two primary reasons. First, the word "occupy" has understandably ignited criticism from Indigenous people as having deeply colonial implications. Its use erases the brutal history of genocide that settler societies have been built on. This is not simply a rhetorical or fringe point; it is a profound and indisputable matter of fact that this land is already occupied. The province of British Columbia is largely still unceded land, which means that no treaties have been signed, and the title-holders of Vancouver are the Squamish, Tseilwau-tuth and Musqueam. As my friend Dustin Rivers recently joked, "Okay, so the Premier and provincial government acknowledge and give thanks to our territory, but Occupy Vancouver can't?"

Supporting efforts towards decolonization is not only an Indigenous issue. It is also about us, as non-natives, learning the history of this land, and locating ourselves and our responsibilities within the context of colonization. Other Occupation movements such as those in Boston, Denver, New York, Colorado, Winnipeg and New Mexico have taken similar steps in deepening an anti-colonial analysis.

Second, we must understand that the tentacles of corporate control have roots in the processes of colonization and enslavement. As written by the Owe Aku International Justice Project: "Corporate greed is the driving factor for the global oppression and suffering of Indigenous populations. It is the driving factor for the conquest and continued suffering for the Indigenous peoples on this continent. The effects of greed eventually spill over and negatively impact all peoples, everywhere." [2] The Hudson's Bay Company in Canada and the East India Trading Company in India, for example, were some of the first corporate entities established on the stock market. Both companies were granted trading monopolies by the British Crown, and were able to extract resources and amass massive profits due to the subjugation of local communities through the use of the Empire's military and police forces. The attendant processes of corporate expansion and colonization continue today, most evident in this country with the Alberta tar sands. In the midst of an economic crisis, the ability of corporations to accumulate wealth is dependent on discovering new frontiers from which to extract resources. This disproportionately impacts Indigenous peoples and destroys the land base required to sustain their communities, while creating an ecological crisis for the planet as a whole.

In creating a unified space of opposition to the 1% who hold a concentration of power and wealth, we must simultaneously foster critical education to learn about the systemic injustices that many of us in the 99% continue to face. [3] This should not be pejoratively dismissed as "identity politics," a characterization that for many re-enforces the patterns of marginalization. The connection between the nature and structure of the political economy and systemic injustice is clear: the growing economic inequality being experienced across this country is nothing new for low-income racialized communities, particularly single mothers, who also face the double brunt of scapegoating during periods of recession.

Harsha Walia is a South Asian activist and writer based in Vancouver, Coast Salish Territories. She has been active in a range of social movements for over a decade. A version of this article originally appeared in *rabble.ca*

This article was previously published online by *Rabble* (14 October 2011) and *Racialicious* (15 October 2011). FUSE thanks the author and previous editors

[1] Grace Lee Boggs, *Living For Change: An Autobiography* (University of Minnesota Press; 1998): 108

[2] Kent Lebock, "Lakotas Owe Aku Supporting Protesters in New York," *Intercontinental Cry* (8 October 2011).

[3] Editor's note: "We are the 99%" has become the one of the dominant rallying cries around the Occupy movement, pitting the interests of a rhetorical 99% majority against a 1% elite.

The very idea of the multitude forces a contestation of any one lived experience binding the 99%. Embracing this plurality and having an open heart to potentially uncomfortable truths about systemic oppression beyond the “evil corporations and greedy banks” will strengthen this movement. [4] Ignoring the hierarchies of power between us does not make them magically disappear. It actually does the opposite – it entrenches those inequalities. If we learn from social movements past, we observe that the struggle to genuinely address issues of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, age and nationality actually did more, rather than less, to facilitate broader participation. Just as we challenge the idea of austerity put forward by governments and corporations, we should challenge the idea of scarcity of space in our movements, and instead, facilitate a more nuanced discourse about inequality.

In order to do this, we need to critically examine the idea of “catering to the mainstream.” I do not disagree with reaching out to as broad a base as possible, but we should ask ourselves: who constitutes the mainstream? If Indigenous communities, homeless people, immigrants, LGBTQ folks, seniors and others are all considered “special interest groups” (although we actually constitute an overwhelming demographic majority), the implication is that, as Rinku Sen argues, straight white men are the sole standard of universalism. “Addressing other systems of oppression, and the people those systems affect, isn’t about elevating one group’s suffering over that of white men. It’s about understanding how the mechanisms of control actually operate. When we understand, we can craft solutions that truly help everybody.” [5] This should not be misunderstood as advocating for a pecking order of issues; it is about understanding that the 99% is not a homogenous group but a web of interrelated communities in struggle.

While it is clearly too early to comment on the future of the Occupy movement, I offer a few humble preliminary thoughts based on Occupy Wall Street and the nature of the Vancouver organizing. Those of us who are already seasoned activists should not have any particular authority in this movement and, as many others have cautioned, more experienced activists should not claim moral righteousness over those who are just joining the struggle. Equally, however, we should not claim ignorance.

As has been repeatedly noted of the Occupy movement, it is a moral and strategic success to avoid having a pre-articulated laundry list of demands within which to confine a nascent movement. Peter Marcuse writes “Occupy is seen by most of its participants and supporters not as a set of pressures for individual rights, but as a powerful claim for a better world... The whole essence of the movement is to reject the game’s rules as it is being played, to produce change that includes each of these demands but goes much further to question the structures that make those demands necessary.” [6] Similarly, Vijay Prashad says that we “must breathe in the many currents of dissatisfaction, and breathe out a new radical imagination.” [7]

The creation of encampments is in itself an act of liberation. Decentralized gatherings with democratic decision-making processes and autonomous space

for people to gather and dialogue based on their interests – such as reading circles or art zones or guerrilla gardening – create a sense of purpose, connect-edness and emancipation in a society that otherwise breeds apathy, disenchantment and isolation. This type of prefigurative politics – a living symbol of refusal – is a way to come together to create and live alternatives to this exploitative system.

One issue I would stress is building awareness about police violence and police infiltration. In some cities, Occupy organizers have actively collaborated with police. While many do this on the principle of “we have nothing to hide,” even the most cursory survey of movement history shows that the police cannot be trusted. The police have a long history of repression of social movements. People who are homeless, racialized, non-status or queer routinely experience arbitrary police abuse. We must take these concerns seriously in order to promote participation from these communities. We must also learn to rely on ourselves to keep each other safe and to hold ground when police are ordered to clear us out. This seems insurmountable, but it has been done before and can be done again.

On the heels of the Olympics and G20, a recurring issue is police repression and diversity of tactics. As G20 defendant Alex Hundert, who has written extensively about diversity of tactics told me, “It is important to recognise that a belief in supporting a diversity of tactics means not ruling out intentionally peaceful means. These gatherings have been explicitly nonviolent from the start and in hundreds of cities across the continent. Obviously this is the right tactic for this moment.” It is noteworthy that Occupy Wall Street has not actually dogmatically rejected a diversity of tactics. It appears that the movement there has understood what diversity of tactics actually means – not imposing one tactic in any and every context. The Occupy Wall Street Direct Action working group has adopted the basic tenet of “respect diversity of tactics, but be aware of how your actions will affect others.” This is an encouraging development as people work together to learn how to keep each other safe within the encampment, while effectively escalating tactics in autonomous actions.

Finally, we may want to stop articulating that this is a leaderless movement; it might be more honest to suggest that “We Are All Leaders.” Denying that leadership exists deflects accountability, obscures potential hierarchies and absolves us of actively creating structures within which to build collective leadership. Many of the models being used, such as the General Assembly and consensus decision-making, are rooted in the practice of anti-authoritarians and community organizers. There are many other skills to share to empower and embolden this movement. As much as we may wish to radically transform unjust economic, political and social systems overnight, this is a long-term struggle. There is always the danger of co-optation. This means that we will need to find ways to do the painstaking work of making this movement sustainable, and rooting it within and alongside existing grassroots movements for social and environmental justice.

*We have begun to come out of the shadows; we have begun to break with routines and oppressive*

*customs and to discard taboos; we have commenced to carry with pride the task of thawing hearts and changing consciousness. Women, let’s not let the danger of the journey and the vastness of the territory scare us – let’s look forward and open paths in these woods. Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks.*

– Gloria Anzaldúa, *Foreword, The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*

# OCCUPY TOGETHER IN THE AGE OF CONSPIRACY (AN OPEN LETTER)

Syed Hussan

Hundreds of people are meeting in Toronto to plan an unpermitted public action. Facebook and Twitter are abuzz. Money is being raised, tents gathered and food being cooked. There are news stories every day. Activists are asked about a single, simple demand, and they refuse to answer, insisting instead, “Our dreams

and hopes are too many to fit in a single sound bite.” The police are on high alert. Bill Blair, the Chief of Police, promises to protect the protesters (from who?) but keeps talking about a crackdown against undefined troublemakers. Progressives and activists argue about strategy and messaging, and blog post after blog post appears condemning the organizers or cheering them on.

No, this is not Occupy Toronto, which began on 15 October 2011. This is June 2010. A massive seven-day spectacle of resistance against the G20 is about to begin. There are many similarities (and differences) between the anti-G20 protests, other anti-austerity actions and the Occupy Together actions. Some of these similarities have yet to emerge, or might be hard for some to predict. Among these are the relationships between protesters and the police, law and our ideas of justice. Occupy activists, especially Occupy Toronto, this is for you. [1]

Well-known fact: Police forces from across Canada descended on Toronto in a billion-dollar debacle in June 2010. They beat up, pepper sprayed and assaulted hundreds, arresting eleven hundred people. Charges against most were withdrawn and no police officer has yet been convicted of these crimes. Less-known fact: Nearly three-dozen activists, community organizers and others were charged with conspiracy. Though many have had their charges withdrawn, seventeen are part of one conspiracy trial and a few others are on conspiracy trials by themselves.

I am one of the seventeen. We were initially twenty co-defendants, but two had their conspiracy charges dropped, and one pleaded guilty to a lower charge. As an alleged conspirator, I am not allowed to participate or assist in organizing public demonstrations. If I could, I would say all this to you in person, but attending a General Assembly has been made criminal for me. So this article is about “you” and not “us.” Conspiracy charges apply to thought crimes. I have lived in a state of limbo, without being able to work, without being able to leave my house alone for most of the last year, not for allegedly carrying out a criminal action but for allegedly thinking about one. Thinking, talking, agreeing to do anything illegal is illegal.

Just to be clear, almost everything is illegal. An unpermitted march and occupation, like Occupy Toronto (and over twelve hundred other actions around the world), is illegal. Sleeping in a public park in Toronto past eleven o’clock at night is illegal. Standing in an intersection, interfering with the flow of traffic is illegal.

Syed Hussan is a researcher, writer and organizer based in Toronto. Hussan has been active in migrant justice, anti-war, anti-racist and indigenous solidarity movements. Currently he works with Toronto Stop the Cuts Network and No One Is Illegal – Toronto.

This article was previously published online by *Rabble* (13 October 2011). FUSE thanks the author and previous editors for their timely and dedicated attention to this topic.

[1] This article was written before the international day of action on 15 October 2011, which saw nearly 1,500 communities occupy public places in a call for economic and social justice. Since then, Occupy actions have been both inspiring and challenging. In spite of the many difficulties and tensions that have arisen, the very fact that thousands of people around the world are participating in direct anti-capitalist actions, openly flaunting established laws and norms of political action, is worth cheering on.

[2] The Occupy movement's most important rhetorical victory to date is the use of the phrase "We are the 99%," in effect categorizing the super-elites of the world as the 1%. As this is less about statistics and more about polemic, it has struck a unifying chord, bringing together masses of people with different experiences and tendencies under the 99% umbrella.

[3] Prepare to go to jail and to support those in jail.

Prepare to be unduly criticized in the media. Prepare for the police to name ringleaders, even when you are a horizontal movement. Prepare for the police to divide you. To tell you that some protests are good, and others are bad.

Prepare to be infiltrated by sociopaths, by police agents that will pretend to be your friends and lie to you. Prepare to spend time in jail, or under onerous bail conditions for years even before going to trial.

Prepare for the police to offer you "deals"—either live under immense and unbearable bail conditions or plead guilty for a crime you may not have done. Prepare for the immense legal costs that will be incurred, and know that sometimes you won't fight in court because you are simply too poor. Prepare to face house arrest, hefty fines, to be banned from cities, to be separated from your friends.

Having open general assemblies or trainings where illegal actions are discussed is illegal. Indigenous people asserting control over their own lands is illegal. And, as we learned during the G20, with the secret powers of search and seizure that existed near the fence and then didn't (the so-called "G20 Fence Law"), laws can be made and unmade at the whim of the 1%. [2]

In other words, you and the thousands of people who believe that one should not have to ask permission to protest, are willing to join online or real-life planning sessions to make these unpermitted actions possible and who will refuse to break camp when ordered to be engaging in a conspiracy. An open conspiracy, but an illegal action nonetheless.

This is not meant to elicit fear in the seasoned or newly mobilized activists gathering around the Occupy Toronto movement. It is to speak truthfully about what many of you are about to enter into—a crime. You are deciding that your beliefs are more important than the law. And that when laws are unjust, they must be resisted. You are deciding to break the law because you know that it is these laws that allow and celebrate the power of the 1% over the rest of us. You are deciding to break the law, because so much of what you oppose is legal, so much of what you desire is illegal. You are breaking the law, because these laws were made broken, and made to break you.

Occupy movements, the government and police are not your friends. Laws do not exist to protect you, they exist to control you. The only thing that stops the police from attacking, arresting and locking everyone up is the balance of social forces. If you are organized and prepared to defend yourselves, if there are thousands of other people with you, and the public opinion to match, you may just stay free(er) for a day longer. If not, expect immense, instant repression. Expect it and prepare for it. [3]

Understand that though you may not have been harassed by police or immigration enforcement, many are every day. Understand that even though that one time you called the police and it worked for you, for many it never does. Understand that though cops are always the good guys on TV and in movies, they almost never are in real life. Understand that the police and laws are part of a system that is anti-poor, anti-women, anti-people of colour, anti-queer and anti-people with disabilities. Understand that to truly be free, to truly do what you are trying to do, which is resisting the laws that allow some to be rich and powerful and for the rest to live at their mercy, you must resist racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and dis-ableism. You must resist the very structure every one of these laws is based on—you must resist colonialism.

Understand that to truly be free, to truly include the entire 99%, you have to say today and every day: We will leave no one behind. We will leave no one in jail. We will leave no one in the clutches of immigration enforcement. We will leave no one when they are strong. We will leave no one when they are weak. We will support the decisions people make, to do whatever they feel is necessary to survive and to resist. We will support those that fight in the courts, and we will support those that fight in the streets.

# CREATIVITY (PRE-) OCCUPIED

Max Haiven

To speak of creativity is always to speak of struggle. The Occupations of fall 2011, which began with Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in New York City's Liberty Plaza, are struggles against a system that pre-occupies our creativity. They also play out, within and amongst themselves, a struggle over what creativity might mean. Today's mode of globalized capitalism is one that actively constricts our creativity, and one that is built on a history of creative politics that stretches back to the birth of capitalism in the fires of colonial brutality. By rethinking the politics of creativity at the Occupations, we can perhaps gain a better sense of what is at stake for so-called creative workers, as well as all those other workers whose creativity is not yet recognized or valorized. After participating in Occupy Wall Street in New York City for a few weeks in October, and now participating in Occupy Nova Scotia in Halifax, where I live, I want to raise a few questions about the creative politics and possibilities of this emerging movement. How are the Occupations creative? What is the political and economic context of this creativity? How do the Occupations participate in struggles over creative space? Perhaps most importantly, how do we re-narrate the Occupations as part of a struggle for and against creativity



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## that stretches back beyond the ideals of the Western avant-garde to capitalism's colonial roots?

The Occupations are not merely explosions of anger at the status quo. They are desperate attempts to create what we might call a creative common sphere: not merely a public space tolerated by the powers that be in which to debate opinions, but a common space to practice creative forms of life by building new egalitarian institutions, ideas, relationships and processes. In an age when public space and time have been eviscerated, privatized and securitized, the Occupations mobilize bodies, tents and assemblies to hold the door open for something else to emerge.

But the Occupations also play out struggles between creativity and its opposite. It has been all too easy for the Occupations to be uncreative: producing banal demands that are limited in imaginative scope; failing to create welcoming and safe spaces that would appeal to the diversity of people they need to succeed; and ghettoizing creativity in the inevitable and un(der)valourized "arts and culture" working group. In Liberty Plaza, New York City, you can see these struggles play out. At one end of the park, in the shadow of the still-skeletal World Trade Center (Redux), you can find an exuberant drum circle, which does arguably allow for an expression of mass, collaborative creativity and the resyncopation of the imagination. Simultaneously, however, it is only too predictable, so much so that tourists and bankers roll their eyes and chuckle as they stroll past. Indeed, its anarchic, hedonistic and disruptive rhythms have consistently been a key source of tension at Occupy Wall Street's (OWS) nightly General Assemblies, with many Occupiers insisting that the drummers concede to the local neighbourhood association's demands that they limit their noise to a few hours in the day and others proclaiming the inherent value of creative freedom at all costs.

At the other end of the park you will find a library, and, on some early evenings, you can hear (and participate in) group storytelling during which participants explain how they came to Occupy, repeated line-by-line through the People's Mic. [1] There is something deeply radical about this creative form of narrative and communication: it breaks down the hegemony of the singular author, the (masculinized) idea of the creative genius so central to the mythos of capitalist cultural accumulation. On the other hand, a cynic might note that the narratives begin to all sound the same after a while, with an all-too-familiar cant and cadence.

The Occupations are manifestations of a struggle over creativity under financialized capitalism, and are neither pure nor pointless. It is a struggle within and against a system that fundamentally reshapes what activities we think of as creative (weapons design, yes; housework, no), that is based around a creative division of labour (frenetic creativity in Silicon Valley; brutal banality in Apple's Chinese sweatshops), and that offers few, if any opportunities for most people to see their creativity change the world. The Occupations are the volcanic eruption of people's collaborative creativity

against its devaluation, its compartmentalization or its harnessing, but it is a creativity laced with the contradictions of the interlocked system in which it brewed, at the nexus of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy and other modalities of oppression and exploitation.

The seers of the utopian creative economy and fabled creative class may be right about one thing: we've all had to become a lot more creative just to survive the age of neoliberalism and its austerity hangover. From our constant worry about debt (credit card, mortgage, student loan or medical) to our navigation of multiple part-time and precarious jobs, to the economic vertigo that comes from thinking too much about our foreclosed futures, creativity today is less about ornamentation and experimentation, and more about raw survival. The creative age has arrived, but it is rife with the unromantic and claustrophobic creativity of the industrious refugee, not the lusted-for, relaxed creativity of the knowledge-economy flâneur.

Our creativity today seems endlessly preoccupied. In the absence of any organized social care, we must hope that we can creatively figure out a way to make do, investing our hopes and dreams in leveraging whatever skills or advantages we have. Not only is our ability to imagine and create oppressed by the privatization of social problems and the downloading of societal risk onto the lonely individual, we are increasingly turning to creativity as a speculative investment. The professionalization and credentialization of creative work has also seen creativity's preoccupation by increasingly corporatized and crypto-conservative institutions, from smug mega-galleries to desperate universities. Meanwhile, as the means of mass expression are concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer global media corporations, and as once-public spaces become increasingly securitized and surveilled, there are fewer opportunities than ever for creative collaboration and transformational communication. Indeed, so preoccupied is the creativity of most people that art is often seen as an annoying interruption or impediment to life in just-in-time, always-out-of-time capitalism.

The sublime masterpiece of the capitalist occupation of the imagination is the financial sector itself. Some of the finest, most innovative minds of a generation, many of them exquisitely schooled not only in classical art history but contemporary and radical art paradigms as well, travelled the royal road from family privilege, to the Ivy League, to Wall Street. The explosion of the art market during the so-called Roaring 90s signalled the intense interest of the financial class in the world of aesthetic production: they were not merely looking to accumulate cultural capital by snapping up works by Damien Hirst and Francis Bacon; they were learning something from the way artists navigate the interconnective ether, something about seeing patterns in the maelstrom. Can any artist match the terrifying creativity of a Collateralized Debt Obligation? Do the venomously elegant contortions of a hedge fund not outshine the most sophisticated work of contemporary dance or theatre? Is not the honey-tongued rhetoric of the financial sector, the author of what Marx instructively called "fictitious capital," [2] the most beguiling act of literature imaginable? Daily, the markets are driven by

thousands of minds frantically competing to creatively outmanoeuvre one another. It is this sinister and crooked model of creativity that the Age of Austerity encourages us all to embrace and emulate in our daily lives.

Wall Street is a creative zone, and financiers are icons of the creative class. After all, they produce belief in representations of reality. Consider the layers upon layers of cultural work that go into producing the belief that a stock certificate (or a string of digits in a computer network) entitles one to a share in ownership of other people's real-world labour, or to common lands and resources. Indeed, Wall Street's most recent crash was caused when investors failed to recognize one another's creative fictions, when they realized their sub-prime mortgage-laced "securities" were no longer believable claims to real world value.

As a whole, New York City is a creative battlefield, with perhaps the world's largest formal creative class negotiating its place in a world of mega-museums, crass Wall Street patronage, government politicking, intense competition for jobs and the ever-present spectre of rent and bills. Meanwhile, many creative radicals wage persistent guerrilla war against the financial-police-aesthetic complex, staging daring public happenings, establishing alternative spaces and supporting social movements like the Occupation of Wall Street.

Indeed, the first indoor occupation site associated with OWS was Artists Space, a former artist-run facility, which, in recent years, has become one of New York's premiere art institutions, with rich and dubious patrons and several Wall Street players on its board. The location was selected in part because it represented a key nexus of aesthetic, cultural, spatial, financial and economic value. Additionally, the Occupiers presumed that the Space's staff would be reluctant to call the cops, perhaps out of political sympathy, perhaps out of concerns it would diminish the Space's carefully cultivated reputation as a counter-cultural hub. The occupation lasted a mere twenty eight hours. Inspired by a militant, anarchist critique of the structural and political liberalism of OWS's pluralist, feel-good agenda, the organizers' radical bravado quickly ran afoul of the Space's director, as well as others in the Occupy Movement. When the eviction came, the Artists Space occupiers lacked the solidarity to defend their gain.

In spite of this failure, it is important to locate OWS's creative resistance amidst the struggles over creative space because it allows us to see the Occupation as part of a historic continuum of struggles which stretches into the city's history, back to before the birth and co-optation of hip-hop, and of disco, funk, jazz and blues. Castle MoMA and Fortress Guggenheim are grim monuments to the folding of the autonomous creative spaces forged by artists into the corporatized, creative space of the "regenerate city." [3]

The financial crisis, which bubbled over in 2008, has merely laid bare, in financial and economic terms, the preceding and ongoing global social, ecological and humanitarian crises. But it was itself the product of an enthusiasm for creativity. For the architects of the neoliberal revolution, government regulation, social programs and state participation in the economy needed to be obliterated to allow the so-called creative destruc-

tion of the market to work its magic. According to this ideological orientation, free markets perfect human collaboration by letting uncreative firms and businesses die violent deaths (god help their employees) and encouraging new, creative enterprises to rise in their place. Government intervention in the economy only protects the uncreative, distorting the markets and eventually bringing chaos into the orderly clockwork of capitalism.

This social-Darwinist philosophy traces its roots farther back than the birth of Western evolutionary theories and their hackneyed application to social and economic life. Early colonizers of the Americas justified their genocidal policies and theft of land by noting how much more creative they were than the Indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island, pointing to their supposedly advanced military and mercantile technologies as deadly evidence of inherent superiority. Nineteenth century anthropologists were to sustain this brutal Eurocentric arrogance (and justify its material empires) by suggesting that Indigenous cultures were both too creative—unable to control their overactive, fetishistic imaginations—and, at the same time, not creative enough—incapable of substantive innovation and locked forever in a benighted past. Either way, these arguments supported positions that ranged from advocating the need for Europeans to benevolently preserve cultures they deemed backwards, to ones that rationalized allowing these same cultures to succumb to the ostensibly natural, genocidal forces of what were taken to be the eternal laws of history and biology.

In the late-nineteenth and through the twentieth centuries, Indigenous cultures became sources of fetishization and popular appropriation. Their fabled intimacy with nature and their romanticized primal creativity became an inspiration for aesthetic movements and corporate cultures alike. From primitivist art movements, to fashion lines that appropriate pan-native aesthetics, to wilderness business retreats where CEOs howl at the moon, imagined Indigeneity has become a key component of the deadly-absurd anthropology underlying the hegemonic notion of market creativity. In a world of manufactured experiences and preoccupied creativity, the fabricated authenticity and fictionalized simplicity of Indigenous civilizations is offered in commodified form as a false alternative.

Not only does this narrative alert us to the way creativity has been used as a weapon of the powerful, it also forces us to consider what sorts of creativity were developed and practiced on and with these lands before the imposition of European models (and continue to be developed and practiced outside these models). In order for the Occupations to thrive with real creativity, it will not be enough to merely take up the fallen Eurocentric standard of the autonomy of the artist or the nobility of creativity as we are accustomed to imagining it. We must decolonize creativity itself, both conceptually and practically.

[1] A technique used in the absence of electronic amplification wherein the mass of assembled participants echo the speaker's words to ensure that all can hear.

[2] Karl Marx, "Credit and Fictitious Capital," *Capital Volume III*, ed Frederick Engels, trans Ernest Untermann (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1909. First published 1894).

[3] Josephine Berry Slater, and Anthony, Iles, *No Room to Move: Radical Art and the Regenerate City* (London: MUTE, 2010).



# REFLEC- TIONS ON STAINLESS- NESS

*We must be willing  
to ask the question  
“what for?” of survival.*  
– Reza Negarestani,  
*Cynclopedia*

*We don't need to see any-  
thing out of the ordinary.  
We already see so much.*  
– Robert Walser,  
*A Little Ramble*

Etienne Turpin

Our major cultural artefacts, or at least those endorsed by dominant culture, such as museums, monuments, statues and the like, suggest through their passive advocacy of stainlessness a paradoxical commitment to both permanence and progress. [1] Not unlike their iron predecessors in the late-nineteenth century, whose *Jugendstil* organicism created a metallic imaginary that provided Baudelaire with the title for his most well known collection of verse, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the evils of our shiny, contemporary wish images remain obscure, not least because their capacity to reflect cultural values is necessarily distorted. [2] Whether one is pacing the promenade leading to Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Music Hall in Los Angeles, cautiously approaching Ned Kahn's undulating kinetic façade that skins Swiss Science Center Technorama, or finding one's bearings among the gluttonous consumption of Michigan Avenue beneath Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* in Chicago's Millennium Park, we witness how our current epoch reiterates a pernicious but pervasive value: metallic surfaces are synonymous with progress. The more polished, refined, expansive and contiguous these metallic surfaces, the greater the representational carrying capacity for our most lauded but least considered civilizational value—stainlessness.

What force compels this aesthetic of mineralization? How did our proliferation of stainlessness (as a quality) take place so rapidly, reaching an almost unthinkable ascendancy in its contemporary ubiquitous dispersion? Most importantly, what precedents within a materialist history of the Anthropocene could help orient our attempt to think the force of the human species, which has proven itself more than capable of antagonizing the vast scale of the earth through the mineralization of its surface? To be without any orientation beyond the surface of the earth is, etymologically at least, to be in a state of disaster; in what follows we will provoke questions of cosmic contingencies, labour unrest, and aesthetic *meditation* (in the sense Georges Bataille gives to this term), as a means to write this disaster into the history of a force best agitated by the threat of its own erasure.

## PSEUDONYMOUSLY

*Human life is exhausted from serving as the head of, or the reason for, the universe. To the extent that it becomes this head and this reason, to the extent that it becomes necessary to the universe, it accepts servitude.*  
Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*

The pseudonymously named force known most commonly as *Homo sapiens* is expanding its territory of influence, or, perhaps more correctly, that force is beginning to recognize its reflection within the expanded field of its operations. No longer confined to the organic register of biology—although by no means freed from it as a limit condition—humans are a geologic force with an impact now comparable to the asteroid that ended the Cretaceous period by annihilating the dinosaurs sixty-five million years ago. To grasp this force of the human, to be capable of understanding the consequence

for our biological *species-being* as it manifests a geologic reformation, several problematic assumptions must be disregarded. First, despite our knowledge claims regarding reasonability or rationality, the overall activity of the human species is entirely *acephalic*: the aggregate impact of human actions on the surface of the earth is without direction, creating positive feedbacks that increase the force of the human without the requirement of a unified program, or the necessity of direction or leadership in the broad sense. Second, the force of mineralization on the tellurian surface suggests the need for a significant reappraisal of concepts like environment and ecology; necessary, then, is a concept of environment that would include not only biospheric interests, but would instead allow the human species to be located within a general economy that is *not even indifferent* to its superficial planetary interests, concerns and afflictions. [3] Finally, if we want to begin to think the operational character of the human species not merely as a form of intentionality or vehicle of teleology, but as a force, we must avoid assuming any purpose for this force in advance of our analysis, as if the human was meant to realize some broader destiny or to operate indexically to some imaginary criteria of progress.

The International Commission on Stratigraphy and the International Union of Geological Sciences are currently debating the relevant scientific merits of the Anthropocene, which would allow them to recognize a geo-synchronic shift from the epoch of the Holocene (since the last Ice Age receded almost twelve millennia ago), to our current “epoch of man.” [4] The term was first uttered by the chemist Paul J. Crutzen in 2002, but, following a paper he published the same year in the journal *Nature*, references to the Anthropocene began to appear within scientific publications regarding hydrospheric, biospheric and pedospheric research. As both an acknowledgement of this informal nomenclature and an attempt to reify it with the requisite scientific standardization, in 2007, the British stratigrapher Jan Zalasiewicz, then serving as the chairman of the Geological Society of London's Stratigraphy Commission, asked his colleagues to review the merits of these yet to be substantiated (at least from the point of view of stratigraphic science) epochal claims.

To determine whether or not the Anthropocene satisfies the necessary criteria, stratigraphers and geologists consider various anthropogenic effects, that is, those changes most precisely associated with so-called *Homo sapiens*. These changes include, but are certainly not limited to: the rise of agriculture and attendant deforestation; coal, oil and gas extraction; the combustion of carbon-based fuels and attendant emissions; coral reef loss producing so-called “reef gaps” similar to those of the past five major extinction events on the planet; a rate of extinction on Earth happening at tens of thousands of times higher than in most of the last half billion years; and, perhaps most significantly, a rate of human propagation—an unrestrained explosion in population growth—which, according to the biologist E.O. Wilson, is “more bacterial than primate.” [5] Even from this truncated list, the evidence suggests a dramatic human impact; however, from the point of view of geology, the obvious problem is that, unlike all

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←  
Previous page:  
Catie Newell,  
*Scapes*, 2007.  
Photograph,  
Sermiligaq Fjord,  
East Greenland.  
Image courtesy  
of the artist.

[1] This essay would not have been possible without the generous support of the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan, through the Walter B. Sanders Research Fellowship (2011–2012). Previous iterations of this research have been presented at

other geological epochs and the even more expansive eras within which they accumulate, the Anthropocene is not yet legible in the sedimentary rock because it is still actively eroding the surface and subsurface of the Earth.

What this means is that to imagine the evidence of our aesthetic of mineralization, a speculative dimension enters into the scientific register, creating a rigorous, but by definition, an exact equation. Because we cannot know precisely how the stratifications that collect our anthropogenic effects will stack up, the conceptual apparatus of the Anthropocene is assembled through a process of speculative geology. Not least among its intellectual virtues, this speculative dimension helps call attention to certain bad habits of thinking that permit us to conceive of objects as distinct from the processes of their emergence and decay. Within the rich territories afforded by geological time, we can again begin to think the “great outdoors” as the Outside of human intellection and its instrumental ambitions; that is, we can begin to think the force of the human within the context of a general economy. [6]

Of course, speculative considerations regarding the legibility of anthropogenic change also stir up the disputatious matter of when, more precisely, the period can properly be said to begin. Several positions have emerged on this point, with three dominant positions now shaping the general discourse on the Anthropocene. In the estimation of paleo-climatologist William Ruddiman, the eight thousand year-old invention of agriculture and its complimentary deforestation led to an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide; this suggests humans have been the primary force on the planet since nearly the beginning of the Holocene, or for most of the last 11,500 years since the most recent ice age. From this perspective, the Holocene was merely an epochal placeholder that held open the question of human impact until it could be recognized scientifically.

Crutzen, the Dutch chemist who invented the term, has suggested his own date for the beginning of the epoch, putting the invention of the steam engine in the late-eighteenth century at the beginning of an uninterrupted rise in carbon dioxide emission, clearly legible in ice core samples. This date might be more precisely located in the year 1784, which witnessed the invention of the steam engine—the technology that freed the human force from the modest limits of muscle (whether human or animal), wind and water power—as well as the publication of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant's essay, “What is Enlightenment?” This date is especially peculiar, since, for Crutzen, the moment at which human and natural history become inseparable coincides with the most decisive event of their (philosophical) separation, that is, Kant's alleged “Copernican revolution.” [7]

Finally, a decisive mark for the beginning of this new epoch could be located, as a third group of scientists contend, in the highly radiated soil that would work its way into sedimentary rock following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Not only would the end of WWII be marked by a clear increase in radioactivity, but it also designates the dramatic postwar spike in population growth, consumption and technological development that scientists refer to as the “great acceleration.” [8]

The world conjured forward in this great acceleration is indeed the world that Antonin Artaud, writing in postwar France, described as one capable of committing suicide without even knowing it. In this regard, we must recognize that the characteristic process of this passive global suicide is also that which most accurately characterizes the Anthropocene—*mineralisation*. [9] The exoskeletal projection of the aesthetic of mineralization—that process which transfers minerals deposited within the tellurian subsurface to the surface for their refinement, chemical recombination and subsequent design, production, circulation and eventual decay—is the triumphal march of the human force whose crescendo introduces to the biosphere the alien quality of stainlessness. To think the force of perpetual mineralization and its stainless iconography of progress, we will now consider another candidate for the eventuality of the Anthropocene: unlike the three dates presented above, ours, 1 May 1886, refers not to the beginning of the process of mineralization, but instead, to the moment of its most intense concentration, or where the stakes of this process are expressed most decisively. [10]

1 MAY 1886

—  
*Energy seeps from my bones into their steel.*  
Jarrett Kobek, *ATTA*

In the Fall of 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions came to the unanimous decision that the date “1 May 1886” would mark the implementation of the eight-hour work day, and they began mobilizing their membership for a massive general strike to support this decisive labour standard. A key engine of this movement was indeed the mining unions, who, in their efforts to call for better working standards and conditions, ignited other labour sectors in a broader campaign for the eight-hour work day. As is well known, but perhaps too readily forgotten, by 1 May 1886, up to half a million workers across major cities throughout the United States collectively acted in a general strike to force a recognition of these necessary new standards. In Chicago, Albert Parsons, the anarchist founder of the International Working People's Association, along with Lucy Parsons, his wife, and their children, joined over eight thousand people on a march down Michigan Avenue to demand these labour reforms. The force of this march, when it connected to another march of over ten thousand striking lumber yard workers, posed a serious threat to the capitalist order of the United States.

As the labour unrest continued on 3 May, demonstrations took place outside the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company plant, where workers had been locked out for several months. The police, who opened fire on the crowd of workers, killing several workers, incited a massive response from organized labour. The outrage over the murders led to calls for a demonstration against police brutality at Haymarket Square, on 4 May, which saw violent clashes with police, including a bomb, allegedly thrown by anarchist conspirators, which is said to have killed several police officers, although conflicting reports suggest friendly-fire from police led to the officers' deaths. In what is

“Pharmakon,” the 25th Anniversary Conference of the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts, during a panel discussion with curator Christine Shaw, 24 September 2011; as part of the “Proof Positive” lecture series, organized by the Ph.D. candidates at Taubman College; to Professor Meredith Miller's “Other Environmentalisms” seminar at Taubman College; and, to the European Federation of Landscape Architecture Annual Conference in Tallinn, Estonia, 3 November 2011. A very special thanks to Labadie Collection curator Julie Herrada and reference assistant Kate Hutchens for their invaluable assistance in the Special Collections Library, University of Michigan; for their dialogue with the text through their images, thanks to Lisa Hirmer and Catie Newell; and, for their generous comments on the text in preparation, thanks to Heather Davis, Emily Stoddart, Seth Denizen, Erik Bordeleau and DT Cochrane.

[2] Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” *The Arcades Project*, trans Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 14–26; for a decisive reading of the concept of the wish image, see AK Thompson, “Matter's Most Modern Configuration,” *Scapegoat* 02: Materialism (Fall 2011).

[3] Recent publications that suffer from this all-too-biospheric conception of nature include, but are not limited to, Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* and Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature*. As the saying goes, there is a ditch on both sides of the road, but you only crash into one at a time: for Bennett, the “thing-ness” of

↓  
Poster for 4 May 1886 demonstration  
in response to police brutality.  
Image courtesy of Labadie Collection,  
Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library,  
University of Michigan.



Pacific Railway literally blasted through the area again, this time revealing with even greater certainty the concentrations of nickel and copper in the basin. The construction of the railway was, of course, a key to facilitating the development of the area as an important site within the global political economy of mineralization, and therefore, a fundamental relay in the construction of our stainless modernity. As a positive feedback within this process, the railway operates both as the physical infrastructure enabling increased mineralization, as well as an early image for a contiguous metallic construction, preceding and anticipating iron construction late in the century.

Nickel is represented in Medeleev's Periodic Table of the Elements with the letters Ni and the atomic number 28. Produced from the smelting and refinement of iron-nickel sulphide, the addition of Ni to the composition of steel increases both corrosion resistance and the overall strength of the product. Stronger and more resistant steel is an indicator of cultural values that can be mapped across the diverse materiality of our world and its objects, but these indicators also bleed through the social field. Because "rust never sleeps," operating relentlessly by way of corrosive contagion on the very fabric of our built world, the positive feedbacks of mineralization are enlisted in the moral struggle for a stainless civilization whose architecture and infrastructure organize the elemental properties of Ni in a war against corrosion. Sudbury's mineworkers and labour organizers are imbricated as a relay between the geological cycles of sedimentation and erosion, and their attempted arrest by stainless steel. Notably, the site of its most productive and well known mine and smelter, Copper Cliff, located at the midway point along the northern edge of the Basin, was officially opened on 1 May 1886, while organized labour was battling the brutality of the police on Michigan Avenue. [13]

In the long parade of human arrogance that incessantly transforms the mineral deposits of massive asteroidal blemishes into the redistributed quality of surface-level stainlessness, we have inverted the impact of the asteroid. In this sense, we can see how the human species acts as Trojan horse, intent on smuggling back to the tellurian surface that which was buried in the deep impact of an alien collision. If the quality of stainlessness can thus be seen as literally alien to the planet called Earth, might we not go further to suggest that the process of exhuming the deposition of this asteroid permits the human species, *as a force*, to become, for itself, an asteroid in reverse? The question is, of course, rhetorical, but it permits a moment to pause and summarize our findings: we, the force called *Homo sapiens*, are an acephalic reverse-asteroid of mineralization advancing our exoskeletal projections through a process committed to realizing the aesthetic iconography of stainlessness as a metonymical (wish) image of progress. Given that these exoskeletal supplements typically take on the familiar form of buildings, we will now turn our attention to the consequences of the force of the human as expressed through architecture.

As the most decisive precedent for a materialist history of the city, Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* emphasizes the influence of Baron von Haussman's plan

her alleged materialist political theory remains entirely caught up in the relation to and support of human intellection regarding her quaint, biospheric liberalism; Morton seems less inclined to accept this position, yet his own tautological position is confident that an appreciation of nature's so-called "dark ecology" will reveal the appropriate comportment for human life toward the biosphere.

[4] Elizabeth Kolbert, "Enter the Age of Man," *National Geographic* 219.3 (March 2011): 60-85.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Georges Bataille's theory of general economy is discussed below; on the Outside of thought as the "great outdoors," see Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, translated by Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2009).

[7] For a prescient analysis of Kant's separation of the noumenal and phenomenal registers, and the consequences of this philosophical parsing, see Iain Hamilton Grant, "Prospects for Post-Copernican Dogmatism: The Antinomies of Transcendental Naturalism," *Collapse 5 (Philosophical Research and Development - The Copernican Imperative)*, ed Damian Veal (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2009): 415-454; for an analysis of the problematic division between natural and human history, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 197-222.

[8] Kolbert, 2011.

[9] It is important to note that the exoskeletal mineralization of the tellurian surface discussed in this essay



→  
Lisa Hirmer,  
*Copper Cliff*, 2011.  
Digital Photograph.  
Image courtesy of the artist.



←  
Lisa Hirmer,  
*The City of Greater Sudbury*, 2010.  
Digital Photograph.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

for Paris on the perception of nineteenth century urban life. For Benjamin, the Haussman plan is a phantasmagoria inasmuch as it attempts to resolve social unrest (i.e. the barricading of the city and its occupation by striking workers, political activists and anarchist revolutionaries) with the technical solution of making any manifestation of this unrest less disruptive to the economic order. By widening the streets and cutting major axial boulevards into the tangled knots of Parisian street life, the army could march on any part of the city to ensure it was open for business, regardless of the protests or occupations of organized labour. Not mentioned in Benjamin's text, but a key for the development of any inquiry into the city as a form of social sedimentation, is the 1909 "Plan of Chicago" prepared by Daniel Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, which is not only the first comprehensive design directing the growth of an American city, but also a clear homage to Haussmann. More important for us, however, is what can also be read in the 1909 Plan of Chicago: the fear of the bourgeoisie following the 1886 Haymarket riot that was the culmination of strikebreaking pro-business violence. In this regard, the expansion of Michigan Avenue that cuts across Chicago must be read as a scar that reminds us of the threat to capital by militant organized labour. The erosion of a history of labour from the city is, as usual, completed by aestheticized stainlessness, in this case, Kapoor's *Cloud Gate*, the beacon of attraction for lost consumers determined

to somehow find their reflection in the city. From a parallax perspective, this stainless steel "bean" offers the distorted reflection of consumption that could, from time to time, also flash a reminder of the struggles of organized labour that threatened the city of Chicago with workers' rights and the decency of an eight-hour work day, if only we learned to read the city through its erasure of history and its absence of memory. [14]

#### PRECURSE

—  
*You see, one must make sacrifices  
however and wherever one lives.*  
Friedrich Nietzsche,  
*Letter to Jakob Burckhardt*

—  
In *The Accursed Share [La part maudite]*, the French philosopher Georges Bataille develops his argument against scarcity, which contends that, from the point of view of a general economy, the key problem on the tellurian surface is not the conservation of energy, but its expenditure [*dépense*]. Bataille offers the following reversal of the political economy of scarcity: "I will begin with a basic fact: The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism);

as the process that most emphatically characterizes the Anthropocene is preceded by the endo-skeletal mineralization that allowed organisms to achieve locomotion — more than mere movement — at the end of the Ediacaran period. For a discussion of the first endo-skeletal mineralization, see Manuel DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1991); for a thoroughly geopoetic reading, see Don MacKay, "Ediacaran and Anthropocene: Poetry as a Reader of Deep Time," *Prairie Fire* 29.4 (Winter 2008–2009).

[10] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[11] For the most precise explanation of the photosynthetic bias (i.e. heliocentrism) dominant in contemporary conceptions of life, see Thomas Gold, "The Deep Hot Biosphere," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA* 89 (July 1992): 6045–6049. Regarding the question of whether the minerals were deposited by the asteroid itself, or whether the asteroid punctured the crust deeply enough to allow the minerals to "leak out," see Jessica Marshall, "Meteorites Pummeled Earth, Delivering Gold," *Discovery News*, 7 September 2011.

[12] For my reading of the astroleme and the attendant condition of the Sudbury Basin, I am largely indebted to the work of architecture historian Kenneth Hayes, especially in his essay, "Be Not Afraid of Greatness, or, Sudbury: A Cosmic Accident," in *Sudbury: Life in a Northern Town* (Guelph and Sudbury: Musagetes Foundation



↑  
Lisa Hirmer,  
*Slag Collection*, 2011.  
Digital Photograph.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

Working in the industrial town of Oberhausen, Germany, in 1968, the American artist Robert Smithson developed a sculptural installation addressing the illusion of the discrete object (the art) and its sealed container (the gallery), while simultaneously indicating the complicity of production and waste. With the aid of an industrial manufacturer, Smithson constructed a series of five steel containers, each increasing in height by linear geometrical intervals toward the wall of the gallery, accompanied by five maps with photo-documentation of the industrial sites from which the contents of the containers were retrieved. The contents of the linearly perforated, stainless steel bins are chunks of slag—the waste product of the refining process.

According to the art historian and curator Robert Carleton Hobbs, Smithson's art "concerns the hopelessness of understanding life through systems, the absurdity of orthodox forms of rationality, and the meaninglessness of life and art when viewed from a universal vantage point. This futility is aptly underscored in such a work as *Nonsite, Oberhausen, Germany*, in which steel bins are fabricated to hold the waste by-products accumulated in making them." [18] For Hobbs, the work "embodies a dialectic between industrially produced steel containers and slag—the waste by-product of the steel-refining process." [19] Hobbs concludes that, "filling a steel bin with the industrial sludge resulting from steel refining belabours the gratuitous, manifests at best a specious unity, and belies the piece's rationality. In [*Nonsite, Oberhausen, Germany*] the underlying premises of mass production are short-circuited." [20] For Smithson, the creation of stable systems of meaning is gratuitous because these systems are constantly plagued by a loss of order—a condition known as *entropy*. The futility of systems of organization (i.e. differentiation) is concentrated in Smithson's *Nonsite* where the aesthetic relationship—the tension between use and ornament—operates as the redoubled image of ornamental entropy. In the Sudbury Basin, as in Smithson's *Nonsite*, refinement and entropy are just two sides of the same coin; in Sudbury, that coin is, of course, a nickel.

In a more recent series of work, the American-born artist Jimmie Durham suggests several other entropic victories, where the geologic overtakes the human project of mineralization, especially in his sculpture *Encore Tranquilité [Calm Again]* (2008). If the condition of "Calm" can be understood as the geologic regrounding of the airplane crumpled under the weight of a massive boulder, the "Again" of the title suggests that there might have been a time, even one within human history, where the geologic was an integral component of life on the surface, not one combated through an aesthetic of mineralization, but one accepted as that *groundless*—because of its own constant, but barely perceptible movement—ground. Profanely, Durham's sculpture, read from the perspective of the Anthropocene, poses the question of whether or not the human species will bear witness to the return of such a calm, or whether this return would necessarily mean our extinction.

and Laurentian Architecture, 2011): 16–25. Although I fundamentally disagree with Hayes' reading of the Basin through the aesthetic of the "sublime"—a term which both postmodern theorists and dihard humanists have repeatedly tried to salvage, both consciously and unconsciously, from the radical failure of Kant's project of transcendental idealism—I nevertheless, refashion several aspects of Hayes' inquiry regarding the *astrobleme*. Contrary to Hayes, I argue that the force of the human is *tremendous*, that is, a force beyond the recuperative logic of the sublime. For the most potent explanation of the imbecility of the "sublime" as an aesthetic category, see Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992); and, more recently, Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007* (Windsor Quarry and New York: Urbanomic, 2011), especially "Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest," 55–80.

[13] For a comprehensive review of the role of police as a fundamentally repressive force within democratic societies, see Kristian Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue* (New York: South End Press, 2007).

[14] For a discussion of Haymarket and its political legacy, see Richard Sommer and Glenn Forley, "Dyn-o-Mite Fiends: The Weather Underground at Chicago's Haymarket," *Journal of Architectural Education* 61.3 (February 2008): 13–24.

## OUR GEOPOETIC PASSAGE

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*Humanity is, at the same time—through industry, which uses energy for the development of the forces of production—both a multiple opening of [facilité infinie] for burn-off in pure loss.*  
Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*

On a long enough timeline, however, even entropy seems, like a dream image, too easily resolved. As Manuel DeLanda suggests, on the geological time scale, rocks are as viscous as the rivers whose beds they variously compose. [21] How then to provoke questions of aesthetic evaluation in relation to geologic force? Robert Smithson approaches this problem of aesthetic value in his 1973 *Artforum* polemic, "Frederick Law Olmsted and The Dialectical Landscape," which begins as follows:

*Imagine yourself in Central Park one million years ago. You would be standing on a vast ice sheet, a 4,000-mile glacial wall, as much as 2,000 feet thick. Alone on the glacier, you would not sense its slow crushing, scraping, ripping movement as it advanced south, leaving great masses of rock debris in its wake.* [22]

With a geopoetic description worthy of the pioneering theorist of plate tectonics, Harry Hess, Smithson goes on to claim that Olmsted is the first earthwork artist in America, and that, "the magnitude of geologic change is still with us, just as it was millions of years ago. Olmsted, a great artist who contended with such magnitudes, sets an example which throws a whole new light on the nature of American art." [23] Olmsted's design logic for Central Park included the process of editing the geological features to expose the rock profile

to the visitors, thus calling into relief the geological time scale within which the city, read in the park as a back formation, is manifest. In their prescient reading of Smithson and Olmsted, Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse of smudgestudio describe the peculiar staircase, designed by Olmsted and Vaux, which is cut into one of the edited rock outcroppings: "Still, what we find most interesting and inspired about this 'staircase' is its poetic futility. The stairs do not provide 'passage' or assistance in climbing as much as a shift in being. By 'using' these stairs, New Yorkers of today accept an invitation to make direct contact with the geology of the city. The stairs politely suggest that we break from the predetermined route of the sidewalk and head out and up onto the open space of the rock surface." [24] For Olmsted, setting the scene for an encounter between the forces of urbanization and their slower-moving geological predecessors was a way to exhume the relation between temporalities buried by the mechanics of urbanization; curating this relation is, for Olmsted, an attempt to balance the anxieties of the city with a calm, imperceptibly slow, but undoubtedly viscous geologic corrective.

While the Anthropocene will almost inevitably draw to a close with the extinction of its most prominent actor—the human—our final consideration here remains inconclusive. As geologists and stratigraphers continue to debate the scientific merits of the epoch, what is clear from our speculative inquiry is that, despite our credulous pseudonym *Homo sapiens*, the aggregate hyper-force that we are—the aesthetic of mineralization that could be the quiddity of the human species—affords no recognition of a sublimated, purposeful nature; our force, like the labour necessary to recognize, if not entirely mitigate its consequences, is tremendous.



→  
smudgestudio,  
*GeoPoetry*  
(after Robert Smithson),  
from *Geologic City: A Field Guide to the GeoArchitecture of New York*, 2011.  
C-print. Image courtesy of the artists.

[15] Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay On General Economy, Volume I: Consumption*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988): 21.

[16] *Encyclopædia Aephalica (Comprising the Critical Dictionary and Related Texts)*, edited by Georges Bataille, and the *Encyclopædia Da Costa*, edited by Robert Lebel and Isabelle Waldberg, assembled and introduced by Alastair Brotchie, trans Iain White (London: Atlas Press, 1995): 35.

[17] Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, translated by Helen Weaver, ed Susan Sontag (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

[18] Robert Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1981): 25.

[19] *Ibid*, 113.

[20] *Ibid*, 115.

[21] DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*; see also, Manuel DeLanda, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

[22] Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and The Dialectical Landscape," *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed Jack Flam (London: University of California Press, 1996): 157; originally published in *Artforum* (February, 1973).

[23] *Ibid*, 159.

[24] smudgestudio, *Geologic City: A Field Guide to the GeoArchitecture of New York*, (New York: Friends of the Pleistocene, 2011).



<http://dogwoodinitiative.org/images/people/tahltanarrests/view>

At first glance, there might not seem to be an obvious common ground between indigenous activists in Canada and performance artists in the United Kingdom (UK). However, the controversy over the far sands industrial oil pipeline in northern Alberta has brought individuals from both communities into cooperative relations, opposing the pipeline. Over the last few years, environmental activists have inspired each other's practices in innovative, creative public interventions.

While traditional NGOs have lobbied officials and targeted their protests, the environmental activists have used their knowledge of art to create powerful public interventions. In one case, the activists used their knowledge of art to create powerful public interventions. In one case, the activists used their knowledge of art to create powerful public interventions.

A majority of cultural institutions have acquired sponsorship from major oil companies, predominantly BP (the company formerly known as British Petroleum) and Shell. For many years, the main sponsor of the museum, The relationship between the cultural institutions and the

corporation has been so close that the ex-CEO of BP, Lord John Browne, has sat on the Tate Board of Trustees.



Some of the most powerful public interventions have been the use of art to create powerful public interventions. In one case, the activists used their knowledge of art to create powerful public interventions.

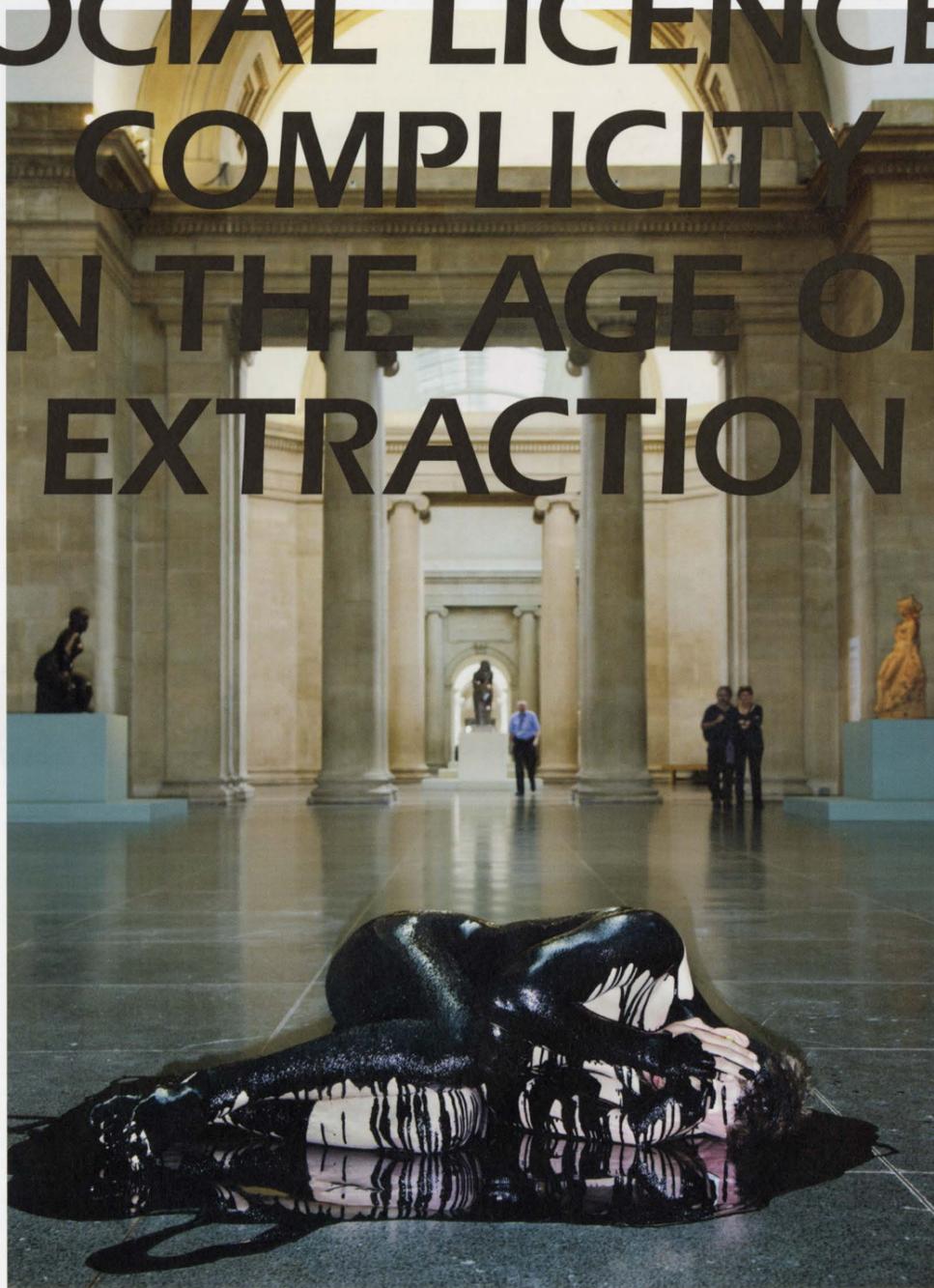
to Canada through her work in the summer of 2008. Her work in the summer of 2008. Her work in the summer of 2008.



the only two people involved with the project were the artist and the activist. The project was a collaboration between the artist and the activist.

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# SOCIAL LICENCE / COMPLICITY IN THE AGE OF EXTRACTION



← Intervention into the Tate Britain exhibition, *Single Form*, on the anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico (2010). Liberate Tate, *Human Cost*, 2011. Photograph by Immo Klink. Image courtesy of the photographer and the artists.

Kevin Smith and Clayton Thomas-Muller

At first glance, there might not seem to be an obvious common ground between Indigenous activists in Canada, performance artists in the United Kingdom (UK) and climate activists in both countries. However, the international controversy over Canada's tar sands industry in northern Alberta has galvanized individuals from all these communities into new cooperative relationships opposing the developments. Over the last few years, environmental groups and artists have influenced each other's practices, resulting in innovative, cross-platform public interventions.

While traditional environmental NGOs have lobbied government officials and targeted the oil companies that are involved on both sides of the Atlantic, people in the UK cultural sector have recently started to interrogate their particular complicity in enabling oil companies to commit environmental and human rights abuses in other parts of the world. This article describes collaborative projects by the arts-activist organisation PLATFORM, Indigenous rights group the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) and performance interventionists Liberate Tate, that are designed to problematize the involvement of oil companies in gallery spaces and to challenge the role of arts institutions in diverting attention from the devastation that their primary sponsors are carrying out in other parts of the world.

In London (UK), an overwhelming majority of cultural institutions have acquired sponsorship from major oil companies, predominantly BP (the company formerly known as British Petroleum) and Shell. For more than twenty years, BP has been the main sponsor of the Tate museums. The relationship between the cultural behemoth and the

corporation has been so close that the ex-CEO of BP, Lord John Browne, has sat on the Tate Board of Trustees since 2007. In addition, BP also sponsors the Royal Opera House, the National Portrait Gallery and the British Museum.

An oil corporation such as BP combines the business models of an engineering company and a bank. It constantly faces the practical challenges of extracting, transporting and processing oil and gas, shifting the geology of distant lands to the cars and turbines of its customers. Like all engineering problems, these challenges are approached in the belief that ultimately they can be solved. The point of solving them is to make money, to profit on invested capital.

The construction of an offshore oil platform is one of the most expensive projects on Earth. Usually, it can only offer a high return on capital if oil production is maintained over two or three decades. The maintenance of this production is often threatened by social and political shifts in the countries of extraction. Any such threat to production—or the perception that this threat might exist—can immediately undermine the profitability of a corporation. BP's share value was almost halved by the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, not because of the potential costs of the oil spill clean up, but because investors were concerned that the company's future prospects in the United States were being undermined by the collapse of support in Washington, DC, and in the media.

To guard against any such threat to the company's value, BP works constantly to engineer its "social licence to operate"—a term widely used in business and government circles that usually applies to the process of engendering support for a company's activities in the communities who live close to their factories, oil wells and so on. This term can also shed light on how corporations construct public support far from the places of extraction or manufacture—for example, how BP builds support in London. The construction of the social licence to operate is what links gallery-goers in London to the devastation of boreal forests and Indigenous communities

in Canada through tar sands extraction.

In the summer of 2009, four First Nations activists associated with the IEN, including co-author Clayton Thomas-Muller, came to London to take part in the Camp for Climate Action. This annual protest camp had an enormous impact on climate change discourse in the UK, and the First Nations visitors engaged activists on the devastation being caused by tar sands extraction. It was at this Climate Camp that members of Liberate Tate and PLATFORM first met the Indigenous community representatives. At that stage, BP had not fully committed to entering into the tar sands market, but in December 2010, it committed a \$1.6 billion investment in the Sunrise Project. Located in northern Alberta, the project could be producing 200,000 barrels of oil a day in the space of a few years. Sunrise will use so-called SAG-D (Steam Assisted Gravity Drainage) extraction methods, in which water is super-heated into steam with vast amounts of natural gas, then injected deep into the earth to "melt" the oil from the sand and clay.

The entire tar sands infrastructure in Canada has been the subject of extensive criticism for clear-cutting boreal forests and polluting waterways, and some Indigenous communities that live downstream of the polluted waterways are experiencing higher than expected rates of rare cancers. According to a report by the Alberta Health Services released in 2009, in Fort Chipewyan, a remote community three hundred kilometres north of Fort McMurray often described as the ground zero of tar sands extraction, fifty-one cancers developed in forty-seven people between 1995 and 2006, almost a third more than would have been statistically predicted. [1]

Extracting oil from tar sands is far more polluting and destructive to the climate than light sweet crude oil, which comes naturally out of the ground in liquid form. Tar sands are only ten percent oil mixed with 90 percent sand, clay, and corrosive agents such as quartz and other minerals, heavy metals and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). The extra energy involved in super-heating the bituminous substance to yield

Kevin Smith is a climate and finance campaigner for PLATFORM. Coming from a more political/activist background and long term involvement with the Camp for Climate Action and associated mobilizations, he now self-identifies as having an "emerging practice" through his involvement with art-activists on oil sponsorship issues.

Clayton Thomas-Muller of the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation also known as Pukatawagan in Northern Manitoba, Canada, is an activist for Indigenous rights and environmental justice. Recognized by *Utne Magazine* as one of the "Top 30 Under 30" activists in the United States and as Climate Hero 2009 by *Yes Magazine*, Clayton is the tar sands campaign organizer for the Indigenous Environmental Network.



← ↓  
Liberate Tate interventions on the occasion of the Tate Summer Party celebrating 20 years of BP sponsorship. Liberate Tate, *Licence to Spill*, 2010. Photograph by Immo Klink. Image courtesy of the photographer and the artists.

↓  
Exorcism of the spirit of BP from Tate Modern, held in the Tate Turbine Hall. Reverend Billy and the Church of Earthalujah, *The Exorcism of BP*, 2011. Photograph by Sophie Molins. Image courtesy of the photographer and the artists.



a usable, transportable form makes it a far more carbon-intensive fuel source than light sweet crude. The size of these oil reserves (the greatest in the world outside of Saudi Arabia), combined with this increased carbon intensity, has led NASA scientist and climate advocate James Hansen to state that if the development of the tar sands continues, then it is “essentially game over” for Earth’s climate. [2]

Since the initial visit of the IEN activists to the UK, action on tar sands has been a regular feature of the political scene. The initial targets in these collaborations were the UK oil companies that were involved in the industry and the UK banks that

were involved in financing other tar sands companies, but this has now widened to include those galleries and museums that are complicit in allowing oil companies to divert attention away from their destructive activities.

Activist groups such as Art Not Oil have been protesting against the involvement of oil companies in UK galleries since 2004. The issue gained a new level of prominence in 2010, in the wake of the Gulf of Mexico disaster. Just weeks after the oil rig blow-out that caused eleven deaths and devastated vast stretches of US coastline, the annual Tate Summer Party was celebrating twenty years of BP sponsorship. PLATFORM



For over 25 years, PLATFORM has been bringing together environmentalists, artists, human rights campaigners, educationalists and community activists to create innovative projects driven by the need for social and environmental justice. Much of PLATFORM’s work of recent years has had a focus on the oil industry, including tar sands in Canada, Shell’s impacts in the Niger Delta, and oil and civil society in the MENA countries.

Liberate Tate is a network dedicated to taking creative disobedience against Tate until it drops its oil company funding. The network was founded in January 2010, during a workshop on art and activism, commissioned by Tate.

coordinated a letter in *The Guardian* signed by over one hundred and sixty people in the cultural sector calling on Tate to end its relationship with BP, and distributed literature about oil sponsorship of the arts to party goers entering Tate Britain, where the party was taking place. [3] Meanwhile, recently formed art-activist group Liberate Tate performed *Licence to Spill* (2010), with eleven performers dressed in black, their faces covered in veils, pouring gallons of an oil-like substance over the entrance steps of the gallery. This was a symbolic act designed to create maximum disruption to the celebrations and draw attention back from the canapés and champagne

to the horrors of the Gulf of Mexico. Inside the party, two elegantly dressed ladies going by the names of Toni (Hayward) and Bobbi (Dudley), released another oil spill from beneath their bouffant dresses, a “relatively tiny one, compared to the size of the gallery,” they insisted, echoing the comments of then-BP CEO Tony Hayward in describing the size of the oil spill relative to the Gulf of Mexico. [4]

In the following year, more evocative, and often headline-grabbing, performance interventions took place in gallery spaces. *Sunflower* (September 2010) took place in Tate Modern’s iconic Turbine Hall, with 30 performers forming a circle before stepping on tubes of black oil paint, monographed with BP’s green and yellow sunflower logo. The prescient performance was later echoed by Ai Wei Wei’s *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) installation, which saw millions of handcrafted porcelain seeds deposited in the same location. On the anniversary of the Gulf of Mexico disaster, Liberate Tate did a durational intervention, *Human Cost* (April 2011), in the exhibition *Single Form* at Tate Britain. In the performance, a naked figure lay on the ground and was covered with another oil-like substance, an image of which appeared on the front page of the *Financial Times* the next day.

While BP’s criminal negligence in causing the Gulf of Mexico disaster was one of the re-invigorating factors behind the Liberate Tate performances and campaign, BP’s involvement in tar sands extraction, in particular, has subsequently become one of the main foci. In April 2011, Clayton Thomas-Muller and Jasmine Thomas, a member of the Frog clan from Saik’uz, spoke outside Tate Modern about the artworld complicity in the destruction of Indigenous communities during a protest by climate action group, Rising Tide. In July, Liberate Tate and UK Tar Sands Network invited performance artists Reverend Billy and the Church of the Earthalujah to perform an exorcism of BP in the Tate Turbine Hall, accompanied by a 12-piece gospel choir singing about the evils of tar sands extraction. In January 2012, PLATFORM and Liberate Tate, working with content contributed by Indigenous Environmental Network, are launching the

*Tate a Tate Audio Tour*, [5] a site-specific sound work in three pieces that enables listeners to tour Tate Modern, Tate Britain, and the boat journey between the two institutions, while listening to the voices of impacted communities, artists and oil campaigners.

Of course, all the activities around sponsorship are occurring at a time when the arts are facing massive cuts in public funding, as part of the austerity measures being carried out by Britain’s coalition government. Many feel that now is not the time for the art world to start getting choosy about where the money comes from, with Guardian art critic Jonathan Jones going so far as to assert that museums should take “money from Satan himself” if it means they can “stay strong and stay free.” [6]

However, it is precisely because of the decrease in public funding that a debate about the ethics of particular corporate sponsors is more relevant than ever. Rather than pitting the need for ethical discussion against the need to secure funding, we must ground this debate in a respect for the value of the arts to society, and the importance of access. State support commits arts institutions to remaining open to all, ensuring that everyone has the possibility to connect with a vivid and changing cultural history, and valuing what the arts can bring to people’s lives and experience.

Raoul Martinez, a portrait painter whose work has been exhibited as part of the BP Portrait Award at the National Portrait Gallery for the past two years running, has written that:

Unless we are willing to accept the sponsorship of arms manufacturers, for instance, we clearly believe a line must be drawn somewhere. So the issue is not *whether* we draw a line, but *where* we draw it. In the case of BP, I believe there is a strong case for placing them on the wrong side of that line... If society decides it genuinely values institutions like the National Portrait Gallery and Tate Modern, it can provide money to support them. [7]

The call to end oil sponsorship of the arts is not without precedent. Sponsorship shifts have occurred on numerous occasions according

to changing social norms and contexts. A few decades ago, many of the same cultural institutions were receiving tobacco money—the creativity of art provided a great decoy to the devastating consequences of cancer—yet, now tobacco logos are absent from the cultural sphere. Smoking is simply not socially acceptable anymore. The major cultural shift over tobacco sponsorship is now widely applauded as an appropriate response, and was in part due to the push given by anti-smoking campaign groups. Yet despite widespread public concern about the dramatic threat of climate change and the ongoing violation of the rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada, oil money is still found greasing the wheels of so many of our cultural institutions. The idea that it is, therefore, normal to continue to burn fossil fuels subtly seeps into our imaginations, fixing the image of a certain kind of culture, a certain kind of destructive behaviour. This cultural acceptance of oil is diminishing, and at some point it will more dramatically wane.

Breaking the sponsorship link between Tate and BP alone will not prevent the devastating tar sands projects from being inflicted across the Northern wildernesses of Canada. By creating and informing a public debate that questions the legitimacy of these companies in being associated with respectable and cherished cultural institutions, we can strengthen attempts to hold them accountable in other political and financial spheres. This is an essential step in ending the stranglehold that the companies have on the corridors of power—a major obstacle that we face in the transition to a low carbon society. The shift away from oil takes place in many municipal sites, as well as in our personal daily experience—from the infrastructure of transport, to the shareholdings of pension funds, from where the food we eat is grown, to divorcing fossil fuel industry interests apart from the seats of governmental power. For a fair and just transition to a post-oil era, the creativity and collaborative practices of artists are essential, and cultural institutions are a key space to nurture that evolution.

The Indigenous Environmental Network was formed in 1990, by community-based Indigenous peoples (American Indian and Alaska Natives) including youth and elders, to address environmental and economic justice issues in the United States and Canada.

[1] “Fort Chip cancer rates higher than expected: report,” *CBC News* (6 February 2009).

[2] Joe Romm, “James Hansen slams Keystone XL Canada-U.S. Pipeline: ‘Exploitation of tar sands would make it implausible to stabilize climate and avoid disastrous global climate impacts,’” *Climate Progress* (5 June 2011).

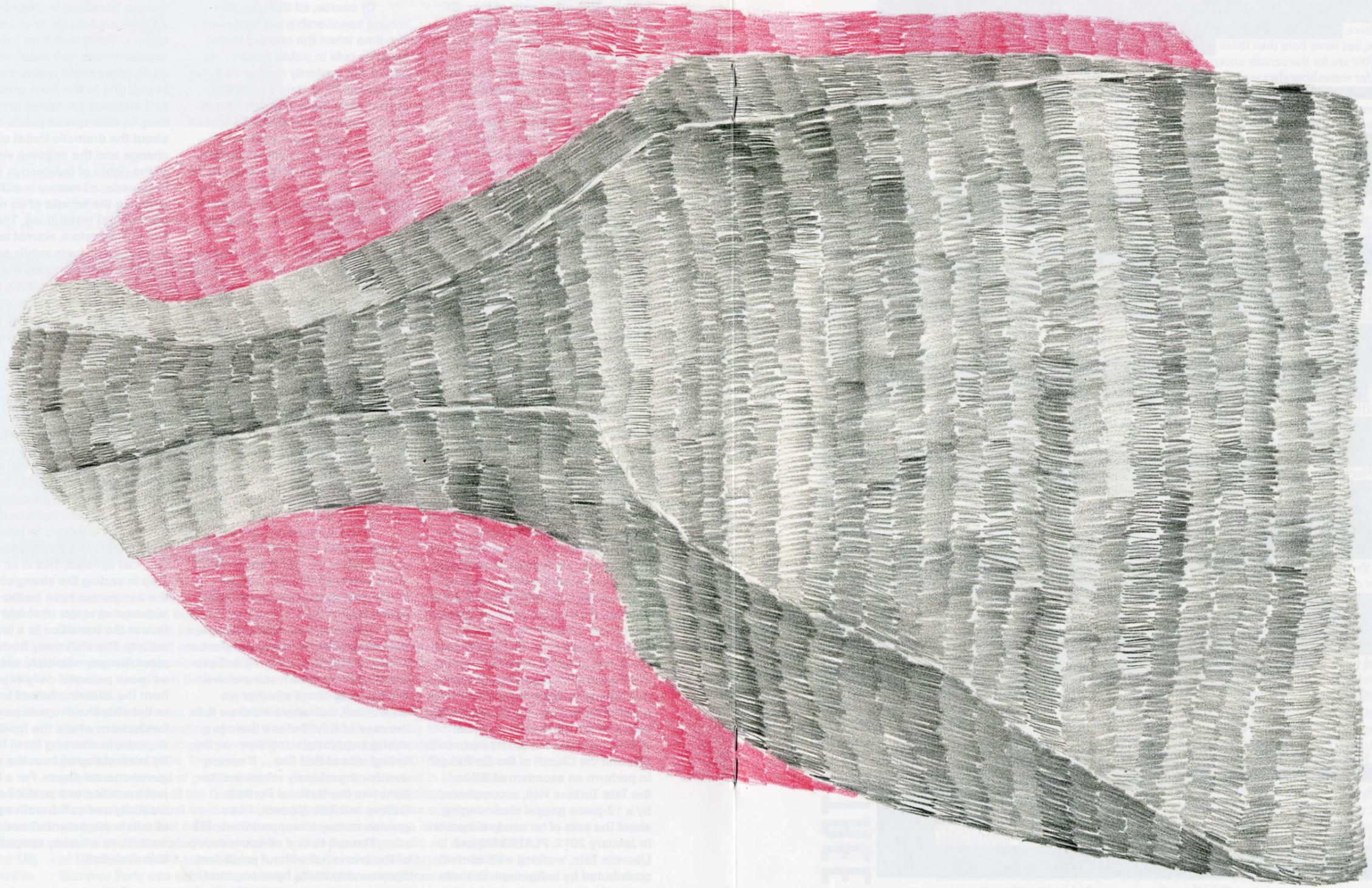
[3] PLATFORM, *Licence to Spill* (June 2010).

[4] Tim Webb, “BP boss admits job on the line over Gulf oil spill,” *The Guardian* (14 May 2010).

[5] See [www.tateatate.org](http://www.tateatate.org) for more information and a sound clip.

[6] Jonathan Jones, “Tate is right to take BP’s money,” *The Guardian* (29 June 2010).

[7] Interview with the authors (August 2011).



<http://www.Sacredland.org/Klabona/>

FROM OPEN

LIBEL

HOW MANY LIBEL TO MATT ZIEBEL



We consisted of filmmakers, curators, archivists and documentarians—mostly people who were loosely related to film and video.

MR: I found out about Red Channels when I attended a couple of screenings that Matt had organized. What I really valued about the screenings were the discussions. Matt was really good at mediating and making sure the discussion was a collective effort. I was really struck by that; it was the first time I had seen a panel discussion structured as an open conversation. Even though there were extremely knowledgeable people in the room who provided valuable context, Matt saw to it that their voices were not privileged above anyone else's. The discussion was allowed to flow in different directions that brought the work into contact with various other issues and concerns. We were allowed to go off-topic—something that most panel discussions steer away from—which proved very valuable. This format provided the conceptual framework for how audience participation would be approached in later events, once Red Channels became a collective.

NH: How exactly did you envision Red Channels as a collective?

SP: Originally, and still, Red Channels is an open collective, meaning anyone can join at any time. We did a film series called *Our Friendships Are Constructed On the Basis of Conflict* (2011). This title is indicative of how we operate, because we find camaraderie in our differences and value productive arguments. We don't want to have a mission statement. We're not all Marxists and we're not all anarchists. Those kinds of political tendencies are in conversation with each other all the time, in each event Red Channels holds. When we work together, we don't do it from a position of a specific political agenda, but instead debate, for example, the value of flexibility in organizing against what has been called "the tyranny of structurelessness." This term emerged from an article written by Jo Freeman, a feminist writing in the 1970s. Freeman, focusing on the women's movement at the time, describes how the bid for non-hierarchical groups often simply precluded discussion within the group about the hierarchies that form anyway. Red Channels strives for fluidity in structure, in part to avoid hierarchy and bureaucracy within the group, but we have to acknowledge that hierarchy bubbles up. There are times when we defer too much to people who have been working with the group longest. And there are other

times when the hierarchies that crystallize perhaps make more sense or are even useful to us. For example, deferring to experience and letting people who have been putting more work into a particular project take the lead.

MR: As a group, we don't want to create a firm and rigid philosophy and approach that would confine our actions. Rather, we allow our actions to determine who we are as a collective.

SP: Red Channels is not a consensus based collective, in part because we don't know who's going to be at any given meeting. For the most part, two or three people are consistently there and another seven or so could be from anywhere; altogether the collective is made up of about forty people. Because of this, it would be difficult to call anything that gets decided in a meeting a true consensus. We feel that we don't all need to agree on everything that Red Channels does as a group. If three people decide they want to do something, they can, and often their initiative is infectious.

MR: I think that is a really significant approach to dealing with an age-old problem or contradiction that exists in so many collectives, which is the problem of maintaining a certain level of activity, momentum and sustainability without becoming too rigid or authoritarian. The model of two or more allows Red Channels to be constantly active and responsive without introducing any sort of hierarchy. This allows the collective to act on various initiatives that were individually conceived harmonizing individual imagination and group action.

SP: And you can do it under the banner of Red Channels even if a lot of people in the group don't necessarily want to participate. We don't all have to agree with the project or initiative. We're generous and understanding with each other about that. It's a nice way to operate. This characteristic is key to how the collective functions. And another characteristic is that we don't have a venue, and we like not having a venue. We like moving around the city.

MR: We've met in parks; we've met in members' homes, like mine and Sunita's; we've met at various institutions like The Brecht Forum, The Maysles Cinema, and The Bushwick Center for the Arts. We've also collaborated with 16 Beaver, and we've met in places like Bluestockings, a café and bookstore.

SP: Another identifying factor of our collective—that is not unique but something I feel is becoming part of the identity of Red Channels—is that we have no funds and we have no budget. We don't

do anything that raises money, or that costs money, or at least not more than a small amount of people working on the project are willing to put in individually. We don't do events in venues that charge us, and we don't charge for our events. We generally get copies of films for free, and if we need materials or services like paper or copies, we try to use our connections in other areas of our lives to get them donated.

NH: One thing I find fascinating about Red Channels is that you're not all film curators, and Red Channels is not fixed on film curating. Can you talk more about the multiplicity of Red Channels' activities? How does it fit into the model of the collective that you are describing?

SP: Red Channels works on multiple platforms: curating and holding events and discussions; organizing actions in the city; engaging the city in collective research, such as the walking tours; and acting as an affinity group in larger protests/demonstrations.

MR: We organized a walking tour of prisons in Manhattan. People often think of prisons as institutions that function in far away places, outside of city parameters, and are therefore more of a general political problem, not one that is directly related to the fabric of city.

NH: These prisons are in Manhattan? They're that local?

MR: Yes. It wasn't a walking tour in obscure places. The walking tour took place amidst heavy pedestrian traffic.

SP: Some of them are maximum-security prisons.

NH: I had no idea that there are maximum-security prisons in the city.

MR: There's one on the West Side Highway, two in the Wall Street area, one near the Brooklyn Bridge, one on 110th street, another one in the Murray Hill area. Another project initiated by a member of Red Channels had to do with the subway fare hikes. We created a campaign around the MTA [New York City Public Transit] Unlimited Ride MetroCard, where we let people know that if you had a card, you can swipe other people through. It's illegal for people to ask to be swiped through.

NH: It's illegal for someone to ask to be swiped through to get on the subway?

MR: Yeah, it's illegal for me to stand in front of the subway toll and ask

people who have Unlimited to swipe me in. I can get arrested for doing that.

NH: How was that made illegal?

MR: It's defined as a form of panhandling.

SP: Or theft from the MTA.

MR: But it's *legal* for me to give someone my card, so we devised a way to make people visible if they wanted to swipe other people through. We had to make decisions: do we use both English and Spanish; should we use images or symbols rather than text; how do we get people's attention. It was an aesthetic question, very tangible. How to make willing card-carriers visible so that others know they can approach?

NH: What did you decide in the end?

SP: We made two-inch buttons out of expired metro cards.

MR: I wanted to mention—in regards to your question about how these activities fit into the model of the collective—that Red Channels feels more like we're made up of different constellations. You can be organizing one project and other Red Channels events are happening around you. It's not systematic, so that we're doing one thing after the next. There are always different planes of activity occurring simultaneously.

Another non-film activity is a reading group we organize based on having someone nominate a list of five books, and the collective votes from the list on which one we're most interested in reading. The first book we read was Henri Lefebvre's *Right to the City*, and we had Peter Marcuse, a professor of Urban Planning at Columbia University, attend the last reading session of that. This reading group runs concurrently with other campaigns, projects, film festivals and actions all occurring under the banner of Red Channels.

NH: It sounds like any time a big event occurs, Red Channels is on it somehow and you begin to mobilize around it.

MR: Yes. For example, during the release of the WikiLeaks cables in February 2011, in response to both the information that was released and the democratization of journalism that the release seemed to point towards, we had an informational potluck/teach-in. It was an open call for people to present information about or from the WikiLeaks cables using open-

source media. The event first took place in Bushwick, Brooklyn, and again in Harlem.

SP: Another Red Channels action took place at a big anti-budget cut rally on May 12 (2011), in the Wall Street financial district in Manhattan. The city was reviewing a proposal that would cut the budgets for schools and other social services in the city, and a lot of student groups, workers and immigrant groups organized a day of action. Red Channels made this big, black sheet, and we were going to try and drape the bull that has become a symbol of the financial world—it was originally a piece of illegal public art. We made a video of the sheet being used in the march, intercut with a text we wrote in response to the demonstration. For each of these actions, there's a collectively written communiqué. They're short, one page texts, where we write over each other on a shared document until we get somewhere that satisfies all of us, or we run out of time. We have also collaborated with Todos Somos Japon, who are trying to radicalize demonstrations already happening there, in order to criticize the Japanese government and TEPCO's [Tokyo Electric Power Company] response to the March 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. In the communiqué we distributed to accompany the action, we pointed out how the Japanese government had fiddled with the legal limits of radiation to avoid providing evacuation services, and how both the government and nuclear energy corporations were willing to place communities on a precarious perch at the brink of annihilation with this dangerous energy source. Todos Somos Japon organized a rally, and we brought giant origami paper with radioactive symbols on it. We made really big, radioactive paper cranes and we walked them from Tompkins Square, in Lower Manhattan, to Rockefeller Center in midtown where the General Electric (GE) building is. GE sells the reactors that were used at Fukushima and has expressed their intention to continue with this model. They are also a major lobbyist for nuclear energy in the US and abroad. We made a shrine of cranes fly in front of the Rockefeller Center, which is full of tourists, and tussled with the security guards.

NH: Can we talk about your film programs? What is Red Channels' main mandate in terms of film programming?

SP: Red Channels has a big identity; it has become bigger and more nebulous. But we are interested in film screenings with a focus on rare and radical work.

One of the programs we did was on women in prison. It included films by Third World Newsreel (*Inside Women Inside*, 1978), Dara Greenwald (*The Package*, 2010) and Blair Doroshwalther (*The Fire This Time*, in progress). Vikki Law, who writes on women in prison, was present, and we had a conversation about issues particular to women: women's health and gendered assumptions in prisons, such as the notion that women prisoners don't organize for their rights. In fact, strikes in women's prisons just tend not to get the same publicity and support as they do in men's prisons. Also, health issues particular to women in prison are not often discussed in the prison solidarity community at large.

MR: Another film program we organized was a screening of early works by Albert Maysles and DA Pennebaker that they made when they were in the Soviet Union. The films were rarely screened. Even the directors themselves hadn't seen them since they made them more than fifty years ago. I watched *Russian Close-Up* (1957) with Albert Maysles for the first time since he made it. The series traced the roots of what later became known as cinema-verité. At the time, Stalin had died, the Iron Curtain was fading somewhat, and western filmmakers were seeing the Soviet Union for the first time. In fact, the series was called *The Thaw: Early Cinema-Verité in the Soviet Union*.

SP: The series we mentioned earlier, *Our Friendships Are Constructed On the Basis of Conflict*, was a smashing success.

NH: Can you talk about that program a bit more?

SP: Yeah. Maria and Molly, two members of Red Channels, worked really closely with Troy from Spectacle, where the screening took place.

MR: Spectacle is a micro-cinema in Williamsburg.

SP: And Molly is an archivist and film curator, and Maria was working at Paper Tiger Television, and they just did an amazing job of collating a huge range of films by collectives.

MR: Films by The Invisible Committee, the Black Audio Film Collective, TVTV, Videofreex and the Worker's Film and Photo League were screened.

SP: Grupo Ukamau, a film collective from Bolivia making Indigenous themed films in the 1960s, did really amazing work. There were films from Third World Newsreel, a major activist documentary collective in NYC, and General Idea.

MR: And Voina, a very controversial collective from Russia, who stage provocative and politically charged public performances.

SP: Discussion is really one of the few mandatory things about a Red Channels event. We lead open discussions on a range of topics. We try to make it clear that we are not an inner circle trying to "teach" the audience about these topics, but instead, we are all contributing to what happens in the room and hope that members of the audience will join us in presenting the next event. We are just starting conversations and encouraging others to start conversations.

MR: If we're dogmatic about one thing, it's that. We never screen a film and call it a day. We want to push the idea of an event beyond its own structure. Often it's about endurance, like the screening of Peter Watkins' *The Paris Commune* (2000). That's a six-hour film, and we had discussion afterwards. New York is constantly producing cultural or artistic events and activities, which at times people approach in a consumerist fashion. Red Channels events challenge this kind of approach. We will screen a six-hour film straight through at 16 Beaver. Or, when we do the walking tours, you're walking around in the heat for six hours or more.

SP: Yes. And after we screened the six-hour film, we got some dinner and talked for another few hours. It's a full day.

NH: Right. So you're committed to the event by giving time. That reminds me of a workshop I attended led by the co-creator of *The Pinky Show*, a DIY radical educational television program that you can watch online. He made it mandatory to sign up for an eight-hour workshop if you wanted to participate. For him, it had a lot to do with time and duration. It takes time to have a conversation with strangers, and to really get at things, to unpack them in such a setting. And people came and we stayed. It was amazing to have that much time.

MR: Focusing on the duration and endurance of an event positions the audience within a new frame. The situation becomes more intimate because each audience member is part of creating a collective and participatory dynamic that is radically different from most panel discussions, where the audience asks questions that are then answered by people in a position of expertise. The discussion is then restrictive and formal. At a Red Channels event, discussion becomes a collective effort. We don't focus on questions like: "Is this work well made? Is it good or bad work?" These are ineffectual questions

that emphasize aesthetic judgment. Rather, we push the attendees to think about whether a work is radical or not, and if so, how. We also try to include all the voices in the room, and not just hear from people who are more talkative than others, or who are more knowledgeable about the topic at hand. Our discussions really challenge the boundary between audience and artwork, or audience and presenter. As a spectator, you're merely there absorbing the content. But as a participant, you're entering a new configuration, where you're pushed to challenge the content, to respond to what is being brought into the room, to invest in what's happening.

NH: What is a radical or political film or event? How would you articulate the politics that drives Red Channels?

SP: That's the kind of question we refuse to answer.

NH: Why do you refuse to answer it?

SP: Because, as we said earlier, our politics are demonstrated through our actions. This sounds a little self-important, so I'll phrase it differently. It is very difficult to speak for the group on what politics drive Red Channels, because it is such an intersection of many politics. However, maybe politics is something we can generate in real-time through our interactions. I think that's what we hope to do.

MR: There are some commonalities between our politics, but we don't need to state them or over-determine them in the collective. We do not want to be bound to a framework circumscribed by statements or specific wording that constitutes a set of beliefs. And that was an issue from the very beginning. There is a certain common, political understanding between us in terms of resistance to structures of political, economic, social or cultural authority. We're different as individuals, but there is an unstated affinity.

NH: I am totally in agreement with you, and I get that refusal to, as you say, over-determine what the politics of a collective or group are, but I also want to get at why it's important to refuse a definition.

MR: And that's not being apolitical. We're not refusing politics. We just don't want a definitive politics that forms a set of principles or manifesto.

SP: I am going to answer that kind of sideways. I have continued to work with Red Channels over the past year consistently and be as involved as I can

because it makes me really happy. I come away from meetings feeling really happy.

MR: Me too.

SP: Red Channels consists of a group of people that I don't share everything in common with but who I genuinely really like.

MR: Yeah. Absolutely, and it's fun.

SP: But when you think of collectives that do the kind of work that we do from a political perspective, however nebulous and unstated, then it doesn't seem to matter that we like each other as much as I think that we do. The secret is, I don't think we would bring our politics into public dialogue as well as we do if we didn't have respect for each other and have a good time doing it.

NH: The point isn't necessarily to make new friends, but that can also happen.

SP: Right. And I think that the reason it makes me so happy is because it is such a concert of thinking and doing together.

MR: That's a nice way of phrasing it.

SP: Red Channels has a politicized way of organizing thinking and doing together that I think makes for a better community. Red Channels is a coalition of people who consider each other more, and listen to each other more, and that make each other happier.

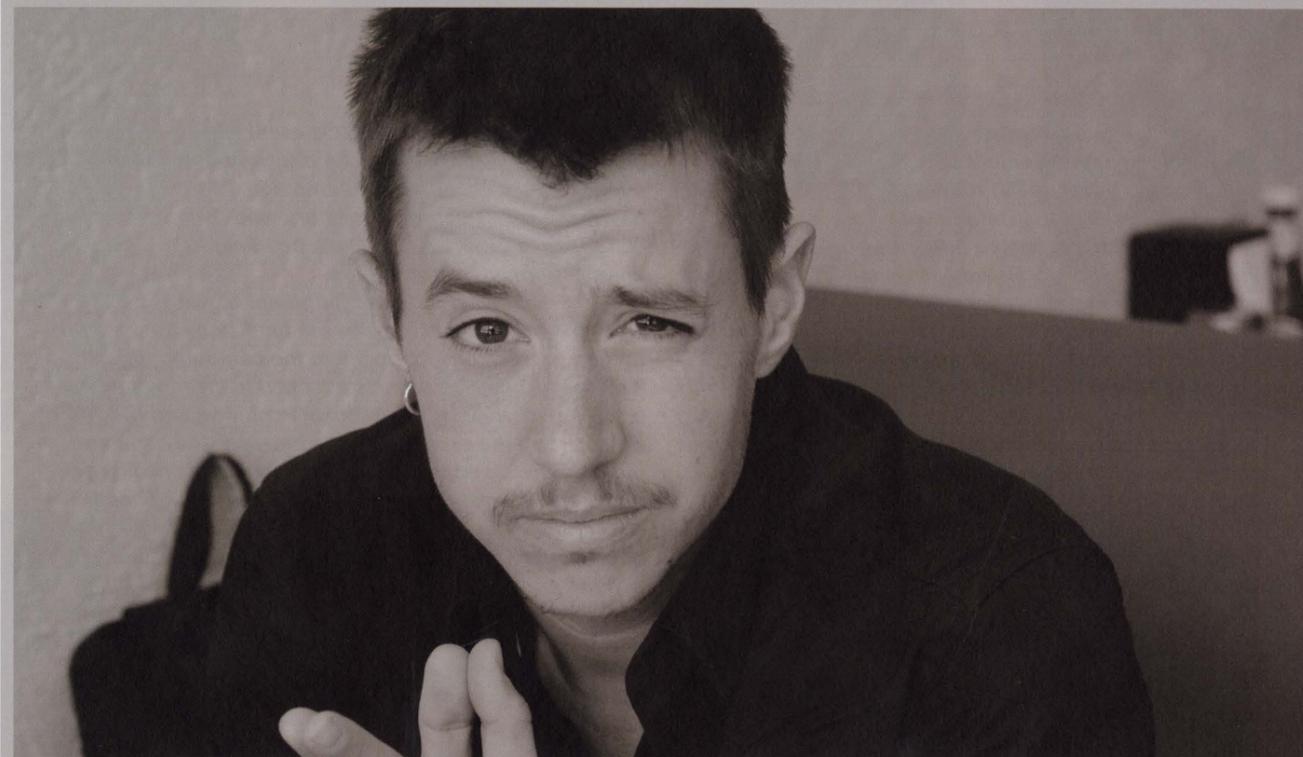
MR: We're not very disciplinarian in terms of contribution or participation. We manage to get a lot done, but we're not task enforcers.

Red Channels has a core membership that has more or less remained stable. But because we're an open collective, where people are constantly coming in and out of meetings and participating at different times, we don't ask for people to commit in a way that they can't. We remain open.

SP: I'll call it an ethos of what we do—determining who we are and how we're represented—also comes into how we organize collectively. We make decisions at meetings, but we don't judge or chastise people for not showing up at meetings. And by the same coin, they understand when we have to make decisions in their absence. Red Channels is both constituted and limited by the participation of its members, and as much as we participate in as much as it's operating.

PROJECT

# PLEASE! DON'T INSULT ME



## I'M CHASE

TEACH ME TO QUESTION EVERYTHING!  
SPECIFICALLY THAT TRANSGENDER, TRANSSEXUAL, INTERSEXED AND TWO-SPIRIT  
ARE JUST SOME OF MY OPTIONS

1. MR. PREMIER, PLEASE DON'T REMOVE THIS FROM THE CLASSROOM. WE NEED TO CHALLENGE EACH OTHER AND LEARN ABOUT DIFFERENCE
2. MY "MOMMY" (SHE HATES IT WHEN I CALL HER THAT...) IS INVESTED IN A FUTURE WHERE SCHOOLS ARE ENVIRONMENTS FOR KIDS TO FEEL SAFE TO EXPLORE WHO THEY ARE.
3. MR. MCQUINTY, MR. HUDAK AND MS. HORWATH, WHAT WOULD JACK LAYTON DO?!

- "Can A Parent Have Their Child Accommodated Out Of Human Rights Education (LGBTQ) Based On Religious Grounds? NO"
- "Should Schools Send Notes Or Permission Slips Home Before Starting any Classroom Work On LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/two-spirited, queer) Issues? NO"
- "Can Teachers Seek Accommodation From Teaching Materials That May Contradict Their Religious Beliefs? NO"
- "Can Schools/Teachers Choose Not To Address Controversial Issues For Fear Of Negative Parent Response? NO"

- "Encourage girls and boys to role-play opposite roles ... At times boys may play girls and rely on sexist stereotypical behaviour with which they are familiar." Page 37
- "Discuss ways to challenge these notions so that people have more choice in who they are and what they want to do." Page 41
- Textbook: Are You a Boy or a Girl? Toronto: Green Dragon Press
- "Read some traditional folk tales and fairy tales with the class. Have students write/illustrate their own "gender-bending" versions." Page 44
- "Read Gloria Goes to Gay Pride. If this storybook is not available, cut out a photo from a newspaper or magazine of the Pride Parade." Page 56

SUPPORT TRANS RIGHTS!

Open Letter Regarding Community Response to Transphobia in National Media

Chase Joynt and Alexis Mitchell

On 28 September 2011 we were made aware of a full-page advertisement purchased by the Institute for Canadian Values (ICV) running in the National Post. The ad, which targeted Ontario voters in anticipation of the provincial election on 6 October, criticized the Toronto District School Board curriculum for its inclusion of information regarding sex and gender education.

Our immediate response was an ad-hoc media campaign parodying the original poster by replacing the image and content of the ad with information about the importance and necessity of curriculum content that specifically focuses on transgender, transsexual, intersex and two-spirit identities. We utilized this specific language to address the use of such categories by the ICV. In addition, we replaced the poster image of a child selected by the ICV with that of Chase Joynt, a Toronto-based artist and activist, with the hopes of drawing specific attention to the manipulative and destructive agenda behind the original campaign.

The incredible community momentum behind our response poster caused it to go viral, with articles being written in local, national and international news. On 30 September, the National Post issued a public apology in response to the backlash and committed to donating the entirety of the funding received from the original ICV ad to LGBT-related organizations.

In their apology, the National Post called the publishing of the ad "a mistake," and while it might be easy to be satisfied with such a public display, we know these ads stem from much larger political and social debates regarding issues of sex and gender in our communities and curriculums. On 2 October, the Toronto Sun made the decision to run the same ad—unaccompanied, of course, by an apology. With such a decision, it became impossible to entertain excuses that the endorsement of this ad were a mistake collectively made by editors across the country. It became clear that transphobia is rampantly being propagated throughout Canadian media.

We planned a community action event in Toronto at the Gladstone Hotel on 4 October to inspire and encourage communication around these issues. The event was an occasion to reflect upon the culture and politics of education in this city, and framed the ICV and the Conservative Government's campaigns within the context of a growing culture of fear towards inclusive

education in this country. At this event, we collected the photos and ideas of those who attended and launched a much larger online poster campaign. At present, we have reached close to 150 posters, and this number continues to grow everyday with people sending in their images from all over the world.

Against the better judgment of everyone around him, Chase has taken the time since the launch to read every online response to the campaign; this includes all of the comments attached to the major media articles published by the National Post, Xtra and BlogTO. He has read the excitement, the betrayal, the hope and the hate. He's personally received emails of encouragement, and has read words from those who take harsh issue with his face, his life, and his decision to see great beauty in an education system that encourages kids to explore their options both inside school and out.

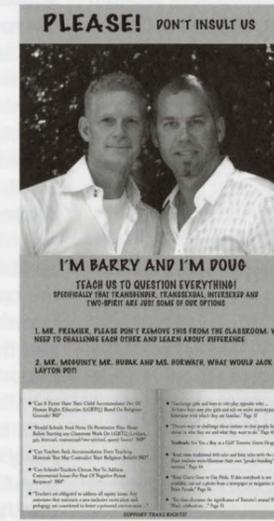
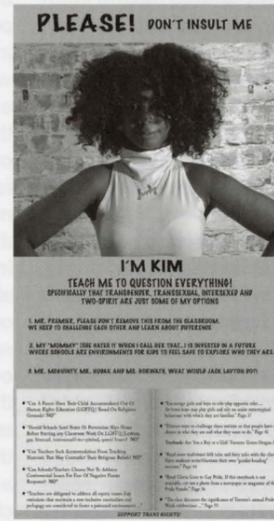
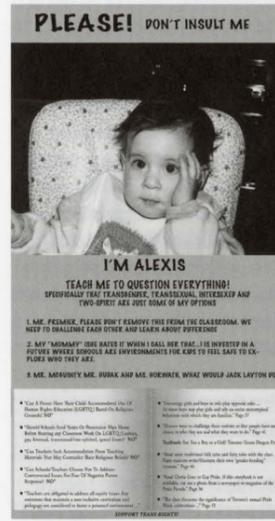
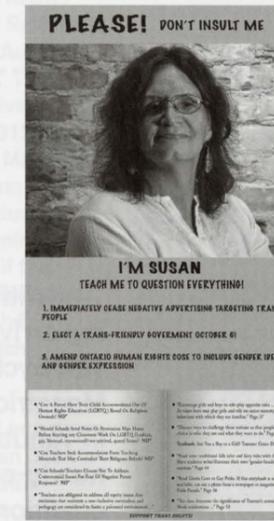
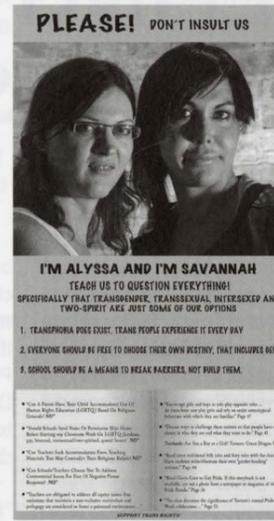
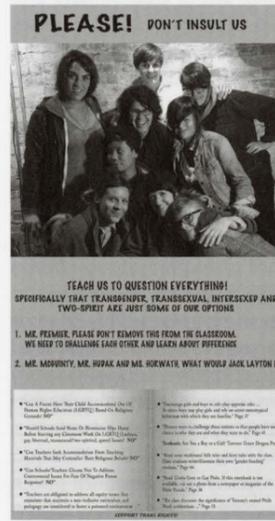
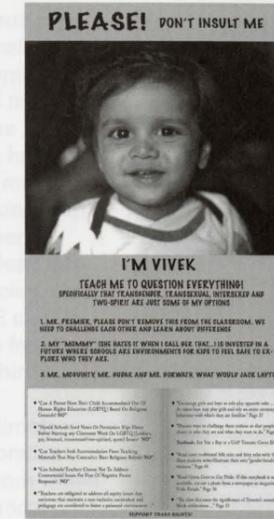
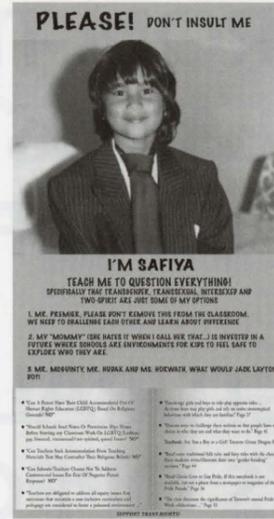
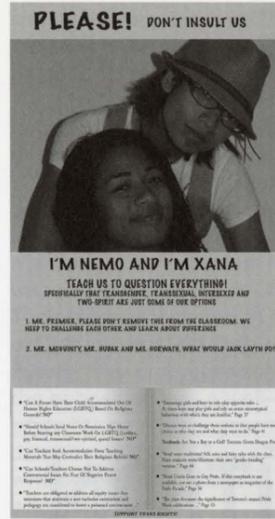
With such reading also came the reaffirmation that we live in a world full of powerful, inspired and engaged people. We live in a world with parents of transgender kids who are encouraged by the curriculum change. We live in a world with people who respond to discrimination every day by living and loving proudly in the face of unabashed hate, and we live in a world where people are consistently enacting upon profound possibilities for positive social change.

Though the hateful propaganda of both the ICV and the Conservative Government have not had an immediate effect on education reform to date, those who believe that children should not have access to knowledge about gender and sexuality continue to pressure the Toronto District School Board to change its curriculum.

We believe that knowledge is power. Trans and gender-variant people in this country face harassment, discrimination and violence and this cannot be tolerated. We need to work together to ensure that we are creating environments in which we can learn about and welcome difference. Please join in the action online. Send us an image to the emails below, or join the various other campaigns to end transphobia and gender violence in our communities and education system. Let us continue to move together, away from full-page hate and toward the possibility of full-page change.

In gratitude,

Chase Joynt and Alexis Mitchell  
Toronto, Ontario, 14 November 2011  
chase.joynt@gmail.com / mitchell.alexis@gmail.com



Haseeb Ahmed's research-based art practice is multi-fold. It straddles architecture, art, curation, engineering, and through Platypus, a group he co-founded in 2006—history and theory of the Left. Ahmed is currently a research fellow in at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, the Netherlands, and holds a Masters of Science in Visual Studies from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

# NEWS FROM THE NETHERLANDS WOULD-BE-LEFT/ THE CULTURAL SECTOR'S OPPOSITION TO SWEEPING FUNDING CUTS

Haseeb Ahmed

Within six months of my arrival at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, the Netherlands, in January 2011, I saw the newly-empowered Dutch coalition government approve devastating cuts to cultural sector funding together with cuts to education, healthcare and immigration services. The cuts marked a sharp turn to the Right in Dutch politics, while the opposition to them revealed a deeply demobilized Left. This condition should be considered in relation to so-called austerity measures and the rise of the Right in Europe and beyond.

The Jan van Eyck Academie (JvE) is just one of many cultural institutions that will be directly affected by the cuts. Categorically, nothing like the JvE exists in Canada or the United States. It is not a school, yet it provides funded time and space for theorists, designers and artists to produce as researchers. It has the ambiance of a monastery and the appearance of a Bauhaus spaceship crash-landed into the medieval, provincial capital of Maastricht. The international researchers at the JvE became witness to an internal Dutch matter, one that affects us directly nonetheless. The funding cuts will take effect 1 January 2013, and the JvE as we know it will cease to exist.

The Dutch coalition government, elected in 2010, is made up of the conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the Christian Democrats. This minority government relies on parliamentary support from the far-Right, neoliberal and xenophobic Freedom Party (PVV). In recent polls, [1] the populist PVV was nearly on par with the VVD, the senior partner in the

current Dutch coalition, indicating that if there were to be an election in the coming year, it would propel the PVV to power. For the supposed Dutch liberal imagination of cultural tolerance, this appears as a bad dream. [2]

In an open letter entitled "Beyond Quality: An New View of Cultural Policy" (10 June 2011), Halbe Zijlstra, the current secretary of culture, announced thirty to sixty percent cuts to most cultural institutions. In large part, museums were left untouched (with the notable exception of the Tropenmuseum, for the study of Netherlands colonial past and its former colonies), which faces closure. Meanwhile the majority of independent organizations and four post-academic institutes, including the JvE, were abruptly abandoned after more than fifty years of investment. For Zijlstra, "The responsibility for the development of excellence will rest entirely with the artist him/herself... and the market." This shift in policy leaves thousands of designers, artists, administrators, curators and technicians out of work. Paradoxically and

simultaneously, taxes on commercial galleries have been raised thirteen percent.

The largest opposition demonstration came on 27 June 2011, the eve of the debate that finalized the cuts to cultural sector funding. The demonstrations involved an estimated ten thousand, many of whom had marched from Rotterdam in what was called the March of Civilization. Their slogans included "A Defence of Culture" and "No Culture No Future." The propagated symbol of the opposition was a well-designed white "X" on a black ground. These demonstrations had no effect whatsoever; after that day, the cuts were finalized.

The problem was *not* one of too little, too late. The organizers and intellectuals of the cultural sector went to great lengths to avoid taking an explicitly political stance by refusing to identify themselves as a Left opposition to one of the first initiatives of the Right coalition government. [3] The chosen path of Defending Culture lead to a flattened political imagination. Its political content existed only insofar as one could equate culture to the vanguard of civilization; its argument was that a cut to culture was a step backwards to barbarism. However, we know that more often than not popular culture is barbarism. In the absence of a clear radical Left analysis, the opposition that emerged fragmented along the same lines as the governmental funding structure—each sector for itself.

The funding cuts in the Netherlands came under the guise of necessary austerity measures identical to those that are currently liquidating all social infrastructure in countries like Greece and Spain. In contradiction to the logic of austerity, the GDP-to-deficit ratio in the Netherlands is well within the standards of European Union membership as set by the Maastricht Treaty (1992). Austerity measures in the Netherlands (as elsewhere) have a function beyond supposed economic necessity. Ideally, the opposition borne of the culture sector would have acted in solidarity with the health, immigration and other service sectors in the Netherlands. [4]

In light of the logic of the Dutch government's austerity meas-

ures, a Left opposition would have taken steps to link with opposition movements in other affected countries as well. Internationally, Greece's pushback against austerity, along with the Spanish 15M, North American Occupy, and British anti-tuition fee movements, all share a common anti-ideological and anti-authoritarian character. To some, this ambiguity is a valued quality; however, as is clear in the instance presented here, it poses serious problems for sustained development of a Left able to overcome the conditions of capitalism. This crisis of leadership takes root between professionalization and sectarianism, activism and academia, and ultimately, class-consciousness and the history of the vanguard party.

When Geert Wilders, leader of the PVV, says, "Art is a Left wing hobby," he actually has a nuanced point. Despite his leadership position in an openly xenophobic, free market capitalist party [5], Wilders is able to make a sophisticated point on the relationship of contemporary art to politics: How does the implicit kernel of politics in each artwork—produced for the sake of production (as a hobby) engender a Left wing audience? His self-serving argument is more insightful than the vacuity of the would-be-Left's Defence of Civilization. Meanwhile, this Left is caught trailing the emergent forms of the Right by asking, "What can we learn from populism?" How is this role-reversal possible? The answer to this can be sought in the extent to which students, artists, intellectuals and cultural workers in the Netherlands deny their opposition its Left-wing character, even while it rises as a target of far-Right policies.

The JvE itself contains three distinct constituencies, each affected differently by the cuts. The staff is organized hierarchically and the cuts target their livelihood. Then there are the advising researchers and the 43 international researchers, whose presence at the JvE is funded by the Dutch government. Each has attempted to respond in his/her own way; members of the staff covered the windows with the names of all former researchers, giving it the appearance of a war memorial. Some researchers suggested the JvE be gifted back to the Catholic Church

that founded it as a religious art school in 1957, to counterbalance the Protestant Rijks Academie. Meanwhile, an anonymous arsonist attempted to burn down the JvE. A new director, Lex ter Braak, has been brought on to take drastic measures to save the apparently sinking ship, while the fragmentation seen in the Opposition now runs deep into the JvE and its constituencies. Up to its present state, the JvE can be taken as an example of the freedoms provided and retracted within a social democratic state.

In response to the climate of funding cuts, two collaborative initiatives have emerged from within the JvE—a pre-Assembly and a general Assembly. The first was held on 5 November 2011, entitled "The Empowerment of the Right / The Dissolution of the Left: Revisiting Tactics of the Left Against Austerity and the Xenophobic Right." The second assembly is tentatively planned for 16 February 2012, the anniversary of the date the Maastricht Treaty brought the European Union into being. It will feature a broad swathe of activists, academics, intellectuals and Leftists—if the program does not disrupt backdoor negotiations between the JvE administration and the Dutch government.

From my position as a researcher at the JvE and as a founding member of Platypus (an international Leftist organization that has become a foreign observer in this momentous turn to the Right in Dutch politics), it has become clear that the indications of this sweeping policy shift were present years prior to the cross-sector funding cuts. With this in mind, the logic of Defense of Culture offered by the Dutch cultural sector opposition seems to be guided by a miscalculated pragmatism that only accommodates a far-Right government. The opposition need not be conciliatory or reactionary if the reality that there is literally very little or nothing left to lose ceases to be denied. Rather, it can admit the Left-wing character given it by the conditions of neo-liberal economics and Right wing public policies and expand its horizon to emerging conditions of resistance across the global North.

substantial dissent into a democratic model has been the Dutch approach of governance since the events of 1969. At present this same model is used to integrate, legitimize and shield the xenophobic Right because of its popular appeal.

[3] The traditional Left parties, The Labour Party (PVD) and Socialist Party (SP), in the Dutch Parliament have come out in opposition to the cuts and supported an advisory committee report that suggested minimal cuts to the previous funding structure. However, on other issues many of their policies are indistinguishable from the center-Right Christian Democratic party. When I refer to the Left in this article, I am not speaking of the PVD and the SP.

[4] The bulk of the arts opposition movement was made up of young students, many of who were being politicized for the first time. In the formative experience of protesting a marked turn to neo-liberal economic policies, the youth movement was being denied access to the tradition of the anti-capitalist Left, which could have inspired and guided coalition-building between sectors such as health and immigration.

[5] Meanwhile, the Dutch Supreme Court has recently cleared Wilders of personally inciting violence against Muslim population of the Netherlands. See David Jolly, "Dutch Court Acquits Anti-Islam Politician," *The New York Times* (23 June 2011).



www.firstnations.de/mining/fahlan.htm

## REVIEWS

### Decolonize Me

Curated by Heather Igloliorte (Inuit, Nunatsiavut, Labrador), including the work of Barry Pottle (Inuit, Nunatsiavut, Labrador), Cheryl L'Hirondelle (Métis/Cree/German, Toronto), Jordan Bennett (Mi'kmaq, Stephenville Crossing, Newfoundland), Nigit'stil Norbert (Gwich'in, Yellowknife), Bear Witness (Cayuga, Ottawa), Sonny Assu (Laich-kwil-tach [Kwakwaka'wakw], Vancouver); at the Ottawa Art Gallery 23/09 to 20/11/2011

Review by  
Linda Grussani

*Decolonize Me* (2011) showcases emerging and established Aboriginal artists who negotiate their own roles within Canada's colonial history through innovative photography, installation, new media and video. The exhibition opens with a series of photographs by Barry Pottle taken between 2009 and 2011, which sensitively and candidly captures Inuit identification tags, exhibited alongside portraits of Inuit. Known as E-numbers or Eskimo Tags, the small leather discs used to be worn at the behest of the Canadian government. Before colonization, Inuit did not have surnames or names that were easily translated into Roman orthography, and many children were given the same names as older family members. By the 1940s, the record-keeping

requirements of traders, religious missions and the federal government required simplicity, and in response, the identification tag system was introduced. [1] Through this series, Pottle literally gives a human face to this little-known living history, emphasizing its ongoing effect on Inuit communities.

It was with Pottle's photographic series that curator Heather Igloliorte began assembling a collection of artworks that provide a sustained reflection on legacies of colonization and their relationship to exhibitions of Aboriginal identities. The works explore the interplay of colonization and decolonization, while exposing how these processes impact Aboriginal and settler identities.

Sharing the room with Pottle's photographs is *treatycard* (2003-2011), the ongoing new media project by Cheryl L'Hirondelle, which offers visitors all of the tools necessary to select their own names and produce identification cards without having to seek government permission. A sign at a small desk equipped with a computer, digital camera and printer takes participants through the process of taking their own photograph and filling out all of the information to create a Treaty Card (or modify the details of an existing card). In her artist's statement, L'Hirondelle describes her work as "an attempt to address relations between natives and non-natives by re-examining the intent, issue and details of the Canadian government's 'Certificate of Indian Status.'"

Issues of Aboriginal identity are also at the centre of Jordan Bennett's work. In his graffiti

performance, *Laying down the law like an O.G.: from J-MacD to Chief Ste-V* (2011), Bennett has assigned each of Canada's prime ministers a graffiti tag name (for instance, Pierre Trudeau becomes Tru Doh!) using street posters that he has pasted to the gallery wall, layered one over another. This work is shown alongside documentation of Bennett's *Sovereignty Performance* (2009), created to draw attention to Aboriginal Sovereignty Week in Newfoundland. Using a copy of the Indian Act of 1876, Bennett took on the challenge of attempting to transcribe the entire text onto a recycled paper teepee, highlighting the rights and rules entrenched with becoming a "Status Indian." The exhibition includes the teepee created in the performance, documentary video and photographs, as well as online comments posted when news of the performance appeared in a local newspaper that range from supportive to racist.

Aboriginal representation, misrepresentation and stereotypes are at the centre of two video installations in the exhibition. *Assimilate This!* (2011), by media artist Bear Witness, is a two-channel video that overlays powerful video

imagery with an innovative and conceptual DJ mix, commanding attention to the prevalent use of Indian stereotypes in North American popular culture. In his work, *Bear Witness* seeks to not only identify racism but also rewrite histories of Aboriginal people from an Indigenous perspective. Instead of completely condemning pop culture, in his artist's statement *Bear Witness* asks the poignant questions: "What happens when there are no more Hollywood Indians? What happens if we forget Tonto?"

*Representation* (2009), a stop-motion video by Nigit'stil Norbert, is a self-portrait of the artist with braided hair that becomes unbound, juxtaposed against the image of a plastic souvenir-type doll in stereotypical dress that is in the process of being covered, bound and confined in white twine. To the artist, the doll is an ignorant portrayal of Aboriginal culture, embodying misrepresentations and stereotypes. Dolls are also featured in her work *Enframe* (2011), a series of black-and-white contemplative photographs that position a doll within a series of domineering landscapes. The dolls might be completely lost

Linda Grussani (Algonquin/Italian, Ottawa) is a Ph.D. student in Cultural Studies at Queen's University and curatorial assistant in the Indigenous art department at the National Gallery of Canada.

[1] The practice of identifying Inuit by numbers was discontinued in 1969. It was replaced by the equally problematic Project Surname, a program the Canadian government sponsored from 1969 to 1972, which resulted in every Inuit being renamed. Together, these programs serve as examples of the racism and colonialism that has marred Canada-Inuit relations.



←  
Barry Pottle, *Awareness* No. 1, 2011. Image courtesy of the Ottawa Art Gallery.

without the small but poignant addition of beadwork in the style of the artist's grandmother, which draws the viewer's eye directly to the small figures.

Representational and institutional authority are challenged in the work of Sonny Assu. In *The Longing Series* (2011), the artist reclaims lumber off-cuts created in the manufacturing process of log homes taking place on his home reserve on Quadra Island, just east of Vancouver Island. The off-cuts, left as they are, resemble Northwest Coast-style masks. Assu brilliantly challenges our culture of consumption by endowing these objects, which would otherwise be relegated to waste, with value and potential. By mounting the off-cuts on brass display stands and inserting them where one might encounter Northwest Coast masks—in the visible storage of the museum, on a plinth in a commercial gallery, and on the shelves of a souvenir shop—before photographing them (with Eric Deis), Assu assigns them value in an artistic and anthropological sense, while concurrently questioning what is and who determines whether culture is “authentic.”

The necessity of exhibitions like *Decolonize Me* is affirmed by Assu's poster-scale work *Chief Speaker* (2011), installed on the outside wall of the main gallery, which reprints Prime Minister Stephen Harper's infamous 2009 G-20 declaration that Canada has “no history of colonialism.” [2] *Chief Speaker* is exhibited alongside a video project by Igloliorte and academic Carla Taunton, recorded in Ottawa on Canada Day, in

which revelers are asked to reveal the depth of their knowledge concerning settler/non-settler relations. Igloliorte's curatorial strategy for reclaiming Aboriginal voice and space is made especially poignant because this travelling exhibition is first being shown in the former Carleton County Courthouse, one of the ultimate expressions of colonialism in Ottawa.

Engaging the dialogue that Igloliorte has sparked with *Decolonize Me*, the artists have all written statements that are exhibited alongside their work, and an extensive program of performance, artist's talks, curator's tour, critics' panel and video screenings has been organized. In sum, this exhibition demonstrates Igloliorte's laudable and innovative curatorial commitment to the inclusion of decolonizing methodologies into Western-influenced gallery spaces.

### Moving Across Borders

—  
Sharlene Bamboat and Alexis Mitchell's *Border Sounds*

Scotiabank Nuit Blanche, Toronto  
01/10/2011

Review by  
Natalie Kouri-Towe

In their sound, performance and video installation, *Border Sounds* (2011), created for Nuit

Blanche, Sharlene Bamboat and Alexis Mitchell bring global issues of nationalism, migration and movement to the quotidian space of the urban parking garage. Mixing sound and video with the participatory movement of the audience through the space of the underground parking garage, *Border Sounds* intervenes into what has largely become a night of partying in the streets of Toronto. *Border Sounds* invited Nuit Blanche participants into a dynamic and participatory engagement with the politics of movement through the form of the silent disco. [1]

Although *Border Sounds* is clearly a commentary on the violence of borders, the work does more than offer a critique of border crossing, the boundaries of nationalism and national belonging. The installation also invites its audience to reflect on the intricacies of life under borders by bringing into conversation the politics of movement, migration and nationalism, hybridity, subcultural production and the aesthetics that emerge through border encounters. Spread across a fenced off portion of underground parking garage, the artists reconstructed the space into a silent disco by removing neon lighting and illuminating the floor with video projections of images of borders, looped in quick sequence. The flashing images—which included pictures of the Canadian and Indian borders, maps of Pakistan and Israel/Palestine, and photos of border security—replaced the flashing lights of the discotheque. Across the space, Bamboat and Mitchell installed five stations constructed out

of wooden frames that looked like trees, with each branch holding a set of headphones. The audience was invited to participate by gathering in groups around each station to listen to a series of remixed dubstep tracks on headphones. Each track represented a different country, made legible only by the vocal recordings of different passport holders reading the inside jacket of their passports.

As *Border Sounds* rescripts the space of the parking garage into a disco, the artists transform a space of transitional movement, an urban space where many often feel unsafe, into a subcultural space of encounter, where participants are compelled to suspend their investments in national borders and belonging. By coupling dubstep music with the concept of a silent disco in conversation with national borders, Bamboat and Mitchell raise a number of questions about what gets produced aesthetically in the messy space of borders. For instance, who gets to produce national culture? Do subcultures belong to the nation, or are they subversive of national belonging? The juxtaposition of the nation, represented in the form of the passport, with the subcultural aesthetics of dubstep in *Border Sounds* disrupts the way we commonly think of borders as fixed, and compels us to reflect on how borders are as much a product of cultural and aesthetic circulations as they are political and economic divisions of nations.

For Bamboat and Mitchell, the project of encountering and contesting national borders is as

[2] David Ljunggren, “Every G20 nation wants to be Canada, insists PM,” *Reuters* (September 25, 2009).

Natalie Kouri-Towe is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education and Women and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto. Her research examines transnational queer activism and the politics of solidarity. Her work has been featured in other Canadian publications, including *Briarpatch* (May/June 2011) and *Upping the Anti* 9 and 13.

Sharlene Bamboat is a film and video artist whose work centres around aspects of diasporas, critiques of nationalism and the ways in which the queer body relates to sites of mobility.

Alexis Mitchell is a documentary filmmaker and media artist whose work explores performativity, memory, statehood, space and architecture.

much an aesthetic response to their personal experiences as it is an intervention into the politics of borders and nationalism. Bamboat, who was born in Pakistan, has lived through the effects of the border politics between India and Pakistan. Unable to travel to India in 2008, she experienced first hand the isolating experience of being denied passage across borders; a solitary experience that is, nonetheless, shared by others with Pakistani nationality. For Mitchell, who grew up in Toronto and attended Hebrew day school until the age of 12, the disconnect between her early education and her later engagement with the politics of Israel and Palestine demonstrates how contestation over borders is more complex and shifting than nationalist narratives provide. [2]

In their 2009 film and video installation, *Inextricable*, both artists began working with the problem of borders by queering the notion of national belonging in diasporic attachments to the idea of home. In *Border Sounds*, they continue to challenge the way we conceive of national belonging by confronting how movement across borders is conditioned by the structures of travel documentation, nationalism and conflict. Formally, the use of headphones at listening stations reflects the systemic yet individualistic experience that shapes how people cross borders. Border crossing is structured through the practices of national security, immigration, economic transactions, mobility and national belonging, but the experience of crossing a border

is one of isolation.

Using dubstep, an underground music genre that is beginning to grow in popularity in Canada but already has an established following in Europe, Bamboat and Mitchell worked with sound designer Heather Kirby to produce five tracks, remixing dubstep beats with audio recordings of the text found on the inside jacket of the passports of Canada, India, Pakistan and Israel, and the Palestinian ID card for the West Bank. Dubstep itself is a kind of border music. The genre emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in south London, and combined electronic dance music with Jamaican and Caribbean dub, often influenced by east London grime. Musical genres like dubstep mark a moment of hybridity, or cultural plurality, where cultural mixings produce new markers of identity and artistic production in the encounter between migrant or diasporic cultures with the dominant and subcultural genres of the host nation.

Like the remixing of dubstep with national passport texts and the remapping of a parking garage into a disco, *Border Sounds* inspires its audience to question how music and borders—how culture and nation—play with and against each other. That we can dance to dubstep in a Toronto parking garage, a genre that emerged through diasporic hybrid encounters in the hub of the British empire and in the location of one of Britain's few remaining colonies, is indicative of how notions of cultural purity or pure identities are falsely produced in the construction of national borders.

For Sara Ahmed and Anne-Marie Fortier, “the present global context of flows, fluidity and transnational connections disturbs, if not forever dissolves, the temporal, spatial and emotive certainties of ‘communities,’ whether national, regional or local.” [3] As I circulated through the installation, I joined others—often strangers and sometimes friends—each time I put on a new set of headphones at a different station. My entry into a collective listening experience brought me into physical proximity to those who shared the station with me, while at the same time I listened to the tracks in isolation of others, able to adjust my own headphones and move on to a new station autonomously from the other participants. As a participant in the installation, I was confronted with the dislocation between my own experiences crossing borders, and my ability to reflect on and recognize the reality of borders for places I had never been. As Ahmed and Fortier argue, the globalized context of our contemporary moment disrupts how we actually move and circulate across borders. That as a person of Jewish ancestry I might more easily cross into the

bordered space of Israel is at odds with the reality that my mixed-ancestry also marks me as racialized, threatening my exclusion from such movements if I do not properly embody the right kind of national border-crosser. These contradictions in my own subjectivity echo the contradictions raised by *Border Sounds* in the way the work simultaneously highlights and obscures the nation through the visual, spatial and aural construction of the piece.

As I observed others move throughout the space of the installation, I noticed how people attempted to understand the languages spoken on each track, trying to identify the nationality of each vocalist. Some people had difficulty distinguishing between tracks, while others guessed at the nationality of the tracks by trying to distinguish the accents of the vocal performers. That the track representing Israel was recorded by the voice of a Palestinian speaking Hebrew with an Arabic accent led to further disruption of national belonging, as participants fluent in Hebrew sometimes noticed the dissonance between the recorded voice and what they might imagine to be



[1] Playing with the concept of the dance club or disco, the silent disco simultaneously isolates participants as it invites them to join others in the listening experience. Participants who are not plugged in experience the disco as a silent space; as they plug in to each station, they join a group of others listening to the same track, and join a collective listening experience. The silent disco reshapes the dance club experience, producing a dissonance between the experience of listening to music and moving through space.

[2] An example of the convoluted border politics between the two is Israel's construction of the “Separation Fence,” “Security Fence,” or “Apartheid Wall,” in 2002. In 2004, the United Nations ruled the construction of the wall illegal by international law.

[3] Sara Ahmed and Anne-Marie Fortier, “Re-Imagining Communities,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6.3 (2003): 255.

Sharlene Bamboat and Alexis Mitchell, *Border Sounds*, 2011. Photography by Chelsea Lichtman. Image courtesy of the photographer.

the proper-sounding, national Israeli subject. Others noticed that the voice of the tracks for Israel and Palestine were recorded using the same speaker, further blurring the lines of national belonging and borders, as the complex relationship between nation and national subject were disturbed.

In *Border Sounds*, questions of national borders and belonging are highlighted in the national divisions between listening stations, at the same time that these borders are blurred in the hybrid cultural mixings of dubstep with the surprisingly homogenous texts from the inside of the passports. With the exception of the Palestinian ID card, the passports all speak with the same vocabulary, even when written in different languages. The passport represents an extension of the nation to the bearer of the passport, and as each track invites the listener to identify with the common vocabulary of the English versions of the passport texts, the markers of national belonging are made ambivalent as most participants lose the ability to understand the content with the national languages of each country. That the text of the Palestine ID card, and subsequently, the track for the Palestine station of *Border Sounds*, is notably different than those of other nations, signals the effects of Palestinian life under the contested and highly militarized border of Israeli occupation.

*Border Sounds* draws participants into the silent disco and reminds them that not all movements are equal, that how we move and why we move is as much a factor

of the political divisions of nationhood, notions of national security and sovereignty, as it is about individual freedom and autonomy. The contradictions of national belonging are clear: that some people belong—as bearers of passports or as ideal citizens—is always in juxtaposition to those who can never fully or properly belong, whose movements are restricted, who are expelled from or barred entry into the nation.

### Aganetha Dyck and William Eakin's *Light*

Michael Gibson Gallery, Winnipeg  
01 to 29 / 10 / 2011

Review by  
Julian Jason Haladyn and Miriam Jordan

For the exhibition, *Light*, Winnipeg artists Aganetha Dyck and William Eakin bring together their unique approach to art in a dynamic collaboration. In their individual practices, both artists have continuously transformed found objects through subtle processes of alteration, revealing the minute beauty and material qualities of ordinary objects. Dyck is well known for her twenty-year partnership with honeybees, which has grown out of her interest in their construction of space through the production of beeswax and honey. Dyck is keenly interested in the crucial role that bees play in the

ecosystem; without bees the pollination of food crops is jeopardized. She has collaborated extensively with these communal insects by placing a variety of reclaimed objects into their hives, allowing the bees to alter the forms and images by covering them with delicate networks of honeycombs.

Eakin has a similar fascination with found objects, which he carefully organizes into collections and transforms from the mundane to the extraordinary through his sensually lush approach to photography. His photographs are well known for their uncanny ability to reframe ordinary objects as commentaries on the human psyche, reflecting, for instance, the creative impulse to amass collections of ordinary things, and how belongings accumulate both meaning and value. In Dyck and Eakin's new collaboration, *Light*, they present an engaging sculptural and

photographic project that brings their separate practices into a collaborative dialogue: a collection of table lamps is assembled by Eakin, each of which is collaboratively transformed into a sculpture by Dyck and the bees (with Eakin's assistance) before being photographed by Eakin.

Over the last two years, since being diagnosed with a severe allergy to bee stings, Dyck has had to reposition her work with honeybees, a collaboration that has come to define her artistic practice. Prior to the development of her allergy, she engaged directly with the bees by placing objects in the hives and moving them to orchestrate the labouring bees. For the work presented in *Light*, Dyck took on a supervisory role and interacted from a distance with her miniature partners, directing Eakin via cell phone as he worked in the apiary.

Aganetha Dyck is best known for her collaborative work with live honeybees, transforming common objects into ethereal and delicate sculptures. In 2007, Dyck won the Governor General's Award in Visual Arts and the Manitoba Arts Council Arts Award of Distinction.

A compulsive collector of everyday objects, William Eakin's photographs are an inquiry into the value of ordinary things. Eakin received the Duke and Duchess Prize in Photography, and has work in the collections of museums such as the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography and the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Julian Jason Haladyn is a Canadian writer and artist. He is the author of *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donné* (London: Afterall, 2010), as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters on art, film and visual theory.

Miriam Jordan is a First Nations writer and artist. Her writings on art, film and culture have appeared in numerous publications and book chapters, including a collaborative text with Jamelie Hassan in *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011).

←  
Aganetha Dyck, *Pink Pillar with Couple*, 2011. Image courtesy of the artist and Michael Gibson Gallery.



The lamps used in this series of works were chosen by Eakin from his extensive collection of collections. In Eakin's solo projects, he gathers and arranges objects—such as tattered, found photographs in *Fading Dream* (2009), cookie tins in *Night Garden* (2000) and trophies in *Monument* (1994) in enlivening configurations before photographing them. With the lamp collection, there is a shared functionality that connects otherwise visibly disparate items. The lamps themselves are unique in their charming quirkiness; among them is a wooden Mickey Mouse, a baroque couple lavishly rendered in ceramic, a matador swirling his red cape behind him, a giant green foot with elves sitting on it, a cartoonish squirrel, a souvenir Leaning Tower of Pisa and a green glass arm of the Statue of Liberty. The lamps are the scale of bedside table lamps and possess a fantastical dream-like quality, which Eakin emphasizes with his dramatic photographs.

Once the bees completed their work on the seven lamps, Eakin photographed them in his studio with a toy camera. As a result of the deliberately distorting lens of the camera, the lamps seem to glow against dark backdrops with a hyper-real gleam that is almost hallucinogenic in its clarity. Viewed alongside the original lamps, which are arrayed in front of or near the photographs, these photographic worlds heighten the already intense play of object and image. The soft yellow beeswax creates meandering hexagonal patterns across the surfaces of the lamps, and emits a delicate

scent into the space of the gallery, reflecting and amplifying the sensorial quality of Eakin's photographs.

There is an interesting back-and-forth visual exchange among the various pieces on display, with the photographs of the beeswax-encrusted lamps revealing surface features and glowing colours that are not immediately obvious in the sculptures themselves. What is most striking about the relationship between Dyck and Eakin in *Light* is the material presence the project offers as a whole, with the lamps giving a kind of grounding to the photographs, which themselves reveal the underlying miniature worlds of the honeycomb-covered lamps. Dyck's sculpture, *Leaning Tower of Pisa* (2011), is covered with a lacy web of honeycombs that seem to be growing right out of the miniature arches of the tower. Eakin's photograph of the same sculpture, *Light 0009* (2011), spectacularly enlarges the diminutive lamp to larger-than-life, emphasizing the monumental nature of the organically-fused tower and honeycombs through a dramatic play of light and shadows. In *Light 0007* (2011), he backlights Dyck's *Pink Pillar with Couple* (2011), creating a surreal shadow of the female figure's beehive hairdo in front of a honey-coloured mesh of wax cells, which fade into purple and then darkness. The altered lamp itself reflects the passage of time through the wax traces left behind by the bees, which obscure the features of the elaborately dressed couple and render them ghostly specters.

Though Dyck and Eakin both present us with the same objects, they

are radically different in their sculptural and photographic formats. This juxtaposition emphasizes elements that appear small and inconsequential at first glance, but are profoundly affecting at second glance. Such is the case with Eakin's *Light 0073* (2011), which reveals a translucent green hand emerging from amber beeswax; against a fluctuating violet-black backdrop the lamp glows with an electric luminosity. This prompts a closer look at Dyck's corresponding piece, *Green Hand* (2011), which is draped with honey-combs, resonating an apian energy that eclipses the kitschy qualities of the lamp, transforming it into an oddly alluring sculpture. Their collaboration is evocative and thoughtfully examines the quiet succession of time and change on these seemingly randomly-selected lamps, which were likely cherished by some of their previous owners and disdained by others. In fact, a similar aesthetic moment occurred between the artists, since Dyck, as she laughingly told us, found several of the lamps to be hideous before the bees transformed them. The collaboration between Dyck and Eakin unfolds as an intriguing material process of change facilitated and made wondrous through their interaction with bees.

### Responding to an Overdue Truth, an Unashamed Lie and Each Other

#### Leah Decter's (official denial) trade value in progress

Traveling exhibition  
curated by Jaimie Isaac,  
2010–ongoing

Review by  
Nahed Mansour

Canada has a brutal one hundred and twenty-six year old genocidal policy of developing, funding and administering residential schools that forcefully assimilated Indigenous children into Canadian society by “killing the Indian in the child.” [1] Mention of this fact in national discourse is modest in relationship to the impact this history has exerted on Indigenous communities. Although severely overdue, the official apology offered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2008 was considered historic since it was the first time Canada had admitted its role in administering the residential school system. Addressing the estimated eighty thousand living First Nations, Métis and Inuit survivors (half of the estimated total of students who were forced into the Indian Residential school system), Harper proclaimed that “Today, we recognize this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm and has no place in our country... The Government

Nahed Mansour is a Toronto-based artist that works in performance, installation and video. Her works have been presented throughout Canada, including: *SINGER* (Whipper-snapper Gallery, Toronto); *Varied Toil* (Modern Fuel, Kingston); *Vertigo Villigo* (La Centrale, Montreal); *Kh* (MAI, Montreal); *Measuring* (SAVAC's MONITER 8, Toronto); *Disorientalism* (AKA Gallery, Saskatoon); and *Darkening Cells* (7a'11d Festival, Toronto). Since completing her MFA at Concordia University, she has worked as a Program Coordinator at Mayworks Festival (Toronto) while continuing to pursue independent curatorial projects.

Leah Decter's (official denial) trade value in progress (2010–ongoing) is actively circulating. Responses are being collected and sewn onto the blanket, and the work will be presented publicly as it travels across the country.

[1] Article 2e of the United Nation's *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, refers to the practice of “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” with the intent to “destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group” as an act of genocide.

of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly." [2] This overdue pronouncement was soon followed by an "official denial," when in 2009, only a year after the official apology was offered, Harper stated at the G20 summit in Pittsburgh "We have no history of colonialism." [3] The contradiction between these two statements was the impetus of Leah Decter's ongoing dialogical work titled *(official denial) trade value in progress*.

The object-based component of *(official denial) trade value in progress* is a single twelve by fifteen foot textile made up of five Hudson's Bay point blankets. The iconic red, green, yellow and indigo stripes that decorate the white wool background are randomly reassembled to make up an unsystematic grid of clashing verticals and horizontal stripes. While the textile is easily discernable as belonging to Hudson's Bay point blankets, their new format suggests a bulkiness and heaviness that is seldom associated with the comfort of a blanket. In the centre of this reconfigured material are the six words that make up Harper's statement of denial, sewn by machine in a typed font. Building on the participatory nature of her previous work, Decter invites the general public to provide a written retort to Harper's denial of Canada's colonial past and present. The responses are collected in a book from which participants are asked to select a previous response that speaks to them. Once a word, phrase or sentence is selected, the participants

can then choose to take part in a sewing action, in which they transcribe the chosen text onto the oversized blanket and effectively make visible other participants' words.

Curated by Jaimie Isaac, *(official denial) trade value in progress* was first exhibited in Winnipeg as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) National Event (16–19 June 2010). [4] Inaugurating the work at the TRC provided the first round of responses to Harper's statement from survivors, their families, communities and others directly affected by the residential school system. Since then, the work has been traveling across Canada, expanding and diversifying the ongoing public engagement with the central text. Decter and Isaac make the sewing actions accessible to the general public by inviting interested individuals to host, participate or contribute to the book of responses. Sewing actions have since been held in a variety of venues, including schools, universities, community organizations, galleries and homes. Decter's textile also lends itself to being exhibited or presented in gallery spaces as a tapestry on which viewers can read an ever-growing number of responses sewn onto the blankets. The many testimonies and personal anecdotes attest to an impressive array of reactions to Harper's historic amnesia. Both the artist and curator, non-Native and Native respectively, emphasize the importance of a participatory response to Harper's statements, affirming that issues of colonialism must be prioritized and discussed



at a national level in order for communities to share, converse, exchange, learn and heal.

While the respondents' ages, races, genders, languages of choice and proximity to the history of the residential school system are varied, most of the responses directly address Harper's words of denial. One such response asserts "We have no history that is not about colonialism." Other responses stress the irreversible impact of residential schools on generations of Indigenous peoples, which cannot be effaced with a simple speech. As one responder confesses "Because of my grandma's disgust with her own culture, I never got to learn to speak Cree." The sense of fury towards the loss of language, family, land and community is evident in the majority of responses written in the book. This feeling is multiplied when readers come to recognize that the words sewn onto the blankets are the personal responses of participants, chosen and quoted in turn by other participants. This trade in words enables a lateral dialogue between participants that stands in counterpoint to the oppositional forms of address critiquing Harper's discourse of official denial.

These tensions are made more vivid by the very material that Decter has pointedly chosen to display the words on. One participant's response directly underscores the genocidal history of the Hudson's Bay point blankets by questioning "Are these blankets infested, too?" [5]

*(official denial) trade value in progress* emphasizes the significance of an ongoing exchange of words. Decter's collection of responses is striking in its ability to reveal a widespread desire to counter Canadian national myths. Directly or indirectly, all of the participants stress that Harper's failure to admit to Canada's history of colonialism calls attention to his unresponsive attitude towards the current conditions of Indigenous peoples today. As such, an engagement with Decter's work entails both an acknowledgement and a contribution to a large and ongoing dialogue about the possibilities of true reconciliation.

←  
Leah Decter,  
*(official denial) trade value in progress*, 2011.  
Image courtesy  
of the artist.

[2] "Prime Minister Harper offers full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools system," *Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper* (11 June 2008).

[3] David Ljunggren, "Every G20 nation wants to be Canada, insists PM," *Reuters* (25 September 2009).

[4] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada documents the truth about Canada's residential school system through testimonial statements from individuals and communities directly affected by the impact of the schools.

[5] The Hudson's Bay Company is notorious for its complicity in the colonial-settler project in Canada. HBC blankets are believed to have been infested with small pox, then traded and distributed to aboriginal communities to annihilate their population in order to appropriate Native land.

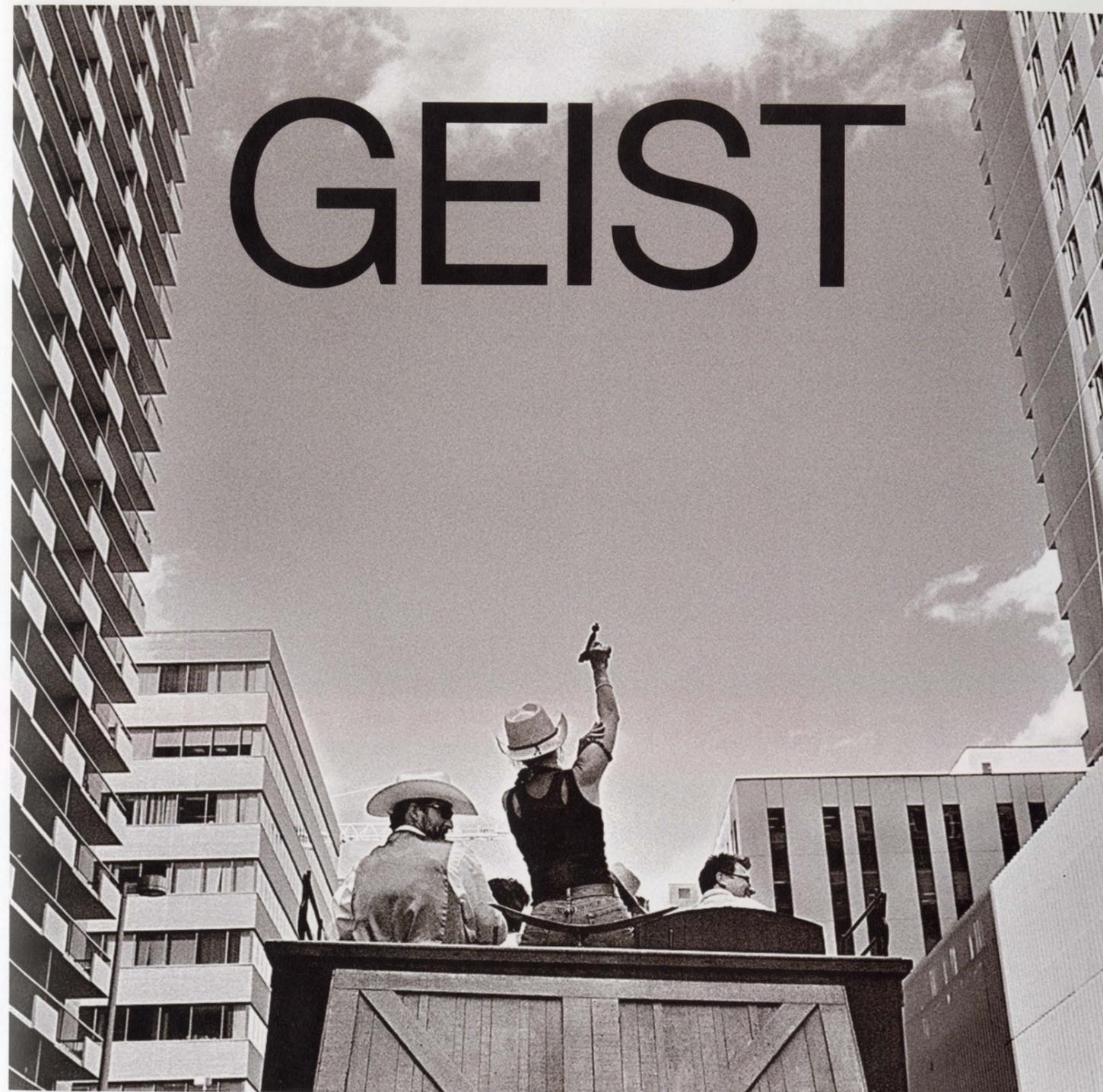


photo by David Campion in Geist 74

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"Weirdo neat  
canmag!"  
"Maddeningly  
homespun!"  
"Better than any  
spam or tv show!"

—*Geist* subscribers write

TORONTO'S 33RD ANNUAL CONVERGENCE OF CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

# THE RHUBARB FESTIVAL

FEBRUARY 8 – 19, 2012

**buddies**  
IN BAD TIMES THEATRE

[BUDDIESINBADTIMES.COM](http://BUDDIESINBADTIMES.COM)  
[FACEBOOK.COM/BUDDIESINBADTIMES](http://FACEBOOK.COM/BUDDIESINBADTIMES)  
[TWITTER@YYZBUDDIES](http://TWITTER@YYZBUDDIES)  
[YYZBUDDIES.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://YYZBUDDIES.BLOGSPOT.COM)

**aceartinc.**

2 MARCH - 5 APRIL

haunted/talisman  
Marigold Santos



2nd floor 290 McDermot Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3B 0T2  
204.944.9763 gallery@aceart.org www.aceart.org



GALLERY

critical art + culture

Established in 1971 as one of the first not-for-profit, artist-run centres, A Space Gallery's mandate encompasses the investigation, presentation and interpretation of contemporary and experimental art forms. We are committed to programming critical and politically engaged work that is oriented around non-dominant communities and crosses disciplines, cultures, abilities, gender and sexual orientation as well as work in new media and technologies.

For information on our semi annual calls for submissions visit [www.aspacegallery.org](http://www.aspacegallery.org)

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

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



PLUG IN INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART  
1-460 PORTAGE AVENUE [plugin.org](http://plugin.org)

LANI MAESTRO | "her rain"  
October 29, 2011 - January 8, 2012

Curated by Makiko Hara

Organized by Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art and Centre A, Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art

Like-Minded

January 28, 2012 - March 25, 2012

Curated by Micah Lexier

MICHAEL DUMONTIER | A Moon or a Button

January 28, 2012 - March 25, 2012

Curated by Micah Lexier

My Winnipeg

At MIAM (Musée International des Arts Modestes), Sète, France  
November 5, 2011 - May 20, 2012

Co-organized by Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, la maison rouge, MIAM, Gallery One One One at the School of Art, University of Manitoba and the National Arts Centre

## Dunlop Art Gallery

CENTRAL GALLERY

**Shelagh Keeley**

Curated by Linda Jansma

Organized by the Robert McLaughlin Gallery

DECEMBER 16 TO FEBRUARY 12

**Trevor Gould**

Curated by Dr. Curtis Collins

FEBRUARY 24 TO APRIL 15

TREVOR GOULD  
watercolour on paper, 2011  
from *A Project for Orangutans*



SHERWOOD VILLAGE GALLERY

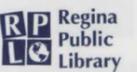
**Press: The Work of Articulate Ink**

Curated by Wendy Peart

JANUARY 14 TO MARCH 15



DUNLOP ART GALLERY  
REGINA PUBLIC LIBRARY 2311 12TH AVENUE  
REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN, CANADA S4P 3Z5  
WWW.DUNLOPARTGALLERY.ORG TEL 306 | 777 6040



**AILLEURS ICI**  
MONTREAL, ARTS INTERCULTURELS



Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo and Marigold Santos  
PERSONAL MYTHOLOGIES

Manuel Mathieu  
SANS TITRE

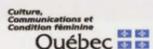
**JANUARY 14 TO FEBRUARY 18, 2012**

**MARCH 29 TO MAY 5, 2012**

Gallery Hours  
Tuesday to Saturday | 12AM – 6PM **Free Admission**

3680 Jeanne-Mance St. # 103  
Montreal, Qc, H2X 2K5 | **514-982-1812**

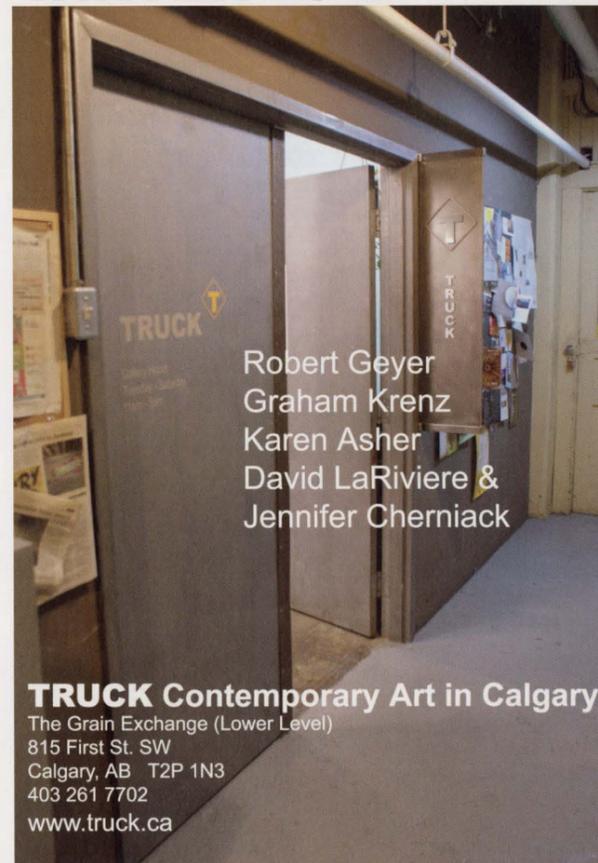
mai



m-a-i.qc.ca



**WINTER 2012**



Robert Geyer  
Graham Krenz  
Karen Asher  
David LaRivière &  
Jennifer Cherniack

**TRUCK Contemporary Art in Calgary**  
The Grain Exchange (Lower Level)  
815 First St. SW  
Calgary, AB T2P 1N3  
403 261 7702  
www.truck.ca



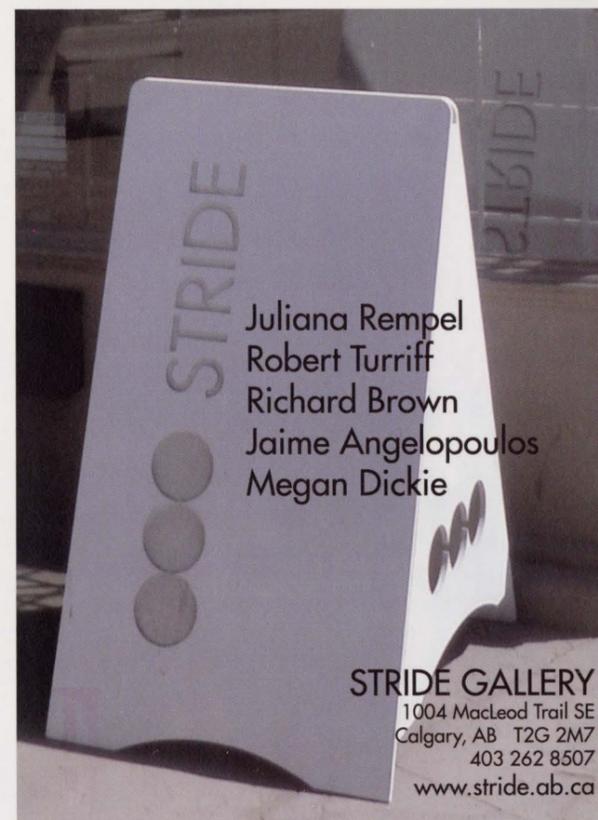
**POLITICAL  
POETICS:  
SUZY  
LAKE**

ORGANIZED AND CIRCULATED BY THE  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO ART CENTRE

JANUARY 5TH TO  
FEBRUARY 18TH, 2011

OPENING RECEPTION  
THURSDAY JANUARY 19TH  
AT 7:30 P.M.

MCINTOSH GALLERY  
The University of Western Ontario  
www.mcintoshgallery.ca



Juliana Rempel  
Robert Turriff  
Richard Brown  
Jaime Angelopoulos  
Megan Dickie

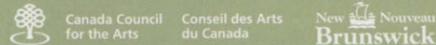
**STRIDE GALLERY**  
1004 MacLeod Trail SE  
Calgary, AB T2G 2M7  
403 262 8507  
www.stride.ab.ca

**third space  
tiers espace**

Third Space Gallery // Galerie Tiers Espace  
49 Canterbury St. Saint John New Brunswick E2L 2C6  
506-696-0862 tiersespace@gmail.com thirdspacegallery.ca

**SIGNALS**

SIGNALS is a succession of locative performances that utilize both old and new technologies. Audience participation animates and shapes the performances with varying degrees of control by the artist.  
Nate Larson + Miami Shindelman Geolocations: Maritimes February 2-March 1, 2012 [pictured here]  
Kay Burns GPS Walking Tour Ongoing starting December 3, 2011.



Two years ago today I lost my Dad... How sure that I miss you Dad. #RP



wrong turn up line, wrong gun got 777 gun yehh heah?



Tell me I'm not making a mistake. Tell me you're worth the wait. #P



Pretty sure I just heard a gun shot lol

**Rosalie Favell: Living Evidence**

Organized by MSVU Art Gallery  
Ingrid Jenkner, Curator  
19 November through 19 February 2012

**Ruth Cuthand: Backtalk 1983-2009**

Co-produced by the Mendel Art Gallery and TRIBE, Inc, Saskatoon  
Organized and circulated by the Mendel Art Gallery  
Jen Budney, Curator  
14 January through 11 March 2012

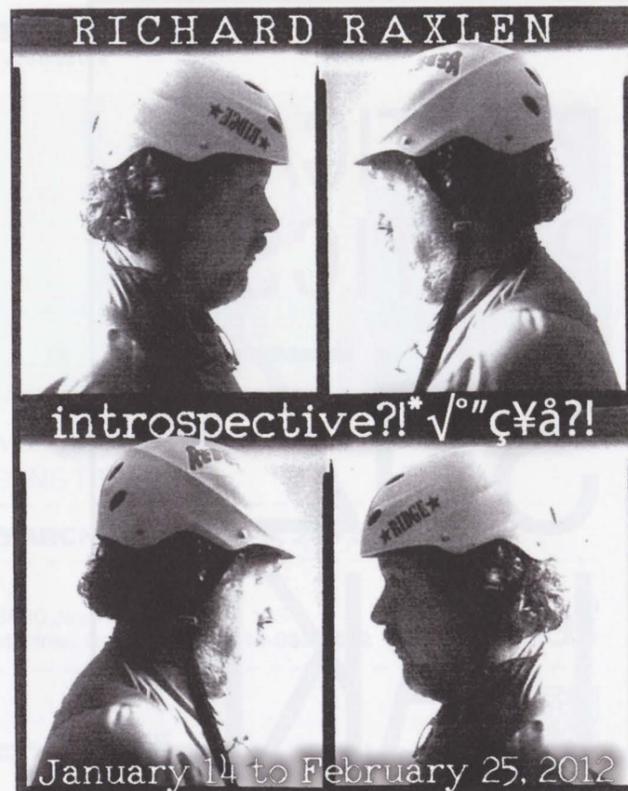
**Susanna Heller: Drawings of Bill**

Organized by MSVU Art Gallery  
Ingrid Jenkner, Curator  
25 February through 29 April 2012

Organized by MSVU Art Gallery. Financial support from the Canada Council for the Arts is gratefully acknowledged.

**msvu art gallery**

Mount Saint Vincent University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Canada B3M 2J6  
902.457.6160  
www.msvuart.ca



**OPEN SPACE** 510 FORT STREET, 2ND FLOOR VICTORIA, BC V8W 1E6 250.383.8835 openspace@openspace.ca www.openspace.ca

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BRITISH COLUMBIA / Le Centre des Arts  
VICTORIA FOUNDATION



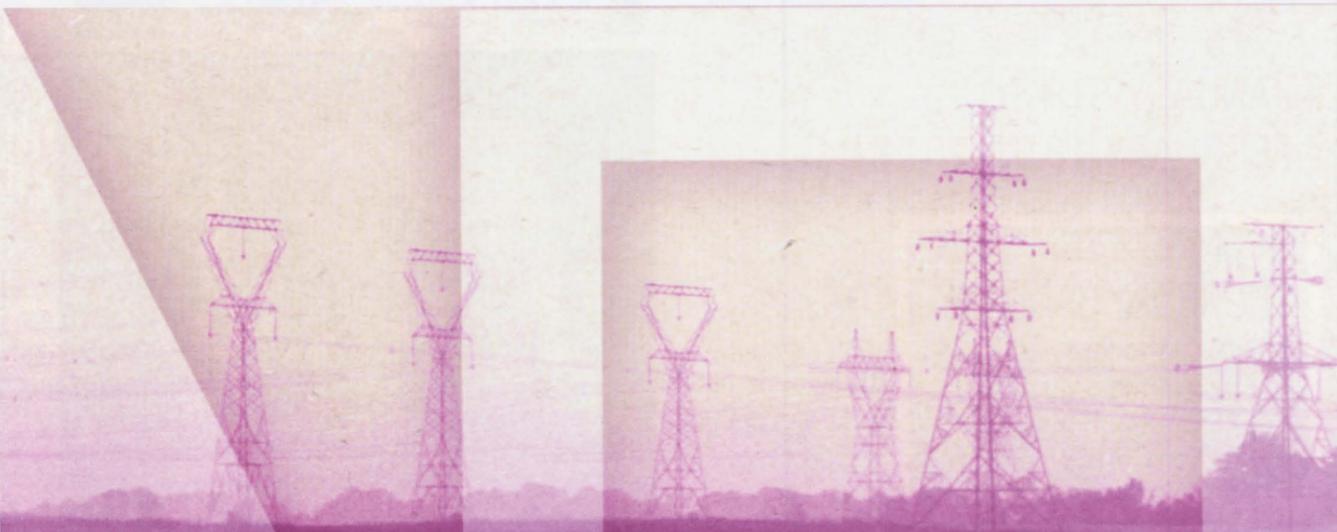
Jason Baerg, *Relations*, detail, White Water Gallery, 2011. Images courtesy of Eric Boissonneault Photography

**Jason Baerg: Relations**  
November 18, 2011 – January 7, 2012



Jason Baerg, *Relations*, installation view, White Water Gallery

The White Water Gallery is proud to present Jason Baerg's most recent body of work, the *Relations* series. Exploring the relationship between the Sun, the Moon, the Earth and humanity, this multimedia installation features several painted sculptural forms and a video projection. This exhibition will be on display at the White Water Gallery from November 18, 2011 until January 7, 2012. For more information please visit: [www.jasonbaerg.com](http://www.jasonbaerg.com).



**Four From Six**

Four Artists from Six Nations: Tracey Anthony, Jay Carrier, Elliott Doxtater-Wynn & Brenda Mitten  
Curated by Shelley Niro, In the Show Room Gallery  
*Takin' it to the Curb*, an installation by Clinton Michael Lown in the Plate Glass Gallery  
Opening Reception Saturday 3 March at 3pm, on display until Saturday 5 May 2012

**nac**  
niagara artists centre

ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL / CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
Ontario Trillium Foundation / Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario  
CITY OF ST. CATHARINES  
Canada Council for the Arts / Conseil des Arts du Canada  
HAMILTON ARTISTS INC / ARTIST RUN CENTRE

**WHITE WATER GALLERY**  
ARTIST-RUN CENTRE

ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL / CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

Canada Council for the Arts / Conseil des Arts du Canada

Ontario Trillium Foundation / Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario

ONTARIO ARTS FOUNDATION / FONDATION DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

NECO  
Community Futures Development Corporation / Société de gestion du Fonds de patronage du Nord de l'Ontario

Ontario  
Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation / Société de gestion du Fonds de patronage du Nord de l'Ontario

[www.whitewatergallery.com](http://www.whitewatergallery.com)



# ***Deconstructed: Works from the permanent collection***

November 2011–May 2012

The Varley Art Gallery  
216 Main Street Unionville, Markham ON L3R 2H1  
Guided tours at 2pm on Saturdays and Sundays  
[www.varleygallery.ca](http://www.varleygallery.ca)

James Wilson Morrice, *Morocco-Carnival Time* (detail), n.d., oil on panel, collection of the Varley Art Gallery of Markham, gift of the estate of Kathleen Gormley McKay

 ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

 MARKHAM