

Locus suspectus

UNCANNY SITES OF VISUAL CULTURE



MICHEL DE BROIN AT MERCER UNION
INSTANT COFFEE & ANITRA HAMILTON'S SACHEL GALLERY
INHABITING THE HISTORIES OF THE APARTMENT SHOW
BGL'S TRAGICOMIC MANIFESTATIONS

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On the cover: BGL, *Montrer ses troués*, 2005.
Manif d'art de Québec, street performance.

This page: BLAIR BRENNAN, *Caretaker and
Tenants*. Bedroom of Apartment 5, Apartment
Show, March 15 - 18, 2007. Photo by Yarko
Yopyk. **Next page:** ISTVAN KANTOR, *Street
Action with File Cabinet*, August 9th, 2007.
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IMAGES AT RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM: a) ATOM DEGUIRE, *In Transit*, 2006. Toronto Transit Commission, Toronto. Public Art Intervention with duct tape, Installation Photograph. **b)** JO SPENCE, ROSY MARTIN, MAGGIE MURRAY, TERRY DENNETT, *The Picture of Health*, 1982–1986. B/W photographs, newspaper cuttings, laminated on plastic panels selection (64 elements in total) © Jo Spence Memorial Archive; photo: Jens Ziehe / documenta GmbH. **c)** MICHEL DE BROIN, *Shared Propulsion Car*, 2005. Courtesy of the artist. **d)** CHRISTINE KIROUAC, projection of *Sentry*. Digital still of screening May 2007, Toronto waterfront. Documentation by Toni Hafkensheid.



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EDITORIAL

EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, a small blip appears on the arts-community radar that transfuses the scene with renewed energy and provocative questions regarding socially sanctioned behaviour in a socially-anxious cultural climate. Whether the blip occurs as a highly choreographed performance in a wading pool, a gallery re-staging of an intimate dinner party, a city-wide arts festival, or the reconceptualization of a traditional curatorial strategy, it signifies that art has become uncubed—that it has moved beyond the standard, white cube gallery setting.

I am always pleased when such events are perceived as newsworthy enough to make it into the national section of my newspaper. Recently, I came across the image of two police officers flanking the 1986 Buick Regal that is artist Michel de Broin's pedal powered *Shared Propulsion Car*. The Buick was pulled over by police in October during a joyride through the streets of Toronto. The driver was issued a traffic ticket for operating an unsafe vehicle—a charge that the artist vehemently denies. Without the additional legal dilemma regarding one's right to pedal one's car, *Shared Propulsion Car* already underscores a number of significant socio-political issues—the West's over-consumption and desire for power, and the environmental destruction that lies in its wake. Of the 15 km/hour vehicle, de Broin was quoted as saying, "The car is not efficient as a transport vehicle, and it is too ambivalent to serve any cause except one: The right to go slow."

During the same month in a different part of the world, Tokyo, Japan, hosted the Artist as Activist festival where *Vapour Trail*—a performance by German artist Valerian Maly and Swiss artist Klara Schilliger—was interrupted by Japanese authorities. The performance addressed issues of global warming and environmental waste as the artists dragged twenty-kilogram ice blocks through a pedestrian space adjoining two of Tokyo's busiest train/subway stations. Drawing a large audience, the piece unintentionally concluded with station guards and police ordering the artists and festival organizers to wipe up all traces of water and debris from the ice that melted during the performance.

While the aforementioned examples raised a considerable amount of press and public attention, interventions that are more subtle in nature, informally organized artist collectives, and alternative art events are also invaluable components in maintaining a city's cultural vibrancy. For example, in an abandoned apartment building in downtown Edmonton, *The Apartment Show* brought emerging and established artists together for a weekend of site-specific installations, performances, and interventions. Moreover, the aftershocks from the event prolonged a sense of dynamism and cohesion in Edmonton's very eclectic art scene. As well, the first edition of the Chicago-based publication *PHONEBOOK* acts as an inspiring model for other cities to create a similar resource combining essays and information on artist-run centres and alternative exhibition venues as a means of connecting visual arts communities that share similar artistic agendas.

While artists like Québec trio BGL deal with their disdain for the white cube by transforming the atmosphere with lighting and furniture, other artists view the relationship between public space and the traditional gallery setting as one that is inevitable and necessary. Toronto artist Atom Deguire creates curious forays into public spaces, but due to the temporal nature of his work, acknowledges the importance of documentation and imagery as an aspect of his work that bridges the inside of the gallery with the outside world.

This issue of Locus Suspectus celebrates artists and curators who draw attention to the politics of space by pushing the boundaries of conventional exhibitions. Many of the artists featured in the following pages have different motivations for working uncubed. Yet the common thread that links them lies in the desire to transform space, evoke curiosity, and create an experience that engages and connects an audience in ways that the white cube alone cannot.

- Jolene Pozniak, Editor-in-Chief

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UNCANNY SITES OF VISUAL CULTURE

IN BRIEF

ARBOUR LAKE SGHOOOL CALGARY

DEEP IN THE HEART of suburban Calgary, on a cul-de-sac just like any other, in a house just like any other, resides The Arbour Lake Sghool. Membership to the Sghool is loosely bestowed on its constituents who include artists, students, musicians, trades-people, and athletes. Since its inception in 2003 its core members have included Andrew and John Frosst, Wayne Garrett, Ben Jacques, Justin Patterson, Scott Rogers and Stacey Watson. Their mandate? Challenging the limitations of suburban life. Most recently, the Arbour Lake Sghool forsook the requisite green lawn, replacing grass with barley and bringing their home one step closer to sustainability—all culminating in a mass Harvest Party. It's a small act that reclaims fertile farmland now overtaken by a city that can't stop sprawling. Disregarding lawn height bylaws (6" maximum), it's also a jab at the politics of neighbourly pride in owning the greenest and nicest lawn. And the Sghool has been jabbing its neighbours for while. In 2005, they brought the mountains into their backyard in the form of a looming two-storey structure made out of cardboard boxes. It resulted in this response from an unnamed neighbour posted on the Arbour Sghool website:

From: name withheld
To: name withheld
Subject: Carboard tower
Date: Sun, 27 Feb 2005 13:00:16 -0700

Hi Elliot ,

Here are a few photos when the tower had some shape. It has been almost a month with the "structure". As I have said they are good neighbours generally. They are not noise makers or wild party goers. We (not just us but several families) as neighbours find it difficult, as over the past year or so there have many projects that would be perfectly acceptable on remote acreage but in an area such as this, where everyone takes pride in their homes and gardens, makes us uncomfortable & quite frankly embarrassed as your house & yards stands out frequently as being remarkably different. Quite often when many guests, family & visitors come by we are trying to explain the various belongings, artifacts & events. What happens inside the house is does not concern us & is none of our business but when it comes out side it affects us & the looks of the entire neighbourhood.

Elliot, I do not believe in just complaining but in having constructive suggestions. If your tenants/son want to have outside events/projects/art work we sure would appreciate some prior consultation as to what is /will happen, for how long & when we would see normalcy return to the outside of the house & yard areas Should you want to build a high privacy fence & gate around the yard so they can have projects with less impact to the surrounding homes I would gladly help build it.

Your sons consideration to their neighbours would be greatly appreciated.

Cheers,
Name withheld

For more information about the Arbour Lake Sghool's events/projects/art work see www.thearburlakesghool.com.

From top to bottom: a) Photo by John Frosst **b+c)** Photos by Scott Rogers



ARTIVISTIC MONTRÉAL

Recently in Montréal, the third incarnation of Artivistic, an international, transdisciplinary, three day gathering took place. Concerned with the interplay between art, information, and activism, Artivistic 2007 took on the theme of [un.occupied spaces], focusing on the hidden confusions caused by the infinite networks of twenty-first century globalization and neo-liberalism. The organizers addressed the charged issues of environmentalism, indigenous struggles, migrant struggles, and urban practices together through the angle of occupation. Including roundtables, workshops, interventions, exhibitions, performances, and screenings, highlights of this year's Artivistic included the Imaginary Border Academy with Schleuser.net, Irrational, the Boredom Patrol and others, interventions by Totem & Taboos in the city and at DARE-DARE artist-run centre, Nicole Fournier's *Live Dining*, David Widginton's social movements poster exhibition, the Think tank that has yet to be named, and last but not least Military Natures. **Is**
Check out www.artivistic.org for more information.



Photo by Sophie Le-Phat Ho

LOCUS HORRIBILIS MONTRÉAL

The self-described "parasitic research group with no exhibition space of its own," CRUM (Centre de recherche urbaine de Montréal), has recently produced *Locus Horribilis*, the 14th issue of *Petite enveloppe urbaine*. A group exhibition stuffed into an envelope, *Locus Horribilis* is a collaborative artists' response to the contemporary Gothic Phenomenon—a phenomenon that can be traced from eighteenth century supernatural tales to contemporary representations of terror, alienation, dislocation, death, and decay. Included in the envelope are: *Six bells had enslaved the curtained city*, a text-based work in the form of a postcard by John Latour, a haunting collage on styrene by Johannes Zits, and an earnest letter printed on manuscript facsimile from Felicity Taylor and Christopher McLeod to the Friends of Strawberry Hill in which they "respectfully suggest the enclosed three colour samples from the Debbie Travis Collection" for the restoration of Horace Walpole's 'little Gothic castle.' *Locus Horribilis* also includes works by Dana Dal Bo & AN Soubiran (Anadama), Christopher Lori, Logan MacDonald, Ed Pien, David Poolman and Mark Prent. **Is**
For more information check out crumontreal.wordpress.com.

Above: JOHANNES ZITS
Out of the Shadows
Digital collage on styrene
11.7 x 23.1 cm

ARTIST AS ACTIVIST TOKYO

From October 4 to 14, Tokyo hosted Artist as Activist (AA)—a week-long series of events that investigated art and activism with the aim of interrogating public space. Through a range of film and video screenings, interventions, and performances, AA highlighted the movement, history, function, and purpose that mark urban space. With performances that ranged from the laborious (slowly evaporating ice blocks lugged by Valerian Maly and Klara Schilliger in *Vapour Trail*) to the mundane (a water tasting in Yevgeniy Fiks's *Ideo Water*) it was the *Hyper Pillow Fight* organized by Niwa Yoshinori that grabbed the spotlight. A guerrilla attack with the softest of weapons, *Hyper Pillow Fight* featured twenty participants breaking bylaws for five minutes at Shibuya Crossing, one of the most crowded spaces in Tokyo. It was a full-scale eruption of the need to whack your fellow citizen. **Is**
Reported on by Emma Ota. For more information about AA and Niwa Yoshinori check out www.niwa-staff.org.



YOSHINORI NIWA
Hyper Pillow Fight, October 9, 2007
Photo by Sachi
Courtesy of AA



THE PUBLIC INTERVENTIONS by Toronto artist Atom Deguire challenge us to reconsider how we negotiate the public realm. As they highlight the site itself, they often require the viewer to question the ways in which we navigate space. Whether it is by placing a bold line of tape along the edge of a wall in Prague, creating an artificial pathway in New York's Central Park, or composing a formal image on empty advertising space in Toronto, Deguire's work not only bridges the mundane world of the pedestrian with the unexpected, but it also addresses the issue of what constitutes exhibition space.

Deguire has been installing public interventions both nationally and internationally since 1999. I recently spent an evening with him, talking about his work, his influences, and the relationship between interventions and the gallery.

ATOM DEGUIRE
Standstill, 2007
Central Park, New York City
Public Art Intervention with design tape
Installation Photograph
Image courtesy of the artist

SITUATIONS

AN INTERVIEW WITH ATOM DEGUIRE

By Claudia B. Manley

Claudia B. Manley: Who do you see as precedents to your work? Who influences you?

Atom Deguire: I would have to say Daniel Buren, situationism, Felice Varini, and Didier Courbot. I'm interested in the way they approach space. They go into a site, and they address that site (usually an exterior site), and then document it. But my work is also influenced by modernism, formalism, and conceptualism. It's not just about the installation or the intervention. Conceptually, I think my work addresses a desire to draw attention to the fact that these spaces are, by nature, accessible. At the beginning it took some courage to do this work because security often does come and harass me. They're just curious, I suppose. They don't really have a problem with what I'm doing because my work is temporary and it can come down, but it's a complex process—the planning that goes into it, executing it, documenting it, and then removing it. I'm at the point now where I often leave the work installed because I appreciate the way in which my work functions after I have left it in a particular site.

CBM: It seems that anytime you do something in public now, it's questioned.

AD: I was doing an intervention once, and I was documenting it in front of a park. I had

two women come up to me, and they told me right away, "You can't do that, you can't do that." I asked why. "Because there are children in the park, you can't photograph children." They were worried that I was preying on them. It's situations like that—anything out of the ordinary gets attention these days. Everyone is on heightened alert. I think a lot of people are addressing this in different ways; I just happen to be trying to do it through the vocabulary of visual art. Although the work may look like it's interactive, often it's not. Over the past year, I've been setting it up, leaving it, and standing farther back and watching what happens because the situation is entirely different when I leave the space. When people encounter me doing something, they're paying attention to *me* in the space, doing something, and that's curious to them. People will always come up and ask, "What are you doing? What is this about?" or "What is this for?" It doesn't matter what country I'm in or what language they speak. But if they come across a sidewalk that has lines of tape on it that's leading them somewhere, and there's no one around who can explain it, that's an entirely different experience. I was at a site in Central Park when I saw a woman walking briskly along the path. When she came to the tape on the sidewalk, she turned and followed it up the stairs to what was essentially a dead-end, paused for a moment a little perplexed, and

then turned around, following the lines back down the stairs and continued on her way. I really appreciate how the interventions have a life of their own after I leave. Again, the work continues to function.

CBM: Have you filmed your interventions?

AD: Yes, and that's great, too. There's definitely a performative aspect that I'd like to further explore. The video shows me working, you can hear the sounds of the site—it's much more visceral than the still image. But then again, I have to remove the camera, and myself, and stand away from the work in order to really witness what happens in my absence. This distance allows me to document the work in a more informed way. I am therefore able to capture the subtle encounters a viewer has with the work, which demonstrates precisely how people interact with the work within the site. This voyeuristic observation often signals the success of an intervention, as I am trying to balance the integration of the applied work within its site, and simultaneously attempting to catch the viewer's attention to its subtleties.

CBM: Interventionist art has seen a surge in visibility in recent years, for example, the Interventionists show at MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art). What do you think is the significance to this—both artistically and socially?



AD: There's definitely an interest in the public realm and the public space that my work addresses. I would like to think it's borne from a collective consciousness that has resulted in the resurgence of Interventionist art. Part of my practice stems from a desire to use public space in its entirety, which for various reasons, I think society doesn't generally feel comfortable doing. Public space acts more like transitory space. As we move from one location to another, we're often restricted as to where we fit in and what we can do in that space based on signage, lines, and movement. Highlighting these mechanisms is an attempt to bring these issues into the public consciousness.

CBM: How does this relate to your desire to help people navigate through what you refer to as the "spectacle of society"?

AD: The term "spectacle of society" is an adaptation of the title *The Society of the Spectacle*, a manifesto written in 1967 by Guy Debord of the Situationist International. This manifesto takes aim at the use of the visual image in the public realm—advertising, storefront windows, the media—and exposes how this mass media coagulates to form a spectacle. It is this spectacle, according to Debord, which prevents us from truly experiencing the subtle details of our environment. Disconnecting us from experiencing the world in a present state, it manipulates our sense of true freedom. Debord believes that the spectacle has a numbing effect on the individual, separating the subject from a conscious state of being. In other words, the spectacle is designed to be a huge distraction. I see many truths in what Debord articulates and I am attempting on

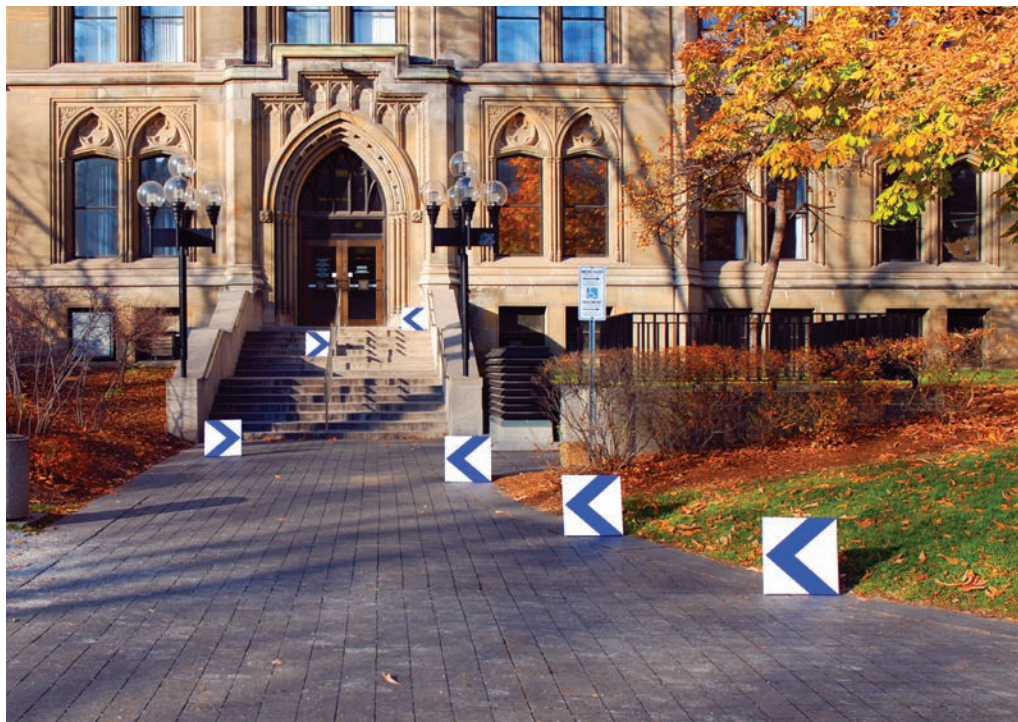
some level to rupture the spectacle of society, which has become pervasive in our urban centres. For this reason, my work is pedestrian oriented. That's an important aspect for sure. I'm not tailoring my work to be experienced in automobiles. Often en route, you don't pay attention to details; you're in transition, you're just moving. There's something nice about being able to slow down and notice the subtleties that are there—those nuances which we have all experienced before. In working with the idea of the spectacle, I have started working primarily in urban spaces. I realize that urban spaces allow me to delineate a chosen site by drawing attention to unique characteristics already present therein. This approach is influenced by systems of communication such as signage, advertisements, directional indicators, and public safety codes. It is, therefore, easier to

Left
ATOM DEGUIRE
Borderline, 2006
Prague Castle, Prague, Czech Republic
Public Art Intervention with duct tape
Installation Photograph
Image courtesy of the artist

decipher the dialogue between the installed work in relation to the saturated urban space. There is already a system of communication going on that's manufactured, and I can go in and subtly address that. Fundamentally, my practice aims to highlight how we navigate the contemporary urban landscape, and facilitates a visual map for negotiating the spectacle of society. In my attempt to integrate each intervention into various urban infrastructures, my work is becoming increasingly less aggressive, and is now resting in a more consolidated space, juxtaposed between being noticed versus unnoticed. It's much more subtle. An example of this in my work can be seen in my *In Transit* series. Here I used duct tape to draw directional indicators on various Plexiglas light boxes of TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) bus stops, usually reserved for advertisements. I had noticed that they were blank and I wanted to address them. So I put them up, documented them, and by eight o'clock the next morning, they had been taken down. They hadn't fallen. There wasn't a piece of tape left. They were completely removed. There are actually people who drive around and monitor these things. They would rather have them blank. *In Transit* isn't aggressive, it's just a formal image and it's temporary. So I found that very interesting and rather revealing. Quite literally, where do they draw the line? What is permitted and what is not?

CBM: What's the relationship between your interventions and the documentation of them? Are your interventions the artwork, and the photographs of them merely documentation? Or do you see the photography now as an art practice in itself?

Below
ATOM DEGUIRE
One Step Beyond, 2006
Whitney Parliament Block, Toronto
Public Art Intervention with paint on canvas
Installation Photograph
Image courtesy of the artist



AD: Initially I was interested in creating a composed image because that was the finished work and a way you could indirectly experience the interventions. By nature, the interventions are temporary. They're ephemeral—they don't last. What I'm finding now, especially since I've started documenting them through video, is that there are different dynamics occupying the same work. There's a certain life that comes through in video that you lose in an image.

Over the last year I've been negotiating the difference between the image as photograph and the image as documentation. I suppose there are subtle differences between the two, but primarily for me I see the image as documentation differing in its uncalculated snapshot approach. When I think of the image in terms of a photograph I approach it formally, aesthetically, and compositionally. Much more weight is placed on the final

still. With the image as document I let go of these concerns and focus instead on capturing an experience rather than an image.

You may notice that there are no people in my images. I think the reason for this is that I'm trying to create an aesthetic, formally considered image of the work. I'm taking a three-dimensional space and flattening it, and when people are in that space they somehow compromise this process, as people add movement and scale to the still image. So often I'll stay at a site for hours and I'll shoot two hundred or three hundred shots because I have to wait for people to leave. When it's video, I don't mind if people are in the frame, possibly because it's a moving image by nature. I actually find that more interesting because then you're seeing the interaction of moving people with the work.

continued on page 56

UNCURATING AT THE SLOUGHT FOUNDATION

ART TODAY IN PRACTICE, THEORY AND TALK

By Arthur J. Sabatini

IN THE CENTURY, philosopher Alain Badiou's rich diagnosis of art and culture, he argues that "the essential activity" of the twentieth century's avant-garde was not in the production of art, but in the drafting and proclamations of manifestos.¹ Referring primarily to surrealism, although examples could be drawn in all the artistic movements, Badiou contends that it is "in the nature of declarations to invent a future for the present of art"² and that "the Manifesto bears witness to a violent tension that seeks to subject to the real all the powers of form and semblance."³ The past century, he asserts, provided the foundation for "the immediacy and presentness" of art in all its capacities.⁴ Badiou valorizes *the act* of art making above all, and recognizes the surpassing and unsayable creativity that art represents, even as language only approximates its complexities and significance.

Of course, for most of the century, manifestos and their inevitable twin, theory, have been regulated to proclaim and perform in separate spaces, often for different audiences. Refusing categorization (except as what it is, in and of itself), manifestos function simultaneously as poems, philosophical tracts, screeds, delirious projections, and agendas for impossible bodies and



alternative worlds. They incite art making and a politics of individual creativity and cultural action that is combinatory, heterological, transgressive, multi-genre, performative, restless, interventionist, and resistant. As for the relationship between manifestos and artists' work, that is a question yet to be resolved.

In the decades since the era of the traditional avant-garde (from the mid-nineteenth century to WW II), artists involved in passing *movements* have materially and conceptually elaborated the poetics of earlier manifestos and produced other widely differentiated models. The conceptual, performative,

political/ecological, interdisciplinary work dating from the 1950s onward has contributed to the ongoing reconsideration of: artistic processes and projects; the spaces of presentation and performance; the expansion of artistic activities; and critical examinations of art and knowledge. From the explorations of the aesthetics of the machine by the Futurists and Bauhaus to Information, Cyber, and Digital Art, from Artaud and Brecht to The Living Theatre, Grotowski's Poor Theatre, and the Wooster Group, there has been a deepening of experimental practice and creative agendas. Moreover, artists and artistic work run in tandem with or provide

territories for the arcs of critical theory. Theatre groups, such as Mabou Mines, dramatize the postmodern problematics of identity, gender, and intercultural practices. Performance artists like Marina Abramović, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Stelarc deeply reveal issues of the body, ethnicity, place, and technology. New music composers, musicians, and ensembles (with and after John Cage) have pursued the universe of sound and human technological and natural sonic production. Every salient issue of theory—whether drawn from the Frankfurt School, or post-structuralist thought, or recent extrapolations—is vividly represented in the work of living artists who continue to transgress boundaries, often under the radar of popular culture and major institutions.

In the realm of the visual arts, museums, galleries, and alternative spaces have made some attempts at accommodating these transformations in the arts. Yet, no matter how expanded the territory of their systems, they are generally far more selective in their attention to theoretical practices, orientations, and the vicissitudes of signification and institutional anti-aesthetics often inherent in their own exhibitions. To be sure, alternative spaces have sought to offer divergent approaches to traditional presenting and curatorial practices with varying success. But few have positioned themselves to be at once a self-critical subject, object, agent, and reactant in their own programming activities,

“Slought ...
is without
masterpieces,
false longings,
dominant
ideologies,
solidified
genealogies, or
spectacle.”



which makes the Slought Foundation a rarity among such spaces.⁵ The Foundation takes risks, even to the point of announcing that their “programs are purposely critical and provocative” with the aim of inviting “audiences to consider criticality itself as a source of dynamism and enjoyment.” As for artists, Slought seeks out those whose work and actions are at the source of self-critique.

Located in a stripped down two-room storefront space in West Philadelphia, on the edge of the campus of The University of Pennsylvania, far from the main drags of the city’s well defined art districts, Slought has been the host of a continuing series of incisive presentations and investigations that address the workings of art, ideas, conversation, events, and performances. The context for

Slought’s activities derives, in part, from the vectors of propositions reflexive of, to use their phrase, “the historic avant-gardes and their ramifications for contemporary practice.” That is, Slought, like the manifestos, theory, and artistic projects that preceded it, engages creativity, art, and the aesthetic and material reality of the present and the near future, with attention to critical thought and dialogue, and a belief in art and community. With a self-questioning clarity devoid of pretension, Slought fulfills the promises and aspirations that emerged from the previous century. It is without masterpieces, false longings, dominant ideologies, solidified genealogies, or spectacle.

Slought’s accessibility is facilitated by an involved personnel committed to its

Above right: HERMANN NITSCH, *Das Orgien Mysterien Theater / Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries*, Salzburg, 1990. From *Hermann Nitsch / Die Aktionen: 1962-2003*, a retrospective of Viennese Actionist Hermann Nitsch, curated by Osvaldo Romberg, featuring documentary videos of his performances since 1962. On display at Slought from February 19 - May 19, 2005.

productions, and through its website. As an organization, it is alive, fluid, permeable, mysterious, problematic, and gregarious. That is, Slought is open to an astonishing range of artists and projects from the recovery of an archive studying the life of bees to an installation featuring talks from poet Charles Olson. Fortunately, I live in Philadelphia part of the year and have the opportunity to spend time at Slought. I am always excitably cognizant that the desire for an art of the future—by the artists and groups with whom I had been associated decades ago—is in a state of actualization.

By now you have (or should have) accessed Slought's remarkable and compendious website. Slought's Executive Director is Aaron Levy, who along with modestly titled "Senior Curators" Osvaldo Romberg and Jean-Michel Rabaté, steers Slought in its multiple directions. Relying on a core group of local and international advisors and a loose collective of associated artists, collaborators, and organizations, Slought has produced over three hundred projects in five years. It has ventured into exhibitions and productions as varied as installations on artists Hermann Nitsch and Günter Brus to symposia on architecture and cities, the politics of mourning and Situationist Film. Slought has also featured selections/retrospectives of work by William Anastasi, Dennis Oppenheim, and Fred Forest (check out an archive on the website. Listen. Enjoy. Respond.) With advisors Gene Coleman and Thaddeus Squire of Peregrine Arts, Slought has presented jazz, electronic music, and

spoken-word artists. In the spring of 2007, I mentioned to Aaron Levy that Polish composer/performer Marek Choloniewski was going to be in Philadelphia, and within a week a performance was arranged.

For all of the expansiveness of Slought's website and its intriguing and formidable publications that are largely based on conversations, the ambience of the gallery itself is low-key. Aaron Levy himself is soft spoken, humorous, and vulnerable. Asked if Slought is a "new institution," he hedges, "What is new? Maybe. We are simply weaving new constellations, finding new networks of unknowing." Is Slought "oppositional?" According to Levy, "It may have been framed that way, but over the years, it has morphed. I see what we do as more of an intervention into both artistic and cultural networks."

Since Slought does not function as a typical gallery oriented toward displaying and selling objects and works of art, how would he describe his role? Levy admits to being "vexed" by the idea of the "white box" and holds to "a profound ambivalence" about the very practice of curating art and staging exhibitions. Can curating, he asks, "sustain but also re-invent aesthetic experience through new forms of spectatorship and engagement?" Levy refers to an essay he is writing where he proposes a rethinking of what galleries can do and what he calls "uncurating" and "radical curatorship." He considers it "an exploratory process that privileges experimental and playful interpretive approaches, and it continually seeks to evade associations with a particular

style or genre." Slought is, of course, the testing ground for Levy, where he and his collaborators are working out a way of insinuating art, conversation, historical and contemporary awareness into the community, without establishing a presumptuous institutional valuation for the work and ideas. "Radical curatorship," for Levy, is "a practice wherein boundaries progressively dissolve, if only to reemerge elsewhere. Rather than existing according to fictions of discrete authorship or authority, curators and artists, but also critics and engaged viewing publics, participate dialogically in an exchange of cultural production and reception." Isn't this how art and culture should operate? To what else is there to aspire at this time in history?

Levy's quest and questions are large. Slought's projects, as you explore them, are evocative and multi-dimensional. As the Slought Foundation enlarges its presence, with exhibitions and events planned this year for New York, Buenos Aires, and Europe, there will be a variety of opportunities to observe, speculate, and participate in its workings, challenge its propositions, and re-theorize its theoretics. My sense is that there will be much to experience, and along with the poetry of events and revelatory exhibitions, more questions to address (with fewer answers) in the midst of art and conversation, flowing, productive, and meaningful. **1s**

Notes

- 1 Alain Badiou, trans. Alberto Toscano, *The Century*. New York: Polity Press, 2007.
- 2 Badiou, *The Century*, 139.
- 3 Ibid., 137.
- 4 Ibid., 136.
- 5 See <http://www.Slought.org>



Braco Dimitrijević's *The Casual Passer-By I met at 3.01 pm* (2007) takes the form of a large photograph of an anonymous individual that is displayed in a manner typically reserved for images of dignitaries.

Braco Dimitrijević, *The Casual Passer-By I Met at 3.01 pm*, Philadelphia, April 9, 2007. Curated by Aaron Levy, with undergraduate students in the 2007-2008 RBSL Bergman Foundation Curatorial Seminar.



SITE SUBCONSCIOUS: AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTINE KIROUAC

By Steven Matijcio

PLUG IN ICA curator Steven Matijcio recently sat down with Winnipeg-based artist Christine Kirouac to discuss *Sentry*, a video work projected upon the Canada Malting Company Building on Toronto's waterfront. This was Kirouac's first undertaking of this scale, projected upon 150-foot grain silos in a continuous loop over the course of three evenings in the spring of 2007. It was commissioned by the Ireland Park Foundation to launch a memorial park commemorating the 160th anniversary of the arrival of the Irish famine ships on the shores of Toronto. *Sentry* is a silent, non-linear video loop combining cinematic and documentary techniques with its unique screening location to create a beacon-like work entwining subject matter and site. Comprised of four sections, it begins with the dramatic emigration of the Irish famine survivors across the Atlantic. Plight travels across their

faces as the rays of a distant lighthouse define human shapes amidst deep, thick shadow. Shifting to the present, cavernous interior views of the empty Malting Company grain elevators provide a powerful bridge between periods of history and economy. Time and narrative collapse upon one another in this space, where the silos inhabit both past and present. These silos stand like monoliths, and their silent lament trickles through the fingers of an anonymous pair of hands as they cradle grain and unearth potatoes. In the last sequence, elegy and resilience meet again in a desolate winter landscape linked to a series of silhouettes of 1847 famine ship descendants presently living in Toronto—where the themes of the video converge with their site of projection to acknowledge the past, live the present, and look to the future.

Steven Matijcio: With all of its inherent challenges and potential difficulties, why did you choose to pursue a public art project in such a highly visible location?

Christine Kirouac: It's a natural progression for artists accustomed to adaptation to look outside the gallery to make a statement. Architects are already creating intentional structures that incorporate those opportunities as opposed to artists struggling to insert their work. However, it is that opposition that can drive the artist to incorporate elements of surprise in work viewed by an unsuspecting audience. Art is being assimilated into everyday experience, and at times, cannot be differentiated from an advertisement. Perhaps we need a level of difficulty to inspire complexity. Context cannot be ignored, and art outside the realm of the gallery space requires more from the artist as well as the audience. Intent, structure, light, climate, time, and audience all add layers to what we experience visually, and socially.

SM: At the base of Bathurst Street in Toronto, the Canada Malting Company building stands silently as an abandoned industrial facility, overlooking the waters of Lake Ontario. Its massive, geometric form and crumbling brickwork project a cryptic, but unmistakable air of *history*. Why did you choose to project the Ireland Park Project on this building, and what dialogue emerged between its character and your intervention?

CK: As a video artist I am always attune to alternative surfaces and contexts for projection. There were practical as well as serendipitous reasons for the location of this particular project. The historical use of the grain elevators was to dry and store grain for the purpose of making beer, but the hollows had become living archives of stories and legends. To me, their present *emptiness* had an undeniable connection—both in proximity and theme—to the park's "famine" theme. The silos are situated at the base of this small green park space and are all but unavoidable. In retrospect, the site really chose the video. The tired quality of the silos—streaked with rain, weather damage, and age—influenced the video narrative in the way they stood between historical periods.



Above: CHRISTINE KIROUAC, projection of *Sentry*. Digital still of screening May 2007, Toronto waterfront. Documentation by Toni Hafkensheid.

Above left: CHRISTINE KIROUAC, *Sentry*. Digital video still. Courtesy of the artist.

SM: Despite its obvious tourist appeal and ability to inspire curiosity, the Canada Malting Company Building is virtually impenetrable to the public. Fenced off with “No Entry” signs, barbed wire, asbestos, falling concrete, and various other impediments, this site is spectacularly present and absent; standing as a reticent staple on Toronto’s skyline. Did this dichotomy affect the making of your work, and the strategies by which it was presented?

fermented grain lining the bottom of the silos, as well as the unstable nature of the structure, my videographer and I were escorted in protective suits, respirators, and hard hats by city workers who knew every nook and cranny of the building. The second section of the video opens with an exterior shot of the silos looking over the water like a beacon. The camera then travels upward, penetrating the silos’ vast voids to expose echoing views of the hollow insides, creating simultaneous abstraction and revelation into something inaccessible to the public.

purposefully, from condo balconies, or evening walks along the waterfront, it became a site of congregation, memory, and storytelling amongst strangers. Outdoor cinema is becoming increasingly popular in both mainstream and not-for-profit circles, and seems to cultivate a greater sense of community in the very fact that one’s fellow viewers are more visible (and immediate) than in the traditional darkened movie theatre. Even in the moments when no one was around, the imagery created a powerful (yet fragile) meaning in the realization that



CK: Absolutely. I’m continually drawn to situations of potential danger in my work, and using the outside of this building was not enough. I wanted to include the silos as abstract characters in the story, and began to think that images of their empty “gullets” could be striking metaphors to convey the presence of famine. I already knew of others who illegally infiltrated the silos at night (there are many human traces inside such as old mattresses, domestic objects, and rock-climbing rope), but immediately I started the bureaucratic ball rolling to acquire the extensive permits needed to shoot inside this condemned facility. Due to toxins produced from the paint and

SM: The Building has been characterized by some as “modern urban ruins.” Their dilapidated state speaks simultaneously to industrial excess, technological progress, and the remnants of antiquity. In this context, can your project be considered an act of urban regeneration?

CK: There are several different options being considered for the Canada Malting Company by landowners, so the action of “urban regeneration” will have a very different meaning for developers than artists. For me, in the moments of its screening—when every logistical, environmental, and ambient element cooperated—an act of social regeneration occurred. Whether

the moment was innately human in its inevitable transience.

SM: A great deal of the emotional content of your work is carried by the faces of Irish famine descendants, whose every nuance is projected at a monumental scale on the side of the Malting Company Building. In the process, the many people that played a role in the construction and operation of this Building were also awakened. Was it important for you to *humanize* this site, and if so, did you find the animation successful?

CK: From the beginning of the project I sought to humanize the site and awaken the emotional history of the Irish famine

immigrant. However, when dealing with subject matter that is culturally sensitive, it can be a challenge not to portray that experience using tropes of hyper-sentimentality. To reflect people rather than roles, I abstracted events and emotions. The faces looking out over a treacherous sea at the start of the video represent the descendants contemplating an uncertain future. The final sequence in the video is a series of black and white Victorian style silhouettes of four famine ship descendants that now

viewing the DVD on a computer—context is everything. As an artist, my job was to meld the requirements of the commission with my vision as a Canadian/Irish Métis contemporary media artist. Personally, I felt the work was extremely successful in its reconciliation of history, architecture, and place—which all came together during the screening. The scale of the video, and the resolution of its many technical challenges, also increased my belief in the possibility of projects outside the institution.

“Even in the moments when no one was around, the imagery created a powerful (yet fragile) meaning in the realization that the moment was innately human in its inevitable transience.”

reside in Toronto. I wanted the themes of the video to converge with their site of projection in a way that entwined the past, those living in the present, and a vision of the future—symbolized by the woman’s hands digging in the snow for potatoes; that life lies under death. As to the question of “success,” it can be difficult for a public art experience to please all. Ironically, there were those at the Ireland Park Foundation who initially supported the idea of the video, but subsequently withdrew their support after the video was completed, before seeing it in the context of the site, which in the end is a completely different experience than

SM: The commission of this work involved a number of constituents and their sometimes-contradictory interests. As such, it reflects the conflicted nature of many public commissions, which must please an eclectic public for fear of potential removal. What challenges did you face in this context, and how did you balance the needs of a number of different audiences?

CK: Public art is a series of negotiations that will always fall short of pleasing everyone involved. A primary problem is that those holding the funding can sometimes underestimate the intelligence (or patience) of the general public. Moreover, boards and corporations are often not cognizant

of the power art can have, so a lot of energy is spent *convincing*, as opposed to collaborating. In this context, there were those that believed in the significance of this video, and the impact it would have on the Park as a whole, who faced firm opposition. I felt very small as an independent artist in this instance and successfully raised funds on my own from resources that support public art interventions.

SM: This project is built upon the stories embedded in both the bricks of the Canada Malting Company and the bloodlines of the Irish famine descendants. What new stories accumulated in the making of the project, and its presentation in a highly trafficked area of downtown Toronto? Can a public setting harm the reading of a video work?

CK: I think it can go either way. Two men approached me during one of the evenings of the projection. One was highly aggressive and asked if I had permission to do this projection. Before I could explain the project, he said he was “sick of people illegally advertising by performing guerrilla projections to sell products, like NIKE had done recently all over Toronto’s downtown.” I was taken aback, but intrigued by a member of the public becoming an active receiver of what enters his/her field of vision—especially in an age when the lines between public art and advertising and the bombardment of other images and messages are more blurred than ever. He felt frustrated with the lack of control the public has in decisions regarding public imagery. Once he took a moment to listen to the purpose for the work, he calmed himself, sat on the park bench across the water and took it in for over half an hour. *ls*

Facing page:
CHRISTINE KIROUAC, *Sentry*. Digital video still.
Courtesy of the artist.

NICK TOBIER: PERFORMING THE CITY

By Vera Kiriloff

NICK TOBIER'S PERFORMANCES reclaim, explore, and celebrate the unseen and unclear layers of the city. Taking on various service-oriented roles; Tobier recently donned the recycled costume of a hotel porter, combined it with the hat of a Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) worker, and watched over a bus stop in Toronto, "attending" to transit riders. *Bus Attendant* (2006) is representative of Tobier's body of work—he throws a little piece of the unexpected at random passers-by and sheds light on the everyday workings and activities of the city.

In 2006, Tobier staged *Small Cascade for a Large City*, in which a small corps of uniformed workers descended onto a public wading pool, and through celebratory and synchronized movements created a human fountain. Tobier has described how the group's "expectations, hopes, and predilections are revealed as they work with the water and their tools." The static wading pool vibrantly came to life as a moving, dynamic artwork in a sort of homage to the under-recognized *civic-employee*.

Small Cascade for a Large City, like *Bus Attendant*, brings attention to the frequently invisible city employee; these performances are celebrations of functionality, which highlight the pride that service employees take in executing their craft. *Bus Attendant*, on the other hand, extends the concept of functionality to the question of wealth and

access to luxury; which neighborhoods get that extra attention?

By positioning his performances in the public sphere, Tobier's work acts like subtle activism that critiques the urban spatial boundaries that are demarcated along socioeconomic lines. Cities are often organized around economic benefits for those residents and corporations with more of a financial advantage; as wealthy areas are maintained, city planners encourage gentrification in "less desirable" neighbourhoods. Tobier makes luxury accessible to the casual wanderer outside of wealthy areas; they become the recipient of Tobier's craft and active parts of his performance, as Tobier enhances urban space by rendering it to its most dynamic and interactive form.

In conversation with the artist, I asked him how he measures the success of each performance. Tobier replied that he measures it through his connectedness with the work, but also through his ability to be completely sincere and answer audience questions without claiming defeat. This earnest performativity is most evident in *Hot Chocolate* (2002), where Tobier dispensed free hot chocolate from a moving and colourful tent that lumbered down city streets. In this improvised performance, as well as *Bus Attendant*, Tobier sought to remain true to his own identity and character as he interacted with participants and

answered their questions, whether serving up hot chocolate, greeting individuals at the bus stop and cleaning the public space that they use. Through both his ability and his keen desire to blend in to the everyday and depend on his own vulnerabilities, Tobier's works creatively and fundamentally blend the "performance" of his performance art with the performativity imbedded into our everyday lives.

In her 1993 novel *Les lettres chinoises*, Ying Chen asks "Comment pouvons-nous apprécier le merveilleux sans être capable de vivre les banalités? Le merveilleux étant une perle, le banal est son sable. Aurions-nous toujours besoin de nous éloigner du sable pour connaître la beauté de la perle?"¹ As Tobier revisits the daily movements of a city and its often forgotten workers, his performances strike an obvious and aesthetic balance, drawing dynamically from the banal, everyday activities of the city and balancing them with something unexpected and original. Working through the prescribed roles of people and spaces in a city, he manages to utilize a vital aesthetic component that confronts and sheds light on the status of the neglected infrastructure of our urban environment. **1s**

Notes

- 1 Ying Chen, *Les lettres chinoises*, Montréal: Lemac, 1993 (85). Sassa, one of the protagonists in this novel, living in China writes this reflection in a letter to her finance who has moved to Montréal.



**At right from top to
bottom:**

NICK TOBIER
*3-Wheeling with
Chandelier*, 2003
Photo by Rebekah Modrak
Courtesy of the artist

NICK TOBIER
*Small Cascade for a Large
City*, 2006
Photo by Rebekah Modrak
Courtesy of the artist

NICK TOBIER
*Bus Attendant (22
Fillmore)*, 2006
Photo by Nina Tobier
Courtesy of the artist

INHABITING THE HISTORIES OF THE APARTMENT SHOW

By Amy Fung

AS YOU GET down into Edmonton's expansive river valley, where all roads flood into the aorta of ninety-seventh Avenue, several small clusters of mid-century two-storey apartments stand amidst the insurgency of condos rising up around them. It is only a matter of time until these apartments meet their inevitable fate with the bulldozers. Built predominantly during the pre-oil boom in the 1940s and '50s, these historical walk-ups carry much of the city's history within their walls. The architectural details of rounded archways and suspended concrete awnings mark a time before the city fathomed an identity for itself, a time when citizens in single room apartments were transients passing through this gateway to the north.

Most individuals who have lived in the city for any period of time have heard of, or might even be the subject of, one story or another in reference to these buildings. A crash pad, anonymous parties, somebody's first apartment, somebody's last—the residue of their history prominently pervades each suite and each room. On the weekend of March 15, 2007, Edmonton-based visual artists Robert Harpin, Aspen Zettel, and Tiffany Shaw-Collinge took hold of one of these quietly infamous walk-ups to create *The Apartment*

Show—an aberrant art exhibition in a city notorious for its lack of alternative cultural venues.

Alternative venues for art exhibitions remain the crux for the growth of any vibrant visual arts scene. One only has to look to artistic centres such as Berlin, New York, and London to view a brief history of cultivating art outside of the gallery cube. Although Edmonton boasts a handful of exhibition friendly cafés and record shops, alternative exhibition spaces are increasingly more difficult to find with the sharp decline in affordable leasing opportunities across the city. One only needs to glance at the current state of The Works Art & Design Festival, a publicly and privately funded international visual arts festival founded twenty-two years ago during the last oil boom. Originally exhibiting in “For Lease” spaces around Edmonton's then-empty downtown corridor, The Works' mandate of exhibiting public art in alternative spaces is becoming increasingly unfeasible with each passing year. Similarly, in the private sector, creating vibrant alternative art venues is an art form in itself. The Red Strap Market, owned by architect Gene Dub, presently sits as an empty, renovated historical building. The closing of the Red Strap Market was unfortunate, but

it did not sustain the successful community programming it required to be a destination venue for alternative artists or audiences.

As alternative exhibition spaces continue to dwindle, the run-down and semi-abandoned apartment in the river valley proved to be inspirational enough as a free exhibition venue for a single weekend. The show echoed many of the artists' feelings about their studios, their living spaces, and their sense of place in an industry-driven city, resulting in the exhibition's unofficial themes of abandonment and voyeurism. The twenty artists featured in *The Apartment Show* created site-responsive installations in abandoned hallways, bathrooms, and bedrooms, as well as in lived-in spaces. Gerry Morita, artistic director of Mile Zero Dance, and independent jazz bassist Thom Golub performed a duet from opposite ends of an apartment suite in a piece called *The Occupants*. The piece began with Golub standing silently with his stand-up bass in the bathtub while Morita lay motionless in the living room with her head in a displaced oven. As Golub and his bass began travelling towards Morita, she in turn began a progressive dance piece. Together they traversed the entire apartment building, bumping into unwitting audience members



Clockwise from top left: a) MINDY YAN MILLER, *One World* in the living room of Apartment 1. b) SQUATTER'S KITCHEN in Apartment 1. c) SHANE KREPAVICH, *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* in the big closet of Apartment 6. d) BLAIR BRENNAN, *Caretaker and Tenants* in the bedroom of Apartment 5. All images from *The Apartment Show*, March 15 - 18, 2007. Photos by Yarko Yopyk.

(or house guests) who inevitably became participants.

The dark humour felt in *The Occupants* performance turned into haunting ambivalence as the viewer descended into the basement to a crawl space filled by the flickering shadow of a light projection by University of Alberta MFA student Andrea Pinheiro. In Pinheiro's untitled piece, visitors crouched in and around a corner of a cramped, concrete crawl space, experiencing an intimacy that was at once calming and unnerving. The work evoked connotations of both lullaby and nightmare, reflecting a sense of discovery and imbalance similar to that found in Shane Krepakavich's installation *A Clean, Well-lighted Place*. A direct reference to Ernest Hemingway's short story of the same name, the installation consisted of a glass half-filled with cognac sitting in spotlight in an otherwise darkened broom closet. The result was a profound sense of loneliness and derangement. Effecting a similar response, interdisciplinary artist Gabriela Rosende's video loop, which was situated in a downstairs linen closet, was a close-up cats-eye view of Rosende herself, mumbling and confessing in self-inflicted agony. Within this confined space the viewer observed Rosende from a deserted hallway, as her brave and disturbing confessions resonated as sorrow-filled emanations from a presence long lost and wishing to not be forgotten.

The most powerful space was the lived-in kitchen that was occupied by several youth. Drawers were turned inside-out, and the floor was completely covered with scraps, waste, needles, and a bloody fork—signifiers that harbour the remnants of a contained

living space that became an exhibition space within the context of *The Apartment Show*. Stepping into the narrative of reality, feeling and smelling the grime, this is work that engaged with the audience at the most visceral level.

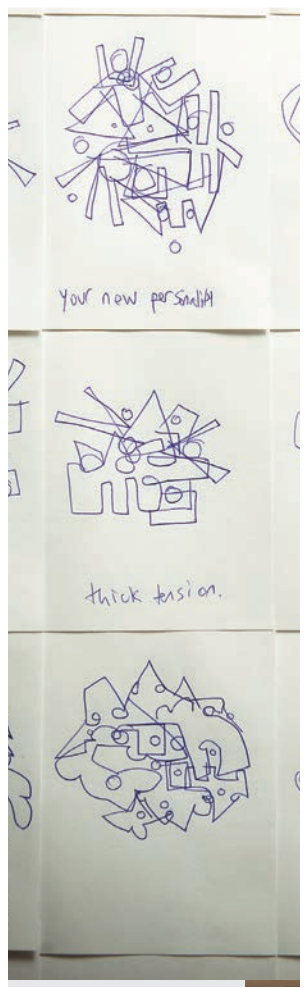
The curators were aware of the exhibition's effect on the viewers—an effect that differed greatly in comparison to impressions of formal gallery spaces. Critical of traditional curatorial strategies, Harpin states that "fine art is put on a pedestal for viewing and people can't relate to it." Moreover, he suggests that there is a level of intimidation maintained within this system that deters people from becoming more involved with art. While Shaw-Collinge (who works for the Art Gallery of Alberta and the commercial Scott Gallery) jumps in to disagree, both she and Harpin acknowledge that this show couldn't have been done within a gallery. While not turning their backs on gallery spaces entirely, the curators do champion the notion of art as more than just an object to be revered in certain spaces under certain settings.

Yet, this does not completely rule out the possibility of creating similar shows in a gallery atmosphere. In a recent exhibition at the Art Gallery of Alberta, Montréal-based artist Patrick Bérube recreated absurdly cluttered living spaces within the gallery; but, the major difference between gallery settings and alternative spaces is the inability to reproduce the history of a space. History can be simulated in a gallery, but not reproduced. By exhibiting within an alternative space, the space itself transforms both the work and audience perceptions. Another difference between galleries and alternative spaces is that calls for submissions for formal gallery

exhibitions happen months, even years, in advance, meaning that the art being produced in the *now*, as a reflection of daily life, is often lost or dated as archival.

According to Zettel, part of success of *The Apartment Show* came from "the subtleties of using a shared space." Zettel and performance collaborator Sian Ramsden took over the upstairs kitchen, leaving mounds of baking flour everywhere in *Rosie Goes Home*. The piece referenced the iconic 1950s stay-at-home wife, who presumably could have inhabited this very same apartment at one time. The ontological sense of presence, history, and memory came to life in the mounds of flour. White powder markings trailed from room to room, while cigarette smoke wafted down the halls. The traces of the performance echoed the audience experience, which refused containment in any one specific space. Elaborating on the participatory nature of *The Apartment Show*, Shaw-Collinge explains, "Where one art piece trailed into another, it ended up informing what your body did—motivating where you would stand and what you would hear."

As a venue for exploring a sense of place, both literally and figuratively, *The Apartment Show* gave affirmation to alternative venues as sites of artistic inspiration. Whether walking through an abused kitchen or standing in an old asbestos-tiled basement, the notion of site specificity relayed itself into a site-responsive attitude. The existing history of the space informed the pieces that made up the show, serving as a reminder that these historically vital spaces that have shaped our pasts also have the power to shape the future development of our arts communities. **Is**



TIM RECHNER, *Backwards Mirrors* in stairwell. Inset: detail. From the Apartment Show, March 15 - 18, 2007. Photo by Yarko Yopyk.





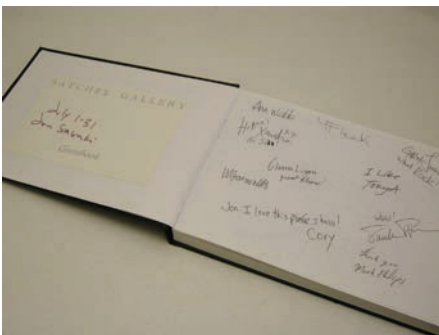
OUR OWN PRIVATE ARTAHO

By Stephanie Rogerson



THE FIRST TIME I officially met artist Anitra Hamilton was at an opening at Toronto's Art Metropole. Without as much as a hello, she was already reaching into her neoprene bag. Assuming she was about to pull out a pack of smokes, a business card, or perhaps lip balm, I was surprised to witness that Hamilton's attentive riffling had produced a gorgeous art object. Still not clear on our exchange, she twinkled while explaining, "This is Satchel Gallery."

I loved Hamilton's lack of pretension and laid-back vibe. She was a walking conduit for ephemeral objects. She was breaking the white wall law, and was as present and engaged as she was gleefully detached. I was dead impressed. It was a strange yet intriguing interaction, and in a way, I thought I'd never see her again. Art opening after art opening, spanning from the Distillery District to the Power Plant to Queen Street West, she'd be there with the same curious vibe. Each



time I'd see her she'd have another radically different art object pulled from her spongy, bright yellow bag.

While Hamilton's travelling exhibition went beyond the standard gallery structure, Satchel Gallery was always presented within a gallery. In essence, she usurped the clean white walls and tungsten lighting for her temporal vision. Hamilton used and benefited from the exact edifice she was critiquing. Her description of Satchel Gallery's birth was as straightforward as she is: "The idea just happened three and a half years ago. I go to a lot of openings and events so I thought, why not carry a mobile gallery. The audience is already there at the event, so I could discreetly hijack it." What was delicious about Satchel Gallery and Hamilton's approach was that it was never heavy handed; it was always beguiling and odd.

The Satchel Gallery isn't a new idea, and Hamilton is wildly aware that do-it-yourself art culture has a long history of thinking outside of the box. Yet Hamilton created something unusual in that she operated with a methodology of trust—built on and within Toronto's local art community. "Once the word was out, artists would approach me either in person or via email to pitch projects. If I approached the artist it was always *carte blanche*—I completely trusted them and knew they'd come up with something good, and they always did. I was consistently amazed by the quality of the work and the ideas behind the projects." It is this belief in the creative spirit that marks Hamilton's Satchel Gallery as invaluable to any arts community.

The transient nature of a gallery-in-bag has a shelf life, and Hamilton has made the difficult decision to take a break. To avoid what she calls the "look of disappointment," Satchel Gallery is to be understood as "being on hiatus." It's not over; it's just on the back burner as Hamilton focuses on her own work and prepares for an artist residency in Bavaria.

Regardless of how long Satchel Gallery is on hiatus, the truth of the matter is that it brought people together. Artists, writers, curators, and the rest of us connected when Satchel was around. It's effect? I'd say approachability. While Satchel Gallery produced an intimacy akin to a small dinner party, the folks from Toronto/Vancouver based artist collective—Instant Coffee (IC)—created an actual dinner party in their recent Mercer Union exhibition *Instant Coffee: Nooks*. *Nooks* was inspired by an apartment on Vancouver's Bute Street. In the cavernous space of Mercer Union, IC created four exact replicas of the apartment's cramped, orange kitchen nook. According to IC, while the nooks represent ten years of "a social and cultural centre for a sprawling group of artists, writers, and musicians," they also reference a similar ideology to Satchel Gallery, in that they are accessible DIY spaces within structured environments.

I saw *Instant Coffee: Nooks* twice while it was up at Mercer Union. The first time was with my five-year-old niece, who thought she had died and gone to heaven. With not one, but four places to play house, we were there for hours shuffling from one nook to another while the bubbly light of the disco balls

Previous page:
INSTANT COFFEE
Nooks, 2007
Mixed media
Courtesy of Instant Coffee

This page:
JON SASAKI
Satchel Gallery Guest Book, 2004
Courtesy of the artist

cascaded over us. It was a relief to simply experience space with an unspoken license to do whatever you wanted, and Instant Coffee are masters at that.

Perhaps one of the best Sunday nights I have had in a very long time was at my second visit, at IC's *Sunday Nook Dinner*. Crammed into a tiny corner, I shared the nook with five others. With a mixture of nervous titillation, we sat thigh-to-thigh, elbow-to-elbow, and drank wine. This group of art aficionados tightly squeezed into the tall orange cube was not unlike those in the surrounding nooks. We all experienced a forced togetherness that was nothing short of delightful. Members of Instant Coffee served up dinner. To each of us they handed a large plate heaped with salad and a slab of lasagna flooded with gooey cheese. As wine flowed and the hearty meal filled our mouths, audio levels went up. Polite chatter morphed into personal tales about each other's lives, and it felt as though something very un-Toronto was happening—people were opening up and were less guarded. We were experiencing the intimacy IC had felt in the original nook on Bute Street. While the closeness many of us experienced during the *Sunday Nook Dinner*

was almost compulsory, its genuineness lay in IC's intention and desire to create social intimacy. Ending the meal with a slice of dense chocolate cake only added to this, as many of us reclined on afghan encased mattresses, beckoning an Instant Coffee slumber party.

Anitra Hamilton's Satchel Gallery and Instant Coffee's *Nooks* mirror a need for in-person contact that only physicality can provide. Whether it's our friendship hoarding on Facebook or the bravado of myspace, there is a recognizable and palpable necessity to have corporal experiences that challenge social interaction. The stricture of white walled, cookie cutter exhibition spaces that have long been under scrutiny continue to deserve socio-politically driven analysis, and part of that critique involves accessibility. Whether museums restrict audiences based on economics and class or we impede ourselves due to social anxiety, the risk isn't in talking about or acknowledging it. The risk is in asking viewers to have both a passive and active role in forming spaces that embrace creativity, intellect, playfulness, and social interaction—and these folks have it in spades. **ls**



Partheniou's canvases are painted to look like objects that share the same dimensions. These replicas of everyday objects, things that someone might carry around in their bag, were created as a site specific piece for Hamilton's Satchel Gallery.

Above: ROULA PARTHENIOU, *Handmade Readymade*, 2005. Ready-made canvases, acrylic paint. Various sizes. Courtesy of the artist. **Below left and centre:** ANITRA HAMILTON and the Satchel Gallery. Photos by Jennifer McMackon. **Below right:** JOHN MCLACHLIN, *Cassette (Fat Boys "Crushin")*, 1996. Brass. Courtesy of the artist.



GALLERY



TELL

ME

WHAT

TO

DO

(2007)

AN

AUDIO/VIDEO

INSTALLATION

BY

JOANNA

GOODMAN

&

DAVID

KASDORF

TELL ME WHAT TO DO (TMWTD) is the audio/video collaboration of poet Joanna Goodman and multi-media artist David Kasdorf. Beginning with a poem composed by Goodman, Kasdorf edited and reformatted the piece to conform to a set of eight ambiguous instructions. Evoking moments of confusion, frustration, complacency, and even insecurity, the viewer faces a nondescript, clinical blue screen as a slowly scrolling text instructs the viewer how to behave. Originally conceived as an audio installation to be experienced within public spaces such as elevators, stairwells, and bathrooms, a video component was added to further explore the monotony of this narrative voice of authority. Divided into two sensorial experiences—a sound installation and a textual video installation—the artists afford their audience the opportunity to experiment with site specificity and the dimensions this brings to the piece.

Most recently, *TMWTD* was projected on a billboard in Kassel Germany during the 2007 Loyal Rooftops event this summer. Although intended for various public sites, *TMWTD* has been exhibited in galleries in England, France, Germany, and the USA, provoking additional questions regarding the gallery's role as an institutional authority and the legitimacy it often lends to a work of art. However, each specific context only further underscores the modelling through which our behaviour

is conditioned. With respect to the gallery setting Joanna Goodman explains, "We often attend art exhibits in order to refresh our ways of being, to challenge our own conventional ways of looking. But we simultaneously—and ironically—look to the behaviour of others in order to create a public image. How should I act? How long should I stand in front of this piece? Have I stood in front of it long enough? Have I listened hard enough? Have I understood? Should I glance down, smile, look away, pace, seem troubled? *Tell Me What To Do* attempts to call into question our human longing to be told how to be."

The undefined nature of *Tell Me What To Do* induces the uncertainty that already underlies a socially anxious society. Only when the insecurity subsides, can the viewer truly begin to ask the necessary questions: Who is this authority figure? Who is being spoken to?

As our Gallery component in this issue of *Locus Suspectus*, we encourage you to explore the depths of this work by drawing it into different contexts. We ask you to experiment with site specificity—bring the piece into your living room, kitchen, or bedroom, watch it in your office, listen to it while you shop, and investigate how the intimacy of a space affects your response.

Is

***Tell Me What To Do* is available for viewing and download at www.lsmagazine.ca.**



LES CLONES TRISTES

BGL'S TRAGICOMIC MANIFESTATIONS

By Mary Christa O'Keefe

BGL

Marche avec moi (Le mouvement), 2004

Ville ancienne/Art nouveau, Bunkier Sztuki, Cracovie

"IT IS A bit like a wild beast of nature, yes?" Jasmin Bilodeau, the "B" in Québécois visual arts trio BGL, has stepped back to survey the tableau before him, co-created with long-time partners Sébastien Giguère and Nicolas Laverdière, whose respective last initials complete the acronym they've collectively laboured under for more than a decade.

And yes, *Jouet d'adulte / Adult's toy* (2005) is rather like a wild beast of nature. Somewhere between a Caravaggio and a cartoon, the hulking off-road recreational vehicle lies belly-up in an airy gallery room, dozens of long arrows piercing its metal and rubber skin, slick black liquid pooling ominously beneath its overturned body. The original sterility of the gallery space has been transformed—light lowered, industrial concrete-grey carpet smoothed over the floor, benches respectfully arrayed around the piece for contemplation. The atmosphere is hushed and funereal, like a tomb that has become a monument in the repeated retelling of its occupant's story.

The scene has unfurled before, in another place, with another ATV. Outdoors, in fresh grass, this other gasoline-gobbling monster was similarly felled—vulnerable underside baking in the sun. Against the verdant greenery surrounding it, the piece looked more playful, more obviously alien and misplaced. Same essential components; opposite environments—each authored by BGL to different effects. Outside gallery walls, the beast invites viewers to imagine it frolicking in the wild before being mercilessly hunted for sport. This inversion of roles invokes the spectre of man's despoiling of nature—the

intrusiveness of a roaring machine, piloted by a bunch of joyriding hooligans and shot down by an invisible army of archers, finds one rooting for nature.

The staidness of a gallery space lends the indoor manifestation more solemnity, further enhanced by the flat carpet tackling the dual role of pavement and stately mausoleum granite. A pallbearer's hush over the room heightens the classically stagey feel of the piece. While the dead machine still carries the connotation of nature raped by the heedlessness of sporting yokels, in this setting it also reads like a cautionary tale against masculine folly and speed-freak squandering of technological powers in a post-information age. The pomp is almost too much to bear with a straight face, and there's a suspicion that the seriousness itself is somewhat of a joke—a riff on the kind of stuffy, pretentious navel-gazing rampant in the art world is surely implicit by the exacting formality of the spectators' benches. And yet, it remains deeply moving. Perhaps cynicism is misplaced here, and viewers are simply invited to linger.

BGL is adept at these complex emotional sleights of hand. The trio offhandedly identify themselves as sculptors, but the actual material shaped by their hands is nothing less than reality. Sometimes they play in the realms of illusion, but often the only truthfulness they obscure is intangible, held within the warring feelings their work stirs up. A BGL manifestation invites viewers to let their intellects merrily cavort, but there is also work to be done and rewards for

those with the patience or bravery to hunt for deeper meaning. According to Laverdière, "We like ambiguity and are fascinated by the enigmatic. We look to slow down the process of viewing art and make people spend time contemplating." Bilodeau agrees, "We wish to slow people down and make them ask—what is that? This is art; let's discover something together. Let's view the possible." Giguère explains further, "We play with convention in the museum, or gallery, or commercial gallery, or on the outside. We search for liberté—freedom."

BGL justly deserves the honours the art industry has heaped on them—most recently, the collective won the Canada Council's 2007 Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award for Visual Art and was short listed for the prestigious Sobey Art Award in 2006. These recognitions, along with a CV that is both long and broad, mark them as potentially enduring wild cards, much like British visual arts pranksters Gilbert & George, who have transcended years of alternately fawning or dismissing arty tastemaker types to become recognized masters of inimitably delivered, oblique cultural commentary.

More than a decade into their careers and collaboration, Bilodeau, Giguère, and Laverdière are heading down a similarly provocative and unique path, crafting multi-layered installations that blend spectacle with environment, nature with industry, existentialism with camaraderie, and other tense polarities in their contemporary compression of genres, mediums, and themes.



“Our definition of ‘romantic’ is when nature is bigger than human.”

The trio has the gregarious defensive armour of people who have been forced to suffer fools all too often, in a couple languages, and thus have no choice but to do it gladly or lose their minds with boredom. Questions are frequently parried by madcap koans, part whimsy and part profundity, in their native poetic French Canadian with occasional forays into English. Beneath their incorrigible flirting, impenetrable jokiness, and greasy sheen of ascendant art stardom they are soulful, brilliant, and industrious and manage a precision of manifestation few other artists have the skill or imagination to actualize.

“It’s a discourse of elements,” Bilodeau

suggests. “There is a new idea every time, in every place. We play with concepts and materials, usually bringing in materials for installation and transforming lots of spaces. We don’t *place*; we *arrange*.” “We think a lot about exhibitions that [are coming up],” Laverdière adds. “We arrive with a couple objects, and then the challenge is to be satisfied.” They admit to stashing objects, ideas, and experiences, sometimes for years, before the right environmental conditions knit them together in one of their manufactured habitats.

And the partnership? “We are like a couple, but without the sex! We are like women with the beards!” Bilodeau exclaims, and Giguère

laughs appreciatively. “But we all love women the same!” Laverdière interjects. Their relationship is certainly close and seemingly easy, aside from a few points of contention (there is a quintessentially French Canadian division in the trio, split along hockey worship lines, between the Montréal Canadiens and the Québec Nordiques). A discussion with them gives a glimpse into their creative practice, a constant elaboration of detail in some vast universe all their own. Ideas and half-completed sentences tumble over each other in roughhousing exploration, like a squirming litter of inquisitive, ungovernable puppies. Many of their jokes are longstanding enough that one or two disjointed words or



Clockwise from top left:

BGL
Superdrain sceptique, 2002
 Évènement House boat/occupation symbiotique
 Axe Néo7, Hull, Québec

BGL
Sa perdre n'est pas si triste, 1999
 Galerie Clark, Montréal

BGL
Sentier battu, 2001
 Festival international de jardins, Grand-Métis, Québec

BGL
La Villa des Regrets, 1999
 3e Impérial, Granby

BGL
La source 2, 2005
 Festival international de jardins, Grand-Métis, Québec

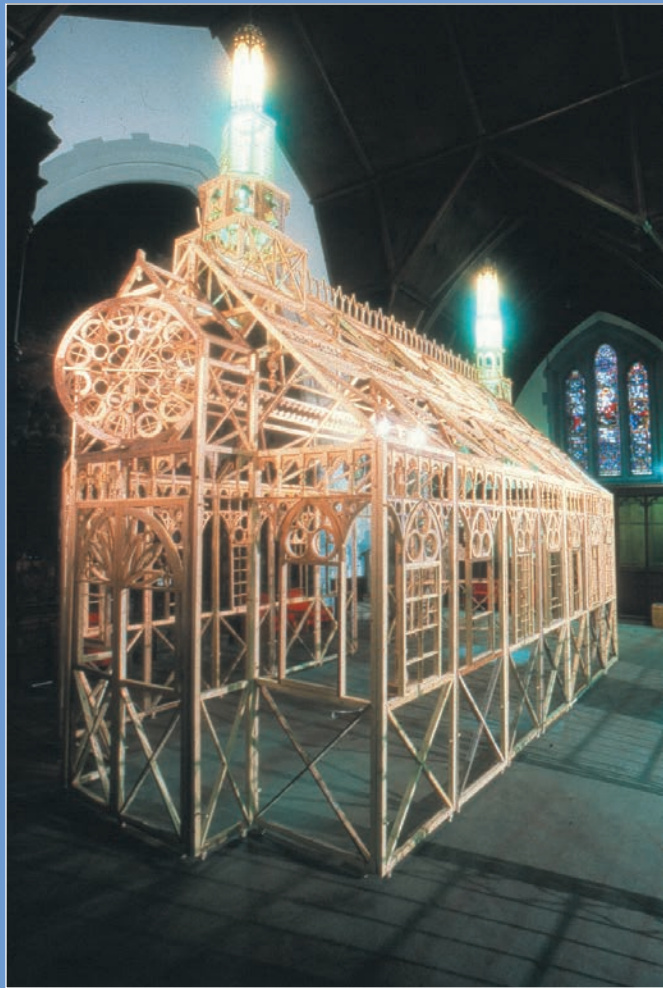


a simple gesture—in the case of Laverdière’s cocaine-addled, money-loving, art-hating mime character—reduces them to belly laughs and mirthful tears. These madcap ongoing conversations act as a sketchbook of sorts for BGL, part of the well of notions they dip into when circumstances ripen to accommodate them. Giguère notes that their process is “poetic and open. We are always together. Jasmin will have one idea, Nico another, and we play and build. We transform an idea together, in the gallery or everywhere. It’s very simple. In our heads, we have an image, and we enlarge that idea, piece by piece, until it walks on its own and works by itself.”

Bilodeau and Giguère are from the same lumber town in northern Québec, while Laverdière was drawn into their orbit when he became a studio-mate at Québec City’s Université Laval, where they earned their undergrad degrees in visual arts. With the catchy simplicity of myth, the official story of the dawn of BGL as a creative entity maintains they were supposed to show their individual sculptural works together in a group show, but chucked their plans at the last minute in favour of blending their pieces into a grander and more bizarre installation. Their moniker is likewise pithily explained—the artists contend that their own names were too long to easily fit on an invitation so they shortened

it to the opaque, slightly industrial sounding “BGL”.

“It is more easy to play with friends than play alone,” Bilodeau explains. “It was a happy solution.” “There is encouragement to be eccentric and passionate,” Laverdière says of the support the three colleagues give each other. From the beginning, the trio has shared a creative philosophy that disdains the traditional boundaries of the gallery, sometimes even challenging the borders of art itself. In an email simply signed “BGL” they recall their initial philosophy, “We wanted people to forget that they were in a gallery when they visited our shows. We wanted people to forget the white cube.”



From left to right:

BGL
Chapelle mobile, 1998
 Église St-Matthew, Québec

BGL
Rejoindre quelqu'un, 1999
 La cuiellette, Centre Est-nord-est, St-Jean-Port-Joli

BGL
Se la jouer commercial (esthétique de présentation), 2006
 Installation view (detail)
 Art Mûr, Montréal

Early projects involved disrupting material expectations—re-rendering everyday objects in substances that made them practically useless, like cell phones crafted from wood or handmade cars. In *Perdu dans la nature* (1998) and again in *Se perdre n'est pas si triste* (1999), BGL constructed full-sized suburban touchstones—swimming pool, slide, and sedan—in wood and displayed them on a fake wooden lawn inside a gallery, arrayed like a game show prize package. Nature was quite literally lost in these items, in the sense that the inherent meaning of the objects was lost in their new material and context, and in the trees that vanished from the landscape in order to build these

objects of luxury. Suburbia, too, is frequently displacing nature.

A frequent BGL trope is a kind of world-inside-a-world. In *Chapelle mobile* (1998), *La Villa des Regrets* (1999), and *Rejoindre quelqu'un* (1999), among other pieces, the artists deploy skeletal, self-contained structures in unexpected places—an exquisite tiny church, an unfinished or undone dream house, and a telephone booth. *Chapelle* lives inside a large church, *Villa* hulks over a bleak landscape, and the telephone booth in *Rejoindre quelqu'un*—glowing at night like a beacon—is in the middle of nature.

BGL's growing reputation by the turn of the millennium afforded them more

opportunities to “play” in larger spaces, as their mutations were, likewise, growing more ambitious, intense, and multi-pronged. Ideas sprawled beyond objects and self-contained rooms into deceptive environments that sometimes took on aspects of performance, further muddying the context, whether in or outside of the gallery. As often as the opportunity arises, BGL creates outside gallery walls. Their most heartfelt pieces are spectacular veneration of the natural world, usually married to ecological devastation or loss, like the gorgeous *Sentier battu* (2001), a large outdoor *area* that looks like a lush forest from above, but turns out to be a ceiling of fake greenery masking a barren landscape



when seen from ground level. *Piscine publique* (2000) uses a similar technique to evoke another scarce resource, water, while *Superdrain sceptique* (2002) draws together these ideas with their freestanding structures, placing a maze of video game-esque pipes in a manmade public waterway.

Performative elements developed almost as afterthoughts, springing out of a desire to explore motion and speed as modern constructs in opposition to nature. For *Le mouvement* (2003) and *Marche avec moi* (2004), the trio pushed small, pumping legs in front of them as they walked city streets. These are benign and comedic at first glance, but their scale means they pump furiously to

keep up with the easy stroll of a real person. *Montrer ses trophés* (2005) links masculine folly and the vulnerability of nature, with BGL driving around Québec City with a life-sized moose strapped to their car. Like *Jouet d'adulte* (2005), it draws attention to our violence against nature as a leisure activity, and suggests we take a deeper look at our playthings.

When confined by a gallery space, they resort to labyrinthine transformations that border on the absurdly theatrical, often involving shameless trickery almost as if they resent having to be indoors, and will pry open another dimension by force to escape into the wild. Their astonishing *Need to believe* (2005)

is an experiential drama that trashes the gallery, with the punchline being a scatological punishment from a hoser labelled “God”.

Bilodeau, Giguère, and Laverdière are creating idealized spaces in cynical spaces, pointing to the real with the unreal, flipping comedy to unearth tragedy—and vice versa. At the heart of these dualities is the key to why they seek to untether their art from gallery borders. “Our definition of ‘romantic’ is when nature is bigger than human,” Laverdière concludes. “We all agree on that definition—nature is the top. It is god. When we talk about ‘nature’, we mean the universe—everything bigger than you.” **Is**

WHITEWASHED GALLERY POLITICS

By Dagmara Genda



IN A CLASSIC CASE OF EATING ONE'S WORDS, THE "ANTISEPTIC" WHITE INTERIOR OF THE NEW SAATCHI GALLERY MAY

come as a surprise to those who remember Charles Saatchi railing against the traditional gallery space in 2003. After his largely unpopular move to the County Hall space, Saatchi derided the traditional white-walled gallery as "antiseptic" and "worryingly" out of date. He argued that art could not be fully appreciated in the false and now-conventional context of the white gallery setting. Saatchi's righteousness came only after a poor public reception of his choice of locale. *The Daily Telegraph's* art critic described the County Hall space as a "nightmare", while Damien Hirst, one of the notorious Young British Artists Saatchi propelled to fame, dismissed it as a "waste of time."¹ Saatchi's after-the-fact polemic was greeted with equal cynicism. The art world's reaction highlighted the fact that the conventional white cube not only remains the preferred method of exhibition for many artists but also that Saatchi's debate on the white cube is rather conventional in its own right.

The gallery is scheduled to open in early 2008, but in the meantime one can get a sneak preview of Saatchi's upcoming exhibition *The Triumph of Painting* in the Duke of York HQ building through a virtual tour on the Saatchi Gallery website.² The virtual gallery is characterized by *antiseptic* white walls evenly lit with massive glowing white panels mounted into the ceiling. Complete with digital art lovers and gallery attendants, the virtual space houses Inka Essenigh's *Blue Wave* and Eberhard Havekost's paintings of apartments and car windows in addition to the many other works featured in Saatchi's



biggest art extravaganza since *Sensation*. Unlike *Sensation*, however, *The Triumph of Painting* is unlikely to have warning signs at the gallery entrance. With this newfound taste for painting, it seems tradition has triumphed over more than just white walls.

To see one of the most prolific art collectors of our time return to convention raises the question posed in art critic Brian O'Doherty's discourse on the white cube. What role, if any, does the white cube have today? Thirty-one years after O'Doherty's three seminal *Artforum* essays (now compiled in the book *Inside the White Cube*) the white-walled gallery persists as an indispensable trope of art display. It has proven over time to be a practical if disputed space in which to exhibit art. Cost-

effectiveness, convenience, and convention all help keep the white gallery a preferred place of display. In *The Daily Telegraph* a Tate spokesperson explains, "Artists like their work to be shown in spaces that are similar to those that they are used to working in—namely, a whitewashed studio."³ Today, the term "white cube," rather than derisive, has become a sign of awareness and savvy. Jay Jopling exhibited this savvy when naming his wildly successful London gallery The White Cube. This name, however, does not keep him from regularly planning exhibitions against coloured walls. Instead of appealing to modernist ideology and aesthetic, Jopling's White Cube owes more to an awareness of gallery politics and a celebration of the gallery's potential.

Previous page: The Saatchi Gallery, Duke of York's HQ, King's Road, Chelsea, London. **This page:** ZHANG XIAOGANG, *A Big Family*, 1995. Oil on canvas. 179 x 229 cm. Courtesy of The Saatchi Gallery, London. © Zhang Xiaogang, 2007. The Duke of York's HQ will open with the exhibition *The Revolution Continues: New Art From China*. The opening dates of the gallery have not yet been confirmed.

In his article “Notes on the Gallery Space,” O’Doherty conceived of white modernist walls as playing an ideological role in the way we perceive modernist painting and art in general. Referring to a 1965 William Anastasi exhibition in New York where Anastasi silkscreened photographs of the empty gallery onto canvas, O’Doherty notes that after the paintings were taken down the “wall became a kind of ready-made mural and so changed every show in that space thereafter.”⁴ The gallery’s impact on the work shown within it is widely acknowledged today. First and foremost, the modernist white space is a call to attention—a signal prompting us to focus, contemplate, and engage in (or feign engagement in) an aesthetic experience. Some have argued it is the gallery itself that makes a work of art. In this way, we can rest assured that what we look upon is indeed worthy of our meditative contemplation. We know we are looking at *art* and not simply a poster on a bedroom wall or a thrift store painting hung over a sofa.

Many art movements from the 1960s and ‘70s attempted to disrupt the prescriptive nature of the gallery space. But as O’Doherty notes, despite their attempted disruptions, the artists of the 1970s were “socially concerned but politically ineffective.”⁵ The work of these artists may have questioned the system, but most of it “passed through that system” anyway. The prime examples include feminist and performance art, both of which attempted to subvert the gallery space by working outside it to provide a more immediate and accessible engagement with art. Today, a long list of major retrospectives serves to substantiate O’Doherty’s pessimistic observation. The recent exhibition *WACK!*

at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles brings formerly subversive feminist gestures into the gallery where they are showcased to a contemporary discerning art public. To this list we can add major solo retrospectives by feminist performance artists such as Valie Export, as well as any number of travelling Fluxus exhibitions such as *The Spirit of Fluxus* organized in 1993 by the Walker Art Centre. Few would dispute, however, the value in a space that can house such large retrospectives. Retrospectives bring past work into the present rather than relegate it to the pages of art textbooks. While we cannot experience first hand, for example, Valie Export’s *Tap and Touch Cinema* (1968), the value of seeing the videos and photographs in person cannot be denied. The curator’s attempt to situate past work today can, and often does, go well beyond the scope of a published book or catalogue. The gallery becomes an obvious choice as a

place to re-engage and rediscover past work in relation to the present.

An argument that supports the continued use of the white cube must go beyond simple examples of how we just cannot avoid it. The fact is that the white cube has been changed by the very practices that are now absorbed into it. What remains of the white cube today is not a place of aesthetic reverence and high art contemplation. Instead it is a space with a history, one that has been filled with earth, splattered in blood, and where multiple art “interventions” have occurred. The gallery space has housed, among other things, dinner parties, apartment replicas, concerts, and even animals. This wide array of gallery events reflects its changing ideological status as a site of often-competing ideologies rather than a throne to modernist idealism. The remains of the white cube can now be used as any other modernist aesthetic trope—as a useful artistic tool. A case in



point is Istvan Kantor and his recent show at the DeLeon White gallery in Toronto entitled *The Revolt of the Depressed Lymphocytes*. Curated by the notorious Jubal Brown who made projectile vomit into an art form, *The Revolt of the Depressed Lymphocytes* features Kantor's paintings rather than his usual performance pieces. While the works more closely resemble acts of vandalism, one may still wonder if Kantor's new work undermines his previous and less welcome gallery interventions. Even more telling is an advertisement for the show, which depicts Kantor posed against a white wall holding a sign reading "Queen West is Dead"—a not-so-subtle promotion of DeLeon White's recent gallery move from its old Queen West location to College Street. It only goes to show that while Istvan Kantor may be dragged out of certain galleries after his notorious blood "X's" are splattered on the wall, he still remains an institutionally sanctioned figure who appears in art magazines, is invited to conferences and art school workshops, and, most notably, is the recipient of the Governor General's Award in Art and Media. While this award is not without its controversies, it is worthwhile to understand that controversy itself is a marketable and sanctioned project—a project the white walls of the gallery have grown to house just as any other.

The gallery can function within the tension that results between various art practices. The gallery is malleable and is one of many alternatives in how art may showcase itself. For many artists, it remains a very convenient venue for exhibiting work. Because it no longer endorses the sanctity of modernist aesthetic, artists can subvert, repaint, or guiltlessly leave white the walls of the gallery.

Most importantly, if none of the above is suitable, the artist is just as free to show the work somewhere else.

The new danger that arises (and there is a new danger) is not whether the white cube editorializes the art presented and precedes the work with assumptions of its own. These assumptions have been discussed and criticized for at least three decades now. Instead, it is the lack of urgency in art practices and methods of showing due to a loss of faith in past modernist ideals. The resulting ambivalence and relativity has reduced questions of value to questions of economy. Even Saatchi could not afford to lose too many artists over a poor gallery choice. Today, while specific spaces and practices each have their own merits, one does not hold supremacy over the next. Against the backdrop of the former modernist hierarchy where painting reigned supreme, today's variety of spaces and practices are virtually interchangeable with one another. This interchangeability certainly makes many artists indifferent to the politics (or current lack thereof) of the white cube. Saatchi's timely outburst and the subsequent virtual tour of the future antiseptic Duke of York HQ gallery bear testament to the worn-out politics of the gallery. The projected exhibition *The Triumph of Painting* will not be a "triumph of high seriousness and hand-tooled production,"⁶ but rather a triumph in politically bankrupt interchangeability. As my one-time fellow graduate student exclaimed after being questioned on how his work challenged the white cube, "Why the hell should I care about the white cube?" For current emerging artists, this sentiment rings most true today. **ls**



Kantor's paintings incorporate many of his trademark motifs including the Neoist movement's logo, large revolutionary flags, and the signature of his Neoist alter-ego Monty Cantsin.

Above: ISTVAN KANTOR, *The revolt of the depressed Lymphocytes*. **Previous page:** ISTVAN KANTOR, *Street Action with File Cabinet*, August 9th, 2007. Performance at the Opening Reception for *The Revolt of the Depressed Lymphocytes*. Both photographs by Dean Goodwin. Courtesy of DeLeon White Gallery.

Notes

- 1 Catherine Milner, Arts Correspondent, "Saatchi turns on 'clichéd' Britart rivals," *The Daily Telegraph*, April 8, 2003, updated July 27, 2003.
- 2 <http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/gallery/intro.htm>
- 3 Milner, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/09/28/nart28.xml>.
- 4 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The ideology of the gallery space*, intro. Thomas McEvilley (Santa Monica: Lapis Press, 1986), 34.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 34.



IMPRESSIONS FROM
DOCUMENTA 12
By Tamar Tembeck

JO SPENCE, ROSY MARTIN, MAGGIE MURRAY, TERRY DENNETT

The Picture of Health, 1982–1986

B/W photographs, newspaper cuttings, laminated on plastic panels selection (64 elements in total)

© Jo Spence Memorial Archive; photo: Jens Ziehe / documenta GmbH

EVERY FOUR TO FIVE YEARS SINCE 1955, THE SMALL GERMAN CITY OF KASSEL HAS BEEN HOSTING THE MOST IMPORTANT ART EXHIBITION IN THE WORLD. THIS YEAR'S 12TH EDITION OF DOCUMENTA FEATURED OVER 500 INTERNATIONAL ARTWORKS SHOWN IN SIX DIFFERENT VENUES ACROSS THE CITY. FOR 100 DAYS, KASSEL WAS FLOODED WITH MORE THAN 750,000 VISITORS WHO PARTOOK IN A FULL PROGRAM OF EXHIBITIONS, PERFORMANCES, GUIDED TOURS, LECTURES, AND FILM SCREENINGS.

Unlike many other international art events, Documenta is not limited to showcasing contemporary, market-oriented works. Rather, what is prized at Documenta is a curatorial vision that brings together pieces both diachronically and across cultures. Of particular interest this year was an inquiry into the migration of forms across geography, time, and media.

In keeping with this theme, Documenta 12 was a decidedly international edition. A significant effort was made to showcase works not only from the developed world, but also from nations traditionally excluded from dominant art markets and discourses. In terms of helping international artists and works gain visibility, this edition did well: forty-three countries were represented by one hundred and nine artists, and one-third of visitors came from outside of Germany.

Before undertaking the journey to Kassel, I downloaded the mp3 audio tours available on the Documenta website. In addition to complementing visits through the major exhibition halls, the guides offered lectures on the three theoretical leitmotifs that ran through the 12th edition: “Is Modernity our Antiquity?”, “What is Bare Life?” and “What is to be Done?”

Judging by these guides and by the press materials provided, the artistic director, Roger M. Buegel, and the curator, Ruth Noack, wanted to promote the pedagogical aspects of the event. With various educational outreach tools, they hoped to prompt visitors into drawing their own conclusions about the works presented, and about the possible relations that brought them together. The idea was to foster an autonomous and engaged form of viewership, so that spectators would actively contribute to the production of meaning at Documenta. In this sense, the 12th edition was conceived as a symbolically participatory event, in the spirit of many of the happenings and performances whose documentary relics it also featured. But the idea that an audience should be *instructed* to be autonomous is not without its contradictions. And although the wish

to provoke participation in viewers who are generally told how to look (as with many museological practices) is laudable, the experience of Documenta left me doubtful as to the success of its intended results.

One element in particular elicited strong reservations on my part: the ways in which works from different backgrounds were brought into dialogue with each other left much to be desired. The theme of formal migration provided little more than a superficial solution to the complex problem of cross-cultural translation, nor did it resolve the revision of interpretive criteria that is required when considering works from outside their contexts of production or intended reception. While it is true that displacing works can bring out new and enriching meanings, at times a certain violence is conferred upon them in the process nonetheless.

In the Neue Galerie for example, *River* (1964), a Minimalist painting by Agnes Martin, was placed next to a textile wedding arras from Mali. What united these two pieces to each other, and to the works in adjacent rooms? Parallel lines and geometrical patterns. The cohesive element in most of the exhibition halls was often limited to form, which might explain the prevalence of Minimal Art throughout the exhibition. The association of works from drastically different backgrounds upset many of the visitors with whom I spoke. It attests to the naïveté that characterized the use of the formal migration motif at Documenta 12.

The display of Minimalist pieces in particular felt dangerously out of place at times, especially when shown next to works that are invested with a strong political critique. In these instances, it seems that Documenta’s curatorial concept trumped the integrity of the works it displayed. In the Aue Pavilion, for example, the audio guide informed me that the common motif in the venue was, amongst other things, the colour green. This purportedly explained why Gerwald Rockenschau’s large, green, inflatable geometrical sculpture was exhibited in the same hall as Jo Spence’s *The Picture of Health* (1982-86), a critical photo-documentary from the 1980s on breast cancer,



This page: TRISHA BROWN, *Floor of the Forest*, 1970. Installation and performance in the exhibition space © Trisha Brown. Photo: Katrin Schilling / documenta GmbH.
Next page: DANICA DAKIĆ, *EL DORADO*, Gießbergstraße, 2007. Guided Tour - Performance in the German Wallpaper Museum Kassel © Lejla Hodzic, Sarajevo.



which happened to be laminated on green card. Spence's project had originally been shown in community centers and clinics; it was hardly intended for display in the same context as Rockenschaub's sculpture. Ideologically speaking, their works could not be further apart, yet the happenstance commonality of their colour schemes was grounds enough to bring them—at least indirectly—in relation with one another.

Unfortunately, Documenta's endeavour to bring art to the masses from above was marred by repeated awkwardness, like the aforementioned arbitrary matching of works, the uneven quality of the audio guide commentaries (often filled with art-jargon banalities), and a few rather gauche attempts to integrate South-American, African, and Asian art in a non-"primitivising" manner (a crucial problem upon which I sadly cannot

elaborate here). Nonetheless, I left Kassel with a good impression, thanks to the strengths of individual works shown, and to some of Documenta's more convincing curatorial efforts.

Amongst these, the prominence accorded to women artists in every venue. In the Neue Galerie, three rooms were dedicated to documents of performances by Eleanor Antin, and two others were filled with

recent installations by Mary Kelly. Her *Love Songs* (2007) featured a *Multi-Story House*, whose walls were inscribed with reflections from various generations on the feminist movement. Many of the exhibition halls also displayed photo-documentary series by Louise Lawler, Zoe Leonard, and Martha Rosler. Apart from these well-established artists, Documenta introduced me to formalist studies by the Indian Minimalist Nasreen Mohamedi, and to the concrete art of Tanaka Atsuko. I discovered the work of the Canadian artist Annie Pootoogook as well, who uses colouring pencils to vividly depict her experience of daily life in the North.

The Fridericianum—home to the first Documenta held 52 years ago—dedicated much of its space to dance and performance art, showcasing pieces by Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown. Many of Brown’s works transform the residual traces of gestures drawn from her post-modern choreographies. Invisible movements and lines in space are given form in her sculptures, like *Floor of the Forest*

(1970/2000), a rope and material structure in which dancers perform, and in her series of drawings, such as *Geneva, Handfall* (1998), which delineate movements of body parts in space. On the top floor of the museum, a commissioned video installation by the Canadian Luis Jacob reworked choreography by the celebrated Québécoise artist Françoise Sullivan.

One piece in particular stood out for me as the successful realisation of Documenta’s best curatorial intentions. Filmed in Kassel’s Museum of Wallpaper and projected in the Wilhelmshöhe castle, Danica Dakić’s media installation *El Dorado* (2006-07) featured testimonies by local teenage immigrants. The youths performed their favourite activities against the changing backgrounds of the Museum of Wallpaper, while some recounted their aspirations and life stories. They jogged, sparred, danced, or sang against tapestries “à la grecque” or in “chinoiserie,” depicting war scenes, exotic landscapes, or fictional utopias—myriad scenes that wallpaper brings into the world of domestic interiors.

Dakić broached many of Documenta’s target areas of inquiry with this work, and did so by establishing a direct dialogue with local residents. She situated the current contexts of migration and globalization against the traditionally hybrid cultural practice of tapestry-making. Forms, images, and ideas are circulated across the globe via the medium of wallpaper, and this aesthetic mobility is reflected in a local museum dedicated to its history. By framing her considerations on both formal and social mobility in this highly resonant, site-specific context, Dakić’s work brought a pragmatic coherence to Documenta’s otherwise overly theoretical project on the theme of formal migration.

Dakić’s success gives credit however to the overall mandate of Documenta, which—far from the prescriptions of art market fads—seems free to provoke the right questions with regards to the place of art in the world, even when it fails to provide altogether convincing answers. **Is**

www.documenta12.de



This page: ANNIE POOTOOGOOK, *Ritz crackers*, 2003/04. Courtesy Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto. © Dorset Fine Arts, Toronto. **Next page:** DANICA DAKIĆ, *EL DORADO*, 2006–2007. Media Installation. © Danica Dakic / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2007.





MICHEL DE BROIN AT MERCER UNION

By Alex Snukal

WHEN ASKED IN AN interview with *Art Net Magazine* about the potential for change in his work, 2007 Sobey Prize winner Michel de Broin claimed, "it is probably better to not be held responsible for too much change."¹ For de Broin, change is inextricably linked with death; it is always involved in the degradation of finite resources "slowly forwarding us towards an inexorable end."² But what are we to make of an artist who refuses to be held responsible for change yet whose practice centres on the sly transformation of objects and their uses?

MICHEL DE BROIN
Shared Propulsion Car, 2005
Courtesy of the artist

In *Revolutions* (2003), for example, de Broin took a spiral staircase and formed it into an unending twisted knot reminiscent of a roller coaster. *Tracery* (2001) is a supplemental bike path, which follows no clear direction or logic and is characterized by jagged corners and intersecting routes. *Black Whole Conference* (2006), a large sphere of office chairs facing inward and joined at the legs, forms an egalitarian—though completely unworkable—meeting space. In these three works, the circle or cycle becomes a kind of shorthand for dysfunction. An everyday object is rendered useless when it is reconfigured to turn in upon itself. Diverted from its usual trajectory, the object displays its previous utility like a mutilated palimpsest, creating a tension between the new useless formal configuration and the old recognizable functionality.

So it is clearly not change in and of itself that haunts de Broin, but rather something that is hinted at in another of his responses in the Art Net interview: “I see art as that which frees itself from any function or intension.” The mutability of objects is beside the point; it is the change in utility that should scare us. The transformation of objects only leads towards an “inexorable end” when it is engaged in the production of new functions—use destroys objects; change only makes use possible. Change towards dysfunction, therefore, can slow the degradation of finite resources and forestall (if only for a moment) our inevitable material apocalypse.

It is in this tension between change and use that de Broin’s *Shared Propulsion Car* (2005),

on view at Toronto’s Mercer Union, makes its uneasy entrance. At first glance, the altered 1986 Buick Regal seems to offer a utopian salve for both local and global economies and polity. The hollowed out shell of a car—replete with tea-light headlights, plastic chairs, one barely functioning front door, a steel chassis, and no floor or windows—is powered by four sets of bicycle pedals. This combination of car and bike makes *Shared Propulsion Car* a model of communal action and removes it from the economy of oil—a substance whose utility derives from explosive change, whose use degrades the environment, and whose

for maximum efficiency.³ A cursory glance at the street during a traffic jam reveals a majority of single occupant cars—a problem no doubt remedied by de Broin’s model of communal power, since it would remove the excess cars from the streets. Indeed, the very act of powering *Shared Propulsion Car* depends upon a series of communal and ultimately unanimous negotiations between all four passengers. Occupants must find the right balance among themselves between the cadence and difficulty of pedalling, between steering and braking (the driver controls the direction, while the front passenger controls

On a recent outing in Toronto, the car travelled nine blocks on a busy downtown stretch before being stopped by police and forced to return by flatbed truck to Mercer Union.

extraction subjugates entire regions and peoples. The initial thrill of the work comes from imagining the potential transformations this syncretic mode of transportation would wreak on our environment and relationships. The range of the car is greatly reduced (the artist has stated that its top speed is around 15 km/h), leading us to fantasize about shared propulsion’s effect (as a generalized mode of transportation) on urban sprawl and the character of cities in general. The work seems to offer an instant end to traffic congestion and waste by insisting upon maximum occupancy

the brakes), and the route taken by the car (the efficiency of the route would presumably take on prime importance since any deviation would require more output of a finite amount of energy).

Yet slower than both driving and cycling, the car is a cumbersome and useless compromise between incommensurable modes of transportation. *Shared Propulsion Car* attempts to close an irreducible gap between the divergent ethics of driving and cycling. Cycling insists upon a personal relationship to the street and the city through

the use of the body for locomotion, not to mention an unmediated sensory experience of movement. Driving a car, on the other hand, separates the occupant both from the work of moving and the direct experience of that motion, as drivers are ensconced in an environment of steel, glass, radio, and heat or air conditioning. Yet *Shared Propulsion Car* eliminates any mechanical advantage produced either by a car or bicycle by forcing the two forms of transportation together. Much like *Black Hole Conference*, the ideal of egalitarian cooperation in *Shared Propulsion Car* becomes untenable when it faces the concrete reality of the world. The car lacks efficiency and versatility, as it demands more space on the road than it requires (a fact true of most cars, though more explicit in this case since four cyclists could move faster and in a smaller configuration). The input of physical force into the machine is matched neither by an increase in luxury or leisure nor by an increase in speed or navigability, and while capable of travelling up to 15 km/h on a flat road, the effort required to ascend any type of grade would be astronomical. As the car makes a slightly reckless right-hand turn around a pedestrian in the opening shot of *Shared Propulsion Car: Hell's Kitchen* (2005), a video documentation of the car's travels around New York City, it becomes clear that making a car that's under the physical power of its occupants is apt to make drivers even bigger assholes, since they'll be more reluctant to slow down or wait for pedestrians or other cyclists. Finally, the model of communal action proposed by the car finds a better and more efficient model already at work in cycling itself: the peloton of road bicycle racing (a large

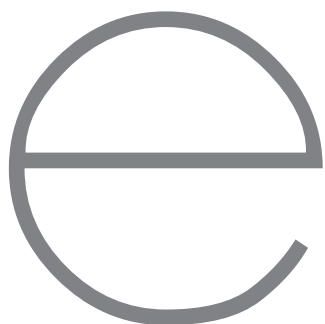
body of cyclists who take turns sheltering each other from the wind) or the protective comfort of large group rides such as Critical Mass. Found worldwide, Critical Mass is a slow moving group of diverse cyclists, who meet the last Friday of every month and ride around downtown together, insisting on their place on road. The slogan for the Toronto chapter, "We're not blocking traffic, we are traffic" seems to be an appropriate analysis of *Shared Propulsion Car* as well.⁴

Caught between utopianism and dysfunctional pragmatism, *Shared Propulsion Car* finds its true potential when it confronts the world outside the gallery space. *Shared Propulsion Car: Hell's Kitchen*, shows the car travelling the streets of New York City. Its slow movement impedes traffic and draws the attention of pedestrians. On a recent outing in Toronto, the car travelled nine blocks on a busy downtown stretch before being stopped by police and forced to return by flatbed truck to Mercer Union.⁵ On the road, *Shared Propulsion Car* enacts what de Broin and others writing on his work (notably Bernard Schutze and Bernard Lamarche) have termed resistance.⁶ Resistance in de Broin's work is a kind of modulating force, not something that acts in direct opposition to (or against) a system but rather something that it disrupts from within.⁷ The easiest example may be that of the resistor in an electric circuit. It modulates the circuit by removing excess current, preventing certain parts of the circuit from overloading, and transforms the excess electricity into useless heat (a work from 1997, *The Opacity of the Body Within the Transparency of the Circuit*, deals with this theme explicitly). The tension between change and use in de Broin's work is mobilized when

Share Propulsion Car interacts with the street. The car can travel with traffic, but it resists the full force of the current at significantly reduced speed. Making an object, which only works on its own terms (independent of any purpose or function) and insinuates its own logic into the rules of the road, allows de Broin to stage a larger intervention into more insidious and destructive forces of change and use. To force traffic to slow to the speed of *Shared Propulsion Car*'s lackadaisical and lugubrious utopianism is to enact a change that ineluctably departs from the utility of everyday objects. A group of slowly moving cars caught behind de Broin's work probably causes more environmental damage than more efficiently moving traffic; however, looking at a group of four people pedalling a car slowly down the street shows more than just the environmental impact of our dependency on oil. It shows the problems of change and use writ large upon our way of life and calls for a reprieve, if only fleetingly, from utility. **Is**

Notes

- ¹ Art Net Magazin "Art Net Questionnaire: Where is Michel de Broin?" 06/09/2007 <http://www.artnet.de/magazine/features/quest/quest09-07-06en.asp>
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Bernard Schutze, "Taking Art for a Ride: Propulsion and Entropy" C Magazine, 09/22/06 <http://www.micheldebroin.org/texts2.html>
- ⁴ Toronto's Critical Mass: [http://www.cmtoronto.ca/Edmonton's Critical Mass](http://www.cmtoronto.ca/Edmonton's%20Critical%20Mass), which contains a wealth of information on the ride, can be found at: <http://www.edmontoncriticalmass.com/>
- ⁵ See the Mercer Union blog at: <http://mercerunionhall.blogspot.com/2007/10/shared-propulsion-car.html>. My sources close to the case expect the charges to be dropped and there are rumours that the car will make an appearance at the courthouse as a show of defiance.
- ⁶ Bernard Lamarche "Michel de Broin: A Logic of Being Against" Available online: <http://www.micheldebroin.org/text/2004-06-Parachutemail.pdf>
- ⁷ Bernard Schutze, "Taking Art for a Ride: Propulsion and Entropy" C Magazine, 09/22/06 <http://www.micheldebroin.org/texts2.html>



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REID COOPER & NEHAL EL-HADI RESPOND TO TORONTO'S NUIT BLANCHE

NEHAL EL-HADI On Laura Madera at Nuit Blanche

TORONTO. SEPTEMBER 29, 2007. NUIT BLANCHE. A RIP-OFF OF A SUCCESSFUL EUROPEAN NIGHT. TORONTO CAN BARELY DO ANYTHING ORIGINAL, BUT SOMETIMES, LIKE TONIGHT, IT GETS IT RIGHT. THE EVENT IS PRESENTED BY SCOTIABANK, AND FROM THE UBIQUITOUS SIGNAGE, YOU'D ASSUME THEY WERE DECLARED THE PATRON SAINT OF TORONTO ARTS AND CULTURE.

NUIT BLANCHE IS completely different from anything I've experienced living in Toronto (this is my third round, and it's been four years). It's a lot of fun. Fun in the sense of being blown away by certain installations. Of hanging out with friends. Of seeing over-tired children running around, hardly believing their luck at being allowed to stay up late so they can get some *kultcha*. Downtown Toronto has been divided into three zones, but I'm not straying too far outside of my neighbourhood tonight. There's plenty to do right here.

Before I embarked on my Nuit Blanche adventures, I had gone through the event guide, and one of the installations I had mentally asterisked was Laura Madera's *Private Moments in Public Places* (2002).

Private Moments is a video installation composed of a looped film projected onto the driver's side window of a beat-up car. The film shows two actors separately getting

intimate with a piece of Plexiglas. One is male, the other is female.

I was curious about Madera's piece because I've always questioned whether a car was public or private space. There seems to be a grey area when it comes to car culture. The interior of a car can be as private as a home, or it can be a site of public splendour. Most people consider it private, and as such, carry out a lot of activities inside their cars that they would never do in a more obviously public place. Applying deodorant, picking their noses, making out, singing along in a loud voice—activities reserved for the confines of the home and the most private of places like the bedroom and the bathroom. Intimate and personal activities they wouldn't do in, say, a shopping mall concourse.

These are the private moments Madera makes public. "I started becoming fascinated with this space that's public and also private and mobile," Madera says. "And I started

looking at ways of inserting something that's more personal or intimate into a public sphere."

But a car isn't necessarily private space. Most of the time, when a car is in use, it's in the realm of the public: city streets, highways, and car parks. Cars, with their transparent windows and proximity to other cars, allow other people the opportunity to see what's going on in there. And most people do look, driven by voyeuristic curiosity and the universal belief that we are entitled to view what has been displayed before us.

As it turned out, Nuit Blanche was an ideal setting for *Private Moments*. When I asked Madera about the importance of the particular setting of her installation, she replied: "I think that it's important that it's on the streets somewhere, and in the city. It's like you have to dance with all these frameworks, kind of like orchestrating a show. It has to adhere to a bunch of different rules. It would be different



in a rural town or in an empty parking lot. The context would definitely change the reading for sure. The psychological possibilities in that space—it has to be on the street for now.”

An “opportunity for dialogue with the happenstance viewer,” *Private Moments* elicits interesting responses. When it was first exhibited in Vancouver in 2002, passers-by started making out with the car. When I had heard that, my inner germaphobe was disgusted. But viewing the piece, I can understand why. Not that I’m about to engage in heavy petting with a parked car, but the projected film plays as an invitation to intimacy.

Madera didn’t actually film the actors; rather, she set them up for filming. “I asked for volunteers to participate in the video project. I didn’t want to direct them. I wanted them to have an intimate experience with a piece of Plexiglas. I wanted them to have

their own expression without me even being there.” So she allowed them their private space to produce an intimate something that would be projected publicly. “At the time I was working in a really intuitive way. In a way it was an experiment—will I get anything that will have that emotional impact? Will it be staged or awkward? Is it going to be bad acting? They did it on different days, and they didn’t talk to each other or anything like that. They both decided to go with kissing and that was a serendipitous thing that happened.”

Watching the video loop, the circularity of the installation is dizzying. It’s a private moment (intimacy) in a semi-private space (the car) displayed in a public space, but created in private (the studio), commenting on an aspect of a private/public activity (travel) being presented to other travellers, in a setting that removes art from a semi-private space (the gallery) into the most public of spaces (the streets).

I am encouraged by *Private Moments* to look beyond space existing as a factor in and of itself, and re-positions my interpretations of space within the context of the activity taking place. It’s all relative, really—an activity is never independent of its location. The car is more than a means of transportation; it’s also the classic venue for moments of stolen intimacy. Intimacy that, in fact, is not welcome in the public realm.

Madera’s installation and *Nuit Blanche* highlighted the intersection of King and Portland in my urban landscape memory. The night, in its entirety, with its temporary negation of galleries, underscored examinations of space. How we categorize a space as public or private depends on our learned constructs and our idea of socially acceptable behaviour—how we view space/place defines how we behave in it. **Is**

Above left: Laura Madera’s video installation *Private Moments in Public Places* at Toronto’s *Nuit Blanche*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist. **Above right:** LAURA MADERA, *Private Moments in Public Places* (film still), 2002. Courtesy of the artist.

NUIT BLANCHE TORONTO



AN EXPERIENCE OF NUIT BLANCHE BY REID COOPER

COLLAPSING INTO MY seat on the flight from Toronto to London, my mind painfully struggles to piece together strands of memory that should compose a holistic image of Toronto's Nuit Blanche festival. It is two days after the festival, and three months after my team won an open competition to install *Life™*©, an artistic and architectural extravaganza in Trinity Bellwoods Park, off Queens Street West. We were ambitious. We were foolhardy. In the end, we were simply exhausted. Despite the seventy-five thousand people who streamed through the installation over twelve hours, the question becomes inevitable: was it worth the effort? Is this festival, which consumes so much money, and takes the time and effort of hundreds of artists worth the over-night, city-wide...*art party*? Swirling images cascade in my head, pummelling it into exhausted submission. I have no answers, though the question remains.

Nuit Blanche literally means "white night." Figuratively, it implies an "all nighter," and with "festival" attached at the end, the phrase denotes an all night party accompanied by some art and culture. The first modern day Nuit Blanche took place in Paris in 2002, initiated by the mayor, Bertrand Delanoë. Since then, the festival has spread to more

than twelve cities around the globe including Tel Aviv, São Paulo, and Skopje. These cities have different approaches to the festival, of course. For instance, the Montréal Nuit Blanche is tamer, less centrally organized, and tends to value the cultural content over the party aspect as compared with the Toronto festival. Toronto did a bang-up job this year—getting the people out (close to 1 million), securing the funding, and keeping the beer off the streets (God forbid, this is Toronto).

The temporary urban festival is a long-standing tradition; from ancient Greek celebrations advertising political triumphs, to colonially-inspired World Fairs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to present day music festivals and Mardi Gras. Urban festivals are an economic force: attracting tourists, and highlighting local products and cultural institutions. They may enhance urban life and boost people's perceptions of their city. Urban festivals are also criticized for their ability to shroud aspects of reality, by masking social and economic inequalities in the city, propagating hidden hegemonic power, and providing subterfuge for passivity in the form of yet another spectacle for eager consumers. They can also utilize assets in unsustainable ways. As an architectural theorist, I was mindful of these elements when designing the installation.

As an artist cum-builder, however, I was barely aware of these conflicting thoughts as I hit the Toronto pavement sprinting, only three days before the festival took place. My colleagues, architect Gurmeet Sian from London, and Toronto curator, Neil Livingston, and I had conceived of highly ambitious plans. Indeed these plans had won us the competition! However, the hubris of building an architectural experiment taking the space of four tennis courts in three days quickly became apparent. The army of promised volunteers did not materialize. Budgets were blown away. The one and only saw we had broke. None of my previous experiences compares in intensity to the days leading up to and immediately following this exercise in egotistical and artistic folly. For three days straight we banged nails like banshees and sawed like sabertooths, stopping only for three-hour naps and to guzzle Coca-Cola and Red Bull.

The prelude to the event—organizing over two continents and five time zones—was an exercise in teamwork, emotional strength, and pure perseverance. The festival organizers had not given us much time or money to realize our plans. The pre-chosen installations in our category of involvement had budgets of \$10,000-\$40,000, and at least



All photos by Reid Cooper

half a year to organize. We were given \$1000 and ten weeks. Budgets, revenue, corporate and government sponsors, public relations, local architects, structural engineers, municipal bureaucracy, design, theory, curation, volunteers, logistics, safety and hazard concerns... Where was the art you may ask (as I did)? In fact the art, and quite possibly the ego, were the driving motivators that brought us back from the brink each of the several times we decided to quit.

We had designed five distinct spaces that were meant to communicate three interrelated themes: the cycle of life, nocturnal states of consciousness, and a synthetic/organic dichotomy. Temporary events have a way of reconfiguring our relationship to space and society. They invoke what architectural theorist Jeremy Till calls *Thick Time*: an extended present of open possibilities. One can be removed from quotidian consciousness, and made aware of not simply what exists, but what is possible. This is the beauty of the temporary event. With our installation we intended to bring to light and enhance this time/space paradigm, and concomitantly, to facilitate the visitor's experience as an active participant in the process.

Indeed, grand ideals and three days

construction time do not always mix together swimmingly. The installation was not fully finished when people started to flow through at the 7:06 sunset. We never actually "finished;" though in fairness, only those that knew the plan could tell. I prayed the entire night that we did not overload the 6-20 amp circuits supplied by the city. In a dazed Red Bull exhaustion I laid my hammer down and forced myself to enjoy the mammoth creation we had built. Strangely, this was extremely simple; sliding from a state of manic builder/designer to passive observer. The hoards of people crowding into the pavilion was a good sign. So were the applause and excited looks of kids and adults in reaction to the various performances and art works we had assembled. Though what I appreciated most were the conversations I unabashedly listened in on. People actually understood the ideas we were trying to communicate with our architecture. They "got" and actually talked about the choices they were confronted with. They questioned the obtuse symbols we intentionally created: physically and conceptually navigating through ambiguity and vagaries. People not only used the visual and audible "portholes" we had created between separate spaces, but performed for the others, as we had hoped and dreamed

they would.

This, the fact we had succeeded in communicating ideas through architecture, is enough to affirm that for me the event was worthwhile. Inter-personal communication is a wonder in itself: communicating to seventy-five thousand people through a medium as figurative as architecture is truly an art. Less selfishly, I took some time to wander around the festival outside of our installation. There were people everywhere, and in the most unfamiliar places and configurations: overwhelming streets, wearing strange costumes, experiencing art and the oceanic spectacle. What I appreciate about the Nuit Blanche festival, experiencing masses of people assembled and engaged with art projects, are the possibilities that such an assemblage suggests. The necessity of moving around the city, the provision of a forum facilitating personal creativity and expression (as witnessed by the costumed crowds), and the participatory nature of many of the exhibits mitigate against a purely passive reception of images. The societal configuration of Toronto's 2007 Nuit Blanche festival shows that a temporary realization of creative and active existences, where alternative social practices thrive, is possible. **Is**

DEGUIRE continued from page 11

CBM: In your artist's statement, you talk about art maintaining its autonomy from the context within which it is shown, yet simultaneously referencing the environment as well. Do you think your work takes on different meaning in different spaces, for example in a gallery as opposed to the outside environment?

AD: It definitely does take on various meanings because it is referencing a specific site. When I'm installing each project I may be using a similar technique, but I'm addressing that space specifically. What I've been finding with going back into the gallery is that, initially, I thought these images would convey the experience if presented in large scale. You could put them in a gallery and be able to experience the outside work in the gallery environment. I have done that—I have shown these in a gallery context and they do function that way, but I'm finding that I am more interested in addressing the gallery for the gallery itself. I've begun approaching the gallery's physical

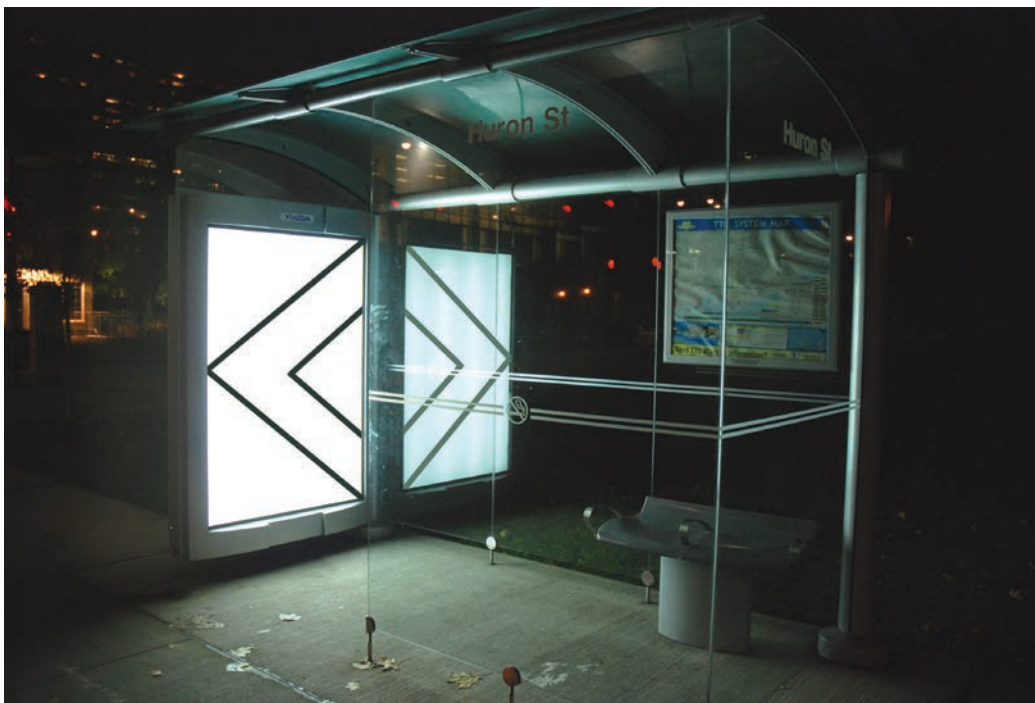
space the same way I would approach an outdoor public space. My concerns translate quite well from one context to another, and therefore, highlighting the movement within the gallery, as well as outlining the gallery walls or what the walls represent in relation to the floor, is a natural progression from my earlier exterior work.

For a recent exhibit entitled *Myself as Chevron*, I designed posters with a large graphic chevron that read "Atom Deguire at Made" with the address at the bottom of the poster. I put the posters up around the city. Everywhere you encountered one, it would be positioned to point towards the exhibition space. The idea was that if you wanted to follow these chevrons, they would eventually lead you to the gallery. Once at the gallery there was a large four-foot sandwich board with the same chevron on either side that pointed to the gallery entrance. Inside, there was a large eight-foot light box chevron in the middle of a darkened room. It took up the majority of the space; you could walk in, but it was kind of an uncomfortable space. And that

was it. Interestingly enough, when you experienced the chevron in the gallery space it pointed back out to the street. The movement I was suggesting had neither a beginning nor an end; it was a continuous loop.

CBM: What do you see as the relationship between interventions and gallery work?

AD: For me, they are definitely linked. What I'm finding is that it's part of the process as a whole—I do an intervention, I videotape it, I document it, and then I have to show it. In this way, I can use the gallery to complete the work. Once it has been exhibited, the process has reached its reasonable end. Therefore, the gallery can function as a vehicle for dissemination, a place where more people can experience the original work through the various forms of documentation I employ. I think that the gallery functions in duality for me in this way. I can either address the space as a site to intervene, or I can use it as a platform to exhibit inaccessible ephemeral work to increase the original viewership. **ls**



ATOM DEGUIRE
In Transit, 2006
Toronto Transit Commission
Toronto, Canada
Public Art Intervention with duct tape
Installation Photograph

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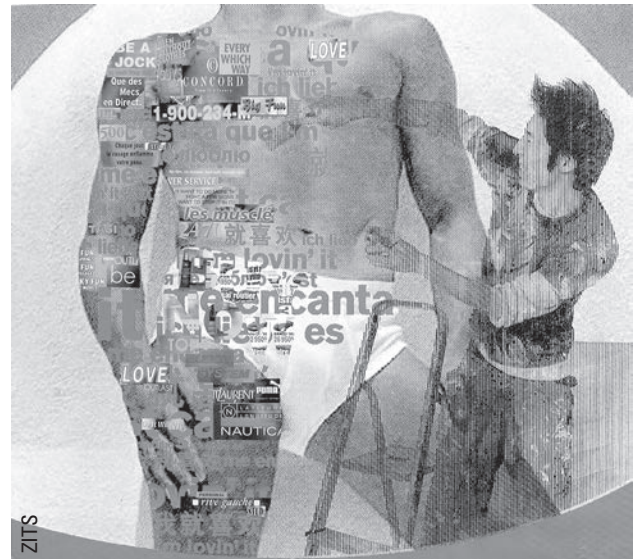
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Amber Hawk Swanson

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Words by Emma Hooper

Pictures by Jeff Kulak

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CALL AND RESPONSE: PHONEBOOK 2007/2008

By Jason Foumberg

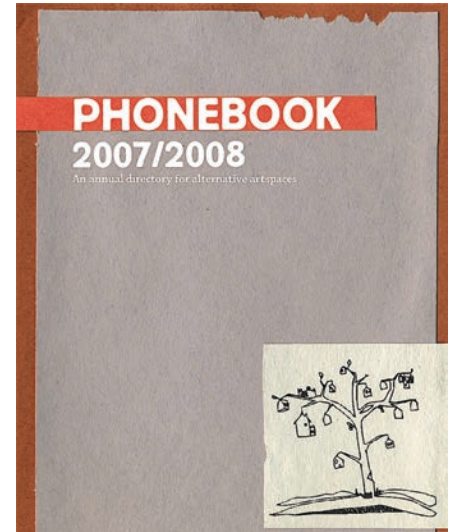
THE SUBURBAN, a well-regarded and long established alternative art space¹ in Chicago's Oak Park suburb "is not interested in sales, curators, critics or collectors," writes its founder, Michelle Grabner, in *Phonebook 2007/2008*. This bold proclamation sounds stunningly defiant for anyone who keeps an eye on the art world, because traditional art institutions cannot keep their doors open without the support of curators, critics, and collectors. What, then, does the Suburban want? Grabner's attitude speaks to a collective perspective, and although Grabner is herself a critic and curator (as well as an artist), she imagines her artspace to be productive in a way that the larger art institutions—even the not-for-profits—cannot be because of their size and scope. Like Grabner, directors of apartment, basement, and garage galleries can do whatever the hell they like, and they want to keep it that way.

The term not-for-profit becomes a rallying motto in the eleven essays in *Phonebook*, and is echoed through the listings of American alternative artspaces from regions north, south, east, and west. Collected and published by Green Lantern Press, an apartment gallery and small independent press in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood, and Three Walls, a not-for-profit artist residency also in Chicago, *Phonebook* includes mission statements, histories, and upcoming events calendars. While the value of the alt-space needs neither introduction nor justification (although you will get a bit of both in *Phonebook*), it is safe to say that as long as a large number of artists continue to produce smart and relevant (or even trashy and irrelevant) art that cannot be adequately represented in larger institutions because the risk is too great, alternative practices will flourish.

Phonebook acts as a unified voice, and in doing so not only mirrors the collaborative DIY-spirit of alt-spaces but also fulfills a need for greater self-representation. Ultimately, *Phonebook* asserts that culture isn't something to take for granted. "Don't we need culture, and, furthermore, don't we need to feel like we are agents of culture? Don't we need participatory culture?" asks Mike Wolf, a Chicago artist and co-director of Mess Hall, a sort-of-alternative community centre in Rogers Park, Illinois.

The almost two hundred alt-space listings, range from Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine, but are padded with essays from some of Chicago's recent and longstanding alt-space luminaries keeping the content Chicago-heavy and the essays Chicago-centric. Not only did the idea for *Phonebook* originate in Chicago, but the city's artists have long come up against a serious lack of both funding and acknowledgement systems, and have thus found purpose in an independent system. The 2007/2008 edition is the first, and hopefully the next will present a fuller picture of the nation's varied spaces.

Certainly, though, each annual edition will differ from the last because it is the nature of the alt-artspace to move, close, re-open, and develop a new program. One of the big questions at the launch of *Phonebook* was why publish a book when this sort of information might be best accessed and instantly updated on the web, and when alt-spaces come and go faster than books can be published? The need for a physical printed page comes amid worries that a life lived solely on the Internet leaves little trace, and that our culture is a material culture, received in the form of things and recorded in the form of artifacts. In essence, *Phonebook* is an act that recognizes the fleeting nature of the alt-artspace and anticipates an amnesiac audience. In this it takes its cue from the



Phonebook 2007/2008:
An annual directory for alternative artspaces
Edited by Caroline Picard
Published by Green Lantern Press and ThreeWalls

Chicago Underground Library's (CUL) founder Nell Taylor, a contributor to *Phonebook*. The CUL collects and houses independent printed matter produced in Chicago—things that give shape to the cultural life of the city yet might be overlooked once they move out of sight.

"Turnover, burn out, dropping out and exhaustion are often the end results of alternative spaces," writes contributor Anthony Elms. Now that many alt-artspaces are writing catalogue essays and mission statements, calling their organizers "curators" and seeing themselves as enablers of a community—as they borrow, mine, refigure, and modify the practices of traditional cultural institutions to suit their own needs—they require a model for a successful support structure upon which they can build, communicate with each other, perhaps burn out as usual, and in the end leave a record that they were in fact here. 1s

Notes

1 Referred to as alt-artspace in *Phonebook*.



YOSHINORI NIWA
Hyper Pillow Fight, October 9, 2007
Photo by Sachi
Courtesy of AA
(See page 8)



Justine Kurland, *Lemmings*, 2001. 30 x 40", Satin finish UV laminated c-print. Courtesy of Monte Clark Gallery, Toronto

generation

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