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Jochen Gerz

Centre Georges Pompidou Paris 6 février - 24 avril

JOCHEN GERZ, CRIER JUSQU'À L'ÉPUISEMENT, PERFORMANCE (SANS PUBLIC), 1972. © JOCHEN GERZ.

De Jochen Gerz, aujourd'hui – que ce soit d'ailleurs pour les louer ou pour les blâmer –, on ne connaît généralement que les interventions des quinze dernières années, où il a réalisé, dans l'espace public, de véritables « anti-monuments » aux victimes du fascisme, qui abordent les thèmes de présence et d'absence (*Monument contre le fascisme*, Hambourg, 1986), de la visibilité et de l'invisibilité du passé dans le présent (*Monument contre le racisme*, dit « Le Monument invisible », Saarbrück, 1993), de la mémoire au singulier et au pluriel (*Monument vivant de Biron*, 1996), ou de la lutte pour la reconnaissance (*Les Mots de Paris*, 2000, installation performative réalisée en collaboration avec des gens de la rue sur le parvis de Notre-Dame). Dans chaque cas, Gerz a réussi à soulever une controverse véhémente, avec des répercussions allant bien au delà du seul milieu de l'art. Et cela en dépit – ou peut-être à cause – du fait que, dans chaque cas, quoique de manière très différente, il n'y avait à proprement parler rien à voir, nous épargnant efficacement un débat purement esthétique. Pour Gerz, il s'agit de faire voir, ce qui est tout autre chose que de donner à voir. Car l'artiste reste convaincu de la nécessité d'utiliser les moyens artistiques pour dépasser l'art – dépassement qui consisterait, comme il l'a dit, à ne plus avoir à y penser. Lors de ces différentes interventions, Gerz travaille à rendre palpable ce qui n'est pas, à conférer une présence incommensurable à l'invisible – qui ne se réduit pas au contraire du visible –, en initiant des processus collectifs qui, au lieu d'incarner l'art dans un objet, le logent, pour ainsi dire, dans la tête des gens, lui assurant ainsi une résonance à la fois plus intensive et plus extensive. Gérard Wajcman dans *L'Objet du siècle*, identifiant l'œuvre de Gerz comme l'une des rares à même de nous aider à penser l'irreprésentable, par le mimétisme rigoureux de son objet, écrit que : « ce qu'on ne peut voir, l'art peut seul le montrer. Et si l'œuvre-de-l'art consiste à accomplir la puissance de l'art, alors, ce qu'on ne peut voir, l'art doit le montrer ». Telle serait sa valeur d'usage.

Ce que nous révèle cette exposition de son œuvre vidéo est peut-être moins l'unité des recherches qu'il mène depuis plus de trente ans, mais plutôt la confirmation d'une expérience profonde qui informe son œuvre entière : l'expérience d'une déception, non pas contingente ou circonstancielle, mais fondamentale, incommensurable, liée au fond à l'impuissance de l'art à se dépasser, à répondre aux attentes qu'il sème; une déception face à l'abîme apparemment infranchissable séparant l'art de la vie, l'artiste du public, le mot de l'image; une déception enfin, et surtout, face à l'art en tant que forme

de domination sociale, pratique à laquelle Gerz refuse de participer.

L'exposition s'ouvre sur la projection de l'extraordinaire *Crier jusqu'à l'épuisement*, une performance réalisée pour et devant la seule caméra en 1972. Sur une colline dans un terrain vague, à quelque soixante mètres de la caméra, l'artiste crie à tue-tête « Allô », aussi longtemps que possible. Or, cette adresse élémentaire à autrui ne rencontre nulle réponse. Petit à petit, la voix défaille, jusqu'à l'extinction totale. Tel est l'accueil plutôt désolant proféré au visiteur de l'exposition... S'il s'agit bien entendu d'une allégorie de l'incommunication entre l'artiste et son destinataire, il s'agit peut-être moins d'un duel entre l'être humain et la machine reproductrice (qui continue à tourner alors que l'homme flanche) que d'une première tentative d'aborder la question de la disparition comme moyen de faire voir. Une logique comparable informe la performance vidéo *Das Autoportrait* (1975) : l'artiste est situé derrière une plaque de verre, qu'il remplit d'écriture à l'envers (donc lisible du côté de la caméra), le texte faisant progressivement disparaître celui qui écrit.

Dans la première salle, Gerz réactive une installation initialement réalisée en 1974 : *Vivre*. Le visiteur pénètre dans la salle apparemment vide, pour se diriger vers un texte encadré, accroché sur le mur au fond, et dont la lecture se révèle peu éclairante. Plutôt rares sont les visiteurs qui, se retournant pour en sortir, remarquent l'élément clé de la pièce. Et pour cause : le mot « vivre », écrit à la craie des milliers de fois à même le sol, le couvrant d'un bout à l'autre, à la manière d'une fragile et pathétique litanie, n'est presque plus visible. Car, pour pouvoir lire le panneau, le visiteur doit marcher sur les mots, participant ainsi à leur effacement, ainsi qu'à la détérioration de cette œuvre éphémère qui, de par son titre, cherche à relier l'art à la vie. À la fin de la première semaine de l'exposition, des traces ne subsistaient qu'aux bords de la salle.

L'essentiel de l'exposition consiste en quatre postes informatisés permettant de suivre les quelque vingt-neuf bandes vidéo restaurées pour l'occasion. La moitié environ n'est que des traces filmées de performances réalisées dans les années soixante-dix : moins des œuvres en soi, que la mémoire d'actions diverses. Les performances corporelles, presque actionnistes, où l'on voit l'artiste nu (*Welcome Home*, 1980) ou vêtu uniquement d'une jambe de pantalon (*Chinook*, 1985), ne s'inscrivaient nullement dans un processus de mémoire; contrairement aux performances sans public, comme *Parler* (1972), elles n'ont pas été réalisées dans le but d'être enregistrées et conservées.

Dans cette dernière vidéo, réalisée en collaboration avec l'artiste Sarkis, on voit les deux hommes mener un dialogue, chacun parlant dans sa langue maternelle : ils s'écoutent et se répondent sans se comprendre (Gerz ne comprendra qu'après coup que Sarkis parle du génocide des Arméniens, alors que Gerz, à l'insu de Sarkis, parle d'une crèche sauvage à Paris), cherchant les bases de la communication au sein de l'incommunication même.

Le premier mérite de cette exposition est de permettre au public (non pas au grand public, auquel ces œuvres expérimentales n'ont jamais été destinées, mais à un public d'artistes et de théoriciens qui se doit d'être averti) de prendre acte des affinités entre les expériences tentées il y a trente ans et celles d'aujourd'hui. Épreuve quelque peu pénible pour l'amour-propre contemporain, dans la mesure où bien des initiatives font triste figure à côté des pratiques expérimentales de la génération précédente. En effet, si l'on connaît assez bien maintenant les tenants et les aboutissants des provocations des avant-gardes historiques du début du xx^e siècle, les recherches innovatrices des années soixante et surtout soixante-dix demeurent encore, sur le plan de l'histoire de l'art, un angle mort. Dans la transmission intergénérationnelle des savoirs, ce phénomène de refoulement, qui consiste à ignorer tout ou presque de la génération immédiatement précédente, est bien connu; et dans une certaine mesure, du

moins dans une perspective nietzschéenne, seul un certain oubli rend possible l'action au présent. Mais on ne peut que déplorer l'appauvrissement de l'œuvre chez bien des artistes s'inscrivant dans la mouvance « relationnelle » qui ignorent – ou feignent d'ignorer – les gestes pourtant irréversibles accomplis par des artistes de la génération de Gerz. Gestes souvent liés à une ambition politique assumée, allant chez Gerz jusqu'à la volonté d'abolir l'art en tant qu'élément d'une « législation visuelle », destinée à administrer les subjectivités. « Est beau ce qui sert » affirme Gerz, définissant un terme par ailleurs peu usité dans son vocabulaire artistique. Mais qui sert à quoi? Sans doute à arracher l'art à lui-même et à imaginer ce qu'il pourrait être, comme dans la plus récente proposition présentée dans l'exposition, la plateforme de dialogue que l'artiste a lancée sur Internet à partir de la question suivante : « Dans le contexte actuel de l'art, quelle serait votre vision d'un art encore inconnu? » L'état actuel de cette œuvre plurielle, imprévisible et encore ouverte se trouve au www.anthology-of-art.net. > Stephen Wright

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Francine Savard

Galerie René Blouin Montréal 2 février - 9 mars

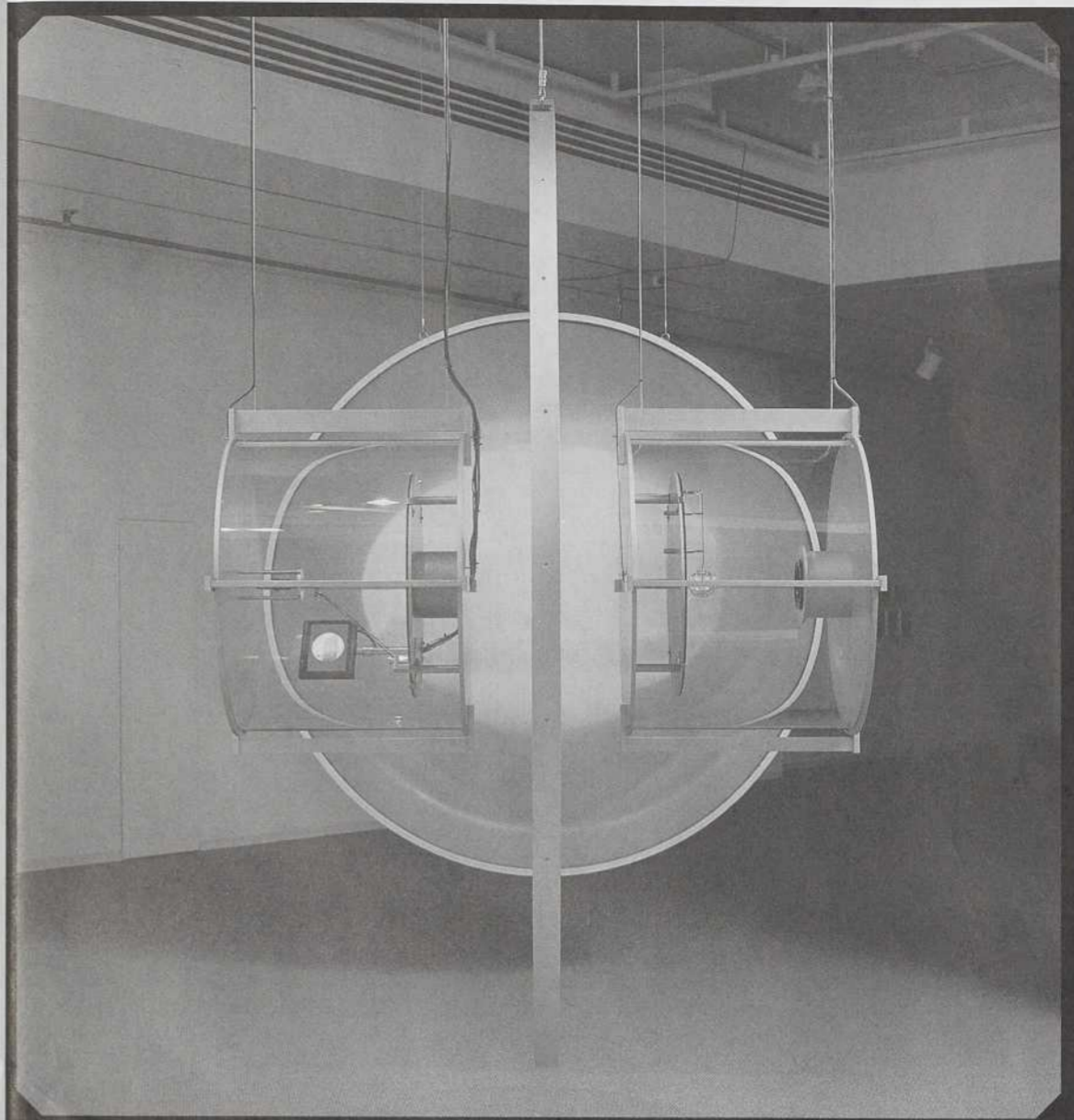
Ces œuvres récentes de Francine Savard nous sont présentées accompagnées d'un livre d'artiste intitulé *Un plein un vide*, avec pour point commun et pour point de départ : des mots, plus précisément un lexique de trente et un termes ayant tous partie liée à la désignation dans le langage commun de l'espace planaire et des formes qu'il peut prendre, notamment en peinture : un fond, une étendue, des étalements, une trainée, un motif, etc. Tous ces mots déclencheurs ont été extraits d'une monographie (J.-P. Duquette, 1980) et d'un catalogue d'exposition (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Chartres, 1985) traitant du travail de Fernand Léduc, et ils composent le *Lexique du vocabulaire de l'abstraction. 1 : les citations* présenté sous forme de liste verticale dans le livre. Des trente et un termes, onze sont repris et littéralement « mis en œuvre », et quoiqu'ils aient été sélectionnés parmi tous, ils ne se distinguent pas d'une manière particulière, par une complexité ou une fortune critique plus grande, par exemple. Par ce souci de n'instaurer aucune hiérarchie de quelque nature que ce soit, l'artiste se trouve à garder ouvert l'ensemble des possibilités offertes par le corpus de termes (ceux-là sont retenus, d'autres auraient pu l'être tout aussi adéquatement). Elle étend cet aspect de dé-hiérarchisation jusqu'au mode d'interaction des toiles entre elles, faisant en sorte qu'aucune ne se présente comme punctum, pivot ou aboutissement par rapport aux autres : le caractère rhizomatique de la liste des termes dans le livre se transpose ici en *all over*, dans un respect très poussé des deux médiums, des deux langages écriture et peinture. Il en va également ainsi de l'accrochage, où aucune ligne force – de nature formelle ou coloristique –, ne s'en dégage d'office.

Chacune de ces onze œuvres exposées mesure aux alentours d'un mètre par un mètre cinquante et se présente comme une toile montée très minutieusement sur un cadre épais de trois centimètres, de forme non géométrique et non régulière. Chacune est peinte d'une couleur monochrome en aplats, sans aucun effet de texture, et en plein

centre de cette surface colorée est tracé un des termes retenus du *Lexique*, en ton sur ton, dans un contraste minimal qui oblige à s'approcher pour lire le mot. Un très intéressant dialogue est ainsi institué entre la forme non orthodoxe, la couleur toujours très unie et franche, et enfin le mot et son article inscrits sur la surface: c'est cette dynamique qui s'installe entre les caractères dénotatif et connotatif attachés au mot tracé et le caractère évocatif de la forme du tableau que le spectateur n'a de cesse d'explorer et d'en vérifier la pertinence. Car, on l'aura compris, le rapport entre les trois éléments forme-couleur-mot ne vise pas à être unilatéralement convergent ou divergent, ni à se donner spontanément.

Ainsi, dans la première toile de la série (*Une étendue jaune*), le spectateur cherche spontanément à mettre en relation la forme vaguement rectangulaire et cassée en «V», le contour bosselé par endroits, le pigment jaune vif, avec le mot *étendue* qui y est inscrit: il évalue spontanément en quoi ceci – et notamment le jaune – s'accorde avec ce que le mot dénote et comment est particulièrement bien rendu le concept ou l'expérience d'étendue. C'est une même introduction à la problématique globale de ces œuvres qu'on retrouve dans *Une aire bleue* qui, parce qu'elle est accrochée à la suite de *Une étendue jaune*, incite à se demander en quoi une étendue se distingue d'une aire, et en quoi le bleu a une plus grande capacité à rendre le concept proprement géométrique d'aire que le jaune, comme l'artiste en fait la proposition; ou encore en vertu de quel *a priori* perceptuel la forme «molle» (comme une flaque de pigment bleu) exploitée ici entre en contradiction avec la régularité et la rigidité qu'on associe habituellement – mais indûment, nous est-il révélé ici – aux concepts géométriques. Dans *Un pan orange*, la forme presque carrée et régulière est animée d'un mouvement, presque d'un «swing», qui fait se retrousser légèrement les angles: ici la couleur orange, la forme nettement plus géométrique que dans les deux toiles qui précèdent, et le mot pan lui-même, ne sont pas sans évoquer la tradition du monochrome. Ce que reprend un peu plus loin *Un aplat violet* à la forme trapézoïdale et d'un violet opaque sombre qui capte la lumière et produit un effet de dématérialisation du support: l'absence d'accidents dans le contour, sa réduction à une pure fonction de délimitation, donne par ailleurs un aspect minimaliste à la forme que n'avait pas *Un pan orange*. Une semblable évocation de la pratique du monochrome – où forme et fond, forme et support, ne font qu'un – est également présente dans *Un plan rouge* mais elle y prend une autre voie: par son format plutôt rectangulaire, l'intensité et la vibrance du pigment rouge ainsi que le mot *plan*, on ne peut manquer d'associer cette œuvre à celles de Barnett Newman. Précédant cette évocation libre de *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* et préparant en quelque sorte le terrain à la référence au discours serré et rigoureux des formalistes américains, *Une forme rouge orangée* offre un contraste fort: elle arbore un contour vague qui s'accorde pleinement avec le flou, le vague inhérent au mot-valise qu'est *forme*. Pour créer cette résonance oppositionnelle entre les deux œuvres, l'artiste n'a pas hésité à faire converger dans chacune les trois termes de l'équation forme-couleur-mot et à les unir clairement. Elle rentabilise une même «reposante» et rassurante analogie dans d'autres toiles mais à des fins qui ne tiennent pas systématiquement à l'évocation de l'histoire de l'abstraction picturale: dans *Une tache rose* qui se présente sous forme de pétale de couleur fuchsia, c'est le dispositif même du procédé de l'analogie qui est mis en évidence à travers la «simplicité» de l'adéquation des éléments, dans le but de souligner – par contraste là aussi – la complexité du dialogue mot-image qu'exploitent les autres toiles. Un même accord aisé des trois éléments se retrouve dans *Un littoral vert* où la forme triangulaire étirée et courbée à sa base évoque la ligne des bords de mer ou de lac vus de très haut, ce que vient renforcer la couleur verte qui a la faculté, bien plus que ne le pourrait le jaune sable ici, de connoter et d'évoquer directement la nature «naturante». Mais *Un littoral vert* se distingue dans sa mise en œuvre d'un accord interne convergent et il occupe une place particulière dans l'exposition: il est le seul en effet à porter un vocable précis dans sa dénotation (*littoral* est plus circonscrit que ne le sont *surface*, *figure*, *plan*, etc.) en même temps que le plus puissamment évocateur (la mer, un lac, l'été, une prairie, la nature...); ce qui s'avère très intéressant ici, c'est cette dynamique forte entre une plus grande précision et une ouverture instantanée sur l'imaginaire et ses multiples connexions mnémoriques, et que vient nourrir tant la forme d'arc qui renvoie à un geste large et libre dans le tracé, que la couleur naturalisante (d'un vert prairie). Un propos opposé anime *Une figure ocre*, où le rapport entre la forme très découpée à la façon d'une pointe de flèche et le mot *figure* rappelle ce mode plus complexe d'analogie entre l'image et le mot qu'est le motif signalétique et qui fait appel à une médiation, une convention sociale en l'occurrence. À l'extrême, l'artiste nous rappelle que le dialogue interne entre les trois éléments forme-couleur-mot peut aussi se montrer sibyllin, comme dans *Des étalements gris bleu* et dans *Des trouées noires* où deux formes vaguement jumelles sont accolées de part et d'autre d'un axe de symétrie sans offrir de possibilité d'emboîtement harmonieux: le hiatus spatial mis en place «fait image», il renvoie au pluriel imprimé aux mots *étalements* et *trouées*, mais sans plus, nous laissant sans véritable réponse.

Ces onze œuvres intriguent et fascinent par le fait qu'elles *font penser* à des formes (de la nature ou appartenant à l'histoire de la peinture) mais le léger pas de côté qui est imprimé dans le rapport forme-couleur-mot change toute la perspective et rend éminemment relative la sorte de reconnaissance spontanée qu'elles induisent. D'où une sorte de mouvement en boucle de la réflexion chez le spectateur, celui-ci tentant en effet de saisir en quoi et



DAVID TOMAS, NOT HERE, NOT THERE, 2001, INSTALLATION VIEW, "DAPRÈSLEDÉPEUPLEUR/AFTERTHELOSTONES"; PHOTO: RICHARD-MAX TREMBLAY, COURTESY GALERIE DE L'UQAM.

daprèsledépeupleur/afterthelostones

Galerie de l'UQAM Montréal January 16 – February 23

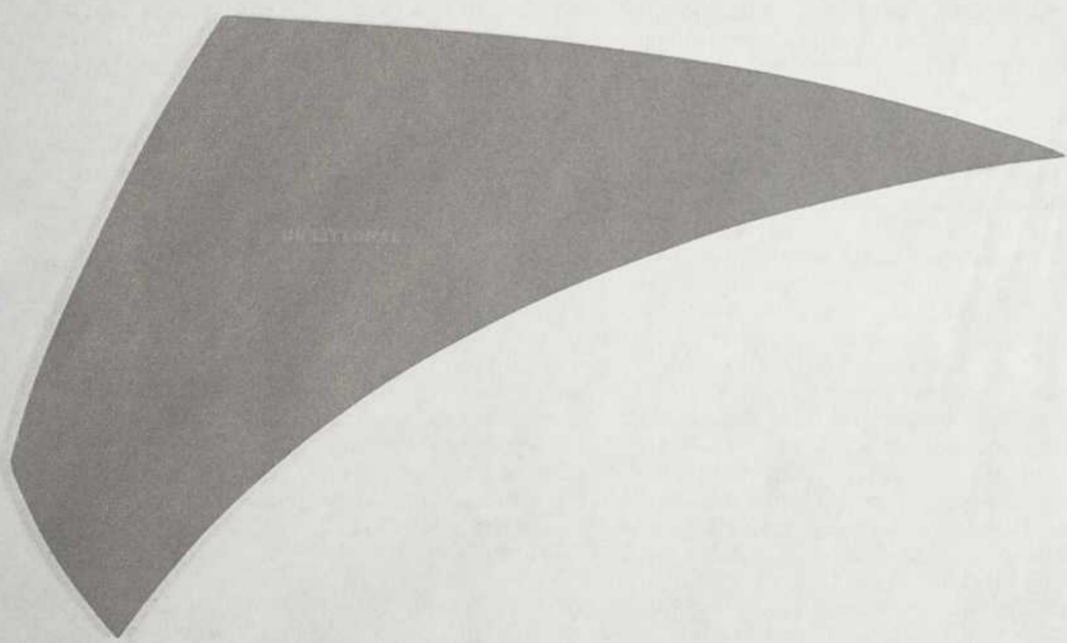
For her most recent exhibition, curator Michèle Thériault invited three artists and one artist team to produce work based on Samuel Beckett's *Le Dépeupleur* (*The Lost Ones*), a narrative text that describes in exacting detail the extreme conditions of existence of some 200 human beings living inside a delimited cylindrical space. The title of the exhibition offers a preliminary staging of Thériault's interest in questions of translation and temporality inasmuch as it registers the polyvocal aspect of Beckett's text – published in French in 1970 and then in English in 1972 – as well as the problematic of translation and interpretation as belated activities. As a translational and cultural matter, the meanings engendered by the exhibition unfold in a temporality that struggles with itself and dissolves itself against the historical, phenomenological and literary aspects of *Le Dépeupleur*. The artists involved are placed in an affective and active relation with the form, factuality and sense of Beckett's descriptions. While we receive and understand *Le Dépeupleur* as a text that withdraws from and refuses visibility, we do so through the materiality of Beckett's language, the text's rhythm and cadence, and its detached description of the suffering of both the body and the psyche inside the cylinder. Through the structure of the text and through the structure of the exhibition, two modalities are brought into play: one which negates and dissolves visibility as an epistemological trope but which retrieves it in the dimension of embodiment, and a second mode which relates to the former; that is, temporality as a physical and material dimension that conditions human life and human contact. The tragic action that unfolds between old and new fluctuates between two poles of political time: that of dehistoricized timeserving and that of serving time in a world of total illusion against which the work refuses to become worldly – the conditions of Beckett's endgame.

Among the artists involved in the exhibition, the artist couple Smith/Stewart have produced a large-scale double video projection superimposed onto the ambient sound of a 16-mm film projector. In *A is B* (2001-2), a flash sequence of images of a grasping hand disturbs one's visual field and physical coordinates. The sound of an outmoded technology is appropriated for the purposes of the looped projection which brings to mind early cinematic montage. While the images of the hand seem to have once moved in real time, we eventually begin to understand their construction from a sequence of numerous video stills. The double projection allows the viewer to move around the screen, inviting a more highly developed sense of phenomenal space. As the light of the screen reflects off of the walls of the room, the screen image becomes increasingly easier to view. The viewer soon begins to seek a level of comfort between the image and the surrounding gallery space, between perception and the apperception caused by the fluctuations of light and darkness. This bodily sensation is doubled by the image of the hand which seems to grasp, grip and scratch, then clutch helplessly and blindly, thereby

figuring the destabilization of sight that we experience. Through gestures of release and tension, vision itself is dimly associated with mastery and aggression, survival, dispossession and eventual fatigue.

Works by Jana Sterbak and Guy Pellerin are also concerned with embodied perception and movement. Sterbak's *Monumental* (2001) is comprised of oversized wooden crutches that lean into each other against the wall. Their massive indifference to potential usage provokes an untranslatability into either necessity or play. While we acknowledge the work's semiotic code almost without effort, we encounter a difference in its semantic register that makes the work recede from comprehension. Between experience and discourse, we are diminished by our incapacity to decipher this difference and are confronted by our hesitation to enter a space of unknowing sympathy. Our hesitation is maintained perhaps because the work elicits the memory of liberal sentimentality. While an aesthetic of special pleading would be highly comforting in Beckett's world of postwar breakdown, Sterbak, like Beckett, closes off this avenue; mobility is frustrated. Movement also characterizes the reception of Pellerin's *No 345 – Ce qui frappe d'abord dans cette pénombre est la sensation de jaune qu'elle donne pour ne pas dire de souffre à cause des associations* (2001). Eight roundels of painted plywood are placed at eye level along a wall painted the same unnameable yellowish, taupe-ish brown colour. We wander from one roundel to the next, as though the enigma of its existence might be answered by a different circle. The figures, painted according to a calculated schema similar to *The Lost Ones* concern with measurement, reason and embodiment, soon seem anonymous and banal. The frame of the minimalist painting that was once so crucial in the work of artists like Stella and Tausen is now dispersed into multiple parts and the painted installation's ambivalent structure opens onto the space of the gallery as environment. In the process, we become aware that the social world that once talked about the abstract painting's metaphysical existence has also threatened to disappear.

David Tomas presents us with two works that are concerned with vision, sound and technology. *L'Œil de Beckett* (2001), a small glass-blown object, seems to function as a key or solution manual to the more complex construction that is *Not Here, Not There* (2001). The former consists of a glass tube and two enveloping glass spheres that engage vision in a ruse that separates vision from the sense of hearing and in the process reintroduces one to the other. As we cognitively and visually follow the length of the tube from its hidden orifice inside one sphere to its visible exit in the next, we experience the impossibility of a purely logical and formal collapse of inside and outside. *L'Œil de Beckett* addresses the possibility and impossibility of Beckett's hermeneutic world inside the cylinder by maintaining the fact of the text's



FRANCINE SAVARD, UN LITTORAL VERT, 2001; PHOTO: (RICHARD-MAX TREMBLAY) GALERIE RENÉ BLOUIN.

comment ce qu'il a devant les yeux n'est pas un rapport d'identité et / ou d'illustration entre image et mot, ou encore à évaluer en quoi la forme construite par le contour ne correspond jamais indubitablement aux connotations formelles de la notion écrite dessus, en quoi la proposition formelle de l'artiste n'est jamais tout à fait «arbitraire» et ne peut être vue comme une pure forme issue de son imaginaire; et aussi, à un autre niveau, en quoi l'œuvre présentée n'est jamais tout à fait de la peinture formaliste comme telle, ni jamais tout à fait un «shaped canvas», ni jamais tout à fait de l'art conceptuel. La fascination qu'exercent ces œuvres provient ainsi de ce qu'on pourrait appeler leur «familière étrangeté», et qui résulte d'analogies sapées systématiquement, de pistes de lecture tronquées, d'associations présentées comme «libres» mais en fait savamment dirigées. C'est la capacité de Francine Savard à exploiter plastiquement les ressorts du langage que sont la dénotation, la connotation et l'évocation, et d'en disposer en toute liberté qui rend les œuvres captivantes. À partir d'un intérêt pour les différentes démarches de l'abstraction en peinture, et à partir d'un matériau de départ que sont les mots et leurs diverses modalités d'extension discursive et imagée, l'artiste a réussi à faire se croiser et se nourrir mutuellement la problématique interne du langage avec la problématique foncière et paradoxale de l'abstraction qu'est le rapport au réel: c'est en prenant en compte le fait que le caractère dénotatif du langage ne peut être disjoint totalement de son caractère connotatif et en produisant un parallèle entre cette nature double du langage et la démarche de l'abstraction, qu'elle redéfinit ici l'abstraction comme processus indissolublement intriqué à la figuration, à une dénotation picturale du réel. Comme nous le révèlent les œuvres présentées ici, le travail d'abstraction chez Francine Savard montre qu'il sait toujours qu'il se constitue en porte-à-faux avec son origine (la figuration en peinture) et expose sans ambages ce qui le nourrit (la pratique du monochrome, la réactivation critique des théories picturales de la dernière moitié du xx^e siècle), ce qu'il prend pour matériau (la nature double du langage, la complexité du lien entre abstraction et figuration), et finalement ses exigences – soit la nécessité qui s'ensuit d'une absolue rigueur de la démarche. C'est en ce sens que l'on peut comprendre la référence au travail de Fernand Léduc: non seulement ce travail a-t-il constitué le point de départ des œuvres mais il se révèle également comme l'horizon qualitatif qui a guidé leur conception. > CHRISTINE DUBOIS

L'auteure est critique d'art et vit à Montréal.

transmission (Beckett being the primary conductor of his text). This understanding helps us make sense of *Not Here, Not There*, a multi-part construction which uses cylinders of glass and aluminum, circular panels of mirrored glass and a video projection, in an elaborate mediation of a ten-second video sequence taken from one of the closing scenes of Andrei Konchalovsk's *Runaway Train*. The two cylinders mediate sound and image through a series of historically and epistemologically laden technologies – blown glass, mirror, camera lucida, speaker and microphone, digital monitor and camera. *Not Here, Not There* articulates the technological present through a secondary designation akin to the procedures of natural history; it proposes an anxious and dizzying non-discursive discourse on technology, on its classifications and condi-

tions of emergence. The work maps the space of a virtual text that we come to inhabit, if only marginally. As we decipher the chain of mediating links, we come closer to sensing and apprehending the significance of the audio-visual artifact of the train locomotive that is captured in the eye of a circular screen. Through the chronotopic image of the character Oscar Manheim riding the escape locomotive, we are blocked off from the sentimental literature of private tragedy. Oscar's singularity is no more real than is our collectivity. Like Oscar, our humanity is serving time as it tries to catch up with the past, going nowhere fast. > Marc James Léger

The author is an artist, writer and scholar living in Ottawa.

Sylvia Safdie

Peak Gallery | Toronto | November 15 – December 15

Serenity diffuses the exhibition space as one first experiences the recent work of Montréal artist Sylvia Safdie. The open structure of the show, curated by Zack Pospieszynski, inevitably invites a second tour. Dynamic tensions and conflicts in the works are gently layered into a whole. Each piece, whether it is sculpture, drawing or video, circumscribes a space-time territory, a zone of reflection by drawing the viewer in and then letting go.

For Safdie, video is a new medium of production and this is her first showing of video installations. A contemplative vision and a free-flowing yet sober approach that is characteristic of the artist is evident. Moreover, the sense of fluidity is even more powerfully pronounced in this liquid medium. The videos are silent, engaged in an invisible loop, their meditative rhythm preserved.

Ben (2001) is projected on a large wall. It shows the shaved head of a man, engaged in a conversation and seen in slow motion. The camera remains still, scrutinizing his expressions as they transform the features of his face. The movement is entirely internal, the head levitating and changing its position within the frame. The artist creates the impression of disembodiment and the head appears as if it is viewed under water. Indeed, another video track is layered over this one: the waters of a river (actually, Montréal's Lachine Canal). At times, waves penetrate the frame, submerge the head and blur the image; at other times, they are dispersed and Ben is seen clearly. Wind and birds interfere at irregular intervals and create subtle disturbances. They ripple and texture the image. In one unforgettable moment, a bird flies in an out of the frame, crossing Ben's head like a passing thought, a touch of inspiration, a sudden enlightenment or a new thrust for life.

The profound reverie of *Ben* is in contrast with *Sam*'s striving for awakening. *Sam* (2001) is portrayed on a tiny, LCD screen, mounted into the opposite wall. The image of the head of a newborn child is superimposed with an image of water, interspersed with raindrops creating many small ripples. Just as in *Ben*, in *Sam* two video tracks run through the whole duration of the piece. Rain showers over the baby's head. This new being struggles to keep his head above water, striving to emerge and confront life.

Ben and *Sam* are a unique personal inquiry into the metaphysical dimensions of video portraiture. The layers of water in both videos create painterly density and depth. An effect of a double screen is created. Face to face, yet unaware of each other's presence, Ben and Sam are linked through multiple strings of meanings. The communication between these two pieces conceives the content which defines the perimeter of a reflective zone. It exemplifies the dialogical mode in Safdie's work that is accurately rendered throughout the whole exhibition.

Walking further into the gallery space, the viewer encounters *Keren No. 4* (1999). A book with empty pages is placed at the bottom of a copper barrel. The gaze of the visitor, who is walking around it, illuminates the pages reflected onto the walls of the barrel and fills them with his/her own imaginary world.

In the large drawing *Earthnotes, Series II No. 1* (2000), many small human figures climb, fly, fall or crawl. In their passage through the visual territory of the work, they move upwards, leaving the lower part of the frame empty and aspiring toward the unknown, beyond the borders of the frame. The figures are drawn with earth mixed with oil and are spread sporadically onto the white mylar surface. Lost in space, their earthy substance counteracts with their disobedience to the laws of gravity.

In *Threshold No. 2* (2001) a pile of black soil and a pile of sand are separated by a transparent glass screen. As the viewer observes the work from different angles, the relationship between the elements changes along with their appearance. First, soil and sand fuse together. Then, one is present and the other disappears until we could see them both again, distanced from each other. It is important to point out that the earth and the sand in this work are part of Safdie's collection of over 400 earth samples gathered from around the world. The sand originates from Haifa at the Mediterranean Sea and the black soil from the Eastern Townships in Québec.

A series of drawings of trees, *Notations* (1999), is placed in a separate room. These drawings are suspended in the middle of the frame creating an illusion that the uprooted trees float in space. In the centre of the same room is a sculpture, *Tahala No. 1* (1999), a black, rectangular metal box, left ajar and overflowing with stones. The drawings and the sculpture function as a composition. They are reminiscent of an abandoned graveyard. The trees come to life and play the role of witnesses to a ceremony of unearthing the forgotten past. In fact, in Doina Harap's documentary on Safdie's work, *Earthmarks*, the artist recounts the story of finding an abandoned Jewish cemetery in Tahala (a small village in Morocco) which served as an inspiration.

The cave-like quality of the gallery space lends itself to Safdie's artistic discourse. It elicits elements from the inscrutable pool of meanings within the artist's voyage into the depths of the past, the vestiges of memory and the contemplative present moment. There are no patterns in this work but a flow and an awareness of the cycles in nature, in culture and in human life. The works communicate between each other in many ways, establishing diverse paths of experience. The different media constitute a variety of thought forms which become inhabited by Safdie's sensibility, its diverse manifestations and its metamorphoses. > ROSSITZA DASKALOVA

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Arni Haraldsson/Angela Grauerholz

Contemporary Arts Gallery | Vancouver

December 7 – February 10

The rise of photoconceptualism during the 1960s and 1970s contributed to art discourses that questioned photography's use as a tool of representation. Photography was no longer considered a transparent medium through which the world could be documented distortion-free. The legitimacy of the documentary photography tradition was questioned by works such as Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1972), which pointed to the inability of either photographic or written language to tell a story objectively and truthfully, free from preconceived notions attached to positions of class, gender, race and power. Photoconceptualist works have subsequently explored the complex spaces between reality and its representation, thereby increasing the perceived distance between the two, where once none existed. The strategies and aesthetics favoured by early photoconceptualists – including a distanced, clinical/scientific approach, the self-directed analysis of pictorial conventions, and the adoption of modernist/minimalist visual forms – remain prevalent today. By contrast, barring a few notable exceptions (such as Nan Goldin and Richard Billingham), tra-

ditional documentary photography practices are seldom seen in contemporary art.

This tendency towards photoconceptual rather than documentary strategies is apparent in two recent shows. While Canadian photographers Arni Haraldsson and Angela Grauerholz have different relationships to photoconceptualism, its aesthetic legacy surfaces in their latest bodies of work. Both Haraldsson's *Firminy* (1999) and Grauerholz's *Privation* (2001) reflect an awareness of critical discourses in their use of photoconceptual methodologies to mine what could be considered humanist documentary territory: the reportage of human struggle and loss. Each project turns an analytical eye to its subjects in cool-toned colour photographs documenting objects and places devoid of the human figure. Human presence is implied through its absence, suggesting disappearance and alienation, and leaves the viewer to complete each narrative through the details and traces that remain.

With *Firminy*, Arni Haraldsson continues his investigation of building sites designed by Le Corbusier, a French Modernist architect well-known for a utopic vision that



SYLVIA SAFDIE, INSTALLATION VIEW OF *BEN*, 2001, DVD CONTINUOUS LOOP PROJECTION, AND *KEREN #4*, 1999, COPPER, BOOK. PHOTO: ZACK POSPIESZYNSKI, COURTESY PEAK GALLERY.

often disregarded actual human use of spaces and cities. Haraldsson's photographs document two buildings located in the town of Firminy, France: the Unité d'habitation, an apartment complex and nursery school, and the empty, unfinished Church of St. Pierre. The dilapidated concrete constructions – one a boxy monolithic ghetto and the other graffiti-covered – sit in stark contrast to the nearby verdant French countryside and picturesque old town of Firminy. The Unité d'habitation in particular is a site of conflict: its residents oppose the French government's efforts to gradually close down the building, as it is said to be too expensive to maintain. Images of protest posters made by the Unité's tenants and an architectural model of the uncompleted church supplement the photographs of building exteriors and interiors.

Haraldsson's continuing investigation of Le Corbusier building sites may suggest an interest in capturing these crumbling edifices for posterity: the anthropological salvage paradigm applied to Modernist architecture rather than "primitive" cultures. However, his photographs are most resonant when they aspire beyond the obvious in their project of documentation. While the images of the building exteriors resemble innocuous landscapes or architectural studies, the images of the nursery school interiors reveal much about the negotiations between these humans and the modernist artefacts in which they live. In *'Ceiling Project', Nursery School, Unité d'habitation*, a construction paper assemblage hangs from the ceiling

of a classroom, deliberately mimicking a nearby patch of disintegrating, peeling paint. It's an ironic gesture, disgruntled yet affectionate, that speaks of the conflicting thoughts and emotional attachments the Unité's inhabitants possess for the decaying eyesore they call home.

In contrast with Haraldsson's social/historical project, Angela Grauerholz's *Privation* expresses more of an individual narrative. *Privation* represents the remains of Grauerholz's book collection, amassed over a period of twenty-five years, which was destroyed in a house fire. The images were produced digitally, without a camera, the books' fronts and backs laid directly onto a flatbed scanner. The lush prints, outputted onto watercolour paper, portray charred, water-stained, mouldering objects. Although historical references to book burning do briefly spring to mind, *Privation* is primarily a testament to Grauerholz's personal loss. Floating timelessly against a neutral background and blown up to a monumental larger-than-life size, the book exteriors reveal little about their contents (only two can be positively identified: *Derrida and Writing* and *William Blake's Theory of Art*); instead, the viewer is seduced by the formal qualities of the books' damaged surfaces, as if they were abstract paintings.

Privation's detached approach works against the empathetic association that it seems to ask of its viewer. The indisputably beautiful images serve as memorials to the lost collection, and although the enormity of Grauerholz's loss is hinted at – the sixteen images shown are only a

small sampling of the hundreds of books destroyed – it is not made visceral. The overall generic character of the images, reinforced by the paucity of specific information about the books and the impersonal, specimen-like titles (e.g., *Book #136 back*), fails to convey Grauerholz's sentimental or intellectual relationship with these objects, and thus they remain just that – mute material objects.

Firminy and *Privation* attest to the vexed status of traditional documentary photography within contemporary art. They both attempt to negotiate the fine line between taking a detached, critical look at their subjects and allowing the emotional affectivity of their subjects' stories to make its impact. The mixed results that ensue elicit a number of questions: Is traditional documentary photography still relevant? Does it have a future within contemporary art institutions? Is criticality more important than compassion?

Is a critical contemporary documentary practice – one that avoids reverting to universalist and humanist tendencies, but that also resists the plague of postmodern cynicism – even possible? If the crisis of representation has presented contemporary photography with a kind of loss (of certainty, of belief in the possibility of Truth) then perhaps works such as *Firminy* and *Privation* represent a step in the process of grieving: an attempt to take loss and transform it into something else – something that still remains to be seen. > ADRIENNE LAI

The author is a writer and photographer whose most recent works (both scholarly and visual) explore issues around technology, perception and cultural representation.



ANGELA GRAUERHOLZ, *PRIVATION*, 2001 (BOOK #10 FRONT, BOOK #10 BACK), EACH 44.5 x 36.5"; PHOTOS: COURTESY ART 45, MONTRÉAL AND OLGA KORPER GALLERY, TORONTO.



ARNI HARALDSSON, *FIRMINY* (NORTH-EAST FACADE, INCOMPLETE CHURCH OF SAINT-PIERRE [1960-74] FIRMINY-VERT, FRANCE; LE CORBUSIER, ARCHITECT), 1999, TRANSMOUNTED C-PRINT 50 x 60"; PHOTO: COURTESY CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY, VANCOUVER.



ATUL DODIYA, *BABU AT RENÉ BLOCK GALLERY, NEW YORK 1974, 1998, WATERCOLOUR, "MOVING IDEAS"; PHOTO: COURTESY GALLERY CHEMOULD, MUMBAI AND PETER WHITE.*

Moving Ideas: A Contemporary Cultural Dialogue with India

Vancouver | Various Sites | January 19 – March 31

"Moving Ideas: A Contemporary Cultural Dialogue with India" arrived early this spring in Vancouver and represented the western Canadian version of the curatorial initiative which began last year as "Dust on the Road: Canadian Artists in Dialogue with SAHMAT" (in Vancouver it was presented at Roundhouse Community Centre). Organized by the Canadian curatorial collective Hoopoe Curatorial, the Vancouver show was curated by Montréal-based independent curator Peter White and was expanded to include two other major exhibitions: "Secular Practice: Recent Art From India" and "From Goddess to Pin-Up: Icons of Femininity in Indian Calendar Art." This ambitious, multi-venue exhibition included the work of nine Indian artists whose visual practice has a shared concern for the intersection of the personal with the political and social terrain in contemporary India.

In the last ten years the introduction of new communication technology to South Asia has facilitated the rise of installation, performance art and video-based work. The shifts in artistic practice coincide with the liberalization of India's economy and the ascendancy of *Hindutva*, a right-wing political movement that advocates Hinduism as a prerequisite for national identity. The diversity of expression and media represented by the work included in this show delivers a visual challenge to the hegemonic assertions of the Hindu right wing in India and positions contemporary art as a generative space of resistance and a site of productive engagement with past and present.

The work of Nalini Malani, Bhupen Khakhar and Jayashree Chakravarty shown at the Charles H. Scott Gallery represented the varied means by which contemporary artists negotiate a cultural terrain vexed by competing notions of the traditional and the modern. Khakhar's gestural watercolours with their homoerotic motifs challenged viewers to cast off any preconceptions that contemporary art in India is mired in traditionalism. Khakhar's valorization of a gay sensibility offered an oppositional voice to the patriarchy entrenched in Indian culture and the overdetermined masculinity of the Hindu right wing. Malani's *Hamletmachine* (2000) exemplified the deployment of new visual media to create a critical space that encouraged dialogue between past and present. By drawing upon the Hindu conception of the caste system as a body, Malani's video installation articulated the formation of a new social body under the influence of the right wing's problematic reclamation of traditional Hindu values in the late twentieth century. Calcutta-based Chakravarty's installation of vertical paper banners suspended from the ceiling called to mind the architectural congestion of the metropolitan spaces of India. Her loose and seemingly hurried drawing style captured the cadence and chaos of the modern urban environment and her vertical placement of the paper recalled the narrative tradition of indigenous storytellers in Eastern India.

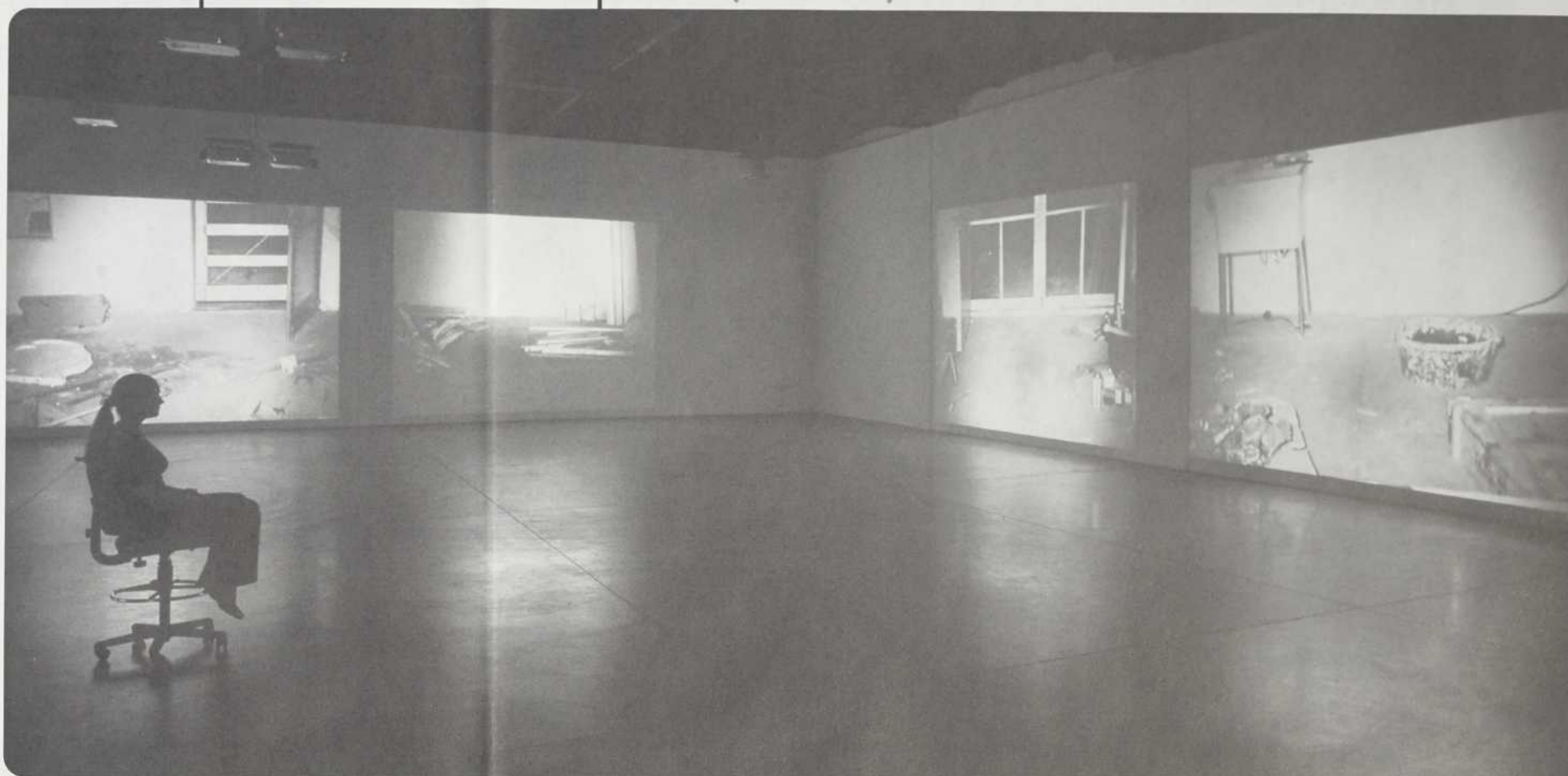
The works of Vivan Sundaram, Atul Dodiya and Sheela Gowda, grouped together at The Contemporary Art Gallery, shared a concern for history and the intervention of the personal and the quotidian into artistic practice. Dodiya's large watercolour drawings took up the life of Mahatma Gandhi as their central thematic. Dodiya's sustained studies recaptured and reconfigured key moments in the Mahatma's life to offer a subjective re-visioning of history and served to highlight the implicit performativity of Gandhi's political endeavours. Similarly, Sundaram's *Re-Take of Amrita* (2001) used photomontages to reconstruct the history of his great-aunt, Amrita Sher-Gil, one of

Bruce Nauman

New York

Dia Center for the Arts

January 10 – July 27



BRUCE NAUMAN, *MAPPING THE STUDIO I (FAT CHANCE JOHN CAGE)*, 2001, INSTALLATION VIEW; PHOTO: STUART TYSON, COURTESY DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS.

Bruce Nauman's haunting, seductive large-scale video installation, *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)* (2001) places the audience in the centre of two spatial superimpositions. Recorded at night over the summer of 2000, using infrared tape, seven surveillance cameras and microphones, the ghostly nocturnal video footage of Nauman's New Mexico studio is mapped onto the present-tense space of the museum in New York City. The result produces a translucent superimposition of two distinct temporalities, rather than a series of seven large-scale pictures projected onto the four walls. Video projection technology, as Samuel R. Delany observed, can liberate the "window" of the picture frame from its architectural support: when the video image vanishes, the screen disperses in the air, reconfiguring both frame and site. This fluidity of the image and sound, plus the mobility or absence of the frame "suggests shifting and mystical *jāta morgana*," or a mirage architecture, "through whose flexing and flickering corridors, closets and gardens the video experience moves us, as the video window changes and its images shift" (*Video Spaces*, New York: MoMA, 1995, p. 10). In this way, *Mapping the Studio* temporarily channels currents that we usually cannot see. As Delany so eloquently writes, "invisible cities that can only be manifested, to whatever ghostly extent, by technology" (p. 11). Like John Cage's "silent" composition, 4'33"

(1952), Nauman's *Mapping the Studio* additionally depends on a field of unintentional movement and sound, chance and indeterminacy as well as the interpenetration of audience and work.

Located in the gallery across the street from Dia's main building, a square room is built inside the former industrial space. Seven high-backed office chairs on casters sit in its centre, providing seating for the audience. Inside, seven greenish-grey infrared videos of Nauman's studio space are projected onto the four walls. The glowing projections reflect onto the smooth, highly polished concrete floor, further merging space and work. The individual pixels quiver on the walls like the surface tension of a heat mirage, barely visible on the low horizon of a highway, or like so many sequins on the wall, shimmering under the influence of a slight air current. Evenly spaced around the room, the projections display the leftover detritus of Nauman's studio – a stepladder, multiple casts of heads, leftover lumber, a rubber bucket with gloves dangling over its edge, pliers, C-clamps, partially opened shipping crates, a plaster-mixing tub, a drawing tube, three mismatched chairs forming a semi-circle, an unstretched, unfinished painting dangling from the wall as well as other unidentifiable bits of rubbish strewn across floor and walls. Multiple soundtracks of incidental noises in and outside of the studio record a coyote's bark, the restless movement of horses in the corral outside, thunder cracks – sounds that are punctuated by other less-identifiable bumps, crashes and bangs from inside the studio. Objects flip-flop from wall to floor, change place or disappear, signaling that the videotape which is initially presented as seamless is anything but. Rather it is a series of segments shot over successive nights and then edited into a five-hour-and-forty-five minute loop. Another cue that what is being watching is not a series of still images, but a field of constant, otherwise imperceptible activity, emerges when twin, glowing pinpoints dance across the field, and resolve into the nervous, stop-and-go motion of mice and lizards. The flicker and twitch of their movements across the floor, under studio litter and up the screen door heightens the already-present pulse and quiver of the video pixels.

"A cat and mouse game" was a phrase that came to mind the second time I sat inside Nauman's work. *Mapping the Space* activates one's peripheral vision, leaving viewers at full attention, inside a series of perspectives onto apparently empty rooms, waiting for the jolt of pleasure that comes when something moves. Beetles and

cockroaches slowly and methodically crawl across the door jambs and floor. Moths scud across the camera lens, drawn to the light, and are caught and suspended on its beams, leaving vaporous streams behind them like jets. The appearance of a black, tailless cat is an event. Its eyes, twin points reflected in the spotlight, create phosphorescent trails as it looks this way and that, hunting for mice. From one corner of the Dia space, the cat's hoarse meow is heard, while on the other it lopes across a corner of the studio, and disappears through a doorway into another room. I find myself waiting for its return. The illusion that the seven screens provide seven contiguous windows onto a roughly coterminous space, existing on an alternate plane that we have been afforded a temporary glimpse into, is ruptured when the same cat appears simultaneously in two projections. However this illusion is repaired when Nauman walks across three frames of his studio, flashlight on.

Combined with an absence of an art object – that no one can bang into or knock over – the mobile chairs and the dark room create an atmosphere of motility, autonomy and uncertainty that differs sharply from both the conventional museum and cinematic experience. Audience members form and disperse, or engage in impromptu bumper car games. Two girls became like two sentries, perched at taut attention in the middle of the space, facing opposite directions so as to miss nothing: "I saw a dog – look!" ... "Where?" ... "Over there!" ... "Do you think it's a live [real time] video?" An intertwined couple vigorously make out, small groups of three or more friends meet, sit down, chat and then disperse, a group of women gleefully straddle the chairs and propel themselves across the smooth floor, laughing with delight, and an unhappy young man wandered up to me and said, "What's supposed to happen?"

Mapping the Studio sits between the type of attention required by a still image, a prolonged, attentive look, and a film, where the action comes hurtling at you and you absorb the rush of information. Over the duration of the video, Nauman brings a cat-and-mouse game into the museum. Suspended between a moving and a still image, *Mapping the Studio* draws on both, setting up a temporal suspense that reconfigures the quality of attention it derives from the audience. > MARGOT BOUMAN

The author lives in New York City and is a Ph.D. candidate in the Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester.

the first Indian artists to bridge the divide between East and West. In keeping with his previous work, *The Sher-Gil Archive* (1995), Sundaram's complex montages spoke of memory, identity and cultural displacement to stress the importance of personal narrative as a counterpoint to a homogeneous national vision. Gowda's installation, *And Tell Him of My Pain* (2000) used simple everyday materials, thread, needles and red kumkum to create a writhing three-dimensional drawing that accentuated the role of the artwork as a residual document. Gowda's work functioned as a testament to the personal tactile experience of its creator and also called attention to the labour and process of both the artist and the women in India who use these materials on a daily basis.

The intersection of personal narrative with public document carried through to the work of Rummana Hussain at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Hussain's installation, *Home/Nation* (1996), was reminiscent of a shrine or reliquary with its sealed momentos, documents and photographs. The eclectic collection wove a powerful narrative which commented on the status of women in India. The intimate nature of Hussain's work was paired off against the documentary films of activist filmmaker Anand Patwardhan, also at the VAG. Patwardhan's films openly critiqued the political situation in India and endeavoured to raise consciousness about the hazards of a government which positions religion as a prerequisite for national identity. Patwardhan's *We Are Not Your Monkeys* (1996) addressed the mythological origins of the untouchable caste found in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, a text which figures prominently in the rhetoric of the right wing, and his most recent *Ribbons For Peace* dealt with the nuclear testing undertaken by India in May 1998.

Presentation House, in North Vancouver, was host to the photographic work of Pushpamala N and an exhibition of popular Indian calendar art. "From Goddess to Pin-Up: Icons of Femininity in Indian Calendar Art" culled from the collection of Sociologist Patricia Uberoi. Pushpamala N's *Phantom Lady or Kismet, A Photoromance* (1998) recuperated the 1935 Bollywood film persona of the fearless femme fatale cum swashbuckling super heroine of the *Hunterwali* films. In their heyday these films gained popular appeal by virtue of the heroine's ability to set right the evils of the world. To cast herself as the Hunterwali in modern Mumbai, Pushpamala N's twenty-two black-and-white photographs delivered a sardonic critique of urban life in the thriving metropolis. Her photographs positioned the feminine as an active agent and called attention to the gender stereotypes exemplified by the "From Goddess to Pin-Up" segment of the exhibition. The ephemeral brightly coloured images that made up the corpus of the calendar exhibit served to capitalize on the purchase power of the feminine as an empty sign ready for enlistment in the sale of both commodity and ideology.

"Secular Practice" encapsulated the need to develop international awareness of India's present political situation. The social relevance of the work included in this segment of the exhibition was sadly underscored this February when sectarian violence broke out in India's northern state of Gujarat, leaving over 500 people dead. The diversity of artistic engagement represented by this show not only challenged the myopic conception of India promoted by the Hindu right but it also highlighted the productive artistic tensions between the sacred and the secular, the urban and the rural, as well as the national and the international. "Moving Ideas" was the first major exhibition of contemporary Indian art to be held in North America. This unparalleled event represented a vast array of current artistic practice in India and successfully unmoored the lingering perception that Indian art is located in an enduring and pristine past. > Kathleen Wyma

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Detourism

Renaissance Society

Chicago

November 11 – December 23

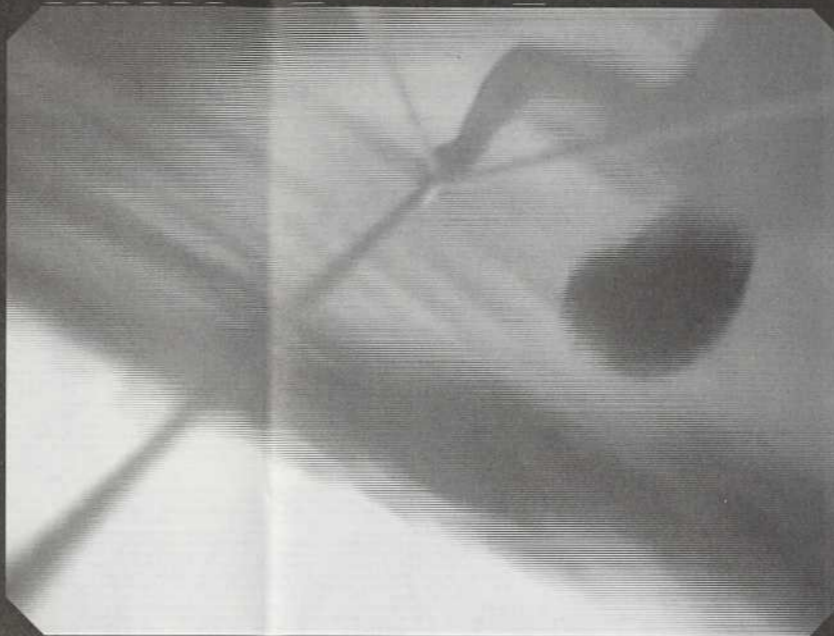
"Detourism" is a combination of "detour," going someplace you don't want to go because of circumstances beyond your control, and "tourism," visiting a place to satisfy a desire to experience someplace exotic and new. Curator and education director Hamza Walker coined this neologism for an exhibit which elaborates on what an idea of "place" can possibly mean to an individual in a post-multi-culti, globalized, very-late-capitalist world. Invoking Gertrude Stein's conflagrations of linguistic meaning as a diasporic umbrella of context – "Can you tell can you really tell it from here From here to there and from there to there"

(*Detourism*, p. 11) – Walker collected work by fourteen artists from around the globe to ruminate on the complexities of owning up to being a tourist in specific geographic locales.

The show includes all the trappings of a holiday trip that one would expect: There are picture postcards, tchotchke souvenirs, and the ubiquitous phrase books that help us translate from a familiar language into a "foreign" one. The postcards are provided by beautiful large-scale colour photographs that describe the thrill of travel: Michelle Keim's gorgeous "Air Traffic" series capture the flight patterns of planes leaving Chicago's O'Hare airport



SUCHAN KINOSHITA, LAUTSPRECHER (LOUDSPEAKER), 1997, STILL FROM VIDEO, "DETOURISM"; PHOTO: COURTESY THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.



DAVID SERVOS, AXES, 2001, INSTALLATION DETAIL, "DETOURISM"; PHOTO: COURTESY THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.

in super-long exposures, allowing her film to capture the elegant rising of air traffic. Miranda Lichtenstein and Edward Burtynsky present vast panoramic views of far-away places in crisp photographic detail, and Jeff Carter and Susan Giles, a collaborative team, show us the up-close bustle of foreign feet in a video that spins around on a merry-go-round contraption hugging the floor of the gallery.

But these various views do not sit easily within the wish-you-were-here-postcard genre to which Walker refers them, and his curatorial premise begins to get fleshed out. The dignified arcs in Keim's photographs look ominous, especially post-September 11. The tracings of the planes' headlights through space could signify scarily precise threats of bombing raids as easily as a harbinger of grandma's homecoming. Similarly, Lichtenstein's pretty pictures from a 2001 series titled "Cyberjaya" draw the viewer in with their inexhaustible detail, but what she describes is eerily unsettling: the pictures document the building of model communities for Internet workers outside of Kuala Lumpur. More frightening than even Disneyland's ideal community in the States, these newly fashioned suburbs sport acres of fake neighbourhoods,

"mass" transportation, and overdetermined atmospheres – not exotic at all.

Burtynsky's sweeping views are exotic enough for a West starved for new unmediated experience – shot in the Bay of Bengal ravaged by monsoons. But his subject matter, beautifully photographed, is of giant rusted cargo ships marooned on beaches after the rains stop. Against the vessels' vast scale, tiny human workers can be seen dismantling them for scrap metal. The contrast between the economy of global trade represented by the ships – Walker describes them as almost geologic – and the tenacious scavengers highlights the interdependency of modernity and ancient trade practices: The death of the ships creates a new economy for a native population, though not one as easily consumed by a visiting Other as a quaint village life of picturesque rituals.

Carter and Giles' video of marching bare feet similarly problematizes touristic consumption. Titled *Footage* (2000), their video was shot during a visit to Bali as they were trying out their new camera. Set on a curb, it recorded a formal procession, but without the full cultural trappings of costume, music and atmosphere. By then transferring

this brief video mishap into a shiny, high-tech, spinning low-slung monitor-machine, the artists made this dramatic immersion into another culture into a friendly merry-go-round, exposing their own ambivalent feelings about yearning to get away while wanting to feel at home.

Tourists bring home souvenirs to prove that they were there, objects from other cultures that point to difference, while remaining safe and understandable. Giles and Carter made seven miniature models of such objects, culled from their travel photos, but denuded them of the mementos' exotic and colourful cheapness: the sandals, pagodas and bananas are each sixteen inches high, handmade of unpainted chipboard. Corey McCorkle makes a more arcane high-art gesture at souvenir collecting: He gathered wood from around the world in thin veneers, wrapping them around fluorescent tube lighting. Nestled into the fixtures of the Renaissance Society's high ceiling, the covered tubes glowed in various brown hues in a combo that conflates Dan Flavin with third-world deforestation issues. Simeon Allen collected postage stamps during the period of South Africa's move from colonialism to post-apartheid times. Displayed in a wall-

size vertical vitrine, the miniature imagery in the stamps, from proud Afrikaaner white leadership to a proud Nelson Mandela, accumulate to trace the history of nation-image-making in this country which continues to struggle with an identity crisis tied to real economic and racial problems.

Inability to speak the language is always a problem when travelling, don't you know. Rainer Ganahl has made a collection of t-shirts, some included in "Detourism," that say "Teach me Albanian" or "Teach Me Chinese" translated into the language requested. This Austrian-born, New York transplant's brand of do-it-yourself diplomacy was furthered in his attempt to learn Chinese. Stacks and stacks of VHS tapes, which document his language studies, could be cynically interpreted, as Walker does, as a commodification of the ability to translate for economic gain. I prefer to hope that Ganahl's ever-inadequate attempt to learn new languages are a pathetic but genuine urge to meet actual people on each other's own terms. Suchan Kinoshita's *Loudspeaker* (1997) is similarly frustrated in attempting language translation. Walking into a shanty-like cubicle, the viewer looks into a telescope to watch a video of a woman listening to two people – one at each ear – and trying to translate what she hears for the viewer. None of the languages are English, and therefore lost on this viewer, but the hope that translation can lead to true understanding is palpable.

Tourism can no longer be understood as West on East or First on Third. Johanna Bresnick's *Panama Canal Conduit* (2000) is her handmade souvenir – a lumpy pathetic sculpture of the grand canal – of a geographic divide that separates her from her Ecuadorian husband's culture. Siegren Appelt's blurred video view from a train into Milan presents only personal visual confusion without any overarching cultural obfuscation. If anything, David Servos's video sling – a projection of footage of the artist flinging around a camera focussed on himself with a background continually in blur, then slung into oblivion – is perhaps the most poignant delectation of Walker's "Detourism." Along with the Afghani carpets woven during the Soviet invasion, replete with helicopter and machine gun images, which were borrowed from local collectors and graced the entrance to this provocative show, are sad but compelling evidence that as much as we want to understand other cultures, our imperialist tourism still wants to own. > KATHRYN HIXSON

The author is an art critic, editor of *New Art Examiner*, and adjunct assistant professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Annelies Strba

Galerie ANTON Meier

Genève

21 février – 1er mai 2002



ANNELIES STRBA, LINDA DANS LA CUISINE, 2001; PHOTO: GALERIE ANTON MEIER, GENÈVE.

Chez certains artistes, la maturité apporte une sérénité bienvenue ou au contraire navrante selon les tempéraments. Avec sa vidéo *Nyima* (2002) et les photographies extraites de son autre vidéo *Dawa* (2001) – en tibétain, « Nyima » signifie lune et « Dawa » soleil –, Annelies Strba démontre une quiétude heureuse en harmonie avec une créativité réfléchie. Dans ces œuvres, elle décuple une propension pour les visions éphémères, les cadrages respectueux de la réalité, les attendrissements de l'œil pour les paysages bucoliques et les floraisons exotiques, les femmes aux cheveux longs et aux jupes de mousseline. Le spectateur pourrait presque s'y méprendre. Cette image de la femme féminine et douce, embrassant des bébés potelés ou roulant de joie avec ses enfants dans une prairie pourrait aisément le tromper. Est-il devant des visions les plus rétrogrades, des clichés les plus défraîchis ou une version aussi obsolète que dépréciée du bonheur? Posées sur un cuir épais et ses fermetures éclair, les fesses roses de bébé qui tortille un *piercing* de maman, tout en buvant son biberon sur une berceuse de Nirvana, semble une image plus véridique de la réalité. Or, tout l'intérêt de ce travail réside dans ce constat: l'erreur est de le prendre au premier degré. Comme toutes les œuvres, elle n'est pas à consommer en passant vite, comme une « restauration rapide » pour satisfaire soudain un besoin symbolique de culture. Cette œuvre requiert l'épreuve du temps et de la patience pour agir en profondeur. Une assiduité anachronique avec l'empressement des visiteurs qui rechignent à passer plus de quelques minutes dans la « boîte noire » de la galerie, alors que *Nyima* nécessite vingt-neuf minutes d'attention au son de chants bouddhistes enregistrés au Népal; un « hum » impérissable suffisamment compensé par l'explosion du plaisir visuel pour les spectateurs insensibles aux bienfaits du bouddhisme tantrique. Cependant, seules les vidéos offrent une approche correcte de son travail puisque les « résidus » photographiques qui en sont extraits induisent une erreur de jugement et, surtout, occultent la dimension créative essentielle. En passant vite devant les photographies le spectateur manque le principal, l'effet poétique qui émerge de la combinaison de trois ingrédients: un déploiement ralenti de la composition entièrement soumise aux coloris; le travail de la caméra, parfois lisse comme une caresse ou au contraire rythmé par de légers soubresauts et bégaiements subtils; la musique propice aux rêves diurnes. La créativité de ce regard patient de l'artiste sur les détails intemporels réside dans un écart de la temporalité et de la saisie du réel par rapport

Un homme se débat dans l'eau, le bruit du ressac auquel se mêlent des voix envahit l'espace. Une sourde oppression submerge le spectateur rivié à cette noyade. Seule l'image en gros plan de l'homme luttant pour sa survie – projetée sur un grand écran double face – éclaire faiblement la salle plongée dans l'obscurité. Cet instant de saisissement passé, le spectateur discerne, parmi les sons, une voix masculine qui résonne au delà de l'écran. Se déplaçant, il s'enfonçait dans le noir et fait face à une autre scène sur un moniteur suspendu à quelque distance derrière l'écran. Le son prend ici toute son ampleur: issu de trois sources distinctes, il emplit l'espace de résonances qui tissent des liens étranges et instables entre l'image de l'écran et celle du moniteur.

La voix a comme un écho, un deuxième souffle. Elle semble raconter une histoire, que l'on est tenté de rattacher à la scène qui défile sur le moniteur. Un homme couché par terre dans une chambre vide est transporté par un autre homme ganté de blanc qui lui ligote les mains et les pieds. Action indéchiffrable, qui n'attribue ni à l'un ni à l'autre les rôles de bourreau ou de victime, la voix jetant le doute sur la distribution. « Because I didn't make the rules, I just suggested. »

L'histoire reprend au début chaque fois que la voix off s'avoue insatisfaite de sa reconstruction. « I will have to start all over again. He will have to start all over again. » Dans cet effort de reconstitution mentale, le narrateur fait appel à sa mémoire, en perpétuelle réorganisation, et à son imagination qui infléchit les relations entre l'événement et sa restitution. « I live from imagination and recollection. » Les mots, à l'instar du noyé, lâchent prise, comme si la raison submergée par les émotions rassemblait des souvenirs qu'une voix intérieure inventerait et qui pourtant auraient eu une incidence réelle sur le comportement du narrateur. Ainsi la mémoire, tissu fictionnel, rejoue à l'envi l'événement et, à force, pose les conditions même de son existence; elle s'assimile à une mise en scène. Celle d'*Unreasonably Resonant*, qui force le spectateur à se déplacer presque à tâtons dans le noir à l'écoute d'une voix, calque en quelque sorte le cheminement intérieur du narrateur. Et la noyade relance la quête du sens, qui fait surface, puis disparaît dans un mouvement que l'émergence reconfigure à chaque fois. « Because anything is possible and likely to happen. »

La mise en espace des sons, des images et des textes est une préoccupation centrale aux travaux vidéo de Shahryar Nashat. Elle sert une thématique complexe où se côtoient mémoire et imagination, rêve et conscience, souvenirs et mise en scène. Le narrateur revient compulsivement à la source de la rupture, c'est-à-dire au moment où quelque chose s'est passé, qui a modifié son comportement et ainsi ses relations au monde. Ces événements d'ordre traumatique refont alors surface par lambeaux qu'une imagination fantasmagorique arrache au passé et que la conscience désormais altérée reconsidère. La voix navigue entre différents états de conscience et voile les inconsistances entre ses différents points d'origine.

La voix est lancée comme un moteur de recherche. Elle parle en termes comparables à des indications scéniques, faisant naître ainsi un sentiment étrange de distance et de froideur clinique. Effet paradoxal, car sous le discours dépourvu d'affect et en apparence rationnel percent des dérèglements, affleurent des états de conscience différents. Les personnages sont en fait scindés, en proie à l'hésitation, proches à certains moments de l'univers psychiatrique et livrés au monde onirique, comme possédés, dédoublés. « Someone should just free me from the nasty person that's inside me. » La connaissance qu'ils ont d'eux-mêmes est mouvante et paradoxale. Cette thématique du dérèglement est explorée dans *Off Screen* (2000). Cet ensemble (six tirages argentiques montés sur aluminium) reproduit des indications scéniques s'adressant au rôle de Blanche dans *Un Tramway Nommé Désir* (Tennessee Williams). Shahryar Nashat sélectionne parmi elles celles qui font apparaître le déséquilibre du caractère de Blanche et dont le style s'apparente à une notice clinique.

Superpositions mentales, décalages et glissements construisent l'ambiance particulière de *All the Way Back, the Reconstruction* (2001) qui illustre bien ce thème du dédoublement et, comme son nom l'indique, met sur le devant de la scène l'acte de reconstruction. À nouveau, le narrateur tente de reconstituer le déroulement d'un événement et de lui insuffler un sens. Une voix lui souffle son texte qu'il répète en boucle; lui-même à la recherche d'une voix, il glisse du « il » au « je », mêlant plusieurs points de vue, se demandant s'il est témoin de ce qu'il a vu ou s'il en est l'auteur, s'il n'est pas victime d'une mise en scène. Qui a fait quoi? Il y a des faits certes « There are the facts, a man running... », mais « ces faits », plus qu'ils n'offrent de clé de compréhension, soulignent la disparition de l'événement. « What just happened has no importance. »

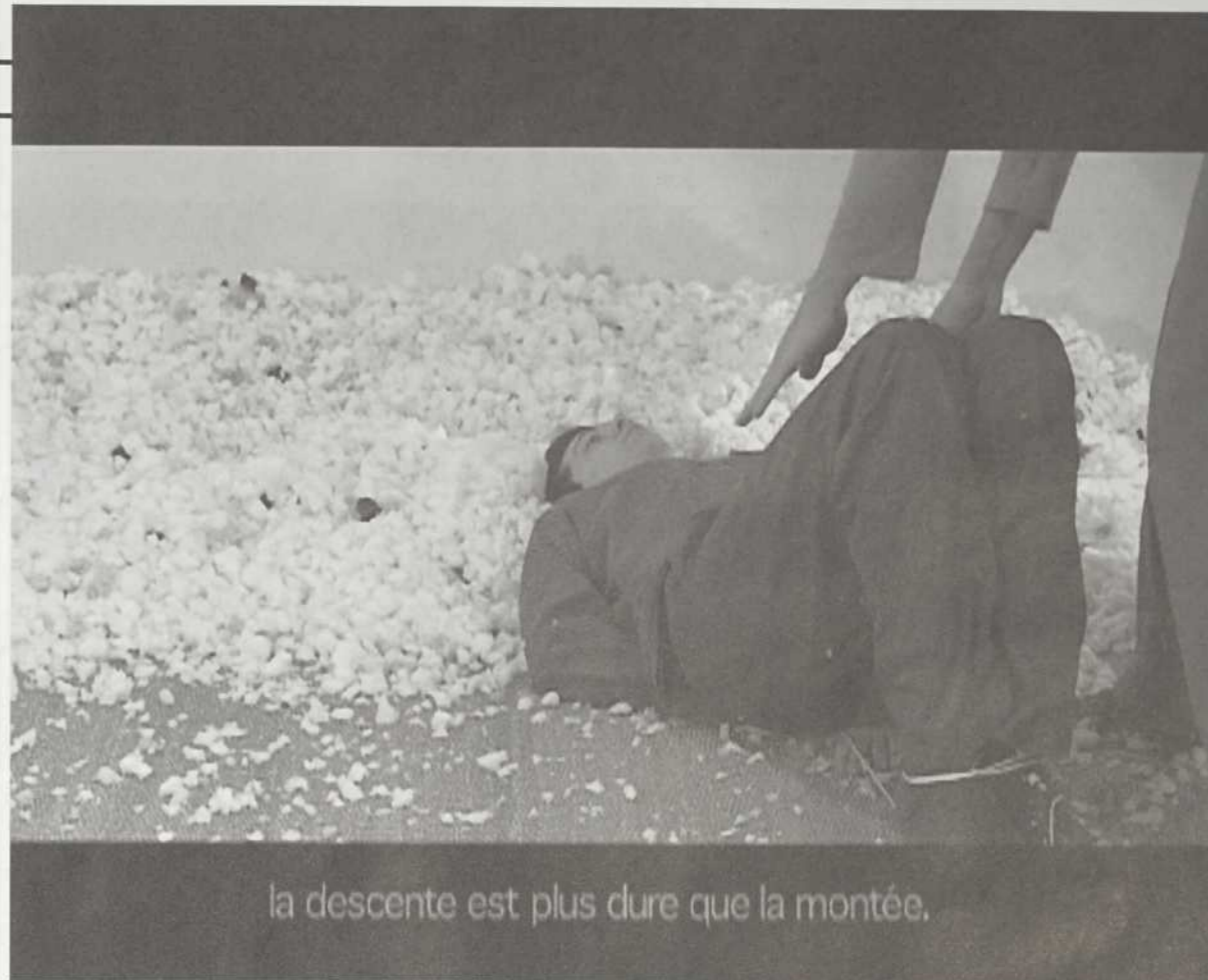
She Can't Keep Hold of Herself, it Keeps on Moving (2001) donne une tournure plus dramatique au thème du dédoublement. Cette installation met en scène le monologue d'une jeune femme. L'image est dédoublée et projetée sur deux écrans se faisant face, la jeune femme s'adresse à elle-même, à son double, et le spectateur muni d'un casque infrarouge entend sa voix comme une résonance se confondant avec sa propre voix intérieure; l'effet s'en trouve encore redoublé. Le recours à de légers décalages dans les angles de prise de vue des deux images, ainsi qu'entre la bande-son et l'image, souligne la difficulté du récit à rendre un événement et rejoue sur le plan formel le thème du dédoublement.

à la norme: ce qui est le lieu même du travail poétique pour éveiller la sensibilité, faire émerger des sensations imprévues et surprendre nos habitudes. Les couleurs pastel et acidulées, souvent réduites à un jeu d'opposition binaire contrasté, alimentent le rendu flou issu de cet excès. Obtenues par saturation, substitution ou traitement de l'image, elles rappellent un penchant désuet pour l'attrait des techniques propres à rendre un effet visuel, comme un écho aux vibrations impressionnistes ou aux substitutions fauvistes d'un autre temps. Le sujet filmé, paysages ou fleurs, ciels orageux ou cascades, (*Nyima*) n'est plus que le support d'une composition essentiellement coloriste. Ce travail glisse sur les franges de l'identifiable, à la frontière de l'abstraction. Comme l'avait très bien souligné Jacqueline Lichtenstein, dans *La Couleur élogieuse*, (Flammarion, Paris, 1989), le coloriste est ce qui ne se laisse pas soustraire par le concept. Les vidéos d'Annelies Strba forcent toute conceptualisation à plier sous le joug de la sensibilité, interdisent tout jugement rationnel autre que technique et échappent à une quelconque emprise théorique. Or, c'est ici que le public retrouve le dilemme de la réception et du jugement des œuvres d'art: soit elles procurent un authentique plaisir, soit elles sont une mise en question radicale et novatrice des formes de l'art, comme le souhaiterait une certaine élite satisfaite de sa seule intelligence au détriment de pulsions sensuelles parfois anémiées. Oui, ces œuvres sont contemporaines et oui elles sont poétiques et sensuelles. N'en déplaise aux derniers consensus à la mode, la création aujourd'hui peut aussi ne pas être cérébrale et nécessiter la logique des propositions ou l'analytique des concepts. Ce qui poserait donc un problème avec ces œuvres radieuses, c'est justement qu'elles sont trop belles. Or, la beauté relève encore d'une dimension « bourgeoise » de l'art: superbe justification pour décorer un bureau ou un hall de banque; critère avilissant pour une œuvre d'art « contemporaine » qui risque, par ce traitre penchant pour la satisfaction d'un plaisir, de tomber dans l'opprobre et le purgatoire de la création d'aujourd'hui. Finalement, c'est un problème de réception: c'est le public qui est fautif, et les déficiences cruelles d'un regard véritablement critique.

> Véronique d'Auzac de Lamartinière

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la descente est plus dure que la montée.

SHAHRYAR NASHAT, UNREASONABLY RESONANT, 2002, EXTRAIT VIDÉO.

L'écran, surface de projection, de réflexion aussi, sert ces rêves éveillés, ces cauchemars diurnes. La multiplicité des positions et des déplacements possibles entre les écrans rend compte de l'irréductibilité de l'expérience et surtout met en scène le spectateur en l'incluant dans le processus de reconstruction. Le spectateur agence les éléments visuels, sonores et textuels dans une succession de combinaisons personnelles et précaires. Cette spatialisation de l'expérience, à laquelle les dispositifs sonores contribuent, est un des traits dominants et des plus prometteurs des travaux récents de Shahryar Nashat.

Les installations de Shahryar Nashat proposent une réflexion originale sur la voix. La voix est un fil conducteur dans ce labyrinthe qu'est la conscience: elle véhicule les mots, articulant à haute voix des cristallisations provisoires et incertaines. Les personnages semblent emprunter une voix – quand ce n'est pas elle-même qui les habite – qui ne dit qu'une partie de ce qu'ils sont, ne révélant qu'une facette, qui plus est temporaire, de leur relation à eux-mêmes et à l'extérieur. Ces va-et-vient entre des voix diverses créent une indétermination fondamentale entre les mondes intérieur et extérieur, deux entités communément envisagées comme distinctes. Et c'est bien le trouble que Shahryar Nashat sème avec cette voix unique, canal de voix multiples, palimpseste vocal.

> Isabelle Papaloizos

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Trauma

Museum of Modern Art

Oxford

January 26 – April 7

As a title for an exhibition, it is at once attention-grabbing and hard-hitting. We brace ourselves as we enter the space, prepared to vicariously relive the traumas presented by twelve international artists. A photograph of Kendall Geers' *Cry Wolf* (1999), an entangled heap of flashing emergency lights, is used on the poster for the show and strikes a brash, challenging note, far removed in fact from the sense of disquiet and pathetic desperation engendered by the actual work in the gallery. The introductory text on the wall draws attention to the multitudinous meanings of the term and highlights the consequent breadth of response of these artists which ranges from the highly personal to the universal, with subjects encompassing both domestic and public concerns.

At the monumental end of the scale lies Johan Grimont's by now familiar *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997). The montage of images, music and literary texts documenting the history of plane hijackings has of course, as in so many cases, acquired a whole new poignancy, currency and indeed significance since September 11th. The images are compelling in both their brutality and in their garbled presentation. Our struggle to make sense of what we see mimics the victims' inability to comprehend, while their grief remains immediately accessible. Continuing in the documentary vein Anri Sala's moving video *Nocturnes* (1999) trades monumentality for intimacy. Two initially separate narratives telling the stories of two men in northern France gradually merge, a path mirrored by the steady conflation of images. While one man, Jacques, talks obsessively about tropical fish, the other, Denis, a UN soldier who fought in the Balkans, recounts his military experiences. His disturbed state



JOHAN GRIMONT, DIAL H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, 1997, DETAIL, "TRAUMA"; PHOTO: COURTESY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, OXFORD.

and the distress apparent from his testimony is heightened by the camera's focus on his nail-bitten fidgeting hands.

Through their respective uses of newsreel footage and the documentary genre, Grimont and Sala present us with common material and more significantly present it to us in the form in which we are most accustomed to witnessing trauma, and indeed experiencing it at one remove. While their subject matter renders their work in one sense unpalatable, it is at the same time strangely familiar to our constitutions and as such peculiarly digestible.

Alongside such works, some of the more oblique pieces in the exhibition struggle to make an impact and risk appearing trite. Martin Boyce's *Now I've Got Worry* (1997) is a beat-up Eames shelving unit, where some of the bright, pristine formica panels have been replaced by graffitied boards. The writing issues challenges to the invasion of private space and, more specifically, refers to the slogans scrawled on walls by neighbours of Nicole Brown Simpson, who were fed up with the tourist attraction status their neighbourhood had acquired in the furor surrounding the O. J. Simpson trial. Immediacy is replaced by a complex layering of references.

The linguistic explorations of Christopher Wool and Felix Gonzalez Torres seem somehow rather dry; they are earnest and yet hollow. This impression is enhanced by the evident satisfaction of the majority of the exhibition visitors who wander around clutching rolled up papers taken from Torres' stacks. While Lucia Nogueira's *Slip* (1992), a bell jar which on closer inspection appears chipped and stained with blood, provokes a flinch, its impact is no greater.

Tracey Moffat's series of lithographs *Scarred for Life II* (1999) come as a welcome relief in their recognition of humour as a valid response. Her kitsch and retro images focus on the domestic and examine the location of trauma in childhood experience: twins cut the grass with scissors as a punishment, a schoolboy is mocked by his fellow teammates for his hand-knitted rugby kit, the authorities intervene on behalf of a child kept on a leash of tights by his mother as he plays in the garden, and two boys are forced to urinate into bags as they remain locked in a camper van while their mothers embrace on the beach in the background. There is an honesty in these images which are at once straightforwardly entertaining and thought-provoking.

Individual works in the show offered powerful and fascinating interpretations of the meaning and experience of trauma and yet, as a whole the exhibition failed to deliver the punch promised by its title. That the framework should not be overly prescriptive seems to be somehow "right," and yet one then begins to wonder, why have one at all? Within such a modest context, the breadth of response results in a grouping of works which lack coherence, and while this coherence is perhaps not necessary it is something for which we have been encouraged to look. The variety of responses to a term as loose and a notion as vast as trauma is not surprising, it is inevitable and in this inevitability it fails to stimulate.

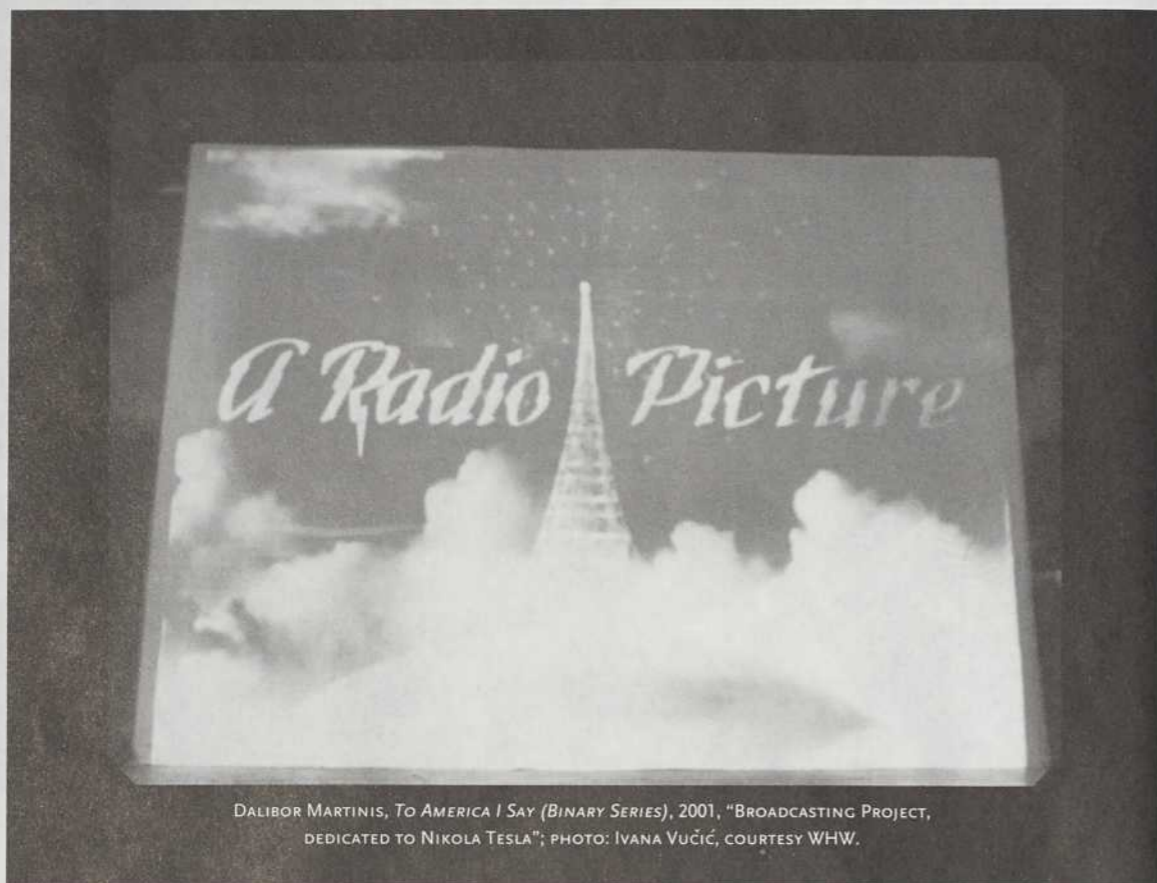
In another work by Kendall Geers, *Double Take* (2000), an exhausted Steve McQueen does push-ups and mutters incessantly "I'm going to be ok." Watching McQueen it is hard either to empathize or sympathize and his lack of conviction seems to serve as a fitting metaphor for the overall "Trauma" experience. But while this feeling of anticlimax may betray all too clearly the voyeuristic tendencies alluded to in Boyce's work, it should be added that it was however a sense of disappointment coupled with one of relief. > Sara Harrison

The author is an editor on *ARTbibliographies Modern* and a free-lance journalist.

Broadcasting Project, dedicated to Nikola Tesla

Technical Museum | Zagreb | Croatia

January 26 – March 3



The cultural event that doubtless marked the small cultural scene of Zagreb this season was the broadly conceived, several-month-long and multidisciplinary "Broadcasting Project, dedicated to Nikola Tesla," organized by the curatorial collective What, How & for Whom (Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić, Sabina Sabolović), in collaboration with the Arkzin publishing house, the miz multimedia institute, and the Technical Museum in Zagreb. As the size of a local scene does not depend solely on its number of participants, but rather on the demands it sets for itself, "Broadcasting Project" was educationally conceived and strategically developed from the outset. From its conception phase in June 2001 to the moment when the exhibition finally opened at Zagreb's Technical Museum, local audience awareness was systematically tuned-in through a series of monthly lectures given by internationally renowned curators and cultural theorists (Brian Holmes, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Viktor Misiano, Diedrich Diederichsen, Keiko Sei, David Toop, Igor Zabel, Branko Dimitrijević, and others), radio shows, presentations in a local cultural magazine and a number of co-ordinated actions and art interventions, as well as through promotional material with a recognizable visual identity, distinguishing all these spatially and temporally dislocated segments as part of a single initiative. In this way, the project created the conditions to unambiguously locate its interests ("to question the artistic and social implications of mass media," as the catalogue puts it) and position (conceptually in opposition to all forms of hegemonic discourse, its realization conceived as a form of *research in progress*) and to advance its cultural scope to the level of a social and political experiment "seeking to redefine the social, political and public role of media," and to redirect mediated forms of communication.



MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ, *IN BETWEEN*, 1996, INSTALLATION VIEW, "BROADCASTING PROJECT, DEDICATED TO NIKOLA TESLA"; PHOTO: IVANA VUČIĆ, COURTESY WHW.

The exhibition itself, inevitably positioned at the border between media fascination and the possibilities for its utilization, was actually an occasion to try, hypothetically, to point out differences between the deliberate and intended media spectacle of the project and its real weight – that is, between the project and its realization, between sign and performance. Because if we take "Broadcasting Project's" systematic and protracted media blitz too seriously, there is danger of turning the exhibition events, the artworks shown and the very participation of the audience itself into a form of politically correct cultural conformity. And at that point, everything that presents recognizable formal signs of rebellion against the ever-vigilant guards of media globalization, or the syndrome of hysteric enthusiasm about new possibilities of hyper-communication, automatically becomes legitimate.

In which case, the whole exhibition would merely float at the surface of simulated interaction between theory and praxis. It would be just a user-friendly system of guiding the audience to predetermined spots in a discourse, where, before the lulled visitor's eyes, a harmonious permeation of theory and praxis would lead to a critical and logically empty conclusion. But if we suppose that the whole media spectacle functions as a part of the project's realization, which in practice surpasses general suppositions of its theoretical articulation, the situation is dramatically different. The exhibition at the Technical Museum, like the events linked to it, as well as the whole narrative formed around Nikola Tesla, produces a necessarily playful and ironic alternative for that segment of the audience inclined to take the bait not only of a trendy concept but also of works offered by major names from the Croatian and international art scene, including Marina Abramović, Braco Dimitrijević, Scanner and Marko Peljhan.

The exhibition was worthwhile not merely in terms of the locally and internationally established authors, but also to see those works in the company of works by less known authors, unobtrusively integrated into the museum context, which managed to poke fun even at the works of artists who are inclined to take themselves far too seriously. In the context – full of the wreckage of iron machinery, unwieldy models and various rare species of outdated technology – every aspect of fascination with high technology was radically de-sublimed. Emptied of the powerful charge of their potential efficiency, technological toys generate a utopian surplus that creates an imaginary projection of an era when electric energy allegedly had a more palpable, more human form than it has now in its present abstract incarnation in the form of digital information. The whole story is further fictionalized by the personality of Nikola Tesla: for as much as one tries to produce an historically exact and scientifically legitimate image of Tesla and his inventions, the semantic mixture provided by "Broadcasting Project" primarily brings out his showman-like charm and strongly developed, ethically motivated utopian consciousness – which makes him seem more similar to Gandalf than to the archetype of a serious scientist.

In this context, even the works that might easily enforce diabolic and catastrophic intonations take on ironic dimensions. For example, in the work of Dalibor Martinis, pioneer of video art in Croatia, the paranoia of binary-coded hyper-reality weakens at the moment when an undecipherable message takes the form of Morse-coded credits at the beginning of the early version of the film *King Kong*. Failed attempts at establishing communication with artist celebrities become less frustrating – both for the author, Russian artist Yuri Leiderman, and a visitor – when

the elliptic exchange of letters is displayed in the geological department of the museum, in the form of a rounded conglomerate produced by a process of copper electrolysis which supposedly transcribed the letters. In the work of Croatian artist Ivana Keser, the possibility of exerting omnipresent control over guileless consumers appears surreal next to telescopic photographs of space, presented as a recording of fictional polemics on cosmic conspiracy emanating from the nearby radio set. At the same time, the romantic hacker idea of wireless Internet access by Slovenian artist Marko Peljhan acquires cynical overtones placed next to a lightbox of the logo of a major Croatian telecommunications company, the main sponsor of the project. The same cynical turn is inevitable in Peljhan's other work, *Trust System 22* (1998). The complicated and totally incomprehensible schema of an electronic military system that mystically glows in the dark, next to a model of a lethal missile, at least partially loses its sublime ominousness when the visitor learns that the author created the same missile as a private acquisition, buying its parts on the Internet black market.

Despite the diversity of the works, the exhibition context offers a possibility to see most of them against the background of broadly understood relations between high and low technology. As sophisticated as it may be, every form of "Broadcasting Project" will seem naive and utopian when applied in a way that diverges from the currently dominant model that imposes itself as normal, normative, logical or original reality. In that sense, awareness about the constructed character of artworks and of the project as a whole presents a dimension of risk that inevitably precedes every subversive expectation. Since at any given moment, the strongholds of hegemonic interest might be adapted in order to calculate in advance the alternative models as nominal counterpoints, every initiative that automatically takes for granted "Broadcasting Project's" subversive and contra-cultural qualities is as mistaken as it is irresponsible. At the moment when (self-)ironic consciousness is being turned off, there arises a risk to comprehend its own critical position as a discursive construct that may quite easily fall victim to those social forces that stand to gain when things are taken to be self-evident.

This is why "Broadcasting Project" is successful both as a platform located in a local context, bringing together people who for many years have used the media of mass communication at different levels, and in terms of how its very realization bypasses authoritarian media practices, and whose ideological contingency could not be sanctioned by any potentially "politically correct" programs. As a media spectacle which, given the opportunism of a certain part of the audience, tries to impose itself as a meta-linguistic optimum, "Broadcasting Project" runs the risk of becoming the privileged discourse of elite cultural forces that nurture a highly cultivated consciousness of the democratic potential of mass communication, but forget Brecht's basic principle: if the theatrical illusion is not broken at its most pleasant point, there is a risk of replacing reality with fiction, denying a chance to those for whom the struggle for media freedom is still imminent. > IVANA MANCE

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Translated from the Croatian by Nataša Ilić

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