



Journal of Visual
& Critical Studies

2018

**Journal of Visual
& Critical Studies**

Student Writing at OCAD University

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Introduction

The Journal of Visual & Critical Studies collects and celebrates some of the best undergraduate academic writing at OCAD University. Comprising critical essays, exhibition reviews, and thesis abstracts, this anthology reflects the unique approaches to art history and visual culture that are being explored at the school.

The publication is managed and assembled by an editorial committee of students in collaboration with faculty advisors, the OCAD U Student Press, and the OCAD U Student Union. The editorial committee is composed of third and fourth year students who lead the editing process with the support of our faculty advisors, as well as first and second year students who lead fundraising and outreach initiatives. This provides opportunities for students to learn valuable community engagement, editing, and publishing skills from each other, and maintains the journal as a sustainable long-term publication.

The Journal of Visual & Critical Studies was created by and features writers, researchers, curators, artists, and designers. The individuals involved with the publication engage in multidisciplinary practices, challenging the boundaries of academic disciplines to produce innovative relationships between art, design, and academia at OCAD University and beyond.

Lex Burgoyne and Maya Wilson-Sanchez, on behalf of the Editorial Committee

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Critical Essays

The Quiet Resistance of Embedded Work

Josi Smit

When invited to participate in the 2012 Whitney Biennial, Andrea Fraser did not submit an artwork. Despite forming her practice around the impulse to expose the hypocrisies of an institutionalized art world that claims to exist for the benefit of all while often benefitting from capitalism's economic inequalities, Fraser increasingly could not deny her own complicities and position within the institutions she critiqued. In place of an artwork, Fraser contributed an essay to the Biennial exhibition catalogue detailing her struggles with her complicities, resistances, and the reasons for her dissatisfaction with art institutions and markets.¹ The catalogue was placed in the exhibition, open to Fraser's essay, for visitors to read or to completely bypass.

Fraser's gesture was nearly invisible to audiences preoccupied by the artworks surrounding the open catalogue. Nearly invisible, but still quietly asserting its presence. As Fraser recounted, she felt "writing an essay for the Whitney Biennial rather than contributing an artwork was a way of participating and not participating at the same time, while attempting to engage the exhibition as an opportunity to reflect on these conflicts as honestly and directly as I could."²

Other artists navigate their desires for art to enact political and social changes by insisting on art's total integration into the fabric of daily life. In "Reflexions on Arte Util," Tania Bruguera advocates for art to be distributed through society's preexisting structures. She insists for art to leave the "sphere of what is unattainable" and move from the theoretical propositions that rest in gallery space towards application in "the real and functional sphere: to be a feasible utopia."³ The works Bruguera produces in this sphere are outspoken and active in their political criticism of the present, literally existing in the realm of politics as functioning political parties (*Migrant People Party*) and movements (*Immigrant Movement International*), and they list immigration policies, laws, immigrant populations, politicians, and media as their materials.⁴

This approach can exert a magnetism. It fixes its sight on the possibility of manifesting a future relieved of current social and political issues. Bruguera asserts,

Art is the space in which you behave as if conditions existed for making things you want to happen, happen, and as if everyone agreed with what we suggest, although it may not be like that yet: art is living the future in the present.⁵

In a socio-political climate that is increasingly shaped by nationalist xenophobia, economic disparity, racial inequality, and autocratic political leaders, it is both convincing and enticing to view such an active practice as the most relevant and righteous approach to politically engaged art.

Still, the ambivalence found in a gesture like Fraser's holds its own kind of magnetism through the honesty of its critical self-awareness. Rather than focusing on the realization of the future, works like Fraser's sit in their discomfort with the state of the present. They impress a quiet resistance, tempered by acknowledgements of how the nature of their existence causes complicities with the social and political systems in which they are embedded. Nevertheless, their resistant impulse persists in gestures of discomfort and dissatisfaction.

Such an ambivalent focus on contradictions may seem like indulgence compared to the proactive stance taken by works which insist on becoming tools (utils) for the implementation of an improved future. This paper explores the possible utility of ambivalent, quiet, and barely visible art works as tools that are essential to the function and sustainability of the work done by vocally political practices. As Fraser states:

The role of crafted, self-consciously and conceptually framed elaborations, objectifications, and enactments of these social and psychological structures is... to provide for just enough distance, just enough not me, just enough sense of agency, to be able to tolerate the raw shame of exposure, the fear or pain of loss, and the trauma of helplessness and subjection, and to be able to recognize and reintegrate the immediate, intimate, and material investments we have in what we do and that lead us to reproduce structures and relationships even while we claim to oppose them.⁶

By inhabiting the complicated state of the present, these artworks are able to demonstrate the small hopes to be

found in it – the glimpses of agency and humanity – and they relieve the pressure of perfection from resistance by acknowledging its inevitable contradictions and limitations

An example of this resistant-but-complicated approach can be found in Daniel Bozhkov's *Training in Assertive Hospitality*. Beginning in 2000, Bozhkov worked in month-long spurts as an official Wal-Mart customer greeter in Skowhegan, Maine. Between shifts, Bozhkov painted a fresco mural of branded consumer products, Skowhegan landmarks, and his own family members on a wall in the store's lay-away department. The mural remained until 2004 when Wal-Mart's universal colour scheme shifted and the fresco, which was designed to blend with Wal-Mart's blue-and-grey brand, was removed for no longer conforming to the corporate identity.

Bozhkov's *Training*, like Fraser's Biennial essay, hovers in an ambiguous position. On one level, the work is complicit with the morally dubious profit system of Wal-Mart, an immense American capitalist power that profits from unfair labour practices both in its suppliers and within its stores. By accepting employment from Wal-Mart, Bozhkov is in some part enabling Wal-Mart's practices, and Bozhkov himself acknowledges he joined Wal-Mart's staff to embed himself in the company and "become part of the problem."⁷ However, Bozhkov's documentation videos also display the absurdity of the dehumanizing behavioural training that reduces employees into greeting robots, and they highlight the genuine humanity of interpersonal relationships that staff and customers resiliently forge, exerting a resistance through momentary connections not meant to serve capital gain.

In this way, Bozhkov's *Training* exemplifies how ambiguously resistant art works employ the same "tactics"

that Michel De Certeau describes to demonstrate how the majority of people in society – the ninety-nine-percent subjected to work within systems designed by the one-percent in power – individualize mass culture, seizing any temporary openings to assert their agency through non-compliance with the behaviour expected by these systems. As De Certeau details,

the space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection ... It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow ... What it wins it cannot keep.⁸

The conditions of existence inherited by the ninety-nine-percent bind them within a system organized and regulated beyond their control. Thus, art works which operate in the mode of the tactic could be interpreted as adhering to a notion of “truth to materials,” locating their gestures in the contested space and conditions of daily life, recalling Bruguera’s call for art “to be part of what exists.”⁹

The gesture of a tactic can be as simple as taking a longer lunch break than allotted or, as seen in *Training*, co-workers taking a moment to discuss their plans for the weekend. They are fleeting resistances that “gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time - to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favourable situation.”¹⁰ Tactical art works are distanced from notions of lasting effect. To seek a lasting effect could even be interpreted as a symptom of capitalist drives for productivity and gain, so a tactical artwork’s

insistence on temporality and covert visibility becomes, in itself, resistance. By assigning themselves the task of manipulating the conditions of the present to demonstrate moments of agency, the tactical approach reveals a way to grapple with what Fraser refers to as the inescapable grasp of the institution, which constantly reshapes itself to annex acts of resistance into its form, eventually neutralizing or erasing their impact.¹¹ It alleviates the pressure to make a large-scale change by focusing on ways to, if only momentarily, make the present more hospitable without the burdensome expectation of legacy.

We can look to a lecture delivered by Judith Butler during the 2013 Istanbul Biennial to expand on the power that can be found in gestures that use stillness and silence to resist conditions which are too immense and consuming to escape. In the lecture, Butler relates how resistance or “useful action” can manifest in many different forms which extend beyond conventional conceptions based on visibility and activity, saying, “The actions by which people assemble and assert themselves to be a people may be spoken or enacted in ways which include inaction and stillness.”¹² Butler proposes that inaction, for some, is the most (or only) accessible resource to exploit in order to express dissonance. In this regard, embedded and barely visible artworks demonstrate the usefulness found in expressions of stifled action. For instance, the silent and constrained action of crawling became a potent expression of discontent in Amal Kenawy’s *Silence of the Lambs*, a performance that took place amid rising Middle Eastern political unrest in 2010, where fifteen people crawled across a busy Cairo intersection.¹³ A work like *Silence of the Lambs* demonstrates how embracing silence and limitation gives power to people in restricted conditions to take

advantage of any resources available, right down to asserting the presence of human bodies in spaces that have been structured to exclude them and interrupting the routine of just one day.

Butler's propositions also touch upon imperfections of resistance acknowledged by the ambiguous positions these artworks take. Butler states,

It never really happens that all of the possible people who are represented by the notion of 'the people' show up in the same space and at the same time to claim that they are 'the people'. As if they were all free to move, as if they all, of their own volition, arrived together in some space and time that can be described or photographed in some inclusive way.¹⁴

The people who are able to display their resistance cannot fully represent "the public" because there are always people missing from "the public." The impossibility of reaching everyone complicates notions of usefulness and integration expressed by conceptions like Bruguera's "Arte Util," which seeks to be "involved in the life of people and ... becomes part of it."¹⁵

Understanding the limited accessibility of this approach to art does not mean artworks like Bruguera's are futile; it merely complicates the desire to enact a "feasible utopia." Despite the addition of 'feasibility' within 'utopia' there is still a suggestion of perfection and bound within perfection is a denial of failure. The positioning of works which address the complexities, complicities, and limitations of their actions does not mean adopting a defeatist resignation. Their ambivalent positioning is a reminder that imperfection is not only acceptable, but unavoidable. In fact, an acknowledgement of the limitations of how far the present

system can be changed or fixed through resistance could be seen as essential to continued acts of resistance, both visible and hidden, because they alleviate the pressure of achieving a better future ‘now’ and prevent burnout by allowing the contradictions that are inevitable when occupying the present. The usefulness of this self-appraising to works like those described in *Arte Util* can be seen in Rick Lowe’s decision to scale back the property holdings of Project Row Houses, a series of row houses renovated into community spaces in the low-income Third-Ward of Houston, Texas.¹⁶ Lowe’s decision was motivated by “[increasing] disconnect from the aesthetic aspect of the project and ... the knowledge that they could never solve the housing crisis in Houston,”¹⁷ and it sits in harmony with the self-appraisals of the less visible works discussed in this paper. To scale back could even be seen as a form of quietness, which Lowe employed to reassess the effectiveness of the project, rather than assuming its value was inherently validated by resistant intentions.

While proposing that there is great value in the accountability and accepted imperfection of softly persistent-but-ambivalent artworks, I am not suggesting such approaches as perfect solutions to questions of how artworks can achieve social and political impact. In the nature of these works, I wish to acknowledge the complications of the limited visibility of works like Fraser’s, Bozhkov’s and Kenawy’s. What does it mean if only initiated audiences can identify their status as artworks? Do they still function for the uninitiated regardless of recognition? Is it alright to suggest those in positions of privilege, who would be more likely to be initiated, are those who most need to be reminded of the power found in ephemeral tactical gestures, or is that just another justification for the art world’s insulation?

Perhaps the power is in persisting despite skepticism about the effectiveness of our resistance. In playing to lose, so to speak. In simmering in our doubts and dissatisfactions but insisting on acting nevertheless, even in the smallest ways. Insisting on presence. Andrea Fraser did not reject the invitation to participate in the Whitney Biennial, after all.

Josi Smit is a fourth-year Sculpture/Installation major with a Creative Writing minor.

¹ Andrea Fraser, "There's No Place Like Home," in *Whitney Biennial 2012*, ed. Elizabeth Sussman and Jay Sanders (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2012), 28.

² Kathleen Massara, "Interview With Andrea Fraser about the Whitney Biennial," *Huffington Post*, 23 March 2017: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/22/interview-with-andrea-fraser_n_1369790.html

³ Tania Bruguera, "Reflexions on Arte Util," in *Arte Actual: Lecturas para un espectador inquieto*, ed. Yayo Aznar and Pablo Martinez. (Madrid: CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, 2012), 194.

⁴ Tania Bruguera, "Immigrant Movement International," *Tania Bruguera*, accessed 10 March 2017: <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/486-0-Immigrant+Movement+International.htm>

⁵ Bruguera, "Reflexions," 194.

⁶ Fraser, "No Place," 32.

⁷ Colby Chamberlain, "Training in Assertive Hospitality," *Triple Canopy*, accessed 10 March 2017, https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/training_in_assertive_hospitality

⁸ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1984), 37.

⁹ Bruguera, "Reflexions," 194.

¹⁰ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 38.

¹¹ Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* 44, no. 1 (2005): 286.

- ¹² Judith Butler, *Freedom of Assembly, or Who are the People?*, video, 00:10:20, 11 October 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd-7iT2JtXk>
- ¹³ Nato Thompson, "Amal Kenawy: Silence of the Lambs," in *Living as Form* (New York: Creative Time: 2012), 175.
- ¹⁴ Butler, *Freedom*, 00:26:28.
- ¹⁵ Bruguera, "Reflexions," 195.
- ¹⁶ Larne Abse Gogarty, "Art & Gentrification," *Art Monthly* 373 (2014): 8.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Sowing the Seeds of the Avant-Garde: The Role of Aesthetic Experience in the Sensation of the Now

Allen Wang

I remember fondly that time I went with a friend to watch the Perseids in Tommy Thompson Park. The date was August 12, 2015. The meteor shower, which comes for a couple days every year, peaked at three the next morning. We biked down the Don Valley and arrived shortly after midnight. It was a beautiful night with perfect conditions, new-mooned and cloudless. There were no lights on the peninsula, although the Vegas glow of the Toronto skyline was in full view over the water. It was a timeless experience in many ways; timeless in that it was unforgettable and transcendental, but also in the sense of being devoid of time. I reckon we saw a meteor – pin-like streaks of teal-white – every fifteen minutes, and yet those intervals may well have not existed. I may have perceived it in this way because we stayed in the same spot the whole time, and so my recollection of the first hour is almost identical to the last. The experience was also timeless in a fourth sense: primal. I like to quote Conrad when I reflect upon my biking adventures, and one passage from *Heart of Darkness* always sticks out: “We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are

gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories.”¹ Marlow, the protagonist and narrator, describes the experience of sailing up the Congo River, deeper and deeper into the jungle, as like travelling back to the beginnings of time, when the Earth was young, the vegetation lush and untamed, and the people uncivilized “savages.” As an adventure novel, I have always found parallels to *Heart of Darkness* in my own experiences. On a physical level, to look at stars is to look back in time. What we see has travelled countless light-years to reach us. But on a psychological level, to have biked all this way just to stare at firmament and the occasional meteor is a choice that gestures towards a primal, dematerialized paradigm. This is the sensation of being alive, of living in the moment, of the acute awareness that we human beings have absolute freedom. The writings of John Dewey and Jean-François Lyotard are jointly concerned with understanding our experiences and how we can liberate ourselves from the materialistic, dehumanizing society we live in. Through integral experiences and the sensation of the postmodern sublime, we reconnect with our true natures as owners of the human spirit: that the onus is on us to make something happen.

This meteor-watching trip, perhaps more than anything else in my life, was an integral experience. Dewey speaks to integral experiences as having “a unity that gives it its name ... The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts.”² He conceives of an integral experience as a situation where everything comes together into a singular gestalt. One way to think about this is that there are no distractions from the experience at hand. Words will not suffice to describe the sheer isolation of being

on that peninsula. In the chilly night, we were very far from home on this crooked talon jutting out into Lake Ontario. Tommy Thompson's isolation is what makes it the darkest place in Toronto and the best place to watch the meteors. The laser-like intensity of the experience kept me awake better than any tea or coffee in the world.

Dewey mentions four aspects of experience which augment its potency: flow, cognition, conclusion, and emotion. On flow, Dewey says that,

In such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues ... As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself ... There are pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement.³

The pattern of the aesthetic experience contributes to its unity in that it keeps the viewer in the interested state, never actually shocking them out of the integral mindset – not necessarily due to something unexpected, but something that clearly does not belong. This harkens back to the idea of distractions, but it also describes a rhythm to the experience. While meteor-watching was a fairly static experience (standing in the same area for six hours), there were a few dynamic aspects to it: the gentle breeze, sighing waves, and of course, the meteors. One appeared every fifteen minutes on average. It may appear contradictory to perceive rhythm while in a “timeless” state of mind, as well as to impose it upon something so sporadic and random as the apparition of meteors. But what it shows is that a certain cognitive judgement went on in my brain throughout the night, even while my own consciousness lost track of time, an attempt to normalize

and find patterns in the occurrences.

Dewey also states that experiences must have a beginning and an end.

We have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences ... Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is an experience.⁴

Gestalt can only be found in experiences that are discrete from one another. If we attempt to incorporate too many diverse stimulations into a single, long “experience,” it becomes impossible to perceive a unity between those constituents, as perhaps none exists, and thus the integration of the experience is lost. Lastly, emotions, to Dewey, are “the moving and cementing force” of experience.⁵ I will never forget my sense of contentment at the first meteor - at every meteor, really, affirming our efforts were not in vain - nor my sense of accomplishment at sunrise (when we ended our long vigil) and then again at the conclusion of the trip. By the time I got back, it was full-bright, and I remember going to bed just before my family woke up and sleeping soundly into the late afternoon.

Having connected my trip to integral experiences, we ought to examine the other part of Dewey’s argument. He expresses a sense of disillusionment with society, in that people had become jaded to aesthetic experiences – and each other. His proposed remedy is to take a “detour” in search of aesthetic experiences in the natural world. “In order to understand the esthetic [sic],” he says, “one

must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens.”⁶ Dewey cites many examples of these raw aesthetics, including a man stoking a fire and being “fascinated by the colorful drama of change enacted before his eyes.”⁷ What Dewey seeks is the reintegration of art with everyday life for the betterment of society.

I am interested in his idea that aesthetic experiences can be the vessel for self-improvement. Having discussed at length the integral nature of my meteor-watching experience, it should be evident that such experiences have a certain *freshness* to them. They are fresh because they are compelling and full of vitality – as they unfold, we feel alive, living in the moment. Dewey’s integral experiences show us what it feels like to experience the “now” as it happens. To unpack what this means, we must turn to the postmodern sublime.

Lyotard pinpoints a first-century Roman text on rhetoric as the first instance of the word “sublime.”⁸ Yet, the text is perhaps self-defeating, as it teaches that the sublime in oration cannot be taught. The sublime is an unexpected sentiment in delivery, an unprepared-for spur-of-the-moment action, that elicits great pathos in the listener. To the author of the text, known as Longinus, the Bible’s “Fiat lux, et lux fuit” is one such occurrence of the sublime.⁹ There is a parallel between the biblical commandment “let there be light” and the sudden actualization of the meteors, seemingly out of thin air. Standing there in the darkness, we were unsure whether any meteors were actually in store for us ... until we saw the first. And after its momentary appearance, there was never any certainty that another would come ... until it

did. Lyotard refers to this as “...the possibility of nothing happening, of words, colours, forms or sounds not coming; of this sentence being the last, of bread not coming daily.”¹⁰ What is sublime in the postmodern is the state of mind where nothing happening is a very real fear. He links this to Edmund Burke’s notion of privations in saying that “What is terrifying is that the *It happens that* does not happen, that it stops happening.”¹¹ And yet, on the opposite side of the coin is the possibility “that something happens [–] *dass etwas geschieht*.”¹² Let there be light, and there was light. The activity of the present moment is Lyotard’s “indeterminate,” and it has the power to disrupt our lives for better or worse.

The mindset in which we can perceive the indeterminate is what demarcates our current moment in time as the “now” – because there is no certainty about the “after” and everything that came “before” are, in fanciful terms, ships that have already set sail. Our blindness to what the future holds is what sets the stage for the sublime. Lyotard goes on to position the avant-garde movement as being on the cusp of the “now,” embroiled in the sublime. “The inexpressible does not reside in an over there, in another word, or another time, but in this: in that (something) happens. In the determination of pictorial art, the indeterminate, the ‘it happens[,]’ is the paint, the picture. The paint, the picture as occurrence or event, is not expressible, and it is to this that it has to witness.”¹³ In this passage, Lyotard equates the inexpressible with the *It happens* (in other words, the indeterminate) and asserts that art (the paint and picture) must bear witness to it. The role of avant-gardism is portrayed in both exciting and essential fashion. Members of the avant-garde must foray into the unknown abyss of the future and attempt to make

something out of it for the rest of us.

As we were watching the Perseids, I remember feeling like a part of the vanguard, standing at the boundary between land and lake, earth and sky, dutifully gazing outward into the darkness. I sympathized with Marlow in the night of first ages, piloting a boat upriver into the ghastly wilderness in search of an inexplicable genius, Mr. Kurtz - only *I* was looking for meteors. We both found what we were looking for, but also unearthed something more, deep within the psyche. The idea of human spirit is one which has eluded my understanding for many years, but it has found some degree of definition in response to the aesthetic theories of John Dewey and Jean-François Lyotard. Dewey's integral experiences provide us with a breath of fresh air in a world that may alienate us or treat us as commodities.¹⁴ Like stepping out on a cold winter day, we rekindle our connection with our basic human instinct – we feel *alive*. What it means to be human is that we have an acute awareness of our freedom in the present moment, in the “now”; that we are aware of the indeterminate and the possibility that we can sit aside and make nothing happen. But there is a seed of the avant-garde in all of us, thirsting for something *to* happen, and we must nurture it by day - or by night.

Allen Wang is a second year Industrial Design student.

- ¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Dover, ¹⁹⁰²), 62.
- ² John Dewey, "Art as Experience," in *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Aaron Meskin (London: Blackwell Publishing, ²⁰⁰⁷), 305.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 305.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 305.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 308.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 297.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 297.
- ⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," in *The Inhuman; Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 94.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 105.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 90.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

An Analysis of Mestizaje in José Vasconcelos's The Cosmic Race and the Works of Frida Kahlo

Maya Wilson-Sanchez

After the Mexican Revolution ended, which was led by Pancho Villa in the north and Emiliano Zapata in the south, many Mexican artists imagined a new vision of Mexico in their work. José Vasconcelos, who was appointed as the Minister of Education from 1921 to 1924, had a significant role in influencing the artists of this time. This essay will briefly examine Vasconcelos' influence on the Mexican Muralists, specifically Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, as well as touch on themes of *mestizaje*, revolution and national identity. It will argue that the work by the Muralists idealizes Indigenous peoples and the revolution, as well as perpetuates patriarchal ideology. As a contrast, a number of works by Frida Kahlo will be analyzed to demonstrate a different perspective on *mestizaje* and Mexican nationality that is rooted in familial identity and femininity.

Vasconcelos had very specific ideas on how the revolution and the idea of a post-revolutionary Mexico would be represented. The ideas, published in his 1925 text *The Cosmic Race: Mission of the Ibero-American Race*, attempted to reconceptualise *mestizaje* (the mixing of people and cultures, usually pertaining to Indigenous and

European mixing) “as providential, progressive, and beneficial for Mexico and Spanish America.”¹ Vasconcelos’ vision of post-revolutionary Mexico was centered on the Cosmic Man, an idealization of a Mestizo man. This idea would unite European Renaissance Humanism with Indigenous values (humility, spirituality, attachment to the land) and the popular arts. Vasconcelos went on to hire, through the Mexican government, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros to paint murals on a number of state buildings that represent this post-revolutionary vision.

Marilyn Millers critiques Vasconcelos’ ideas regarding *mestizaje* as too universal, romantic and manipulated for political ends.² Vasconcelos states that Latin America “may be the chosen one to assimilate and to transform mankind into a new type.”³ He continues by writing:

[This] mandate from History is first noticed in that abundance of love that allowed the Spaniard to create a new race with the Indian and the Black, profusely spreading white ancestry through the soldier who begat a native family, and Occidental culture through the doctrine and example of the missionaries who placed the Indians in condition to enter into the new stage, the stage of world One.⁴

This idealization of *mestizaje*, as one formed through the “abundance of love” rather than the violent processes of colonialism, is important to note and something that I will come back to when discussing the work of Frida Kahlo and José Clemente Orozco.

Some argue that Vasconcelos creates an “aesthetic eugenics” that uses Indigenous art for a “new national culture, predicated on the mestizo ideal.”⁵ This Mestizo

ideal can be seen in many works by the Muralists, especially in early work by Rivera. Diego Rivera's *Creation* (1922-3) depicts the Cosmic Man in the center of the image. Furthermore, his work in the chapel at the University of Chapingo (1926) also shows Vasconcelos' influence, merging European Humanism and ideas of Mother Earth by depicting Mexico as two reclining female nudes: the virgin earth on one side, and the liberated earth on the other. Although Rivera uses the symbol of Mother Earth to represent Indigenous and mestizo communities in Latin America, what is also at work here is both the European history and use of the reclining female nude and the "the traditionally gendered image of colonization – that of the female land taken by force and condemned to give birth to a bastard culture."⁶

In the same year, José Clemente Orozco creates *Cortes and Malinche* (1926), a work that depicts a nude Malinche and Cortes, with Cortes stomping on the body of an Indigenous man. Orozco presents Cortes in a strong, confident pose as he defeats the Indigenous man and gains the hand of Malinche, who is known as both a traitor for being with Cortes as well as the mother of *mestizaje*. Malinche, however, passively sits beside Cortes while holding his hand. Although Orozco seems less romantic and more critical regarding the violence within *mestizaje*, he still "represents *mestizaje* through the trope of heterosexual romance and patriarchal kinship relations."⁷ This active/passive, nature/culture, European/Indigenous, man/woman dichotomy that exists at the center of colonialism is barely addressed by Vasconcelos and the Muralists. Coffey, for example argues that Indigenous culture has been "feminized in order to reassert the racial order and patriarchal privilege of Mexico's bourgeois

reformers after the chaos of the revolution,” thus making normalized misogyny in Mexico serve “to naturalize the disciplining of indigenous cultures and peoples within the new order of mestizo nationalism.”⁸

Frida Kahlo, existing outside of the Muralist trinity (although related to them through her socio-political context and her marriage with Diego Rivera), provides a different perspective on *mestizaje*. Kahlo’s *mestizaje* is not the grand imaginary *mestizaje* of Vasconcelos and the Mexican Muralists, but rather one with a personal vision related to her mixed ancestry, as seen in the 1936 painting titled *My Grandparents, My Parents and I (Family Tree)*. On the right, she depicts her European grandparents and her father, who was of German descent and immigrated to Mexico, and on the left side, she depicts her Indigenous Mexican family including her grandparents and her mother in a white dress. Kahlo represents herself as a child standing in the courtyard of the *Casa Azul* where she grew up, connected with her family members through blood vessels. Here it is evident that *mestizaje* for Kahlo is a real, material, lived experience and identity.

Although Kahlo supported post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism and Marxism alongside the Muralists, the conception of Mexican history and identity in some of her work differs. While Malinche was seen as a traitor to the Mexican people, the reality is that she was sold by her family and later taken up by Cortes at age fourteen to be his concubine and slave, as well as his translator and mother to Cortes’ Mestizo son. In relation to this history, Kahlo imagines herself as Malinche many times in her work. Some examples include *The Dream* (1940), echoing Antonio Ruíz’ *The Dream of Malinche* (1932), *Roots* (1943) and *Mask* (1945), where Kahlo depicts herself wearing the

typical red Malinche mask pictured crying.⁹ In *The Dream*, Malinche/Kahlo is seen as a traitor, as a Judas skeleton is portrayed on top of her bed canopy, which Kahlo also set up on top of her bed in reality.¹⁰ In *Mask and Roots*, Kahlo also depicts both her pain as well as Malinche's. In *Roots* Kahlo represents herself in a reclining pose, with a hole in her torso that plants pass through. Resembling an open wound, this image relates to *La Chingada*, a vulgar Mexican term used to characterize Malinche as a "forced open, screwed, or ravaged woman."¹¹

By identifying with Malinche, Kahlo allows the Mexican imaginary to see her through another perspective and to empathize with her rather than blame her.¹² In doing this, Kahlo exposes Mexico's colonial history, and the origin of *mestizaje* for what it really was: a violent and non-consensual event, that was not formed in "the abundance of love" like Vasconcelos states, but rather in support of colonial racist and sexist ideologies. The post-revolutionary Mexican culture that Kahlo depicts is one of *mestizaje*, not the *mestizaje* that Vasconcelos envisioned but rather one rooted in past colonial violence, personal experience, femininity and Marxist visions of the future. It is an embodied *mestizaje*.

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¹ Marilyn Grace Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 23-25.

² *Ibid.*

³ José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 407.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham: Duke University Press 2012), 6.

⁶ Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser, *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America* (London: Verso, 1989), 124.

⁷ Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹ Gannit Ankori, *Critical Lives: Frida Kahlo* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 131-2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹² *Ibid.*, 134.

A New Design Thinking: The Role of Art and Design in Urban Planning Communities and Thinking

Saqib Mansoor

People within a specific space behave according to the environment surrounding us. This concept gets amplified when it comes to the various designers of the environments. Art and design interventions provide the planners, designers, and architects with a medium to communicate their intentions to the public. Through art and other creative practises such as design interventions, designers and architects are able to preserve, merge, or even create new cultures within a space representing the history and the spirit of the neighbourhood or the city itself. Through this, they are able to confront the environmental, social, technological, and cultural issues facing the city making them transparent to the general public. This research paper will observe the Art Gallery of Ontario's Grange Park revitalization intervention by PFS Studios and how it transformed the conception of social spaces within the urban environment. Located behind the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), this revitalization project was directed not only towards sociability of the space, but also towards sustainability and accessibility. This paper will also examine Toronto's development of West Don Lands' art installments and their connection between social,

environmental, and cultural issues. Using the Grange Park revitalization project and development of West Don Lands as case studies, this research paper will look at how City of Toronto's ongoing initiative to implement sociability, sustainability, and accessibility as core design functions within the urban environment.

The Changing World

As the world continues to change socially and technologically, new challenges and issues are brought to light, to which today's technology and knowledge attempts to create new solutions. Within an urban environment, designers and planners are challenged to adopt a responsive way of thinking, which does not only resolve the existing issues but is flexible enough to predict and address the issues to come. To get a better understanding of the issues at hand and what is to be expected for the future, the present along with the past must be studied. As the American sociologist Lewis Mumford states, "To understand our troubles, we simply cannot only look at the city today now, we must also look at the city in history."¹ When looking at the Grange Park, it is important to look at the parks in the past and then today to understand what role they play within the environment. Sabrina Richard, liberal studies professor at OCAD University, posits that historically, four types of parks were established: domestic temples and gardens as places of worship, hunting parks for agricultural uses, public gardens for the general public, and palace gardens for the ruling class.²

Today, the purpose of parks has evolved to be a place that is for "everyone": children, youth, adults, and seniors.³ The idea of the palace garden has been minimized due to the fact that it creates division and hierarchy in terms

of the accessibility of the park. According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), parks and recreational areas are essential within urban environments today as they facilitate sociability and provide health and environmental benefits at a city scale.⁴

Sociability

As more people within urban environments become dependent and adaptive to the digital world of social media, physical social interaction becomes difficult to establish. Sociability is one issue that designers and planners attempt to develop solutions for in Toronto through upcoming design projects. In the revitalization of Grange Park, many different elements were added to increase the sociability of the space. The park underwent landscaping to form green spaces along with a water feature that provides an escape from the city's hardscape.⁵ New features of the park include playgrounds for kids, a fenced off dog park, new seating, new paths, new gathering spaces, and public art. This invites a variety of demographics such as dog owners, children, seniors, youth, and even artists to utilize the space that functions as multiple venues at once. With the removal of some existing structures such as a small building located at the north-east entrance and the fencing which created a barrier, Grange Park now gives a feeling of openness which links the park with its surroundings in an organic way. It opens up the view of the park and provides entrances that are inviting. The designers were able to preserve the main existing elements - trees - of the park while introducing new elements to express people's relation with nature, public art, and the city itself.⁶

Lewis Mumford describes the city as a theatre, an

urban stage, on which citizens perform.⁷ To enhance sociability, Toronto embraced this idea of the city as a designed stage set by integrating public art within its spaces. An example of this is West Don Lands, a new neighbourhood in Toronto where citizens are encouraged to interact with the art installations in the space. As mentioned earlier, artists are able to create new cultures. West Don Lands creates an environment in which different aspects of the city are considered and reflected within this neighbourhood in hopes of capturing and redefining the relation between public art and the city itself. West Don Lands contains public art installations at different nodes of the neighbourhood which represent different aspects of Toronto. *Water Guardians* is one of the many art installations located within the neighbourhood. Due to *Water Guardians'* colour, form, and monumental size it has become one of the icons of the neighbourhood. It is easy visible and most importantly inviting. It integrates art and landscape in a way that does not only engage children, but also anyone that passes through the gateway that it provides, similar to Grange Park.⁸ The *Water Guardians'* contribution to the area is more complex than just being appealing and inviting to the general public; it also integrates people's relation and connection to the nearby Don River. It metaphorically hints at peoples' role of being the guardians of Don River, a source of vital resources to be protected.⁹

Sustainability

Toronto is attempting to implement standards of sustainability within its upcoming design interventions. Sustainability has become a major trend over the last two

decades, being adapted by many cities around the world. However, the term sustainability has been so overused that it has become extremely vague in terms of what it refers to and due to this commercialized sustainability, it has become a product in itself. Sustainability as a label is sold. As practicing architect and professor of design at OCAD University Eric Nay states in his critique of Laurentian University's new School of Architecture, sustainable design is a lot more than just throwing some solar panels on a building. Sustainability understands and embraces the culture, climate, history, community and localized contexts within the design.¹⁰

The Grange Park and West Don Lands project interventions go beyond this generalized idea of sustainability. The Grange Park's sustainability is identified as high priority, not only to implement it but also to maintain it post-project. Sustainability of the park includes a tree strategy which assessed the health of every tree in the park which determined trees can be revitalized. To further support this strategy, infrastructure like a n irrigation system was put in place to ensure a water supply to the trees. These additions are defined to be sustainable as they take into consideration the existing context and provide solutions that support the existing elements, rather than demolishing them. The lifespan of the park is considered by ensuring that operating funds are available after the project has been completed.¹¹

West Don Lands also follows Nay's definition of sustainability. Aside from the fact that this neighbourhood received Gold LEED certification from the Canada Green Building Council for exceeding the minimum standards of sustainability, West Don Lands also considered culture and community as part of sustainability.¹² In the West

Don Land project, art plays an important role by representing the history, identity, and the spirit of the city itself. It engages the public with the surroundings in a critical way while emphasizing people's connection with the localized context: water guardians represent the environmental issue of the Don River and its relationship to citizens of Toronto.¹³ Through these methods and interventions, designers and planners have created a space in which sustainability is reflected not only through an environmental context but also through a cultural context with which citizens are able to interact with and think critically about issues facing the city.

Accessibility

Accessibility is a growing concern around the globe, requiring extensive attention and critical thinking. With the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) being implemented as mandatory code in Ontario in 2025, designers need to become familiar with the standards provided by it. The AODA regulates accessibility standards for employment, transportation, and design of public spaces.¹⁴ All the furnishings and playground equipment designed in the Grange Park revitalization project aimed to comply with the AODA.¹⁵ Designers must consider accessibility because design has the capacity to create independence or dependence; people are either disabled or empowered by design.

The AODA was issued as a result of the Ontario government realizing the inaccessibility of various public spaces. Providing an environment that empowers individuals with disabilities and avoiding segregation is the ultimate goal. The AODA is a tool provided to designers and planners to employ strategies for creating public

spaces which invite all individuals rather than disabling individuals.¹⁶ Toronto has taken up the code and is implementing it within all the upcoming projects, including the Grange Park revitalization project.

Adaptive Thinking

With the world rapidly evolving, new factors are introduced and are to be considered within design of urban life. With the increased use of personal aid devices and Earth's finite natural resources in critical condition, a new design thinking is to be implemented. An adaptive designing thinking in which issues on hand are examined while considering future issues, then providing a flexible solution, is needed. In the revitalization of Grange Park and development of West Don Lands, the general public initially described as being fully abled individuals was redefined as differently abled individuals who require the assistance of both personal devices and the environment. Introducing the AODA standards into the design ensures these spaces avoid creating segregation by becoming accessible to all individuals. Carefully implementing sociability, sustainability and accessibility into the design, Grange Park and West Don Lands impact the urban life by providing a social space that is truly for everyone. This design intervention impacts the design thinking within the urban lifestyle by providing a precedent and inspiration for the future projects to come.

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- ¹ Lewis Mumford, *Lewis Mumford on the City*, directed by Christopher Chapman (1963; National Film Board of Canada, accessed 13 Aug. 2017), online video.
 - ² Sabrina Richard, "Introduction to Open Spaces," (presentation, Urban Life, OCAD University, Toronto, July 13, 2017).
 - ³ "National Recreation and Park Association," National Recreation and Park Association, accessed August 13, 2017: <http://www.nrpa.org>.
 - ⁴ Ibid.
 - ⁵ "Grange Park Toronto Canada," Grange Park Revitalization Project: The City of Toronto, accessed August 12, 2017: <http://www.grangeparktoronto.ca/revitalization-project>.
 - ⁶ Ibid.
 - ⁷ Lewis Mumford, "What is a City?" in *The City Reader*, ed. Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout (London: Routledge, 1996), 91.
 - ⁸ "West Don Lands." Waterfront Toronto (The City of Toronto), accessed August 13, 2017: www.waterfronttoronto.ca/nbe/portal/waterfront/Home/waterfronthome/precincts/west-don-lands.
 - ⁹ Ibid.
 - ¹⁰ Eric Nay, "Sustainable Architecture is Localized Architecture," *Alternatives Journal: Canada's Environmental Voice*, April 18, 2014, accessed August 14, 2017.
 - ¹¹ "Grange Park Toronto Canada."
 - ¹² "West Don Lands," Waterfront Toronto.
 - ¹³ Ibid.
 - ¹⁴ Madeleine Meilleur, *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005: 2006 Annual Report* (Toronto: Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2006), 3.
 - ¹⁵ "Grange Park Toronto Canada."
 - ¹⁶ Madeleine Meilleur, *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, 3.

***gendertrash: Transgender Anarchism
in Canadian AIDS Activism***

Lex Burgoyne

gendertrash – initially entitled *Gendertrash from Hell*– is a four-issue zine produced from 1993 to 1995 in Toronto, by and for trans people. The zine was produced by the do-it-yourself (DIY) publisher genderpress, headed by Xanthra-Phillippa MacKay (Xanthra Phillippa) and was largely distributed for free with the intention of reaching as many trans people as possible. What is particularly interesting about *gendertrash* is the hole that it filled in the HIV/AIDS activist movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. As artist collectives such as General Idea and Gran Fury made up for the lack of public awareness and education about the AIDS crisis – manufactured by the very social institutions that chose not to address this lack of information – they garnered widespread attention through the use of graphics in public space, and more elaborate projects in art institutions. These collectives and their efforts campaigned for the rights of gays and lesbians, but failed to address the specific concerns of trans people within those communities. In Toronto, genderpress attended to this oversight, utilizing the *gendertrash* zine as an anarchist vehicle for spreading information, fostering social support, and encouraging

political engagement in regard to the problem of HIV/AIDS awareness and education in Canada's trans communities.

Before discussing the significance of *gendertrash*'s zine format, the cultural context of its material must be addressed. While ACT UP! was at the centre of the late 1980s AIDS crisis in the United States, Aids Action Now! (AAN!) had formed in 1987 in Toronto to fight for three demands: "immediate access to aerosolized pentamidine[,] a consensus conference on standards of care [and] access to experimental treatments" for people living with HIV/AIDS in Toronto.¹ The core group of AAN! consisted of gay activists and people living with HIV/AIDS - over the course of their campaigning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they saw several successes for lesbian women, gay men and people living with HIV/AIDS such as blocking the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health's call to quarantine sexually active, HIV positive people in 1990. The first issue of *gendertrash* was published in April/May 1993, just a few months after AAN! had won a fight for an increase in the federal AIDS budget. While AAN! was doing incredible activist work advocating for themselves and adjacently vulnerable communities, trans people were largely left out of their campaigns.

Each issue of *gendertrash* published content made by Xanthra Phillippa and others, touching on a wide range of transgender issues in a wide variety of formats, ranging from poetry to a glossary of transgender related terminology. One of the lengthier pieces of writing in the first issue of *gendertrash* is titled "gendercide." To clarify the language used, our contemporary understandings of cisgender and transgender are termed 'genetic described' and 'gender described', respectively, by the zine.

“gendercide” is a text by Xanthra Phillippa that lists questions and statements concerning the health and welfare of gender described people, specifically in relation to genetic described lesbian women and gay men. Phillippa notes that “this society maintains the myth that the gender described are really a subsection of the lesbian and gay communities” and consequently, she asks, “where is the necessary statistical documentation regarding our lives, like for instance our average life span, our average incomes, housing, professions... and what about HIV/AIDS and the gender communities?”.²

Education on and healthcare related to HIV/AIDS for trans people is a prominent topic in the first two issues of the zine. Near the end of *gendertrash Issue 1* is “an incomplete list of issues that we will try to deal with in future issues of *gendertrash*,” including “TS’s [transsexuals] & HIV/AIDS” and “TS’s & the queer communities.”³ It is frequently addressed that trans people are sidelined by the cisgender lesbian and gay community, not solely by the system of cisheterosexuality. In *gendertrash Issue 2*, a contributor identified as kiwi writes a review of the academic conference Queer Sites held in Toronto, May 1993. The review opens with the statement that the conference was “devoted to studying queer issues... it became all too clear that the current use of queer only refers to lesbians and gay men... to the irreducible difference of two sexes”.⁴ This is followed by a quiz with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ boxes to check out beside statements such as “transsexuals are really just lesbians/gays who can’t handle their orientation,” “transsexuals are homophobic when they complain about their treatment by lesbians & gays,” “transsexuals are trying to take over the Lesbian-Feminist Movement” and so on. On a more serious note, another

submission by kiwi in the second issue entitled “Transsexuals and AIDS: The State of the Research” addresses how there is next to no research on AIDS issues in transgender communities— they share an anecdote about doing an online search and out of over 30,000 articles on AIDS research, only four addressed transgender concerns.

This lack of knowledge and education on transgender healthcare in the context of the AIDS crisis was reflected by the lack of transgender representation in the larger realm of queer cultural production, such as the work being put out by Gran Fury, associated with ACT UP! Gran Fury certainly had an interest in advancing the visibility of demographics who were silenced by the medical institution but nonetheless affected by AIDS, such as in their work “Women Don’t Get AIDS They Just Die From It” that detailed how HIV positive women suffer from effects of the illness but are denied healthcare on the basis of not meeting the definitional criteria for AIDS patients. One of the largest AIDS related art campaigns in Canada, General Idea’s *Imagevirus*, did not explicitly mention the issue in any gendered terms whatsoever. As Douglas Crimp has noted in his text “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism” about the cultural production that emerged around the AIDS crisis, “art *does* have the power to save lives”.⁵ In the face of a government that was unwilling to help a population labelled as deviant, artist collectives such as Gran Fury adopted a practice that intended to “inform – and thereby to mobilize” because they felt that “until a cure for AIDS is developed, *only* information and mobilization can save lives”.⁶

The concerns expressed in *gendertrash* over the exclusion of transgender experiences from HIV/AIDS

research and activist campaigning has certainly proven to be true. While significant developments have been made in the realm of HIV/AIDS healthcare – such as the development of anti-HIV medications, such as PrEP which has been around since 2012 – several studies in Ontario indicated that even in just the past five years, more “trans-sensitive HIV testing and prevention programs are needed throughout the province”.⁷ Transgender HIV/AIDS activism has fallen by the wayside at the hands of cisgender gay men and lesbian women who further marginalize the experiences of trans people affected by this issue.

The DIY zine format of *gendertrash* was already a heavily established practice by the time it was being published, obviously borrowing from the distinctly punk graphic language of resistance. For example, the cover of Mark P.’s fifth release of the *Sniffin’ Glue* zine in November, 1976, is hand-lettered by a felt tip pen, the title of featured bands and other zine contents scrawled around a close-up image of someone yelling into the camera. There is some neater text on the cover that has been typed out: “If you actually like this rag you must be one of the idiots we write it for.” Another example is the back cover for the eleventh release of Mick Mercer’s *Panache* in 1978, featuring an apocalyptic poem about the fall of civilization, haphazardly cut and paste from typewritten text. The poem is bordered by cut and paste collages that poke fun at Margaret Thatcher. Similar visual styles are taken up by *gendertrash* – a major difference between it and these punk fanzines of the 1970s is that *gendertrash* is heavily focused on typewritten text. The front and back covers of each zine, however, are decorated with the distinct punk style of collaged image and text,

combined with language for a shocking effect.

The title on the cover of *gendertrash*'s first issue actually combines cut and paste text with typewritten text. The inside cover mentions that the creation of the zine necessitated the use of a computer and certain software, so the production process was somewhat more elaborate than the simple 'scissors and glue' production technique of *Sniffin' Glue* and *Panache*. *gendertrash* uses cut and paste text to communicate the urgency of two statements, the sentiments of which are perhaps the most important takeaway from *gendertrash* in regard to its status within AIDS activism. In chaotic ransom note-style lettering, mixing colours and swapping between uppercase and lowercase, the back cover of the first issue reads "CAUSE WE'RE JUST AS QUEER AS DYKES AND FAGS MAYBe evEn MORE SO," bookended by two exclamation points. Along this same line of thinking, the back cover of the second issue reads "hey faggots If you're going to CALL uS TRANNIES OR TRANSies Then WE'LL caLL You stupid DICKs & WEE-wees time for you to groW UP." *gendertrash* uses confrontational wording and punk's graphic language of resistance, combined with the DIY publishing format in a way that highlights the immediacy of the zines' content and message.

In a 2007 interview on the subject of "Queer Art/Queer Anarchy," Toronto-based artist Luis Jacob describes a model of anarchist cultural production, involving two key ideas that prove useful in analyzing the cultural value of *gendertrash*:

the idea of manifesting counter-models of social communion presented within society in its current form, here and now (not in some deferred revolutionary moment);

and the idea of spontaneous participation as overcoming of alienation and a liberation of energies of personal agency and collective pleasure. ⁸

In general, these are two functions that zines serve. This sentiment links up with Douglas Crimp's description of the art practices of collectives such as Gran Fury as initiatives that were engaged in political action by way of disseminating information. The difference between Gran Fury's works, and the practice of zine making, is that zine making often encourages viewers to share feedback with the object's publisher, thereby building a community through dialogue. Gran Fury's works and posters were largely directed toward consciousness raising, and did not provide a platform for conversation as zines have.

gendertrash actively invited submissions to be approved for publication. It seems to have been quite organized with submission deadlines detailed in the front cover of each issue, as well as the disclaimer that "any opinions expressed are those of the individual writers." *genderpress* also sought to use *gendertrash* to expand the conversation of trans people beyond the scope of their immediate Toronto trans community, even into the realm of cisgender social networks. An additional disclaimer under the call for submission specifies that *gendertrash* can be reproduced by "any gender described person ... [or] non-profit journal for gender described" with credit, meanwhile "genetics" required the "prior written consent from *genderpress*" to reproduce *gendertrash* in any way. Evidently, the journal had a specific trajectory in mind as to where its information should go and how it should be used, and this trajectory is what would have helped in creating a community around the zine.

This is where *gendertrash*'s zine format becomes most

interesting and important, as it falls not only within a lineage of punk zines but also one of homocore or queercore zines – while it was engaged in a critique of this queer political organizing. In addition to more professionalized publications such as *The Body Politic* magazines, Toronto saw an emergence of a distinctly queer, punk scene. This scene’s cultural production was building up the ‘queercore’ or ‘homocore’ scene through zines such as *J.D.’s* by G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce, published from 1985 to 1991. *J.D.s* was created in response to “what it saw as an increasingly assimilationist, homogenous, and bourgeois gay culture”⁹ – the core sentiment of the word ‘queer’ when it was taken up as a keyword by 1990s activist groups such as Queer Nation.

gendertrash, first published in 1993, followed on the heels of *J.D.’s* and the culture it had both produced and become embedded within. Taking what *gendertrash* has to say about the marginalization of trans people in mind, the queercore culture may have been against homonormativity, but it had not offered much support to those whose very lives disrupt the heteronormativity that cisgender lesbian women and gay men were mimicking in order to make their lives ‘respectable’ and appealing to mainstream politics and social institutions. *gendertrash* thus may be thought of as an anarchist project necessitating a collective practice that both manifested counter-models of socializing and encouraged spontaneous participation from the trans community of Toronto, in response to an anarchist culture in Toronto that was not entirely successful in its endeavours, perpetuating the lack of trans people’s inclusion in the utterly necessary conversation surrounding queer people and HIV/AIDS health services and education.

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- ¹ "History," Aids Action Now, accessed November 23, 2017, http://www.aidsactionnow.org/?page_id=38.
- ² *gendertrash Issue 1*, ed. Xanthra Phillipa (Toronto: genderpress, 1993), 6.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ⁴ *gendertrash Issue 2*, ed. Xanthra Phillipa (Toronto: genderpress, 1993), 34.
- ⁵ Douglas Crimp, "AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism," *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 7.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁷ Greta Bauer et al., "High heterogeneity of HIV-related sexual risk among transgender people in Ontario, Canada: a province-wide respondent-driven sampling survey," *BMC Public Health* 12, no. 1 (2012): 11.
- ⁸ Allan Antliff, "Queer Art/Queer Anarchy: An Interview with Luis Jacob," in *Realizing the Impossible: Art Against Authority*, eds. MacPhee and Reuland (Oakland: AK Press, 2007), 239.
- ⁹ Scott Rayter et al., *Queer CanLit: Canadian Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Literature in English* (Toronto: Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library and Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, University of Toronto, 2008), 44.

***Redefining Inuit Printmaking:
Annie Pootoogook's Man on The Radio***

Gabrielle Lanthier

Inuk graphic artist Annie Pootoogook has produced a rich, autobiographical body of work detailing contemporary life in the Arctic during her career. In 2016, her death summed up to the many cases of murdered Indigenous women in Canada. Though the result of the investigation was officially inconclusive, Pootoogook's case served as a reminder of how institutions have failed to protect Indigenous communities, especially women. Her legacy in the art world continues to be a critique and a depiction of these very issues.

Throughout her career, Pootoogook developed her skills, and came to be known for work that includes scenes of intimate, direct, and non-romanticized representations of her daily life in her hometown at Kinngait, using a style often referred to as narrative realism.¹ Pootoogook's honest portrayal of her life and of Cape Dorset's community deals with Inuit experiences of forced insertion into a capitalist economic system, life in settlement homes, substance abuse, response to Western modernization, and challenges brought by colonization. By examining the drawing *Man on the Radio* (2006), this essay demonstrates how Pootoogook's work portrays local Inuit lived reality and

challenges the notion of Cape Dorset printmaking as sentimental and limited to traditional subject matter of pre-colonial life in the Arctic. Pootoogook's work has contributed to the recognition of Inuit artists in Canada, and continues to encourage them to create powerful lived narratives through their own techniques and mediums.

One of the most historically significant developments for Inuit art was the implementation of artist co-ops in Cape Dorset, as it encouraged Inuit artists to produce artworks which would be revered by southern markets as authentically Inuit. During the 1950's, these co-ops were established in order to create a formal means of trade between Inuit artists and the southern market, allowing these artists to make a living, as well as incorporating them into a wage economy.² Typically, each co-op functioned in a similar manner, buying the artwork of an individual, reproducing it, and then selling it to the southern market. Most of the artworks within the print category included scenes of traditional Inuit culture, such as portrayals of hunting, family life, mythological imagery, and anthropomorphic figures; even as these aspects of Inuit culture were being simultaneously eradicated by colonial forces, in the hopes of assimilating the Inuit into white culture. The style of the prints being made in the co-ops reflected a hybrid nature, one which emerged from the stylization of Inuit sculpture, in combination with the mediums of coloured pencil and large format paper, which were introduced by the South.³ Art historian Heather Igloliorte remarks on the precarious, contradictory nature of the artist co-ops put in place by the Canadian government:

while Inuit culture was being debased, devalued, and actively oppressed by the dual forces of colonization and

evangelization, these same values were revered, celebrated, and preserved in their art, which was voraciously collected.⁴

In this sense, the artwork that was being created in the co-ops did not depict the current reality of life in the Arctic, and catered to the taste of the southern viewer who was content with upholding the romantic concept of the “noble savage,” as discussed by art historian Janet Catherine Berlo.⁵ Although it may not have been an honest depiction of the current state of life, the production of these images allowed Inuit artists to preserve their traditions in their artwork as well as subvert colonial powers, while being able to earn the money to make ends meet.

The colonial establishment of the artist co-op is the one in which Pootoogook was able to develop and make a living from her artistic talents, although much of the credit for her development can be linked to her artistic lineage. Her grandmother, Pitseolak Ashoona, and mother, Napachie Pootoogook, were both prolific artists who taught her how to draw, as documented in Annie Pootoogook’s drawing *Pitseolak Drawing with Two Girls on the Bed* (2006). In this image, Pootoogook displays the Inuit apprenticeship method of learning by observation. Both her mother and grandmother produced images which documented life in the Arctic, and Napachie Pootoogook often brought attention to the hardships of life, such as gender and power struggles, domestic abuse, and substance abuse. One artwork by Napachie Pootoogook which displays a harsh subject matter is *Alcohol* (1994), in which a woman is trying to remove a bottle of alcohol from her husband’s hands. Generally, this kind of subject matter would not have been marketable or palatable to

the southern viewer who is primarily interested in purchasing images of a romanticized, primitive, and spiritual Arctic, unpolluted by Western industrialization. Annie Pootoogook follows in the footsteps of her mother by continuing to depict difficult scenes which show the effects of the impact of colonization. Igloliorte discusses that despite the troubling subject matter, Pootoogook manages to avoid presenting the image “of a people subjugated by the encroachment of Western culture and accoutrements. Instead, these scenes reveal how Inuit have adapted these comforts to their lifestyle.”⁶ In presenting everyday scenes of contemporary life in Kinngait, she is able to show the community’s development and adaptations to Western culture, such as in *Dr Phil* (2006), where she sits on the floor watching day-time television, and *Eating Seal at Home* (2001), an image of friends and family gathered on the floor in typical Inuit fashion, sharing a meal. Through these works Pootoogook dispels settler’s unrealistic notions of the North as an untouched, “primitive” place. Her fusion of traditional and southern elements is also visible in *Man on the Radio* (2006).

In this drawing, Pootoogook depicts a family conducting activities of daily life, which include traditions of the Inuit culture as well as modern adaptations. The drawing depicts a contemporary scene of an Inuit family conducting their daily activities: a man speaks on an electronic radio, while a woman is cutting up some meat with a traditional ulu knife as children watch. She uses a simple style in which she employs a limited use of linear perspective, simplified forms, and vibrant colours applied on flat surfaces with little shading. This reflects the techniques taught by her mother and grandmother, and

offer a documentary representation of her daily life. Her portrayal of the everyday in settlement homes in the Arctic, although ubiquitous to her and those in her community, were shocking and foreign to the southern art market when they first made their appearance in galleries in the early 2000s.⁷

Pootoogook's first appearance in a formal gallery setting was in Toronto at the Power Plant gallery in 2006, which also marked the gallery's first solo exhibition of an Inuk artist. Through this exhibition, Pootoogook was able to demonstrate that works which depicted the contemporary Arctic could make their mark in the art world, which was made even more evident when she won the 2006 Sobey Art Award.⁸ In order to be able to include her in the running for the competition, the Sobey jury had to expand their geographical borders for submissions, which prior to 2006, did not include the Prairies and the Northern Territories. In this sense, Pootoogook was literally breaking barriers for Inuit artists in the North and beyond.⁹ Pootoogook expressed mixed feelings about this event in a drawing titled *Annie at the Sobey Awards* (2006). In this drawing, Annie is positioned with her back facing the viewer, surrounded by a group of journalists and important art-world figures. In an interview with the Nunatsiaq News, Annie expressed her excitement of winning such a prestigious prize: "I was excited. They like my work, so I was happy."¹⁰ Preceding the events that led to her her national acclaim, Pootoogook decided to leave the comforts of home, and move to the south in order to produce work on her own terms. Unfortunately that meant not having her artwork bought on a weekly basis within the system of the Kinngait studios, which led to a significant decline in her personal

life as well as her art production.

Regardless, Pootoogook's work has been influential in the push to bring Inuit artists out of the periphery and into the mainstream art world, including various contemporary artists whose work have also received critical acclaim. Zacharias Kunuk, an Inuk filmmaker and director who creates films in the historical-drama genre, has been awarded many prestigious titles both nationally and globally, including a Camera D'or award at the Cannes festival for his film *The Fast Runner* (2001). More recently, Kunuk has been chosen represent Canada at the Venice Biennale in 2019, the first Inuk artist to have been awarded this prestigious position. Another contemporary Inuk artist who has been recognized for his excellence is Jutai Toonoo, an sculptor who creates work that addresses the many issues Inuit communities face due to colonization and its ramifications, such as in his 2001 work titled *Upside/Downside*. Both of these artists exemplify the talent and creativity that Inuit art has to offer, and demonstrates how far the art world has come in making a rightful space for them as artists.

Annie Pootoogook's rich, albeit tragically short-lived career, has had an undeniable effect on the course of Canadian art history and Inuit art production. Her works depicting a view of life in the Arctic have broken the barriers of what was accepted as "authentic" Inuit art, and made way for Inuit artists to be considered producers of fine arts worthy of critical acclaim, not from a place of fetish or othering, but for their innovating, socially challenging, and beautiful art works. Her death was an extremely tragic moment for all who admired her honest drawings and humble personality, although her legacy continues to live on and impact the art scene in many ways.

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¹ Nancy Campbell, "Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Contemporary Inuit Drawing," (PhD diss., York University, 2017), 70.

² Janet Catherine Berlo, "Drawing (upon) the Past: Negotiating Identities in Inuit Graphic Arts Production," in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (Oakland: University of California Press, 1999), 181.

³ Kaitlyn J. Rathwell and Derek Armitage, "Art and Artistic Processes Bridge Knowledge Systems about Social-Ecological Change: An Empirical Examination with Inuit Artists from Nunavut, Canada," *Ecology & Society* 21, no. 2 (2016), n.p. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-08369-210221>].

⁴ Heather Igloliorte, "Inuit Art: Markers of Cultural Resilience," *Inuit Art Quarterly* (Spring/Summer 2010): 5.

⁵ Berlo, "Drawing (upon) the Past," 181.

⁶ Heather Igloliorte, "Annie Pootoogook: Depicting Arctic modernity in contemporary Inuit art," *Artlink* (June 2017): 59.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Campbell, "Cracking the Glass Ceiling," 59.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

***On Colonialism and Curatorial Practice:
The Latent Ideals of the Art Gallery of Ontario***

Sam Holzberg

Upon entry past Walker Court, the Art Gallery of Ontario's visitor is confronted by several rooms dedicated to European painting and sculpture from the 1600s. The work of this period epitomizes the collective notion of 'fine art', and the Gallery's curatorial choices reinforce this Eurocentric standard. Distinct disparities between display methodologies emerge when this wing of the gallery is compared to a peripheral room on the second floor, which houses the AGO's collection of work from throughout the African continent.

Margaret Lindauer's 'critical visitor' lends itself to an investigation of the AGO's inconsistent displaying of artworks. In *The Critical Museum Visitor*, Lindauer asserts that

the critical museum visitor notes what objects are presented, in what ways, and for what purposes ... explores what is left unspoken or kept off display ... and asks, who has the most to gain or the most to lose from having this information, collection or interpretation publicly present?¹

This individual may observe a myriad of problematics

when faced with the discrepancies between the AGO's presentation of African and European work. Most significantly, though, the critical visitor will observe an implicit privileging of Western traditions; they may deduce the institution's undermining of artwork from other global regions. This paper compares the AGO's collection of Italian Baroque artwork with the Frum Collection of African Art in order to demonstrate this institution's tacit colonial ideals as manifested in curatorial choices of architecture, choreography and display methods.

An exhibit's most conspicuous display method exists in its architectural framework; thus, it is necessary to analyze the physical rooms themselves in order to ascertain the implicit biases placed on the works within them. The room housing Italian Baroque is painted a deep, muted blue, which complements the *chiaroscuro* effect commonly found in the Italian Baroque. Through the use of original hardwood flooring, the room is imbued with an atmosphere akin to that of a bourgeois domestic environment. The moulding feels like a classical revival, as it bears resemblance to a *Frieze* on a Greek temple. The ceiling is ornate, haloed with elaborate crown moulding. This architecture is a clear reference to traditional Western institutional styles. Margaret Lindauer cites two art historians, Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, who "have suggested that art museums with exterior facades inspired by Greco-Roman temples metaphorically allude to the beginning of Western civilization." ² This observation leads the visitor to view the room, and the works within, with a sense of historical significance - they belong to some greater legacy.

The other noteworthy architectural feature of the space

is its location in a centrally placed room, conveniently accessible through the Gallery's cardinal space, Walker Court. Lindauer continues:

Duncan and Wallach argued that this temporal reference is politically significant when the sequence of primary exhibitions celebrates Euro-American art and marginalizes Oceanic, Native American, African, Asian and Latino art works by exhibiting them in secondary galleries.³

The AGO is directly entitling the Italian Baroque to greater visitor exposure by placing it in a primary gallery. In doing so, the visual cues provided by room's architectural and choreographic plan profess the work as being Art in essence. In their book *The Value of Things*, Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings write:

exhibiting artefacts in a manner calculated to embody and communicate specific cultural values - narratives of progress and evolution - this collection environment enabled a direct flow of knowledge, via the artefact to visitor. This means of understanding was reinforced by the physical architecture of the Museum, which with its grid-like structure of parallel galleries and cross-connecting rooms imposed a specific itinerary for the visitor to follow. A walk past sequences of ordered objects, following a prescribed route through the main galleries and smaller adjacent spaces, enabled the visitor to trace the key narrative at the museum's heart: the evolution of Western European culture.⁴

Because the room is acutely present in the Gallery's physical layout, it is simultaneously conspicuous in the psyche of its visitors. As the Gallery's patrons internalize the suggestion of geographic and ethnographic hierarchy

as demonstrated in the curatorial practices of the AGO, the ongoing social violence of Eurocentricity – in all facets of cultural output – is perpetuated. With critical thought, the visitor may begin to understand the museum’s masked ideals: to present a history dominated and circumscribed by European perspectives, and to emphasize that history through the building’s construction.

Conversely, the Frum collection’s room implies an overtly deliberate construction. The flooring, which may appear mundane, strikes the scrutinizing eye of the ‘critical visitor’; it is composed of cross sections of trees laid out as tiles. This appears negligible, but is greatly significant to a post-colonial reading of the space. The tree’s rings are on display as a reminder of its dismemberment by an axe. If the critical visitor ponders the action of deforestation, they recognize this as an imperial action often perpetrated by a colonial hand. Indeed, this subtle feature of the space is an unsettling demonstration of colonial totality. Furthermore, the walls and display cases are made of teak, a wood found throughout the world in tropical climates and yielded in many African countries. During the period of European colonization, many teak plantations were founded throughout Africa’s equatorial regions.⁵ This connection hardly needs stating – the choice to use a resource largely commodified by forces during the Colonial era in Africa demonstrates questionable intent on the institution’s behalf. To infuse the space with a material whose history is so laced with violence is as unthoughtful as it is disturbing.

Lindauer would describe the Frum collection as being contained in a secondary gallery – it is off the beaten track of the AGO’s choreographic plan and difficult to find. She writes, “the spatial relationship between primary and secondary galleries connotes a cultural hierarchy

(Western civilization above all others) encased in a quintessentially Euro-American architectural structure.”⁶ As one must go out of their way to reach the space, African artwork is subject to little traffic and minimal public exposure. So, while the Italian room follows a standardized approach concerning the presentation of (European) artwork, there is a more idiosyncratic approach to that of the African work. Each contain a bias; for the Italian work, it is to finance a perpetual legacy of European presentation. While the African work’s bias is less clear, the aforementioned curatorial choices function to further entrap African work in a colonial cavity and sustain its distinct ‘otherness’ from its European counterpart.

While architectural choices demonstrate certain ideals, display choices further perpetuate those biases. The method of labelling the African pieces is contentious, as the labels themselves are physically independent of the works. While the pieces, primarily the masks, are mounted on a wall under a pane of glass, the labels are located closer to the floor than to the artwork. This amounts to a constant back and forth between the label and the work. If a viewer wants to make the mental association between the information on the label (type of work, culture of origin, location, year) and the actual piece of art, they must glance incessantly between the work and the label. This makes it difficult to access information about African art and erases the value of both the information on the label and of the artwork itself. Additionally, the objects under glass assume a decidedly anthropological character instead of an artistic one. Instead of being displayed as works of art, they become ‘artifacts’; consequently, the viewer is encouraged to think of the work as extinct rather than evolving.

In contrast, the labelling of the Italian Baroque work has been somewhat canonized. It is burned into the collective memory pertaining to the labelling of all art – ‘all art’ being all apparently Western art, or art existing under a Western umbrella. This method is simply the ‘nameplate-next-to-the-piece’ style; it allows for a simultaneous, effortless viewing of both the artwork and its information. In this case, a curatorial choice was made to streamline the Baroque work with a well established museological habitude. Moreover, the status of these works are elevated with the use of sumptuous frames. This display choice asserts these works as being of high caliber. As this is the canonical approach, the visitor immediately recognizes this work as ‘Fine Art’, while non-Western work – in this case African – falls to the lowly rank of anthropological artifact.

The appellation of ‘African Art’ (hence ‘the Frum Collection of African Art’) carries its own form of significance. Janet Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips have both written extensively on the subject of Native American Art and its relationship with the Western institution. In their essay *Our [Museum] World Turned Upside Down: Re-presenting Native American Arts*, they write about the phenomenon of collecting; Berlo and Phillips contend that “the totalizing construct of ‘primitive’ art obscures differences among colonized peoples that are worth remembering.”⁷ By clumping a variety of distinct cultural practices into one conglomerate of ‘Africa’, a word used to thinly guise ‘primitive’, the individual qualities of the artworks disappear. Thus, the lurking Euro-American conception of a singular artistic voice disseminated by all of Africa is privileged over the reality of a vastly plural articulation of unique iconography from myriad cultures.

The modus operandi of the AGO does not stray from that of a typical colonial institution. Through architectural strategies such as classical moulding, the Italian Baroque is exalted to a lofty prestige; its central physical location within the museum aligns the visitor's tour with eurocentric ideologies. Disparagingly, the architecture of the Frum collection references Africa's dark history of colonialism; peripheral physical placement forces it to exist as inessential to the Gallery. In terms of display methodologies, the presentation of the Baroque achieves the 'standard' treatment – one saved for Western art – of opulent framing and easily accessible nameplates. Alternatively, the African work is treated as primitive and anthropological. In doing so, the AGO undermines the boundless artistic achievements of non-Western cultures and implicitly privileges Western traditions.

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¹ Margaret Lindauer, "The Critical Museum Visitor," in *New Museum Theory and Practice*, ed. Janet Marstine (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 204.

² Lindauer, "The Critical Museum Visitor," 207.

³ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴ Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings, *The Value of Things* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 45.

⁵ African Arguments. "Is All Well in the Teak Forests of South Sudan? - By Aly Verjee." *African Arguments*, African Arguments, 2 Mar. 2017: africanarguments.org/2013/03/14/is-all-well-in-the-teak-forests-of-south-sudan-by-aly-verjee.

⁶ Lindauer, "The Critical Museum Visitor," 207.

⁷ Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "Our (Museum) World Turned Upside Down: Re-presenting Native American Arts," in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, ed. Donald Prezioso and Claire Farago (London: Routledge, 2004), 711.

***Text on a Label for a Work by Hank Willis
Thomas at the Art Gallery of Ontario***

Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti

“the central fact of my life has been the existence of words and the possibility of weaving those words into poetry” -- such is the confession Jorge Luis Borges delivers during the last of a series of lectures in 1967-1968. ¹ I would like to focus on the fact that the weaving of the words does not necessarily imply the creation of poetry (I mean poetry in a “strict” sense, as opposed to a view that allows all language, all communication, to be taken as a form of poetry inherently). The quote’s content, I think justly, allows us to conjecture (which might sound old-fashioned, but I choose to use regardless) that words might be woven into things other than poems, too. Communicating through the English language, for example, demands this weaving: we write or speak using symbols and sounds that interact with one another and sort of add up to an attempt to communicate a message, to form meaning. Poetry is weaving just as much as writing this essay is, and identifying “conjecture” as old-fashioned or specifying a notion of “poetry” are important parts of the weaving because they help define what the end product will be. Its reading is also a form of weaving to the extent that we have to interpret these symbols given to us. Art is also a

place where this weaving goes on. Focusing on photography specifically, we see the work, try to identify its elements, try to arrange them with the help of our reason and our memory... it is a long, dense process, I think. It is fair to mention that our reading of a work may be affected by a friend's opinion, or our mood, and sometimes a label that a gallery or museum attaches near a work to accompany it. This exerts an influence on the reading of the work which is completely different from the others, because the label is *always* near the work – it is, if it isn't ignored, *always* part of it. For this, the content of such a label is extremely important. I recall an article about labels and gallery text at the Victoria and Albert Museum's website, where the Lead Educator for the Europe Galleries is quoted as saying that in-situ text is "the bedrock of interpretation."² I want to take for an example the label on Hank Willis Thomas' seven retro-reflective screen prints, on display at the Art Gallery of Ontario as part of the 2017 AIMIA Photography Prize exhibition. How does it relate to the work? What are its consequences? I divide the description of the work given by the label in four parts:

[1] To the naked eye, these white on white images are barely visible. When we activate the works with light, they become vivid evidence of historic moments easily forgotten in our fast-paced visual culture. [2] Through this experience, we become both researchers and witnesses to the ongoing collective struggle for equal rights in North America. [3] Thomas uses the images in these works, sourced from press photography archives from the mid-1900s, as a counterpart to images of protest in today's media. [4] His method of working echoes the process of artists in the 1960s like Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, reminding the viewer that the past may not be visible, but is always present. ³

The first part makes both direct and indirect claims about the work. Immediately, we are told what the work is supposed to be when we look at it. Since this label is by the only door leading to the prints, I argue that this both alleviates the workload of interpretation and also severely narrows the possible readings that the lazy observer might end up engaging in. A sort-of-opposite thing might occur if an observer, before or after reading the label, finds no “vivid evidence,” no “historic moments.” Are they then blind to the work’s qualities, or is the label deceptive? With enough effort, one might be convinced the label is trying to make viewers make up something that isn’t really there, so people will try their best to find it, or end up loosely weaving it just to keep from feeling blind. A familiar phenomenon, let’s call it “believing through others,” wherein a person believes something only because their friends, or family, or co-workers believe in it, might come into play - the reasoning being something along the lines of “they can’t *all* be wrong.” In any case, the impression that one might not be able to grasp the work, and the impression that the label is fallacious are things that will depend on the viewer. Yes, the reading of any art invariably depends on the viewer, but in this case the label is deliberately putting the viewer in a specific position - as do all labels that talk specifically about an invariable meaning in the work. Of course, any observer can go well beyond the suggested interpretation— I have near my left elbow a little copy of Jack Kerouac’s *Book of Sketches*, and if I tried hard enough, I could relate every sentence, every word, to this work - , but such an “official” statement of what the work is supposed to be will keep at least some from trying. I think it will keep *most* from trying. This all also applies to the claim that

these moments are “easily forgotten in our fast-paced visual culture.” I think it’s not hard to argue that the visual culture in Canada today can be called fast-paced, at least comparatively, but it fails to make an argument for its implication that back in the day, when visual culture was “slower,” things weren’t as easily forgotten. An interesting thing to mention at this point might be the fact that, at the time of that “slower” visual culture, things weren’t as easily known, either.

After telling us what the work becomes once we see it, the label tells us what we ourselves become as we see the artwork: “researchers and witnesses to the ongoing collective struggle for equal rights in North America.” This implies that viewers are not researchers and witnesses already. To what extent is this second part of the label true, then? It cannot be true for a distracted observer, amused by the flashes, shaking his head from side to side and spending around thirty or forty five seconds in the room. It cannot be true for the observer that claims the artwork is far too hard to see, even with the light, to even relate it to North America. This text is, effectively, suffering from what the first part did: it commands, and offers no alternative to the viewers that don’t fit those commands.

The third part of the label text states Thomas’ intention of using these photographs as parallel or equivalent to the images of contemporary protest “in today’s media,” and this is probably the most informing, concise part of the text. It presents a fact, just like the other two, but a fact apart from the viewer, a fact that is more informative than assertive. Arguably, this sentence could replace the first two and prove to be better.

The fourth and final part of the text is also problematic. We have only few facts from Thomas’ method so far: for

this artwork, he used images from archives and presented them using a specific material. That is not nearly enough, I'd say, to say that it "echoes the process" of Warhol or Rauschenberg without being superficial. If it is only because of the use of archive images and screen printing, his method echoes thousands of other artists - and if that is indeed not the only component of his method of working, then readers simply don't have enough information about the rest of the components to prove that mentioning Warhol and Rauschenberg makes sense or, even better, achieves anything. The viewer that is unfamiliar with Warhol and Rauschenberg's methods will also not be able to link them to the reminder that "the past may not be visible, but is always present" - if such a link exists at all. Or, should, I say, the viewer will be able to link them to that reminder just as well as they will Thomas' method. With so much missing information, it is only the last half of this fourth part that speaks to the work in any way, simply saying that the past is part of the present. It is also problematic to say that the past is not visible, because what is meant by "visible" is not defined, and the whole statement also contradicts the very first part of the label text, in which we encounter "vivid evidence" of the past. And if I'm wrong, and "the past may not be visible" means we cannot go back in time and look directly at it, then this is nothing new.

Now: does it matter to discuss this? For many questions asked throughout this essay I do not have answers, and maintain that that doesn't make them any less. For this question, I do have an answer, and it is that yes, it matters. Labeling a piece of contemporary art, or maybe even any art that isn't a historical object of use, should be done responsibly. Can it ever be done with certainty? The

nature of the way in which we communicate makes that extremely difficult. That responsibility entails, then, an effort to be as conscious as possible of the weight of the words that we use. Maybe another method can be devised, one where such a text is optional. On-site text and descriptive text in labels in museums and galleries can severely affect the work of art which it refers to.

Jorge Luis Borges, at the start of his lectures, says he cannot offer any revelations about “The Riddle of Poetry”—that he hasn’t deluded himself into believing he has discovered the true reading of the riddle, that he can only offer time-honored perplexities, only doubts.⁴ Bertrand Russell, in an article for *The Atlantic* titled “Education as a Political Institution” claims that history in every country is so taught as to magnify it.⁵ Arnold Hauser, at the very end of the last volume of his “The Social History of Art” writes:

The problem is not to confine art to the present-day horizon of the broad masses, but to extend the horizon of the masses as much as possible. Not the violent simplification of art, but the training of the capacity for aesthetic judgement ...There is today hardly any practicable way leading to a primitive and yet valuable art. Genuine, progressive, creative art can only mean a complicated art today. It will never be possible for everyone to enjoy and appreciate it in equal measure, but the share of the broader masses in it can be increased and deepened.⁶

I think these ideas have much to do with the seemingly small phenomenon of these labels. I think they are precursors to the textbook, distant infant versions that can carry the same power – as much power as anybody that makes a good argument has. Power that might connect Thomas with Warhol and Rauschenberg and

attract fans of Warhol and Rauschenberg to the work of Thomas, looking for connections to weave. Not only responsibility, then, is what I ask for when writing such text. I also want to warn the reader.

Whitman said he preferred to look at the stars than to hear an astronomer lecture - that's one way of approaching things.⁷ He also offered this alternative:

Oh me! Oh life! of the questions of these recurring,
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with
the foolish,
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more
foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean,
of the struggle ever renew'd,
Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid
crowds I see around me,
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest
me intertwined,
The question, O me! so sad, recurring - What good amid
these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here - that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute
a verse.⁸

Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti is a second year Photography student.

- ¹ Jorge Luis Borges, *This Craft of Verse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 100.
- ² Dawn Hoskin, "Writing Labels and Gallery Text," Victoria and Albert Museum Blog, October 31, 2013: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/creating-new-europe-1600-1800-galleries/labels-gallery-text>.
- ³ Wall label text for seven screenprints by Hank Willis Thomas, *AIMIA Photography Prize*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.
- ⁴ Borges, *This Craft Of Verse*, 1-2.
- ⁵ Bertrand Russell, "Education as a Political Institution," *The Atlantic* (June 1916): <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1916/06/education-as-a-political-institution/305258>.
- ⁶ Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art Vol. IV* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 259.
- ⁷ Walt Whitman, "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," The Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45479/when-i-heard-the-learn-d-astronomer>.
- ⁸ Walt Whitman, "O Me! O Life!," *The Poetry Foundation*: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51568/o-me-o-life>.

Exhibition Reviews

Every. Now. Then: Reframing Nationhood
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

June 29, 2017 to December 10, 2017

Pauline Askay

The Art Gallery of Ontario asks: What does Canada 150 mean to you? Startling and retrospective, *Every. Now. Then: Reframing Nationhood* is a politically charged exhibition that questions our ties to the land that we stand on every day. A mixed-media show, it examines Canadian identity and gives a glimpse into difference, experience, and Indigenous heritage. Highlighting both immigrant and Indigenous stories, I find the exhibition to be a whirlwind of emotions that makes one reflect on Canada, one's story, and oneself.

The exhibition opens with a large photographic print that brings Canada's under-recognised, unexamined history of slave ownership into discussion, and continues with a bejewelled art piece that gently affirms the historical and spiritual importance of water for Canadian Indigenous peoples. My walk into the white rooms shows me artworks made by people with their own stories – many different personal journeys are present throughout. So many identities, stories, and histories are here that it makes me contemplate my own ancestry.

I am a first-generation Canadian with Armenian parents. When my grandfather was alive, he told me many

stories about his life, his decision to move to Canada, and his menial but rewarding job in this nation - most important of these stories were the tales of his father escaping the Armenian Genocide. One piece in particular, Lisa Myers' *and from then on we lived on blueberries for about a week*, 2013, reminded me of this story. In this stop-motion animation, blueberries resembling mass migrations stained a wooden spoon as they moved from one end of its concave surface to another. The wall's didactic panel features a quote from the artist, which reads, "I created this animation in response to a walk I took ... following the route described by my grandfather as he fled from residential school." Instantly, my grandfather's words echoed in my thoughts, with his stories of running towards the mountains just as the artist's had escaped the schools to seek freedom. The familiar feelings I had reminded me of the stories most of us have as immigrants to Turtle Island, and enriched the context that I have for my identity as a Canadian citizen.

Another series of works present in the exhibition, Curtis Talwst Santiago's jewellery boxes, were a reminder of the nature of immigration and my own past. In *Here (Gaia's Door) I*, 2015, a figure in a boat seems to be departing a beautiful tropical wilderness. These miniscule people leaving lush places and venturing into the unknown - the outside of the jewellery box - were reminiscent of the feelings my family experienced when they immigrated to Canada.

Xiong Gu's *Illuminated Niagara Falls*, 2017, a monumental collection of photographs, baskets, and 'souvenir water,' reflected this as well. The museum relays the artist's poignant commentary: "Niagara Falls is such

an iconic Canadian place, but few know about the seasonal migrant workers who harvest produce in the region, or appreciate their contributions.” This is another story of immigrant life and work ethics, which directly related with my own story. My grandfather worked virtually every day until his death in 2016. The migrant labour ethic is strong and this piece shows that it is one that shapes Canada into the country that it is today. My lived story is one of many of immigrant experience in this nation.

Overall, *Every. Now. Then.* is an evocative and timely exhibition, with an openly relatable nature that allows for a political and existential dialogue on Canadian identity. It is an exhibition not to miss, with stories that resonate with all of our lives.

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Propped
Oakville Galleries

June 25, 2017 to September 2, 2017

Karina Roman

Displayed at Gairloch Gardens and at Centennial Square, *Propped* explores the prop, a term taken from theatre that is understood as a support and as an object activated by human intervention. The object becomes a proposal for an action; how the artist uses it enables a human-object kinship, and develops narratives where the role of the propped oscillates between the animate and the inanimate subject.

At the Gairloch Gardens gallery, a dog welcomes the visitors. Each day a volunteer from the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program is there with a docile, furry friend that the public can pet. As a therapy animal, its mission is to soothe people, but such presence alters the gallery space and raises questions about the nature of the prop itself. This work by Abbas Akhavan makes us wonder if we, as living creatures, can become propped too.

Two pieces that show how human intervention changes our reading of the object, are *Insert Coin* (2014) by Maya Ben David and *Asking for a Friend* (2013) by Bridget Moser, both audiovisual artworks. The former presents Super Nintendo's arcade game landscapes from the 1990s without its characters; the instrumental music

background and the transitions between each image creating a quiet atmosphere. Ready to be activated, these usually ignored scenarios gain power by themselves. The latter shows Moser manipulating diverse objects, among them chairs, a microphone, and a bicycle pump, while in a voice-over monologue she asks questions that could be addressed either to herself or to the public. How she interacts with the objects makes them blend spontaneously with her words, creating a humorous and dynamic visual explanation of her personal thoughts. Through Moser's body, the artifacts are propped into visual, metaphoric language.

In *Beaded Figures Project* by Bev Koski, an ongoing series started in 2002, a prop is altered in order to rethink Indigenous representation. Koski collects kitsch figurines that portray stereotyped images of Indigenous people and covers them with beads. While simultaneously hiding and beautifying them, layers of the propped are revealed. Indigenous culture, which had been used as a prop by a settler colonizer narrative,¹ is embodied in the figures that Koski takes back to enable empowerment, care, and memory.

Artist Oliver Husain challenges the notion of the prop that places the human as the generating force to start a kinship. In *Five Thinking Hats* (2007), he brings our attention towards these felt hats and the wearer becomes the prop with a mannequin role; Husain "intervenes in the rules of the game by making people the support for props."² The sculptural feel of the hats and their classification as 'thinking' objects endows them with autonomy.

I have only discussed a small selection of artists from this show because their interpretations of the prop

portray best its multifaceted aspect. *Propped* proposes ways to read and comprehend the prop in order to understand the kinship between the human, their narratives, their doings, their ways of seeing and what is in between. By projecting into environments and its objects humans also discover their own possibilities: sometimes they turn others into props and other times they themselves are turned into a props.

Karina Roman holds a BA in Early Childhood Education and is currently in her second year in Visual and Critical Studies. She is interested on focusing her research and practice on the relation between art, pedagogy, and social change.

¹ Gabrielle Moser, "Mute object, Loud Object," in *Propped* (Oakville Galleries, 2017), 11. This document is available at: <http://www.oakvillegalleries.com/site/static/redactoruploads/Propped.pdf>

² Moser, 8.

Thesis Abstracts

Anthony Masucci

The Broken Telegraph: Godzilla and Post-WWII Japanese-American Relations

Science fiction monster films of the post-WWII/Cold War era were filled with estrangement and metaphors of nuclear warfare. Japan's *Gojira* (1954) is significant in this postwar era because it uses cognitive estrangement to address the direct experience of the destruction that nuclear warfare brought by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *Gojira's* use of cognitive estrangement to represent nuclear trauma however was subjected to American censorship and visual culture translation in the American film *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1956). This investigation of the American translation of *Gojira* reveals what is gained and lost in its manipulation of visual culture to translate and estrange Japan's collective trauma, thus shedding light on post-WWII Japanese-American relationships. This thesis argues that *Godzilla* equally represents itself as a significantly relevant product of both postwar Anglo-American culture as well as postwar Japanese culture: a product of the atomic bombs, American censorship, and of translating postwar visual culture.

Matthew Mancini

***Vain Utopias in the Restoration
of Cleveland's Thinker***

In 1970, a provocative case for art restoration involved Rodin's *Thinker* and three sticks of dynamite. On March 24th, the *Thinker* in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art was damaged by an explosive in a political act of protest. The decision to reinstall the work in its disfigured state encapsulates relativistic changes in cultural preservation, trends in art de-restoration, and the museum's changing role in the community. This essay will investigate the Cleveland *Thinker's* dual context as a historical document, and how democratizing experiments in cultural preservation impacts the transmission of its meaning over time.

Sammy Van Herk

The Stinger and the Swarm

In 1625 the first artwork to be produced with the help of a microscope was created. This work is known as the *Melissoграфия* and was produced by key founding members of the Academy of the Lynx (Academia dei Lincei), the first society of modern science. The work depicts three honeybees, displayed dorsally, ventrally, and laterally. The piece was presented, in the hopes of gaining patronage, to the head of the Catholic Church, Pope Urban VIII. Pope Urban had recently changed his family's heraldic crest from a trigon of horseflies to a trigon of honeybees, a decision informed by centuries of artistic representations of bees and bee mythology. My essay will argue that the *Melissoграфия* was by far the most accurate depiction of the honeybee to date as well as why this accuracy is important from a political, scientific, and art historical perspective.

Maya Wilson-Sanchez

Giuseppe Campuzano's Living Museum: Travesti Methods and Performing History in the Andes

Created between 2003 and 2013 by the late Peruvian artist, philosopher, activist, and drag queen, Giuseppe Campuzano, the Travesti Museum of Peru is an art project that has been exhibited in museums, galleries, street corners, public parks, protests, and red light districts. It contains an archive whose collection includes visual and cultural practices from pre-colonial times to the contemporary moment that presents history through the bodies of colonized and pathologized queer and indigenous communities. This thesis focuses on the differences and similarities between (re)producing history within the archive and through more embodied practices of cultural memory such as performance art and ritual. It will explore how through performance, artists can create methods that allow for the creation and understanding of a history that unfixes indigenous and queer people from colonial and Western accounts of history and modes of creating memory.

Victoria Girard

You Are What Eats You: Maternal Perversion of Consumption

Feeding is an inherently nurturing action, suggesting a maternal future that complements the paternal drive of accelerationism. This futuristic feeding is seen in Christina Agapakis and Sissel Tolaas' *Selfmade*, where the artists used their own microbiota to create cheese, and in Jess Dobkin's *The Lactation Station*, a performance where the artist offered gallery visitors various samplings of human breast milk. Minerva Cuevas' *Oreja de Chocolate Patate* also provokes questions about the relationship between capitalism and food access. The abjection of the body in these works accompanies an idealistic depiction of care, as we confront the reality of ourselves as food. The visceral real clashes with imaginary politics as we swallow our disgust to reveal how we have become what we eat.

Won Jeon

***Certainty, Conscious Purpose,
and the Creative Act***

Certainty does not exist alone as a condition of knowing, or in the process of relating that knowledge with words. The implication of this proposition in the art world is that it forms a framework or attitude by which we understand art not as a defined thing, but as an unresolved process or an instance in time of unpredictable collective judgement. Marcel Duchamp's "The Creative Act" and Gregory Bateson's research in communication and epistemology offer inquiries into how we think with and about certainty in proximity to uncertainty. Certainty cannot be created with a single set of presuppositions, but can be a propositional and playful instance of communicating the systemic complexity of self, other, and context. This essay explores the paradox of claiming certainty in the meaning and value of a work of art by examining "4'33" by John Cage, *Rainforest IV* by David Tudor, and *Reunion* by Cage, Duchamp, and Tudor. These three artworks correspond in their use of sound as their primary medium, and their curiosity with acoustic vibrations as gestural and implicative entities.

Vanessa Tadman

Representing the Female Body in the Work of Jenny Saville, Ishbel Myerscough, and Aleah Chapin

The tradition of nude figurative art has perpetuated a specific female ideal that is typically young, white, void of imperfections, and of a thin body type. Contemporary artists Jenny Saville, Ishbel Myerscough, and Aleah Chapin actively subvert this standard through the inclusion and representation of bodies that do not conform to this convention. They celebrate the female form regardless of weight, age, or race and are mainly concerned with representations of realness. The nude figures in these paintings confront the viewer with their gaze and challenge their own objectification while forcing audiences to reconsider the tradition of the nude and the bodies that operate within that tradition. Through an analysis of these artists, this thesis will examine the importance of authentic representation in contemporary figurative art and question the conventions of the female nude in art history.

By Meagan Van Capelle

The Constructed Situation and the Collection

How absurd it is to think that a museum would collect an ephemeral work on an oral contract with major stipulations. Tino Sehgal sold his constructed situation, *Kiss* (2002), to the MoMA in 2007 on an oral contract, for 80,000 USD. After researching Sehgal and his artist statement, as well as collection practices and Relational Aesthetics, I realized the artist was not as avant-garde as he initially appeared; rather, what was most radical here was the museum's decision to purchase this work for their collection, for it brought into question the role of the museum collection. If the modern art museum is not about collecting masters and instead about collecting "experiences," what will change in the structure of collecting? Is it possible to predict these changes by considering the acquisition of Tino Sehgal in the MoMA as a case study?

Yana Rydzevskaya

Outsider Art: a Redefinition

“Outsider Art” is a term used to group artists together who do not seem to fit within the normative spectrum of societal models. Mental disability has become a subject of curiosity, not only in day-to-day life, but also in the art world, which has romanticized, exploited, and marginalized artists who deal with mental illness. The goal of this thesis is to break down how the term “outsider art” shifted to a negative meaning with the rise of psychiatric practices. It explores the historical emergence of the term and its theoretical properties - further challenging the theories by making use of Bonnie Burstow’s concept of anti-psychiatry. It examines how the works categorized as “outsider” do not relate to one another and do not possess unified structure; invalidating the concept of outsider art as a “movement.”

The Journal of Visual & Critical Studies collects and celebrates some of the best undergraduate academic writing at OCAD University. Comprising critical essays, exhibition reviews, and thesis abstracts, this anthology reflects the unique approaches to art history and visual culture that are being explored at the school.



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