

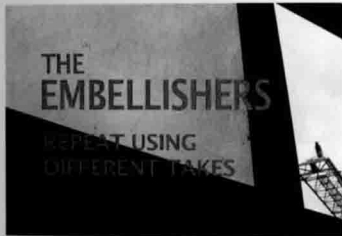
# BY THE END OF THIS DECADE

Like the exhibition itself, the title *Exponential Future* came up spontaneously, after several conversations between ourselves (the curators) and with others (artists, of course, and other curators, and friends). The title came up *intuitively*, and by intuitively I mean *speculatively*, that is, in anticipation of the works that are now in the exhibition, many of which we only got to see at the very end of the process—at the onset of the exhibition proper—even though we more or less *knew* what they would be. *Knowing* and *Seeing*: these are the two end-points of an interval called “the artwork,” if we can call the art system an interval, an interruption, or an interlude. We saw that the artists were interested in cycles, regressions, recurrence, flipping, shifting, mirroring, reflection; temporal motifs and ways of assembling different realities; forms of assembling different times and distinct spaces; and motifs that compose the surface of contemporary life, a surface (or interface) that is mostly there in order to produce ambiguity, disorientation, uncertainty, an illusion of chaos whose only plausible antidote seems to be a “call-to-order.” From Hollywood to political discourse, an aesthetic of confusion has been built based on these and similar motifs. That artists want to reappropriate them should be seen as more than just a dialogue with popular culture: it is, to make reference to a popular phenomenon, a *forensics*—as opposed to an archaeology—not a study of sedimented time and accumulated space, but of how surfaces interact, leaving traces on each other, surfaces hiding behind other surfaces rather than contents buried beneath forms. This is why, beyond or beside the fetish principle, form is so obviously important in the works that we have included in the exhibition itself.

These surfaces and motifs appear and are arranged by

virtue of the individual logic of each artist rather than by way of an overarching thematic content. They exist in reality, but they don't necessarily interact outside of the individual works—just as the works exist beyond but don't necessarily interact outside the exhibition. Our goal, with the exhibition, has been to formulate parallel (parasitical) logics, additional series to those already implied or produced within each work, series formed between the different works. We can say, for example, that the works of Isabelle Pauwels and Alex Morrison offer a radiographic image of the city, one that moves away from the documentary quality of photography and offers an impression of a fracture or fragment, deepening the relationship between subject and milieu. Between the work of Corin Sworn and Kevin Schmidt one may identify two different views on *Faktura*, that is, on the introduction of narratives of production in the artwork, or how the artwork may contain or involve its making, and how this involvement reflects an outside that we are used to calling “reality.” Memory and optical illusions appear as binding agents of different temporalities and spaces in the works of Mark Soo, Tim Lee, and Elizabeth Zvonar. Rather than Walter Benjamin's close-ups and slow motions, these artists resort to stereoscopy, montage, and collage: all forms of adding volume to time and space. Lee, Sworn, and Althea Thauberger make clear references to a Constructivist aesthetic, which refers us to at least two moments of the twentieth century that are present, albeit in subtle ways, in the exhibition as a whole: the 1960s and 1970s and, through their recurrence in those recent decades, the 1910s and 1920s.

Isabelle Pauwels' video installation *The Embellishers* (2007) takes place inside an apartment in the Downtown Eastside, exactly halfway down 100 West



Isabelle Pauwels, *The Embellishers*, 2007

Hastings Street. The view from the window frames a foreclosed landscape in which construction cranes tower over the site where the Woodward's family department store once occupied the centre of the neighbourhood. Against this backdrop, a series of narratives involving the artist and her identical twin unfold. The ways in which the narratives are interlinked and tied to the environment call to mind Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's schizophrenic "out for a walk," whose non-hierarchical and non-moralizing sensibility produces an assemblage of surface-effects that place the individual in a profound relationship with her or his milieu.<sup>1</sup> This deepening of the relationship between subject and milieu is complemented by a "sublimation" of the thing's value, as "bags of groceries" appear to be signifiers of abundance, while lighters are surprisingly positioned within a triad of use, market, and aesthetic value. Rather than a single individual with a somatic identity, Pauwels' video features identical twins, one an artist, one an actress, in an exchange and confounding of roles and personas, accosting the viewer as they move through a series of timely themes and temporal displacements, from being and failing to become an actor, to gentrification and exclusion, weaving in footage of such happenings as the demolition of the Woodward's building at the corner of Abbott and Hastings.

Tim Lee's work denotes a different distribution of identities, one underlined by appropriation and duplication, rather than synthesis and exchange. In *Untitled (The Pink Panther, 2092)* (2007), for example, through a point of view whose eccentricity is implied by the multiplication of viewing devices in the image, Lee brings together an assemblage of personas as he inserts himself, as a Korean-

Canadian, within a "tradition" of the remake. The two photographs that compose Lee's work are self-portraits in infinite regress, and might be interpreted as giving form to the artist's fascination with layering and multiplication, on the one hand, and with the cyclical return of themes and motifs, on the other. In this case, the remake involves an American (Steve Martin) pretending to be an Englishman (Peter Sellers) pretending to be a Frenchman (Inspector Clouseau). We might say that with *Untitled (The Pink Panther, 2092)*, Lee calls attention to the fact that the identification of multiple and complex identities in the individual is a way of displacing the subject from the normative subject-formation (i.e., the simple white man). It is for this reason that Lee takes up a dialectic of body and costume, but one in which the costume acts as the constant whose inhabiting body is continuously replaced. The body, in Lee's work, is condemned to be an insufficient suitor. Nevertheless, there is a logic of the lens, an "objective logic" or a formula, that Lee uses and subverts, producing a "moment" in the works that is meant to open up or disrupt its logic. This is found in the impossibility of the portraits' status as self-portraits, as the orientation of the camera in the photographs is incongruent with the portraits themselves.

In Mark Soo's *Sweet Leaf* (2008) we find a counter-example of the displacement of logic, a "flawgic," and a multiplication of states of consciousness. *Sweet Leaf* is a time-lapse video that condenses the growth of a marijuana plant into a one-minute loop, assembled from several clips that show the plant rotating as it grows, under a bright light, against a white background. Formally, the video expresses the disjuncting of time-space perception that one

experiences under the influence of marijuana; but in making reference to this disjuncture, it also refers to that space of altered consciousness that is at once disjointed and expanded, a shuddering of one's perception and a consciousness of one's own consciousness. Niklas Luhman refers to this as "double closure" when "the brain, in separating levels of operation, puts itself in a condition to coordinate the coordination of its primary processes."<sup>2</sup> *That's That's Alright Alright Mama Mama* (2008) is made up of two large-scale stereoscopic photographs of Sun Studios, the immortalized site of Elvis Presley's early recordings. For this work, Soo reconstructed the studio using rented props and collectibles to produce two photographs from slightly different points of view. The stereoscopy requires that the viewer look through a set of cyan and magenta glasses, at which point the images acquire a strange elasticity, becoming "deeper" as one retreats, and "flatter" as one gets closer, thus frustrating the promise that stereoscopy carries of confounding represented and real space. These photographs impose an indefinite distance between the viewer and the image that is antithetical to the pseudo-analytical distance that the media imposes between the viewer and reality, and to the idea that original objects make *their* remote present "present" to the viewing subject. Soo, therefore, proposes an asymmetrical relationship between the viewer and the artwork; presenting itself as the centre of an encounter, the artwork quickly reveals an intolerance to the analytical (that is, singular) point of view and forces the viewer to circulate and move around and back and forth, to "mingle."

Another displacement of the "original" that complicates the relationship between body and

Gaitan, Juan A. "By the End of this Decade." *Exponential Future*. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery. Vancouver, 2008: 16-22.

## Native warriors admit to flag theft

**VANCOUVER:** Society stole Olympic flag from city hall to 'honour' protester Harriet Nahanee

BY SUZANNE FOURNIER  
STAFF REPORTER

The Native Warrior Society took credit yesterday for cutting down the Olympic flag at Vancouver City Hall "in honour" of elder Harriet Nahanee.

Three figures wearing black balaclavas are shown in front of what appears to be the flag that hung at city hall, in a photo and statement e-mailed from "hunter killer" and signed by the society. They are holding a red Mohawk flag and a photo of Nahanee, who they describe in their statement as "our elder-warrior who was given a death sentence by the B.C. courts for her courageous stand in defence of Mother Earth."

Nahanee, 71, died at St. Paul's Hospital on Feb. 24, a month after she was sentenced to 14 days in jail for protesting against the destruction of the Eagleridge Bluffs for an Olympics-related project, the expansion of the Sea-to-Sky Highway.

Friends of Nahanee warned B.C. Supreme Court Justice Brenda Brown when Nahanee was sentenced on Jan. 24 that she was ill with flu and had severe asthma.

Nahanee, who said in court that she considered the bluffs to be unceded native land, served nine days at the Surrey Pre-Trial Centre, where lawyer Lyn Crompton says she suffered "racist" and rough treatment.

Nahanee's death provoked widespread outrage, from West Vancouver maroons who protested with her to young native activists, some of whom wore combat boots and camouflage gear while fighting tears at her funeral. The Native Warrior Society statement says that early on Tuesday "we pried open the access panel on the pole with a crowbar and, using a bolt-cutter, cut the metal cable/halyard inside, causing the flag to fall to the ground."

"We stand in solidarity with all those fight-



The Native Warrior Society has claimed responsibility for the theft of Vancouver's Olympic flag to honour Harriet Nahanee, a native elder who died recently after spending time in jail for protesting the development at Eagleridge Bluffs.

### SEE OLYMPICS, PAGE A19

ing the destruction caused by the 2010 Olympic Games," says the statement, concluding with the slogan "No Olympics on Stolen Native Land." Const. Tim Fanning said "the photo and the statement will be part of the ongoing investigation."

Members of the society were seen with

black face paint and a similar Mohawk flag at a recent melee with Vancouver police, leading to several arrests, when the Olympic countdown clock was unweilded downtown.

In August 2005, two Native Warrior Society leaders were arrested in Vancouver in connection with a gun seizure. No charges were laid and the guns were found to have been legally obtained.

Tewanee Joseph, executive-director and

CEO of the Four Host First Nations Secretariat, said his group respects the individual's right to protest "but to do it peacefully and respectfully is very important as well."

International Olympic Committee official Rene Fasel, in Vancouver for meetings with Olympic organizers, said he was disappointed by the theft of the flag. "It's totally illegal," he said.

— with a file from Damian Inwood

language is present in Alex Morrison's *Friday March 9th, 2007* (2008), a reconstruction of a photograph that appeared in the newspapers three days after the Olympic flag was seized from Vancouver's City Hall. Presumably taken by the Native Warrior Society, it was released with a statement explaining how they had carried out the act during the night of 6 March "in honour of Harriet Nahanee, our elder-warrior, who was given a death sentence by the British Columbia

The Province, 9 March 2007

courts for her courageous stand in defending Mother Earth."<sup>3</sup> In this case, the costumes used by the Native Warriors and replicated in Morrison's simulacral photograph synthesize identities (rather than resisting the bodies that inhabit them): the Native Warrior becomes at the same time a rebel. The evocation of the *Zapatista* movement in the original photograph is surely a way to present the act as a *statement* rather than a *warning*, which is to say it is an act of *resistance* and not of *terrorism*. The erasure of the face, which is the subliminal function of the balaclava, allows for this synthesis to take place. Morrison's photograph must be seen as a simulacrum and subversion of that already complex model, but this time reduced to its surface-effects, emptied out of its original context, and replaced by a radically different political content. In his 1967 essay "The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy," Deleuze introduced a distinction between two forms of appropriation: the copy as a legitimate (i.e., respectful, reverential) appropriation, and the simulacrum as an illegitimate (disrespectful, parricidal) one.<sup>4</sup> The three works by Morrison can be seen as three commentaries on appropriation that take the side of the simulacrum. At work here is an economy of the image, a series of appropriations that force the "origin" of the image to recede indefinitely and possibly disappear. The repetition of an event—be it Hollywood's repetition of the World Trade Organization protests, or Morrison's reconstruction of the Native Warrior's self-portrait—has a dubious existence as offering and as theft.

In Elizabeth Zvonar's photomontage *Pelly's Mission 2982* (2006), a fish-eye lens view of the inside of the Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier concert hall in Montreal has been flipped upside-down, shot through in its lower part by a prismatic "beam." Against the levitating

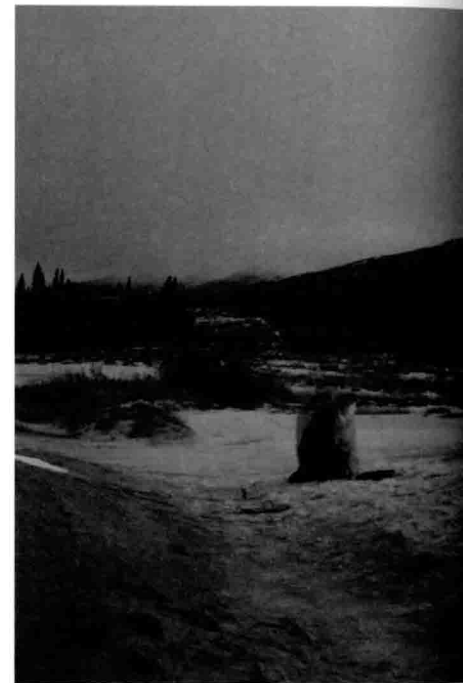
immateriality of this photomontage, Zvonar has placed *Sign of the Times* (2008), a sculpture in serpentine stone of a hand in dual gesture: "peace" when seen from the entrance of the gallery and "fuck you" when seen from the back. One must circumnavigate this hand for it to render its double meaning. It can be seen as a volumetric rendering of the rabbit/bird problem of perception, a problem profoundly rooted in the crude dialectics of the Cold War with its renewed relevance in our own time. *Pelly's Mission 2982*, on the other hand, refers to a past whose future expectations are profoundly incongruent with our present ("our" present being "their" future).<sup>5</sup> A time-warp of sorts, this disorienting photomontage produces a circular directionality as the eye moves from right to left when looking at the higher portion of the image (that is, the eye moves in the direction of the stage) and from left to right (away from the stage and back towards the crowd) when looking at the lower portion. Due to the proximity of the camera to the ceiling of the concert hall in the original photograph, the lower part of Zvonar's image is also more detailed, gigantic with respect to a dwarfed audience that has been turned into a mass of dots. These forms recall a past in which architecture and design were monumentalized and full with signifiers of the future—a singular future, for the most part, profoundly rooted in ideologies of progress and evolution. In a way, Zvonar's formal scheme is antithetical in its simplicity to the inflated designs that, during the 1950s and 1960s in North America, came to replace the functionalist aesthetic principle and endorse a technological utopia according to which things would make themselves, rendering manual labour unnecessary. "Free time" was the expectation, an expectation that was at odds with the capitalist principle of consumption, but which was already

by then being integrated into this very principle. This expectation was also present in the idea of the dematerialization of the art object, which, of course, imploded after the codification of the photographic document as an artwork in its own right.

A total confounding of leisure time and labour time lay at the heart of the Constructivist utopia of the 1920s as well as of its rediscovery in the 1960s. This desire to unify creativity and labour is, however, lost in contemporary art, whose vantage point is less historically motivated, and whose tactics are, in many ways, a total integration of these two temporal arrangements, albeit within a strictly capitalistic framework. For *Exponential Future*, Corin Sworn produced a room with a Tinkertoy sculpture, a collage, and a suite of drawings based on photographic documentations of A. S. Neill's Summerhill School in Britain. Anarchist inflected, Neill's school was founded on the idea that children must have sovereignty over the use of time and choice of subjects, along with an insistence on the individual's radical dis-identification with normativity. An empirical regulatory system, produced by the students themselves, understands rules (legislation) as relational rather than cumulative, adding rules as they become necessary and discarding those that have become obsolete. Precisely for these reasons, the Summerhill School was brought to North America in the 1960s and heralded as the educational counterpart of an architecture of "free play" that manifested itself most visibly in public playgrounds, themselves the subject of an earlier suite of drawings by Sworn. This idea of free play may, in fact, be considered a discourse, insofar as it involved architecture, education, literature, film, and philosophy. It was at the heart of a counter-cultural

movement synthetically referred to as "the Sixties," and was heavily modulated through a wild, brutish imagery whose dual goal was to oppose academic principles in art and to dismantle categorical thinking. Drugs were an obvious ingredient in this process, as was a psychosomatic aesthetic in which the image and the viewer were, so to speak, producing of each other. Sworn's work takes themes from this moment that are marginal to the normative idea of "the Sixties," but which were actually closer to a proper institutionalization of these ideas: education, during that time, was open to an experimentalism that was still extra-instrumental. The playgrounds that emerged during that time were also more sensitive to the idea that play should be a mediation between environment, people, and the imagination.<sup>6</sup>

Althea Thauberger is presenting *Zivildienst ≠ Kunstprojekt*, made in 2006 during her residency at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, and *The Art of Seeing Without Being Seen* (2007-08), a photomural made at a Canadian Forces training area south of Chilliwack. Both works compliment one another in an obvious way. The former refers to those who refuse mandatory military service in *Zivildienst* (roughly translated as civilian service, as an alternative to conscription), while the latter represents those who have chosen to conscript. The suggestion of a mathematical difference between "social service" and "art project" in *Zivildienst ≠ Kunstprojekt* denotes an historical disjuncting, the famous discernment of "art" and "life" as separate spheres. But the title also makes reference to stolen or appropriated time, as two different ways of using time become uneasily interlinked. As Jacques Derrida argued in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (1992), a moral imperative lies beneath the capitalist distinction



Kevin Schmidt, *Wild Signals*, 2007  
Production still



between leisure time and work time, as leisure time is something one gives to oneself, a small fraction of the time one must give in order to receive something in return: money in return for labour; indulgences in return for piety; and postponed revenue in return for voluntary hours.<sup>7</sup> In what I consider to be a crucial moment in *Zivildienst ≠ Kunstprojekt*, having split into two separate factions, the characters in the film are suddenly woken up by the loud sound of a disaster occurring “outside,” at which point the artificiality of the world they have been inhabiting is dramatically revealed. Thauberger makes works that focus on collective or group identities that at once override and extol the individual: the tree planters in *Northern* (2005), for instance, or the female singers/songwriters in *Songstress* (2004). Presented as “collaborations” between the artist and predetermined but heterogeneous groups, these works, as well as those included in this exhibition, are structured around a set of identifications that, although normative, are also unconscious: in a way, the artwork provides as good a ground for the construction of an ad hoc collectivity as the situations that Thauberger chooses for her projects. This loud noise brings them back together and thus reinforces the contingent nature of their group identity.

The road trip has become such a staple in Kevin Schmidt’s practice that one could almost claim it as a statement: a statement against the city, for example, and the kind of representation that, within a certain discourse, the city seems to demand for itself, as the site, par excellence, of contemporary reality. For the production of *Wild Signals* (2007), the artist spent three winter months in the Yukon, re-interpreted the theme song of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), and played the recording to a light show on a frozen lake.

The single-channel video shows a continuous, uncut shot of this peopleless light show. As in former works by Schmidt (*Burning Bush* of 2005, or *Sad Wolf* of 2006), *Wild Signals* is a mediation between standardized production values, technology’s artificial relationship to nature, and the individual’s own capacity to meet these terms. Usually devoid of narrative—we may think of *Fog* (2004) or the *Lakes* series (2006)—his works tend to follow the Constructivist principle of *Faktura* as an incorporation of references to the work’s production through which narratives of the work’s construction become visible, unsettling the ease with which the viewer may otherwise experience the image. But unlike the strictly armchair concept of labour that Lee’s *Untitled (Light-Space Module, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 1928-30)* (2007) suggests, and in contrast to Sworn’s subtle references to education as a form of production of labour force, Schmidt’s work is very much founded on toil, on the physical labour that the high standards in production value threaten to render invisible. The absence of people (and even their traces), the ease with which the scaffolding rests within an “untouched” snowy landscape, the naturalness with which a soundtrack plays through the speakers that frame the scaffolding: all these are references, in the negative, to that “other” presence, that absent narrative of labour that is hidden from view. An attentive listener would hear the humming sound of a generator and an attentive viewer would recognize the tracks left by the installers (in this case, the artist). By showing the tracks left by the artist, the photograph that accompanies this video projection, titled *Aurora with Roman Candle* (2007), brings this absent presence into view. Through it we may return to an early theme through which I have attempted to connect all the works: the flaw, the ripple, or the paroxysm that belies the logic of each work. In



the case of *Aurora with Roman Candle*, it is the "cheap trick" through which Schmidt humourously attempts and fails to simulate the Northern Lights, which he had initially sought to register in *Wild Signals*.

The works included in a "group show" invariably develop a centrifugal force with respect to the gravity of the exhibition's premise. As framing devices, the curatorial essay, the title of the exhibition, and the gallery space are likely to neutralize this centrifugal force, the works' difference with respect to the exhibition. In this sense, the essay may be redundant. We find in the written responses to Thauberger's photomural *The Art of Seeing Without Being Seen* that its placement in the Walter C. Koerner Library has been disorienting to many viewers, in part because its status as "artwork" is unstable, and in part because its subject matter is problematical (soldiers at a faux Afghan village in a training site near Chilliwack). No one has questioned the presence of art in the library, but many, if not all the comments, have something to say about what kind of art should appear in that space. A not so similar confusion is produced inside the gallery by Morrison's *Contract with the People* (2008), a sandwich board, identical to film industry announcements, declaring that by passing beyond that point (and at what point, since the board is double sided?), one is giving one's image to the production company, "throughout the world and in perpetuity." This declaration is so wicked that it has effectively made many visitors hesitate before compromising their image for the sake of looking at the works. Yet, its status as "artwork" and its positioning inside the space of the gallery are enough to neutralize its otherwise abusive statement. These are, perhaps, the two most pronounced examples of what we see the works

doing in terms of the fictional realities they propose as interval, interlude, or interruption.

#### Notes

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 2-8.
2. Niklas Luhman, *Art as a Social System* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 319, n. 3.
3. A Nuu-cha-nulth elder, Harriet Nahanne was arrested and imprisoned during a protest against the expansion of the Sea-to-Sky Highway for the 2010 Olympics. She died of pneumonia within weeks of her release from jail. Morrison points out that this reference to Nahanee is a way to indicate the human and individual cost of global capitalist entrepreneurialism.
4. See Gilles Deleuze, "The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy," *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 253-80.
5. Significantly, the Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier opened in 1963, as part of the project for the Place des Arts built for Expo 67 in Montreal. This was at a time when Canada was beginning to shift its economic discourse from natural resources to industry.
6. Much of Sworn's work focuses on a nostalgia for "free play," indicating that alongside an increased fixation on the autonomy of the student there has emerged a proportional or even more severe system of control over all the aspects that surround the child's "autonomy."
7. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).