Need not pander

CHARCUTERIE strives to provide a forum for experimental writing and informed polemics without pedantry. It assembles a polyphony of inquiry and documents the messy landscape of opinion and critique that unravels in close proximity to where we work, live and make art in Vancouver.

THE BUS AS HOSTILE ARCHITECTURE: PART 2

Sungpil Yoon is a writer and curator. He is Director of Spare Room, a subsidiary of Rice Cooker/Hair Salon Inc. a non-profit organization that explores the composition of theories and objects through the lens of artistic practices. Yoon is a graduate of the UBC Art History department and currently works in Vancouver from 222, a studio building in Chinatown.

The Bus as Hostile Architecture is the second of five texts by Sungpil Yoon that are informed by his bus commutes from Lynn Valley to Downtown Vancouver. Read “The Bus as Hostile Architecture: Part 1” in Charcuterie 2 or online at http://www.charcuterie.party.

Stories of regulars

They share the bus with me.
Sometimes I play a game
As to where they will sit
I am always right
Because people are predictable
But mostly
Because patterns form
subconsciously.

Slightly off schedule

It is about 3:20pm, a weekday in 1998. Probably Autumn. My sister and I are running to catch the bus. It only comes through the main road and school is a bit of a walk. I run and run, to the bus stop that I always go to. It’s the one beside a church that looks like a community centre, or a community centre that looks like a church. I went back to this location years later to find that this church centre had turned into a cafe. The bus narrowly misses me but I manage to create enough of a fuss that I can wave it down for the extra ten seconds while I run and catch up to it. Completely out of breath, I get on. As I walk past the driver he confronts me and says, “Did I wait for you?” the driver is a bit shy of middle age, with a slight comb-over and a pair of large translucent-framed glasses. I manage to drag out an answer similar to “yes.” He looks at me with utter disapproval, “Then you say, THANK YOU!” as if to scold me for having been so rude to not acknowledge his gesture of kindness.

Nod on home

This regular that I ride the bus with is a very large man. He appears to be narcoleptic. He is nodding off every 30 seconds and I always see him on the 1am bus. He misses his transfer in one of the stop-overs because he’s always asleep when he gets there. This seems to be an ongoing joke with the bus drivers during one of the loops where they all congregate to discuss shitty passengers in unison. Very large man seems to have a serious lung problem. He coughs out his entire organs until all seats within a 6-ft radius are left vacant. He also falls asleep at a level that can be considered narcolepsy. He is so out of it. Nowadays he has started to bring a guitar case with him to the bus. I like to think he is the DJ for a sports stadium because he looks the part in my mind.

Shopping spree (Tokyo)

I am riding the metro. Train is close to empty except for the odd seat here and there. A woman that looks to be in her early 30s gets on the train with an older woman. Perhaps family, perhaps not. The younger woman is wearing a white mask. She starts to yell “SHOPPING!!!” in Japanese out loud (I only find out what

she said afterwards, after asking a friend). She starts to bang on the train windows as she continues to yell “SHOPPING!!!” over and over until the older woman calms her down.

Someone that I used to not know

Running for the bus once again. I see someone I recognize at the stop who I almost never run into. Catching my breath, I ask

“How are you?”,

“Hey! I’m good. I’ve just been—”

My bus arrives abruptly as she is about to respond to my attempted small talk only after a few words in. I have to catch this. It’s the last one of the night. I cut them off,

“I’m so sorry to do this, but I have to catch the bus.”

I make that face that everyone makes when they want to project empathy but require that they maintain their stance of saying “No”.

I think to myself, that was not nice.

The 80’s businessman in navy blue

He is already there when I get on the bus.

I see him sitting in the back, and as always, wearing a dark blue suit at least a size too big for him coupled with an equally large overcoat. He has a black leather messenger bag that has multiple cracked sections from wear and tear that he rests on his lap. This bag looks like it has been used every day for the last 15 years. He has a haircut that is about an inch in length with a slightly receding hairline. Every 15 seconds he fidgets in his seat, looking for something in his bag. He never seems to find what he is looking for and stops for a short period, only to look again and again for the duration of his bus ride. He looks concerned. He fixes his glasses intermittently, and seems uneasy about people sitting next to him. About 15 minutes in he continues to fidget, but this time is different as he finally takes out something. It is a transparent plastic bag labelled, “Dempster’s”. It’s originally a bag used to house a loaf of bread which I have seen in grocery stores for $4.99. Within it, he takes out something from another package. It is covered in wax paper. Inside it looks to be a sandwich. I get the feeling that his mouth is very dry because every time he chews it does not sound succulent, or enjoyable. Like eating dry cereal. He seems like he’s just stuffing nutrients into his mouth to fill the void. I can’t smell anything else on that sandwich. Is he just eating two slices of bread? The smell of yeast fills the bus interior. It’s not quite a punch of aroma, but enough to notice that the bread could be slightly expired.

Every single day that I see him on the bus, and this is his ritual. He looks so uneasy that I just want to give him a hug. If not, I imagine he will explode in a fit of anxiety.

Still from Speed, 1994. Directed by Jan de Bont
Distributed by 20th Century Fox

WHEN EXHIBITIONS FLATTEN BLACK EXPERIENCE

Denise Ryner has worked in commercial, public and artist-run galleries in Toronto and Vancouver for over ten years. These include Art Metropole, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, the Jackman Humanities Institute, the Vancouver Art Gallery, SFU Galleries as well as the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. She completed her BA and MA in art history at the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia respectively. Currently she is the Director/Curator at Or Gallery, Vancouver.

In 2015 a series of multiple, intermittent and precarious roles comprised my involvement in Vancouver's artist run and public gallery scene. In that year I worked as an independent curator, paid curatorial intern, sessional instructor in curatorial studies, volunteer gallery board member, gallery assistant in a commercial space and copywriter of exhibition didactics. The range of these positions indicate how invested I was in Vancouver's contemporary art institutions more than the necessity to rid myself of financial debt amassed from my recently completed graduate degree. Towards the end of 2015 I found myself questioning my decision to work in the area of contemporary art in Canada. I wondered how often I would have to overlook the critical blind spots that resulted in exhibitions and events that continued to marginalize my own agency, culture and humanity within a field and institutions where I was supposed to situate my practice.

Three exhibitions in Vancouver's artist run centers took place in 2015. What links them to each other and to the professional crisis I encountered are that they each forefronted the appropriation of black culture and used black bodies as a medium. None of the artists identified themselves as Black, African or members of a Black diaspora. These artists all had solo exhibitions in Vancouver's artist run and public galleries during a year when there was only one solo exhibition of a Black-identifying artist.(1) However, this did not improve the fact that the majority of representations of Black culture and bodies in artist run centers that year were those engaged in their own reification and estrangement through authorship by non-Black artists.

In early 2015, the Contemporary Art Gallery (CAG) presented Canadian artist Jeremy Shaw's filmwork *Variation FQ* (2011-2013), which revolves around a dance routine choreographed and performed by Leiomy Maldonado. Shaw learned about Maldonado through online videos of the dancer, who identifies as transgender, Afro-Puerto Rican and is well known within and beyond New York's underground ballroom scene. Her online presence confirms that she is a respected performer and activist who astutely manages her image and career, so it's doubtless that she negotiated proper compensation for her time and work with Shaw. While Maldonado's work is able to circulate in spaces associated with contemporary art, such as the CAG and the National Gallery of Canada, Shaw's abstraction of Maldonado's dancing body removes her from her public, identity and creative authorship.

I observed the same phenomenon when only a month later Artspeak presented a solo exhibition by Invernomuto, an Italian art collective consisting of Simone Bertuzzi and Simone Trabucchi. This time Jamaica's dub subculture was on display for Vancouver's contemporary art public in the form of famous living legend, Lee "Scratch" Perry who the artists, self-professed fans, filmed as a strutting, flamboyant, yet isolated caricature, charged with making amends for Italy's crimes against Ethiopia and its then leader, Haile Selassie I, on their behalf. Invernomuto's work, entitled *Negus*, refers to a negative Italian archetype that was applied to Selassie I after his overthrow by Italy's fascist forces during WWII. The artists' ethnographic isolation of Perry, his patois and Rastafarian declarations within a context of their invention and control, similarly to Shaw's treatment of Maldonado, is a slickly aestheticized voyeurism and process of identification whereby the audience is meant to recognize the figures in Shaw's and Invernomuto's work as 'other-than-us'. This flattening and differencing of black-diasporic culture by non-black artists was central to the work of another artist who presented a solo exhibition in Vancouver in 2015.

French artist Lili Reynaud-Dewar engages both of these strategies throughout her practice that has referenced Sun Ra,

Josephine Baker and African-American hip hop culture. I was a curatorial intern, without influence on exhibition programming, at the Audain Gallery in Vancouver when she presented her fall 2015 solo exhibition, *My Epidemic*. This body of work was comprised of an installation and series of closed seminars based on the syllabus of Norwegian artist Bjarne Melgaard. *My Epidemic* largely, yet no less problematically, addressed the AIDS crisis, but the exhibition also included a performance that was an offshoot of a series in which she used video and security cameras as surveillance of her body in architecture. Often, Reynaud-Dewar created this work during closed hours in the emptied gallery or museum where she is exhibiting, however in film footage of her performances she doesn't simply wander through these art institutions, she moves and dances in a manner culturally coded from 1920s negro revues and minstrel shows. Her attempt at hammed up versions of the Charleston are ostensibly in honour of Josephine Baker. To emphasize this, she completely covers her nude body in paint that varies from one colour to another with each performance. However, coloured paint appears as blackface in the surveillance videos that her work has been documented and presented through. In one iteration, African textiles are hanging in the background. Reynaud-Dewar has regularly embodied another artist or personality by wearing their style of clothing or featured performers wearing body paint. Reynaud-Dewar reverted and reinforced stereotypes of the non-white female body as wild trickster, located after-hours and peripheral to culture, to invoke Baker. Baker, a dancer, activist and member of the Pan-African movement aimed to produce independent black and black-diasporic literacy, that performance and artistic communities adamantly worked to defend from the very essentializing mimicry that Reynaud-Dewar was illustrating.

Both the Contemporary Art Gallery and the Audain Gallery held versions of public talks following protests made by myself and others about the way black culture was presented in the Shaw and Reynaud-Dewar exhibitions. As is often the case, these were ineffective discussions that by design maintained and reaffirmed the authority and perspective of the galleries in their ability to neatly appropriate protest into public programming.

I am now preparing to take up a role as Director/Curator of Vancouver's Or Gallery and am fully aware that as a black-identified woman, my appointment and decisions can nonetheless repeat and further entrench the exclusion, fixing and alienation of particular voices and bodies in the critical space of the gallery unless I consistently work to do otherwise.

My work as a curator continues to research and critically consider the function of black culture and bodies in delimiting space and establishing a hierarchy of authorship in contemporary art which has lead me to a long-running debate in literature around the use of blackness and the agency of black writers. In her 1992 analysis of American identity as constructed through a selection of that country's literary works, writer Toni Morrison demanded that, "...we need studies of the technical ways in which an Africanist character (what she terms a Black figure instrumentalized in literature) is used to limn out and enforce the invention and implications of whiteness."(2)

Morrison proposed analyses of the strategies that employ black characters to define and enhance the qualities of white characters, including attempts to represent knowledge of the other in order to address external and internal chaos within the writers, or artists concerned. She points out how Black narratives are appropriated in the construction of context for white culture and the positing of history-less-ness and context-less-ness for blacks. In other words, we need to know why the fate of non-white bodies is to be flattened and emptied of experience, history and humanity. African-American writers James Baldwin and Zora Neale Hurston address this question through a focus on narrativity and who is granted the privilege to narrate beyond their culture, body and experience. They each seize claims to transcultural authorship and the ability to return the alienating, ethnographic gaze.

In Baldwin's most famous work of fiction, *Giovanni's Room* (1958), he narrates the existential crisis of a young, wealthy caucasian, American protagonist named David. David is at the heart of a group of other itinerant Americans and Europeans through whom Baldwin examines strategies of difference and ordering as in each encounter or memory of them, David instrumentalizes the other, their hard or soft, dark or fair bodies to gauge how his nationality, gender, class and sexuality grant his claims to space and agency above and beyond his various consorts. Only David retains a fluid subjectivity in contrast to the other fixed bodies.

Having studied anthropology and the ethnographic gaze, Zora Neale Hurston, turned to the vernacular arenas of Broadway and Hollywood where, as she divulged in a 1942 letter to a friend, she thought she might finally be able to break "that old silly rule about Negroes not writing about white people," which she did with *Seraph on the Suwanee*.(3) Throughout her career as an anthropologist and writer, Hurston continually wrote about her access, claim and hesitance to record and publish the stories of those she studied and lived amongst.

While Baldwin is not alone in centering white experience to subvert white authorship of black experience, his fiction and critical essays indicate to me that this act of authoring the Other, fixing and flattening is entangled with the role of the gaze that is so central to the critical analysis of gender, class and racial representation in the visual arts. In his essay, "The Black Boy Looks At the White Boy," Baldwin asserts, "I know how power works, it has worked on me, and if I didn't know how power worked, I would be dead."(4) For me to understand what a curatorial practice is capable of assuming about its possible audience, I find it useful to think of Baldwin's representations of power through his white protagonists in combination with the appropriation of non-white bodies for the benefit of the gaze in visual art.

Artist and writer Lorraine O'Grady proposes that there is neither the possibility of a choice, nor separation in cultural representations of the female body. Her 1992 essay *Olympia's Maid* examined the dependent process of identity in depictions selected from modern and contemporary art history. For O'Grady, images of the female body are always comprised of an 'obverse and a reverse' or 'white and non-white' that cannot be isolated: "The black female's body needs less to be rescued from the masculine 'gaze' than to be sprung from a historic script surrounding her with signification while at the same time, and not paradoxically, it erases her completely."(5)

What is at stake with uncritically programming representations of black culture and bodies by non-black artists and curators is not so much the protection of identity or the idea of authenticity, but rather the very practical consequences for cultural workers such as myself. Namely, the reproduction of ongoing exclusions and struggles for space in contemporary, public art institutions in relation to labour and recruiting as well as artistic practices.

(1) David Hartt, adrift, Or Gallery in Spring 2015.

(2) Toni Morrison, Playing In The Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 52-53.

(3) Elizabeth Binggeli, "Hollywood Wants a Cracker: Zora Neale Hurston and Studio Narrative Culture", 33-52 in Plant, Deborah G. "The Inside Light": New Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston. (Santa Barbara: Calif. Plant, Deborah G. 2010.), p. 37.

(4) James Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks At the White Boy," Nobody Knows My Name, (US: Vintage Press, 1961), p. 232.

(5) Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity, "New Feminist Criticism: Art/Identity/Action", Icon Editions, HarperCollins, 1994, pp. 152-170.

SEVEN YEARS OF TENDERNESS: ALICE DIOP'S VERS LA TENDRESSE AT 2017 DOXA DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

Casey Wei is an interdisciplinary artist, filmmaker, and musician based in Vancouver. Her practice has evolved from filmmaking (Murky Colors in 2012, Vater und Sohn / Father and Son / 父与子 in 2013), into works that cross over between art, music, and the community at large (Kingsgate Mall Happenings in 2014, Chinatown Happenings in 2015, the art rock? series 2015–present, and the Karaoke Music Video Free Store in 2017). In 2016, she began Agony Klub, a music and printed matter label that releases material under the framework of the "popular esoteric". Her music projects include Kamikaze Nurse, hazy, and Late Spring.

Astonishing things happen if one gives oneself over to the process of seeing again and again: aspect after aspect of the picture seems to surface, what is salient and what incidental alter bewilderingly from day to day, the larger order of the depiction breaks up, re-crystallizes, fragments again, persists like an afterimage. And slowly the question arises: What is it, fundamentally, I am returning to in this particular case?

T.J. Clark, The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing

In the summer of 2010, I was spending time in my studio working on a wall collage. Belabored cutout pieces surrealistically and fussily composed together, growing outwards, spread across the wall. It was the summer before I would start grad school, and I was trying to reinvent a studio practice after an arduous undergrad experience. Art sentience had not yet come; I was still unanchored, foundationless, sitting in a pile of magazines, naively trying to construct a visual language that was both historical and my own. I had at least 300 National Geographic magazines at my disposal and that day, sitting amidst a working pile of 60 or so, I by chance flipped onto and paused on this spread:

I reread it several times—its affect was surprising. I was compelled to rip it out for future examination, but I was lazy and a bit weary of that unarticulated ache, so I moved onwards.

Later, when I did want to return to it, I forgot which issue it was in, and soon I relocated that wall collage, in delicate fussy little sections, to my new studio provided through my graduate program. The wall was bigger; I worked on it for another eight months but couldn't find the spread again. We look for meaning when something is affectively triggered.

"Astonishing things happen if one gives oneself over to the process of seeing again and again."

In February 2013, the image surfaced in my thoughts again, and I wrote about it in a Tumblr post:

there really isn't an image of tenderness that is approximate to the meaning of the word.

a few years ago i was working on a collage project after coming into a gigantic load of old national geographics. i remember i was in my studio, flipping through an issue, when i came across a feature on the aftermath of the Tokyo Metro Sarin Attack in 1995 by members of the cult, Aum Shinrikyo. i can't remember anything else about that issue, how many months or years since the attack had it been? i haven't been able to track it down. the only thing i remember is a photograph of an old man wiping the forehead of his comatose wife with a cloth. the caption said something about this action, which he performed every night after coming home from work. (1)

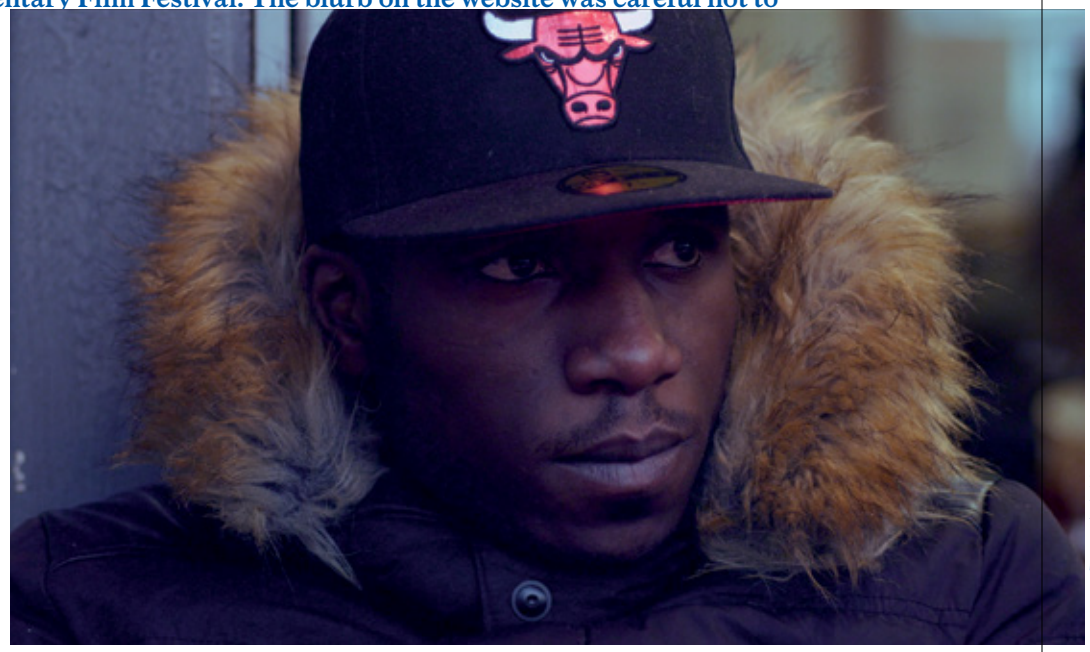
*

It is 2017 now. This week (2), I subscribed to nationalgeographic.com in order to to access their archive. I searched 'Tokyo,' 'sarin,' 'gas attack,' 'subway,' 'Japan,' but was unsuccessful in finding that spread. I was beginning to think that I had misremembered the whole thing, but the afterimage was too palpable for that to be true. I anxiously wondered about the Mandela effect, the unreliability of collective memory and of my own, until finally I found it (!) by re-directing my search for an article about the Iraq War and weapons of mass destruction. (3)

We all know that feeling of deflation when we revisit the memory of something from the past to have it falter in the present, but what was tenderness then is still tenderness now. And what is tenderness? 1) Gentleness and kindness; kindliness; 2) a sensitivity to pain, soreness. I think about the old woman bruising the peach in the grocery store, from Juzo Itami's *Tampopo* (1985). I think about Pussyfoot and Marc Anthony. I think about Mr. Kouno.

*

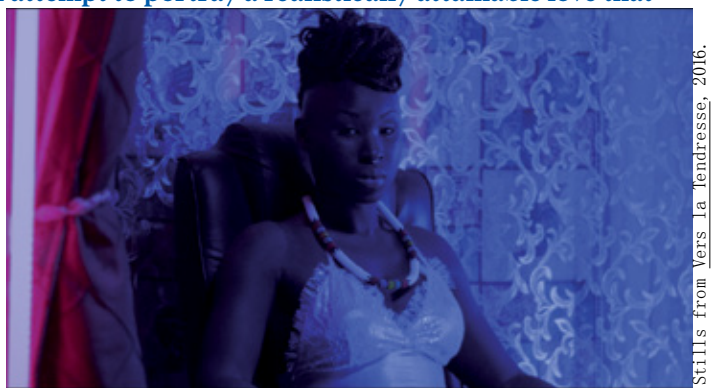
I have been returning to this word over the years, and so all signs pointed to watching *Vers la Tendresse* (Towards Tenderness), Alice Diop's 38-min investigation into the politics of love—specifically, who gets to have it?—as told by three immigrant French men in Seine-Saint-Denis, at the 2017 DOXA Documentary Film Festival. The blurb on the website was careful not to



explicitly label these three men, but described them as "dressed in hoodies and streetwear, talk[ing] with remarkable bluntness and honesty about love, desire, sex, and race." (4)

The camera cuts between establishing shots of Seine-Saint-Denis, France's poorest subdivision and site of the 2015 terrorist attacks, to tightly framed shots of these men's pensive faces as they are captured existing in their everyday. Their voice-overs speak of their personal experiences that have shaped their attitudes towards "love."

Our first narrator bluntly describes where his attraction to easy women—"hoes" and "sluts"— comes from, and calls himself a "slut" as well, admitting that "it takes two sluts to tango." The second narrator is gay, and speaks of the power struggle that is inherent in sodomy; logistically, the physical act excludes the tenderness of face-to-face kissing. In this district, the notorious *neuf trois*, there is no peach to bruise, no cartoon cat and dog, no back issues of National Geographic. But Diop offers hope: the final narrator (Anis Rhali) is depicted with his girlfriend (Thaniat Satirou) at home in close-up verité-style scenes of cuddling, joking, kissing, sleeping. They make a bet on whether or not she will be able to wake up at 6:30am for work—if she does, she gets his undivided attention for a whole week, no friends, no other engagements. This wager was made half-jokingly in-between laughter and caresses, and the film ends with her getting ready the next morning while he quietly watches her from bed. His voice-over concludes that despite being 'gangster,' some people find relationships at an early age, and from thereon in are always open to the possibility. Anis's insights seem quite mundane, but its place at the end of the film subtly functions as a plot device that flips our understanding of what love fundamentally is. There aren't any didactic answers, as Diop recognizes that one's feeling towards love is a nuanced and individually specific question that cannot be reductively lumped into the two qualitative categories of class and race. But love, L-O-V-E, is a universally understood ideal and can be reduced to a gesture as simple as a touch between two bodies, directly experienced or vicariously represented. What *Vers la Tendresse* offers are three case studies, leaving a lot of the specifics unanswered in a final attempt to portray a realistically attainable love that



Stills from Vers la Tendresse, 2016.
Directed by Alice Diop

is accessible no matter what color, what class. Thaniat's 6:30am wager rang familiar, but also left me uncomfortable. A glimmer of a universal heteronormativity, is that the best one can hope for?

The blurb describes the film as being a "*cri du coeur* in the most profound sense," "made with the same type of tensile delicacy" as Barry Jenkin's *Moonlight*. I struggle to see value in this superficial comparison. Yes, these are both films that depict the struggle of being a black man, and in the case of our third narrator, an immigrant, possibly a Muslim man. But in directorial intent, cinematic scope, and narrative form, there is not much else to compare other than the sometimes jerky, 'of-the-moment' camera-work. Visually, *Vers la Tendresse* bored me. It was a 38-minute film that was 20-minutes too long. The interviews conducted with the three men are paired with banal and overused actuality-footage tropes: pulled back shots of train tracks, window reflections of a passing street in a moving vehicle, a couple in bed. As much as I can linger and revel in the muddy indifference of the world, I found myself unmoved.

It is difficult to feel empathy, tenderness, and love for incomplete characters in incomplete situations. The biggest problem I had with the film was its neither here-nor-there-ness. It gave me too much time to dwell on what I didn't know, and what was withheld from me. In a 2016 interview with *Another Gaze Journal,* Diop describes her filmmaking as being "about [the] democratization of knowledge, which passes through a cinematographic emotion and that's what seems to [her] to be perfectly useful and interesting."(5) Knowledge here has not been made democratic, it is only presented as a given, resting on the crutch of the documentary genre. I assume that Diop achieved a level of closeness with her subjects, and there

In this district, the notorious neuf trois, there is no peach to bruise, no cartoon cat and dog, no back issues of National Geographic.

are some moments of intimacy that resonate more than others. The camera sits on a tripod and captures our first narrator's darting eyes. The camera follows our second narrator from behind as he walks here to there. The camera pulls in and out of focus while our final narrator and his girlfriend make out. Let's be honest: with a good lens, these shots of closeness are quite easy to achieve, and it does not take much for a discerning viewer to be able to tell between physical proximity and emotional intimacy. The democratization that I recognized in *Vers la Tendresse* wasn't that of knowledge, but of technology.

The idea of tenderness is open and vulnerable. It is a breathing, beating space in which you can locate your empathy. I can project myself into the space of the old woman bruising a peach at a grocery store; I can imagine being both Pussyfoot's obliviously sharp claws and Marc Anthony's enduring threshold; I can care about the drudgery of the everyday in hope of an improbable dream. These are narratives that appeal to one's capacity for tenderness. I understand the exercise of 'less is more' in the practice of cinematic language, and Diop gives herself a big question to work with, but she fails to construct the context around which we as viewers are able to locate our own subjectivity. It seems that *Vers la Tendresse* is more of a private conversation between her and her subjects than a *cri di coeur* for those of us watching. I'm not sure if I should be pulled closer or pushed back. I'm not sure if she's telling me that the third act is any more fulfilling than the first two. Tenderness is a quiet, intimate thing with an afterimage that lingers around for years, possibly a lifetime. This film does not.

Vers La Tendresse was the recipient of DOXA 2017's Best Short Documentary award.

(1) http://nothingreasons.tumblr.com/post/42331880147

(2) The week of May 8th, 2017.

(3) Lewis M. Simons "Weapons of Mass Destruction", National Geographic, November 2002, 2-35.

(4) "Vers la Tendresse." Doxafestival.com. http://www.doxafestival.ca/film/vers-la-tendresse-towards-tenderness (accessed May 22 2017).

(5) "In Conversation with Alice Diop", Youtube video, posted by Another Gaze Journal, November 7, 2016, https://youtu.be/HnmVK_YRRvU

TWO MISTAKES

Jamie Hilder is a Vancouver-based artist and writer whose work engages the intersections of economics and aesthetics. He has exhibited work internationally, and his critical writing has appeared in Fillip, Yishu Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art, Contemporary Literature, and Public Art Dialogue. His book Designed Words for a Designed World: The International Concrete Poetry Movement, 1955–1971 (McGill-Queens UP, 2016) addresses the effects that technologies of an emergent globalism had on the poetry of the mid-twentieth century. He is an instructor in the Critical and Cultural Studies Department at Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

In the summer of 2014 I made two mistakes. The first was that, assuming I would receive a grant, I bought a digital projector to install in my apartment. I rationalized the extravagance as a work expense. I make video work sometimes, and the projector would allow me to see things in initial stages that I wouldn't otherwise see until later in the editing process or during installation. I didn't get the grant. And I didn't have a job or any savings.

The second mistake is related to the first. I put up a shelf in my living room for the projector. I'd had enough experience with projectors to expect the projector's fan to be loud, so I didn't want it close to me where I sit while watching things, nor did I want to move the painting that hangs above the couch, nor did I want to mount it above and have a cord ruin the flatness of my ceiling. So I placed the shelf towards the corner of the room, close to the outlet so the cord wouldn't show, thinking I could just keystone the image onto the wall. I knew enough about projectors to anticipate fan noise, but not enough to realize that keystoning is for *minor* adjustments only, not for projecting from oblique angles, and that the more I adjusted the image the lower the quality would be. I eventually bought a ceiling mount and a cord management system the same colour as the ceiling. And I ended up with a shelf I neither needed nor wanted, a shelf that mocked me every time I looked at it.

I'm sure I made other mistakes that summer, but these two are my favourites. The projector became an excuse to have people over to watch films, and I turned the shelf into a gallery.

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I like to talk during movies. I use Brecht as a way to justify it as a radical political gesture. Several years ago while watching *Purple Rain* in a theater I exclaimed to a friend of mine how bafflingly sexy Prince was, and was asked to "please be quiet" by a man sitting in front of me. I hissed back "If you want to be an audience of one, go rent the DVD!" A book is an individual space. A theater is a social space. So when I thought about how I could best use my projector socially, the idea of talking during movies was the one I found most promising. I had been to some of the *Dim Cinema* programming at the Pacific Cinematheque, where audiences would watch a film and then be encouraged to speak about it after in whichever groups they might split into. I thought the films I saw (Dan Starling's and Casey Wei's) were fantastic, and the conversations after were okay, but I would have preferred them to happen simultaneously. So when I decided

to invite people with whom I enjoy talking to my home to watch films, the subject line of my first email was "Dim-Witted Cinema, or Talking Through Movies." My apartment, being quite small, could realistically only manage 10-13 guests. Some people I invited were uninterested in the project, and never showed up. I stopped inviting them. Others were enthusiastic.

We watched *Gung Ho* (1986) first, Ron Howard's distressingly racist treatment of American deindustrialization and the fear of Asian modes of production. I thought this would funnel us into more explicitly critical, difficult films like Raoul Peck's *Lumumba* (2000) or Nikita Mikhalkov's *Anna 6-18* (1994), but when only one person showed up to the second screening, Glauber Rocha's *Black God, White Devil* (1964), I realized that the programming had to be responsive to its audience. So our next film was *Mr. Mom* (1983), where Michael Keaton—who also stars as a white-working-class everyman in *Gung Ho*—"discovers the inherent inequality of his labour prejudices as he is forced to confront the structurally undervalued sphere of domestic work." That's how I phrased it in the email invitation, anyway. Subsequent films were mostly decided upon collectively in the conversations during and after the films. We watched Patrick Swayze in *Roadhouse* (1989); Denzel Washington in Nick Cassavette's ham-fisted two-hour-long argument for socialized medicine, *John Q* (2002); the bizarre gentrification thriller *Wolfen* (1981); and the even more bizarre *White Nights* (1985), starring Gregory Hines and Mikhail Baryshnikov in a Soviet socialism vs American racialized capitalism dance battle.

There were fifteen screenings in total between 2014 and 2016, most of which were accompanied by thematic snacks and drinks. At the end of the program, I produced sixteen small, eighty-page full colour books of all my email invitations and hand delivered them to everybody who attended a screening. If I'm being honest, I think that book is the best thing I've ever made.

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The shelf that was meant to hold the projector is a 12"x12"x1/2" piece of bamboo. I have a friend who is a cabinet maker and he had some lying around. If I were designing a shelf to be a gallery, it would neither be that size nor of bamboo, nor would I put it in a dimly lit corner of my living room over top of a modem, a router, a computer, and a rat's nest of cables.
I know about apartment galleries. I know about Barb Choit's Allergy Gallery and Lee Plested's The Apartment Gallery, though I never visited either. I have been to others, in different cities, and however interesting the work might have been, I couldn't help thinking: "Who thinks art is so important that they want to live with it like this? Who likes art THIS much? Who wouldn't rather this closet be a closet?" I write about art, I teach about art, I make art, and I'm close friends with people who do the same. But I have never thought it was a good idea to live in a gallery, nor to invite people to my home with art as our primary reason for interacting. I had previously considered designating a small section of my apartment as a domestic gallery, mostly because I had some glass display cases I really liked (in a way, more than the work that was in them) left over from a couple of exhibitions. I thought they would look good in my apartment, and that maybe I could borrow work from friends or make my own exhibitions in them, and invite people over to see them. But I never followed through because a) they would have taken up too much space in an apartment that is already impeccably organized, and b) I didn't want to invite people over just to look at and contemplate artwork. It seemed like a poor structure for social engagement.

But the shelf in the corner that would have been more trouble to take down than it would be to leave up seemed like an opportunity to investigate the social supports of art and friendship without much sacrifice. The conceptual scaffolding I developed around it goes like this: I ask people who and whose work I admire to lend me a piece that will fit on a 12"x12" shelf. If they agree, I invite them over to install the work and make them dinner. They leave the work for me to live with, and in exchange I write about it and post the text online, along with an image, on a website called *shelfed.ca*. I don't do any press besides an announcement on my only social media apparatus, a rarely used Twitter account. I promise to send the artist the text for their approval in advance of posting it, and to alter it in any way they recommend. Then I return the work to them. Initially I imagined exhibitions of 6-8 weeks, but they have turned out to be closer to 4-5 months, as other projects with deadlines and pressures and my job often get in the way.

Elizabeth Zvonar, "Leather Gloved Hand; Burned", 2015

Abbas Akhavan was the first artist I invited to show, and he lent me a foil swan. Elizabeth Zvonar was the second artist, and she lent me a cast-hand incense holder, with incense sticks she made herself. Colleen Brown lent me a box of pocket sculptures, all of which I walked around with in my pockets at some point. Steven Brekelmans lent me an assemblage. Gabi Dao, whose work is currently on the shelf, lent me her gelatin ears. I'm not sure what food I served for all the dinners, but I remember the conversations all being very nice. I remember being grateful and surprised that people would bring something that they thought seriously about and made with purpose and leave it with me, and that they would come over to spend time talking to me. I remember that I was happy to feed them and have them in my home.

It's a similar gratitude and reciprocity that characterizes the writing I do in response to the work. I have written for journals and for exhibition catalogs, and in those cases always feel a territorial anxiety around readership and genre. But as the texts I produce for Shelfed are primarily

I like to talk during movies. I use Brecht as a way to justify it as a radical political gesture.

Steven Brekelmans, "The Fisherman", 2016.

for the artists, and aren't written in any kind of direct relationship to curatorial framing or gallery residue, the writing has become more personal. I do not select which work to borrow, after all, so often find myself at a loss when initially encountering it and thinking about how to write about it. I have yet to resent a work in the way I might if I were tasked with reviewing an exhibition for a particular publication, and had trouble finding a way to enter it. In those cases, with their deadlines and generic research or vernacular pressures, I might find myself—often out of impatience or self-doubt or distance—looking for reasons to criticize the work, or the space, or the curation, or the larger structures of exhibiting art. But because I live with the work in my home, and generally don't have conversations about it beyond those I have with the artist or with friends who visit and are interested in it, my writing doesn't take on or respond to the same discursive pressures. Because I spend time with the work differently—I eat, drink, nap, watch tv and movies, host friends, read, water plants, vacuum and clean in close proximity to it—I think about and through it differently. So my text on Abbas's work begins with an anecdote about my mom's reaction to one of Abbas's paintings, and moves into historical prohibitions against eating swans. My text on Elizabeth's work discusses the evening she installed the work, and how the piece's olfactory character was overwhelmed by the smell of forest fires that blanketed Vancouver for a few days that summer. I don't know which days, exactly, or even which year, because the exhibitions aren't dated (though I'm sure I could figure it out if I tried). My text on Colleen's tactile work includes an investigation of a weird, nervous habit I have of touching my keyring or playing with a car's gear shift in a particular way. I entered Steven's work by thinking about a building I have been fascinated by for years but actively prevent myself from knowing in any further detail. I don't know how I'll write about Gabi's work, but I suspect that, like the others, it will be rooted in something personal. I hope the artists don't mind. If one ever does, I'll write about their work differently until they are happy with it. There has yet to be a Works Cited section in any of the texts, despite me quoting directly from other sources. I figure, what's the point? If Google Analytics is anything to go by, nobody has visited shelfed.ca in over six months. I think that's likely a problem with the site, though, since a handful of people have mentioned to me that they have looked at it during that time. But my point is that the way I write for Shelfed is a different kind of writing, in a specific space, and one that is rooted in a particular relationship to art, friendship, and reciprocity.

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When I began thinking about how to frame Dim-Witted Cinema and Shelfed in order to write about them, I thought that they might be best understood as ambition-less. Neither of them appear on my professional CVs (art or academic), nor have I sought out conventional spaces like conferences, symposia, or journals to theorize or trumpet them. I generally don't talk about them unless other people bring them up, or somebody who is already in my apartment asks me about the work on the shelf. Even this text only happened after the editors of *Charcuterie*, who I like and admire, invited me to submit something and then told me that they would prefer a reflection on Shelfed to what I initially gave them. But when I say "ambition-less" I fall into the same thought trap that irritates me in others, where everything needs to be absorbed into a professional or personal or instagrammable ledger of experience, as if when we're not working actual jobs we're interning for some future position or relationship that we hope we'll like better. So I won't say they are ambition-less. Their ambitions are just different. They have a hope and a pleasure my other work doesn't. I've been surprised by them.

Tiziana La Melia is an artist and writer based in Vancouver. Recent exhibitions include The pigeon looks for death in the space between the needle and the haystack (2017), LECLERE Centre d'art, Marseille; Broom Emotion (2017), galerie anne baurrault, Paris; Johnny Suede (2017), Damien and the Love Guru, Brussels; Kamias Triennale, Quezon City (2017); Stopping the Sun in its Course, Ghebaly (2015) Gallery, Los Angeles; Innocence at Home (2015), CSA, Vancouver. Her writing has appeared in Agony Klub, The Interjection Calendar, Organism for Poetic Research, The Capilano Review, and C Magazine.

Nice, but...
Nice, but there's something, I don't know.
Of the fair rose that grew from a sharp thorn, they wore pure virgin wool and liked accounting.
Nice, but, it's ok it will be amazing.
I wasn't in any position to get rid of them.
Nice, but only offers me a diet coke and a gluten free cracker.
Nice, but what's behind the kindness?
Nice-y-ish, and thank-you.
Nice, you are a whistleblower, but the goal is still to own your own house.
Nice, and get your way.
Nice, but having been described myself as sugar and spice and everything nice, I think, what are they hiding?
Nice, but makes money from plastic and does nothing in particular.
Smiling at themselves, they meditate on a smart jacket and steady composure.
Nice and forgetful is a strategy.
Nice is nice.
Nice is a strategy.
Nice enough for supporting foundations.
This is a heavy niceness.
Nice martyred their allowance so they could hang a weird drawing above the toilet.
Nice, but one day I'll manage without you.
Nice, so I was careful not to upset you in any way.
You may be a saint, and I may be ugly and hairy.
Nice, and chamber music leaks into this room as I try to figure out what kind of nice.
Nice, but I have to remember to ask the question, *do you need the money?*
Over and over nice.
Over and over I ignore the *but.*
Over and over it brings me numbness.
Over and over *their smiles catch onto my skin, little smiling hooks.*
Nice, but careful not to upset anyone.
Yet I still depended on them, though I did it regretfully.
They seem immune to exhaustion.
They were airy and in perpetual conversation with the sky.
At the end of summer even the flowers notice you are nice as they unpetal.
Nice, and I serve you.
Nice, you mine.
Nice, but always watching.
Nice and exquisite or invisible.
***I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted* nice, you never brag, I bragged.**
Basic nice.
Down-to-earth posture with pollen on a shirt.
The picture isn't always a nice one.
They'd supported me for so long I was limp—

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Sheila Delany, ***A Translation of Osberne Bokenbam's Legends of Holy Women*** **(1992)**
Sylvia Plath, ***Collected Poems*** **(1974)**
Elena Ferrante, ***Those Who Leave And Those Who Stay*** **(2013)**

Nice, but no attention to details
Nice, but also skirting the subject.
Nice, but how do they pay the rent?
We were chatting about something and instead of *nice* you wrote *mice, mice mice. I mean nice.*
Nice, but it's easy to be nice when you have an inheritance.
Nice, with no return.
Nice, but we can't speak about making a living.
Nice, but it's easy to be nice when you have nothing to lose.
Nice, but skirting the subject.
Nice, and I don't want to dislike you because you are so nice.
Nice, and also stupid when you need to be.
This you and we, it doesn't mean you, especially if it's not nice.
They're nice, and I don't really want to specify pronouns.
They is nice.
They's nice, but, when I close my eyes *she lays her fire-red tongue under my heel, and swallows me instantly.*
I clench the nice as my shoulders hover at my ears.
I collect some nice in the hips and chest and neck.
Nice, but too nice in a tooth.
Nice, like so many things, is complicated.
An erasing sighing nice.
Achingly very agreeable.
I will nice on you.
Nice and tells you that getting to work for her is a gift.
The opportunity is the payment.
Nice, but I won't tell you the things I feel that aren't nice.
Nice, but I won't dwell so much with my own hypocrisies, and simply point out how nice this is and that is.

Nice, but doesn't have time for negativity.
Nice, and we appreciate the chance to answer your emails all day.
Nice, that they gave us the gift of booking a room at the hotel so we could ornament her ego, this is my assistant.
They promised to call me her assistant and put me down as managing editor – just online though. I wondered why she couldn't put it down on paper but she quoted someone and hummed *delete is my favorite button.*
Nice as a piece of ice.
Nice, but, I needed the money.
Nice, but I wanted you to lose composure.
Nice, but doesn't know that titmice are not mice.
Nice as a mouse not nice like a rat.
Nicely put together.
It's a gift.
Put yourself together.
Days when nice looks micey.
Titmice were not nice when they opened the bottles of milk left on the front steps in England in the 1950s.
One grandmother is nice.
The other grandmother was nicer to my brother.
Great grandmother twisted her nice hair into a cinnamon bun covered by a scarf.
Sorry rhymes with sister in my baby tongue.
I apologize because I'm nice, and you tell me your sister is across the ocean.
Innocent kind of nice
Self protective kind of nice.
Sorry if the hag story is wrong, I never heard it, I only saw it.
She's nice, but when she sacrificed her eyes, I wondered if it was really that nice.

BOOK REVIEW

"TELL THEM I SAID NO" BY MARTIN HERBERT STERNBERG PRESS, 2016

Bopha Chhay is a writer and curator based in Vancouver. She is co-founder of livedspace, a research and publishing organization. She has held positions at Enjoy Public Art Gallery (New Zealand), Afterall (Contemporary arts research and publishing) Central Saint Martins College of Arts & Design (UK), 221A Artist run centre and currently holds the position of Director/Curator at Artspeak in Vancouver. She provides editorial support for Bartleby Review and is co-founder and an editor of Charcuterie.

Need not pander

I recall a professor of mine mentioning how important it was for us to show up and be present, at openings, at launches, at talks, at screenings, at whatever and wherever there were people to see that you were there, *that you were engaged*. Initially I appreciated this sentiment as getting out there to "support one's peers" and to develop an awareness of what was going on in the community. Gradually it became clear that he was preparing us as students for professionalization, and that we should be aware of ourselves as operating in a particular niche attention economy. It felt like good practical advice, but it also felt strategic and insincere. What would it mean to refuse this advice completely and to cultivate absence instead of presence? Martin Herbert's 'Tell Them I Said No' is a collection of essays that contemplates the reasons various artists have decided to disengage from the art world and its implications of a highly professionalized system. While acknowledging that self-marketing and networking is essentially part of an artist's role, Herbert contextualizes the practices of ten artists and their distinctive strategies that refuse the art world. What does it mean to retreat, to withdraw or refuse to partake within a particular art system in which we situate and locate our practice(s)?

Herbert generously dedicates a chapter to each artist's practice, allowing for the nuances of each artist's desire, needs and reasons for their withdrawal from the art world to reveal themselves through their work; contextualized and supported with some biographical information. Each chapter begins to reveal the limitations that the art system has on the practices of these artists, notably tensions that arise along the lines of class, gender and race. Deliberate withdrawal becomes an immediate disruption to the art system that we know and operate within. Their antagonistic position forces us to reconsider the role of the artist within an art system that forefronts and values a highly professionalized attitude and approach. The way one conducts their artistic practice becomes a means to negotiate power relationships within the art world, relations that actively resist a neoliberal attitude whereby the performance of one's presence becomes a commodified unit. Herbert admiringly refers to these artists as 'dropouts' of various degrees, whether that be their outright withdrawal from the art world to temporary moments of respite. Agnes Martin, Charlotte Ponsenenske, Trisha Donnelly and David Hammons are four of the ten artists Herbert discusses. Their works cultivate refusal and the negation of the attention economy that speaks to affirmation and self-determination outside of the art system. Martin's process of self-isolation; Ponsenenske's belief that the capabilities of art to address real social and political problems are insufficient; Donnelly's strategically choreographed process of withdrawal within and around her works; and Hammons elusiveness and the difficulty of categorizing his work.

Agnes Martin's move westwards from New York City to New Mexico in 1968 has long been considered the ultimate withdrawal from the art world. Herbert respectfully addresses Martin's long term battle with schizophrenia, and how this, along with her relocation has influenced how her work continues to be read. This is evident in Martin's grid paintings that induce and encourage a serene transcendental form of engagement with the painted surface. Her body of work has long been described as containing

[W]ithdrawal and refusal to partake are timely reminders that an art career need not pander and feed into an excessive and overly demanding attention economy.

something of a mindful and mystical element. The deep voids and supposed emptiness of her canvases have drawn obvious comparisons to the expansiveness of the desert and its big skies, as well as the necessity for this environment that suited her temperament and self-isolation.

In 1968 Charlotte Posenenske, who worked in painting and sculpture, made a decision to no longer make art and enrolled in a degree in sociology. Herbert discusses Posenenske's body of work "Square Tube Series" (1967/68) as exemplary of her attempt for her minimal sculptural works, through standardized industrial objects to address ideas of collectivity. Her works antagonize the system in a way that denies exclusivity or privilege as being held by the object. "They are standardized objects designed to behave in non-standardized ways: they restore power to the owners, they're intended to be unruly and subjectively slanted, they remain in flow." (1) Through her practice she sought possibilities for art's agency to address social issues. Her intent extended beyond production, where the consumer becomes part of the work. Shared authorship reflected her desire for mobilized action amidst the social and political environment of the late sixties, as she expressed 'It is painful to me that art cannot contribute to the solution of urgent social problems'. (2) For Posenenske it seemed as if she had exhausted her search for agency within art that could effectively address social and political issues of the time.

Trisha Donnelly's conceptual practice can be seen and considered as a strategically well timed withdrawal. Her lack of press releases, or denial of interviews (the title of the book is taken from her request for an interview) or didactics within the space of her exhibitions or surrounding her work, places emphasis on the experience of the work itself. The intent is never over-contextualized or over-articulated. It exists to be experienced in the time that you spend in the space of the exhibition. In Herbert's discussion of Donnelly's work 'The Redwood and The Raven' (2004) that he saw at the Tate as part of an exhibition 'The World as a Stage' (2007), he narrates returning to the Tate on a daily basis to view a series of thirty-one small black and white photographs, which were presented one at a time, removed at the end of the day and replaced with another the following day. Herbert says 'You wanted more, aware that the more you received the more you would equate with less'. Whether Donnelly's withholding works or words, the subtractive process requires of the viewer to directly reckon with the work through the material itself, as experienced in the space of the gallery.

My first encounter with David Hammon's work 'Bliz-aard Ball Sale' (1983) was as a photographic slide in an art history lecture. I recall the class suddenly becoming more attentive. We were still earnest and severe undergraduates who thought that we were supposed to commit to a particular medium; painting, photography, sculpture etc.. Hammons 'Bliz-aard Ball Sale' had given us permission to indulge humour and absurdity, material and immaterial forms simultaneously, point to issues of race without overstating it, and question the system of the art market. Hammon's work eludes categorization and medium specificity. His rejection of institutional protocols of retrospective exhibitions and the art market, is a form of dissent. In doing this he ensures that his artistic practice remains determined by himself and not circulating within an art system that co-opts his work. Steven Stern describes Hammon's elusive personality as a form of resistance; 'Able to choose how and where he engages with a world in which his presence is a valuable commodity, Hammons makes his participation bear as much critical weight as his refusals.' (3)

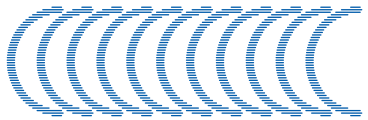
'Tell Them I Said No' encourages us to draft our own rules of engagement of how we want to live and make work in the world. In his discussion of the art world as a business that relies heavily on personalities, Herbert questions what the stakes of visibility are in the art world today. He puts forward the proposition that withdrawal and refusal to partake are timely reminders that an art career need not pander and feed into an excessive and overly demanding attention economy. Social media has intensified the links between private interests and the attention economy, where often artists are increasingly making their private lives public. Self-promotion and oversharing IRL or online might broaden your reach and visibility, but it becomes a commodity in itself, where your presence might be potentially compensated for in the speculative possibility of future opportunities. While acknowledging that the artists in his collection of essays are at a certain stage in their careers, where they have some leeway in making these decisions to step outside and refuse art world protocols, he views their decisions as a sketch of the different possibilities for creating and maintaining political and artistic agency within one's practice. His discussion of these specific artistic practices goes against the grain of today's pressures and asks us to question what's at stake and how we are implicated in systems that don't necessarily provide a means for us to make art in the ways that we want to, or challenge the ways that private interests outweigh wider social and political concerns. In highlighting tactical silence or well timed pauses as being of great value to think about where we go from here, he quotes Mark Twain "No word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause." (4). Sometimes it's ok to close the door and leave it shut, maybe ajar.

(1) Martin Herbert, "Manufacturing Dissent" in 'Tell Them I Said No', Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2016, p. 42.

(2) Ibid., p. 42.

(3) https://frieze.com/article/fraction-whole

(4) Martin Herbert, p. 15.



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Charcuterie strives to provide a forum for experimental writing and informed polemics without pedantry. It assembles a polyphony of inquiry and documents the messy landscape of opinion and critique that unravels in close proximity to where we work, live and make art in Vancouver.

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